

The Cause in Albany

In another column will be found an article from the pen of Rev. W. S. Balch, in regard to the condition of affairs in Albany. At the suggestion of brethren in Albany, New-York and other parts of the State, he has twice visited the former place to ascertain the facts in the case, with a view of opening a way to harmonize conflicting views and bring about an adjustment that would be mutually satisfactory to all parties. His high standing, long experience, and entire impartiality in the premises, peculiarly fitted him for this duty. The results of his observations will be found in the communication from his pen, to which we have called attention. We trust it will be carefully read and maturely weighed.

And now a few words for ourself [sic]. We have said but little in our editorial capacity, in regard to the unhappy difficulties which have arisen among our friends in Albany. This course, which we felt imperatively called upon to pursue, has exposed our motives and our position to misunderstanding. We therefore feel it due to all interested, to make the following suggestions:—

1. We claim to stand second to no individual in a heart-felt, life-long love for the doctrines, principles, and very name of *Universalism*, and for the *denomination* into whose charge they have been given by Divine Providence. For more than thirty years we have loved this cause as we have loved our own soul, and since the days of our boyhood, have yielded it all the support, the labor, the talent and ability in our power. And by the blessing of God, we shall not falter in pursuing the same course to the end of life! We claim, also, to stand second to no one, outside of the Universalist Society itself in Albany, in a deep and most anxious desire for its prosperity—that no one could possibly rejoice more to see it in a vigorous and healthy condition, able and strong, and calculated to exert a wide felt influence in a place so important as the Capital of the State—and that no one, not a member of the same, has been, or now is, more willing to contribute liberally, according to their means, or to work more ardently for the upbuilding and prosperity of our cause in Albany, than ourself.

2. But we had long been aware that the Albany Society had for years been in a languishing condition. A kind of fatality appeared to rest upon it and paralyze its prosperity. A heavy debt hung like a mill-stone upon its neck, and seemed destined to utterly overthrow it. We learned that repeated efforts had been made to sell the church—that the prospects of the Society grew less and less promising, and that its best members were disheartened. In the light of these representations we were led to harbor the fear, that unless some providential change should take place, the Society would ultimately be compelled to throw up its organization and expire, and our doctrines would be without a public advocate in the city.

3. While affairs were in this state, we learned that a proposition had been started for the Universalist and Unitarian Societies in Albany to throw up their separate organizations, and unite in a new Society for the purpose of propagating more successfully those religious principles on which they mutually agreed, and which, in fact, form the soul and substance of Universalism. This

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intelligence gave us great satisfaction. We felt that (much as we loved our denominational name) if the *principles* of Universalism could be built up in Albany under the name of an Independent Society, it would be better, vastly better, than to have them die out entirely. And when we understood that the new Society was to be under the pastoral charge of Rev. A. D. Mayo, a firm and established *Universalist*, and a preacher distinguished for talents and eloquence, we felt a perfect guaranty that our distinctive doctrines *would be maintained*, and that, all things considered, no better arrangement could be made for our cause in that place. The new Society in Albany would have been similar to that which has been formed in Ogdensburgh, N.Y., of which Br. D. K. Lee is pastor, and which is well known to be in a highly prosperous condition, and of the greatest advantage to our cause in Northern New-York.

4. When the proposition for a union of the two Societies was first made, it was received, we understand, with favor by nearly every Universalist in Albany, and was generally acceptable to most of our editors, and to the denomination at large. And if we are rightly informed, the Universalists in that city, with few exceptions, would still be in favor of a union, and an Independent Society, could mutually satisfactory measures be adopted to accomplish that end. The project has failed thus far, in consequence of a difference of opinion as to the STEPS which should be taken to bring it about.

5. The disagreement among our Albany brethren, and the different statements they have felt called upon to lay before the public, have placed us personally in an embarrassed position. We had no feeling against either party. How could we have? They were all equally our brethren, and we felt toward them an equal regard. Our sincere, deep and earnest desire was, that such a course should be adopted as would be best calculated, under all the circumstances, to promote our religious principles in the State Capital. Not being on the ground, and unfamiliar as we were with many of the details of the transactions, we did not feel competent to take sides in the division; neither had we any heart to do it. We did not wish to make war on the brethren who went for the union—and we could not feel to denounce those who desired to keep up the old organization.— Both parties, we were confident, were equally sincere, equally anxious to do right, and their feelings should be equally respected. Consequently we remained silent, or nearly so. We judged that if our brethren were left to the guidance of their own good sense, they would be much more successful in harmonizing views and adopting a mutually acceptable plan of operations, than for brethren abroad to take strong sides, and urge on a war which, in such case, could not but result in injury to our cause. *These and these only were the reasons for our silence.* We have declared heretofore, and now repeat it as our decided opinion, that much that has been said by several of our papers in other States, has made matters in Albany all the worse, rather than better—has had a tendency to drive our brethren apart, rather than to draw them into that *unity* which is so vitally essential to the prosperity of the doctrines of Universalism in that city. If an unfortunate division should arise in

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one of the Universalist Societies in Boston, which our most judicious brethren there believed could be adjusted much more successfully by keeping the matter among themselves and out of the prints, we are confident they would think it exceedingly impolitic, if not *impertinent*, for the *Ambassador*, published in another State, to take up the matter, and by indulging in harsh and irritating epithets, and making broad charges of recreancy, defection and corruption, blow the embers into a roaring flame of discord.

6. We still indulge the hope that if our Albany brethren can be let alone, they will yet succeed in bringing all their matters to an amicable and satisfactory arrangement. There is little or no personal ill will between the different parties. But few, if any, object to Br. Mayo as a man or a preacher. He is a well known and distinguished Universalist clergyman. No one can consistently doubt his fidelity to the great distinctive doctrines of Impartial Grace, or that they will not continue to form, as they ever have done, the back-bone and veritable substance of his pulpit labors. We have recently learned that measures are to be taken to remove his meetings from the Unitarian church to a commodious hall. Thus one obstacle to a union of all parties will be taken away.

7. Our Albany brethren of all parties, we trust, will permit us to urge them to a spirit of moderation, mutual forbearance and forgiveness. In the exercise of these qualities, and with an eye single to the upbuilding of God's truth in their city, we trust they will yet be able to overcome all the discouragements by which they are surrounded, and will ultimately be rewarded in beholding that truth deeply planted and gloriously prospering in their midst. Such, at least, is our earnest prayer to the wise Disposer of events.

8. Before closing this article (already filling much more space than we designed), we feel it a duty to state, that some weeks since a very offensive and unjust communication in regard to the Albany difficulty, appeared in the *Christian Register*, a Unitarian journal published in Boston. It purported to be written by some member of the Albany Unitarian Society, and asserted that those Universalists who united in inviting Br. Mayo to remove to that city, went into the arrangement as *Unitarians*. This article was copied into several of our Universalist journals, with severe comments. The brethren in Albany to whom it alluded, declared that it did them great injustice, as they were still as firm Universalists as they ever had been, and that their uniting with Unitarians to employ a *Universalist* preacher, could not consistently be construed into recreancy to their Universalist principles. The *Christian Register*, within a short time since, has published the following disclaimer from the clerk of the Albany Unitarian Society, who claims to be "intimately conversant with the whole matter." We insert it as due in justice to all parties.

Your correspondent says that the Universalists who united with our Unitarian Society for the purpose above mentioned, "came in as Unitarians." This is an error.— The simple truth is as follows: The members of the two Societies having heard Mr. Mayo, who had been invited hither in behalf of both, to preach in each of their churches

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alternately, for several Sundays, were deeply impressed and gratified by his discourses; and an effort which had previously been set on foot to effect a consolidation of the two Societies having failed; and each being without a minister, and neither feeling able separately to support one, a considerable number of the Universalists united with the Unitarians in giving Mr. Mayo an invitation to preach to them for the term of one year, and in raising a subscription to pay the salary and other expenses of the undertaking; and as the Universalist Society had some time before voted to sell their church edifice, and some of the Baptists of the city were actually endeavoring, successfully, it was reported, to raise the money required to make the purchase, the Universalists who came into the joint measure of engaging Mr. Mayo did not hesitate to attend on his preaching in the church of their Unitarian neighbors. In doing this, however, they did not profess to change any of their religious views, nor were they understood to do so by the Unitarians, certainly not by those of us who took the active part in helping to carry this arrangement into effect. No—their joining with us, in order to secure, at least for a year, the privilege of listening to preaching so acceptable to all concerned, instead of being construed into a renunciation of their long-cherished religious convictions, is really to be regarded as evidence on the one hand, of their good sense in availing themselves of the only convenient mode by which, under the circumstances, they could secure the preaching they so much enjoyed; and on the other hand, of a magnanimous and liberal spirit, strong in its christian freedom, superior to narrow jealousies and paltry surmises, and not to be disturbed by railing accusation.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Saturday April 5, 1856

Transcribed on 14 Jul 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY