

First Universalist Convention in New York Columbus, Jun 2d, 1807

While traveling through some of the Eastern counties in this State, I had the pleasure and satisfaction of being accompanied by Br. Z. [Zenas] Cook, and an old and venerable gentleman whose name was Howard, to the ground where, some thirty-eight years since, was held in Columbus, Chenango county, the first Convention of Universalists in the State. It is about three quarters of a mile from the Unadilla river, which separates the counties of Chenango and Otsego.

The first discourse was preached in the chamber of a Mr. Lamb, in the evening of the first day of June, A. D. 1807.

The next day they repaired to the woods, and the audience were seated on a side hill. The order of exercises, say Judge Campbell and Mr. Howard, were as follows: Sermon by Rev. Hosea Ballou, Subject—Levite and the Samaritan. Second day, A.M. Sermon by Rev. Joshua Flagg. P.M. 1st Sermon by Rev. Paul Dean. P.M. 2nd Sermon by Rev. Hosea Ballou. Text Acts xvii:23,24. The sermons were all excellent, and they did not fail to make an impression.

Br. Howard pointed us to the spot where stood Father Ballou nearly two score years since, when he preached to “the children of the wilderness,” who had come in from the four winds, and admonished the multitude with his eloquence, as he stood at the “foot of Mar’s Hill,” by which name it has ever since been distinguished.

The congregation were seated on logs and among the forest trees, and under the branches of the sturdy oaks, whose leaves were waving in the gentle breeze from the northeast, and rise of ground which descended to the southeast.

“The Partialists,” says Mr. Howard, “would sly around and hide themselves among the trees, so as to listen unnoticed. One man hid himself behind an oak tree up there on the side of the hill,” (pointing out the place where the tree stood with as much precision as if it were only yesterday), “to hear and know what was going to be said and done while the eloquence of Father Ballou would resound and re-echo in the distant woods, and after listening to the voice of truth and benevolence for a while, they had a disposition to hear *more*, ‘if that was Universalism.’”

The day was clear and serene, and not a cloud could be seen under the blue curtains of heaven, to throw any shadow over or around them, during their devotional exercises and deliberations, and every thing passed off in the most profound harmony.

“After the audience were dismissed by a benediction, Father B. was walking along by the side of his colleagues down this hollow,” says Mr. H, “as he [Ballou] was leaving the ground, when he remarked, ‘well, I think there is *some* ice broken today.’” And, as the assemblage was following Father B. along down the winding hollow to the road from the consecrated ground, their countenances were animated with joy and gladness, while the sun continued, as it had during the exercises of the day, to pour forth its rays, which seemed to enliven all animated nature. All felt well. Mr. H. said to Dr. Robinson, “I could sit there till midnight to hear Mr. Ballou.” The Doctor then interposed in his common mode of expression, and said, “I could sit there and hear him to all eternity.”

The influence of the Convention was a good one. It did much to establish Universalism, and the remarks of Father Ballou have proved emphatically true, the “ice” was completely broken, by the reflections of that holy fire which they kindled—the light of whose flames has not only extended as high as the heavens, but [has] lighted up “a dark corner of the earth.” The principles which were advocated at that Convention are now the popular religion of that part of the country. It may be said with propriety, that this was the place from which, as from a centre, the principles of Universalism, or God’s impartial

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grace, have spread over the Empire State, and perhaps over the extended Union, and a part of British America. A knowledge of those principles have [has] continued to expand wider and wider until the present time, when all may, to some extent, enjoy their gladdening principles, and share a part in their blessings, and which will doubtless continue in all future time till it will, when combined with the light of science, bring about the reform, for which we *hope* and *most confidently pray*.

I was extremely delighted with the view of this romantic spot, and the enlivening reflections that passed through my mind while looking over the footsteps of those reformers of the age.

Father Stacy was present at the Convention, and took a part in the services, as he was then residing in that vicinity. He was the projector and originator of the Convention for which due credit should be given.

Yours,
E. H. Sanford

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