

Leighton Parks

LEIGHTON PARKS WAS CALLED TO THE RECTORSHIP OF EM-
manuel in 1878. At this time he was a Deacon and but
twenty-seven years old. Bishop Paddock, after a talk with Mr.
Parks, remarked to his wife, "I don't know about so young a
man taking as large and important a parish as Emmanuel after
such men as Dr. Vinton and Dr. Huntington. It is a great re-
sponsibility; he has only twenty-four written sermons". The
conservative element of Emmanuel agreed he was too young
and "too broad," and some parishioners left the church be-
cause of this choice. They may have lived to regret it, for
Dr. Parks built up a superb ministry even with Phillips Brooks
packing Trinity at every service only a few blocks away.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Parks always maintained that any
success he had was owing to Mr. Brooks saying to people,
"Do not trouble to come here, go around the corner and hear
a wonderful preacher at Emmanuel Church." Mr. Brooks be-
came a very dear friend and on his birthday, December 13,
the three Parks children always took him a bunch of flowers.
He would receive them in his study and make much of them.

Leighton Parks was born in New York in 1852 while his
father, Martin Phillips Parks, D.D., was rector of St. Paul's
Church, New York. Both his parents were southerners and
his father had previously been Professor of Ethics at West
Point. One of nine children, Leighton Parks graduated from
St. John's College, Annapolis, and from the General Theo-
logical Seminary in New York. Following his graduation, he
went round the world as a tutor to a young man. When they
reached Geneva, Switzerland, the American Church was with-
out a rector. He was asked to take the services for six months,

and it was here in Geneva that he met his future wife. Born
of American parents, she had nevertheless lived all her life in
Geneva. She had never been in America until she came here
as the bride of Emmanuel's new Rector, and resided on Mt.
Vernon Street.

A story is told that things were a bit confusing to her at
first. One day someone came to see the Rector and she told
the maid to ask him if he would wait for a few minutes as the
Rector was at breakfast, the word (*déjeuner*) always being
used in French for lunch. It quickly got around the Parish
that the Rector did not get up until mid-day.

The boundless energy of this minister, his forthright ap-
proach to the many problems of the Church very soon pro-
duced results. The first mention in the Vestry minutes of a
new approach by the Rector was his request that the seats
in Emmanuel be free for the afternoon service. This was ap-
proved in theory but necessitated securing from the pew
holders a release of their rights to the public in the afternoons.
Dr. Parks was constantly working to build up this second
congregation, and when this service was changed to 7.30 in
the evening, and included music and the choir, it became as
large as the morning one. This extra music expense bothered
the Vestry, but Dr. Parks offered to pay for it out of his
salary for four months until he had demonstrated a success.

It is noted in the minutes that the Vestry was suddenly
aware and disturbed, and parishioners had complained, that
certain changes and additions in furniture had taken place
in the chancel without the Wardens' knowledge or approval.
A vote was taken signifying disapproval of the changes "with-
out legal authority" and independently of the right which the
Vestry claimed belonged to them. A motion was also passed
that the Senior Warden present this disapproving vote to the
Rector. Such suppression must have irked the vigorous young
rector and certainly would not be acceptable to any clergyman
today.

However, at the next meeting the Vestry voted "to exon-

erate the Rector from any intentional infringement on the rights of the Wardens”.

It was the policy up to this time, and it continued for many years (in spite of Dr. Parks' requests to keep it open), to close the church from the end of June to September. This was undoubtedly an economy measure but also one which would seem to indicate that the congregation was composed largely of people who lived in Back Bay in the winter and moved out of town for the summer.

Dr. Parks instituted Bible Classes for every age and deplored the “lack of vigor” in the Sunday School. He reorganized it, gave it his personal supervision, and each Sunday had a class to instruct the teachers on “such subjects as he might think likely to tend to their profit.”

Apparently the Rector did not attend Vestry meetings unless invited to do so — or else should he have something to propose. He “said his say” and left! On one such occasion he wished to report the unhappy and unhealthy conditions under which the women's societies and Bible Classes met in the basement. When the chapel was built, these activities were less conspicuous but now they were growing greatly and rapidly, and the accommodations for these “charitable workers” — so essential to the life of the church, was poorer and in striking contrast to all the other Episcopal churches. Dr. Parks had secured plans and estimates for new space (cost \$6,000), and suggested that this be covered by the Easter Offering. Such a building for the use of the different societies of the church was immediately voted, and promptly completed.

A resolution was voted about this time, and sent to the Rector, “That the Wardens and Vestry of Emmanuel Church desire to express their sense of the earnest and faithful work done by its Rector during the three years that have elapsed since his first connection with the society and their appreciation of the peculiarly satisfying results which have already accrued therefrom to the best interests of the church. Having a well assured and ever increasing confidence in his Christian



The Rev. Leighton Parks, D.D.

1878 - 1904

character, in his ardent devotion to the cause of religion and his consistent purity of purpose, they trust that he will feel still further encouraged to press on in the path he has marked out for himself which must eventually lead to the abundant profit of the church and the community." Probably after this the Rector had things pretty much his own way.

His was definitely a teaching ministry. His Bible classes for all ages were very fine. He had the rare gift of putting much meaning into few words. One parishioner remarked, "Most weekday services consist of five minutes of service and twenty-five minutes of preaching, but Dr. Parks had twenty-five of service and five minutes of preaching, and one did not forget what he said."

In 1889 a gift from an estate made it possible for Emmanuel to erect a new church on Washington Street to replace a mission carried on for some years in a store — the Chapel of The Ascension. The *Boston Transcript* notes, "It was a novelty in that area to see a line of carriages driving up in front of the new Chapel." (Enthusiastic Emmanuel supporters, for this mission and church continued to be an interest and responsibility of Emmanuel for many years.) Many prominent clergy were present, among them Phillips Brooks. Bishop Huntington, Emmanuel's first Rector, in his dedication address, said, "The vigor, enthusiasm, and ideas which animated the founders was a sense of responsibility; a feeling that no church, any more than an individual, could live for itself; that a true parish is one which is always working for others. The missionary spirit may be called the first distinguishing mark of this congregation."

At about this time Dr. Parks wrote the Vestry for a leave of absence. He was "mentally tired and the responsibility of the past ten years has tended to dull my mind." This request was granted and a reception was given Dr. and Mrs. Parks at the Hotel Brunswick on the eve of their departure for Europe with their three young daughters. These were left with their grandparents in Geneva and the parents carried out a long

cherished plan to go to Italy. Unusual cold and unheated hotels brought disaster, and they both caught pneumonia at Pisa. Here Mrs. Parks died while Dr. Parks was still very ill. It was decided the children should remain with their grandparents in Geneva while Dr. Parks came home alone. Three years later the children returned and, with the help of a much loved governess, they grew up in Boston.

On Dr. Parks' fourteenth anniversary at Emmanuel, he stressed the growth of the congregation, from a small one to the present where "there are more parishioners than it would be possible to seat in the Parish Church were they all to attend the same service — not a pew to be rented". There was no opportunity to enlarge the church on its present site and he suggested that land be bought now in the growing city to the west (Massachusetts Avenue and Beacon), and when propitious to move there with a larger church.

The committee of the Vestry to study the suggestion pondered the subject for two years before presenting a report which was unfavorable to new land and new church, primarily because of incurring a substantial debt, it would seem.

Dr. Parks apparently had no hesitancy in asking for needed money. Every other Sunday a collection was taken for a specific purpose, but frequently he asked for amounts for needs not met — for Emmanuel House, for instance — "We have some money on hand but need \$800 more. There is no special offering for this — no further plea — just send in the money to me. I've no doubt that it will arrive." One Sunday he announced — "This is my seventeenth birthday and I'd like a present from you of \$2,000 for Emmanuel House. I'd like to be able to announce that I have it next Sunday."

He finally admitted he did not like asking for money — there ought to be a better way. Why offerings were only taken on first and third Sundays? (long an established custom). He thereupon analyzed the contributions of the Parish and reduced it to a final figure of an average of 12½ cents per parishioner per week. He appealed for fifty cents from every-

one, and if weather or sickness prevented one from coming, it was to be made up the next time.

This seems to be the beginning of the knowledge that the church cannot function without a steady known income; perhaps the start of the pledge system.

In 1896 Dr. Parks had a call to a Brooklyn parish but he decided to remain at Emmanuel. This called forth a special resolution of satisfaction from the Vestry and a reception at the Hotel Vendome "as a testimonial of the high esteem in which he was held in the Parish."

Perhaps out of fear of losing him, they now felt they must work out a larger church, and a new committee (including two ladies) was appointed. They quickly not only approved Mr. Francis R. Allen's plans which permitted an additional forty pews, but as quickly collected \$45,000 of the \$100,000 needed. Full cooperation was given by the Parish and the last-service in the old church was in April, 1898. The rebuilding of Emmanuel was now underway and services were held at the Young Men's Christian Association not far away.

In December, 1900, Dr. Parks asked for a leave of absence — "After twenty-two years I find that the preparation of new sermons has become a burden, and that reaction from the strain is not such as to free me from the dissatisfaction in the results."

While Dr. Parks is resting in Europe and the new church is abuilding, is perhaps a good time to review some of the myriad of unmentioned activities of the Church during Dr. Parks' rectorship. For brevity's sake, they will only be listed, but this in no way should belittle the vigor and importance of these many working units throughout the past forty years; each with a purpose of meeting a specific need in the church, community, and in the mission field, also to develop close parish relationships both in service and in fellowship.

The choir had become full-fledged with forty members, men and boys, and the Sunday School had increased rapidly until at this time there were nine officers, twenty-two teachers, and

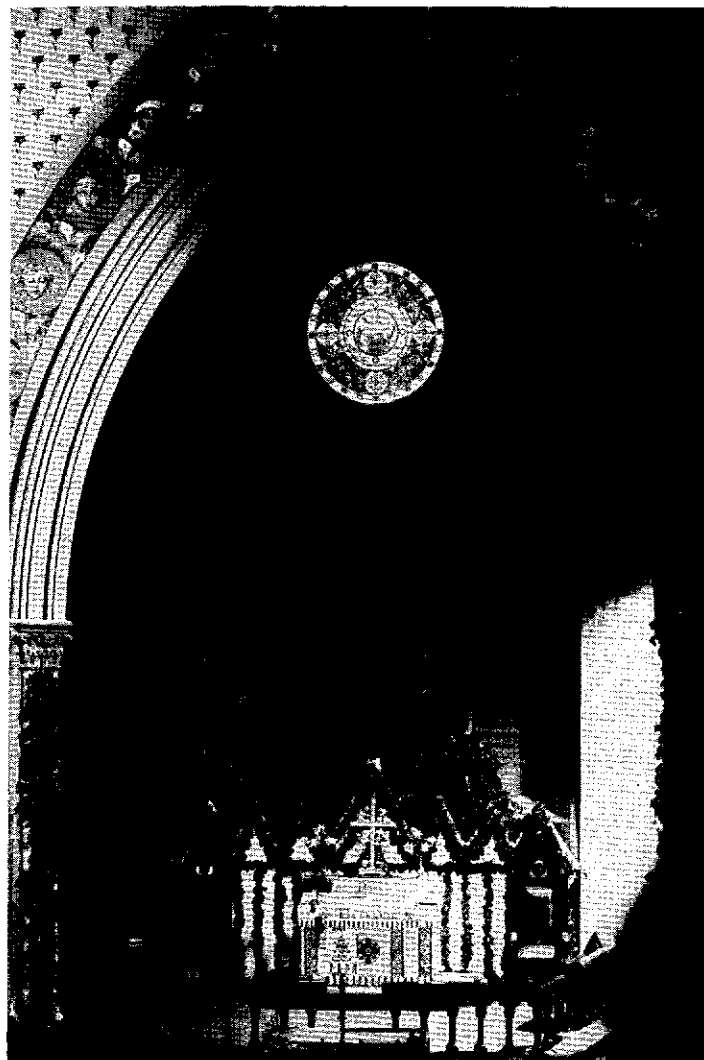
308 students enrolled. This necessitated dividing the classes into the Huntington School which met in the morning, and the Vinton School which met in the afternoon.

Under the name of the Parish Association, so organized by Dr. Vinton, were many active societies.

The Dorcas Society, the first women's work begun under Dr. Huntington, where garments were cut and given to needy women to be sewn for a weekly payment. The Women's Missionary Society, another early group, existed for the purpose of serving missionaries and their families at home and abroad. The Guild of Emmanuel gave opportunity for the younger members of the Parish to engage in charitable work. The Periodical Club, The King's Daughters, added their contribution of "good works" — The Chancel Committee, a small but devoted group who cared for the Altar linens and flowers; The Girls' Friendly — a great society in the church in this country and in England — was to bring young girls into friendly relations with their more favored sisters, and to make them feel at home in the church; The Emmanuel Club for younger men of the Parish; The Students Club of young women from away, studying in Boston; The Mothers Guild, a friendly get together with a tinge of the missionary spirit thrown in.

So much for the Parish Association, something for everyone with a desire to become a part of Emmanuel. For the most part, these organizations raised their own money to support their program by fairs, shows, or collecting money from their membership.

From mid-June to mid-September the people of Emmanuel were scattered, but then began some of the most gracious works of the Parish. Nearly seven hundred children were sent to the country for longer or shorter stays. Camp Emmanuel in Plymouth for young boys, Fay Cottage at Woods Hole for women and children, and Summer Harbor excursions twice a week, about 600 from the Parish, including the Church of The Ascension, enjoyed a day's outing.



Original Chancel of Emmanuel Church

Many of the same Societies had their counterpart at The Ascension. Emmanuel House, outgrowth of a former mission in Park Square, was moved to a vacant store near the Church of The Ascension because of the growing need of a Parish House for its increasing activities.

On March 5, 1899, the new church was dedicated. It was paid for on the day it was opened. The great work of enlarging and beautifying the church was brought to a successful and happy conclusion. The old church went north and south; the new church was turned to run east and west to use available lawn on the east side of the church. The Vestry had voted a sum "not to exceed \$125,000." The actual cost of the building was \$103,042 and the value of the memorials was \$23,000 — a total of \$126,342 (pretty close figuring).

The memorials, many of which were designed and built into the fabric of the church by the architect Francis R. Allen, have greatly enhanced its beauty.

The chancel rail was temporary, for though several large donations for it were offered, it was the intention of the Rector that the beautiful rail designed by Mr. Allen "be given by those who desire to share in the new church, and can give but small sums." The necessary sum was finally raised, and the communion rail in place "in memory of all who have been communicants in this Parish from its foundation." The Rector must have been overjoyed that this particular memorial was completed before his departure.

In June, 1900, Mr. James Haynes died, the sexton of Emmanuel for thirty-nine years. He was buried from the church which he loved well and served faithfully, and "his memory will be cherished while any remain to remember that silent footfall and reverent carriage and quiet dignity and shrewd humor."

No sooner was the new church completed than Dr. Parks urged the enlargement of The Church of the Ascension. Its seating capacity was three hundred with six hundred communicants, and five hundred in the Sunday School — bulging

at the seams. The Vestry voted an expenditure of \$16,000. This was promptly in hand and the improvement completed successfully.

In 1902 Dr. Parks announced the first gift of \$5,300 to the Endowment Fund, the necessity for which he had spoken many times — “to insure the permanence of this work from generation to generation and the carrying out of the large program when those who support it now have passed on.”

In February 1904 Dr. Parks resigned to accept a call to St. Bartholomew’s Church in New York. His was a difficult decision to make. He was very happy in Emmanuel, but Bishop Lawrence, his close friend and his Bishop, urged him to go.

Dr. Parks in summing up his twenty-five years with the Parish spoke feelingly of the spiritual growth of “his people” and the annealing of friendship and worship together. He mentioned as well the physical growth and the place of the Parish in the community. He continued: “that it may not be supposed there is nothing to offer but sentiment, I append the statistics for twenty-five years —

	1879	1903
Baptisms	14	83
Confirmations	15	68
Communicants	266	1300
Offerings	\$21,105	\$66,989
Offerings for 25 years		\$1,143,083

The years in New York were happy and fruitful for Dr. Parks and his Parish. After twenty-one years at St. Bartholomew’s, he resigned to make way for a younger man. He and his unmarried daughter went to England to live to be near his eldest daughter who had married an Englishman. His grandchildren were devoted to him and gave him infinite pleasure. Here he lived out his life which continued to be a happy one in spite of increasing blindness during his last four years. He died in 1938 at the age of eighty-six.