

[Oswego, Oswego Co. NY]

A PRECARIOUS POSITION

Troubles of the Universalist Church Society

Missionary Hutchins, Who Was Sent Here to Build Up the Church, Will Go Away on Monday and the Recently Called Pastor Will Not Come—What Will be Done Next?

The Rev. A. U. Hutchins, a missionary for the Convention of the Universalist Society, will leave Oswego on Monday after a visit of three months, without finishing the work he was sent here to do—reorganize and place on a firm basis, the Universalist church in this city. For twenty years or more Mr. Hutchins has been engaged in this work and this is the first failure he has to record.

The society of the Universalists here is a comparatively new one and its existence has been marked with struggles and battles. When it was decided to build a church the society was in quite a flourishing condition. A plot of ground in West Second street, between Mohawk and Oneida streets, just south of the Post Office building, was purchased and a handsome edifice, not large, but sufficient to accommodate the members of [the] congregation, was built. It became necessary to borrow money and the late H. D. McCaffrey was applied to. The money was forthcoming, but a mortgage was taken as security. When the mortgage came due the society was without money with which to meet it. The State Convention was appealed to for aid. The funds to take up the mortgage were produced and the Convention took a deed of the property. This relieved the society here for a time and it was though[t] that the members of the congregation, having seen the folly of petty jealousies, would all put their shoulders to the wheel and work together. But the old trouble broke out again.

Not in Harmony

There were several members who thought they knew just what to do and wanted to decide just how it should be done. The Rev. Mr. Beardsley was brought here to fill the pulpit. He was not a high salaried preacher for a church with a large congregation, but the salary he received was too large for the Universalist church to pay. It was but a short time before the church was in debt to its pastor and this debt continued to grow. The members who took no part in the contentions saw the finish, but they did not have the courage to tell Mr. Beardsley that he should resign and allow them to secure a cheaper man, and Mr. Beardsley did not seem to take any of the hints let out and [?] until last Fall, when the church owed him \$600 back salary. Then it was too late.

A Second Appeal

The church was without money and preparations were made to go out and raise this amount. To encourage the movement Mr. Beardsley knocked off \$200 from his bill. Another appeal was made to the State Convention and the Rev. A. U. Hutchins, a missionary of reputation in the church, was sent here to take charge, straighten out matters and settle a pastor. He arrived about the first of January and immediately set to work. He did not know of the mountainous task he had before him. But he was not long in finding out. His first work, it is said, met with opposition by certain members of

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the church. Mr. Hutchins has a mind of his own, however, and was not long in letting the fact become known. Then his troubles began. He found opposition in every move he made. Nevertheless he continued with his work and succeeded in decreasing the debt against the church.

The Missionary's Ambition

What Mr. Hutchins wanted to do more than anything else was to settle a pastor here. Letters by the score were sent out and an answer was received about two weeks ago from the Rev. Mr. Goodelle, of Clarendon, N.Y., stating that he would accept a call. A meeting of the church was held and the call made. But the influence that had been working against Mr. Hutchins was again put in motion and Mr. Goodelle sent another letter declining the call. It is thought some person wrote him a letter in which the condition of the church and the reception he would receive here was not set forth in very glowing colors.

This action did not please the missionary. He had contracted with the State Convention to stay here three months, but had the option of extending that time if he desired to do so. But the opposition he has met with has determined him to cut his stay on the day his contract expires and leave for his home near Buffalo.

No Help From Other Pastors

Mr. Hutchins will not take away with him a very exalted opinion of the clergymen of this city. He thinks he has been treated rather shabbily by the other ministers, for he said that not one of them has called upon him or offered to assist him by even a word of encouragement in the struggle he has been making. Mr. Hutchins is a cultured gentleman. He was educated in St. Lawrence county as a lawyer and was admitted to the bar. About twenty years ago he gave up the practice of law and entered the ministry of the Universalist church, becoming a missionary, traveling from place to place building up churches which had not been wise in the handling of their finances. In this work he has visited nearly every State and Territory in the Union and always with success. It was left for him to come to Oswego to meet his Waterloo. With the failure of Mr. Hutchins grave doubts are entertained as to what will become of the Universalist society here.

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Transcribed on 17 Nov 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY