

## OUT OF DEBT

The Event Celebrated by All Souls' Church  
Nearly Eighty Thousand Dollars Raised During the Past Twelve Years—  
Addresses by the Pastor, ex-Senator Russell, George W. Bungay,  
Bernard Peters, Rec. C. H. Fay and Assessor B. W. Wilson

All Souls' Universalist Church, Eastern District, pastor, Rev. Almon Gunnison, D.D., having paid the entire church debt, held a jubilee meeting last evening in the chapel on South Ninth street, in celebration of the event. There was a very large attendance and the meeting was a most enjoyable and interesting affair. The room was extensively trimmed with flags and banners and upon the tables were beautiful floral pieces. At one end of the room was a crayon portrait of the pastor, and at the other end a portrait of the late George Ricard, president of the late George Ricard, president of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, and for many years one of the most prominent members of All Souls' Church.

In 1871 Rev. Dr. Gunnison undertook the work of building a new church edifice. The society was then worshipping in a church on Fourth and South Sixth streets. Lots on South Ninth and South Tenth streets were purchased and a large and elegant church was erected and a beautiful and commodious chapel, the entire cost of which was \$77,310.89. The society has worked zealously to pay this amount and has at last succeeded in liquidating every cent of liability against it and has a surplus in the treasury.

Music was furnished by an orchestra and singing by the church choir and the Portia Quartet, a club of talented young ladies and excellent singers, consisting of Mrs. C. H. Russell, Mrs. W. C. Bryant, Mrs. James A. Sperry and Miss Anna Wentworth. The opening prayer was by Rev. Mr. Barnes, of Greenpoint. An original hymn, written by Mrs. Bernard Peters, was sung by the congregation. The following is a stanza:

We bend before Thine altar, Lord  
Rejoicing o'er and o'er,  
Our burdens lifted, hear the word,  
Rejoice forevermore!

The introductory address giving a history of the work done by the church was delivered by Rev. Dr. Gunnison, the pastor of the church for the past twelve years. He said that in the Fall of 1871 the subject of a new church was agitated, but the work seemed so impossible that there was very little faith that a building could be erected. There was a debt of \$540 and a missionary debt of \$400. A subscription book however was started and an executive committee was appointed. The lots on South Ninth street were bought at a cost of \$12,000 and paid for, and the lots on South Tenth street for a chapel purchased at a cost of \$6,510. The church was erected at a cost of \$42,889 and was dedicated April 12, 1874, with a debt of \$14,000. In 1876 the new chapel was dedicated. The cost of this building was \$21,105. The mortgage debt of the society at the completion of the chapel was increased to \$16,000, and also a floating debt of \$1,500. In 1878 the floating debt was paid and the mortgage debt reduced to \$12,000. In February, 1882, a final effort was made for the entire payment of the debt. A few persons were invited to the pastor's study, where a council was held. It was decided to

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undertake the work. Letters and circulars were sent to all the members of the church, and in less than three weeks the whole amount was subscribed and a surplus of \$2,346. Two years were given for payment, and at the expiration of that time, without any person being personally asked for his subscription, the mortgage was paid, principal and interest and the entire property made free from debt. The society is now free and independent, owning no man anything save goodwill and love. In conclusion Dr. Gunnison said: "Every one has been generous, throwing no obstacles in the way, ready to contribute according to his means—the poor giving their mites, the rich giving of their abundance. Not once, but many times more was given than was asked, and though of necessity the calls have been many during these years of building, they have always been responded to with cheerfulness. I know of no other instance where a debt was raised by sitting at a study table, or where the last subscription was the easiest and largest. I deem myself fortunate in seeing the beginning and the end of this work. I have seen more anxious hours during my long pastorate than could be conceived, and the burden of this work has rested heavily upon heart and brain. It would have been heavier had I not been helped by the constant and uniform kindness of those who have labored with me."

Ex-Senator Russell referred to the occasion as the golden wedding of All Souls' Church. She stood before the world as an organization of moral, religious and financial honor. The members of All Souls' were to be congratulated that they were emancipated from the thralldom of debt. Credit for this was due to the beloved pastor, who has been the pastor, friend and instructor of all present. He was a leader so discreet and with such a high ideal of Christian standard that he was able to make possible the jubilee occasion.

Mr. Bernard Peters, a former pastor of the church, said that he had been intimately acquainted with all the pastors of the church. He referred to the Rev. Mr. [Henry] Lyon and the Rev. D. [Day] K. Lee, both men of ability and high character; Rev. W. W. King, a marvelous genius, followed by the speaker, who left the ministry to go into journalism, and Rev. Mr. [Andrew J.] Canfield, at present the pastor of the Church of Our Father [First Universalist Society of Brooklyn], this city, and the Rev. Dr. Gunnison. The church had prospered and done a good work under the ministrations of these faithful men. He spoke in high terms of George Ricard and his work in the church, and of Messrs. Price, Hawkins and others. He counseled the society to keep out of debt in the future. He said that he, for one, should [would] oppose all changes and improvements unless the way was clear to pay for them.

The pastor explained that he liked to have Mr. Peters oppose matters. He opposed the making of the attempt to pay off the debt, but nevertheless when he found it could be done he subscribed the last \$1,000.

Mr. George W. Bungay, author of "Creed of the Bells" and a member of the Bedford avenue Reformed Church, congratulated All Souls' Church upon its wonderful achievement. No church in the city had a better record. It was out of debt and out of danger. It was a monument with which to refute the criticism of the infidel that the Christian churches had no financial honor and were all in debt and worshipping God in edifices which did not belong to them. There had been great progress in religious

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thought during the past twenty years. Now members of all denominations could meet together upon the same platform. Such was the case at the recent celebration at the Ross street church, and a Universalist Sunday school (All Souls') was to lead the procession at the Sunday school parade. This was surely evidence of liberal progress, but there would be rumbling in some of the coffins if the old fathers of the orthodox church knew of it. In conclusion Mr. Bungay read a fine poem, written for the occasion, entitled "Out of Debt."

Rev. C. [Cyrus] H. Fay responded to the toast: "If a national debt is a blessing, why is not a church debt also a blessing, and if not, why not?" He first argued that a church debt was a good thing for certain members of the congregation. It gave them something to do. But a church must be out of debt in order to accomplish the real work for which it was intended. No church was true to its charge which did not look beyond self perpetuation.

Assessor B. W. Wilson, chairman of the Board of Trustees, reviewed the work which had been done by the society and gave credit to all who had assisted in removing the burden. All had been inspired by the pastor. He had educated them to give liberally and the more they contributed the more willing they became to do so. No one was a penny poorer for what he had done for All Souls' Church.

The exercises were brought to a close by the entire audience rising and singing an original hymn, written by Rev. C. H. Fay, of which the following was the first stanza:

Rejoice! rejoice! our debt is paid!  
This temple now is free!  
And where the cheerless shadow lay  
What pleasant light we see!  
A light like that which fills the span  
Of Heaven's wide arch above,  
Where naught is due to God or man  
But pure, immortal love!

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Transcribed on 28 Feb 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY