

[Fourth Universalist Society, New York City]

DR. CHAPIN'S CHURCH
THE CHURCH OF THE DIVINE PATERNITY CONGREGATION
HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM IN THIS COUNTRY FOR OVER ONE CENTURY—
THE OLD EDIFICE IN THE BOWERY—SERVICES AT THE PRESENT CHURCH YESTERDAY

Universalism in America properly dates from the year 1741, in which George De Benneville, the first professor¹ of that faith, landed in Philadelphia. His father, one of the Huguenot fugitives from the cruelties of the monarch² who signalized his reign by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, settled in London toward the close of the seventeenth century. Here in the latter part of 1703, young [De] Benneville was born. Comparatively little is known of his early youth, save that it was chiefly passed in the society of his father, a man of considerable talents and more than ordinary devotion to the reformed religion. On coming of age, the son was sent to travel on the Continent. In the course of his tour he became deeply impressed by the looseness of life and manners which pervaded all ranks of society, as also by certain tenets of the orthodox churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, which he considered diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures. The result was the inauguration by himself of a series of wayside sermons, setting forth for the first time the distinctive features of the Universalist belief.

From France he passed into Germany, continuing to preach in the towns and villages on his route upon the final restoration and salvation of all men [sic], and winning a not inconsiderable number of converts to his opinions. In Germany he encountered Count De Marsey, and other evangelists holding similar but more advanced views, by whom his conversion and admission into the new church was effected. The usual persecutions at the hands of the authorities and established clergy followed. Of the leaders of the new movement, many fled to England, then, as now, an asylum for the oppressed of all nations. Others, among whom was De Benneville, embarked for America. On arriving in this country he took up his residence at Olney, in Berks County, Penn., not far from Philadelphia, where he married into the family of the De Bertollets, one of the most important in that locality. Later in life he removed to Germantown, near Philadelphia, where he passed the remainder of his days, dying in 1793 at the advanced age of ninety. Though a firm believer in Universalism, he does not, in America, appear in the character of a propagandist. This last was reserved for his successor, Rev. John Murray, born in London in 1741, the year of De Benneville's emigration from Germany.

This gentleman may be justly styled the first active apostle of the faith in the New World. In early life he was a Methodist, and at one time an attendant upon the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield. His first practical experience as a convert occurred at Good Luck, in the State of New-Jersey, where he landed on the 28th of September, 1770, in the brig Hand in Hand, of London, bound for New-York. A short distance from the shore stood a small meeting-house, erected by Thomas Potter, a retired sea captain, who freely proffered its use to preachers of all denominations, but had never

¹ e.g. professing individual

² of France

been satisfied in his own mind by the doctrines they taught. The appearance of the Hand in Hand, which had been driven out of her course, at this juncture impressed the good man with the conviction that here, at last, was the long-looked-for ambassador [sic] who was to deliver the gospel message in all its purity. He hurried to the water's edge, made the acquaintance of the youthful preacher, and after much persuasion induced him to appear in his pulpit on the following Sunday, the 30th of September, 1770. In New-York the fame of Murray's oratorical powers was not long in spreading. He had not been in port twenty-four hours before a committee appeared to solicit a repetition of his Good Luck sermon. Such was the excitement to see him that the Baptist meeting-house on Golden Hill, wherein he preached, was thronged, and that almost without notice. During the week which elapsed before his departure, his time was almost wholly occupied by sermons and lectures. As an instance of the warmth of his reception, he says, "Even the minister extended to me the hand of apparent fellowship." In this and the years following to 1774, he continued his missionary work at Good Luck and other points, in southern New-Jersey, and also in Philadelphia. The warmth of his reception in the latter city may be easily gleaned from any old volume of the annals of the time. In one of them it is stated, with much apparent satisfaction, that Bachelor's Hall, in Kensington, "was once lent to the use of Murray, the Universalist preacher, keeping then the doctrine cannon-shot distance from the city." Religious as well as party lines were drawn in 1771.

In the Autumn of 1772, Murray again visited New-York, while on his way to Newport, R.I. A Presbyterian clergyman of the same name, had distinguished himself in New-York and New-England, chiefly through several transactions which were not considered to redound on his credit. This afforded a handle to the enemies of the Universalist, who, on his arrival in New-York, proceeded to attach to his name the charges against his Calvinist rival. Satisfactory explanations followed, though not until after a long interval, and the Murray of Good Luck fame was properly vindicated. To distinguish the two namesakes in the future, they were respectively dubbed "Salvation" Murray and "Damnation" Murray. Later in life they were on the most amicable terms, and frequently exchanged pulpits. But it is an old proverb, that falsehood travels a league while truth is putting on its boots. It was not until 1823, half a century later, that the name of the Universalist was entirely cleared from the unjust stain that rested upon it. So late as 1865-66 a book was compiled in one of the New-England universities, in which this slandered clergyman is mentioned and "one John Murray alias Murphy, a fugitive from justice in Great Britain." The church in this City was undoubtedly planted by Murray, although for a number of years no regular organization appears to have existed. Preaching in private homes was the usual form of worship. In 1796 three members of the John Street Methodist Church, together with eleven others, whom the action of the Presiding Elder in refusing certificates of dismissal had impelled to a similar course, formed "The Society of the United Christian Friends." A room in a private house was leased, and In November, 1800, the society was incorporated under the laws of the State.

This last was vigorously opposed by two of the original members, who, on the passage of the act, withdrew from the connection. During the first years of the society's

existence Rev. Edward Mitchell, one of the leading organizers, and previously a class teacher in the John Street Church, presided alternately with the other Elders. On the 19th of January, 1801, the society purchased the Lutheran Church on Pearl street, in which they continued to hold services for upward of seventeen years. In 1803 a second Universalist minister, Rev. John Foster, arrived in New-York, and aided by several members of the Pearl Street Church, opened a place of worship in Rose street, and subsequently on Broadway, near Pearl. This branch of the society failed to increase in the ratio anticipated, and was disbanded two years later. In July, 1803, Rev. Edward Mitchell was formally chosen Pastor of the Society of Christian Friends, an office which he continued to hold for seven years. At the expiration of that period, in 1810, he was selected to occupy the pulpit of Mr. Murray, in Boston, while that gentleman took his place at the head of the Christian Friends in New-York. This arrangement lasted for a period of fifteen months, Mr. Mitchell resuming his old position in October, 1811. From this time the progress of the New-York Society was onward and upward. Large audiences filled their church on Pearl street on every Sabbath as well as during the week. An equal increase in wealth was another characteristic of its growth. A new church in Duane street, near the present City Hall place, which had been long projected, was completed in 1818, and dedicated in December of the same year.

In the early months of 1820 the first number of the *Gospel Herald*, afterward the *Christian Leader*, was issued by Henry Ritz, a native of Newburyport, Mass., who came to New-York from Albany in the preceding year. One of the outgrowths of this paper was the formation, in 1822, of a "Society for the investigation and Establishment of Gospel Truth," the germ of what afterward became the Second Society. At first its meetings were held in a school-room on Chrystie street. Subsequently a larger building, formerly belonging to St. Luke's Church, was secured and opened for worship in the following year.

This edifice was situated at the corner of Hudson and Chistoph streets, in what was then known as "Greenwich Village," to which stages ran hourly from the City Hall. At many of the subsequent meetings Mr. Mitchell presided, and before the close of the year the name of "The Second Society of United Christian Friends" was assumed by the new association. In July, 1824, it removed to a new and spacious church, erected with its own funds, at the corner of Prince street and Orange. Rev. Nehemiah Dodge officiated as pastor until August, 1825, when he was succeeded by Rev. Abner Kneeland. Controversies on important points of doctrine which subsequently sprang up soon terminated this connection, Mr. Kneeland and a large minority of the members leaving in the Spring of 1827. Their first place of worship was the New Jerusalem Chapel, in Peal street, occupied May 27, 1827, and their second Tammany Hall. In June, 1827, they effected an organization under the title of the Second Universalist Society, the majority in Pearl street taking the name of the First. In the two succeeding years occurred three painful complications, by which the name of their Pastor was mixed up with the "reforms" inaugurated by Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen. His connection with the Second Society terminated in 1829, the larger part of his congregation uniting in the purchase of a vacant Episcopal Chapel at the corner of

[Fourth Universalist Society, New York City]

Grand street and Division, which, in the following April, was dedicated as the Third Universalist Church.

Meantime the Third Universalist Society in Greenwich had been growing rapidly, under the charge of Rev. Henry Roberts and Rev. C.[Clement] F. Le Fevre. This latter gentleman was formally called to the Pastorate in March, 1834, and in November of the following year presided at the laying of the corner-stone of the Bleecker Street Church, into which the Third Society moved in 1836. On the 11th of November, 1838, the Fourth Society was organized from the Third, its first meeting being held in the Apollo Saloon, No. 410 Broadway. Among the original forty-three members were Thos. L. Harris, Abner Chichester, Benjamin F. Bunker, Col. Tyree, Samuel S. Parker, James Bradley, Cornelius Schenck, Thomas Wallace, Franklin Johnson, Seymour J. Strong, Wm. Underhill, John W. Schenck, Luke Lincoln, Archibald A. Peterson, and Samuel Weeks.

In November of the same year the society leased the New Jerusalem Chapel, No. 486 Pearl street, the same building occupied by Mr. Kneeland and his followers ten years before. The chapel was of wood, and situated at the rear of a row of buildings fronting on Pearl street—the only ingress being through a narrow alley leading from the street. Fifty pews and a small organ loft constituted the accommodation of the interior. By the sale of pews, which took place on the 4th of December, the treasury realized \$365. Of the forty-three persons who rented pews, but six, Messrs. John W. Schenck, Archibald A. Peterson, James Griffin, Seymour J. Strong, Franklin Johnson, and Samuel Weeks, are now living. Rev. Wm. Whittaker was their first pastor. In April, 1839 the society removed to the church in Duane street, corner of Chatham. In this edifice the first three sermons were preached by Rev. Hosea Ballou. Mr. Whittaker's pastorate terminated in July, 1840, when simultaneously with his resignation, he announced his renunciation of Universalism.

In August, 1840, Rev. Mr. Chapin, then on his way North from Virginia, preached in the Duane Street Church for the first time, and on the 1st of November Rev. J. [Isaac] D. Williamson succeeded to the vacant pulpit. In the Winter of 1840-41, the society again removed, to the lecture-room of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Crosby street, between Broome and Spring. A fourth migration followed after a lapse of six months, this time to the Bowery Church. Of the lot surrounding this edifice the valuable portion fronting on the Bowery was sold and the entrance placed on Elizabeth street. The Spring of the following year was passed by Mr. Williamson in Europe, whither he had sailed for his health as well as to represent the Odd Fellows of America at an important convention of the order abroad. During his absence the pulpit was supplied by Rev. William S. Ballou. Toward the close of 1843 his resignation, rendered necessary by the state of his health, was tendered the society, and accepted by them with deep regret. Mr. Williamson was a man of marked ability, a fine scholar, and the author of a number of religious works, among which are *The Crown of Life*, *An Argument for the Truth of Christianity*, and *Rudiments of Theological and Moral Science*. His successor was Rev. Moses Ballou, who resigned in 1845.

Rev. Thomas L. Harris was the next Pastor, occupying that position from the 12th of March, 1846 to the Summer of the year following. The edifice in the Bowery, then

[Fourth Universalist Society, New York City]

known as the Elizabeth Street Church, was sold in May, 1847, and the old Apollo saloon reoccupied until the Spring of 1848. In that month the purchase was completed of a church corner of Murray and Church streets, over which Rev. E. H. Chapin, the present Pastor, was called to preside. After a four years' continuance in this one place of worship, the society removed in October, 1852, to the abandoned Unitarian Church of the Divine Unity in Broadway, near Spring street, disposing of an old building on Murray street at an advance of nearly \$30,000 on the cost price. The new church was 100 feet square, and of fine architectural proportions, the main building being finished in the Gothic style and capable of seating 1,600 persons. There was also a large entrance on Crosby street. This church the society continued to occupy until Dec. 3, 1866, when the present edifice, with a front of 105 feet on Fifth avenue, and 100 feet on Forty-fifth street, the corner-stone of which had been laid in October of the previous year, was dedicated.

In architecture, the Church of the Divine Paternity is pure Gothic of the perpendicular order. The material used is brown stone, cut to an even surface. At the corners on Fifth avenue are two towers, the one on the north-east capped by a spire 190 feet high. Windows of exquisitely stained glass surround the auditorium on all sides. On the main floor an audience of 1,000 can be seated, and in the galleries over 800. Few churches contain more pleasing or well-arranged interiors. Mr. John Correga, of this City, is the architect. The entire cost of the church was \$135,000, of the land \$50,000. Other expenses aggregated \$40,000, making the total outlay \$225,000. At the present time the property is worth between \$350,000 and \$400,000.

An important element in the work of the society is the Chapin Home, on Sixty-sixth street, between Third and Lexington Avenues, completed in 1872 at an expense of \$125,000. The building is of brick, with white stone trimmings, three stories in height, and equipped with all the comforts of a pleasant and even luxurious home. It contains sixty-five rooms, furnished with every comfort and convenience which the most exacting philanthropy can demand, and well supplied with all the latest and most approved forms of heating, ventilation, bathing facilities, gas, fresh water, &c. In a word, it is a first-class hotel and hospital combined. Over forty inmates, aged and indigent members of the society, of both sexes, are here supported at an annual expense of \$25,000. The officers of the Home are Mrs. E. H. Chapin, President; Mrs. Geo. Hoffman, Mrs. Emily A. Wall, Mrs. J. A. Jameson, Vice Presidents; Mrs. Norman Stratton, Secretary, and Mrs. D.D.T. Marshall, Treasurer. The Trustees of the church for 1874 are Geo. W. Platt, D.D.T. Marshall, Chas. L. Stickney, A. A. Peterson, Wm. Montross, Edward Ellsworth, Wm. Banks, Jacob Weeks, and Washington L. Cooper.

New York Times, New York NY, Mon. 15 Jun 1874

Transcribed on 16 Aug 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY