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from this issue: The Riverside Cemetery, Middletown

Note from the publisher

We at Between the Lakes Group are happy to make this article from Volume 2 of the *Connecticut Quarterly* available to you. We anticipate adding considerably more material like this to the free material we are pleased to offer. Even though the article is short, we have added an index – as much to facilitate finding it on the world wide web as to use in actual perusal of the article.

If we detect sufficient interest in the subject matter, we will follow this article with a larger collection of Middletown history and ephemera. That would become our second CD-ROM of Middletown History. [Our first Middletown Collection](#), republishing a detailed list of real property holdings in that city, along with other material, is available via our website.

Please visit our website, located at <http://www.betweenthelakes.com>, examine the material offered on our Middletown Collection CD-ROM, and see the other [Connecticut material](#) that is available. Note that Connecticut is only one of the states for which we publish historical and genealogical material.



THE RIVERSIDE CEMETERY.

A SKETCH OF THE OLD BURYING-GROUND IN MIDDLETOWN.

BY ALICE GRAY SOUTHMAYD DERBY.

Just across the track from the railroad station at Middletown, scarcely a stone's throw from the blue waters of the Connecticut River, lies the quaint old graveyard variously known as "The Old Cemetery," "The Old North Burying Ground," and the "Riverside Cemetery." It was probably when Middletown, or as it was then called Mattabesett, was first settled in 1650 that this site was chosen for the graveyard, but whatever town records may have been made before 1652 have been lost, so that the first measures taken in regard to the ground cannot be quoted. In 1656, however, "Thomas Allin was chosen to dig the graves, that is to say 5 foot deep and to have 3 sheelings a peese for them."

"At a towne meeting November the 27, 1658, it was agreed betweene the towne and Thomas Allin about the buring place which is as followeth: That the sayed Thomas Allin is to have the buring place for his uss ten years, and at the end of which terme the sayed Thomas Allin douth ingage to have a good sutfient fence of post and rayle not above ten years standing and in the meene time to keep it from any damages done by swine, to the true performance hereof the sayed Thomas Allin douth hereunto set his hand provided that the towne have free liberty to bury their dead and to visit by there graves."

While Goodman Allin had the "uss of the buring ground" there were probably not a few deaths, but little record is left of those early sorrows. The stones, if

such there were, have crumbled away, or themselves been buried out of sight, and the earliest inscriptions now legible are those of 1688.

On "Jenewary 8" of that year, the town records tell us, Zipporah, wife of Thomas Harris, died, and the inscription which marks the spot where her "deceased body" is laid can be easily read. On the eighteenth of March, just a week before the "new year" of 1689 began, little Hannah Sumner's short life of seven years was ended, and June "DAN^{LL} COL^{NS} SON TO M^R SAM^{LL} COLLINS" died at the age of thirteen. But the most important death in town during the year was that of Mr. Giles Hamlin, who died on the first of September.

Dr. David Dudley Field tells us that "among the men whom the people delighted to honor were Mr. Giles Hamlin, his son John Hamlin, and his grandson Jabez Hamlin. Mr. Hamlin, though 'near fifty years



THE OLDEST STONE.

crossing the ocean wide,' was elected representative to the General Court twenty-two times; and in 1685 was elected an assistant, and thus annually until his death, except as the privileges of the freemen were interrupted by the usurpation of Major Andros."

Giles Hamlin must have been foremost in the people's thoughts whenever the roll of the town-drum was heard, for he it was who, on "desember 17th '66" gave to the town and train band a drum, which "the towne voated" was to be beaten "twis on fornouns and twis

in afternouns on Saboth days and thanksgiving days and fast days." So presumably it was beaten again and again until 1679 when "a parte of the inhabitance of the towne," having "purchased a belle," first "among the proprietors of the bell" stands the name of "Mr. Gills Hamline," the largest subscriber.

Owing to the position of Mr. Hamlin's tomb it was with difficulty that a photograph of its curious epitaph was obtained, and even this seems to represent the side of an obelisk, but it is really a bird's-eye view of the top of a flat table-stone.

Giles Hamlin's wife was Hester or Esther Crow, daughter of John Crow of Hartford, and granddaughter of Elder Goodwin. A plain brown headstone next Mr. Hamlin's monument tells us that

HERE
LYETH THE
BODY OF
MRS. HESTER
HAMLIN AGED
72 YEARS DYED
YE 23 OF AVGVST
1700

Less figurative than his father's epitaph, but touching in its chronicle of a good man's life, is that which marks John Hamlin's grave:—

Here Lies the Body of
John Hamlin, Esq^r, Eldest Son
of Giles Hamlin, Esq^r, of
Middletown: A Faithful Man
And Feared God Above Many
36 years Succesively He Was
an Assitant of This Colony and
in that and Diverfe other important
publick trusts he Served his
Generation with Great integrity
Not Seekin his own But the
Wealth of His people and
Having done Good in israël
Finifhed his Cowsr and kept the
Faith he Fell Afleep jan^{ry} 2^d
173⁸ in the 75th year
of his Age.

One of the silver communion chalices still used in the First Church of Christ in Middletown is inscribed "The gift of John Hamlin, Esq^r." His wife Mary, whose tombstone is next to his, was the daughter of the Reverend Nathaniel Collins, the first pastor of that church.

Not less honored in his epitaph than his father and grandfather is Jabez Hamlin, a name still dear in Middletown, and noted as that of her first mayor when the city was incorporated in 1784:—

In Memory
of
the Hon. Jabez Hamlin, Esquire
son of the Late John Hamlin, Esquire
who deceased
AE. 82, Apr: 25, AD. 1791.
Having been honored
by the public confidence
from his youth to his advanced years,
and employed in various grades of office
untill he was called to the higher duties
of Magistracy,
after a life of great usefulness
in Church and in State
he died, in a good old age
respected, beloved, lamented.

Beside him lies interred

the Body of
Mary the Virtuous Confort of
Jabez Hamlin, Esq^r and Daughter of ye
Hon.^{ble} Christopher Christophers
Esq^r of Newlondon, who Fell afleep
April ye 3^d A. D. 1736 in ye 22nd
Year of her Age.

Epitaph.

"So Fair, so young, so Innocent, so Sweet,
So ripe a judgment, and so rare a wit,
Require at Least an Age in one to meet.
In her they met, but long they could not stay,
twas gold too fine to Mix without Allay."



INSCRIPTION ON TOMBSTONE OF GILES
HAMLIN.

Jabez's matrimonial history did not end, however, with the death of Mary in her twenty-second year; for in addition to her stone we find those of two other wives and a "relict." His second wife was Margaret, daughter of Captain George Phillips, one of the chief men of the town. She died in 1748. In 1768 his third wife, Abigail, daughter of the Rev. Nathaniel Chauncey of Durham, died, as her pastor's record tells us, on "Nov^r 3 at 4 P. M. She had long had the Asthma and laterly the Dropsy." Jabez's fourth and last venture was "Mrs. Susanna, widow and relict of the Rev. Samuel Whittlesey of Milford." After twenty years of life together, she became also the relict of Jabez Hamlin, and was finally laid to rest beside him in 1803.

The Hamlin stones are gathered together in one lot, surrounded by a wooden fence, the grass is kept cut and the stones well cared for. Such is not the general



rule. The place has been greatly neglected; in summer the poison ivy covers the ground, entirely concealing the smaller stones, climbing up to wave in triumph from the tops of the taller ones, and covering the treacherous holes of former graves, so that the living who wander in and out among the long rows of stones need to take constant heed each one to his footsteps lest he literally "stand with one foot in the grave." Yet it is a lovely spot, even in its uncared-for state, this small odd-shaped God's Acre, which is daily used as a thoroughfare by all sorts and conditions of men. It formerly extended nearer the river than it now does, but twenty-five years ago the eastern portion of the cemetery was appropriated to the uses of the railroad, and the bodies lying in that part were carefully moved. Unlike some old cemeteries, this one has never been used for two layers of graves, at least not intentionally. There was plenty of room when it was first laid out for it to be extended towards the west, as has been done more than once.

From time to time interest has been awakened in the old ground. Half a century ago the North Burying Ground Association was formed, a map of the cemetery was carefully prepared, plans were made for buying adjacent land, and lots were portioned off for sale. Little was accomplished, however. Within a few years the General James Wadsworth Chapter, D. A. R., decided to make the Riverside Cemetery the object of special care, and it is hoped that soon by its efforts

and those of the "Middletown Old Burying Ground Association," incorporated in 1895, something may be done to keep as consecrated ground this spot which has been so neglected by those who should have cared for it, and so desecrated by those who have no reverence for the past or present.

One name, at least, among the many recorded on the moss-grown stones carries us back to New England's beginnings, for it is that of Lucey, wife of Elisha Brewster, the great-great-grandson of Elder Brewster of the Mayflower. Here lie also Allens, Bacons, Cornwalls, Halls, HARRISES, Henshaws, Hubbards, and Hulberts, Johnsons, Millers, Phillipses, Rockwells, Shalers, Starrs, Stancliffs, and Sumners, Wards, Warners, Wetmores, and others well known in the early history of both town and colony.

Between 1690 and 1725 the stones are many, and but few can be particularly referred to. In 1690 "Insine William Ward dyed" on the 28th of March, and not far away, beneath skull and cross-bones, "lyeth the body of Phebe Ward, wife of Ensigne William Ward, 1691." In 1694, John Hall, jr., son of John Hall, one of the first settlers, and a deacon in the First Church, died and was deemed worthy of the epitaph shown on his stone in the cut on the preceding page.

An inscription of 1695 which, in spite of its ludicrous quaintness, reveals a great deal of sorrow and domestic calamity, tells us that

SARAH THE
WIFE OF JOHN
BACON LYES HERE
WHO DIED BEING
AGED BUT 31 YEARS
WHO HAS LYING
BY HER SIX CHIL
DERN DEAR AND
TWO SHE HAS
LEFT HER HUSBAND
TO CHEER.

There is one curious boulder, now almost level with the ground, which, in rudest lettering, bears the words: —



N. W. CVTLER
AGE IN THE 100
YER. DIED IVNE
THE 5. 1706.

We are told by tradition that the old man buried here was a stranger in the town; that some time after his death a friend came, and with his own hand carved this rude memorial, and then went away.

The old cemetery is not lacking in curious inscriptions. One which always possesses great attraction for me is that which states that

Here lies the Body of the
truly virtuous, peaceable
and peacemaking M^r
Nathaniel Brown who lived
in peace and so Died, May
the 7th, 1735 in y^e 53^d
Year of his Age, leaving
one only Daughter, the heir
of his fortune.

My thoughts always wander from the peaceful end of the peaceable father to his one only daughter, and a curiosity entirely out of place in this solemn spot seizes me to know what became of her and her fortune. Let us hope that some worthy man sought and won her in marriage, and that their wedded life was such that in after years it could be truthfully recorded on his tombstone also that "he lived in peace and so died."

Very quaint are some of the inscriptions on children's stones. One to the five-year-old son of Abner Ely reads:—

In Memory of
This Letle Youth,
Wich we Hope
Did kno' the truth.

Another is inscribed:—

This lovely pleasant Child
He was our only one
Altho we have buryed three before,
Two Daughters and a Son.
God grant us grace with Job to say:
The Lord doth give and take away,
And Blessed be his Name for aye.

One, with a beautiful thought in the simple lines, declares that

Under these clods of clay
and Dust doth lye
A pleasant plant
gone to Eternity.

This is in memory of little Annah, daughter of William Southmayd 3d. Her mother was Mehitable, daughter of Rev. Josiah Dwight of Woodstock, granddaughter of Col. Samuel Partridge of Hatfield, and great-granddaughter of John Crow of Hartford. Little Annah's grandmother on her father's side, who is buried near by, was Margaret, second wife of William Southmayd 2d, and one of the six daughters of John Allyn of Hartford, for many years Secretary of the Colony of Connecticut. But to me the most touching of all the children's memorials is that upon a little stone, now lying on the ground, from which the clinging vines and brambles were with difficulty torn away:—

George ye only
Son of M^r George &
Sarah Lason. Died
March 2nd, 1756. Age
6 Years. 8 Mons. & 1 day.
Farewell Dear Gift
Since God will have it *
Tis sin to mourn
at his will we Know
Here he Lyes asleep
Within his Earthly Bead
until y^e Resurrection
of the Dead.

Looking at the closely set stones, we can but wonder—though it is perhaps a gruesome subject—what were the various causes of death. An old church record may perhaps give us some idea. Not a few little children succumbed to the "black canker, worms, throat distemper, fitts, cold after measles, chincough, rattles and yaws," while those of older years struggled in vain against "chronical con-

sumptive difficulties, putrid fever, asthma, dropsy, or sometimes smallpox," and those who by reason of strength attained to four score years, yielded at last to the all-conquering "infirmities of age." One little lad we know died "of the small Pox by Enoculation" in his twelfth year; and here and there we find a stone recording a sudden, tragic death, as this one, for instance:—

Here lies the Bodies of Isaac &
Nathaniel Sons of Jacob & Edith
Cornwell, both slain by Lightning
in an Instant, April y^e 13, 1739
Isaac in y^e 17 & Nathaniel in y^e
10 Year of their age.

Another stone, erected fifty-five years later, is

Sacred
to the Memory of
Miss Ruth Starr
daughter of Mr. Elihu
& Mrs. Mary Starr
who was unfortunately
drowned in the Sound
July 12, 1794.
Aged 24 Years.

"Alas! they plung'd in watr'y graves
and tasted death beneath the waves."

More than one inscription tells in differing words the story found on the large headstone which is

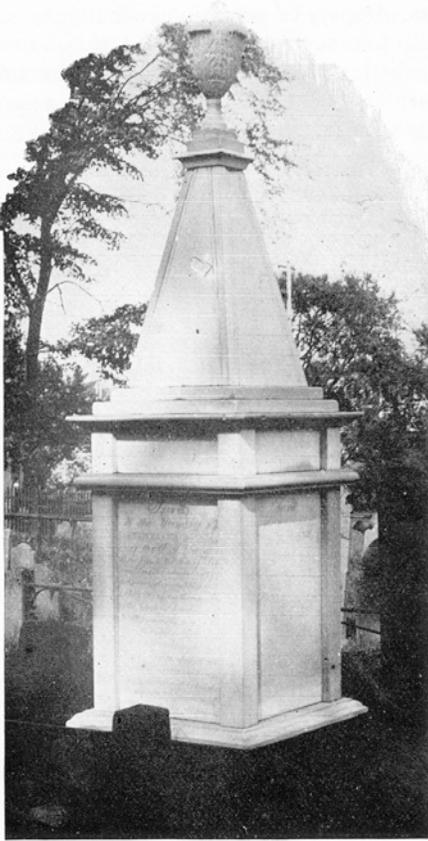
In Memory of
Mrs. Lydia Bull & her Infant,
Wife & only Son of M^r
Samuel Bull, only Daughter of
Capt. Joseph & Mrs. Sarah Gleason.
She died 24th January
A. D. 1772 aged 22.⁹
the Infant died 11th Jan^{ry}
A. D. 1772 Aged 24 hours.

"Beneath this stone death's prisoners lies
The stone shall move, the prisoners rise
When Jesus with almighty word
Calls his dead Saints to meet their Lord."

In 1753 Dr. John Osborne, a scholar, poet, and physician, died at the age of forty. A pompous epitaph was carved on his monument, but when his son came of age he had the former inscription effaced and this substituted:—

Here is interred the mortal remains
of Dr. John Osborn.
— Ask nothing further, traveler; nothing
better can be said, nor nothing shorter.
Ob. 31st May, 1753, Æ. 40.—
Life how short, Eternity how long.

Not a few military titles are to be found, and while many represent officers of colonial militia, here and there is a name famed in early American history. There are few marble monuments among the somber sandstones, but prominent among these few, near the western entrance of the cemetery, gleams the one which honors the man of whom Middletown is so justly proud, "distinguished in the world as



TO COMMODORE THOMAS MAC DONOUGH.

the Hero of Lake Champlain; in the Church of Christ, as a faithful, zealous and consistent Christian character, in the community in which he resided when absent from professional duty, an amiable, upright, and valuable citizen,"—Commodore Thomas Mac-Donough.

One elaborately carved stone is sacred to the memory of Return Meigs, the father of Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs of Revolutionary fame. This quaint family name of "Return" always brings to mind the courtship of a former Jonathan Meigs, who, having pressed his suit in vain for his sweetheart's hand, finally turned away, vowing that he would sue no more. The maiden, finding that he was in earnest in his determination, quickly relented, and ere he was out of hearing called to him in loving tones, "Return, Jonathan, return." He returned, and in memory of this ancestral romance, in each generation of their descendants there has been a "Return" or a "Return Jonathan."

During the greater part of the time that the old cemetery was in use slavery existed in Connecticut, and



black and white, bond and free, lie side by side in the old ground. Next Deacon Hall's stone may be seen a carefully carved one in memory of "Sambo, Negro Servant of Thomas Hulbert"; and next a small stone bears in clearly cut letters the name of "Fillis, wife of Cuff Negro."

The old graveyard is closely connected with the history of the church. Tradition tells us that the first Christian services in Middletown were held under the grand old elm which used to stand near the entrance of the burying-ground. The first minister in town was Mr. Samuel Stow, whose grave is without doubt in the old cemetery. His death occurred in 1704, but the table stone which probably marks his grave is without inscription. Mr. Stow's ministrations not being acceptable to all the people, the Reverend Nathaniel Collins was called to succeed him in 1661, the "Generll Court advising both Mr. Stowe & all the inhabitants of Middletown to a loving X carriage to Mr. Collins & friendly complience with each other, that ye memory of former differences may be wholly buried —."

In 1668 the First Church of Christ in Middletown was organized, with Mr. Collins as its first pastor. He died in office in 1684. No inscription to his name can now be found, although one who sixty years ago was familiar with the cemetery well remembers the table stone of Nathaniel Collins, not far from that of Giles Hamlin. There is no difficulty in finding the memorials of several of the children of Mr. Collins and his wife, formerly Mary Whiting of Hartford; while one little stone in memory of their grandchildren, has a historical interest not revealed by this brief statement, for their mother was Mary Dixwell of New Haven, daughter of one who during many years was known to most people as James Davids, but whom we know as John Dixwell, the regicide.

Another stone of much interest is that of John Dixwell's widow,—"she that was Bathsheba How," who died here in Middletown in 1729, perhaps in her daughter's home.

Seeking for the grave of the second pastor of the church, we wander down to what is now the

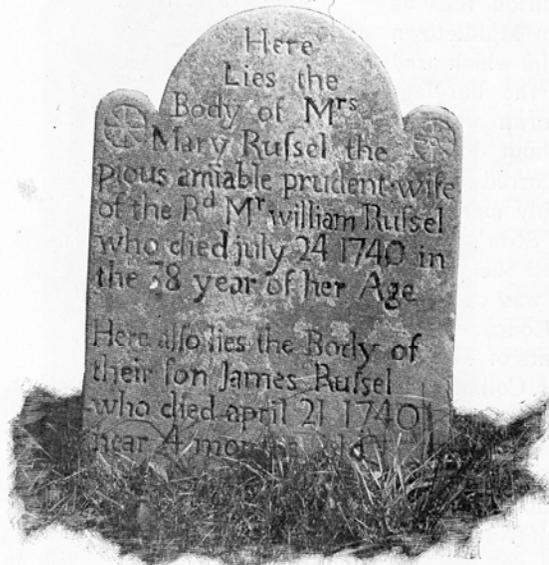


northeastern portion of the ground. Here, beneath a table stone,

lies the body of
the R^d. Mr. Noadiah Russel,
Minister of y^e Gospel in Middletown
who having served his generation
by the Will of God fell asleep Dec. 3
1713 in ye 55th year of his age.



He will be remembered as one of the founders of Yale College, and as one of the framers of the Saybrook Platform. Beside him lies his wife, Mary, daughter of Giles Hamlin, and "a mother in Israel." The next table stone is in memory of Noadiah's son and successor in the ministry, whose history is given sufficiently upon his monument, save for the mention of the fact that his death occurred on the anniversary of his ordination:—



S. M.
The Rev^d Mr. William Russell
A Man of God
eminent for Wisdom, Prudence &
Meekness,
having served his generation
by the Will of God
As Tutor & Fellow of Yale College
& Pastor of the first Church in
Middletown
died June 1st
A.D. 1761. Æ. 71. M^o 46.
He fought a good fight
He kept the faith.

There are few, perhaps, who know, or fewer still who, knowing, remember, when reading the simple inscription on the next stone, that before Mrs. Mary Russell became the "virtuous, amiable, prudent wife" of the Rev. William Russell she was

Mary Pierpont, daughter of Rev. James Pierpont of New Haven, great-granddaughter of Rev. Thomas Hooker, and sister of Jonathan Edwards' noble wife.

We are tempted to turn for a few moments from the records of deaths and burials to glance into the minister's household. When, in 1740, Mary, the mother, died, we can see the daughter Mary, only nineteen, taking a mother's place in the family, doing her best, though with a sad heart, in the two months which intervened before her marriage to Matthew Talcott, which took place on the twenty-fourth of September. It must have been a quiet wedding in the bereaved household; yet it is quite probable that Governor Joseph Talcott came in state from Hartford to be present at his son's wedding, bringing as a gift the deed conveying 100 acres of land on the west side of the Great River "to my son Matthew Talcott, for the consideration of the Paternal Love & Affection that I have for him." As the years went on no children came to Colonel and Madam Talcott, and we may feel certain that she did not cease to exercise a motherly care over her brothers and sisters and to watch over her father during the twenty-one remaining years of his life,—a long widowerhood for a man in those days, especially a minister. Thinking of Mary Talcott with all due love and reverence, she yet seems to me to have been something of a match-maker, and one or two intermarriages with Hartford people seem to point to her influence. Her brother Noadiah married her husband's niece, Esther Talcott, the daughter of Treasurer Joseph Talcott; and another wedding which in after years, perhaps, brought a gay company from Hartford to Middletown, was when Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth, son of the Rev. Daniel Wadsworth of the First Church in Hartford, came to marry Mrs. Talcott's sister, Mehitabel Russell.

The minister's son Samuel is the ancestor of the Russell family in Middletown at the present time, and the mayor of the city to-day is his lineal descendant and bears his name.

Another daughter, Sarah, married Dr. Eliot Rawson, great-grandson of Edward Rawson, for so many years the Secretary of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. Sarah Russell Rawson lived but a year after her marriage. Then the passing bell tolled twenty-four, and she was laid to rest in the Riverside Cemetery, leaving a baby Sarah to bear her name. Seven years later Dr. Rawson married Ann Cushing of Providence, R. I. He, his wives, and children are buried near the Russell family. Only names and dates are on his marble monument, but an entry found in the town records might well be his epitaph:—

Know all men by these Presents, That Eliot Rawson of Middletown in the County of Hartford in the State of Connecticut being truly desirous to do every thing in my power to relieve all those that are suffering for their country, for liberty, or for righteousness sake, do will and determine that my five Africans or negroes shall be free, if they behave well, upon the Selectmen's giving a certificate according to law, that Phillis Rawson shall be free in six months from the first day of next June, that Duchess Rawson, Francis Rawson, Lettice Rawson, and Eve Rawson shall be made free at twenty four years of age. In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal. ELIOT RAWSON.

Middletown, June 30, 1780.

As the century drew to its close Madam Talcott, having outlived most of her family, died, "much respected by her numerous acquaintances in all the relations of life," and was laid to rest beside her kin in 1799. Colonel Talcott, mariner and merchant, had prospered and held various offices of trust and responsibility. There is an old saying that "whenever Colonel Matthew Talcott went from Middletown to Hartford, as he crossed the Little Bridge he made all Hartford tremble, because he held so many mortgages there." He survived his wife but three years, and his long life of eighty-nine years ended in 1802. Their graves are the last we shall visit in this ramble through the Old North Burying-Ground.

Occasional interments were made here during the next seventy years, but with rare exceptions they have little interest for us compared with those between 1689 and 1800.

There is but little sadness in such an old cemetery. The hearts that ached when dear ones were laid here have ceased to beat, the eyes that wept have themselves been closed in death to open again, we hope, where God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. Only a great peace and rest are left, and it is with reverent feet that one whose ancestors for generations have been buried in the Riverside Cemetery walks among the graves and spells out here and there, between the lines of the quaintly lettered inscriptions, a bit of heart history.

"City of the dead, so populous grown,
Home of the bodies whose souls have flown;
All of thy dwellers have passed through the strife,
Their spirits have entered the higher life.
They all have yielded their mortal breath
And passed through the stream with the Angel of Death.

"Good Angel, thy terrors have often been told,
And mortals fear thee, as cruel and cold,
But still thou are kind, and thy mission is blest,
To take weary pilgrims away to their rest."

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