

Centennial Anniversary of the Shaker Church at Enfield, NH
October 18, 1893
Commemorative Address by Isabella Russell

Brethren and Sisters and Kind Friends, All:

It is probably well understood that the object of our meeting is to commemorate, in our humble way, the Centennial Anniversary of the Shaker Church, or United Society of Believers, which was established in this place in the year 1793.

As we look back over the years that are past and gone, to that period, and note the progress which has been made in each successive stage of development, we have the comforting assurance of the stability and correctness of its basic principles, which will in the future as in the past, find expression in the lives and conduct of those who come after us, adapted to the forms and customs of the age and society in which they live.

Let us bear in mind that a truth once established remains a truth forever, and our predecessors, through the influence of their noble, consecrated lives, have proved to us by precept and example beyond a doubt, not only the possibility, but the practicability of rising superior to the interests of a generative life, even to the forsaking of father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children, houses and land, and their own lives also for Christ's sake and the gospel. And can we do more than this to prove our integrity and loyalty to a cause which we believe has very much to do with the uplifting of humanity from a state of darkness and degradation, into an atmosphere of light, love and liberty?

Since the establishment of this Church, hundreds of poor and destitute children have been gathered into its fold, clothed and fed, kindly and tenderly cared for by cheerful hearts and willing hands, not by donations and contributions from other sources, but by the honest toil and industry of its members, who conscientiously felt that while giving even unto the least of these little ones, they were giving unto the Lord, and when the harvest day shall come, as it surely will to each and every one of us, how great will be the rejoicing of those, who in his name have consecrated their lives for the benefit of his children

Time in its onward march moves so rapidly, it is not easy for us to realize that one hundred years have passed since the dedication of this simple structure, where our fathers and mothers brought their heart's best gifts and sacred offerings, where they met to hold sweet communion with each other and with the enumerable hosts of kindred spirits, whose mission it is to bless and strengthen those who are needy; and who shall say they do

not form a very important factor in the celebration of this, their natal day? And my young friends, the inspiration which comes to me upon this occasions is this: we are indeed, the children of a noble parentage; to us has been given a legacy worth more than silver or gold and let us not be satisfied with anything less, than a rightful inheritance to this priceless treasure; let us remember that it can never be attained in a spirit of indifference; as well might we think of depending upon the atoning blood of Jesus for our salvation, as upon the merits of those who have gone before us. They acted their part nobly and well; let us do the same for ourselves and successors.

Let those who in the strength and vigor of youth give the fruits unto God. The sacrifice is none too great for such a glorious cause; let us press on, overcoming every obstacle that lies in our pathway, until we can sing, as did those of other days who made these consecrated walls ring with the echo of their voices:

I'm a free volunteer
I've enlisted under the banner of Christ
And I will not retreat
For I'm no more a slave unto sin.

This is indeed a most fitting occasion to call to mind the severe struggles deprivations and hardships endured so patiently in a spirit void of offence toward those from whom they received the most cruel and inhuman abuse, thereby teaching us the all-important lesson of forgiving our enemies, doing good to those who persecute and despitefully use us, thus establishing in our own lives the principles of peace, love and good will to all mankind.

While this faithful little band of Christians were striving to live free from the defilements of a worldly, sensual life, they had many drawbacks which had a tendency to dishearten and discourage; and oftentimes their only refuge and sustaining strength was their undying and unflinching faith and confidence in their divinely appointed leader to whom they cheerfully and willingly accorded the well-earned and endearing title of 'Mother', and such she truly was to those who were fortunate enough to come under her special care and guidance.

Ann Lee was a woman with gifts so rare, a spiritual vision so clear, sustaining a life and character so pure and blameless before God and man, that those coming into her presence, at once felt an influence and power which they could not resist, oftentimes disarming even her enemies, turning their hatred and prejudice into the most profound respect and admiration, and it is worthy of note, that coincident with the declaration of American Independence, came the joyful tidings of the emancipation of woman, proclaimed by this heaven ordained messenger, and in their seasons of

sacred worship, hers was the voice that gave utterance to words that were like a consuming fire to the very nature of sin and every worldly lust, and with no uncertain sound protested against the injustice and inequality of a system which all down through the ages had placed women in an inferior position, subjecting her to a life of misery and degradation, from which there was no escape, no possibility of redress, so long as man was her acknowledged lord and master.

She it was, who led the advance guard of the grand army of noble men and women, who, today, influenced by the same irresistible force and power, oftentimes in the face of opposition, yet like our own brave leader, are marching on to victory, their motto: "No Surrender," persistently battling for the right, contending against the combined forces of ignorance, superstition and prejudice. And the struggle will continue until the victory is gained; for until this is accomplished, peace and righteousness cannot reign supreme, God's Kingdom cannot come, neither can his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. With this important fact before us, let us give honor to whom honor is due.

Well may we sing:

O my Mother, my blessed Mother!

A sound to me most dear

I'll praise her name, I'll spread her fame,

And kings and priests shall hear.

There are many thousands praise her name,

And shall be many more

Yea, millions, millions, tens of millions,

Shall her name adore.

Do we not see the wisdom, knowledge and insight of our parents in teaching the principle of purity, bringing home to the hearts of those under their ministrations the truth contained in the words so often spoken by our Mother? If you would overcome the evils brought into the world through the lusts of the world, you must lay the axe at the root of the tree, instead of lopping off the branches, thus doing away, abolishing at once and forever all sex distinction, bursting asunder the ties that hold men and women to the generative plane. And this aspiring, this deep longing for liberty and freedom, from the bondage of the flesh so prevalent in the world today is just as much the natural and legitimate growth, unfoldment and development of the soul, as is the transformation of the worm crawling upon the earth at our feet into the beautiful butterfly flitting in the rays of the noonday sun above our heads, which after fulfilling the conditions of its little life below, is already (sic) for a broader, higher and more enjoyable state of existence.

Whatever opposition we may meet, Brethren and Sisters, let us not forget that this is a distinctive feature of our Church. Others may have their mission in life, but it is ours to teach and practice, at home and abroad, wherever we are, under all circumstances and conditions, in connection with every other gospel grace, this vitalizing principle.

And have we not great reason to rejoice, to lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving to the source from whence we derive the power, to live as perfectly to our light and conviction as we do, not withstanding all our imperfections, and the disadvantages oftentimes arising from circumstances over which we have no control?

Evolution is upsetting and overturning the false systems and man-made creeds of the past; but the truth which we hold so dear will not suffer nor be harmed thereby. And if there are errors which sometimes almost unawares creep in among us, if during the lapse of a century, we have accumulated some rubbish, or if we are clinging with a tenacity not born of virtue to relics of a past age and generation, or cherishing some pet theory which we should outgrow and for which we have no use, it would be far better to let them go, and much wiser for us to keep pace with the day and time in which we live, if we would benefit those about us. Our motto should be forever, "Onward and Upward."

One very important event in the history of our Church, which marked an era of progress and development in all that pertained to the present and future welfare and happiness of its members, occurred in the year 1837. Like a thief in the night, there came almost simultaneously into every Shaker home in the land, a remarkable manifestation of spirit power, commencing among the children where there could be no opportunity for fraud, no possibility of deception, thus establishing the genuineness and truth of the communications purporting to come from those who had passed over the river and were now rejoicing in their ability to communicate to their friends in earth life through this medium, their messages of love and kindly interest in those with whom they had once lived and toiled.

This influx of spiritual life and power continued for several years, and from this source came the beautiful gift of songs, many of which are still fresh in the memory of those who listened and were charmed with the music, sentiment and inspiration, under which they were given, and it is the universal prayer of those who have been imbued with this uplifting spirit, those who have drunk from this never failing fountain of living waters, that angels may hasten the day when the knowledge of immortality, the truth which maketh free, and that love which casteth out all fear may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.