ARTICLE VII.

THE PILGRIM FATHERS AND THE MESSAGE OF PURITANISM.[1]

BY THE REVEREND NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS, D.D.

FOR full two hundred and seventy years and more have men assembled upon Forefathers' Day to celebrate the landing of the Pilgrim fathers; to revere their virtues, to sympathize with their sufferings, to recall the thrilling story of their first winter upon the bleak coast of New England; to marvel at their victory over the wilderness, famine, winter, disease, savages, and death itself, and for themselves and their children to swear anew fidelity to their fathers' God, to law and love, to liberty and learning, that these sacred fires may not die out upon the altars of the human heart. In scores of cities in our land, in church and hall, and around the banqueting board, the sons and daughters of the Puritans through oration and eulogy, through song and story, recall the famous men of old, with wit and laughing jest indeed hitting off their fathers' foibles, but in the secret heart reverencing their ancestors and emulating their example—for thus alone we prove that we are not the ignoble sons of a noble heritage. For if the giants of misrule and despotism may be forgotten, no race can afford to forget its heroes. God raised up the famous men of yesterday as soul food and stimulus for the youth of today. Standing at Plymouth rock, Webster looked up toward the fathers, that he might himself be lifted to their level. Lingering long upon those shores, where the first

[1] Address given Forefathers' Day, Chicago, 1897.

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pilgrim stepped foot upon this new world, Webster uncovered his head and joyfully confessed that the patriotism, fortitude, and faith of the heroes had entered into his soul, as iron enters into the rich blood of the physical system. For the faith of the fathers is, indeed, "the elixir of the children."

FINAL VICTORY OF PURITANISM.

Looking back upon our history, we now do see that the Puritan spirit and principles first conquered New England; that the ideals and institutions the Pilgrims developed soon repeated themselves in New York and the Reserve of Ohio, and afterward journeyed into the towns and cities of this great North and West. Then, when the civil conflict came and the whole land shook with the earthquake of civil war, it was the Puritan spirit that again went forth in battle array to conquer servitude and make our soil too pure for the feet of slaves. To thinking men it must now be evident that the time is surely coming when this entire land is to be puritanized. As loyal patriots and true Christians, we may also look forward to an era when our republic shall educate the world in free institutions. Should that time ever come it will be found that all the nations will recall Forefathers' Day as one of the great days of history, and celebrate the qualities of the Pilgrims with admiration, awe, and tearful sympathy. "If we succeed," said that first intrepid leader, "men will never cease to celebrate this day with song and story." But, should the spirit of the fathers fail, "should the consciousness of a divine energy underlying human society, manifested in just and equal laws, and humanely ordering individual relations, disappear," we may believe with Curtis, "the murmur of the ocean rising and falling upon Plymouth rock will be the endless lament of nature over the baffled hopes of man."

Now that long time has passed, all men do see that the

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age of the Puritans was the heroic age of our history. In its innermost genius the story of the Pilgrim fathers is a story unparalleled in all the annals of history for the weakness of its beginning and the glory and grandeur of its victory. To the end of time, Xenophon's march of the 10,000 will fascinate mankind. But the young Grecians were soldiers, men of iron strength. They marched not toward the wilderness, savages, and certain death; they marched toward life, home, and all-welcoming love. With absorbing interest also we follow the adventurous career of Cabot and Drake, Ponce de Leon, De Soto, and Champlain, in their search for gold and gems and the treasures hidden in the palaces of Peru; for fountains of eternal youth, and for the fame that has ever beguiled brave men. But no dreams of power or wealth allured these Pilgrims forth. Our heroes unfurled their sails to leave behind gold, lands, ancestral halls, and resigned forever all thoughts of ease and luxury.

AN AGE OF POETRY AND BIGOTRY.

To us it seems incredible that in the very years when Shakespeare was writing his greatest dramas, English rulers could have been so bigoted as to burn the wisest scholars, behead the thinkers, and imprison resolute souls, whose only crime was the love of liberty in thought and word and worship. And yet in those far-off days, independent thought was a penal offense, and the worship of God in any way, save that ordained by the King, was more likely to be punished than murder or theft. In the British Museum men have preserved an autograph letter of Queen Elizabeth, written to the Scottish King, and asking for the extradition of one John Penry. Now, Penry was a graduate of Oxford, a scholar of great attainments, a man of the noblest life and character. He had been guilty of the crime of saying that a clergyman might be ordained by a presbyter as truly as by a bishop, and, therefore, once Queen

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Bess got her hands upon her enemy, she had him indicted for treason. Standing before the Lord Chief Justice, Penry said: "If my blood were an ocean sea, and every drop thereof were a life unto me, I would give them all for the maintenance of my convictions." But the best use that England could make of such a man was to behead him! Soon the Puritans felt that the time had come when they must decide whether they should live under an absolute or a limited monarchy; whether or not a king might also assume the functions of a pope. And when one scholar and leader had been imprisoned thirty-six times in seven years, and fifty of the leading Puritan pastors and scholars were lying in the dungeons of London, the Pilgrims decided to leave the old homeland and cross over to Holland, a land made glorious by the valor of "William the Silent"; made free by the fortitude and faith of the heroic burghers who endured the siege of Leyden, the cruelty of Alva, and the awful tyranny of "Philip the Monster."

A FAMILIAR HISTORY.

A thousand times through stately oration and thrilling narrative have our orators and editors rehearsed for us the story of that unique voyage. When eight fearful years had passed over the factories and fields of Leyden, we see the Pilgrim band marching down to the seashore. There they kneel upon the sands, and, weeping, commend themselves to God, while John Robinson asks him who holds the seas in the hollow of his hand to care for their little craft and bring them into some harbor of peace. Taught by our artists, we see these brave men assembled in the cabin of the Mayflower to sign their compact and covenant. And when for weeks the little ship has tossed up and down upon the tumultuous sea, upon the shortest day of all the year, midst drifting sleet and snow, while water freezes in their garments and makes their coats to ring like iron, we see two

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little boats pull through the surf at Plymouth, and, jumping into the water, the men take the women and children in their arms, and carry them through the surf to the shore. What dangers were theirs, when the first flight of arrows fell upon them from the Indians ambushed in the forest! How pathetic the stern record of that first Christmas morn in the new world! "On Monday the 25th we went again on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to rive, and some to carry; so no man rested all day." What sorrow and suffering are revealed in the fact that when the second December came, half of the little company were sleeping beneath the winter's snow! As once that Scottish hero, fleeing from his enemies, sprang over the precipice above the sea and clung to a narrow ledge of rock, while his enemies above pelted him with sticks and clubs; so this frail band clung to the edge of the forest, while hail and snow, famine and pestilence, harassed and assailed them. There on the edge of the forest we see the Pilgrim rearing his cabin, for the family is the first of his free institutions. We see him dedicating his little church and on Sunday morning standing before it as a sentinel, with rifle in his hand, keeping guard over wife and child while they worship God in peace. We see him completing the first schoolhouse and calling a meeting of the citizens to pass a law that when there are one hundred families they shall be taxed to fit the sons for college and found a university. We see them coming together in the town meeting to publicly discuss all questions of government in the town meeting that was to be the germ and seed of all our social institutions. Verily, these were "famous men, by whom God hath gotten glory," of whom "the world has not been worthy."

FAULTS OF THE PURITANS.

Of late years it has become the fashion to belittle the

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Puritans and ridicule them. Our pleasure-loving generation hurls many a gibe and stinging jest at their high hats and somber garments, their cold reserve, their solemn habit of thought and life. There is a type of mind that can never think of the Puritan save as "mere acrid defiance and sanctimonious sectarianism, nor of the Puritans save as a band of ignorant and half-crazy zealots." With biting sarcasm, Hume said the Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectator. While in America, when Connecticut expelled a Tory for disloyalty, he went home to palm off upon credulous England the so-called "Blue Laws"—laws which never had any existence outside of the brain of a man who had been expelled for treason. And yet many an English author still refers to the time when the mothers of New England were punished for kissing their husbands or babes on the Sabbath day, and when the Puritan housewife threw away the vinegar on Saturday night, lest the acid should work on Sunday, thus breaking the law against labor on the day of rest. We smile also at Judge Sewall's diary, written after going home from church and listening to a sermon in which the minister had turned the hourglass four times, on the coldest winter day, in a church where no fire was permitted. The journal begins: "Extraordinary cold; storm of wind and snow. The bread was frozen at the Lord's table to-day. Though 'twas so bitter cold, John Hutchinson was baptized. At 6 o'clock my ink freezes so that I can hardly write by my good fire. Yet," adds the judge, "I was very comfortable at the meeting today"—subterranean fires having doubtless been opened up by the preacher. The fathers are also criticised for lack of sympathy with art and beauty, and the elegancies of life. Some also insist that the Puritans sympathized deeply with that iconoclastic spirit that spoiled the cathedrals of England and of the Continent, whitewashing the fres-

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coes, pulling down the altars, smashing the precious statues. Let us confess that they were men with faults, many and great. To minimize their errors or magnify their excellences would be alike unworthy of their memory and our inheritance. Their theology was narrow, and has in part ceased to satisfy thinking men. Their stern thought toward the Hester Prynne of the "Scarlet Letter" has been succeeded by a certain tender, gentle, throbbing sympathy. To the rocklike sternness of virtue, we have added charities and sweet philanthropies, that embody God's tenderness toward each "bruised reed." But, faulty as they were, be it remembered that there is some spot on every shaft of marble, some flaw in every pearl and diamond, some disproportioned feature even in the loveliest face.

PURITAN AND CAVALIER.

For criticise him as we may, we must go back to the Puritan for the foundation of our social happiness and peace. If these men of granite were cold, be it remembered that the mountain peaks that are crowned with white snow are not low browed. If the Puritans were simple folk and without the graces of the modern drawing-room, be it not forgotten that Doric temples have their beauty through a column that represents a single shaft of white marble. Our heroic fathers doubtless were different from their children. But what if the generation of Bradford and Brewster differs from ours, as warships differ from pleasure yachts, as great organs differ from harps and music-boxes, as the oak and pine differ from the vines that cover them? For if the Pilgrim fathers were not ideal men, neither can their children lay claim to that high honor. Nor will the ideal man ever come until one rises up who, to the stern virtues of the Puritan, adds the grace and sweetness of modern life, carrying his strength up to beauty, inflecting sternness toward sympathy, clothed with

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integrity that is spotless indeed, but having also sweet allurement. Happy indeed the man who, to the rocklike qualities of law and justice without, conceals the amethystine qualities of affection and sympathy in the heart within. Not until Puritan and cavalier unite in one man, who bends for coronation before Christ, his divine Master, will the perfect man appear.

In his eulogy upon John Brown, Wendell Phillips said Lord Bacon, as he marches down the centuries, may put one hand on the telegraph and another on the steam-engine and say, "These are mine, for I taught you to invent." Could we assemble in one room earth's greatest sons, who have achieved much for liberty and progress, and could the Puritan spirit pass from one son of goodness and genius to another, few would be found in that goodly company who did not belong to the group called Puritan. For long before Puritanism became an outer cult it was an inner spirit and a potent influence. It was the Puritan instinct in Moses that led him to resign the splendors of the palace in Egypt, choosing rather the rigors of a life in the desert. It was the Puritan spirit stirring in Daniel that led him to stand forth alone, braving a throne and its decrees, that he might worship God after the manner of his fathers. Paul showed the Puritan spirit when, fettered and a prisoner before Felix, he lifted his chains and boldly indicted the King upon the throne and brought the tyrant to his trial. Socrates had the Puritan spirit when he braved the Athenian jury and said, "It is better to die than to refuse to obey the voice within." Galileo was not a Puritan in the hour when he recanted, but a spark at least of the fathers' faith showed in him when he muttered under his breath, "Nevertheless the earth does move." Savonarola, too, had the Puritan valor. When the Pope tried to buy him off with an offer of the cardinal's hat, he replied that rather than sin against his convictions he would receive the red hat of

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martyrdom. Luther had a like intrepid temper when he said that he would go to Worms and front the Emperor though there were as many "devils in the streets as tiles on the roofs." Cromwell was a Puritan when he went forth to destroy that citadel of iniquity called the divine right of kings, and razed to the ground the ancient castles of England that long had been the strongholds of feudalism. The Puritan temper also dominated Milton when he wrote the noblest plea that was ever made for the freedom of the press. Robinson was a Puritan in the hour when he foreshadowed our toleration, in the words, "There is more light yet to break forth from God's word." It was the Puritan spirit also that spoke in Garrison, "I am earnest; I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." It was the Puritan spirit that lent power to the polished shafts of Wendell Phillips; that lent a deep moral purpose and passion to the orations of Lincoln and Beecher and Sumner and Curtis; when Gladstone also stood forth to plead the cause of Ireland's poor against England's power and wealth, it was the old heroic faith of the fathers that flamed forth in the famous son. It is not too much to say that the history of modern liberty is the history of Puritanism.

FAITH IN GOD.

If now we analyze the qualities that lent the Puritan his power and influence, we shall find that his crowning characteristic was his faith in the unseen God. In words that have the roll of thunder, Macaulay, in the most eloquent page he ever wrote, has portrayed the vision of God as the hidings of the Puritan's power. "The Puritans," said the essayist, "were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an over-

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ruling Providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know him, to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. . . . They recognized no title to superiority but his favor; and, confident of that favor, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the work of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of heralds, they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands; their diadems crowns of glory which should never fade away. On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt; for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language; nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand." So death lost its terrors and pleasure its charms. Enthusiasm made them stoics and raised them above danger and corruption. "They went through the world like Sir Artegal's iron man Talus with his flail, crushing and trampling down oppressors, mingling with human beings, but having neither part nor lot in human infirmities; insensible to fatigue, to pleasure, and to pain; not to be pierced by any weapon; not to be withstood by any barrier." Happy—thrice happy—our generation, could we exchange some of our tools, our knowledge of bugs and beetles, our outer embellishments, for the temper and spirit of the fathers. Because they worked under their Taskmaster's eye they needed no paid overseer to see that they slighted no task; no timekeeper to see that they came not late nor went early; no lynx-eyed reformers to search out their accounts

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for sinful entries. They lived in God's presence, as the flowers live and unfold in the soft enfolding sunshine, as birds sing when the morning rolls in warm billows over them. "The times that have ceased to believe in God and immortality," said Mazzini, "may continue illogically to utter the holy words, 'progress and duty,' but they have deprived the first of its basis and robbed the second of its sanction." And when our fathers' faith in God shall go, when we become materialistic and bow down to a mud god, and live by ethics of pleasure, not duty, then justice will forsake the laws our fathers left us; liberty will fade from our institutions; the glory will depart from library and chapel; our music will lose its sweetness, and our canvas its lustrous color; peace also will pass forever from the American home. For the loss of faith in our fathers' God would be the most disastrous loss that ever befell the young republic; just as the victory of our fathers' faith is soon to be the sublimest history in the annals of time.

PURITANS' LOVE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

To the vision of God that, like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, led the Puritan forward, let us add the emphasis of civic righteousness and the recognition of conscience and duty rather than pleasure and selfish gain. Though the cavalier called him a dreamer and an idealist, the Puritan held firmly to his faith that the ideal republic would come when the law of Sinai and the sermon on the mount were organized into the laws of the market-place and city hall. Not Plato in his "Atlantis," not Thomas More in his "Utopia," not the modern dreamers of ideal cities have dreamed so noble a dream of the ideal commonwealth as these Puritans who labored to set up the kingdom of God upon earth. These grim, stern men have been praised for their valor, kneeling down to

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pray before they entered the battle Naseby or Marston Moor—who were never defeated, and never wounded in the back. Admirable as was their physical bravery, their moral courage was even more significant. How unique that scene in the Puritan parliament! Carlyle shows us five hundred English gentlemen, members of Parliament, who, upon the opening day, after taking the oath of office, fell upon their knees and besought God for their country. Afterward they healed all enmities, and, striking hands as brothers, forgave and forgot all wrongs and ingratitudes. And then, testing each proposed law by the rule of right and conscience and God, they presented their bills for discussion and adoption. What if to-morrow, when Congress assembles, that Puritan scene should be repeated? What if every ruler who has done wrong should first go away to make restitution, and afterward return to do justice and plead the cause of the poor? Our age does not need more tools, luxuries, or comforts so much as it needs the fathers' sense of righteousness and justice. During the past year two hundred towns and cities of a sister State have been blackened with murder, where man has slain his brother man in the streets. And to-day, while we sit here, the ministers in that State have been asked to cry aloud against this wave of sin and crime. What means it that in many of these little Puritan towns the first hundred years of their history was never so much as stained with the record of a single murder? What means it that these little communities had no poorhouse, no jail, no tramp, no drunkard, and that in 1690 a sheriff in one Puritan community proposed the abolition of his office, because in his four years of service he had never had a single duty to perform? It matters little what we think of the Puritans. It matters much what Bradford and Brewster, what Vane and Hampden and Cromwell and Pym, think of us and our era of lawlessness and crime.

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A NOBLE HERITAGE.

Standing close beside the anniversary of that far-off winter's day when our fathers first stepped foot upon these new shores, let us with reverence and holy hope swear anew fidelity to our fathers' faith and to the institutions they have bequeathed us. To-day our generation is rich indeed, through a thousand treasures that have come down out of the past. But our greatest treasure is not the tools of Watt and Arkwright, not the philosophy of Bacon or Newton, not the poems of Shakespeare or Milton; the greatest boon our generation possesses is the religious and political liberty that our Puritan fathers gave us. The battles they won will never have to be fought again. Never again will kings try to pass an act of uniformity in worship. Liberty of thought and speech and act are our eternal possessions. Never again will the colleges and universities be closed to all save the patrician classes. The great institutions that represent the rights of the common people are now surely fixed as the mountains. But if the blossoms of our tree of liberty are crimson they are red with our fathers' blood. If our institutions bear a royal stamp, they are stamped with our fathers' signatures. Those who won for us our institutions have the right to expect that we shall transmit them unimpaired and greatly enriched to the next generation. The memory of our fathers should consecrate us, their approval should be our benediction. We fulfill a noble instinct when we remember the famous men of old of whom God hath begotten us. We, too, are Saxons, and therefore the sons of Milton and Hampden and Cromwell. We, too, are Puritans, and therefore the sons of Bradford and Robinson and Brewster. We, too, are Americans, and therefore the sons of Adams and Webster and Lincoln. Unto this generation there sounds forth the word: "Ye are the sons of the prophets, and heroes are your fathers."

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"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine;
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

"The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
A humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

"If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not thee in awe;
Such boasting as the gentiles use
Or lesser breeds without the law,
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!"

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