

Alexander Hamilton Vinton

IN SPITE OF THE OVERSHADOWING OF WAR AND ITS CRIPPLING aftermath, Emmanuel was now at last beginning to feel secure under Dr. Huntington's leadership. He had really established Emmanuel as an important factor in the religious and social life of Boston. Dr. Huntington's departure, therefore, was a stunning blow to Emmanuel's congregation and to its wardens and vestry. A committee was immediately appointed to find his successor. Eventually the Rev. Alexander H. Vinton, D.D., was offered the rectorship but he refused the appointment. However, some six months later, no satisfactory candidate having been found, Dr. Vinton was asked to reconsider, and this time he accepted and became Rector of Emmanuel, October 5, 1869.

Dr. Vinton was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1807. He studied medicine and had practiced for three years when he "felt the call to the ministry." It is interesting to note that Emmanuel's first two rectors should each have made a drastic change in their "early life's work" and each became noted in their final careers of Episcopal ministers.

Ordained after three years at General Theological Seminary, he served six years at Grace Church, Providence, and was then called to St. Paul's in Boston where he remained ten years. Phillips Brooks speaks of this period as "the strongest and most effective ministry which our church has ever had in Boston." Phillips Brooks was brought up under Dr. Vinton's influence and greatly loved and honored him.

In 1858 Dr. Vinton left St. Paul's for Holy Trinity in Philadelphia and from there to St. Mark's in New York. In 1869 he came back to Boston to finish his ministry at Emmanuel at

the age of sixty-two. He found that in his absence of eleven years Phillips Brooks had risen rapidly into prominence and had already drawn many people away from the neighboring churches. Emmanuel shared in this loss of parishioners to Trinity. Dr. Vinton, however, brought with him some of his past parishioners from St. Paul's, a demonstration of how often one's religious life is involved with the individual appeal and power of a rector.

Dr. Vinton continued to strengthen the religious life of Emmanuel, calling on everyone to participate in some part of its activities. It was under Dr. Vinton that the many parish societies were brought together under the name of "The Parish Association." The object was "The promotion of Religion in the congregation and its extension among those without!" It included teaching Sunday School, visiting the poor, promoting classes, lectures, etc., and organizing benevolent operations. There were seven departments — one for men called the "Committee on Work within the Parish." The Rector was ex-officio president and the wardens ex-officio vice-presidents. There is no mention in the records of their activities.

During Dr. Vinton's rectorship the Mission Church of the Good Shepherd became independent and immediately he asked that a new mission be started as the Chapel of the Evangelist. Still later came St. Andrew's Church. This last mission was active for many years and though its clergy developed their local program, they continued to keep in close touch with Emmanuel. Eventually Trinity took over this mission and finally, after some years, it was closed because of the changes of population within its neighborhood.

Though Dr. Vinton was renowned for his preaching and scholarship, one young parishioner recalls that in her early church-going days she found his sermons "very long and very difficult to follow, so she and many of the young learned their commandments from the tablets back of the communion table during the long sermon time, or counted the gold stars on the blue background of the ceiling."

During his entire rectorship Dr. Vinton was harassed by the pressing and ever increasing debt of the church. There seemed little chance of erasing it during the depression of these years. Finally some extra land on the west side of the church was sold and after much discussion for and against, it was agreed that over and above the twenty per cent annual tax on pews, there would be added another five per cent to apply specifically towards reducing the debt. In the midst of the concern about the debt, the Vestry received a communication from the Rector proposing to share with the congregation the hardness of the times, and to aid in the reduction of the debt by a reduction of one-fourth of his salary. The proposal was accepted by a vote of the Vestry.

The expenditure for music was in turn reduced to \$2,500 from \$3,500. During all these early years, no item seems more often a subject of discussion and contention than the amount to be spent on music, including the salary of the organist. One organist of this period was remembered as a particularly temperamental gentleman who one day locked the organ and went off with the key before service. The congregation imagined the choir sang without accompaniment intentionally and was pleased with the effect!

The church music at first was provided by a quartet, followed by a mixed choir of men and women. The men and boys' choir did not come until Dr. Park's time.

In October, 1877, Mrs. Vinton died. She was exceptionally beloved in the parish and it was very shortly thereafter that Dr. Vinton resigned. He wrote that he had always "entertained a conviction that the Scriptural term three score years and ten should define the limit which, with average ability, a clergyman can successfully conduct parish work."

Mr. Mudge, a long time member of the Vestry, spoke regretfully of Dr. Vinton's resignation and extolled his great qualities at a parish meeting. "A marked man in the church for many years — no General Convention complete without his presence — cogent reasoning of his sermons — classic



The Rev. Alexander Hamilton Vinton
1869 - 1877

oratory — ripe scholarship — transcendent qualities of mind — beauty of a rounded ministry.”

So, once again Emmanuel is losing a master mind and dynamic leadership.

This may be an appropriate place to comment on the records of the Vestry meetings to date, the first fifteen years. Nothing could be more coldly factual and arid — full of dates of meetings and names appointed on committees — corporation annual meetings were dry as dust also — no content of discussions — only the final vote — no personalities even hinted at. All in the most proper “rules of order” style. However, when a member of the Vestry or congregation died, eloquence burst forth in Spencerian perfection of sensitive, generous praise and loss. All this is in the small, precise handwriting of the era. It sometimes needs considerable perseverance to discover the content and intent.

It is amazing to find that throughout these years there were constant complaints from the parishioners that they could not hear the minister from the pulpit which finally was moved; also, demands for more windows and light everywhere — church, chapel, and even the basement where the women worked. All this in a new church was disheartening — no loud-speakers or electric lights in those days.

On Dr. Vinton’s resignation, the Parish was well cared for by his assistant, the Rev. Henry Evan Cotton, who was especially interested in young people and organized several activities for them.