

# Charles Krauth

## The Burning of the Old Lutheran Church



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# The Burning Of The Old Lutheran Church

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# The Burning of the Old Lutheran Church

On The Night of September 27th, 1854

By Rev. Charles Porterfield Krauth

Delivered In the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Winchester, Va, The  
Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity, 1854.

Winchester  
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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

A giant of the faith, CHARLES PORTERFIELD KRAUTH (1823-1883) is one of the most prominent American Lutheran scholars, perhaps best known for his masterful and essential volume, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology As Represented in the Augsburg Confession and in the History and Literature of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. He served congregations in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Virginia and in the Virgin Islands, and later edited the *Lutheran and Missionary* and *Evangelical Review* journals. Rev. Krauth was instrumental in the establishment of the General Council and the Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia, which he led. Dr. Krauth was professor of intellectual and moral philosophy and vice-provost at the University of Pennsylvania.

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# Correspondence

WINCHESTER, VA., OCTOBER 25, 1854.

REV. C. P. KRAUTH:

*Dear Sir* – We desire to express the pleasure which we in common with a very large audience derived from the instructive and beautiful discourse delivered by you on Sunday last, and suggested by the burning of the venerable edifice to which every citizen of our town has been attached by strong ties from infancy.

We but express a general wish, when we ask that you would place in our hands a copy of your discourse for publication, it is the more proper that you should comply from the fact that such an event deserves to be made memorable, and such a building, with so many hallowed associations clustering about it, should not perish without the perpetuation of its history in a form durable and worthy of the theme. We say no more than it merits, when we add that your discourse was eminently worthy of the subject.

We are, with high regard, your friends,

J. R. Tucker, William Miller,  
Jo. Tidball, Jacob Baker,  
H. J. Mesmer, Tho. B. Campbell,  
J. S. Carson, Robt. B. Holliday.  
T. A. Tidball, F. W. M. Holliday.

LUTHERAN PARSONAGE, WINCHESTER, VA.,

OCTOBER 26, 1854.

*J. R. Tucker, Esq., and others:*

*Gentlemen* – I am not less willing to commit to you the discourse you so kindly ask for publication, because I feel that your estimate of it is one of



the heart and not of the judgment. I meant but to lay a garland on an altar, and I thank you that your reverence of the memories to which I meant to do homage, has given value to so inadequate an offering. I am truly and gratefully yours,

CHARLES P. KRAUTH.

## The Old Church On The Hill

Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire. —  
Isaiah 64:11.

## The Early History of the Lutheran Church in Winchester

THOUGH THESE WORDS, beloved, give a natural voice to our grief, so natural that they were on the lips of some during the burning of the church, and have been suggested to almost every one since, yet it would be affectation to pretend that our feelings rise to the same intensity as those of the Jews, who used them when contemplating the destruction of their temple. In the mouth of the Prophet, who embodied the spirit of his nation, they are the expression of a climax of sorrow: Zion and the holy cities are a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation; and in flames, their temple, more like a beautiful dream than a fabric, like a dream has vanished. Ours is not such a grief as theirs, for the Jew's idea of the temple was more like that we have of heaven than that we have of a church. In their temple Jehovah was visibly enthroned, the light between the Cherubim was his face, whose glory was hidden by the awful veil from every eye but that of the High Priest, who entered but once a year, and that not without blood. In that temple only could the public worship be fully performed. As the objects of the first dispensation required the preservation of a strict unity, God bound many of the blessings of the covenant to one central place, linking the nation by every possible tie to Jerusalem. The dwellers in all portions of the earth, as they

tasted year after year to the great festivals at the temple, were reminded, that wherever their tents might be pitched, the city made glorious by God's resting in it was their home. The temple was their bond of life, the heart of their state – that gone, the Jew became a mere atom of a dismembered body, a particle of dust to be floated at the will of waters, and borne at the mercy of winds, till the day of the resurrection of his people.

No one temple limits us in the worship of God. We sow the land broadcast with churches. Ours is an invisible center of unity, the glory of the latter house surpassing that of the first. Ours is a unity that makes needless the assembling of all in one earthly house – it binds together all true worshipers on earth, whether they bend in some mighty Minster of ages gone by, rich with the forms of art and hung with the fading trophies of battle, or sing their simple hymn in the rude structure of logs, deep in the quiet woods, with only the gorgeous drapery of autumnal leaves waving about it. Their temple was designed to educate them into the spirit of devotion – with us the spirit of devotion is to be the creator of the temple.

The place in which we gather reminds us that their most serious grief is one in which we are not sharers. We have this place of worship spared. Our ancient church has gone, like some venerable sire whose children are provided for, whose ties to him have become less distinct by intermingling with the new bonds of life, and who in new homes feel an assuagement of sorrow, even when they think of the old home forsaken, and the old hearth desolate. Thus we mourn with a subdued regret, mingling in not unnaturally with that gentle autumnal melancholy which is hardly sadness.

And yet our attachment is strong, our grief is sincere. Association, memory, reverence, hallow and beautify the spot. Some wept for the church, all follow its destruction with regrets. We have lost a remembrancer of our fellowship with the dead, and a prompter and aid to communion with them. They seemed not to be wholly torn from us while it was with us – but now it is departed too – our dead fathers lie around our dead church. Yes, it is a language created marvelously, as so much of Scripture is to our very lips, for us who spring from those who were the founders of the church, and for us who are their children in the lineage of faith: “*Our* holy and *our* beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire.”

On the 15th of May, 1753, Lord Fairfax granted certain lots in the “Addition to the Town of Winchester” for the use of the German Lutheran Church. At the meeting of the Synod of Pennsylvania, the mother of all our

Lutheran Synods, in 1762, the Lutheran Church in Winchester was received into synodical connection. Two years later, April 16th, 1764, the cornerstone of our church was laid. When the black cloud of Indian warfare was scowling over our colonies, and every heart was throbbing with the horrors of a merciless warfare, our fathers laid the foundation of a temple which was to stand when the savages had melted away like snow, and the French with whom they were allied had undergone mutation on mutation – a temple which was to witness the birth and growth of the greatest of nations. Eight years later, in 1772, after great expenses had been incurred, the walls were completed, on which even women had labored with their own hands, the rafters raised, and workmen were busy in covering and finishing the church. The subscription papers, now in possession of our congregation, were duly authenticated by the clerk of the court, and by all the justices of the peace in the county, and the county seal appended. The growing troubles which ripened into our Revolution seem to have suspended the work. During the Revolution the church was used as barracks, and the traces of the smoke from fires built within it were visible upon the walls till they were plastered over. In 1785, when Rev. Christian Streit took charge of the congregation, the church had neither doors nor windows, and in the following year funds were raised for its completion by a lottery. The proposals were printed in Frederick, Md. The spire was not erected as part of the original structure. In 1790 two bells of wonderful sweetness were cast in Bremen, expressly for this church, as the inscription on the one which still remains states. It was long the custom to ring them on Saturday evening, to remind men of the approach of the day of rest. The larger one was unfortunately broken while tolling to announce a death. About 1795 the organ was placed in the church, where it remained until the summer of the present year, when it was taken down and removed to be used in a German Lutheran Church in Baltimore.

The church was constructed with the utmost solidity, built of the old gray limestone, down upon the rock. It ascended slowly because the expenses of building were enormous, and workmen difficult to procure at any price, and because our fathers would contract no debts in building. It was built to endure, and generations might have continued to worship there.

And may we not apply to our church, thus reared and completed, the epithet “beautiful?” It did not indeed pretend to be gorgeous – there was nothing showy about it – but it had preeminently the beauty of congruity. All the

churches now used in our place have been built since, yet it remained most church-like of all, most sure never to be mistaken for anything but a church. It was a plain old church with no sort of pretension; it did not aspire to be Gothic or Romanesque; it was neither modeled after the Parthenon nor Pantheon, neither after St. Peter's nor St. Paul's. It simply sought to be a church, a church for the village on whose borders it was reared – and such it was.

It had the beauty of adaptation. It answered its ends. It was not provided with curious recesses by which the fabricated temple steals from the space meant for the living one; it had no elaborate windows of stained glass, covered with emblems, a maze of cups and ears of wheat and clusters of grapes; of apostles with keys and swords; of butterflies leaving their chrysalises, and pelicans feeding their young with their blood. It had not a single one of all the contrivances by which the religious appetite is titillated, and which help the eye to the delusion that it can do the work of the heart, not a solitary one of the ecclesiological contrivances which are slowly toiling in our country to create the want they pretend to supply.

Our church was a place fitted for praise. Its arched ceiling did not drink up the voices of those that sung to Jehovah, but increased their volume as they rose with the trumpet stop of the organ, or mellowed them as they floated on its softer ripples of sound. In simple good taste it stood, offering no pretensions unworthy its builders, no incongruities as an offering to Him to whom they reared it; a fit place for unpretending men to worship in spirit and truth the living God. Its whole air was calculated to impress the mind with reverence, and make men say as they entered: “How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

## The Site

Those rough, hard-handed old fathers of ours were not without feeling, not without taste. The very location of the church they reared availed itself of an effect, taken without money or price from the hand of Nature, an effect which it would have cost thousands of dollars to produce by mere art, and which then would not have been so perfectly secured. The church swept with its sober glance almost to the horizon. Clear out from all buildings, on

a wide-commanding hill, it received from the eye of the observer part of that reverent regard which it is the highest triumph of Architecture to share with nature. O'er valleys and the silvery traces of the Shenandoah to the blue mountains on the East, o'er forests and the lake-like undulations of hills to the blue-gray mountains on the West, the eye wandered, till it was drawn to the venerable church and fixed by it as an adjunct, half of Nature, half of Art, to the scene, a venerable daysman harmonizing two powers not unwilling to be reconciled. It formed a more vivid object in the memory than the whole town which lay beneath it. It took a place in the mind by the side of forests and rivers and hills; by its uses and its site linking earth and heaven, a thing dear to man, to Nature and to God. Dear for its suggestions was that old church; the first object to salute, the last to fade from the eye of him who came or went. The departing child of our place saw it through tears of sorrow, the returning one through tears of joy; the last, the first object; the last to tell the pilgrim wanderer as it pointed to the sky that there was a home for him in heaven happier than the one he was leaving; the first to tell that same wanderer when he came back again that the home of his childhood was near, yet still, *still* pointing away to a brighter home beyond the stars. What a silent yet not unreal influence for virtue was exercised on the children that were reared in our place by the fact that an object of such early and tender reminiscence should be a holy one, a house of God. In all the wantonness which had given so much alarm, who believed that a hand, young or old, could be found, malignant enough to touch with flame that venerable pile? And it was not design, but what men call accident, and Christians call providence, that gave it at last in its sacred beauty to the flames.

## **Its Hallowed Character**

For its beauty was sacred. It was a "holy" house. We have been speaking of its body, let us look at its soul. It was holy because of the name of God upon it. We know on general grounds our fathers' principles, but an ancient paper has been recovered within a few years, through which they seem to speak to us out of their tombs. It is a discolored paper, reduced to fragments by time, but with every word legible, the Latin record of the aims of the builders, designed by them for the cornerstone of the church:

“In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the foundations of this temple of God have been laid.” “This temple is consecrated to the triune God.”

To the blessed Three, the Undivided One, they reared this house. It was hallowed by the doctrine to whose preservation and extension it was consecrated. Their view of freedom of conscience was not that of the indifference which mingles and confounds truth and error. “It is consecrated,” says that same old document, “to our Evangelical Religion only, to the exclusion forever of sects, whatever name they may bear, and of all dissenting from, or not truly assenting to, our Evangelical Lutheran Religion.” They did not simply say, We consecrate it to religion,’ (though that would have been enough if none were in error as to what religion is,) for even the Pagan calls his dark superstition religion; not simply ‘to the Christian religion,’ for the Mormon calls his beastly materialism the Christian religion; but they used that definite term which placed their meaning beyond question, just as they found it necessary amid the “gods many and lords many,” to say not simply ‘to God,’ but to ‘the one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’ Knowing that their religion was no novelty, they placed the house beyond the invasion of error by consecrating it to the faith they confessed, and that alone. And when they said ‘Our Evangelical Lutheran faith,’ what did they mean? They meant to confess the supremacy of God alone over the conscience, the divine authority of the Bible in every question of faith and life, the great doctrines of human corruption and loss, of the repairing and healing of our stricken nature in Jesus Christ, the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, salvation by grace, justification by faith, which works holiness by love, the uncontaminated sacraments, unbroken in their external essentials, untouched at their heart by the worm of unbelief. To these great doctrines, old as Christianity and enduring as eternity, to these precious doctrines which after the lapse of nearly a hundred years are still preached to their descendants, and still show their saving power in many of their hearts, our fathers hallowed this church. Yet, though they sought to prevent any wresting from its legitimate ends, the church they reared was marked by many an act of fellowship with the other portions of the body of Christ. Its pulpit has been filled at various times by ministers of almost every prominent branch of the church, at its altar the invitation has been given again and again “to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever name or denomination,” to approach and partake in the Holy Supper. The

Rev. William Meade, now the venerable Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia, administered on one occasion the Holy Communion, after our own form, to the worshipers there, who were then destitute of a pastor, and at a subsequent period the Episcopal congregation worshiped in our church for some time. In the earlier efforts of the German Reformed Church to revive their interests here they had the use of it repeatedly; and during the past summer it was our privilege to place it under the control of our Methodist brethren, during their temporary privation of a place of worship. I rejoice that the very last use that was made of our church was one which implied the unity of all saints, one which testified mutual love and confidence between two great parts of the Redeemer's kingdom.

## **What Hallows a Church?**

Our church was "holy," too, in view of the sacred scenes which occurred in it, the sacred memories which grew around it. Our church was indeed one of the most simple, while the temple mentioned in our text was one of the most gorgeous ever erected to the worship of God in our world. The temple of Solomon, with its columns and turrets, stood like some dense priestly band in robes of marble whiteness, lifting a thousand hands to implore mercy on the worshipers, till, touched by the sun, its lambent flames of gold appeared to be colling up from some great sacrifice to Jehovah, the priestly band seeming to vanish in the clouds of their own offering, as did the angel that soared from the altar of Manoah. But our temple, though far less beautiful, was no less "holy." What hallows a place? No mere outside can do it, no forms, no mere creed which leaves the soul untouched, no pompous rites, no consecration by ceremonies however august can render a place truly God's temple. It is the living temple – the body of believers radiant with the soul of faith and glorified by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which alone can hallow the temple made with hands. The church is but the outer court, the heart of believers who worship in it is the holy of holies in which Jehovah dwells, and into which the great High Priest enters, and this hidden shrine makes the temple. The peace that passes all understanding must descend, the love that is stronger than death must tremble upward – and when their wings mingle, the sanctuary is hallowed – and God shines forth from between the Cherubim. And many a scene of fervid love and

faith in our church showed that it had the hallowing element. There fathers and mothers offered their little ones to God, with streaming eyes imploring the great Shepherd to keep these lambs safe from the snares of life, and at last to gather them to the great fold above. There in due time those children, approaching man's and woman's estate, renewed for themselves those holy vows, and by the laying on of hands and with the right hand of fellowship were received into the communion of the people of God. There after the hours of lowly confession, precious seasons of communion passed by, foretastes of heaven, leaving long and sweet remembrances. There fervent prayer oftentimes rose, there the words of the cross rushed from the heart to the lip and from the lip to the ear and heart of the hearers, there dews of refreshing and showers of revival fell – Jehovah showed that it was a place of his rest by making it glorious, by clothing its priests with salvation, and making its people shout for joy.

## **Our German Ancestors**

And year after year new associations clustered about it connected with the *dead*. It was first hallowed by the ashes it shaded, and at last by the ashes it contained. Our fathers fell asleep. Many of them were good and wise men. They had their faults, but happy will it be for us if posterity shall not see that our faults are more serious than theirs. Happy shall we be if we leave to those that follow us as much as our fathers left to us. They were Germans, not ashamed of their origin. We do not claim that our fathers were men of noble blood; it was noble enough, however, to make strong arms, rational brains, and stout hearts. Theirs was the majesty of unpretending self-reliance, the stern independence which the resolve to toil promises, and the toil itself secures. Their motto was: "By working, the workman is made." Some derided their broken English, but they could not often deride them for broken promises, however they might sneer at them for being so cautious in making promises. Some who never knew the value of a dollar because they never made one, despised the economy which refused to squander what severe labor had won. Men laughed at the rough scales in which, whether an idea looked like silver or like brass, our fathers persisted in weighing it. They kept the even tenor of their way. Clinging perhaps more tenaciously to their language and usages because they felt that they were the subjects of an



indirect persecution, on they moved soberly and calmly, building up fortunes and demolishing English in their own fashion. Time, the great test of all things, has shown that they were wise men. While families of other national stocks have vanished in their posterity, our fathers have grown stronger in theirs. That surely is not wise that tends to annihilation; and when we see the names of the deriders passing away, and those of the derided abiding, we are forced to ask, if we admit the claim of the former to have had more knowledge, was there not more wisdom shown by the latter – if the one had more intelligence, had not the other more good sense? I for one am quite satisfied with my patent of nobility furnished by the appearance of two ancestral names in the old Latin record of 1764, and shall be satisfied to leave to my children a name as truly honorable.

Beneath the walls which intercept the evening sun, our fathers lie in the shadow of the church they reared. They have passed away as we are passing, many of them, we trust, to the home of just men made perfect.

## **Rev. Christian Streit**

But our church is hallowed not only by the ashes on which its shadows fall; it is hallowed by the ashes it *contains*. Within it lie the remains of him who is entitled to the name of its first pastor; who, though preceded by transient supplies, may be regarded as the father of our church in this place. Christian Streit was the first, or certainly one of the very first, of the Lutheran clergymen who were born in this country. All the rest of his era, of whom we know anything, were natives of Germany. This venerable man, who so long, so faithfully, and so successfully labored in his ministrations of love, entered on his toils in this place July 19th, 1785. He commenced at once to preach both in German and English, and to act as the untitled but true bishop of all our congregations in this portion of the Valley of Virginia. At the first two communions which he held in Winchester, the number added by confirmation was sixty-five, more than doubling the membership. He at once took steps for completing the church. Our congregation were worshipping, at the time of his coming, in the log church on the hill. But they soon had the happiness of occupying a house of worship of their own. For twenty-seven years they enjoyed the faithful preaching, the spotless example, and the untiring pastoral attentions of one of the most unpretending and

good men with whom a church has ever been blessed. In the sixty-third year of his age, (1812,) he was called from toil and sorrow to his reward. Amid an immense concourse of people his remains were committed to a tomb in front of the pulpit, which then stood on the East side of the church. I have before me the original of some obituary lines, prepared by one whom without offense or contradiction I may call the most distinguished man of the many who have graced Winchester, one who knew the meek departed well, and loved him because he knew him, one who weighed his words – I mean the late Judge Tucker. These lines are written as if inscribed upon the tablet that covered the remains of Christian Streit:

“Within these walls, where late his warning voice Our pastor raised, that voice is heard no more.

His meek and placid eye, his lips whence flowed  
In accents gentle as the dew of heaven,  
The mild, benignant doctrines of the cross,  
Are closed in death; and on his slender frame,  
So oft in humble supplication bent  
Before the throne of God’s most bounteous grace,  
Th’ insatiate monster lays his icy hand.  
This consecrated house, within whose walls  
‘The pealing organ swells the note of praise,’  
Is now his monument! The holy aisle  
No more his people crowd, no longer join  
With awful reverence the benignant prayer  
Poured from a father’s fond and pious heart.  
To this sad spot they now repair, to view  
The sad memorials of that father lost.  
Does hoary age or pensive youth approach  
To read these lines, upon his loved remains  
To drop a tear of fond regret, and draw  
New lessons of instruction from his tomb!  
Speak, gentle spirit, from the silent grave,  
And let thy death, than any mortal tongue  
More eloquent, thy last, best precepts give.  
Bid them like thee pursue with steadfast course  
The paths of virtue, and like thee acquire  
The Christian’s best possession, a soul  
To peace attuned by meek-eyed gentleness  
And humble resignation to his God!  
Tell them that then his terrors death shall lose,  
And from the direst foe become the best  
Of friends: Tell them the everlasting gates  
Of heaven shall ‘turn harmonious’ to receive  
Their souls, like thine, into the realms of bliss.”

When he first lay in the grave, and those to whom he had ministered gathered where they had been wont to hear his voice, it might have been written, as upon the tomb of the architect of St. Paul's, who sleeps in the crypt of the church he planned: "If thou wouldst see his monument, look around." A few columns of the living temple he helped to rear remain, (long may God spare them to us!) but the outward temple is now reduced to ashes and ruins. Those gray old walls alone now mark the spot of his rest. They mark it sufficiently for the Saviour he loved to know from whence to raise the dust of his faithful servant; but shall these remains lie undistinguished by any token of the memory of the living. *He* needs indeed no monument, for it is so ordered that they who deserve such memorials most, need them least. Monuments are not designed to meet a want of the dead, but to do honor to the holiest sentiments of the living. Joshua was commanded to mark with stones the place where Jordan was passed, that the children might be excited to ask in time to come: "What mean ye by these stones?" What mean ye by these stones! That loved ones sleep here who are not forgotten; that the good sleep here, whose memory is precious, whose very bodies are consecrated to immortality. These stones are part of the testimony that man does not die, that he survives dissolution, that these ashes have a connection still with what was lovely and loved. What mean ye by these flowers, ye gentle ones who come to strew them where the sister, who was torn from you in her bloom, is sleeping? Living she loved them, and her hand trained them – but she is gone to the land "where fragrant flowers immortal bloom;" why lay these fading ones, for which she cares not, upon her tomb? What meanest thou by these tears, thou bereaved one who comest to weep, where the gulf is covered but not closed where all the joys of home, all that lifted up the cloud from the future, all that gave a glimpse of heaven amid the sorrows of the world, yes the whole freight of thy soul's joy went down with one awful blow like that which sent the *Arctic* to the sunless depths of the sea? What canst thou do by weeping where thou sawest for the last time the form prepared by robes of whiteness and the pale roses on her still breast for the bridal of the tomb 1 Thy tears were once precious to her, when in some conflict of life resting her head Upon thy heart she felt them dropping warm in sympathy upon her brow. But what cares she for them now? What mean we by all the instinctive homage we pay to the memory of the dead, the mysterious hush, the subdued tone when we speak of them, as though on silent wing they hovered about us,

hearing our words? Their last requests are sacred. The very thought of the covenant we sealed with them when the lips could speak no more, when the thin, transparent hand lay in ours, too weak to return its pressure, and by its faint, gentle trembling interpreting the appeal of the sad and dim but loving eyes – the very thought thrills us to tears. With gentle care we lay aside, as though it was holy, the slightest thing which the hand we shall never press again has touched. Say that the dead know not of all these things – yet we know of them. The impulse that moves us is of God. The fullest homage to the dead is our most sacred duty to the living, to ourselves, to our families, to society – to God. The heart gushes over, not that its waters may moisten the lips that shall thirst no more, but by the impulse of its own fullness; it sings its love song of sorrow to hush its own grief; like a trodden flower it breathes forth its fragrance, though it may be “wasted on the desert air.” Death is the ministrant of all the sweetness that lingers in our world. Let the heart, then, rear its memorials as its visible utterances, its soliloquies on the departed. Let us mark our desire that their memories, and our memory of their memories, may live when we sleep with them in the grave. The dead and living form one family, which awaits a perfect and abiding reunion. One of the venerable Catechisms of our church says truly and beautifully: “Where thou seest a Christian’s grave, there thou seest the couch of a living saint.” And no less truly, no less beautifully, the Shorter Catechism of a sister church teaches: “The bodies of believers, *being still united to Christ*, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.” Christianity has made all that appertains to the dead inexpressibly dear, The more it has glorified the soul, the more has it exalted the body. When Christianity itself was preparing to go down to the darkness of death, in Him who was its incarnation, as well as its Author, she who anticipated the homage to the dead was declared to have wrought a good work, and the box of ointment which prepared the sacred body for burial left a lingering perfume for all generations.

Be it so, then, that the venerated Streit needs no monument; that his best memorial is his works which have followed him to the throne of God, and his works that remain to keep his name fresh upon earth. Be it so – and it is so – yet for our self-respect, for the homage due to meek and long tried virtue, from gratitude to one who passed through hard and often unrequited toil, through weariness and watchings, that he might serve Christ in his church; and that we may teach our children that goodness, if not rewarded on earth, is at least not forgotten, let us rear a memorial. It is not that we

may pay our debt, for that we cannot do, but that we may acknowledge it, and that by the hands of the survivors of his ministry and from ours who share in its blessings a monumental stone may be placed to mark the spot where the servant of God reposes. While many a little one that barely cast around it a flickering ray of heaven and then fled back to its home, while many who left behind none who had cause to pronounce them blessed, have their names recorded in marble, it is not fitting that these ashes should lie unmarked – the ashes of one who for more than a quarter of a century walked blamelessly before the flock, with a heart always faithful, often anxious, and at times silently bleeding.

## The Firemen

The holy and beautiful house where, led by him and the pastors that followed him, our fathers worshiped God, is “burned with fire.” How our text tells our story in a few plaintive words.

And the question rises at the very threshold, ought it to have been so? Was the providence one which designed it, or merely one which permitted it as a punishment to human neglect? There is a tendency in the human mind to torment itself, when a stroke is irreparable, with the idea that it might have been prevented. The means of arresting or curing it seem so obvious when it is too late to use them, that sorrow itself is sometimes absorbed in self-reproach. How slow is the broken merchant to believe that he could not have snatched his fortunes from wreck – if he could have averted the crisis a little longer, if he could have borrowed a little more money, he might have saved himself. It is always the turning of a hand, which unfortunately turned the wrong way, but which turned the other way, as it might and ought to have been, would have reversed the whole result. What mother can be persuaded out of her belief that if this or that had been done her babe had not sickened, or falling sick had not died. How many writers sitting calmly in their homes have shown, after some gallant vessel was engulfed, how the catastrophe might have been averted or mitigated – and yet wrecks of vessels, wrecks of fortune, wrecks of life, still occur and will occur. Man’s heart is ever rising against the pressure of the thought that there is a destiny over which he has no control, that there is a will supreme and fathomless, which he not only cannot stay, but which he cannot even comprehend. “The

number of his months are with thee; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." There is providence in all things, there is chance in nothing.

It is a serious thing to intimate, yet more to make the charge, on slight grounds, that those to whom we look for security against the ravages of fire have by carelessness, obstinacy, or even by want of judgment, failed in doing their duty. Men should be very slow, except on resistless evidence, to suspect such a thing, and cautious in expressing it, for libel is not less libel because the sufferers by it are many.

I confess when with hundreds of others I stood and gazed on the slow progress of the flames on the church, as though they were reluctant to execute their work, my first impression was that it might easily be saved. But when I reflected on the intense drought, not of weeks but of months, which had made that roof like tinder, remembered that the slow spreading of the flame upon it showed that the fire was burrowing in the dry moss and incipient decay on its surface, saw with what difficulty the fierce fire raging below it with residences all around was subdued owing to the great scarcity of water, I felt that it would not be easy, even at an early period, to extinguish the flames. It was the duty of our firemen first to render secure the property around the fire. At what stage they could turn from this to the church they were themselves the best judges. It is hardly just for those who did nothing to throw upon those who did everything the blame of sacrificing the church, a building as dear to the firemen as to the rest of the community. The fidelity of our firemen has been tested repeatedly in the hour of need. In the dead of night, in the freezing breath of winter, they have risen to labor for the preservation of property in which they had no personal stake. Theirs is a labor for which they receive no compensation, and for which they ask none. Our fire companies are not like some in our large cities, recruited from a class eager to avail themselves of the license created by a fire. They are the flower of our young men and of men in their prime, men not hastily to be charged with conduct for which their personal character and their whole past deportment is a warrant that they feel abhorrence. If a single doubt could have lingered in any bosom, it ought to be dispelled by their own clear and satisfactory statement; the unbroken good feeling characteristic of our community should return, and we should feel that now as heretofore there is nothing to abate the gratitude with which we regard the past, the confidence with which we look to the future services of our faithful firemen.

## The Burning of the Church

The fire in which our church was destined to be consumed, as well as the various others which have occurred, is by common consent regarded as the work of an incendiary hand. This fact is one which ought to be seriously pondered. Have these fires been the work of boys? Then our home influences are not what they ought to be. What sort of homes, what sort of parental influence, can be fostering boys who for an hour's wicked excitement are willing to set fire to property, the flames of which may extend where the guilty perpetrators did not mean they should – the flames in which helpless animals have been cruelly burned, and by which human life is always hazarded. No mere thoughtlessness, no mere recklessness of sport, can lead any boy thus far. He must be rotten at the very heart, thoroughly depraved, before such a thought could be harbored in his mind; so wicked that some awful judgment of God will almost surely fall upon him, or on those whose example or neglect strengthened his tendencies to crime. Who are rearing such boys? Or is it another portion of our households? The question then arises, are we doing our duty in regard to their moral training? Can we slothfully give up our domestics to their natural corruption, and expect the fruits of virtue } can we leave the fang and the poison-gland, and wonder that they sting? We must either treat them as though, like ourselves, they have hearts to be renewed and souls to be formed in a Saviour's image, or we will find that their vices will prove scourges of fire to us. Or are we to attribute these burnings to a part of our community debased by griping poverty and ignorance, friendless and therefore the friends of none, who find food for their souls in malignancy at the more favored, and food for their bodies by plundering those they envy? Are we doing our duty to them? I ask not are we dispensing charity with that careless hand which often aggravates what it seeks to relieve, which buys sensation, or finds relief from a disagreeable theme by giving. Is there any care for their souls' estate, any judicious, united and protracted effort to restore them to society? From the one solitary vice of drunkenness great efforts have been made to reclaim men, and one reason why that beneficent labor has not been more fruitful is that it has been directed to that vice alone; one deadly leaf upon a tree, whose root and trunk, whose sap and foliage, whose flower and fruit, are poison. The church itself is not the power that can renew society, but it is

the medium of the power. God acts through it, and men must act with it – they must not put obstacles in its way, they must not maim and cripple it, and ask, why does it halt in walking? Its interests every man should feel to be his own; and until the church ceases to be a mere association in the community, until it becomes the community itself, society cannot be saved. The nightly watch cannot be omnipresent, but if we could restore a conscience to those who are plotting mischief, it would watch them all the time. Till society feels itself a unity, realizes that it can no more shut its eyes to the healing of its diseased members than the body can to the cancer which preys upon a part of it – till the eye ceases to say to the hand I have no need of thee, and the head to the feet I have no need of you, so long mischief will summon its conspirators, and the moment vigilance relaxes, the blow will be struck again. It is an unalterable law that society shall bear in her bosom the scourge for her own crimes. If the effort of the community could be concentrated to the development of the tone which would check incendiary malignity, as it is upon the external means of preventing and extinguishing fires, the vital force would be felt in its deadest members, a light would pervade the darkest abodes and the gloomiest bosoms, and the flame henceforth kindled would be that of good will and love.

We have seen the house reared by the gifts and toil of our fathers burned to the ground. Many eyes that gazed upon it were in tears, as if an old friend were slowly dying. There it stood so meekly, offering its silent plea for preservation; the fire spreading, yet lingering, as if not unwilling that some hand should check it. First a single light tongue of flame seemed to play upon the edge of the roof, and then another, and another, creeping each toward each. At last high upon the spire began to blaze out a lone, lurid star of flame, like Mars upon the horizon of a sultry day, and then hearts began to tremble which up to that moment had not doubted that the Old Church might be saved. But the appointed hour had come. It had not come without a warning. Like an old man admonished by paralysis that the next blow will come from a hand which will lay him in the grave, our church had more than a year ago been touched by a lightning stroke, which proved an omen of that fiery death which was now at hand. At last through doors and windows, as if infuriated at having been so long neglected, the flames surged like the surf of ocean through the cliffs it has worn into openings. Scarcely could flame justify itself as an image of wrath in a form more vivid than that which it now showed itself. It had leaped from point to point, exultant



and panting. At first it had been like some serpent softly moving toward its prey, its head bent low, its scales trailing softly along the ground, its forked red tongue playing silently; now with towering crest, and gleaming eyes, and frightful hissings, it whirled in coils of fire around its victim. Portions of roof, and rafters, and gallery fell, with a sound like thunder. The flame spread among the graves, through the grass dry with the parchings of an unexampled summer, it fiercely followed through all their windings the dead roots of the venerable trees which once stood before the church, and spared not the sweet briar which for years had breathed its fragrance by the door. The spire, which so long had pointed to heaven, lifted its finger to the last, like some brave old martyr unsubdued by the flames. Till the last iron ligament was sundered, it pointed with holy obstinacy up to God, and when everything else that flame could absorb had vanished, it stood, though in fragments, rooted amid massive stones, and towering to the skies.

## **The Ruins of the Church**

It was a superstition of other ages that lightning and flame hallowed whatever they touched. It was not, however, a superstition without a root, for what powers are so fearfully direct from God, what so God-like, so resistless, so beneficent when they purify and warm, so awful when they strike and consume, as lightning and fire! God's pathway, the prophet tells us, is burning coals, and the lightning is the spear that glitters in his hand. Our church is a ruin by no desecrating touch; it is the sacred ravage of the two mightiest and purest powers in nature – the flame of earth, the fire of heaven. When we reflect "to what base uses we may return," and especially in our land where Utility of the lowest kind is a giant with an iron hand, and Reverence a poor abandoned babe, and think that some future ignominy might have blotted out all the beauties of its older memories, we can feel but a tempered regret that the church is gone. To the question, what shall be done with one of the gallant ships of our land, which after long bearing her thunders over the deep has grown unseaworthy, who would not reply: "Let her with spread sail and the glorious flag she defended flinging its folds over her, with no human foot touching her hallowed deck, with no human eye to see her last struggle, let her be given to the winds and the waves, that her memorial may close with the words, 'she yielded to no arm but that of

Jehovah,' and the latest generation of our race say of her tomb as was said of that in which God laid Moses, 'no man knoweth of it to this day.'" It shall not be for generations that we know not to decide what shall be done with our church. God has decided. He has taken it from our hands and theirs, and I for one say, it is well; holy houses like holy men may be taken from the evil to come.

The church is gone, but the soul, the immortal part, remains. The patriot dies, but the country lives; the mother dies, but her spirit lives as a household power; the pastor dies, but his teaching and example live; Jesus was "crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God;" the church is burned, but the God whom men were taught in it to reverence, the truth and holiness it cherished, these live and perpetuate themselves through generation after generation. All that is of God abideth. Like the Hebrew children, it walks through the fire, with one like unto the Son of God by its side, and not one hair upon its sacred head bears trace of the flame. As we move along the paths where we were wont to be cheered by the sight of our old familiar friend, we still, though it gives us pain to see the wreck, turn our eyes toward it by the instinct of habit. How melancholy does it stand now, gray, and its crown cast to the ground. All swept away – all seeming to be forsaken. The rank weeds in time may fill the courts, the dark ivy find root in every crevice and mantle every stone – yea, the "sparrow may find a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God." And when some in the last steps of old age shall dwell with lingering and fainting soul on the privilege of going once more before they die to the old church to which their first and warmest affections cling, as if there they could be nearer to God than in any other spot earth-side of heaven, when their dim recollection of recent things is aroused when they are reminded that the church they loved is burned, they will shake their mournful heads, and with eyes dim with tears say, 'Ah, yes, we remember all now, we can enter it no more, our holy and our beautiful house is gone. Oh, Lord, how long? Is not thy time near that we too may go?'

It is gone – but its consecration shall be preserved to it – it shall be hallowed to God still. Its shattered walls wake new and not undevout thoughts. "Where will you find shelter," was said to Luther in a dark hour; "if you are deserted by your last friend, where will you find shelter?" With his hand uplifted, he replied: "Under the heavens." And thus our church, hallowed to

the pure faith he restored, stands not unsheltered. A fuller light of heaven now beams into it; its roof, which in covering feeble man also veiled a part of the glory that cometh down from above, is gone – open now to the heavens, it seems to say: ‘Let the lightnings burst, let the storms of summer beat upon me and the snows of winter shroud me, I have done my work for God, and not without Him shall a single stone that gave shelter to his children or echo to his praise, not a single stone shall fall to the ground.’

Now the noontide sun lies full upon its heart, the firmament covers it above, the moon sheds her pale beams where they entered not before, the stars shine softly down upon it, and nightly the dews fall as though they wept that it is gone. Removed from temples for the limited worship of a single congregation, Nature by her stern and fiery hand has caught it back and claimed it for her own, a part of her universal temple:

“That dome of nobler span,  
That temple given  
To faith, no bigot dares to ban,  
Whose space is heaven.”

## Ode Sung By the Choir

### *The Old Church on the Hill*

Sung by the choir, with the exception of the three stanzas in brackets.

A hundred years have almost passed –  
Our fathers’ gifts and toil,  
Where now thy shifting shades are cast,  
Hallowed to God the soil.

And though a veil above their dust  
Thine evening shadow falls,  
Still springs to endless life the trust  
They learned within thy walls.

Softly thy measured bells at eve,  
When weekly toils were done,  
Called men the cares of life to leave  
With the declining sun.

Blent with the pilgrim's memories, chime  
Those sweet-according bells,  
And still, though distant be his clime.  
Ring as of home he tells.

When last he heard their sounds, the sky  
And fields of home were fair,  
The heavens seemed filled with melody.  
And music all the air.

When from his heart, at parting, broke;  
"Where now a home have I?"  
Thou, in the last long gaze he took,  
Wert pointing to the sky.

And through the happy tears that filled  
The homeward eyes, was given  
By thee, to each returning child,  
A glimpse that told of heaven.

[Thou stood'st before the natal morn  
Of Freedom's sov'reignty,  
Thou that hast seen our Nation born,  
Thou shalt not see it die.

Though flame had left unsummed thine hours,  
And Time with kind delay  
Forbidden Nature's hostile powers  
T'anticipate decay;

That Land, when heaps of mossy stones  
Had marked thine ancient bound.  
Should rise, as thou didst once, when thrones  
Like them should strew the ground.]

Farewell, thou holy house of God,  
Our fathers' and our own;  
Where in thy beauty thou hast stood.  
Gray walls remain alone.

No dove-like wings of th' Holy Ghost  
O'er font and altar spread,  
But Wrath on fiery pinions tossed  
Her horrors o'er the dead.

'T is gone— a wreck of stormy flame,  
A hulk of stone it lies,  
Yet worthy of its hallowed name,  
It bosom to the skies.

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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions by Pastor George Gerberding](#)

## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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