

FEAR OF NEEDLESS RIVALRY

Some People Think Even This Big and Growing Section Doesn't Want Two Liberal Churches

Considerable dissatisfaction is said to exist among the members of the Unitarian denomination in Flatbush over what it appears is regarded as an invasion of their territory by the Universalists. Since November 2 the latter body has been holding services in the stone chapel on East Twenty-third street, near Foster avenue, which was formerly used by the Presbyterians. The Unitarians, who have organized themselves into the Flatbush Unitarian Church, worship in temporary quarters at Church avenue and East Eighteenth street. They expect to build an edifice next spring on property which they have purchased on Beverly road and East Nineteenth street, which is less than a mile from the stone chapel.

The intention of the Universalists to organize permanently in Flatbush, provided the attendance at the services now being held there warrants such a step, is viewed with apprehension by the Unitarians, who, from their comment on the subject, seem to incline to the opinion that, while two established churches of liberal tendencies in the same large and growing section would be mutually beneficial, the advent of one while the other is struggling to establish itself would be not only unwise, but extremely detrimental to the success of either.

In connection with this the Unitarians also refer to the existence of an implied understanding with the Universalist body regarding a possible conflict of interest growing out of the establishment of a church of either denomination in the same locality where one of the other body has already established its field. They consider the two denominations very much alike as regards doctrinal principles and the liberalism of religious belief in general. They admit, however, that there is no binding obligation upon either denomination to respect the territory and field of the other.

The Universalists, while evidencing no hostile feeling whatever toward the Unitarians, appear to be somewhat indifferent to everything except the necessity of ministering to the spiritual needs of people of their belief in any locality where demanded and do not believe in allowing other denominations to do this for them.

It is understood that when the Rev. John Davidson, the pastor of the Flatbush Unitarian Church, called upon the Rev. L. Ward Brigham, pastor of All Souls' Church in the Eastern District, which is holding the services in the stone chapel for the benefit of members of its congregation residing in Flatbush, in relation to the contemplated establishment of a Universalist Church in the vicinity, and insisted upon the consideration of some of the Unitarian contentions referred to, he did not receive a very encouraging reply from Mr. Brigham regarding the possibility of All Souls' Church discontinuing its efforts because a Unitarian church was available.

Mr. Brigham is said to have been very emphatic, especially when Mr. Davidson brought to his attention the alleged fact that Universalists had been and were attending regularly the services at his church, some of whom were former All Souls' members. Then it was that Mr. Brigham is said to have exclaimed to Mr. Davidson:

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“My dear young man, they would rather attend a Methodist or Episcopal church than a Unitarian.” Mr. Davidson, according to report, then came away considerably discouraged.

When an Eagle reporter asked him yesterday if Mr. Brigham had made use of the words quoted, he seemed reluctant at first to discuss the matter, but finally said:

“I do not remember if Mr. Brigham said just what you have described. I understood him to say that members of his congregation living in Flatbush preferred to hear their own pastor preach, if possible. When I saw Mr. Brigham we discussed the matter of the possible establishment of a Universalist church in the section most amicably and pleasantly. He said that the matter of starting a church had not been definitely decided upon. There was no friction whatever. Of course, some Unitarians fear the result to both churches if they are simultaneously started, but there is no feeling of jealousy at all.

“It will be too bad if a report that there is feeling between the two bodies becomes broadcast. Of course, there are always one or two people in matters of this kind who will consider it in the wrong light and become agitated when there is no necessity for it, but I am sure that the majority of the members of both churches look at the whole subject in a fair minded and Christian spirit.”

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Transcribed on 2 Sep 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY