Historical Sketches: Third Series

Published 1856

By: Stephen R. Smith

The pioneer Universalist preacher in New York State, Stephen Rensselaer Smith, died before the third series of his renowned Historical Sketches could be published. As noted below, his family desired that these Sketches be published without charge for the benefit of the Universalist denomination. In 1856 they were given to Rev. John Mather Austin, editor of the Universalist weekly paper "The Christian Ambassador," for publication.

Karen E. Dau, Archivist, New York State Convention of Universalists, April 2016

Historical Sketches

In the year 1843, there appeared a work from the pen of Rev. Stephen R. Smith entitled "Historical Sketches, and Incidents Illustrative of the Establishment and Progress of Universalism in the State of New York." It was published in Buffalo, N.Y. by the author. This volume attracted much attention at the time. It was received with great favor by the Universalists throughout this State, as embodying a large mass of interesting facts connected with the early planting of Universalism in our borders, which had they not been thus gathered up and preserved, would have soon passed away from the remembrance of men. It brought down its narration to 1817.

In 1848, Br. Smith brought forth in a new volume a Second Series of his "Historical Sketches." The period embraced in this work was four years—from 1818 to 1822. Its interest was quite equal to the first Series, and it was received by the Universalist public with an approbation equally as great. These two volumes are still in print, and for sale, and can be found in any of our denominational book stores. To a true lover of Universalism, they are of great worth, being full of narrations, incidents and anecdotes connected with the early labors of the noble and self-sacrificing pioneers who first proclaimed the Gospel of Infinite Love in this State. Every Universalist family should have a copy.

As intimated in the Ambassador some time since, Br. Smith left at his decease, a Third Series of his Historical Sketches. This has never yet been published. By the kindness of his family it has been placed in our hands for publication through the columns of out paper. The commencement of the series will be found on our first page. It was prepared in 1849, as it would seem, from Br. Sawyer's Memoir of Br. Smith, but it is incomplete—embracing but about a year, (1823). His failing health prevented him for prosecuting this enterprise to its conclusion, and bringing down the "Sketches" to the time of writing.

As one of our correspondents two or three months ago seemed disposed to cast censure upon us proposing to obtain and publish these Historical Sketches without remunerating the family of the honored and departed author, (a proposition, however, which was not made), we think it proper to insert the following note from Junius S. Smith, the only surviving son of Br. Stephen R. Smith. It will be seen that the family desire to furnish the "Sketches" gratuitously, as a donation for the benefit of the denomination, for which we are confident they will receive the hearty thanks of the Universalist public at large.

BUFFALO, Feb. 1st, 1856

Rev. J.M. Austin, Auburn

In the Ambassador of 19th Jan. I notice a communication from Rev. O. Roberts mentioning and suggesting the publication of the unfinished volume of the "Historical Sketches," and the issue of Feb. 2nd., a letter from Mr. Van Schaaick to the proper method of procuring the manuscript. The "Sketches" are in the hands of Rev. J. H. Campbell, who will forward them to you, and who will, perhaps, make some suggestions in regard to their publication.

As to the proprietorship of the work, the family of the author has, for years, desired its publication for the benefit of the denomination: and we now request you to accept and use it to that end.

Respectfully yours,

Junius S. Smith

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: Saturday May 31, 1856

Historical Sketches of Universalism in the State of New York

THIRD SERIES

1823. That Universalism was at this time, as it had been for a number of preceding years, making very rapid progress in numbers, stability, and in the formation of a proper denominational character, was apparent to all who gave any attention to the subject. New Societies were springing up in every direction; and many of those already established were receiving moderate, but healthy accessions. Several ecclesiastical associations were organizing, and every thing indicated an unusual, if not a high degree of prosperity. The Western, or Central Association, had already to some extent, won the reputation of being a respectable, if not a Christian ecclesiastical body; and not a few clergyman and laymen, as well as some congregations, were considered quite worthy of Christian fellowship—were they not Universalists. The denomination could count about one hundred Societies in the State, most of which, were duly organized and a majority of which embodied all the elements essential to religious prosperity. –Still, as a people, we were comparatively powerless. In the aggregate, we excited no fear, and enjoyed little respect from the religious masses of various creeds, by congregations, were scattered over the land, who constituted exceptions to the general rule. And these received in their respectable vicinities, all the respect and consideration that a proscribed sect had a right to expect, and under the circumstances, a right a claim. But with our statistics before his eyes, and with his acknowledgement of their substantial correctness, the orthodox man of whatever sect, smiled contemptuously, when assured by us, that we should, in due time, do much towards giving to the Christian church a more rational and liberal creed, and introduce among all sects a more elevated and pure morality. His reply, if he condescended to reply, was full of acrimony—we were referred to the worst examples of lay or ministerial folly and corruption, to be found in our ranks, and we were asked with scorn, if such were the instrumentalities with which we proposed to reform the doctrines and correct the morals of the church?—We were occasionally reminded that denominations will less than half our numbers, and perhaps resources, were taking precedence of us, and exerting more power and influence over the public mind. This, as far as appeared on the surface, was undoubtedly true. But subsequent events have tended greatly to strengthen the belief—that with all the obstructions in the way of our progress, we were quietly working a mental and moral result, which much more numerous and powerful sects have been unable to control. It was in vain that we urged our isolated position; that we stood alone and single handed against the religious world; that although we might numerically compare with any existing sect in the country—still we had not, and could not expect to have the sympathy and co-operation of any. Whereas, on the contrary, any rising community, however small or contemptible, which either kept its real Christians, was sure to be encouraged by sympathies, always withheld from Universalists.—Every known sect held what regarded as fundamentals, by all other denominations. But it was not so with Universalists. They had very little in common with any others. And although Dr. Kirkland had said that "Universalism was Calvinism run to seed," he only furnished new proof that great men are sometimes mistaken, and that wise men are not always careful to be well informed. A few of the original fathers of Universalism in the United States, had unquestionably followed the Calvinistic views in general, merely extending the grace of God to the whole human race. But this system of Universalism had passed away long before the Dr. uttered his assertion.—This he ought to be known. No fact is better established, than that the Calvinistic tendencies of

Universalism were almost entirely obliterated, as early as 1805, and that they may never had a place in the order, in the state of New York. And it must be apparent, that a system which rejected every fundamental of the dominant theology; which questioned and impugned the prevalent motives to virtue, was emphatically a system by itself—and could have no proper affinity with any of the existing sects. This was the paramount reason why, with all our energies and numbers, we apparently effected so little. There were, however, causes in constant operation among ourselves, eminently calculated to foster and prolong this state of things.

In the first place, our ministry, though generally composed of honest, sensible, and self-sacrificing men, was from the first, and in a majority of instances, totally destitute of those attainments and accomplishments generally deemed essential to the profession. It was admitted that they were men of sterling original talents, and of unexceptionable moral deportment; but it could not be denied that they were ignorant of almost everything, except their peculiar theology. They constantly betrayed their deficiencies, in a thousand ways, both in and out of the pulpit. They read nothing but the Bible; they had no taste for reading, and by consequence had nothing save the Bible to read. Some of them were able, and even eloquent speakers; and without a single idea of what properly constituted a sermon, surprised and delighted their hearers with the evidences of profound thought, no less than with the efficiency of their delivery. In a majority of instances, they were in no other sense, the pastors of the congregations to which they ministered, than that their Sabbath ministrations were regularly performed in those places. They were not always residents in any of the places where they preached. It became, therefore, almost a matter of necessity, that they visited the places of their appointments in haste; and that when the Sabbath labors were closed, they might be found, "busy and careful about many things," and apparently as unconscious of any parochial duties beyond the pulpit, as if no such duties existed.

They were equally thoughtless, or regardless, of the preferences and tastes of jest and scorn, what the world thought of the color and fashion of their dress; and they held in special contempt, the common notion that a clergyman must wear a black coat. Several preachers evidently cherished this distinction between themselves and other denominations, with something very like sectarian pride. And in one instance at least, it showed itself on an important public occasion, in a full suit of the purest white. Think of it as we may, and allowing what cannot be denied, that with few exceptions, these were strong and good men; yet it was not in the nature of things that such men, with all their congregations to which they ministered, and not always even there!

Among the obvious and assignable reasons for the proud and contemptuous distance with which we were sometimes treated by the ministers of the more respectable and influential denominations—we must probably reckon this disregard of public taste, and the indulgence of what they considered slovenly habits. It might be a matter of just and painful regret, but it ought never to be one of surprise or complaint, that little courtesy was extended by a highly cultivated clergy to a body of men notoriously deficient in almost every qualification for the exchange of circumstances, Universalists would have acted precisely as their popular neighbors did. As the qualifications of the Universalist ministry in general, have approximated the standard fixed by long usage, as well as public opinion, the distance between them and other sects has diminished, until we have very little to complain of, on the score of courtesy.—Other and far different causes have contributed to this result; but they still leave us to the full perception of that state of things, which, twenty-five years since, greatly affected our denominational influence.

Another obstruction to the moral progress, and especially to the influence of Universalism, consisted in the material and condition of many of our Societies. Probably one-half of the Societies in the state, were unable to obtain or support preaching more than one quarter, or one-eighth of the Sabbaths, and some of them had no regular services, but relied on the occasional visits of clergymen for a few lectures in the course of the year. Many of these Societies had been organized, after a flying visit or two, from some itinerant preacher, who in his zeal to gather congregations, and advance the cause which he had as much heart, overlooked some of the important considerations involved in his measures. Finding a congregation respectable for numbers and appearance, and hearing nothing but professions of devotion to the great truth of a world's salvation, it was natural that he should encourage that formation of a Society. Similar considerations would operate on the minds of such congregations, while perhaps not one in five has any just views of the doctrine they were thus pledging themselves to support—if not to process. The opinion was sedulously propagated, that Universalists cared much less about the gospel, than a systematic opposition to the dominant religious sects. It was not strange, therefore, that many who wanted the means, or the disposition to inform themselves on the subject, should so far imbibe of our Societies, if they only felt a proper degree of indignation towards some hated creed which prevailed in their vicinity, or under which they had been educated.

It followed, that if the preacher did his duty, and whoever he might be, he usually did to the best of his ability: that most of this class of members who did not choose to hear a pure and rational Christianity preached, withdrew both their support from the Society, and from attendance on the congregation. If, as sometimes was the case, they were the more numerous, or wealthy, or influential portion of the Society, their withdrawal or refusal to aid in its support, almost to a certainty, wrought the dissolution of the society. A few zealous and devoted believers would struggle on—"hoping against hope," for a season, exhaust their means, become discouraged, and finally give up all for lost. With 20 or 30 such Societies out of a hundred, when most disposed to support and encourage what had pleased to profess as liberal Christianity; what substantial Christian influences could be reasonably expected? In what enterprise would they cooperate which had for its object that elevation of the denomination in Christian knowledge and virtue? In none; but devising and adopting objects, which would show their hostility to a creed, they were usually among the first. They were actuated much more by local, than by general motives; and presuming that other congregations were governed by similar views, feelings, and objects, they neither saw nor felt the necessity of any very ample interest, in what lay in the distance.

Let it not be supposed, that Universalists or Universalism, was responsible for this state of things, in some of the Societies. Neither the doctrine, nor its teachers, induced or encouraged by any direct agencies, any thing less than a firm and sincere Christian faith, and a manly and persevering virtue. Those who made it their business, and indeed their pleasure, to misrepresent and abuse us, were the authors of these evils. They were constantly and industriously predicting them; and when in any instance they succeeded in making others believe it, and acting upon it, they drew from the results a nameless satisfaction. The dissolution of a Society from any of the causes above named, was assumed as infallible proof of the correctness of their predictions, in relation to the whole order. It was considered, or rather represented, as beyond controversy, that Universalism possessed none of the essential elements which constitute the stability of a

religious society. And that the social combinations of Universalists were the result of hatred of the prevalent "orthodoxy," rather than regard for Christian purity and truth, or even sincere faith in the doctrine of the restitution. The "Orthodoxy" was of course everywhere prepared to believe of the whole fraternity of Universalists, what at most was only true of a few Societies. There were indeed exceptions where they were brought in contact with well-organized and well sustained Societies, but in a majority of instances, even then, the strength of prejudice, or of the profundity of religious ignorance, triumphed over the conviction of sense. Thus with the obstructions placed in the way of our progress, and the capital made by our opponents out of a condition of things which they had address to create, it will be apparent that our general influence must be materially circumscribed.

If I am correct in the foregoing statement, it will be seen that there were other reasons than that we constituted a new and rapidly growing sect, which aroused the hostility of the "Orthodox," and weakened our religious influence—reasons existed in our midst which, while they did not greatly affect our visible progress, diminished in no small degree, our moral power.

In the mean time, with few exceptions, neither clergymen nor laymen were sufficiently aware of the magnitude of their mission. They did not understand, much less comprehend, the great intellectual and moral changes, which the gospel of Universal grace was destined to work among men, and especially in the Christian world. By consequence, they did not perceive the importance of a system of measure calculated to exert a wide and lasting influence upon society beyond the organization of congregations, and the ordinary labors of the pulpit. Almost everything was done for the present time; and it naturally followed, that some things appertaining even to the present, were overlooked or omitted. In illustration, no pains were taken to instruct of interest the children of Universalist families, in the great and benignant doctrines believed and professed by their parents. The usual apology for this, was the young mind should be left free from all sectarian influences. A little reflection, or observation would,—or rather should have convinced any one, that if Universalists would not take that trouble and responsibility of instructing their children in the principles and aims of their own faith, other sects would take the matter in hand, and induct them by various processes, into the faith and mysteries of "Orthodoxy." What the effect of this remissness has been, not only for twenty, but has swelled the ranks of our opponents, with tens of thousands of children from Universalist families, and proportionally diminished our numbers, and weakened our energies.

It was quite common for clergymen to speak of the present sinful and suffering state, in contrast with the glorious and happy one, when all the purposes of the Redeemer's mission should be accomplished in the complete and eternal salvation and bliss of every child of Adam. But they as often passed over the years and ages, during which the mutual and moral changes necessary to the final results, should be in progress, the slow and almost imperceptible work of reforming the sentiments, opinions and moral principles of mankind, was seldom taken into account. The means and measures in which it was not only desirable, but important that each should bear a part, were not often proposed or acted on. Local considerations, or fears of falling into measures which had sometimes been perverted in the religious movements of others, furnished reasons—if reasons they may be called—of contentment with laboring diligently to build up the faith of Universalism by establishing and multiplying congregations. This was indeed very well, as far as its influence extended.—But it was not enough. Neither was it

sufficient, that preachers were faithful in presenting the paternal character of God to the contemplation of their hearers, as most calculated to awaken and sustain the devotional feelings. Religious emotions and observances had been so long disassociated from the moralities of common life, by all denominations, that our people, educated under these influences, shared in the prevailing error. Members of all sects too generally believed, that exalted attainments in piety, were compatible with considerable laxity of morals. Universalists were certainly among the first to endeavor to correct this dangerous error. But whilst they labored to expose its absurdity, and to win men to a moral practice worthy of the religion of Christ, they generalized too much. They spoke of morality in the abstract, as involving everything true and good, but they did not particularize with the force and clearness that brought its requirements home to the "business and bosoms" of their hearers.—The great matters of "justice, mercy, and faithfulness," were earnestly and frequently urged upon the attention of congregations; but it was seldom shown how these should operate, and interests of HOME. It was not often shown how these great principles were to be diffused over, and mingled with every profession, calling, and labor of life, and tempting and sanctifying every condition of earthly weal or woe; and how step by step, and faster and faster, these domestic and social moralities would go on, until the race of man should be purified, and the glory of the Redeemer's kingdom be complete.

But in all these omissions of Universalists, there is much more to regret, than to blame or condemn. Whoever will take into consideration, the almost universally prevailing views respecting the connection between religion and morality, will not wonder that the great body of the laity among Universalists, as well as among other sects, should entertain no very just or large conceptions on the subjects. Nor could it be reasonably expected, that a body of ministers, without any pretentions to literature, or very ample information, should at once discover all the bearings and influences of a purified christianity. Their limited perceptions were their misfortune, not their fault; and though constantly scandalized by sects who claimed all the intelligence as well as all the religion—they were a whole generation ahead of the calumniators in their endeavors to advance the doctrine of human fraternity, and the virtues which are involved by that great truth. For those whose attainments and claims should have placed them far in advance of Universalists in the recognition of those great principles, there is, there can be, no apology.

Such, then, was our general condition, as late, and even later than 1823; and such were the more active causes, which affected our denominational influence. But with all the embarrassments and discouragements growing out of our own deficiencies, or forced upon us by the machinations of unscrupulous opponents, we were slowly advancing in all those views and attainments, calculated to place us among the first and most efficient reformers of the age. The young men entering the ministry, were in most instances, giving more attention to the qualifications necessary to the fulfillment of the responsible duties of their profession. A great majority of them were much better educated, than most of their predecessors. They had in general, formed a taste and a habit of reading; and with few exceptions, made respectable beginnings of private theological libraries. Our ministerial mind, if it was no more active, labored with the aid of instrumentalities, which enlarged its sphere of operation and at the same time mitigated or removed many embarrassments. It was becoming every year more and more apparent, that the Universalist clergy were gradually approximating that standard of mental improvement and ministerial attainments, assumed and maintained by other religious

denominations. This work is still in progress among us, and must advance slowly to [obliterated] ample resources are put in requisition to furnish facilities long talked of, but not yet effectively undertaken, and by consequence not yet enjoyed.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: 31 May 1856

1823. The "Western Association" convened on the first Wednesday in June, at Fly Creek, Otsego co., in the Universalist Church. This was the first instance, in which it ever assembled in a church erected and owned exclusively by Universalists. Up to this time, it had depended on such accommodations as accident, or the kindness of other denominations furnished, except in a few instances, in which it occupied Union houses.—It is due to the several sects, to whom in many respects we had reason to regard as the uncompromising opponents of Universalism, to state, that with few exceptions, they manifested a commendable liberality in opening their houses for our use on these occasions. Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians, gave up their churches at such times, with a degree of frankness and civility, at which we are now surprised. We were at the duly grateful for [obliterated] acts of kindness but we were very much disposed to regard them as little more than common courtesies between sects, and therefore very properly shown to Universalists. The propriety of granting these indulgences to us, is unquestionable; but we ought not to assume that they were to be extended to us, because there denominations granted them to each other. We professed little in common with any of them, and it could not be overlooked, that while they regarded us with mingled contempt and dislike, they possessed the exclusive power of controlling the use of the churches, and while these recollections remind us of our exceeding dependence but a few years since, they should awaken and cherish the feeling, that our most determined opponents knew how to be civil, even if they were deficient in true christian liberality.

When it happened, as it sometimes did, that there was no church in the place to which the Association was adjourned, a court house, a school house, or a barn, furnished us shelter, and very satisfactory accommodations. It may therefore very naturally and justly be regarded as an epoch in our history, when for the first time we sat down in annual Association in a church emphatically our own. This was the seventeenth session of the Association, and the Gospel of Universal Grace has been preached in that place and vicinity more than 20 years. Whatever might have been the cause of such long delay in the erection of churches at that time, no Society would now think of dispensing with one for any considerable number of years, that possesses half the number of means then enjoyed by several different congregations in the county of Otsego.

The minutes of the session give the names of seventeen clergymen in attendance. This was an array of numbers, if not of talent, which few sessions of that body had ever brought together.—And with few exceptions, the Council comprised an amount of moral courage, and practical effort for the advancement of truth, seldom surpassed by any body of ministers since the apostolic age. There are few instances on record, in which a similar number of clergymen performed more labor, and still fewer, where it was performed at so little expense to congregations. It is quite probable that the aggregate support derived from the ministry of these devoted men, did not exceed $3000 per annum—and it was perhaps even less than that sum. Let the reader reflect on the pecuniary encouragement afforded to a life of great labor and reproach, where $150 constituted an average on which the man and family were to rely for their yearly support. There were, indeed, a few exceptions to this equation; but there were probably more who received less, than who realized a larger sum.

Letters of Fellowship were granted at this session of the Association, to Benjamin Hecock and Ezra S. Goodwin—both, it is believed, converts from the Methodists, among whom they

were exhorters or local preachers. Mr. Hecocks [sic] resided in Jefferson of St. Lawrence co., and evidently entered upon his vocation as a Universalist clergyman, with much of the power which so much distinguished the sect, from which he had lately withdrawn. What were his preaching talents is not particularly known to the write; but whatever they were, either from want of satisfactory encouragement, or some other cause, he took up at an early day the practice of medicine, in some form, and is quite as well known by the appellation of doctor, as by any other professional designation. He removed, after a few years, to some part of the Western Reserve, in Ohio, where he still resides.

Of Mr. Goodwin very little was known. He came to us as was frequently the wont in those days—on the recommendation of a few individuals who, in their zeal to serve the cause of truth, exhibited more charity than judgment. His residence was in Cayuga co., and of right he should have received fellowship, if at all, from the Cayuga Branch Association. From circumstances afterwards made known, it is probable that he could not have obtained fellowship where he is known. However this may be, he was regarded by most of the intelligent of those who knew him best, as the embodiment of idleness and filth. All that is ridiculous and disgusting in such a character, is represented as identified with his appearance; and it was very naturally and properly inferred, that so much outward corruption was incompatible with inward purity. Still, he was a young man of considerable talent, was respectfully educated, and had read more than most others of the time, among our preachers. In 1825 the Cayuga Association directed its Committee of Discipline to require him to show cause, at the next annual session of that body, why he should not be suspended from its fellowship. Whether he attempted any justification does not appear; but at the session of the Association for 1825, it was

Resolved, That on account of immoral conduct and neglect of ministerial duties, that we withdrew the hand of fellowship from Ezra S. Goodwin, a preacher in fellowship of this Association."

During this session of the Western Association, Ordination was conferred on Amos Reed, Arthur Field and Henry Roberts. Up to this time (1823), ordinations were seldom conferred, except at the regular meetings of the Association; and then in all cases, the candidate was set apart to the work of an Evangelist. The practice had not yet obtained amongst us, of ordaining any as pastors; for the probable reason, that very few were so located as to justify such a measure. And, indeed, the custom of installing every new preacher who happened to make an engagement with a Society, was never viewed with favor by the ministers or laymen in this state.

When the connection between preachers and congregations is so frequently dissolved after a few months or a year, to call a grave council for the purpose of again installing the lately removed but re-settled candidate, as well as his successor, is at least of very questionable propriety. The dignity of a solemn religious ceremony, is very much diminished, if not sacrificed, by its frequent and obviously unnecessary application. The office of a pastor should be viewed as involving some very important duties, unknown to any other relations between minister and people, and it ought always to imply a degree of permanence in the connection, not to be dissolved from mere haste or captious resolves. Without supposing that many occasions do not occur which render a dissolution of the connection between pastor and people proper and necessary, it would still be well for the interests of religion, it those changes were less frequent,

multiplied as these sudden changes have become amongst us, as well as other denominations, they give too much reason to suppose that there is a levity and captiousness in the transaction, which little compost with the importance of the professions and interests involved.

Ordinations were sometimes conferred during the recess of the Association, either because the candidate had some special reason for desiring it—such as contemplated removal, or it was requested by one or more congregations to which he ministered. The Council on such occasions was called without any regard to the Committee on Fellowship and Ordination, annually appointed by the Association, whose authority and duties were then supposed to terminate with the session. In process of time, however, it was very properly deemed expedient and necessary to keep so important a matter—important to all the true and best interests of the Gospel, and to the prosperity of the cause of divine grace among men—in the hands of a responsible and competent committee, whose business it is to regulate the time and manner of proceeding, as well as to judge and determine concerning the fitness and utility of the measure. By these judicious arrangements some approaches have been made toward the establishment of order, system and safety, over one momentous branch of our ecclesiastical economy.

Of Messrs. Reed and Field, brief notices were given in the preceding vol. of this series of sketches. The name of Mr. Roberts appears here for the first time, on the minutes of the Association. At what time he received the fellowship of the order, does not appear; nor is it known by which of our Associations it was granted—but very probable by the Cayuga Branch, the preceding year. Mr. Roberts was a true man, and a faithful and upright christian, and the fullest confidence was never lost, and never betrayed. But through a life of much labor and privation, as well as of many vicissitudes, he never faltered.

Always and under all circumstances, he was a devoted and reliable Universalist, and he exerted his best abilities for the advancement of the great cause which he had espoused, and which he believed to be the religion of Jesus Christ. His preaching, though not the most attractive, commonly left a good impression upon his hearers, and exerted a salutary influence. He traveled much, and sometimes entered into short engagements; but probably never settled as the regular pastor of any congregation. With a feeble constitution, he performed a large amount of labor, and the energy of his character rendered him equal to most emergencies. Mr. Roberts died after a short illness, in the city of New-York, during the session of the General Convention, in September, 1847. His faith in the power and fullness of divine grace, sustained his hopes for a glorious immortality for himself and all mankind. And looking back upon a life of duty faithfully performed, and forward to the continued care and presence of God, he closed his labors and his life in peace.

At this session of the Association, the following Societies were received into fellowship, viz: Little Falls, Onondaga, Salisbury and Walton. The first, as its name imports, was located at the village of Little Falls, Herkimer co., and comprised the friends of truth in that place and vicinity. It was neither large nor wealthy, but was composed of individuals of much respectability. Like many other congregations, it appears to have been disposed to procrastination—to wait for some more favorable season for efficient action, until the time to act passed away. It never erected a church, never took any measures as a society calculated to advance its substantial interests, and only during a very short period sustained meetings for public worship. It soon lost its identity,

and for many years the name of a Universalist Society in that place has been alike unknown to the public, and to the records of the denomination.

The Society in Salisbury, also in Herkimer co., appears to have been of uncommon strength and energy from its organization. It has long owned, what in mere business matters would be called, a controlling share in two churches. One of these is located in the principal village in the town, denominated "the corners," is a very commodious house, and is used alternately with the Baptists. The other, distant from the former some two miles, is a very near edifice, and was built and shared with the Presbyterians. This Society has not only preserved its identity, but it has usually and for many years sustained regular preaching a part or all of the Sabbaths; and few Societies in central New-York have exerted a larger or a better influence in their vicinities, than that of Salisbury. Yet like most others of that day, it has felt the vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity; and suffered the loss by death or removal of some of its most influential and honored members.

Very little is known of the Society in Onondaga. Its existence appears to have been quite ephemeral, as it soon ceased to have a name on our records. It was doubtless organized under the ministry of Mr. Vandenburg, and probably dissolved into its original elements, when he, from ill-health suspended his labors. There were devoted and intelligent Universalists in that large town—enough to constitute a large and wealthy Society. But they were separated from each other by wide and inconvenient distances; and it was perhaps impossible to fix in any common centre that would accommodate more than one third, or one half of their number. This circumstance no doubt had great influence upon the stability of the Society; though we confess our inability to understand why even a few individuals cannot preserve the relation implied in the formation of a religious Society, as certainly as if their numbers were tenfold. That the resources of a small Society will correspond with their numbers, may be supposed to be true; but it is not very clear what this has to do with the social organization and christian fellowship of the members of an inspiring and common faith.

The Society in Walton, like one or two others in Delaware co., soon lost its legal organization. But it appears that, by the zeal and energy of a few devoted believers, a [obliterated] and occasional of stated preaching sustained, as circumstances permitted. It very generally sent a delegation to the Association, which was as uniformly received, and its delegates enjoyed a seat in Council, with all the rights of other members. In Sept., this year (1823), it became one of the original members of the Chenango Branch Association.

In the preceding vols. of this series, we have had occasion to name Mr. E. [Edwin] Ferris, from time to time. As this session of the Western Association, he rendered himself again conspicuous, by presenting a request for permission to withdraw from the fellowship of the Association. The principal, indeed the only reason which he assigned for that extraordinary and abrupt procedure, was that he was a believer in future limited punishment, and as that doctrine was not made an essential prerequisite for the ministry, he could not voluntarily and conscientiously remain in fellowship. He still professed, what he had always done, in that heart and soul, in faith, and hope, he was a Universalist. However momentous the reason given might appear to himself, it was one which, if it operated at all, should have done so through the preceding twenty years. For it is morally certain that during that whole period, the candidate for

fellowship or ordination, had never once been asked whether he did, or did not believe in future limited punishment.

Mr. Ferris was one of the Committee on Fellowship and Ordination, appointed at this session, and the several candidates were before the committee, when he asked Mr. Reed whether he believed in future punishment? The reply was full of acrimony and impertinence, and was suitably rebuked. "It is none your business," said Reed, "I am a Universalist, and came here to ask ordination—not to answer questions that have no concern with my character or qualifications for the ministry." By all the common usages of the denomination in such cases, this answer was substantially correct, and might have been expressed in terms that would have given no offence. It is not surprising that Mr. Ferris should feel deeply wounded, at the extreme rudeness of this reply; and it is probable that it hastened his determination to withdraw from the fellowship of the Association. The other two members of the committee, one of whom was known to believe in future limited punishment, and probably both, thought proper to grant the ordination, and it was accordingly conferred.

Another consideration might have operated influentially upon that mind of Mr. Ferris, to take the particular step which he did, at this time. It was well known to most of the clergymen present, that a movement was in progress in New England, to effect a permanent division of the denomination, on the question of future disciplinary punishment. And the meeting of the Association might perhaps have been regarded by him, as a favorable opportunity for testing the views and feelings of that body, on the subject. If that was the intention, the experiment must have been entirely satisfactory. For though it is quite certain that a large majority of both ministers and laymen, sympathized with him in opinion—his request for withdrawal was quietly granted, with scarcely a remark concerning the doctrine of future limited retribution. Here began, and here ended, all subject of division in our Councils in the State of New York. Mr. Ferris soon grew weary of standing and acting alone; and in 1827, he applied for, and received the fellowship of the Chenango Association, within the limits of which he resided.

1823. Arrangements appear to have been made during this session, for the organization of another Branch—known as the "Chenango Association;" and a committee was appointed to draft a constitution for its government. The records of that body for Sept. inform us that—"The Messengers, Ministers and Delegates composing the Chenango Association, met in the village of Oxford," etc.,—and that—"The Committee appointed to digest and [obliterated] a plan of government for the Association, reported accordingly," which report was accepted. This Association comprised the counties of Chenango, Delaware, and Broome, in New York, and much of that portion of Pennsylvania now embraced in the Susquehanna Association. Six Societies furnished the original representation that constituted the organizing Council, and during the session one other Society received fellowship. Letters of Fellowship were also granted to S. Fitch and I. S. Sherburne, as ministers of the everlasting gospel. Of the talents, services and character of these individuals, the writer has not that information which will justify any attempt to introduce them more particularly to the reader.

Another Association was organized in the Autumn of this year, but whether by any previous act, a reduction of the parent body (Western), is not known yet from the location of this Branch, the measure would be approved. This new ecclesiastical body was organized by the name of the

"Black River Branch of the Western Association" Oct. 1823. The territorial limits were not defined; but it must have been considered as embracing at least, the counties of Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego and St. Lawrence—a tract of country decidedly larger than one or two of the States in the America confederation. Like the Chenango Association, there were but six Societies, which constituted the original organization; and two others were received into fellowship at this, its first session.—There were also at this time, but six preachers in the vast region comprised in the Association—all of whom, it is believed, were located in the county of Jefferson. We now had five Associations in the State, viz: Western, Genesee, Cayuga, Chenango, and Black River. The three last named, have from the first been among the best regulated and most efficient of all our ecclesiastical bodies. The central power was supposed to rest in the "Western Association," of which, every clergyman in the State was considered as directly or remotely, a member. In its sessions delegates were sent from the respective branches; and all who could without great inconvenience, be present at its meetings, availed themselves of the privilege of doing so. The most perfect and cordial sympathy subsisted throughout all the parts of this widely extended social and religious body. To advance the religion of Jesus, to be co-workers in [obliterated] and demoralizing views, and to free and bless them with the perceptions of the abundant and never-failing grace of God, were the great and worthy objects to which every effort was perseveringly directed.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: 7 Jun 1856

1823. "Genesee Branch Association." —This ecclesiastical body held its annual session this year, in Pittsford, Ontario co., the first week in October. It was its tenth session, and it had become, in number of Societies, the number, talents and influence of its preachers, one of the most efficient bodies in our ecclesiastical organization. It comprised the entire territory now occupied by seven Associations, viz: Allegany, Steuben, Chautauque, Ontario, Niagara, and Buffalo, as well as that portion still included under its own original name. And although it was then a season of real prosperity, and causes of congratulation existed in the firmness and fidelity of preachers and Societies—what an impulse and elevation of soul would have been given, could they have looked forward a few years and see the result of their own and others' labors!

The Society in Livonia and Richmond, the First in Buffalo, and the First in Alexander, were received into fellowship at this session. It appears that the first named, and which was made up of believers from two towns, in due time separated and constituted at least two Societies. Churches were erected both in Richmond and Lakeville some years since, from which it is fair to conclude that they have enjoyed a portion of prosperity.—Doubtless they have shared the common lot of all similar communities, as well as of individuals, of seasons of adversary and depression. However this may be, it is very evident that there was in the elements of the original Society, the stamina necessary to self-perpetration and progress—things frequently wanting in religious Societies formed in a comparatively new country.

The Society in Buffalo was organized a few months previous, and had with commendable foresight and enterprise, already secured the services of a pastor. In the mean time, the "Gospel Advocate," a religious journal published weekly, had been commenced under the editorial care of the venerable Thomas Gross. Little was then thought that the position of this Society would, in a few years, render it one of the most important in the State. Buffalo was then a small village. The rapid and almost unprecedented growth of the town—the city—and the perpetual and ever-increasing throng that are passing and re-passing through, or sojourning for a season in the city, from every part of the world, could not be foreseen, but these are the things that particularly gave consequence to the location of this Society. At first its numbers were inconsiderable, but it always embodied a respectable weight of character, and which, in defiance, of prevailing prejudice, to a great extent the request of the better portion of citizens. It has, however, passed through an unusual number of vicissitudes—some of which have been eminently calculated to test the power and stability of the principles, as well as the patience and fidelity of its individual members. In June, 1833, this Society opened its neat and finely located church, which had been in process of erection during the preceding season. Previous to that time, the Society had occupied during several years, a convenient chapel, which had been constructed and fitted up expressly for its use.—The first Universalist Society in Buffalo, though never remarkably prosperous, and occasionally suffering very depressing reverses—has still not only maintained its position, but has augmented slowly in numbers and influence.

The Society in Alexander has, if not from its organization, at least during some seventeen or eighteen years, been one of the most substantial and efficient in Western New-York. Its pecuniary resources appear to have been quite ample, from the first; and these were applied in 1833, to the erection of a convenient church—situated on a commanding eminence, and overlooking the village and a large tract of country. It has usually sustained public worship from one half to all the Sabbaths, and has exerted as broad and beneficial moral power, as any other

congregation of equal number, within the very ample limits of the Association. For a few years past, it has enjoyed a more than ordinary degree of prosperity; and has added much to the number of members of church and Society, as well as made considerable increase of attendants of the congregation. From greater caution, or better discrimination, it has usually been particularly fortunate and successful in the choice of its ministers. They have not only been good and true men, generally distinguished for their worth and weight of character—but they have been men of fair, if not eminent pulpit talents.

We do not stop to ascertain the cause, but so it is, that the better principles of members of a Society, as well as its stability and permanent prosperity very much depend upon the personal worth of the minister—upon his being "a man among men." The mere pulpit orator, though not in any sense a bad man, is inclined to give too much of his time to the preparation of his discourses. He may attract a throng of hearers, but they only seek to be pleased, and are ready to seek that pleasure anywhere else, under a change of circumstances.

Letters of Fellowship were granted at this session to J.S. [John Samuel] Thompson and S. Holliday, as ministers of the Reconciliation, and ordination was conferred on J.S. Thompson and L. [Linus] S. Everett. The names of all three appearing for the first time on the minutes of the Association. Who this Mr. Holliday was, or where he ministered, does not appear. It is probable that, like several others of that time, he asked a Letter of Fellowship, for the purpose of feeling more fully authorized to officiate in public, when circumstances should render it expedient or desirable. This class of preachers rendered good service to the cause in some respects, especially by attending funerals, and by their efforts to mitigate prevailing prejudices.—Most of them were useful in the sense that the Methodist local preachers are so, to that denomination. They generally resided and performed their occasional ministrations, in sections of the country out of the range of the ordinary ministry of the more active preachers. And at all, these remarks may be applicable to Mr. Holliday, is unknown, but they are due to a class of men, who added their might to the stock of instrumentalities, for making known the paternity of God, and the freeness and the fullness of his grace.

Mr. Thompson was a recent convert from Methodism, and from the position which he held in that denomination, it may be inferred that he had been ordained by them. The only objection that lies against this is, that it was not the custom of the Associations to re-ordain those ministers who came from other denominations. Mr. Thompson was a genuine Irishman; and few men of that remarkable people, could better represent the entire national character. He claimed to have been educated in Scotland, and to bear the honors of the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen. However this might be, he certainly had a right to make some pretensions to literary and theological knowledge. But he was absurdly boastful and bombastic, and often rendered himself exceedingly offensive and ridiculous, by the obtrusive manner in which he put forth his assumptions of classic and professional eminence. He was a powerful and fine speaker, and when not provoked by some real or fancied attack upon his private or ministerial character, delivered profound discourses, replete with great thoughts and benignant principles. But when his indignation was aroused—an event which too often occurred—he would weave into the texture of his discourse the most pungent sarcasms and overwhelming recriminations, and set them home upon the "luckless wight" that had incurred his displeasure, with a look, and tone, and manner, peculiarly his own. Had he exhibited a becoming self-respect, and self-control, he

might have been a very useful and successful minister of Jesus Christ. For he possessed fine feelings and kind and generous sympathies, which in his dispassionate moments, shone out like unobstructed sunlight gleaming through opening clouds in a dark and boisterous day. Calm and sincere inquirers were repelled by rashness and merciless severity, and his friends were disgusted and outraged by the turbulence and violence of his passions. These causes forced him out of the excellent Society of Charlestown, Mass., over which he had been settled as pastor, and where his pulpit talents might have rendered him both useful and popular. Perceiving that he had lost the confidence of Universalists, he renounced his connection with them, and also professed to have changed his views in some important respects—though he still rejected the doctrine of endless sufferings for any of the human race. He abandoned the ministry, and devoted himself to teaching—and it is understood that he opened a school in Cleveland, Ohio, where he died in 1831 or 1832.

Mr. Everett is so generally and well known to the denomination, that any attempt of mine, and especially at the present time, to give an account of his ministerial career, is uncalled for. As a sermonizer he is surpassed by few in the denomination. At the time when he received ordination, he was ministering to the First Society in Buffalo.

The following note by Rev. W.J. [William I.] Reese, who commenced the ministry this year—is inserted under the head of Remarks which follow the minutes of session: —

"I had a very imperfect idea of the strides the cause has then made; and was surprised to see the many and respectable votaries of the doctrine, who attended the Associations and ordinary meetings, with so becoming a degree of independence."

This observation has a general and not a local application. Mr. Reese was not at the date of this session, a resident within the limits of the Genesee Association; nor did he become the Standing Clerk of that body, until several years later. He received fellowship from the Western Association in 1824. But wherever he chanced to be, the candor of all he said, entitle his remarks to our earnest regard and confidence.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: 14 Jun 1856

General Convention—Elementary Movements

1823. The "General Convention of Universalists," organized in 1785, usually held its sessions in Massachusetts or New Hampshire, and consequently, at too great a distance from even Central New-York, to admit of a full delegation from our Societies. The Convention was held in great estimation—almost veneration—by the ministers in New-York, and the Western Association annually appointed two or three of its members a committee to attend its sessions. These, our representatives, were always received with due kindness, took their seats in Council, made reports of our conditions and prospects, and enjoyed the privilege in common, of giving their votes on all subjects that came up for consideration. But our representation was wholly unlike that which obtained in New England, and left us, except by courtesy, without the weight of a feather in the great two or three delegates from each Society, constituted the Convention. And whilst we had a similar right of representation, the appointment would be entirely nugatory; the distance and expense rendering the attendance strictly impossible. Still the deference paid by the Western Association to the Convention, was like that of out branches to the parent body, in New-York. The Convention, like the Association, had no power except by mere concession—for it was never defined—over other ecclesiastical bodies similarly constituted. And it remains to be explained why such concession was ever made, and why on the other hand, such authority was ever assumed. In the mean time, it was becoming more and more obvious from year to year, that we were too far off, and too little known to receive much consideration, except from a few of the older and earlier preachers, who had visited Central New-York in former years. The practice which formerly obtained of actually sending a Committee of the Convention to the annual sessions of the Western Association, though nominally kept up as a matter of form, had not been so far complied with as to give us the delegation more than two or three times in seven years. The distance seemed to increase between New-England and Central New-York, as the denomination increased with the respective sections, until it was seldom passed by delegates or committees in either direction.

Of the degree and character of sympathy, and of the motives and apprehensions of many of the younger preachers at the East, relative to the brotherhood on New-York, the following is an illustration: —The Rev. Pitt Morse, and the writer of these notes, attended the meeting of the General Convention at Claremont, N.H. in 1820. On our way thither, and while on a short visit in the city of Hudson, N.Y., we were instructed by the Universalist Society, to request the Convention to hold its next session in that city. In due time we presented this request, there being, it is believed, but one other application for the adjournment—that of Warner, N.H. The respective claims of the two petitioning Societies immediately became the subject of rather earnest and warm debate, several persons on both sides entering with very commendable zeal into the discussion. In the course of this debate the Rev. John Bisbee, long since deceased—probably the best educated, as well as one of the most gifted of the ministers of the denomination, remarked, in his peculiar tone, and with very strong emphasis—that for his part, he "could see no propriety in taking the Convention away to the city of Hudson." "Why," said he, "I should as soon think of taking it to Chillicothe"—at that time one of the most important towns in small amusement to us New-Yorkers. It showed how very easy it is, for learned and even talented men, to form incorrect opinions, well as deep-rooted prejudices. For this far-off city of Hudson was more than 200 miles nearer to Boston than to some of the Societies in the

State of New-York. Of that fact, it seemed impossible for good Mr. Bisbee and some others to form any proper conception.

Another fact of much greater moment was elicited during this discussion, concerning the power and policy that might be exercised, if once the General Convention was carried into the State of New-York. It was urged that if we were as numerous as was represented, we might bring our strength into the Council, out-number and out-vote the delegation from New England, and permanently establish the Convention among ourselves. Whether this betrayed more fears of the Universalists of New-York, or informed, and must leave the reader to determine. However this may be, we obtained the adjournment to Hudson, by the influence of the senior clergymen, and on the pledge that no hindrance should be put in the way of the return of the session to Warner in the following year.

From Warner, the Convention was again adjoined into New-York for 1823, and according held in Clinton, Oneida co., in September of that year. The Universalist Society in Clinton, presented a very earnest request for the Convention to meet in that place, but it is probable that other and very different controversy—personal and otherwise, between two of our most distinguished clergymen, had been some time pending: and if the subject came, as it was intended it should, before the next Convention, it was desirable to bring it forward, where the least prejudice or partisanship respecting it existed. As far as that object was concerned, no place could have been selected more favorable to an impartial adjudication. Few of the New-York members, whether ministers or laymen, knew much, if anything concerning the matters in controversy, and had therefore no partialities to indulge or gratify. The matters pro and con were accordingly brought forward, and an immense mass of testimony adduced by the respective parties, which was duly examined. The time, two days, for the sittings of the Convention, appropriated to public worship and the transaction of ordinary business, was evidently insufficient for as full and deliberate an investigation of this great addition to its duties, as the subject required. It attracted the deepest interest in the Council proper, and in the vast assemblage who thronged the Council room whilst it was possible for them to give their attendance; and at times to that excess which obstructed of suspended the proceedings.—Most of the lay delegates and many of the ministers, make arrangements on such occasions, to leave immediately after the close of the public services on the second day of the session. By doing so at this time, it left a minority of the Convention, to take the final vote on the important questions at issue—which was done at twelve o'clock at night. Whether a full Council would secure the attention of members to the business of the session, would add much to the apparent propriety and dignity of the deliberations.

Without designing or implying any reflections upon the Convention, or the parties concerned in the controversy referred to above—it is still too true, that the circumstances under which the whole subject was conducted, were exceedingly injurious to our cause in Clinton. The Society was but recently organized; and had erected and opened a fine brick church, and established regular meetings at a still later period, in one of the strongholds of an opposing denomination. Hamilton College, exclusively controlled by Congregationalists and Presbyterians, exerted the full weight and measure of its influence against us, and the power and prejudice of the oldest and by far the largest Congregational Society in the State west of Hudson River, were made to bear upon the Universalist Society. The most searching vigilance was constantly exercised over all

our movements, and all possible capital made out of every measure open doubt or misconstruction. Among the hundreds that pressed forward to see and hear what was passing in the Council, there were those who, if they came with other and better motives, were quite willing to avail themselves of any little matter for scandal which the occasion offered. And unfortunately, the circumstances under which the trial was conducted, were eminently calculated to furnish facilities for misapprehension and misrepresentation.

Notwithstanding the disadvantages of our position, from the dedication of the church to this session of the Convention, the Universalist congregation in Clinton had been respectable for numbers, and the prospects of the Society were justly regarded as encouraging. The request for this session of the Convention, was made with a view to give an additional impulse to the cause of truth, by securing the attendance and ministration of several of our ablest clergymen, and convincing our opponents by the presence of multitudes from abroad, that were not particularly deficient in ministerial talent, or numerical force. But clergymen were so wholly occupied with other thoughts, than of public services, that their discourses fell far below the standard of their well-earned reputation. And the result of a meeting which had been sought with so much earnestness, was, that within a few weeks our congregation diminished at least one—third, and the succeeding twenty-five years have not been sufficient to restore it to its former number. In the mean time the integrity of the Society has never been lost, under any of the vicissitudes through which it has passed.—And possessing a very competent amount of wealth and considerable influence, it has exerted both, less for its own immediate benefit, than for the interests of the denomination. The "Clinton Liberal Institute," in which about forty of our active clergymen have received an education far above what they could have otherwise obtained, originated in this Society; and was built principally by its means, and has been to a great extent sustained by a constant tax upon its generosity.

If after this session of the Convention any fears were entertained, either in New-England or elsewhere, that we were plotting to remove it from its original and customary location—such fear were certainly groundless. It was felt, at least by a few, both clergymen and laymen, that wherever the Convention of right might belong, it was by no means desirable to transplant it into the State of New-York. What was really wanted, as an advisory or controlling ecclesiastical body, remained to be ascertained. One thing was becoming more and more apparent—that for the effective transaction of business, a less cumbersome and better defined organization was necessary—one whose powers should be fully explained, and which should be constituted of a more equal, and less numerous representation. This was the last session—one expected—(that at Saratoga Springs in 1827,) held by the Convention in the State of New-York, previous to its re-organization. In its present form its powers are merely advisory—the State Conventions assuming and performing all the duties, which it formerly exercised in common with the Associations.

It is the misfortune of all merely human institutions, that they are more or less imperfect. The stamp of divine and enduring perfection, is alone impressed upon the works and word of God.—But whilst man can make no pretensions to infallibility, he ought not to content himself with the attainments of past generations. Indeed, the only reason why he should aspire to higher and better attainments—why he should unceasingly strive after progression—is contained in the truth, that his best efforts are still imperfect. In the physical and social worlds, that great

principle has become the rule of action and enterprise. But the forms and institutions of religion, as far as these depend upon human measures, too generally remain stationary. We may very properly venerate our fathers, and respect and honor the energies which they put forth as the best and highest efforts of their minds, for the advancement of divine truth. But why should we persist in following in their footsteps, under circumstances which they could not provide for, because they could not anticipate their existence.—And yet it scarcely admits of a question, that the least conservative of all christians upon earth, continued to sustain for years, the original General Convention and Universalists, for no higher or better reason, than that it was the work of the fathers of the denomination. It was wisely adapted to the circumstances of a people, almost wholly comprised in a district of country less than a hundred miles in extent. But when that people had spread themselves and their principles over nearly or quite a thousand miles in different directions, it was no longer possible to participate in the annual doings of a body composed of a few ministers and delegates from neighboring Societies.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: 21 Jun 1856

Perhaps nothing contributed more directly and effectively to the agitation of the subject of a State Convention, than the proceedings above stated, at the session of the General Convention in Clinton. Another, and which soon became the engrossing reason, was, the great extent of territory over which the Universalist Societies in New-York were scattered, and the rapid but necessary multiplication of Associations. The vigilant and excellent Mr. [Rev. Nathaniel M.] Stacy was probably the first to perceive our wants in this, as in many other things, and to urge upon our clergymen especially, the importance of adopting early measures on the subject. It could not be expected that the acknowledged dependence of the branches upon the Western Association, and under the pressure of conceivable local interests. In the very know how soon, declare themselves independent of the Western Association, and the only existing bond of union thus become at independent bodies, whilst neither could appeal for redress or compromise. Besides, the probabilities of collusion would be greatly increased, by the estrangement of members of the same faith, which would naturally result from their less frequent intercourse with each other.

This subject became one of much earnest thought, as it was at once perceived, to be one of very grave import. But what would be done, or undertaken, to advance the prosperity of Societies and secure the union and co-operation of the different ecclesiastical bodies, was still a matter to be experimented, rather than determined by speculation. That a central [union?] was needed, few were found to question; but how it should be constituted, or what its powers should be, were questions eminently perplexing, and would involve great diversity of opinion. It was certain, however, that whenever the time for action should come, the general mind would put the most liberal construction upon the rights claimed and exercised by the Associations, and with which the least possible interference would be permitted.

Our numbers certainly justified, and our position and circumstances clearly demanded the adoption of some measure for securing—not for the present time only, but for the future—the union and a more efficient system of discipline of the order. To secure these ends, it was the opinion of some of our most esteemed clergymen and laymen, that a different organization was imperative. But there was one obstruction to any efficient or immediate movement on the subject. The Associations did not appear to perceive the necessity of any change in our institutions, or in the administration of our affairs. They held each other in high respect, and the most cordial fellowship, and seemed not to consider that time, accumulation of numbers, and even local jealousies might work influences as yet unknown to the denomination. And this was neither for want of interest, nor an unwillingness to provide against unforeseen evils; but from an excess of charity. Loving and honoring all Universalists themselves, they could not believe that the time would ever come, when members of the same family of believers that the time would ever come, when members of the same family of believers could be less devoted to the interests of truth, or their sympathies less expansive or kind. They overlooked the impulse which great and beneficent truths, when first inculcated and believed, give to the feelings as well as the mind, and which by familiarity, lose much of their power over the sensibilities of honest and intelligent persons. Still, it was foreseen by some, or at least supposed possible, that, as the denomination increased in numbers, and new ecclesiastical bodies should be formed, the existing fraternal charities might give place to strife, and our system of fellowship of fellowship become a mere rope of sand.

The acts and decisions of any one of the Associations, were generally, perhaps uniformly, admitted to be obligatory upon all the rest. And yet, it could not but be known, that in certain instances, various considerations had interposed for the protection of the undeserving. The tender sympathies of those who had more zeal than knowledge, and more piety than discriminating common sense, could be excited by a shrewd offender, who could cant and whimper about his toils and righteousness, and for the hope of amendment, his fellowship would be continued.—It was obviously impossible to prevent the recurrence of any number of instances of this description, so tribunal, except to the General Convention. This "hoping against hope," that expressions of confidence, and measures of encouragement as well as indulgence, will work the reformation of the moral delinquent, seldom results in any visible good, and cannot therefore be safely relied on, and is usually sufficiently tested before the subject reaches an Association.

From facts and considerations like these, it came in due time to be believed, and was finally deliberately acted upon, that clergymen were better qualified to exercise a faithful and salutary discipline over each other, than could be relied on from the Associations, as they were then constituted. But it was foreseen, that the attempt to organize such a body for such purposes, would place its projectors in a peculiar dilemma. For it would not be very difficult for any one, who wished to obtain credit, as the special guardian of the interests of the laity, to excite their apprehensions by raising a "hue and cry" about the assumptions and machinations of the clergy. It might be said for effect, and in subsequent discussions it was said, that they were the entire control of the denomination. On the other hand, they would be exposed of the charge, however unjustly, of intending to protect and defend each other under all circumstances, and so enable the guilty to laugh at all attempts to bring them to justice, while under the shield of the brotherhood. What then should be done? It was becoming daily more apparent that something should be done; and clergymen of undoubted integrity and worth, resolved to hazard the experiment. Such were the elementary workings, which, after the delay of another year of careful thought and free conversation, resulted in the establishment of the "New-York State Convention of Universalists."

It is a subject of great moment, to ascertain how far and in what way ecclesiastical tribunals, exercising high and responsible disciplinary powers, exercise a beneficial influence, or consist with the personal freedom of those over whom they claim jurisdiction? There can be no doubt how these questions should be answered, if all christians, or perhaps rather all clergymen, were truly what they should be, and what the importance and sacredness of their profession imply. If each were influenced by the spirit of his Divine Master—if he would strive to imitate those virtues which constitute so remarkable a feature in the life, and which add such luster and glory to the character of Jesus Christ—then would each be in a peculiar sense, "the Lord's free man," and ecclesiastical tribunals would be unnecessary.

But, unfortunately, neither clergymen nor the members of the great christian family, give in all instances, any evidence that they are, or ever have been, what the Gospel was designed to make them. As whole classes, they have no doubt been sincere in their professions, and acted upon their knowledge and comprehension of the divine requirements. Still the exceptions in individual instances have been so frequent, and marked with such atrocities—and especially among the clergy—as to startle the credulity and tax the charity of many sober-minded and intelligent christians. During nearly forty generations, clergymen in general seem to have had little idea of the practical bearings of divine truth upon daily life. From such men little more

could be expected than they performed. Occasionally, too, individuals have risen up in the church, the philanthropy of whose principles, and the purity of whose lives, were worthy of the first ages of Christianity—worthy of all imitation—worthy of a millennial reign. These seem to have been in some sense appreciated, but their example was not followed—their devotion and virtue were deemed too spiritual, too refined, too elevated of the power and forms of spiritual beings, that the merely human could not aspire to similar attainments. And men gazed, and wondered, and admired, and felt that superhuman grace had been conferred by heaven on its favorite children, while here below. The masses continued to live and act, and the priests to observant of the ritual, but negligent or unconscious of the many power to punish offenses by appropriate means, if not to correct might have been effectively applied, little attention was given to crimes, beyond the imposition of a paltry fine, or the infliction of an unmeaning and ridiculous penance.—Priests without any pretensions to religion or morality, were permitted to exercise their functions unrebuked, under the pretext that however rotten and worthless the vessel, the freight was sacred and indispensable to the safety and peace of souls. This was personal freedom with a vengeance, so far as the decencies and practical moralities of Christianity were concerned! Ecclesiastical power was almost exclusively made to bear upon matters of faith. Defection or difference there, were sure to be visited with unrelenting severity. But can any one believe that the same amount of corruption of principles in the Church, or of public morals, would have occurred, if more attention had been paid to the discipline of the vicious, and less to the punctilios of faith?

We live under very different auspices. But mankind are still more influenced by their passions than by their reason—more by the impulses of their senses, than their religion. To this there are many splendid exceptions—but we speak of professions as a whole. And although general morality has greatly improved, clergymen as well as others are, in not a few instances, deplorably deficient in the practical virtues enjoined by the religion of their adoption. What can be expected from such men under a sense of individual freedom, when with the acknowledged disciplinary power of an ecclesiastical tribunal over them, they can so wantonly disregard the requirements of their religion and their reputation?

And what would be the effect upon thousands of others, were all ecclesiastical bodies may be too lax or abused, is beyond controversy. This is the misfortune of all human institutions, and should be imputed as much, at least to misconception and ignorance, as to improper of evil intentions. When self-deception has led to error, its subjects should receive a very lenient judgment from the community; and when intentional violence is done to the right, the public is too slow to visit its perpetrators with severe but righteous retribution. The time is rapidly passing away, when the acts of an ecclesiastical council, however venerable for age, or for the names of which it is composed, will be received without the most rigid scrutiny. Such acts are no longer regarded as the undoubted expression of the will of God, or as infallibly exempt from human passion or weakness. But does it follow, because such, or any other institutions are imperfect, that they are therefore intrinsically evil, and should be rejected? If so, we should be without government and laws---without social institutions of any kind, for they are all imperfect. And if the mere consideration, that in human rejection as evil—Christianity itself would, with all its divine hopes and influences, be abandoned as unworthy of the faith and trust of the soul. For that has been abused by the mistakes, fanaticism and cruelties of its professors, through long ages. But is any right-minded man disposed to think or weak and ignorant men have mistaken,

and rash and passionate men have disregarded its principles, and violated its divine precepts? Has it no longer any heavenly impressions upon its great and benignant the lives of men—none in soothing the sorrows of the heart, and sustaining the dying with the hope of a better life? This none can doubt. Are we to reject all government, all laws, because they are imperfect, or are administered at times by ignorant or vicious men? He who supposes this, may compare the safety and protection of life and property which he enjoys under our organized civil institutions, with that of others in some of our newly acquired territories, which are comparatively without a government—and find the answer there. We shall arrive at the same conclusion respecting every institution formed for the ostensible well-being of man. They are better in their worst forms and [obliterated] a constantly improving intelligence, as well as mere practical and clearer views of Christianity, it is safe to infer that the causes of social and the abuse of ecclesiastical institutions, will continue to diminish. From these and many other considerations, it appears that not only social and civil, but ecclesiastical institutions and tribunals are beneficial as means of individual restraint or discipline.

Personal freedom is understood by too many in a latitudinarian sense, as without law and without responsibility, other than the suggestions of the will. Upon this view many have apparently acted and still act. Which, then, is most likely to inflict a permanent injury upon a christian denomination—the personal discretions and offenses of ministers, whom you can neither control or punish—or the possible or even probable to mistakes and wrongs of tribunals to which they are amenable? To this there is, there can be, but one safe and correct answer. Public men, whether clergymen or others, must be held responsible for their conduct, and where else can a christian minister be so properly subjected to discipline as before an ecclesiastical tribunal? Since the organization of Universalists into a religious body, the errors of its tribunals are scarcely to be taken into the account, in comparison with the good they have done, in the exercise of disciplinary power, and in stopping "the mouths of foolish men." An individual preacher, with mediocre pulpit talents and respectable address, will do more mischief in a single year—if a bad man—than all our ecclesiastical bodies have yet done, or are likely to do. And for this reason—he perpetrates evils that the lifetime of a generation will scarcely suffice to remedy. He brings his profession into disrepute—he disgusts and provokes both friends and enemies, and paralizes [sic] efforts for the advancement of the cause of truth. The mistakes of one of our tribunals will be, as they may be, corrected at a subsequent session.

But what personal freedom do men want? Who desires to be absolved from all responsibility to the members of a common faith? No good men can wish any liberty that conflicts with propriety and right—with God's law of purity and truth. As a christian, whilst connected with any of our ecclesiastical bodies, he is at perfect liberty to think, speak, and publish at pleasure, none hindering, because he has no desire to relinquish his hold on everlasting truth and righteousness. Ecclesiastical rules were not instituted for such men, but for "the lawless and disobedient." In the late movement among ourselves, who have complained that their personal freedom was abridged—that certain measures conflicted with their religious liberty?—those who received the Scriptures as containing a divine revelation—who believed that the life, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus were demonstrative proofs that he was sent from God, to be an instructor and Saviour. O, no; but those who would reduce the character of our Lord, to that of an expert mountebank, and engraft upon christian truth, the last and by far the lowest form or infidelity.

Again—who have found fault with our ecclesiastical tribunals proclaiming the right of supervision, and the power of discipline over the moral conduct of those within their jurisdiction? Those who have reason to apprehend rebuke for their offences—and those who would compromise their conviction of right, to perpetuate a connection already dishonored by vice. No truly good and thinking man has ever complained—except that discipline was too leniently administered. He is influenced by higher and better considerations than are inspired by the dread of ecclesiastical censure. His filial relation to God, his brotherhood with man and his consequent obligations to promote, by all honorable means, the election and happiness of his fellow beings—these are the principles which aspire the right-minded and virtuous christian. —Few will plead that their personal liberty is materially abridged, by our civil institutions—or that the punishment of offenders is inconsistent with the best interests of society. Why then should it be especially objected to ecclesiastical bodies, that they conflict essentially with personal freedom?—It need not be proved that many forms of transgression exist, wholly inconsistent with Christianity, and which are yet unprovided for by the civil code. It is only in religion, and with a religious profession, that men—nay, ministers—would enjoy exemption from all accountability, and perpetuate at pleasure the many and sickening crimes, that have so often and so long disfigured the beauty of the christian calling! For the same reason that complaints are uttered against human institutions for the protection of morals—they may in time come to be made against the government of God; as that occasionally conflicts with unlicensed liberty, and brings down severe chastisements upon the head of transgressors. And as the Deity carries on his plan of moral government by ordinary and human instrumentalities, it would seem that he that resisteth the law, "resisteth the ordinance of God."

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