

REPORT

OF

Committee of Investigation,

APPOINTED BY CITIZENS OF WILTON,

TO ASCERTAIN THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE BY WHICH THE TOWN'S
MEETING-HOUSE WAS DESTROYED.

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the pulpit, hallowed by the footprints of Livermore, and Fiske, and Beede ; and, heedless of the sacred memories garnered therein, he laid his hand upon it, and it was made silent forever. Stretching out his arms, he clasped the whole structure in his embrace, and soon " walls, arches, roof, and deep foundation stones, all, mingling, fell."

Probably no event in the history of the town, which did not involve the loss of human life, has ever occasioned so deep and so general a feeling of regret as the burning of the Old Meeting-house. Erected in A. D., 1773, it had stood for eighty-six years, and was highly prized as a relic of the past, increasing in interest, in this point of view, as years passed by and churches of similar construction became more rare. Having been recently repaired, so far as to secure it against rapid decay, it was hoped it would long remain to furnish to future generations an illustration of the style of church-architecture of the eighteenth century.

More than this. It was an object around which clustered a thousand associations connected with the religious sensibilities of the community. It was a memorial of the time when there was a unity of faith, and when deep-seated religious principle was the rule, and skepticism, or a disregard of Christian institutions, was the exception. It was the place where our ancestors worshipped. Thither, in its earlier years, the inhabitants of the town, almost without exception, were accustomed to go up to keep holy time ; thither, too, many of us present here to-day, perhaps most of us, were carried by our parents in our infancy, and led in our childhood, to receive our first public religious instruction.

The old house was fraught with interest on account of its connection with the civil history of the town. It was there our honored ancestors were wont to meet for deliberation and action in the troublous times of the revolution. It was there, probably, that they signed the covenant of non-importation and non-consumption of British goods, which is spoken of in the centennial address as " a

THE Committee appointed at a meeting of citizens of Wilton, held Dec. 12, "to investigate the cause of the fire by which the Town's Meeting-house was destroyed," have attended to the duty assigned them, and ask leave to submit the following

REPORT.

ON Thursday evening, Dec. 8th, 1859, a musical entertainment was given in the old Meeting-house belonging to the town of Wilton, by the members of a Juvenile School under the instruction of Miss Thurston, assisted by several ladies of Wilton, and one or two persons from abroad. A large and interested audience had assembled, and the hours passed pleasantly by. Hundreds of hearts, if not literally "a thousand hearts, beat happily." When the exercises were closed, the audience, with hearty cheers, left the house — left it never to pass its portals again. Scarcely had the echo of the last foot-fall of the retiring congregation died away, when a mighty destroyer, like some fearful demon, entered. Throwing out from the church-tower a signal of his presence, that a few might gather round and gaze with saddened hearts upon his work of ruin, he strode on through pew and aisle, thrusting out his tongue of flame, and gathering within his devouring jaws the memorials of a past century, pregnant with a thousand reminiscences, pleasing or sad, of by-gone years. He descended into the orchestra, from which the voice of sacred song had so often ascended, and beneath his scorching breath it was blackened, charred, consumed. He leaped into