

[Utica, Oneida Co. NY]

Universalist Church in Utica

Several inquiries of late have been made relative to the Universalist church and society in this city—whether the church has been sold, whether the society hold [sic] any meetings at present, or whether they are likely to hereafter, or not. To satisfy such inquiries, we will briefly state the following facts:

The Church is not yet sold; but will be now in a few days, or weeks at farthest. The society has had no pastor since Br. [Henry Birdsall] Soule left in April last, and but few, or occasional, Sundays preaching. The members seem mostly discouraged and ready, and apparently willing, to “give up the ghost.” Their history, without its details, is simply this: When they built their church (a substantial and commodious brick edifice, which cost, with the lot on which it stands, between \$7000 and \$8000) which was completed and dedicated in the Spring of 1830, they were few and feeble, (and they have held their own pretty well in that respect ever since,) and very imprudently run [sic] largely [greatly] in debt for the lot and building, hoping their subscriptions would be afterwards increased, and that the pews would sell for enough to pay off the debt. These hopes were never realized. In the Spring of 1832, (the debts being then about \$5000) the house was sold on a mortgage and bid off by one of the friends of the society. A strong effort was then made to pay off the debt, and a very liberal subscription, nearly enough for the object, raised on paper; but much of it was never collected, and the debt hung heavily on the hands of a few—the interest kept accumulating, and new efforts were made to pay off the debt. The congregations rather increased, and were always respectable for numbers so long as our¹ personal ministry continued with them. And so anxious were we to have the church debt extinguished, that we waived most of our claim to a small salary they agreed to pay us, and allowed them to apply nearly all they could raise in any and all ways towards the payment of said debt; and thus they reduced it some in each succeeding year; and the state of our health became such, in 1837, we were obliged to leave for the South, and finally to abandon the ministry almost entirely for four years. We have never been their pastor since. They have employed since we left, successively, five different preachers, of fair character, talents and standing. They were men, however, who could not live the *life of spirits*, though they might live *spiritual lives*—in other words, they could not live without a salary—*that* they must have. The consequence was, that as all the society

¹ The writer is using the “editorial we” in this report.

could raise was barely sufficient to pay their minister a very moderate salary, they could pay nothing, or but little, towards the debt—that has been constantly accumulating by interest—the congregations fell off, notwithstanding the increased population of the city,—they became discouraged; those who paid the most, finding the debt increasing, resolved that they would pay *no more*, unless the *whole* sum could be raised and the entire debt paid: so that for nearly three years past, no interest has been paid.

The house was mortgaged, several years ago, and the money on the mortgage was due in 1840. The two individuals holding it have wanted the money ever since it was due; but have waited on the society this long, hoping they would make a final and successful effort to raise it; but they have waited in vain. The great pecuniary embarrassments of the last few years and the belief that they could not, if they tried, raise the whole, have disheartened them from making the effort to raise any.—And so discouraged were they last Spring, that, soon after Br. Soule left, they held a meeting and formally resolved to request the holders of the mortgage to foreclose the same, sell the house, and that the personal property should be sold to pay for as many of their debts as possible, and thus die a voluntary death! The mortgagees have waited, until December last, hoping for better things, and still reluctant to sell the house; but nothing being done, the mortgage is now in process of rapid foreclosure in Chancery, and the house will soon be sold, past redemption. In the mean time it has been rented until the sale takes place, to a Presbyterian society, who have lost their house in a similar way. Our inquiring friends may therefor expect shortly to learn that our sanctuary in this city has passed forever from the hands of our friends into those of our enemies.

The Church debt is only about \$2700, and our friends here, some of whom still feel an interest in the cause of truth, could and would raise from \$1500 to \$1700, to save the house, provided the balance of \$1000 or \$1200 could be raised abroad, and the entire debt thus paid off. But they will pay *nothing* unless the *whole* can be paid, though they have already paid *twice* as much as they owe. We believe nothing has been, or is likely to be, done toward saving the house. Though our friends in Boston, where three Universalist preachers formerly of this city now reside, and where they are able, if disposed, to help, have been written to, yet no response has been received. We expect, therefore, the house will go, and with its loss the society will die, if not already dead. And yet could they receive a donation of \$1000, or \$1200, from abroad, they would redeem their house, pay off their debt, employ a constant [full-time] preacher, and go on prosperously, we have no doubt, in all future time. And, aside from the above named debt, we are confident there never was a more favorable time to build up a

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numerous and strong Universalist society in this city. Almost all the other churches in the place are in commotion, rent to their vitals by intestine divisions and quarrels, and hundreds of families are now waiting for the issue of things, and looking for a quiet and peaceable church, where they can go and worship God in quietness and joy, and hear doctrines preached that honor God and harmonize and happify mankind. These they will never find till they find them in a church of universal love and grace.

There, reader, our task is done—the record is made, and a melancholy record it is. But it is true, ay, too true. Nevertheless, we wash our hands of the sin, if sin there be, in the sacrifice of the Universalist sanctuary in Utica. We could tell a tale of our own sacrifice to save it; but we forbear. We will only say in conclusion, our cause throughout our land, thank God is generally onward and prosperous; and the time *will come* when it will have a strong foothold in Utica—stronger, by far, than ever yet it had. But when that will be, God only knows.

D. S.²

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Transcribed on 13 Jan 2015 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

² Rev. Dolphus Skinner was the editor of the *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, and a pre-eminent pioneer of Universalism in New York State.