

ing for it a building. There were then, he says, not over 300 people in the city. Meanwhile the seminary building had burned. There was no place of public worship.

#### LINCOLN AT BIRTH.

Among our archives is a long letter of Mr. Little's, dated March, 1868, soliciting funds from eastern friends. In this letter we have an interesting account of Lincoln as it then was, and an outlook on its future. He writes: "We are the most western of the five Congregational churches in southern Nebraska. (Now there are a hundred beyond us south of the Platte.) "We are," he goes on to say, "in the capital of the state, which though only six months old, gives signs of vigorous life. Less than one-half the city lots have been sold for \$50,000. The foundations of a state house, 160x70 feet, have been laid. The building is to be completed this year. Dwellings, shops and stores are rapidly rising. One newspaper receives a lucrative patronage, and two others are projected. The immediate future is most promising. Attracted by the healthy climate and rich soil, farmers are rapidly opening up the surrounding country. Just without the city limits on the west are salt springs, apparently inexhaustible, which of themselves must create a village. The site of the city is a natural center for railroads. The Midland Pacific Railroad company will soon commence a road from Nebraska City to be extended to Fort Kearney and form a link in one of the great lines to the Pacific coast. A railroad is also contemplated from Omaha to Fort Riley. This will eventually be a part of a through line from Lake Superior to New Mexico. Other roads will follow in due time.

"By act of the legislature the university has been established here. These facts warrant the belief that Lincoln will become the political, literary and religious center of the state. Its influence will be immense, affecting not only the present but future generations. That this influence should bless and not curse, as it flows out and on, is infinitely important. You will admit that the foundations of this commonwealth cannot be firmly laid unless those institutions which have made the east what it is shall have been first established." He then speaks of the place of the Congregational church and polity in national history, and of the special need of this church for its "effective and aggressive work" of a place of public worship. He concludes: "Such a building, erected now, will accomplish inconceivable good. A place where Christians, previously strangers, will become acquainted, an attraction to the young and wandering, who now, in crowded hotels or boarding houses, or in saloons, seek but find not a substitute for home. It will give stability to society; it will draw to us a class of persons whose presence is most desirable, and will strongly tend to secure from the outset what we so much desire to see, a religious and intellectual community."

#### THE FIRST CHURCH.

The church building was erected in 1868 and finished and furnished in 1869—simple but substantial and capable of seating 125 people. It cost \$2,778.86. This was, I think, the first permanent building dedicated to the worship of God in our city. Soon after this church was built, on February 15, 1868, the legislature, to encourage immigration and building, offered three lots to denominations which should erect an edifice within the next two years. As a consequence there was a hastening to organize churches, far beyond the immediate needs of the city, and to put up some sort of a building to secure the offered ground. Whatever ultimate good came of this arrangement, at the time it divided Christian forces, and laid heavier burdens on the early settlers. It was in many cases a struggle for life with the churches, and a question of the "survival of the fittest." Following the completion of the building in 1869, the church was able to pledge only \$201 for the pastor's salary, of which only \$132 had been raised at the close of the year. The remaining meagre support was contributed by the Congregational home missionary society. Such a condition of things makes short pastorates. The minister having exhausted his own resources and those of his friends, must leave. Mr. Little resigned in 1870, the church, then numbering thirty-four members.

Rev. L. B. Fifield, a man of scholarly tastes, and well educated, as all you ministers have been, took up the work and helped to bear its burdens for two years more, adding twenty-three to its membership; but owing to deaths and removals, he left it the same in numbers as he found it.

His successor, Rev. S. R. Dimmock, was a man of unusual oratorical gifts. He attracted a large congregation. The church building was enlarged, in what seemed the easiest, but has since turned out the most expensive way for Nebraskans to raise money, borrowing it and mortgaging the future. Fifty were added to the church in Mr. Dimmock's pastorate. Yet there was the constant going and coming so characteristic of a new western town—and peculiarly, so I think of Lincoln in past days. So when after two and a half years the minister was compelled to resign on account of poor health, there were but fifty-four names on the roll, of whom only about forty were resident and active. While on the other side was a debt of \$2,000.

Nine years had passed since the organization of the church, and what was there to show for all the efforts made? A great deal more surely than than

appeared on the surface. It is a serious thought that the foundations of so many enterprises have often to be laid beneath the surface, on the unrequited toil, the sacrifices, the very blood and bones it may be, of the brave pioneer. It was so the pilgrim fathers gave themselves for the building of this nation.

Few, if any, of the early settlers of this region, who dared so much, have escaped bankruptcy. The city of Lincoln, that is to be, with its hundred thousand people, and prosperous business, years hence, probably will not find a large number of those who have been so generous and far-sighted in its upbuilding occupying places of wealth and power. But such stern facts should not dishearten or cause to say: "It was all a mistake. I have labored in vain." Out of such seeming failures the best things of this world come. One generation labors and is laid aside, only that others may enter into the fruits of their labors.

The pioneer church builder breaks up the hard ground, plants the good seed, waters it with his tears, grieving because it does not take better root, then passes on without seeing the harvest.

#### EARLY CROAKERS.

There were many who prophesied that Lincoln had seen its best days. "It was overgrown." "What was there here to support a town of 8,000 people?" "Then the grasshoppers year after year!" When the subject for the next evening meeting was announced as "What has the Lord put the Congregational church here for?" one of those Jeremiah's always to be found among God's prophets, whispered to his neighbor: "To be burned," though he himself was one of the old martyr sort to stay by and be burned with it.

Few and discouraged as the Christian workers were twenty-one years ago, they had done better than they knew. They had stood for the church as an essential institution in the new community. They had maintained public worship for years. They gave comfort and help to strangers constantly coming and going. They had permanently gathered a handful of choice members, rich in love and good works. Their trials had melted and fused them. Their seeming failures had taught them self denial and dependence upon God. The church was dear to them all. They were ready to do all they could for it. They gave themselves and their personal service. They were ready to go to the prayer meeting to pray and praise, and to the business meeting, if it was only to bewail their poverty.

They were not afraid of hard work.



REV. LEWIS GREGORY.

Any sensible minister might consider it a privilege to be invited to such a field. The New England village pastor, with all his pleasant surroundings, could scarcely hope to do more than maintain what was already so well established. He knew more than one capable minister waiting and anxious to take his place. Here on the frontier was a call that appealed to his missionary spirit. The place was vacant. The need was urgent. Here was the chance of building up from the foundation a new work, with plenty of room. Though he might accomplish but little—even that little would be a distinct gain to the Master's cause, and God seemed to say "come."

#### FEW ARE LEFT.

Of the members who extended such a hearty welcome to the new pastor twenty-one years ago, most have passed on. Only eleven remain, and with them a few other helpers, some since uniting with the church, and others who in all except the Christian name have served the church, outside saints, whom the pastor has always hoped and still longs to see taking their stand among the recognized members of this church.

It was agreed at the outset that the Congregational home missionary society would contribute \$500 a year towards the minister's support, possibly for three years, while the church undertook to decrease its debt by that amount from year to year. So every one took hold for a final effort. And lo! the stone really began to move. To the surprise of all when the year closed the first thousand dollars of indebtedness was removed. The people were so much encouraged that they voted to accept no more help from the missionary society.

When the minister said, if they could

do that, the balance of debt might wait another year, a good sister rose up in meeting to protest, saying "they could pay the minister and the debt too." She offered to put her name at the top of the subscription paper. So the minister was overruled and the good work went forward until May 2, 1878, when the last note of indebtedness was burned, and the church again stood even with the world.

It was still a little church, and poor, with only 150 members, but full of the strength and courage which comes of duties faithfully performed.

Their debts cancelled, the people could not rest, but set to work at once to thoroughly renovate the house of worship, which was painted, frescoed, re-seated and furnished with its first new carpet. Five years more passed, during which there was a slow but steady increase in membership and benevolence, and we were permitted to send four of our Sunday school teachers into foreign missionary service. Then in 1883, having increased to 225 members, came the talk of a new building. It was not seen at first how the \$10,000 necessary could be secured. But past experience made the church hopeful, and finally the limit to which the trustees should be allowed to go was fixed at \$12,000. Yet somehow \$24,685.63 was raised for this purpose in the next three years. The church was all paid for except \$3,000. The ladies' contributions included in the above sum furnished the church. The generous individual gift of our beautiful organ completed the enterprise.

Let us pause a moment to consider the privileges of worship we have here enjoyed; then let the mind go reverently back thirty years to the very beginning. Has not God been a kind Father, a bountiful benefactor, a helper tried and true? Is there not much for everyone to be thankful for?

Not the least among reasons for gratitude is the fact that the church, in its pleasant home, was not permitted to settle down into the ease which always marks the beginning of degeneration.

#### DAUGHTER CHURCHES.

Early in 1887, not through any spirit of discord or division, but out of the enterprise of growth and service, a new church was planned. The pastor's vacation was given to getting meetings under way. The young people's society of Christian endeavor helped. Therewith was that in October the organization of Plymouth church, our oldest and beloved daughter to whose prosperity this church was permitted to contribute seventy-five of its choicest members.

Two years following, in 1889, it was the privilege of pastor and people to assist in the gathering of another church, and to contribute a large part of the money needed for a house of worship among our German Congregational friends in this city, who have ever since gone on their way rejoicing. Nothing of equal cost which this church has done, has brought more comfort, or been of greater service.

Again in 1890 we were able to send out another colony of forty-five members to form the Vine street church, which has also been greatly favored, and has a bright future before it.

In 1895 we were permitted to contribute some material aid and a few members to the Butler avenue church, which is already more than fulfilling the hopes of those who desired to see religious services established in a neighborhood remote from other churches. And finally for the past six months we have been furnishing a room in our own building for some Swedish brethren who are enjoying a precious ingathering and are ready to erect their own building, as soon as the frost is out the ground. To their church also I trust we will be able to contribute some of the foundation stones.

Into these, and all the events which indicate the life and progress of the church—the work of God and the co-operation of pastor and people are so mingled and interwoven that all alike may rejoice. Each can say of the aggregate result: "In all this I shared and was permitted to do my little part."

#### THE CHURCH RECORDS.

The financial and statistical records of the early years are so meagre that it is impossible to make a complete summary. During the last twenty-one years there is a record of \$110,656.92 contributed toward our own church expenses. In the same period \$32,828.64 was given in benevolences. The total number received to membership has been 1,664, of whom 941 have united during the present pastorate. Three hundred and thirty-two on confession of faith; 69 by letter. Of the total number received 496 have been dismissed, and 86 have died. The present membership is 472. The number exceeded 500 at one time the present year. Thirty-five absentees have recently been induced to take letters, and there are enough others who should do so to make our real working force about 460. There is abundant opportunity to fill the absent places with a living membership before the year closes. It is to this blessed work of winning men and women and children to Christ that I hope this year may specially be given. Gratitude to God's many mercies in the past should prompt to this. It is the great lesson we ought to learn from the disappointment of many personal hopes and ambitions in the trying school of God's providence during the last few years. Out of them all the church has been safely brought—to give comfort and strength and character with spiritual blessings, which are

not like uncertain riches, liable to take wings and fly away.

#### THREE GENERATIONS.

In twenty-one years a pastor has the privilege of associating with three generations among his people. There are the pioneers, when he came in middle life, who bore the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle days; the heroes and founders of our Zion, whose wisdom and prayers follow the minister as an inspiration, whom one by one he is permitted to follow far down into the dark valley, to learn how quiet and serene is the aged Christian's death. A few left are mercifully spared to the church to enjoy the fruits of their labors, their heads whitening, their steps becoming infirm, their active church life nearly over; yet in patient sympathy, and zeal, setting an example and exerting an influence, which makes their last days a blessing and a benediction.

Then there are young people of twenty years ago whom the pastor was permitted to lead into the Christian life and to welcome into the church at whose marriage he officiated—whose joy he shared in the birth of the first born, whom he sought to comfort in their first great sorrow; whom he helped to enlist in Christian service; whose growth in character and business ability has gone on before his eyes until they now stand in the very fore front of the battle of life, the officers and pillars of the church, holding the moral, political and intellectual interests of the community in their keeping, steady and sober, and strong, the men and women today, grown up from the boys and girls of yesterday.

Then come the children, God bless them all. How fast they are coming on. It seems but a few days since they were brought as little infants to be baptized, and here they are fast crowding to the front in home and school. They stand upon the threshold, looking out upon the larger life beyond. They all love the church, and if parents and pastor are wise, they would first enter the great world through the church doors; there to learn the lessons and receive the training of mind and heart which will make them years hence our joy and stay. Christ and His church already needs them all.

#### A LONG PASTORATE.

Surely there are some advantages in a long pastorate. It preserves the historic associations and traditions of the church especially in a new place where so many changes are going on.

It gives the minister a sure position as a man and citizen in the larger life of the community; he becomes better acquainted with the people and they with him. He knows the needs of town and state. This advantage ought to make him a wiser counsellor, a better pastor.

There is an inspiration too for growth and work if he (the minister) would keep abreast of the times. He can see and teach the unfolding of God's kind providences, making good and evil, bitter and sweet as the years go on, all working together for the upbuilding of character and the ultimate advance of Christ's kingdom.

There is another side to the picture which is less assuring. There is the luck of the new face and the new voice, and the new way of putting things, which seems to make the trick more attractive and always leads people to expect great things of the new minister.

Then there are the failings and mistakes which time clearly reveals and the prejudices formed—not easy to forget—from which it would often seem easier to escape by running away than by trying to live them down.

Besides it is absolutely impossible that any minister should long continue to be the first choice of all. The question arises would it not be better that he should pass on after a little stay and give all in turn the opportunity to hear the gospel in their own favorite tongue? It is hard sometimes to know what is the best for the church and Christ's cause.

I can readily see how much of the virtues of charity and forbearance some must be called to exercise in the continuance of a long pastorate. Yet even this may not prove an unmixed evil. There is great virtue in learning to agree to disagree. The strongest attachments are those that are slowly formed out of a mutual respect, and the forgetting of petty disagreements.

#### A LOVING BLESSING.

Now, friends, it is in my heart to say in words as few and simple and as true as I can possibly utter, how much I love you all; and how pleasantly you have made the years go by; and how thankful I am to God for what he has enabled pastor and people to do. The future we cannot know except that so far as our duty and purposes are concerned it should be more given in serving Him, who has proved such a kind father, such an ever present helper—such a merciful and all sufficient Savior.

And now brethren I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And when Paul had thus spoken all.