

Phillips Endicott Osgood

THE VESTRY ANNOUNCED IN A LETTER TO THE PARISHIONERS that Dr. Phillips E. Osgood had accepted the call to Emmanuel and would commence his duties as Rector on February 12, 1932. The letter reads:

"Born in Massachusetts, son of a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, Dr. Osgood began his ministry as a curate at our Church of the Ascension. He was ordained by Bishop Lawrence in Grace Church, Attleboro — his birthplace and home town — and later had his own church in our suburbs and in Philadelphia. For the past eleven years he has been Rector of St. Mark's Church in Minneapolis, one of the largest parishes west of Chicago. He has also been very successful in his summer ministries at Manchester-by-the-Sea, and at St. Paul's Cathedral in this city for the past few years, and has a host of friends in this community. The Vestry is greatly pleased at securing him and feels the Parish will be very enthusiastic over him."

A reception was given for Dr. and Mrs. Osgood in the Parish House on Monday evening, February 13, at 8:30 p.m.

Dr. Osgood came in the midst of the depression. The Vestry had of necessity cut the budget some \$13,000; pew rents had for some time been falling off, large contributors of the past had died or moved out of town, and many felt the need of reducing their pledges. The new Rector faced a challenge of adding new parishioners and adding new income — no small task.

Of all the yearly bound volumes of reports and programs, etc., since Dr. Parks' day, none is as "meaty" as those of Dr.

Osgood. If they are replete with verbosity, they are also replete with ideas. If one approach failed to produce results, he was immediately ready with another. Through all his thirteen years as Rector he never gave up working, hammering, seeking for an enlarged and responsible congregation which would fill his church and also provide a sufficient income to meet all of Emmanuel's responsibilities fully, and promote a more effective program.

Soon after his arrival a special letter was sent to a selected group of forty-six parishioners asking for fifty dollars each. Twenty-eight replied with \$1,425. This was a great disappointment to the Rector who had hoped for \$2,500 to augment the budget, to build up the Sunday School, develop publicity, and establish connection with "our lost younger generation." He had a particular interest always in youth and had an active young people's group with compelling programs and excellent speakers. As they grew up and went to war, he kept in touch with many of them. He appointed a Junior Vestry of fifteen young men and gave them responsible church duties. Later, they were a great help at the Friday dances given for the Service men — as also was the Men's Club of Emmanuel, once one hundred strong but depleted because of the war.

From the beginning of his ministry Dr. Osgood was interested in religious drama, and he formed an Emmanuel Drama Council, adding new members, especially younger people inside and outside the Parish. From time to time throughout his Rectorship the Drama Group gave colorful, dramatic and relevant plays at Emmanuel, many of these written or adapted by Dr. Osgood.

Probably in the community he was best known for his classes on "The Art of Living" which he gave twice a week with an attendance from 100 to 150 at each; also Bible Classes, twice a week — one in the morning and one in the evening — with 150 to 200 men and women at each. These were brilliant, inspirational and very popular events. Many attending were not Emmanuelites, but surely a source of new

parishioners. But the Rector was bothered because about twenty-five of each group were our own, and another twenty-five perhaps from Trinity—the balance, however, was never seen or heard from at Church services. Unknown to the Rector, they in no way took part in the support of the Church or its activities. This was one more problem for the Rector—along with his findings that with a list of 1078 communicants—865 pledged nothing to the Parish.

In May 1933 Dr. Osgood celebrated his twenty-five years in the ministry. He held a service of re-dedication and wrote in the church leaflet: "Any friends who care to join in this service, visibly or invisibly, will add to his appreciation. This is of course only a personal moment, except as it involves a new sense of happy consecration. The ministry is a wondrous, satisfying, enriching, rewarding and glowing experience! It gets tangled in the heartstrings pretty intimately. No happier calling can there be."

Toward the end of 1933 a League Council of Women was organized by the Rector. He explained that its function was apart from the Vestry. It should be responsible for the policies of the League work as a whole. Though each group should be allowed freedom in its own activities, the team-play and corporate function should be directed by the Council.

Dr. Osgood was a large, heavy set man, a dynamic preacher and a compelling personality that commanded attention. He had an extraordinarily voluble use of the English language. As one parishioner said, "He has only to open his mouth and a spate of words pour out." Another confessed that she became so intrigued by his choice of words and the "coining" and hyphenating of words that she found it difficult to concentrate. Still a third remarked—"Most of us are satisfied with an adjective or two, but the Rector never uses less than five and I've sometimes counted to seven." Admittedly, such bounty sometimes confused the issue.

A new Rectory was bought at 116 Commonwealth Avenue—one more functional for the Rector and his wife and three



The Rev. Phillips Endicott Osgood, D.D.
1932 - 1943

children—for \$11,000 with \$3,000 for repairs and remodeling.

In May 1936 Emmanuel suffered a very great loss in the death of Walter C. Baylies, a Vestry member for thirty years and our Senior Warden for twenty-eight years. Throughout this long and devoted service he gave bountifully of himself and of his possessions. To mention a few—11 and 13 Newbury Street for a Parish House—acquisition of a Rectory—successful inauguration of the Endowment Fund Trust—his establishment of the pension for our former Rector—and “more than all,” say the Vestry minutes, “the ever present, strong, steady, competent hand at the helm which has guided this organization through all the vicissitudes of the last thirty years.”

There were three other deaths of importance to the church during the next few years. Hugh Ogden died in September 1938—a brilliant, unassuming, and faithful member of the Vestry wherein he served as “clerk” for thirty years. Albert Snow, our dedicated organist for twenty years, and John O. Haynes, sexton for forty-six years. He followed his father and together they covered the position of sexton for seventy-nine years.

Some years later Mr. Hollis French, who followed Mr. Baylies as Senior Warden, died. What a distinguished pair they were, Mr. Baylies and Mr. French. Every Sunday they greeted the church members as they arrived, perfectly and formally attired in cutaway and striped trousers, and the parishioners felt tremendous pride as our Wardens took the offering to the Altar.

Emmanuel was approaching its seventy-fifth birthday and a committee was set up by Dr. Osgood to plan for the anniversary ceremonies. It was suggested that a substantial increase in Endowment Funds be a feature of the celebration, but there is no indication that this part of the plan materialized.

December 13, 1936, was the day selected for the ceremonies. Sunday morning—Bishop Lawrence reviewed briefly Em-

manuel's seventy-five years. Tuesday evening, December 15, the Anniversary Dinner was held at the University Club with the Rector presiding and Bishop Sherrill and Dr. Worcester the main speakers.

Over a period of several years the Church of The Ascension and Emmanuel House were frequently a subject of discussion in Vestry meetings — trying to work out some way by which Emmanuel could be relieved of this responsibility and burden, financial, moral and social. If disassociated from Emmanuel, would the Diocese have funds available to carry them on? Or could this expenditure by Emmanuel be accepted as a part of its annual Diocesan apportionment?

In September 1937 the Rector reported that the Archdeaconry of Boston was now ready to take over the operation of the Church of The Ascension on November 1, and thereafter Emmanuel Church would have no further responsibility. Also, it was announced that Emmanuel House had no longer the means to function on a sufficient scale to be effective — at least \$8,000 more annually was needed to do this. Voted: "That Emmanuel House be not opened pending a decision as to its future disposition."

Very shortly thereafter Emmanuel Camp was given to the Bishop and Trustees of The Protestant Episcopal Church, and when Emmanuel House was finally transferred to Cardinal O'Connell for his Catholic Welfare Program, an era ended in Emmanuel's history.

Founded on service to others, noted through the years for its generous and gracious social service, participating actively in its missions, its contact and service in the community alive and active, and always its concern for our poor, Emmanuel's perspective had now narrowed to self-survival!

Of course the Vestry and the Rector had manoeuvred in every imaginable way to avoid such disaster but the sword of Damocles had been hovering overhead for some years — it finally fell.

A luncheon meeting of all parishioners was called October

31, 1937, at the University Club — so soon after the happy anniversary celebration and on such a different theme. The Senior Warden and the Rector explained in great detail the conditions necessitating these tragic amputations. With deep regret, but standing loyally by their Vestry, a unanimous vote approving the actions taken by them was passed.

The monies saved by this action "shall be assigned to Emmanuel's apportionment to the Diocese." Bit by bit, year by year, this Diocesan apportionment was again rising to a dignified contribution befitting Emmanuel. This was perhaps a comfort to the Rector, yet what frustrating years these must have been. A man of great drive and self-confidence, to be thwarted of his dreams for the church at every turn by minimum budgets, and though his classes were eminently successful, he was unable to turn his increased church attendance into a "supporting" congregation.

In January 1943, Dr. Osgood reported he had received a call to a large southern parish and also had been notified that his name was being considered for the office of Bishop, and after consideration, he had declined and asked that his name be withdrawn. At the following annual meeting, the parishioners unanimously voted, "To record our deep and abiding appreciation of the wise and dynamic leadership of Phillips E. Osgood during the last troublesome decade and our faith in that leadership for the years ahead." This was duplicated by a vote of the Vestry at its next meeting: "That we, the Wardens and Vestry of Emmanuel Church, on this tenth anniversary of Phillips E. Osgood, wish to record our great friendship for him and our deep appreciation of his distinguished and constructive service to our Parish and our confidence for the future with his continued help and guidance." These surely were warning words to the Rector.

In the midst of a third war, the Vestry was true to its tradition. War was not mentioned in its minutes — but in the weekly leaflets the Rector spoke of it constantly. Many beautiful prayers were included, some his own, some quoted. He set

up a war shrine which was in constant use, established intercessory prayer for those in the armed services, and brought sympathy and comfort to bereaved and anxious families.

As Dr. Worcester before him, Dr. Osgood rued the "week-end habit." "The easiest of all habits to break is that of going to church. The minute we allow ourselves to debate it saying, 'Shall I go today? It's too hot — too cold — too wet — or I'm too tired' — that moment the habit is gone and a weekly debate sets in." He wondered if a mid-week service, if provided, would be attended by these "week-enders." It was worth considering.

Again the Rectory proved unsatisfactory and in July 1944 it was voted — "That since it was impossible for the Rector and his family to go back to the Rectory without substantial repairs and a new heating system, and in spite of failure to dispose of the Rectory, the Rector is hereby authorized to secure an apartment for himself at the expense of the church, subject to the approval of the Treasurer."

A happy event of 1945 was the return of Mr. Courtenay Baylor, so long associated with Dr. Worcester — his salary to be met by funds donated to the church for this purpose.

Rotation of the Vestry had been suggested several times but now another effort was made to have twelve vestrymen, and to assign them to specific responsibilities. A chairman of the Executive and Finance Committee was appointed and soon a report was made to the Vestry. Suggested was a committee on Service and Parish Work, including Young People's Work, A Committee on Property and Staff — plus the Executive Committee and Finance. Further recommendations were that alterations in budget once approved, and planning of future budgets should be referred to the Executive Committee before being submitted to the full Vestry. This report was approved and accepted.

At the next Vestry meeting, however, this vote was rescinded, a committee abolished, and a chairman resigned. This sounds as if someone's "prerogatives" had been infringed

upon by the Executive and Finance Committee, and, save for the disagreements on the cost of music, this is the first entry in eighty-five years that records dissension in the Vestry.

For some years the Rector had attended General Convention, meeting every three years, sitting in the House of Deputies representing this Diocese. Modifications in the existing canons were hard to come by. Each year the Rector seemed to have little optimism that changes would be effected, but always hoping some of the diverse convictions within the communion would be modified and broadened. He especially mentioned his hopes for the liberalization of the marriage canon. In 1943 he was "honored and overwhelmed" by being elected President of the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies of the General Convention.

1944 was the year of Dr. Osgood's supremacy: recognition in the fellowship of the Church, knowledge that he was held close in the hearts of his parishioners, and that under his dynamic leadership the "corner had been turned" and Emmanuel was again going forward to its rightful destiny.

1944 also was the year that Dr. Osgood turned from the Church, turned from Emmanuel and its people, and turned from his own family.

Frequent Vestry meetings in the spring of 1945 contain minutes that scent of trouble. "Certain correspondence" is discussed. Various interviews with "the interested parties" are reported. Selected members are "to wait upon the Bishop for advice." There should be "as little publicity as is possible." After four score years of arid Vestry minutes, these entries invited speculation but also reflected mounting anxiety. Further Vestry minutes record, "The Bishop decided that Dr. Osgood was to resign immediately from the ministry."

Dr. Osgood wrote a long statement to the effect that for some time he had had difficulty in accepting certain theological definitions in the canons of the Church, and that he was resigning because of these difficulties. If one reads the Rector's own words week by week in the Sunday leaflets, through to the

very last one, there is no hint of qualified belief or a weakening faith. His leadership of his people was as vigorous and eloquent as ever. It seems justifiable, therefore, to believe "these difficulties" did not reflect accurately the underlying cause for the dissolution of his relationship with the Church, for behind Dr. Osgood's theological rationale was his rejection of his marriage.

Dr. Osgood wanted to send his written statement with the notice of his resignation to the Parish, but the Vestry did not approve of this and voted "to send to the Parish the Rector's resignation and its acceptance by the Vestry with a short letter of appreciation of his services." The next entry reads, "A committee was appointed to select a new Rector."

Thus the episode was closed — in the Vestry minutes — but not in its dire consequences and repercussions on Emmanuel and in the hearts of its people. Their Church was shamed, their pride crushed. Many felt they could never rebuild their trust in mankind or in their God within Emmanuel's walls. Whether right or wrong, strong or weak, humans being human, many were through with Emmanuel. Emmanuel had reached its nadir.

For Dr. Osgood a divorce followed and subsequently another marriage. He was taken into the Unitarian Fellowship in June 1950 and he was Minister of the First Unitarian Church in Orange, New Jersey, from 1949 until his death November 6, 1956.