

Incidents in my Field of Labor

BR. AUSTIN:—From the commencement of my labors in this vicinity, four years ago, I have been wonderfully favored with Methodist toleration, and something of the same spirit has been manifested by other denominations.

In the town of Morristown, where I labor a portion of the time [e.g. part-time employment] we occupied a church built by Presbyterians and Methodists, aided by Universalists to the amount of between two and three hundred dollars. We held our meeting in the church one quarter of the time for two years, and one eighth the third year. But about a year since, the Methodist Conference sent a man by the name of Barnes to labor among the people. Everything moved along pleasantly, and the community were in peace with the exception of a few restless, jealous individuals, who began to think their "craft was in danger."—They reported to their Shepherd as soon as he arrived the religious aspects of the community, and their own desires to interfere with the privileges, and interrupt the prosperity of Universalism. They soon found that they had a man as a spiritual guide of kindred spirit, and suited to their selfish desires.—They came to the conclusion that the only way they could effectually spite Universalists and oppose Universalism would be to crowd them out of the church. Mr. Barnes therefore made arrangements to occupy the pulpit by two of his exhorters at the same hour of my appointment. I went to the church at the time appointed, and found it full, and the "exhorters" in the desk. I waited patiently until one had finished his harangue, and when the other arose for the purpose of occupying the remainder of the time, I remarked that I had an appointment to preach there at that hour, and demanded the time and the pulpit, and claimed protection at the hands of a Methodist Justice of the Peace, in the enjoyment of my religious rights. Whereupon they closed their services, and after laboring some fifteen minutes to quell the disturbers, order was restored, and we proceeded in our devotions without further molestation that day. These circumstances, reaching the ears of their captain, greatly enraged his pious emotions, and he boastingly said, "I will be there next time *myself*, and see if Baker will bluff *me* off."

When the time came I went quietly, as usual, to my appointment. I found the church, as before, full. People had flocked from all quarters. Many came who were not accustomed to attend church. They came "to see the fun," as they termed it. I found the personal cause of this disturbance of the peace, and gross infringement upon the religious rights of others, and desecration of the Sabbath, in the desk, engaged in what he probably called prayer. He was not in the proper place assigned for the occupant of the pulpit, but he was knelt at the head of the stairway to be seen of men and women... He seemed to be praying against time, and no one felt devotional, and no one could under the circumstances, for all felt that the presence of the occupant of the stairway was a bigoted intrusion upon the sacred rights of individuals. When he closed his boisterous supplication no one

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said "amen," no one felt to, but all were glad and felt relieved.—When he arose to name his text, I asked the privilege of making a single remark, but was refused.—I however stated that I had an appointment to preach there at that hour, as before demanded the time and the pulpit. But while I was making this statement, Mr. Barnes was reading his text, and some of his leading brethren exclaimed at the top of their voices—"Go on, go on, Br. Barnes, we will back you up." After I had repeated my statement I left the house, together with many Universalists. Some, I am sorry to say, insulted themselves by remaining and listening.

The secret of the matter was, our congregations numbered three times as many as those of other denominations. This was a vexation, and they supposed they could build themselves up by an attempt to injure Universalists. But they have found their mistake, for we still prosper and our meetings are well attended. A site has recently been purchased for a church, and in the course of the coming year we shall have a house of our own in which to worship, where intruders and hypocrites will not dare to enter.

The prayer meetings which Mr. Barnes appointed to be held every Sunday for the purpose of preventing my preaching in the house, long ago died for the want of life and interest, and when he makes an attempt to preach, he has but a few hearers. I hope that Universalists will never impose upon themselves enough to give him any countenance as a preacher. Before Mr. Barnes came upon the circuit, friendship and peace prevailed; but now, and for a year past, that of ill-will and discord disturbs the community. It should be the business of the preacher of the *Gospel* and of the followers of Christ, to promote peace and good will among men, and I think that *such* desire it.

In another part of the town, and in a district embraced in Mr. B's circuit, I had an appointment to preach not long since, in a school house which has been for years occupied by the Methodists, both summer and winter, but never but once by Universalists. On arriving at the house I found the friends collected but the door locked, and the following notice pasted upon it, for which its literary merit and Methodist spirit, cannot fail to interest and amuse the reader:—

NOTICE.

"The Trustees of District No. 13 in Morristown A majority of them have resolved that no universalist minister shall hold A meeting in this house."

David Ackerman
Sylvester Ackerman
John Panter

No objection has ever been expressed to the Methodists occupying the house, although they have had every winter their distracting meetings, and have freely burnt the district's wood, and thus appropriating public property to sectarian purposes. But when the Universalists in turn wished, in common with others, to

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enjoy their privileges, and to occupy a house which is public property, and which they helped to build, the spirit of bigotry and persecution...tramples upon the laws...and bolts the door of a school house... Did Mr. Barnes advise his brethren, the Trustees, to do as they did? He impudently went to the house the next Sabbath, and held his services, knowing at the same time that the Universalists had been unjustly and unrighteously debarred from their privileges. He has probably never said a word against the mean and unchristian act, but has practically given countenance to it. This is the only way he or his brethren dare meet Universalists or Universalism. Cowards never dare enter an open field where they can meet their foe face to face, but timidly throw their missiles from behind some fortification.

All these things, instead of injuring us, are turned to a gracious account, and serve to defeat the unholy purpose of those who hate the doctrine of God's impartial grace.

Our friends at Brier Hill, which is a part of Morristown, have raised a sum sufficient to build a church, and the job is already let, so that we shall ere long have two Universalist churches in Morristown.

In Hammond, where I reside, the cause is steadily progressing. The friends have raised more means for the support of preaching the present year than for the past two.

I am now in my fifth year in Hammond and Morristown. I have engaged to preach once in four weeks at Jamesville, where the friends have recently started with new spiritual life. They have a good, neat church, and our meetings are well attended.

It is rather fatiguing to preach three times a day, and travel from 15 to 25 miles besides. But we country ministers have to work, and if we do get tired and weary, it is no more than the farmer and mechanic experiences, and our appetite is the better and our sleep the sweeter.

Besides my clerical labors, I have a garden in which I pleasantly and profitably spend a portion of my time. We have our own dairy, which affords us plenty of butter and milk, and while I am writing our better half is busy working over and moulding the golden lumps. If it were possible, Br. Austin, we would send you a sample, just enough for breakfast, some morning. You would probably do as we used to do when boys—our good mothers would spread our cake, and we would eat off the butter, leaving the cake to be spread again.

H. H. B.[Baker]

Hammond.

The Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Saturday June 25, 1859

Transcribed on 5 Jan 2007 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY