

[Minden (Fort Plain), Montgomery Co.]

A MISSING MINISTER

Rev. Mr. Wright Has Left Fort Plain In Financial Straits and Has Not Returned

FORT PLAIN, N.Y., March 16.—Rev. Daniel F. Wright, pastor of the Universalist church, the richest church organization in this village or vicinity, left his charge on a four weeks' leave of absence on Jan. 10 for the purpose, as he stated, of visiting Arizona, where he had private business interests. Nothing had been heard from him until a day or two ago, when a letter, received by Lawyer Lester M. Weller, was read before a meeting of prominent Universalists, in which the clergyman declared he was wrecked financially; that he would not come back to Fort Plain, and that he would not again preach the gospel until he had regained the money he had lost. It is understood the Mr. Wright was interested in gold mines in the west.

He is well known throughout New York state, particularly in the central portion. The letter was postmarked "New York" and in it the writer stated that he intended going to Mexico. His wife, who is living at her home near Potsdam, is prostrated by the shock of her husband's disappearance.

Daily Argus, Mount Vernon NY, Mon. 16 Mar 1896

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Rev. "Dan" Wright Gone

A Former Canton Theologue and Energetic Mason Loses His Gold Mine, Leaves His Parish and Wife and Departs, Half Crazy, for the West, to Begin Life Anew

Everybody in Canton knew Dan Wright, and will learn with regret that he has lost his fortune, deserted his parish, and gone west to begin life over again, leaving his wife in Potsdam. Some four years ago Daniel Wright came to Canton from the west, and immediately entered the Theological school. He speedily became a general favorite. He had accumulated some property in the west in mining enterprises where he had worked in mines and pushed himself up until he had acquired a share in one of them. He was a forceful, energetic, well read fellow, who had knocked about in the world and had seen things. He knew how to talk, and anything he did was done well. After he had been in the Theological school for some time he acquired a prominence in Universalist circles throughout the state and it was through the recommendation of President I. M. Atwood that he was made State Missionary. In this capacity he was a great success, building up many parishes and raising large funds for the erection of new churches. He was an enthusiastic Mason. About two years ago Mr. Wright was united in marriage to Miss Rose Wright, of Hopkinton, whose father is a retired farmer of some wealth. A little later Mr. Wright accepted the parish at Fort Plain. His wife was opposed to his labors in the Universalist denomination and although devoted to each other this seemed to be the rock upon which they split, and for some time she had been living with her father at the Albion house, Potsdam, while he was laboring at Fort Plain. He often spoke of his western property, but gave little idea of its value, although he always seemed to have plenty of money.

The story of Mr. Wright's work at Fort Plain is interesting in the extreme. He preached there on the resignation of their former pastor last May, and carried the parish by storm. The trustees immediately requested him to become permanent pastor, but he said that although he had been a student of St. Lawrence University he had never been ordained and had never preached. He and his wife had money and he was not obliged to work; but the trustees insisted. They were about to tear down their old church edifice and commence the erection of a new house of worship. Mr. Wright's reputation as an organizer and promoter had preceded him, and finding the trustees determined to secure him, he accepted the position and was ordained to the ministry.

If churches can be said to have booms, Pastor Wright's church certainly had one. The old building was torn down, and Architect Russell, of Syracuse, prepared plans for a \$20,000 church. The village opera house was engaged for the church services. From the first Sunday the new pastor preached in the opera house great congregations listened to him. New members began to flock in. The third Sunday in July, Pastor Wright named "rose" Sunday. On that day 20 people became members of the church, and each one was presented with a rose by the pastor.

The corner stone of the new church was to have been placed with Masonic honors September 4, but an unexpected advance in the price of the building materials caused a

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postponement of the ceremony. This temporary delay in the plans in building did not diminish Mr. Wright's enthusiasm, and during the autumn months the opera house was packed nearly every Sunday. Mr. Wright was elected a delegate to the state convention in Troy, and when the convention was over, Fort Plain had been selected as the place for the '96 convention. The first Sunday in December, preceding the annual church fair, was a "red letter day" in the history of the church, the right hand of fellowship being extended to 58 people.

Pastor Wright had mentioned several times to some of the officers of the church that he was largely interested in gold mines in Arizona. He had been associated with two partners—one of whom had died several years ago, and the other of whom was the active proprietor of the mines. Mr. Wright said he and his partner were also interested in some cattle ranches near the Mexican border. At times these interests in the far west seemed to worry him greatly. He evidently did not have great confidence in his partner, and was fearful that he might lose some of his wealth.

Last January he asked leave of his parish to go west to look after his interests, which was granted. On the tenth of that month he wrote to his wife in Potsdam that he had lost his wealth and that he was going west to look after his affairs. He said she would not care to see him again until he had retrieved his fortunes. On the next day he left Fort Plain, and little has been heard of him since until about a week ago. It is said that Mrs. Wright heard that he was in this state and put detectives on his track, but this probably is not true. Very recently the trustees of the church had a letter from him written in New York stating that he had lost his entire property and that he should [would] not return to them until he had paid off debts that were harassing him. About the same time President Atwood, of Canton, received a similar letter. Mr. Wright had evidently gone to New York hoping that matters could be straightened out, but had discovered that he was ruined financially. This seems to have nearly crazed him so that he scarcely knew what he did. He said that he was starting for Arizona, and might go to Mexico, as he had accepted an offer to that effect from parties. The loss of his property and the sense of indebtedness seems to have overbalanced him. He did not say where he could be reached by letters, and letters have been returned to the writers uncalled for.

His affairs in Fort Plain were all right, and the large sums of church money which he had handled were found intact. The whole thing has been sudden and in some way incomprehensible, but to those who know the man there will be no doubt but that his loss has been severe and deeply felt, and that he will be heard from later on.

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