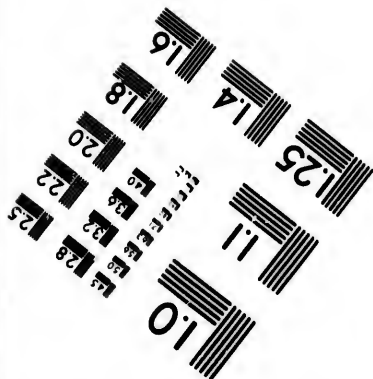
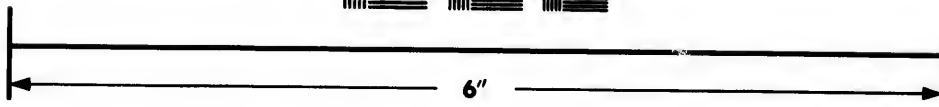
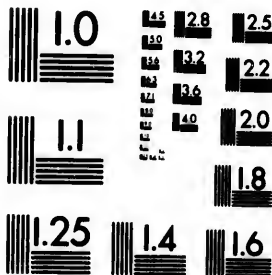


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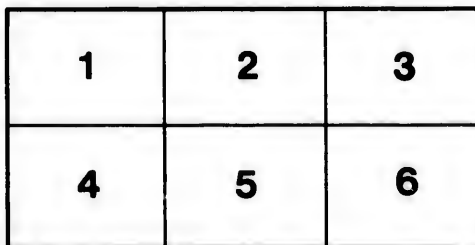
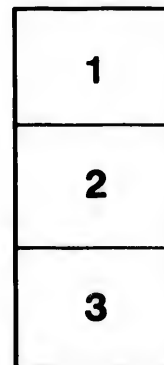
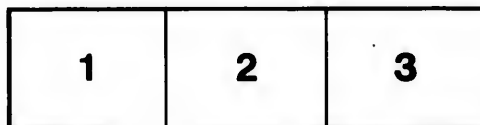
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THE

For

DELIVER

Th

L. Allison
From WOR.
ADDRESS, Oct 15/92.

IN MEMORY OF

THE REV. EBENEZER DIBBLEE, D. D.,

*For Fifty-one Years the Minister of St. John's
Church, Stamford.*

DELIVERED IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, SUNDAY, MAY 29, 1881,

BY

The Rev. William Tatlock, D. D.,

RECTOR.

STAMFORD, CONN.:
STAMFORD HERALD PRINT.
1881.

NOTE.

On Wednesday, May 25th, a granite tomb-stone was placed over the remains of Dr. Dibblee in the burial ground of St. John's church. It was provided by Mrs. John W. Leeds, in grateful memory of the care of the late rector for her mother, who was left as a young girl under his guardianship by her loyalist parents during the Revolutionary war.

W. T.

Wednesday

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ADDRESS.

Monday
In connection with the placing of a monumental tombstone over his remains, last ~~Thursday~~, I propose this morning to recall the life and ministry of Dr. Ebenezer Dibblee, for fifty-one years minister of St. John's church. In 1745 he "read prayers" here, before his ordination. From 1748 to 1784 he was a missionary of the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; and after the Revolution, from 1784 to 1799, he was the rector of the parish. His life has never yet been written; and so far as I know, the attempt I make this morning is the first attempt that has ever been made to give any complete record of a life and a work that were very influential in their day and very worthy of record. And as the founder of this parish, whose teachings made our predecessors and the ancestors of many among us whatever they were as Christians and as Churchmen, and so have shaped the influences which have made many of us what we are, a record of his life may interest us personally.

He was the eldest son of Wakefield Dibblee, and was born at Danbury, April 16, 1715, graduated at Yale College in 1734, and for some time was a licensed preacher among the Congregationalists, having been brought up in that persuasion. He conformed to the Episcopal Church, however, having been made acquainted with it through his intimacy with Dr. Samuel Johnson, rector of Stratford parish, and afterwards President of Columbia (then King's) College, whose conversion to Episcopacy while a tutor in Yale College made such great commotion in Connecticut. And from the number of baptisms he performed afterwards, in his native place, of persons

bearing his own name, we may infer that he brought many of his relatives into the Church.

The dominant sect in Connecticut at this time was the Congregational body. It was the form of religion established by law, and was very intolerant of any other. Every person was bound to pay a tax for the support of religion, in proportion to his property, and it was only recently that the "professors of the Church of England," as they were called, had obtained permission to celebrate Divine worship according to the liturgy of that church, and to have the taxes they paid appropriated to the support of their own ministers. One of the clergy writes, in 1742, to the Society in England, "The magistrates of Connecticut continue their former violent methods, especially against our new conformists, and not long since committed four of them, contributors towards building a church, to gaol, for not contributing towards the building of a meeting-house."

In December, 1742, the town of Stamford granted the petition of the church people residing here for a plot of ground—it was 45 feet long by 35 feet wide—on which to build a church, and in order that it might not damage the town it was placed on a ledge of rocks outside the village, on the edge of an impassable swamp to the east and north. The first church was built in 1743, and the site is now covered by the highway in front of our chapel building.

The times were ripe for the establishment of our church in New England, and its conservative influence was very necessary. The "sober Dissenters," as the old-fashioned, orderly Congregational folk were called by Churchmen, had not been able to keep out the fanaticism of Whitefield and the followers of Wesley. Methodism had recently arisen in England, and had got over into the American Colonies, where, unrestrained by the presence and control of its earnest and

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pious founder, it ran into many and violent excesses. The followers of Whitefield, however, were still more fanatical and ungoverned. "The letters from this country" to the English Society "abound with the wild doings of enthusiasm." "Not only Teachers, but Taylors, Shoemakers, and other Mechanicks, and even Women, Boys and Girls, were become (as their term is) *exhorters*. From all which, this advantage hath by God's kind Providence arisen, that it hath remarkably engaged serious People's Attention to our Liturgy and the Doctrines of our clergy; and this hath brought many considerable Families, more especially at Stratford under the administration of the Reverend Mr. Johnson, to be added to the Church."

The first services held here were by the Rev. Mr. Caner, missionary at Fairfield, in 1727. The missionary at Rye, Mr. Wetmore, also officiated here from time to time. Mr. Caner reports, in 1744, that "there have been large accessions to the Church of Persons who appear to have a serious sense of Religion, at Norwalk, Ridgefield, and Stamford." And in 1747 he writes, "Likewise the good people of Stamford, hitherto comprehended within the mission of Fairfield, have built a Church, to which they have given the Name of St. John, and they have conveyed to the Society by a Deed of Gift, an House and seven acres of Land, for the use of the Rector of that Church for the Time being for ever; and they oblige themselves to pay him £20 Sterling yearly, on condition that the Society will vouchsafe to appoint a worthy Missionary to St. John's Church in Stamford."

The Stamford churchmen made two unsuccessful attempts to secure a resident minister. Owing to political reasons the English Government had positively refused to allow the consecration of a bishop for the colonies, and they were therefore, until after the Revolu-

tionary War, under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of London, and all those who desired to receive Holy Orders were under the necessity of undertaking a long and perilous voyage to England to receive them. The Stamford church-people "contributed considerably to assist Mr. Isaac Brown, when he went home for Orders, with the hope that he might have been sent to them, but were disappointed by his coming back for Brookhaven." They afterwards assisted Mr. Richardson Miner, who was a Congregational minister at Trumbull from 1730 to 1744, to go home for Holy Orders; but he was taken by the French on his passage, and after his release from confinement, while on his way from Port Louis in France to London, he died of a fever at Salisbury, to the great sorrow of his waiting and dependent family. Not discouraged by repeated failure, they sent Mr. Dibblee. He had declined a call to succeed Mr. Caner, who had recently become the minister of King's Chapel, in Boston, and had accepted the charge of the Stamford church on condition that it would pay his expenses to England for Orders. Two brothers, John Lloyd of Stamford, who lived in what is now called the Davenport House in West Park, and Henry Lloyd, of Boston, afterwards of Lloyd's Neck, on Long Island, paid his expenses, which were afterwards repaid to them in great part by the other parishioners. Mr. Dibblee had served the parish as lay-reader for a year and a half, and went to England for Orders in 1747. He was ordained Deacon in the Parish Church of Kensington, on Wednesday, August 3d, 1748, by Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, and by the same prelate and in the same place ordained Priest on Sunday, August 7th, 1748. On the 11th of August, Edmund, Bishop of London, granted him license to officiate in the Province of New England in America, then under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop

of London, his declaration of conformity to the Church of England having been subscribed the same day. On the 17th day of August, 1748, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts appointed him its missionary at Stamford and Greenwich, at a yearly annuity or pension of twenty pounds of lawful money of Great Britain, to commence from St. John the Baptist's day, 1748. His first entry in the Parish Register is, "Arrived to my mission October 26th, 1748, and began to do duty the Sunday following."

So his half-century of work began. His immediate charge included Greenwich, and what are now in part the towns of Bedford on the north, and New Canaan and Darien on the east, and the present town of Stamford. He was a genuine missionary, however, and his frequent excursions took him to Rye, White Plains, Peckskill, Northcastle and Salem, in the New York Colony, and to Ridgefield, Danbury, Norwalk, Redding, Newtown, and as far north as Litchfield, Sharon and Salisbury in Connecticut, and to Huntington on Long Island, in all which places he preached the Gospel and administered the Sacraments. He was a great friend of that generous churchman, St. George Talbot, whose benefactions our own parish, and many others, enjoyed at that time, and some of them are enjoying still. Mr. Dibblee and Mr. Talbot made several journeys together, encouraging and strengthening the scattered parishes of the Church, and the influence and counsel of our old rector inspired and guided the beneficent use of Mr. Talbot's wealth.

The chief sources of information as to Mr. Dibblee's ministry are the annual reports he made to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Parish Register and Records, which were very well kept except during the Revolutionary War.

In 1750 he reports that his labors are

attended with visible success in each part of his extensive mission. He had a very numerous audience on Christmas Day, and many Dissenters among them, some of whom declared they never saw a more regular or better ordered Christian assembly.

In 1757 he writes that he continues in a constant painful discharge of the duties of his mission, and his church is in a peaceful, increasing state; and also that he has officiated occasionally to the poor people of Salem, and wants Bibles and Prayer-books for Salem and Stamford.

In 1761 we find the introduction of the parochial collections,—they were voted by the parish to be made at the evening service. The rector was supported in part by the Society's grant of £20 a year, in part by the ministerial rates or taxes, and in part by voluntary subscription.

In 1763 he writes that he has the happiness to live among a people who in general are of a quiet and peaceful disposition, and make a religious improvement of the advantages they enjoy. In this year the inhabitants of Stamford numbered 2,792.

In 1764 the chapel at Horseneck was often much crowded when he did duty there on the second Sunday of each month. Three Sunday evenings in the month he officiated at Old Greenwich, or Riverside.

In 1766 he reports that there are in his care 186 heads of families, and 62 actual communicants.

In 1775, the year before the War, he reports that notwithstanding the melancholy state of the Province and the emigration of some heads of families (to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia), there remain at Stamford and Greenwich about 227 families, professors of the church, and about 90 communicants.

In 1781, the Society's report states that no accounts had been received directly from the missionaries who still reside in the New England Colonies; but

that there is reason to believe, from general reports, that their condition is much better than it has been, and they live more quietly, though their churches are still shut up. This was during the War of the Revolution. It appears, however, that the clergy were not absolutely hindered from officiating—probably in private houses—for I have seen two manuscript sermons on the Healing of Naaman, on which is the note, in Dr. Dibblee's handwriting, "Preached Mar. 16, 1777."

It is matter of history that the Episcopal clergy in the northern colonies generally were loyal to the king. They often persisted in using the prayer for "our Sovereign Lord King George," when to do so was as perilous as it was in the South during our late Civil War to pray for the President of the United States. The War appeared to the loyalists of that time in very much the same light as the Rebellion appeared to us, and we cannot greatly blame them for their loyalty. In the parish at Newtown the fearless rector read the Prayer for the King's Majesty with the muskets of American soldiers levelled at his head, having been forbidden to read it on peril of his life. Many of the clergy were imprisoned or banished, and many escaped to Canada and the Provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Mr. Dibblee does not appear to have left his post, though his eldest son, Fyler, and the youngest, Frederick, escaped to New Brunswick, and one historian speaks of himself as having been "cruelly dragged through mire and dirt." His parishioners were well represented on both sides—his own third son, Ebenezer, went into the New York Colony and took the American side—and the passions aroused by the war must have divided the church as well as the community. And not only here, but everywhere, the fact that so many of the Tories were Churchmen, and conscientiously opposed to the war, weakened the church in the estimation of the

people in general, and created a prejudice against it which it took a long time to overcome.

The Episcopal Parishes had to suffer great loss from the flight or banishment of many of their members, and the confiscation of their property; and then, in 1785, from the withdrawal of the aid hitherto extended by the Propagation Society for the support of their clergy. For in that year the Society communicated with Mr. Dibblee, and through him to the other missionaries employed in this State, that it could not consistently with its Charter continue to employ any missionaries except in the Plantations, Colonies, and Factories belonging to the King of Great Britain, and that their present salaries would be continued no longer than Michaelmas next.

This action of the society in England threw the burden of Mr. Dibblee's support entirely on the parish, which immediately increased his salary from £50 to £66, 13s., 4d., and renewed the union under his "Parsonal Care" with Greenwich parish, Stamford to have two thirds of his service, and Greenwich one third. Whether Stamford and Greenwich together found it difficult to support him, and were therefore contented to share the service with still another parish in order to share the responsibility, or whether the arrangement grew out of the scarcity of clergy immediately after the War, we cannot tell, but Mr. Diblee's pastoral charge appears in 1785 to have included Rye, to which he gave one fourth of his Sundays, and which provided one fourth of his salary. In 1788 consent was voted by the parish that he should give one Sunday in twelve to Rye, and afterwards that he should go there "as often as he may think best and for the good of the Church."

Before the Revolution the parish seems to have been organized after the English system, which now prevails in New York State: the "Professors of the

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Church of England" meeting every Easter Monday to elect Wardens and Vestrymen, who constituted the legal corporation. After the War, however, it was re-constituted in accordance with the Laws of the State of Connecticut—those who desired to belong to it being legally warned under warrant of Abraham Davenport, Justice of the Peace, on September 20, 1784, and assembling accordingly on the 30th, to form an Ecclesiastical Society. By act of the Legislature the title to the property hitherto held for church purposes by the Propagation Society in England, passed to the parish itself, which now holds the Glebe lauds in trust for the use of the Rector.

The time had now arrived when the Episcopal church in the independent United States could take measures for securing the Episcopate, and must do so if it would not die out, for it would henceforth be impossible to rely on the Bishop of London for the ordination of its clergy. The first step towards it was taken in Connecticut, where ten of the clergy met in Woodbury, in a house still standing, and made choice of the Rev. Samuel Seabury to go to England, and seek for consecration at the hands of the English Bishops. Failing in this he went to Scotland, and was consecrated by three of the Scottish bishops on the 14th of ~~Feb-~~ *Nov* ~~ruary~~, 1784, as Bishop of Connecticut, in which office he served nearly 12 years. Provision had to be made for his support, and in 1788, (Feb. 8th) this parish sent a lay-delegate to the convention at Waterbury (Feb. 13th) to confer with the representatives of other parishes in the matter. This appears to have been the first Diocesan Convention.

Having secured the Episcopate, the next step was to adapt the English Prayer Book to the use of the American church. So far as the changes rendered necessary by the national independence were concerned, the task was easy, and the Prayers for the President and Congress

were substituted for the Prayers for the King's Majesty and for the High Court of Parliament. But many, especially in the Southern States—Pennsylvania being counted as a Southern State—desired radical changes, affecting doctrine and order, and it is largely due to Bishop Seabury and his clergy that more variation has not been made between the American and the English Prayer Books, and that such changes as have been made are for the most part evidently changes for the better. But it was hard for Dr. Dibblee, then one of the oldest clergy in the Diocese, to reconcile himself to much change, and though our present Prayer Book was adopted in 1789, he continued to use the English Book for 3 years longer. I have recently seen a letter, in the hand-writing of Bishop Seabury, addressed on the 22nd of February, 1792, to Mr. Dibblee, couched in terms of the highest personal consideration, expressing the desire that he would review in his own mind the grounds and principles on which he had hitherto refrained from the use of the Prayer Book of the Church in the United States. It is an admirable letter, every way, and seems to have had its desired effect, for I find in the Parish Record, under date of 9th of April, 1792, that the Parish passed a vote to adopt the new constitution or liturgy of the Church, as agreed upon by the Bishop and clergy of this State, provided that it is agreeable to Rev. Mr. Dibblee.

But the old rector was growing feeble year by year, for he had passed fourscore, and on the ninth day of April, 1798, it was voted that the Wardens apply to the Bishop of Connecticut for an Assistant-Minister. Very considerate were the parishioners in all their action—their letter to him and his reply are both extant, and show the affection and respect subsisting on both sides. The Rev. Calvin White seems to have become the Assistant, with the right of

succession, though he did not succeed him in the rectorship. On the 9th of May, 1799, Dr. Dibblee died, aged 84 years. From the recollections of an old member of the church, deceased a few years since, I have gathered that he died of a tumor in the face—she remembered his preaching with his face bound up in a cloth.

His wife, Joanna Bates, died 3 years before him, and her remains, with those of his daughter, (probably Joanna, the eldest,) rest in the same place with his. His son, Frederick, a graduate of King's College, (now Columbia) became a clergyman, and Rector of Woodstock, N. B., and died in 1826.

"The funeral of Dr. Dibblee," says the narrative, "was attended by a large concourse of people, and he went to the grave like a shock of corn fully ripe for the garner." Ten days before his death the parish met, and placed on record a recognition of "the valuable benefits received through the faithful service and unremitting labours" of the rector. These labours had not been confined to his own parish. He was the first member of the "College of Doctors," or Council of Advice to the Bishop, now called the Standing Committee, and from the beginning almost to the end of his ministry he was often in the adjoining towns preaching and baptizing. He baptized, altogether, over 3,500 persons, and from the mother church of St. John have grown the parishes of Christ Church, Greenwich; (with the parishes at Round Hill and Glenville in that town,) St. Mark's, New Canaan; St. Luke's, Darien; St. Andrew's, Stamford; and Emmanuel Mission Church, Stamford.

It was a fitting thing, therefore, that we placed above his tomb last Wednesday the massive granite which so well represents the firmness and strength of his character and principles, surmounted by the floriated cross which tells the story of the Christian made perfect through

sufferings and triumphant over them, with fitting words of commemoration from the successor of the first American bishop, whose counsels and whose labours, which did so much to shape the future of our church in this land, our old rector so abundantly shared.

He rests from his labours, and his works do follow him.



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