

HISTORY

— OF —

FALL RIVER,

WITH NOTICES OF

FREETOWN AND TIVERTON,

AS PUBLISHED IN 1841,

BY REV. ORIN FOWLER, A. M.,

TOGETHER WITH A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF REV. ORIN FOWLER;
AN EPITOME OF THE MASSACHUSETTS AND RHODE ISLAND
BOUNDARY QUESTION; AN ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT
FIRE OF 1843; AND ECCLESIASTICAL, MANUFACTURING,
AND OTHER STATISTICS.

FALL RIVER:

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1862.

ORIN FOWLER.

*Orin Fowler, the eldest son and sixth child of Captain Amos and Rebecca (Dewey) Fowler, was born at Lebanon, Conn., July 29, 1791. His early years were spent in laboring upon his father's farm, though he was engaged for two winters—when he was sixteen and seventeen years old—in teaching a school.

He fitted for college under the instruction of his pastor, the Rev. Mr. Ripley, and entered Williams College in the autumn of 1811. At the end of the first term he took his dismissal, and after studying again for a while under Mr. Ripley, and also for one term at the Academy at Colchester, he entered the Sophomore class in Yale College in October, 1812. Here he maintained an excellent standing as a scholar, being distinguished in the more solid, rather than in the more graceful branches. A few months previous to his graduation, he accepted the Preceptorship of the Academy at Fairfield, Conn., and held the place—discharging its duties with great fidelity and acceptance—until the autumn of 1816, when he resigned it, that he might devote himself more exclusively to theological studies,—Dr. Humphrey, then minister of Fairfield, afterwards President of Amherst College, taking the direction of them.

He was licensed to preach on the 14th of October, 1817, by the Association of the Western District of Fairfield County. Having preached occasionally in different places, chiefly in Fairfield County, but without any reference to settlement, he decided in March, 1818, to go on a mission to the Western country. He was ordained with a view to this, at Farmington, at a meeting of the North Association of Hartford County, on the 3d of June following, and the same

*From "Annals of the American Pulpit," by William B. Sprague, D. D.

day rode twenty-one miles toward his field of missionary labor. Having spent about one year laboring in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana, and perhaps some other of the Southwestern States, he returned to New England, by way of Virginia, in the summer of 1819.

Having preached with acceptance at several different places, he accepted an invitation to supply the pulpit at Plainfield, Conn., in the winter of 1819-20, and shortly after received a call to become the pastor of the church. In due time he signified his acceptance of it, and was installed on the 1st of March, 1820.

Mr. Fowler remained the pastor of the church at Plainfield for nearly eleven years, when, owing to some peculiar circumstances existing in the parish, it was thought expedient that he should be dismissed from his pastoral charge; and this accordingly took place on the 27th of January, 1831. The council, in dissolving the pastoral relation, rendered an unqualified testimony to his Christian and ministerial character.

Almost immediately after leaving Plainfield, his services were required by the church at Fall River, and he was installed there on the 7th of July of the same year, the installation sermon being preached by the Rev. Dr. McEwen, of New London.

In the year 1841, Mr. Fowler delivered three discourses, containing an historical sketch of Fall River from 1620 to that time. In this sketch he referred to the boundary line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, that had then been in dispute for about a century. Not long after, at a meeting of the citizens of Fall River on the subject of the boundary, Mr. Fowler, without his consent or even knowledge, was placed upon a committee to defend the interests of the town before Commissioners appointed by the two States. This service he promptly and ably performed; but the Commissioners came to a decision in which the people of Fall River were little disposed to acquiesce, and they resolved upon an effort to prevent the establishment by the Massachusetts Legislature of the line fixed upon by the Commissioners. Mr. Fowler now published a series of papers in the *Boston Atlas*, designed to present before the public mind the historical facts sustaining the claims of Massachusetts; but even his most intimate friends did not know that he was the author of them. When the authorship was ascertained, there was a general voice in favor of his being chosen to the Senate of the Commonwealth at the next session of the Legislature. He was accordingly

elected in the autumn of 1847, and the Senate, chiefly, it is said, through his influence, rejected the report of the Commissioners by a unanimous vote. Such was the estimation in which he came now to be held as a legislator, that in the autumn of 1848, before his Senatorial term had expired, the people of his district elected him to the thirty-first Congress. Here his influence was extensively and benignly felt, and his advocacy of the cheap postage bill, particularly, is said to have been highly effective.

Mr. Fowler, during the time that he was a member of the Massachusetts Senate, supplied his own pulpit, either in person or by proxy, and continued to perform his pastoral duties until the last of November, 1849, when he left Fall River to take his seat in Congress. Agreeably to a previous understanding, he was dismissed from his pastoral charge by the same council that installed his successor, in the spring of 1850.

During his connection with Congress, he often supplied the pulpits in Washington and the vicinity, and preached for the last time in the autumn of 1851. On the night of the 27th of August, 1852, he had a slight attack of illness, but the next day was able to be in his seat in Congress as usual. A day or two after, the attack was repeated, but relief was again obtained after a few hours. It was soon found, however, that his disease, so far from being dislodged from his system, was taking on an alarming form, and that his system was rapidly sinking under it. After he became convinced that his recovery was hopeless, he requested to be left alone with his wife, when he offered a comprehensive and affecting prayer, without wandering or repetition,—mentioning especially both the churches of which he had been pastor. After this he began to speak of his spiritual state, and said:—"I have tried to live in peace with God and man." But the difficulty of respiration did not allow him to proceed. He languished until the 3d of September, and then gently fell into his last slumber.

His remains were taken for burial to Fall River, and were received by his former charge, as well as his fellow citizens generally, with every testimony of consideration and respect. His funeral sermon was preached by his successor, the Rev. Mr. Relyea.

Mr. Fowler was married October 16th, 1821, to Amaryllis, fourth daughter of John How Payson, of Pomfret, Conn. They had no children.

Besides various speeches in Congress, and contributions to periodicals, newspapers, &c., Mr. Fowler published a sermon preached at the ordination of Israel G. Rose, at Canterbury, in 1825; a Disquisition on the Evils attending the use of Tobacco, 1833; Lectures on the Mode and Subjects of Baptism, 1835; History of Fall River, 1841; Papers on the Boundary, 1847.

NOTICE.

In the delivery of the following discourses, those portions of them not suited to the services of the Sabbath, were omitted; and some matter suited to the day and the occasion, was delivered, which is not printed. The numerous facts recorded in this Sketch, have been collected, and their accuracy has been tested, by unwearied labor and research. It is believed they may be relied upon as substantially correct.

The author takes pleasure in acknowledging his obligations to the many friends who have assisted his enquiries; and he will only add, that if these discourses shall aid, in the humblest manner, in saving from oblivion the early history of FALL RIVER, and in promoting her future prosperity, he will be amply rewarded.