

ALL SOULS' FIFTY YEARS

THREE SERVICES CONDUCTED BY NOTED UNIVERSALISTS
Dean Sawyer, nearly Ninety-two Years Old, Makes Two Addresses,
and the Rev. Dr. Almon Gunnison Preaches in the Evening

A full half century of Christian work was celebrated at three special services held at All Souls' Universalist church here yesterday. In the morning, afternoon and evening the large church edifice was crowded to the doors with members, former parishioners and friends, who heard with interest addresses delivered by eminent speakers in the denomination and pastors from other churches in the vicinity, who eloquently and earnestly declared their friendship for All Souls' and its people. It was a day of great rejoicing. The services were necessarily long, but not wearisome. Dr. Thomas Jefferson Sawyer, the dean emeritus of Tufts' divinity school, who is now in his 92d year, spoke at the morning and evening services greatly to the delight of the large congregations, containing many whose fathers and mothers loved to listen to his preaching in the old Orchard street church, New York, fifty years ago. Dr. Almon Gunnison of Worcester, Mass., the predecessor of Dr. John Coleman Adams, the present pastor, who for nearly twenty years filled the pulpit of All Souls', addressed the children of the Sunday School and the audience of older people in the evening. His presence and his timely remarks were necessary to make the occasion wholly enjoyable.

Hydrangeas, Easter lilies and potted plants bordered the pulpit platform, on which were seated at the morning service the pastor, Dr. Adams; Dr. Sawyer, the Rev. Almon Gunnison, D.D.; the Rev. Cyrus Fay, D.D.; and the Rev. Gerhardus L. Demarest, D.D. Dr. Fay read the devotional sentences, the invocation and the Lord's prayer. The scripture lesson was read by Dr. Demarest. Dr. Sawyer offered the prayer.

An anniversary hymn, written for the occasion by Dr. Fay, was sung by the quartet choir and congregation.

Dr. Adams reviewed the history of All Souls' church in the sermon which followed. Dr. Adams chose as his text Psalm cxi:4: "He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered." He said in part:

The reason for the organization of this new society has been shown in its larger relations to the great movements of thought and faith which fifty years ago were sweeping through the country and the world. We should not do that event full justice if we failed to connect it with the grand and impressive changes in religious thought which were altering the face of Christendom and preparing the world for a new reading of the gospel of Christianity. But the great movements have their relations to special locations and particular people. The vast storm area which drenches half a continent with its refreshing downpour gladdens the field of every small

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farmer in every several township. It is time to turn to the bearing of these theological and religious events upon the life of a certain small town upon the banks of the East river, to the northeast of Brooklyn and the Wallabout. These plenteous rains of a more rational and liberal thought dropped their refreshing moisture upon the green fields of Williamsburgh, and lo! these fifty years of seed time and harvest. I am persuaded from much that I have heard of late concerning the origins of this church, that one man was very largely responsible for this, as for many other similar beginnings, Dr. Sawyer had been for some thirteen years pastor of the Orchard street (or Second) Universalist church of New York city. He had been filling the minds of his congregation with the most uncompromising and durable sort of Universalism. But he had to suffer the same hardship which befalls the metropolitan pastor to-day. He could not hold all his people in their city homes. There was the same drift away from the church neighborhood which is going on in middle New York and lower Brooklyn to-day. As fast as his best people grew rich enough to afford to live in the suburbs they moved away just as they do to-day. Not a few of them cast their eyes toward Williamsburgh. It was not a large nor a very bustling place. There were but 856 names on the polling list in 1845, and in 1840 there had been but 5,094 in the population, though a year later (1846) the population was nearly double what it had been in 1840. But the immigrants from Orchard street, with the spirit which always characterized Dr. Sawyer's disciples, were bent upon having the privilege of the gospel now in their new home. The prime movers in this matter were George Ricard, Joseph C. Stanley, William P. Miles and G. L. Demarest. To their desire and resolve this church owes its existence. They were our spiritual fathers.

The growth of the good cause in New York and its survivors had been up to this period slow and hard, in the face of much opposition, indifference and social aversion. There were at least three churches by this time in New York. The movement at Newark was well under way and down in Brooklyn a society had been organized for three years, under the charge of that stalwart defender of the faith, the Rev. Abel C. Thomas. When Hiram Haskins, William Burbank and their friends had tried to hire a certain hall at the corner of Fulton and Cranberry streets, they were refused point blank and the frank reason given for the refusal was that "Brooklyn was bad enough without having Universalism preached in it." But the brethren obtained a church on the corner of Fulton and Pineapple streets, which was burned in the great fire of 1848, and no doubt, after the fashion of those days, the destruction was deemed a just judgment. Though, as two other churches were also burned, the judgment was less pointed than it might have been. Away from this immediate vicinity the men who to-day are veterans were young and almost untried ministers, the churches which have

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since taken rank as citadels of the faith were just beginning their splendid careers of service. Dr. [Edwin Hubbell] Chapin was still in Charlestown, Dr. Miner—he was plain Brother Miner then—was at Lowell, and so was Elbridge G. Brooks. Thomas B. Thayer was getting ready to come to Brooklyn, a young man named William H. Ryder was preaching in Concord, N.H., only two years ordained. Gerhardus L. Demarest was not entitled to a "Rev." before his name, much less to a D.D. after it, as he was an important functionary in the Williamsburgh Savings bank. It may be of interest to this people to recall the fact that in this year, 1845, down East, by the Kennebec, there was a boy baby, in the family of a Universalist minister named Gunnison, whom they had christened Almon, and who at this particular date was still busy cutting his teeth. Verily it would have been a strange place to us younger folks, the Universalist church of 1845, and perhaps as lonesome to us as the church of 1895 is to Dr. Sawyer and to Dr. Demarest.

Into the fellowship of the men and the churches of that busy and stirring period came this new band of believers in the Omnipotent Love. Its first regular services were held on the 6th day of April, with preaching by the Rev. W. S. Balch. On the following Sunday a Sunday school was organized, with Mr. G. L. Demarest as its superintendent. It may be remarked in passing that this young man, Demarest, seems to have been a most useful sort of person in the little church. He organized and superintended the Sunday school, he led the singing, and from certain entries in the early account books of the society it would appear that he had charge of posting the bills which advertised the new movement. By the middle of June the society was organized, and on Thursday evening, October 9, after a sermon by the Rev. W. S. Balch of New York city, the Rev. T. B. Thayer of Brooklyn, as the representative of the Universalist churches of the vicinity, publicly recognized twenty-one persons as the First Universalist Church of Williamsburgh. Of these persons, three are known to be still living, viz: G. L. Demarest, Eliza C. Demarest, Mrs. Mary Wilson. On the 1st of July a pastor came to the little flock in the person of the Rev. Henry Lyon, whose modest stipend of \$500 per annum, paid sometimes in \$5 and \$10 installments, was not excessive, certainly, even for those days of small things. Mr. Lyon labored with fidelity and effectiveness for four years, until December, 1849. That he laid strong foundations of faith and good works all the later years of this church's life bear witness, and when he went away from it, he left an undivided interest in the church to certain of "his heirs and assigns forever"; three of his children and two of his grandchildren are in the fellowship of this church, while nearly a score of persons in the immediate families of his children are active and earnest workers in the parish. Not every pastor can thus perpetuate his interest and influence in the church he has organized.

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After an interim of five months, in December, 1849, came that fine and noble soul, the Rev. Day K. Lee. No truer minister than he ever served the Universalist church, nor one of more deeply imbued with a love of his noble office. An ardent student, a lover of letters and of science, a poet of no mean gifts, he left a memory of righteousness and love behind him, and all his successors have had reason to feel that in the best and highest sense his works do follow him. The brief pastorate of the Rev. W. W. King, lasting for less than a year could not, of course, leave any deep impression upon the church. But in 1856 began the work of the Rev. Bernard Peters, a period very dearly cherished by the many hearts that were won and held for this church by his ministrations. A minister so earnest and so vigorous could not fail to have a vigorous and earnest pastorate. Zealous alike in his defense and championship of the faith, and in his support of every movement and principle which promoted moral benefit to society, Brother Peters put the stamp of his enthusiasm and fidelity indelibly upon his church. He magnified and illustrated the office of the minister as citizen and neighbor, and won for himself and his church a respect which the years have only augmented. It was in the midst of his eight years of pastoral service that the trying days of the civil war began; and no memorial of that season of conflict, sacrifice and suspense is more distinct than the fervid patriotism of the young pastor, his ardor in support of the national cause, his words and his work in manifestation of his loyalty. The best evidence of the mutual respect and attachment between himself and this church and community is that when he transferred his energies from the ministry to the editorial chair he could find no more congenial home than among his old friends and parishioners.

In January, 1865, the Rev. Andrew J. Canfield assumed the charge of the church and remained with it until July, 1870, winning to himself many and warm friends and maturing those powers which were destined to shine so brilliantly in the later years in Chelsea, in Brooklyn and in Chicago. How good a record he made is attested in the fact that when, after a period of probation in New England, he reappeared in a neighborhood pulpit he won an immediate recall to the region in which he had once labored and proceeded to justify the hopes which centered in him by the success of his ten years' work in the Church of Our Father [First Universalist Society of Brooklyn]. All through the years of this uneventful pastorate the church was waxing stronger, was healthily active in good works and was maturing for those undertakings which were to lift it to higher levels and entitle it to larger influence in the community and the denomination. It was the quiet prelude to the more stirring period of activity and growth which was to follow....

Aside from those almost lifelong settlements in which the whole career of the man is practically identified with that of the church...there are many

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brief pastorate which distinguish the course of a generation and mark the beginnings of a new era in the church's life.... Such a season of activity, achievement, evolution into broader life this church enjoyed when, in the flush of his youth and with all his splendid energy still undrained and unwearied, Almon Gunnison came down from the quiet city of Bath to lead this parish to its most permanent and distinguished achievements. It is no disparagement to any other pastorate or minister to speak of this one in these emphatic terms. The time was ripe, the leader was at the front, the people were ready. That, under God, was the fortunate combination which made those nineteen years so eminent in the history of this church and in the life of Dr. Gunnison. He was a favored man in being thus elected of the Lord for so grand a work; this church was favored in having just this pastor sent at just this time, for just this work. There is no need that I should rehearse a tale so familiar and fresh in the memories of all of us. Besides, its character and details have been told with more fullness than I can give it here, in a little white covered volume, accessible to you all, entitled "A Record: Almon Gunnison, D. D., 1871-1890." But it is proper to say that it is entirely possible to misplace the real power and inspiration of that pastorate in laying too much stress upon the acquisition of his handsome property and the rearing of this substantial church home as its chief work. That was a great achievement. But I may be permitted, in the role of the impartial historian, as well as in the character of the fortunate successor of this pastor, to aver that Dr. Gunnison did far greater. In quickening all the activities of this parish, in broadening and deepening its religious foundations, in knitting its social ties more firmly, in linking its life more intimately into that of the great city which had swallowed up the village and the town that were, in leading it to the very front of the column of denominational aggressiveness, loyalty and zeal; in compelling for it that fraternal recognition by every church and denomination of the Christian name which was so signally exemplified in the concession of a place in the Sunday school parade; in all this enlargement and uplift of the whole character of the church, and its advancement into an eminence worthy of its place and possibilities, lies the real and lasting honor of this pastorate, which will always hold a high place among the notable histories of Universalist churches and ministers. Of the present pastorate it is not safe to speak; at least for the present historian. So far as it may be properly introduced, as a matter of record it is perhaps possible to affirm that it has been extremely happy and harmonious, with no apparent loss of gain or ground already new. If it shall be entitled to this much of approval it will be chiefly for two reasons: first, that the effort has been steadily made to keep upon the old foundations, so well and firmly laid by other hands; and second, that

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whatever additions and enlargements have been made, the growing life of the church and the community have demanded.

This church has had but three homes in half a century. The first was no more than a rented house, occupied but for three years for \$200 per annum. It still stands in the rear of the building at the corner of Berry and South Fifth streets, with a paint shop in the basement and a tenement house population in its upper stories. From this temporary home the society moved in 1848 to a more commodious one, the brick church at the corner of Bedford avenue and South Third street. The little book in which are recorded the first subscriptions for this purpose is still in existence, and under date of January 19, 1846, bears a number of signatures pledging sums from \$5 upward, and headed by George Ricard, promising \$100. The edifice finally cost about \$7,000. Here the congregation remained until 1874, a period of twenty-six years, when the present church was dedicated. The sacrifice and labor which acquired and devoted nearly \$80,000 to the service of Christ and the gospel of the larger faith can never be realized by any estimate in dollars and cents, because every dollar stood for loyalty and love, for duty and devotion. The investment of these sentiments here is the real value of the church property. As All Souls' church itself draws its early strength largely from another and older church so in turn its own life has been drawn upon to form another. The Church of the Good tidings is the offspring of All Souls'. It was started—and Dr. Gunnison is my authority—in a back parlor by six persons, all attendants at All Souls'. It has received many accessions from this church in the families which the tide of removal has carried out toward the eastern boundaries. It has had substantial aid from this church all through its brief history, and the most cordial relations still exist between the elder and the younger church. But the chief work of this church in the past half century has been, not the raising of money but the rearing of Christian men and women. Its largest pride is and ought to be not in the value of its properties and the amount of its contributions, but in the clean, conscientious, Christian lives it has given to this community. This is the finest record, this its worthiest work. Its leaders have been leaders in the life of the city. Its membership has carried influence and energy of the best sort into public and private affairs. It has allied itself with every good cause and supported every movement for social order and purity. To-day you may find its members in public offices of highest trust and honor, on a score of institutions of charity and beneficence, at the head of great public schools, eminent in the learned professions, leaders in commercial life in two great cities, influential in journalism of the best type, earnest students of the best in letters, in art, in social life. If we have not been able to show the largest congregations in the city, we have been proud of the character of the men and women who composed such congregations

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as we could gather. There have always been certain names of leaders in this church which its members have delighted to pronounce in public or in private, as typical at once of the very best manhood in the community and of the style of character for which the church has stood. Such was the name of George Ricard, who for thirty-five years was the president of the board of trustees and the wise, generous and loyal friends of this church. In him the church had a representative it was proud to acknowledge, to whom it was glad to point and say: "This is our man." Nor do I violate any propriety nor risk any contradiction in saying that in his successor in office this church found one who was his peer in character. I have a friend, expert in historical study, who has had occasion to search many such discourses as this present one, who once impressed it upon me that if I ever was called upon to say aught upon such an occasion as this, it was no more than decent treatment to future searchers in the past which is now present, to say something, enough, to convey some clear idea of contemporary life and atmosphere. I suppose it is at least a Christian act to save time, labor and study for future historians. That is one reason at least for my reminding you of the changes which a half century has produced and the strangely altered conditions of our church lie to-day from those which surrounded the little band of people who formed this church. Some striking features mark the result of a half-century's preaching of Universalism. It has not indeed effected all that some of those early believers hoped for; but it has done more than some of them expected. Outwardly and formally but [only] very slight changes have taken place in theology within fifty years. Go by the creeds, the schools, the symbols of religion and you would think that scarcely anything had come of the life and labor of our churches. Not one of the great creeds of Christendom has been materially altered; not a theological school has renounced its elder teachings; not an evangelical missionary society will send an avowed Universalist to non-Christian lands; not an evangelical newspaper supports Universalism; not a Young Men's Christian association receives the Universalist on equal terms; not a pulpit of that stamp is open, save perhaps in Episcopal churches, to the believer in the final holiness of the race. That is one side of the matter, and upon the surface it appears like a most discouraging result, after fifty years of fighting. But who does not know how inadequately is represented the situation! The creeds may not be altered, but how has the old faith weakened in their sterner features! How few stand fairly and squarely upon them! The theological schools may teach the old horrors, but they cannot make their students believe them. The missionary societies stand fast in the old policies, and their conservatism is "cutting the nerve of missionary effort." The evangelical press does not defend Universalism, but mark how faintly it defends the harsher dogmas it was so aggressive in teaching fifty years ago. The Young Men's Christian

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associations still refuse fellowship to Universalist youth; but how many hearty, honest protests one hears from the membership of these same unions against the ancient bigotry that keeps the fences up. Universalists are not wanted in any save Universalist pulpits; but the most popular pulpits in the land are those from which the most pronounced Universalism is preached with only the thin disguise of an evangelical name and sign. The whole emphasis of Christian teaching has shifted, and in place of a stern presentation of the justice, the power or the wrath of God, sinners are entreated and won in the name of Infinite Love.

Dr. Sawyer, at the invitation of Dr. Adams, who said he feared many present might not have another opportunity to hear the venerable preacher, made a brief address. Dr. Sawyer said he was present at the first services held by the All Souls' society in the little church on Second street. He spoke of the trustees of the early church who had been connected with his church in Orchard street, which he said was the mother of all Universalist places of worship in this vicinity. Notwithstanding his great years Dr. Sawyer's voice remains firm. He was heard distinctly in every part of the church.

Dr. Gunnison pronounced the benediction.

At the afternoon session, which began at 3 o'clock, half the pews in the church were occupied by the Sunday school, which marched in after forming in the chapel. On the platform were Dr. Adams, Dr. Gunnison, Superintendent George E. Moulton and Dr. Demarest, first superintendent of the school. Five other ex-superintendents were present: George H. Fisher, George W. Smith, Frank B. Mayhew, Fred H. Wight and Benjamin W. Wilson. After the devotional exercises, including the reading of the scripture by Dr. Demarest, Mr. Moulton made a brief address. He introduced Dr. Demarest, who related events which occurred during the early life of the school and spoke of objects for which a Sunday school was organized, the first and most important of which was for worship.

An historical sketch of the school was then read. Mr. Fisher spoke next and told how the Sunday school organization was perfected during his superintendency. Mr. Mayhew followed and reviewed incidents in the history of the school during his eight years of leadership. A letter from Abram J. Moore, at one time superintendent of the Sunday school and now a resident of Chicago, was read by Daniel T. Wilson. Mr. Smith, in the course of an address, told how the entrance of the school into the Sunday school was effected. Mr. Wight related his personal experiences in the school, not only as superintendent but during all the time up to the present, since he has been connected with it.

Benjamin W. Wilson, whose superintendency extended over a period of seventeen years, was listened to with close attention as he spoke of the work which had been done during his long term of leadership.

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The last speaker was Dr. Gunnison. His remarks were of a reminiscent and congratulatory nature. Dr. Gunnison was in his happiest mood talking to the children. He said that since his departure from Brooklyn the one thing which he had missed above all was All Souls' Sunday school. He always had a longing to see the children assembled when Sunday afternoon came, as his own school in Worcester met immediately after the morning church session, leaving a vacancy in the afternoon. He spoke particularly of his labors with Mr. Wilson, who was superintendent during all of his pastorate. His humorous allusions to events which were still vivid in the minds of the majority of the children were heard with much amusement.

There was singing by the school and congregation at intervals during the service, which lasted over two hours. The rear of the church and all of the pews which were not occupied by the Sunday school children were filled by members of the congregation and visitors.

At the evening service, which was presided over by Dr. Adams, addresses were made by Dr. Sawyer, Dr. Demarest, Dr. John D. Wells, pastor of the South Third street Presbyterian church; Dr. Fay, Dr. Gunnison, Dr. Stephen H. Camp, pastor of Unity Unitarian church; Dr. Louis Wintner, rabbi of the Temple Beth Elohim; Dr. James H. Darlington, rector of Christ Episcopal church; the Rev. Rivington D. Lord, pastor of the First Free Baptist church, and the Rev. Alexander Lewis, pastor of the New England Congregational church. Prayer was offered by the Rev. Daniel Wight.

Dr. Adams expressed his regret that Bernard Peters, who was pastor of the church during the war, was unable to attend the jubilee celebration on account of illness. On behalf of the congregation of the church he extended the sincerest sympathy to Mr. Peters, accompanied with the earnest wish that good health may soon be restored to him.

Dr. Sawyer spoke of Williamsburgh as he knew it in 1830. There were very few houses there then and many farms. "I wish I had bought some of those farms," he said, "but our foresight is not so good as our hindsight." During the course of his remarks he said, "One of the saddest things about getting old is that you are left alone. Nearly all my friends are in their graves. Those with whom I was associated fifty years ago are gone. I cannot think of these things without sadness. Now when I walk in the streets of lower New York I recognize no one and no one recognizes me. This is the fate of old age, but this, my friends, is not all. There is a future life and let us cherish the hope for it and in Christianity we honor the common nature God has given us."

Dr. Gunnison said that it was five years ago last night that he said farewell to his friends of All Souls' before taking his departure for Worcester. He said, "I spent two-fifths of my life in this church and I have found no field so pleasant to toil in. No friends are like the old friends to whom we are

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bound by many interlacing cords of joy and sorrow." Dr. Gunnison said the success of the church was due to the fact that it was well founded and well led by pastors and well sustained by its people. He reviewed the career of its several pastors. Speaking of Dr. Adams he said he had found him a kind and considerate successor, and wished the he might long continue his successful pastorate.

The pastors who followed Dr. Gunnison spoke briefly in a congratulatory vein.

An anniversary hymn, written for the occasion by Dr. Adams, was sung by the congregation.

Dr. Demarest concluded his brief address by singing the hymn, while the congregation joined in the chorus, "There will be no sorrow there."

Dr. Sawyer pronounced the benediction.

The jubilee celebration will conclude with a social reunion, to be held in the church and chapel to-morrow evening. Addresses will be made by the Universalist clergymen of the vicinity.

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[very slightly abridged]

Transcribed on 23 Dec 2012 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY