

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF WARWICK

BY

THE REV. TABER KNOX.

THE Reformed Church 'of Warwick was formally organized as such by the Classis of Paramus, on the second Sunday of January, 1804. Previous to that time the congregation had been Presbyterian in its organization, holding ecclesiastical connection with the Presbytery of New York, and later with the Presbytery of Hudson, upon the formation of the latter in 1795.

The earliest history of the original Church is somewhat obscure. The year 1764-5 is given by some authorities as the date of the organization of the Presbyterian body, but owing to the fact that the records of the Presbytery of New York previous to 1775, are lost, and in the absence of necessary early local records, this date cannot be verified. On the other hand, the records of certain early ministers, who served the people of Warwick and of Florida (five miles distant), conjointly as pastors, do exist; and from these it is evident the Warwick Church had pastoral care at least fifteen years earlier. The Rev. Jonathan Elmer was pastor of these two Churches from 1750 to 1754. After that there is no evidence of pastoral care for eight years, or until 1762, when the Rev. Samuel Parkhurst was pastor of the same Churches, so remained until his death in 1768. Then another interval of four years occurred, during which period the Church became the possessor of property; as, in 1770, two contiguous acres of land were reserved out of certain properties that changed possession, " for a burial ground for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church of Warwick. " In 1773-4 the erection of the first rude house of worship was begun; at that time it was enclosed, but the war of the Revolution delayed its final completion twenty years. This first building was manifestly a very uncouth affair, square in shape, with a curb-roof, a single aisle, with a tier of clumsy seats on either side; the gallery was never completed.

Trustees for the care of the church property appear to have

been first selected in 1784, when, on October 22, John *Wheeler*, Francis Baird, and John Dennison were constituted as such. The incorporation was legally effected in 1791, the certificate of incorporation bearing the date of October 24 of that year. After this incorporation, quit claim deeds for the two acres of land, before mentioned as having been reserved for the use of the Presbyterian Church of Warwick, were executed in favor of the trustees b^y William Wickham and the heirs of John Morin Scott, dated respectively April 23, 1793, and January 18, 1793.

But to return to more spiritual matters, the Rev. Amzi Lewis in 1772, (after four years' interval in the time of ministers), became pastor of the joint charges of Florida and Warwick, severing his connection with the Warwick Church in 1777. Serious difficulties, evidently, at this time, agitated the congregation and made the withdrawal of Mr. Lewis wise in the eyes of Presbytery. But whatever the difficulties were, the separation of pastor and people does not seem to have improved matters materially; for eighteen years things were in so unsettled a condition that one may judge the spark of life was well nigh extinguished. In 1784, when the first trustees were chosen, the memorandum noting that fact also contains the somewhat unusual information that there were -no minister, elders, or deacons existing." Finally the movement of life is again evidenced, and, in 1795, the Rev. John Jolinc assumed pastoral charge of the Florida and Warwick Churches, giving to Warwick one-third of his time; he thus served for seven years. After that the Presbytery furnished supplies.

While the Presb^yterians of Warwick for over fifty year. had thus maintained their ecclesiastical existence, they could not claim great activit^y for themselves. Certainly a Church that, for a time at least, had no minister and no other officers than trustees to hold possession chiefly of a burial ground, and possessing a neglected building, could not claim a high degree of vitality. At the beginning of the century a very decided advance was evident, the result of the *oming*- of new families into the neighborhood, and then began a most unique attempt to carry on a dual organization (which in point of fact did continue in form until the year 1890) by which it was hoped to maintain organic connection with both the Presb^ytery of the Presbyterian Church and the Classis of the Reformed Church.

A strong Dutch element, coming- into the locality, not unnat-

urally desired a Church organization in connection with their ancestral denomination. Their position was considerably helped by the fact that, " about this time several young Dutch ministers, lately landed, preached to the great acceptance of the people. " The English element finally yielded to the Dutch brethren and agreed to the organization of what should be styled the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Warwick. The reason for this double designation was to insure the legal possession of the property that had been given to the " Presbyterian Church. " Accordingly, while Presbytery was still continuing to appoint supplies for the Church, forty-four subscribers petitioned the Classis of Paramus to " furnish them from time to time with preaching and catechising, and to organize them in due time into a congregation. " The petition, dated February 23, 1803, was presented to Classis by the Rev. Mr. Eltinge of Paramus, on May nineteenth of the same year. The petition was granted, though the organization was not immediately effected. Cornelius Demarest and John G. Ackerson were in the following September appointed to wait on the Classis of Paramus at the next session for the purpose of asking supplies. The request was granted, and it was resolved that " any minister belonging to this Classis, with an elder, be authorized to organize the people of Warwick into a congregation, whenever in their opinion, a proper opportunity offers. " In accordance with this resolution, the Rev. Wilhelmus Eltinge and the elder, Stephen Hopper, reported to Classis on April 4, 1804, that on the second Sabbath of January, 1804, they had organized " the people of Warwick into a congregation by the name of the congregation of Warwick. " At this time Andrew Ackerman and Cornelius Demarest were chosen elders, and Aaron Taylor and John G. Ackerson, deacons. Two years later Edward P. Ackerson and John Pelton were also made elders, and Andrew Onderdonk and David C. Demarest, deacons. These eight persons constituted the first full Consistory of the Church.

Of course the dual name of the organization could never be recognized by Classis or any other ecclesiastical body. The organization was constituted a Reformed Church and four years later the Presbytery of Hudson formally recorded that the congregation hail placed itself under the care of the Paramus Classis. As late as 1809 the Church evidently regarded itself as both Presbyterian and Reformed, for, at that date, during a vacancy in the

pastorate, the Warwick Church is found applying to the Presbytery to appoint supplies "if they should think proper." The request rather naively suggests that Presbytery shall not name supplies for certain specific dates, as "these are the days appointed by the Reverend Classis." There is a decided humor in such an application, as evidently the congregation supposed that the dual organization of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church actually existed and that the chasm was thus bridged.

March 8, 1807, the Church was duly incorporated as the "Consistory of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church and Congregation of Warwick." The trustees, however, continued to hold the property in the name of the Presbyterian Church of Warwick, until March 18, 1890.

THE REV. CHARLES HARDENBERGH.

The first minister of the Church after its organization by the Classis of the Reformed Church was the Rev. Charles Hardenbergh, a licentiate of the Classis, who, on the second Sabbath of November, 1804, was ordained and installed as pastor. Mr. Hardenbergh's pastorate continued until the close of the year 1807. He was a great-grandson of Johannes Hardenbergh and Catherine Rutsen, of Rosendale, Ulster county, N. Y. the Johannes Hardenbergh to whom, with six others, Queen Anne of England, gave a royal grant in 1708 for the large tract of land in the state of New York, which has been known as the Great or Hardenbergh Patent. His parents were Johannes Hardenbergh and Rachel DuBois, of the Wallkill Valley. His father was a cousin of the Rev. Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh, D. D., the first president of Queens, now Rutgers College, of which institution he was elected a trustee in 1812. He studied under the Rev. Solomon Froeligh, D. D., was licensed by the Classis of Paramus in 1812 and was the first minister the Classis ordained. After leaving Warwick he was pastor at Bedminster, Somerset county, for twelve years, when, in 1820, he accepted a call from the Greenwich Reformed Church, corner of Bleecker and Amos streets, New York, and died the following year. A man of more than ordinary ability and devotion to his work, his death was a loss not only to the Church he served, but also to the denomination he loved.

More than four years elapsed before a successor to Mr. Hardenbergh was selected; the congregation was ministered to by

supplies. During this time the original little building that had been in use seventeen years since its final completion, was discarded for a new, and, for the time, commodious church. The new church was completed in the spring of 1812.

THE REV. JOHN I. CHRISTIE.

The summer of the same year witnessed also the settling of a pastor in the person of the Rev. John I. Christie, who, though a licentiate of the Classis of Bergen, had served for ten years in the pastorate in the Presbyterian Churches of Amsterdam and Galway. He was born at Schraalenburgh in 1781; was graduated from Columbia college in 1799, and was licensed by the Classis of Bergen in 1802.

Mr. Christie was the beloved pastor of the Warwick Church for twenty-three years, until his health, which had not been good for a number of years, made his retirement necessary. During the pastorate of Mr. Christie, in 1830, the Sabbath school was organized on the eighth of August, with a total enrollment of sixty-five scholars. Mr. Christie was a faithful minister of the word, and a godly man, his sincere nature drawing to him the hearts even of the children of his flock. His sermons were always carefully prepared, and under his ministry the Church became much strengthened. His death occurred in 1845.

THE REV. BENJAMIN VAN KEUREN.

The Rev. Benjamin Van Keuren became pastor in May, 1836. He was a graduate of the seminary at New Brunswick, class of 1824. Before coming to Warwick, he was pastor at Esopus from 1825 till 1836, during parts of which period he was also pastor of the Churches of Hurley and Bloomingdale, N. V. Mr. Van Keuren's pastorate at Warwick covered only a period of a year and a half, closing in November, 1837. His later pastorates were in connection with the Presbyterian Church. He died in 1865.

The next important act on the part of the congregation was the purchase of its parsonage property. This was made April, 1838, and included twenty-two acres of land, with a dwelling upon it that served as the minister's home for twenty years. The minister was not expected to cultivate so large a farm. The purchase was the rather made as a speculation. Its cost was \$5200, and arrangements were at once made to sell off so much of the land as was

not needed for parsonage use. By this plan the parsonage, with the ample grounds that still surround the present building, were secured at what finally proved to be but a small cost to the congregation.

THE REV. JAMES W. STEWART.

After securing a parsonage, the Church sought again a permanent minister, the choice falling upon the Rev. James W. Stewart, who on May 15, 1838, having held pastorates in Salem and Jackson, was installed as the Warwick pastor. The Church prospered anew upon Mr. Stewart's assumption of leadership, and gained largely in numbers; his pastorate ended in the fall of 1842.

THE REV. FERDINAND H. VAN DERVEER, D. D.

On the fourth of December, 1842, the Rev. Ferdinand H.



THE REV. F. H. VAN DERVEER, D. D.

Van Derveer, began to preach regularly, and on the fourteenth of February following (1843) he was installed as pastor. His long and successful ministry in the Warwick Church covered a period of almost thirty-four years. Dr. Van Derveer was the revered and beloved father of the Warwick Church of today. He graduated from Union College in 1821, and from the seminar^y at New Brunswick in 1823. His previous pastorates had been at Hyde Park, New Hurley and New burgh. He was an independent

thinker, an earnest speaker, clear and logical in statement, illustrating the truths he proclaimed by his holy and consistent behavior. Though a man of great energy and decision of character, he was peculiarly social in disposition. Dr. Van Derveer's ministry was signally blessed in the salvation of souls and in sowing the seed that has borne its fruitage long years after. He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Rutgers College in 1828.

In the early years of Dr. Van Derveer's pastorate the church building of 1812 proved inadequate for the uses of the congregation. Accordingly a new edifice was erected, which was corn-

pleted and dedicated in 1848. Eleven years later the Church was enlarged and beautified; as then completed and used by the congregation for thirty years longer, it was attractive and commodious. Its architecture was Grecian Doric, the roof supported in the front by four massive fluted columns, forming the spacious portico where for so many years the congregation were wont to gather for mutual greeting before or after the services within. Soon after the enlargement of the church, the congregation built



THE REFORMED CHURCH OF WARWICK,- 1 848.

the new parsonage, which has continued to be the comfortable and commodious home of its pastor until the present time.

Dr. Van Derveer's pastorate terminated, in consequence of the limitations of age, September it, 1876. His death occurred July 10, 1881, at the home of his son-in-law, the Rev. Thomas S. Dusenberre, at Livingston, N. Y.

THE REV. VERNON B. CARROLL.

On December 28, 1876, the Rev. Vernon B. Carroll was installed pastor of the Church, and remained at its head for ten

years, until January 1, 1887. Mr. Carroll was born in Baltimore in 1846; was graduated from Rutgers College in 1868, and from



THE REV. VERNON B. CARROLL.

the seminary at New Brunswick in 1871. His previous pastorates were in Pottersville, N. J., and New York city. He was a man of scholarly attainments and of large capacity for work; an able preacher, deeply spiritual and profoundly conscientious. He was decidedly progressive in his ideas and keenly alive to the methods and demands of modern Church life. A new era in the Church's spirit and activity began with his ministry. The Church made much progress along all lines; its membership was largely augmented and its benevolences were systematized and greatly increased. The Ladies Missionary Society (Auxiliary to both the Boards) was organized while Mr. Carroll ministered to the Church. His later pastorates were at Tenafly, N. J., and Armenia, N. Y. His death occurred December 21, 1899.

THE REV. PETER CRISPELL.

On the third of August, 1887, Classis ordained to the Gospel ministry, and installed as pastor the Rev. Peter Crispell, under whose seven years' ministerial care the Church continued to make very marked progress. The additions to its membership were especially large; its Young People's society was organized, and the growing congregation found the church of thirty and forty years before, again too small. Once more the question of enlargement or rebuilding had to be considered. It was decided to build a new church on the old site, and plans, drawn by Mr. E. G. W. Dietrich, of New York, calling for a handsome stone structure, were adopted. The new edifice



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was built at a cost, complete with organ and furnishings, of more than \$35,000, besides the value of work done gratuitously. By the personal exertions of the pastor and the liberal response of a most united people, it was dedicated without encumbrance on June 26, 1890. The building is in many respects an unique structure. Its architectural style is Byzantine; its walls and arches, towers and buttresses are built of the rough stones gathered from fields and fences, which, when first built into the structure were still green or black with growing



THE REFORMED CHURCH OF WARWICK.- 1890.

lichen or moss, and the mold and weather stains of years, and are still most beautiful, covered with growing ivy. The church is commodious, with a seating capacity of five hundred.

Mr. Crispell's pastorate terminated the first Sunday of June, 1894. He resigned to become pastor of the Reformed Church at Utica, N. Y., of which he is now pastor. Mr. Crispell is a native of Hurley, Ulster county, New York, where he was born in 1862. He is the son of Peter Crispell, M. D. He graduated from Rut-

gers College in 1884, and the seminary at New Brunswick in 1887.

THE REV. TABER KNOX.

The present pastor, the Rev. Taber Knox, was called from the Fourth Reformed Church of (Manayunk) Philadelphia, and was installed October 23. 1894. Previous to his Philadelphia pas-



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torate, Mr. Knox was pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Tarrytown, N. Y. He was born in New York city in 1863, and is a grandson of the Rev. John Knox, D. D., who was one of the pastors of the Collegiate Church for forty years. Mr. Knox is a graduate of Columbia College, class of 1883, and of Union Theological Seminary, class of 1886. After leaving the seminary he had charge, in the absence of its pastor, of the Presbyterian Church at Schaghticoke, N. Y. He was ordained to the ministry when installed pas-

tor of his Tarrytown charge July 12, 1887.

The Junior Christian Endeavor society and the Young Ladies' Missionary society ("Heart and Hand") and two branch summer Sabbath schools are recent additions to the working agencies of the Church, and with the Sabbath school, the Christian Endeavor society and the Ladies' Missionary society, organized as noted above, in former years, are doing good work.

According to its most recent report the families now constituting the congregation are 150; its membership 269; Sabbath school enrollment, 237; its benevolent contributions last year, \$1524.

This Church has given three of its sons to the gospel ministry. The Rev. Cyrus G. Van Derveer, the son of its pastor, Dr. Ferdinand H. Van Derveer, was ordained to the Gospel ministry by the Classis of Paramus at a meeting held in the Warwick church, November 9, 1859. He was pastor of the Reformed Church at Davenport, Iowa; and during his pastorate there also served as chaplain in the Civil War; at the time of his death he was secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions. His death occurred at Warwick in April, 1868.

The Rev. Thomas S. Dusingberre, the son of Elder Peter Dusingberre, was also a son of the Church. A sketch of his life is given in the history of the West New Hempstead Church, in this volume. He now resides at Pine Plains, N. Y.

The Rev. James Henry Bertholf, another son of the Church, son of James Holly Bertholf, was ordained to the Gospel ministry by the Classis of Westchester, and installed pastor of the Church at Unionville, Westchester County, N. Y. He afterwards served as pastor of the DeWitt Chapel, in connection with the Collegiate Church, New York city; the Reformed Church at Nassau, N. Y., and the First Freehold, Marlboro, N. J. Mr. Bertholfs present residence is Yonkers, N. Y.