

[Otsego (Cooperstown), Otsego Co.

Dedication at Fly Creek, N.Y.

COOPERSTOWN, January 19, 1862

*Rev. Nathaniel Stacy:—*

Dear Beloved Father in Israel: Knowing what joy it gives you to learn of the prosperity of our churches, and especially of those with which you have had personal association, I am moved to write you of the recent dedication of our house of worship at Fly Creek, Otsego Co., N.Y. That church has a history with which few are acquainted. It is related, in a peculiar manner, to the entire history of Universalism in this country.

In your "Memoirs" you make mention of a Sabbath, in the summer of 1805, spent in the north part of the town of Otsego, upon which occasion you received a visit from Miles T. Wooley, who had organized a small society in the adjoining town of Hartwick. Neither in your "Memoirs" nor in S. R. Smith's "Historical Sketches" is further mention made of that society. It is certainly worthy of note that it is still in existence, and in a flourishing condition. The same society worships to-day in the tastefully modernized house at Fly Creek.

The point in the town of Hartwick where it was organized is little more than two miles from that village; and when, in 1819 it was determined to erect a church edifice, it was long debated, as the records show, whether it should be located in the neighborhood of the original meeting-place or at the village. Finally, however, on the 15th of January, 1820, at a meeting, the call for which embraced "the inhabitants of Hartwick and Otsego," it was determined to build at Fly Creek. And on the same day a legal organization was effected, bearing the same name as that formed by Mr. Wooley, and composed largely of its members, "The First Universalist Society of the County of Otsego." That church was dedicated, as you doubtless remember, in the autumn of the same year. It will afford you pleasure, I know, to learn that your text and sermon on that occasion are still distinctly remembered by those then in the flush of youth, now trembling, like yourself, with whitened locks, on the borders of the grave. "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people," were words engraved on the hearts of the fathers and mothers. May they long be cherished by their children.

As it fell to my lot to preach the sermon at the recent dedication of the house after its extensive improvements, I heard a voice saying, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Thronging memories of the past filled the house with unwonted sacredness. Prophecies of the future gave encouragement to faithfulness in that hour, such as I had never experienced before. The past and the present were

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brought into contrast. I reflected that on that first Sabbath day you spent in this town, there were but two Universalist clergymen, beside yourself, in the State of New York—Mr. Wooley and Mr. Ferris, and that you all were then in this county; that there was then only this one society in existence in the State, if we except, as we should, that of Mr. Mitchell, in New York city; that there was then not a single Association, nor a State organization; that not a paper of any description in the whole land favored our views, and but about half a dozen pamphlets in their defence [sic] had been published on this continent; that *out* of New England there was but a single other society of believers in the land—that over which our esteemed and faithful brother, A. C. Thomas, has so long had charge [in Philadelphia]—and that *in* New England there were not a score. In fancy, I went back to that infant beginning, and I saw the scattered handful of those who cherished faith in God's infinite grace—poor, misunderstood, despised, outcast.

The scene changed, and I saw the three preachers of the faith multiplied to one hundred and twenty-four; the one society to two hundred and four; two hundred and eleven houses of worship were owned where there had been a claim upon none; a State Convention and sixteen Associations had sprung into existence; there was a State Educational Society, a newspaper establishment, two periodicals, a university, a theological school, and a high school. In the United States there were a General Convention, a National Historical Society, a General Reform Association, twenty-three State Conventions, six State Missionary Societies, two Educational Societies, a Relief Fund, two publishing establishments (besides several conducted by individuals), two universities, one college, four academical schools, fourteen periodicals, books constantly issuing from the press, eighty-nine local Associations, twelve hundred churches, many Sabbath schools, nine hundred and fifteen church edifices, and seven hundred and three clergymen devoting themselves to the proclamation of the "good tidings."

Such were the two scenes which presented themselves as I spoke on that occasion. And the period which separated them in actual history was only that covered by the public life of one man. Indeed this was not half the change I saw it had been your lot to witness. I reflected that, in your day, the entire general literature of the land had learned to speak the dialect of the better faith; and that even in the very churches opposed to us, ideas which you had been persecuted for maintaining had been widely received.

My brother—my father, rather—have we not cause to "thank God and take courage?" Often have I been disheartened as I have looked upon the field of my labor, and have been unable to perceive any direct fruits. But when I take this broader view, I know that our labors are not in vain. I see

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that the Lord has gone forth in his chariot, and the nations have been suffused with the light and glory of his train.

It is God's doing; and yet he has only rewarded human faithfulness. One has planted, another has watered, and God has given the increase. Those have been years of toil, and hardship, and sacrifice, through which the work has grown: toil, and hardship, and sacrifice will be needed to its further progress. May your example, and that of your early associates—now, alas! all departed—inspire us who have entered into your labors, to be faithful ministers of the Word. I feel all the more my insufficiency, when, standing in that ancient church, I reflect who of the fathers have there proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ; and I pray that their mantles may fall upon those of us who take up the work they lay down.

Next June the Otsego Association is expected to meet in that house. O what joy it would give us could you be present! Fitting, indeed, would it be that you, who have seen all these changes I have so imperfectly stated, should stand there in the evening of your life, and speak again the message of Heaven, heard from you when that society was alone in the state enlisted in the advocacy of Universal Grace. Come, and let us have in the reunion, a Pentecostal season from the Lord.

Your brother in Christ, and son in the faith,

CHARLES W. TOMLINSON

*Christian Ambassador*, New York, NY, Sat. 31 Jan 1863

Transcribed on 24 Jan 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY