

[Bennett, Ella May]

ABOUT MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

Until recently the only Universalist Churches in Suffolk County were at Huntington and Southold, but Stony Brook must now be added to the list, preparations being in progress for the ordination of a Universalist Church in that village. Mrs. Bennett has been a licentiate for one year, and a council will meet at Stony Brook to examine her as to her qualifications, composed of ministers of other Universalist churches on the Island.

*Newtown Register*, Newtown NY, Thu. 18 Sep 1890

[Bennett, Ella May]

## ON LONG ISLAND

### **Mrs. Bennett's Ordination to the Ministry**

A Visit to the Woman Preacher's Home at Stony Brook

Mrs. Ella May Bennett, of Stony Brook, will be the first woman ordained to the ministry on Long Island, and the interesting event will take place at Stony Brook, September 24. She is a Universalist, and has been a licentiate for a year. She is a woman of excellent reputation and much culture, and has a model home and an indulgent husband, who seconds her every effort in church work. A council of Universalist ministers has been called to examine the qualifications of the candidate, and every church on the island will be represented. The Rev. J. H. Ballou, of Southold, has been appointed by the ordination committee of the state convention to officiate on the occasion, and Mrs. Phebe A. Hanaford, of the New Haven [Connecticut] church, will preach the ordination sermon. The examination of the licentiate will take place in public Wednesday evening 24th, and the sermon on that occasion will be preached by the Rev. Frank L. Masseck, of Brooklyn. The ceremony of ordination will take place Thursday evening, 25th, and there will undoubtedly be a very large congregation.

An EAGLE reporter was pleasantly entertained by Mrs. Bennett for two hours last evening. She is a charming conversationalist and can hardly fail to be an eloquent pulpit orator. She is the mother of three bright and handsome children. Her features are pleasing and she is slightly above the average of woman's height. She wears her black hair short and it does not seem to detract from a fair face that would attract attention anywhere for its intellectuality. She has a languid gray eye that lights up with animation when she becomes interested in a subject or an object. She wore a white evening dress that was utterly devoid of trimming effects, its plainness being really an adornment. The children were neatly dressed and the general tenor of things went to establish Mrs. Bennett's reputation as a thorough housewife. She has a reptile in the form of an alligator which she has trained to recognize her voice and heed her call, and she is doubly fond of it because everybody else hates it.

Mrs. Bennett was born in Stony Brook thirty-five years ago. She does not look to be more than 25. Her father was Daniel Shalor Hawkins. There were fourteen children. Mrs. Bennett was the twelfth and there are eleven living. Her mother, Mr. Hawkins' second wife, was Harriet E. Terry. Mrs. Bennett has two uncles who are clergymen—John Terry, a Methodist, and Wilson Terry, a Baptist. She is the only member of her family who imbibed the doctrines of the Universalist church. Senator Edward Hawkins, ex-Senator Simeon S. Hawkins, and George and Jedediah Hawkins are half

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brothers of Mrs. Bennett. They have all made fortunes on the water, and Mr. Bennett is a seafaring man and in possession of a comfortable share of the world's goods. They have been married fifteen years and no household has a better record for happiness. Mr. Bennett is not a Universalist, but he encourages his wife's ambition because he believes she is destined to serve God successfully. Obstacles have been placed in her way by jealous neighbors and backbiting sectarians, but they disappeared like the morning dew before the sun. She was born a Universalist, she thinks. Her mother says that as soon as she could read she evinced a love for the Bible and began early to discard the theory of endless punishment and other doctrines and became quite atheistic. She went to church but seldom and then only because she was moved by the same curiosity that would draw her toward a circus. Her mother was greatly worried by her lack of piety, being a whole souled Methodist herself, and often stood up in prayer meeting and asked the brothers and sisters to pray the good Lord to open the girl's eyes to the light of the gospel. A few years ago Mrs. Hawkins presented her daughter with a Bible—(revised edition)—and besought her to read it, chapter by chapter, every night. She did so and developed very original ideas, as she thought, but which upon investigation, she found to be Universalist doctrine. Edward Oakes, himself a Universalist, and residing in the village, had many conferences with Mrs. Bennett, and induced her to preach to a select company in Union hall on what she believed to be the true theory of salvation. The people were aroused to a deep interest and in a little while large congregations gathered to hear her and a choir was organized and a regular service established. Her fame spread and people flocked in from the neighboring villages and everybody was talking in terms of praise about the "woman preacher." The churches of other denominations were practically deserted and as a result unkind things were said of Mrs. Bennett. The Rev. Louis P. Masseck, then the Universalist pastor at Huntington, took no small interest in her work, and advised her to apply for a license to preach so as to get a standing in the denomination. Going to Bridgeport, she was received as a member of the Universalist church and was baptized in the faith. As a licentiate her labors have been confined to preaching, but after ordination she will have authority to administer the sacraments. Her mother and her brothers have been laboring to induce her to give up preaching, but she feels that she is called of the Lord and must obey the summons. Woman, she says, has been the cause of nearly all the trouble in the world, and she thinks woman ought to avail herself of every privilege and labor to lift man up. Mrs. Bennett is familiar with the Bible and can recite whole books. She is preparing a paper to prove that Christ did not believe in a literal hell and eternal punishment. She never preaches from notes, and her command of

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language and powers of description are remarkable. One night, Mrs. Bennett says, she made up her mind to give up preaching, so many people seemed to think she ought to, but taking up the *Christian Herald* her eye rested on the eighth verse of the third chapter of Ephesians: "Unto me who am less than all the saints is the grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It seemed to her a new command from the Lord to her to preach the gospel of salvation and she prayerfully resolved never to falter in the work. At a Methodist prayer meeting Mrs. Hawkins was taken to task for having given her daughter a Bible for free reading instead of forcing her to join the Methodist church, but the good old woman, whatever her own view, fired up and declared that God had made her a Universalist in His own wise purpose and had a work for her to do.

Mrs. Bennett will not at once assume the regular duties of a pastor after ordination, but will remain in Stony Brook for a time and conduct services. There is talk of calling her to the church at Brooklyn, Pa.

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, New York NY, Fri. 19 Sep 1890

[Bennett, Ella May]

MRS. ELLA MAY BENNETT ORDAINED TO THE MINISTRY  
An Interesting Service at Stony Brook Last Evening—  
Sermon by the Rev. Phebe A. Hanaford

The ordination of Mrs. Ella May Bennett to the ministry of the Universalist church took place in Union hall, at Stony Brook, last evening. The hall was crowded. Mrs. Bennett is a woman of thorough education and has been preaching acceptably for several years in her native village. A council was held on Wednesday to conduct an examination as to Mrs. Bennett's qualifications for the ministry, and the council were greatly pleased with the result.

The services in Union hall opened with the singing of an original ordination hymn, written by the Rev. Phebe A. Hanaford to the tune "Autumn."

The Rev. L.[Lyman] Squires read the scriptures and offered prayer. The address to the people was made by the Rev. T. L. Mapeck, of Brooklyn, and the charge to the candidate was given by the Rev. Mr. Squires. The ordination prayer was made by the Rev. L. B. Fisher and the right hand of fellowship of the state convention was given by Rev. J. H. Ballou. The Rev. Phebe A. Hanaford, who is pastor of a church at New Haven, preached the ordination sermon from II Corinthians v:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The doctrine of the soul's salvation from sin by the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, said the speaker, should be the pith of all our preaching and the comfort in all our believing, but the very spirit of the master requires that his ministers should do what He did Himself—i.e. preach in reference to the relations between God and man, but also preach in suitable proportion upon the ethics of everyday life, in relation to our duties as individual souls and as members of a community. The only doctrinal sermons that are really valuable are those which have a cheering influence on the heart, a purifying power upon the life. Preach the dogma of total depravity as it used to be preached and no soul is cheered, no life made purer. Preach the dogma of endless punishment and a gloomy pall is spread over all who receive it. But proclaim the glorious doctrine of the Divine Paternity and the meanest man that treads this footstool of the Almighty may lift his eyes to the stars that roll in glory through the midnight heavens and say, "My Father made them all," and the sense of his kinship to the Divine elevates him at least for the moment and, continued, will ultimately purify his life. Proclaim a blessed doctrine of a world's salvation and the clouds are banished and the glad sunshine comes to every heart that receives it. A sunshine which will enable the believer to walk securely along the paths of earth and strengthen him in the performance of every

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duty and the bearing of every burden, knowing and feeling all the while that his labors and crosses are not done or borne in vain for the Lord. And to every struggling, toiling, weary one of earth the preacher of such a gospel can say, always, 'Bear up, bear on, the end shall tell. The dear Lord ordereth all things well.' And it is because I believe all this to be true that I believe myself to be specially preaching Christ when I proclaim most clearly the distinctive doctrines of one blessed faith. These truths have proved to thousands of souls the power of God unto salvation.

After elaborating the thought of the text and illustrating it in various ways, she closed with the following reference to the occasion:

"And now in this solemn hour, with our hearts full of the thought of God and His boundless love, it is our privilege to set apart one of his own dear children to the blessed work of the gospel, the hallowed minister of reconciling love. The question as to whether the sons or daughters of the Lord Almighty should alone be chosen for messengers of truth and pastors of the flock is not one which the enlightened, cultured Christian people of our land need to discuss any longer. Truth is the same by whomsoever it may be proclaimed. The first commissioned messenger of Christ after his resurrection was a woman. 'Go tell the disciples and Peter that the Lord is risen,' was the Masters command to Mary, and ever since the women of the church of Christ have been thus commissioned. We say to our sister to-day: 'Go tell those who profess to love Jesus, and those who are careless and unconcerned about religious things, the Lord is risen, and the world is rising into light and knowledge and love. Ask them to follow Him in rising to newness of life, and for their enjoyment in prosperity and their comfort in adversity say over and over what our church has been continually saying in this land for more than a hundred years by her many voices; God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.'"

The services closed with the benediction by the Rev. Ella May Bennett. She was heartily congratulated by scores of people and the hope was expressed that she might enjoy a long and useful career in the ministry. She is not at present prepared to accept a call to a church, but will conduct services at Stony Brook, Setauket and Port Jefferson.

Mrs. Bennett is the first woman to be ordained on Long Island.

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, New York NY, Fri. 26 Sep 1890

[Bennett, Ella May]

ABOUT MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

Mrs. Ella May Bennett, of Stony Brook, the only ordained woman preacher on Long Island, is gaining converts to the Stony Brook Universalist Society. It is probable that a branch to the Stony Brook church may be erected in Setauket. Mrs. Bennett is said to be a forcible speaker. She has made friends ever since her ordination, which at times was bitterly opposed by many members of her congregation.

*Newtown Register*, Newtown NY, Thu. 28 May 1891

[Bennett, Ella May]

## A SCENE AT A CAMP MEETING

### **The Rev. Ella May Bennett Couldn't Compose Herself**

"SING, BRETHREN, SING," SHOUTED A PASTOR

Then All the Christians Waved Their Handkerchiefs and the Universalist Retired Much Agitated—Her Letter and the Statement She Wanted to Make—Did a Clergyman Apologize Through a Reporter's Hat?—A Strange Spectacle at Stony Brook

In expectation that the Rev. Ella May Bennett, the Universalist, and Evangelist Isaac B. Remsen would cross swords drew a big crowd to the camp meeting at Stony Brook yesterday. The tent was filled to overflowing at night, and old grey haired men occupied seats on the platform. The meeting opened with praise service, followed by prayer, during which the invitation to kneel at the altar was extended. About twenty responded. When the meeting opened Mrs. Bennett walked forward and told Pastor Graham that she was present and would like the five minutes for speech as promised her. She walked up the aisle with the right hand aloft. This was the signal she had promised to give.

No attention was paid to her and she then went to Deputy Sheriff Thomas Anderson and requested that he stop the singing. He refused. She then went to the rear of the tent. When the closing hymn was being sung pastor Graham said: "Now, Mrs. Bennett wishes to say a word."

She had prepared a written statement but could not become composed enough to read it. She grasped Remsen's hand and said: "I hope you will bear with me. Brother Remsen, I forgive you as you don't know any better."

With this the Rev. Daniel Jones shouted, "Sing, sing, brethren," and Mrs. Bennett's voice was drowned out. Then as though a victory had been won, one of the men on the platform said: "Wave your handkerchiefs, all Christians wave your handkerchiefs." They waved and Mrs. Bennett, much agitated, went to her home. The following is a copy of a letter she sent to the Rev. Mr. Graham asking to be afforded an opportunity to speak at the meeting:

Sunday, September 2, 1894

*Alexander Graham:*

Rev. and dear sir—Mr. Remsen has, in compromise and before evidence which cannot be disputed, given me permission to-night to speak a few words and tell the people how I got saved. He denies me even a Bible explanation for Universalism. I have not been alone. God has been with me and it will be Mr. Remsen's or his friends' fault if there are further sensational developments. When I rise to speak and lift my right hand for silence it belongs to me more than to any person present, and the arrest of any person hindering me will surely follow. We Quakers are about to take



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off our coats. I will occupy not more than five minutes of time if not hindered and will say nothing any Christian cannot before God and in justice I say I have the right to say. Nothing can be gained by keeping me from being heard and Mr. Remsen is fairly committed to it and cannot escape with a denial. There is too much evidence. The words will go to the world tomorrow, also the Bible defense and scandal and trouble ensue. This trouble was not of our seeking, but shall be of our ending.

ELLA MAY BENNETT

This is part of the statement Mrs. Bennett expected to have read:

"In speaking to you I could bitterly and scathingly denounce any other denomination represented in the tent. I shall not, for if I did I should [would] have to forget the golden rule of the Master.

"Permission has been given me to say a few words to you this evening and Brother Remsen promised not to interrupt me, and it will not be wise to interfere with me. You know what Brother Remsen said last Sunday evening, and I am willing to admit I have been somewhat in the devil's power of late. I am now going to tell you how I escaped from the power of the devil and how Brother Remsen apologized. It was through a reporter's hat. Brother Remsen, did you say last Sunday evening every Universalist belongs to the Devil, yea, every one. It is false, for by the grace of God they can and will outwit him every time."

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, New York NY, Mon. 3 Sep 1894

[Bennett, Ella May]

## WANDERING IN THE RAIN

### **The Storm Didn't Keep Rev. Ella May Bennett Indoors**

Ever Since Evangelist Remsen of Jamaica Alluded to Universalism as Belonging to the Devil, She Has Acted Strangely—A Pathetic Spectacle Last Night

The Rev. Ella May Bennett has undoubtedly lost her mind. She has acted strangely ever since Evangelist Isaac B. Remsen of Jamaica denounced Universalists as belonging to the devil. For years she had worked in the cause of Universalism in Suffolk county as a regularly ordained preacher and nothing Remsen could have said was so calculated to thoroughly arouse her. That she was becoming insane was evident to many when a week ago Sunday night she was granted an opportunity at the camp meeting to speak in defense of her creed. When the time came she was unable to compose herself to read her written statement and, after taking Remsen's hand and saying, "Brother Remsen, I forgive you as you don't know any better," she sank into her chair. The statement she prepared for this occasion was printed in the Eagle.

Since this meeting Mrs. Bennett has at no time appeared to be herself. She appeared on Main street in last evening's rain. Although the black clouds threatened a deluge at any moment, in light attire she sauntered along, mumbling to herself over and over again a few disjointed sentences, the only intelligible words of which were "Remsen" and "devil." Near Penny's hotel she turned abruptly up the road toward the railway station. Professor John Egbert Smith, who has played his violin in nearly every ball room in Suffolk county, lives on this road. He was sawing away with his bow, while the deep thunder rolled an accompaniment as the woman passed.

She stopped at the sound of the music, and some friends asked her if she did not want to go home. The woman looked at her friends in blank amazement and answered not a word. She drew one arm across the other, imitating the musician's performance on the violin, and then waved them away. The heavy thunder storm was at its height and the rain was falling in sheets. She was led to her home. Mrs. Bennett's husband is a seafaring man and is not at home much of his time. She is therefore much in the society of the neighbors and a host of warm friends, who feel much distressed over the turn affairs have taken. Mrs. Bennett is nearly 50 years of age and is credited with having much good to the world in the course of her preachings and teachings.

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, New York NY, Tue. 11 Sep 1894

[Bennett, Ella May]

TUMULT AT A CAMP MEETING  
**A Hearing Refused To A Universalist**

The Methodist camp meeting recently held at Stony Brook for two weeks closed a few nights ago amid considerable excitement. The rumor that the Rev. Ella May Bennett would discuss "Universalism" with the evangelist, Isaac B. Remsen, who at a previous meeting had declared that "all Universalists belong to the Devil" drew a big crowd to the closing exercises of the camp meeting. Mrs. Bennett is a Universalist. She had anticipated trouble and had Deputy Sheriff Thomas Anderson present to protect her. When Mrs. Bennett arose to speak the entire audience began singing, "Oh, Let the Dear Saviour Come In." Seeing that the singers would not listen to her, Mrs. Bennett requested Deputy Anderson to preserve order and compel the audience to listen to her remarks. The Deputy Sheriff, however, refused to interfere, and the speaker was forced to take her seat.

Toward the close of the meeting, Mr. Graham called Mrs. Bennett and asked her to speak. As the announcement was made a stampede followed. Everyone rushed toward the front, overturning seats and frightening women and children. In the midst of the excitement, Mrs. Bennett grasped Mr. Remsen's hand and said:

"Brother Remsen, I forgive you, for you don't know any better."

At this point Mrs. Bennett's voice was drowned in shouts of derision, and one of the men got up on a platform and shouted: "Wave your handkerchiefs, all Christians; wave your handkerchiefs." Soon the air was filled with waving white, and Mrs. Bennett was compelled to retire.

After the enthusiasm had cooled down, quite a number of the congregation regretted that Mrs. Bennett was not permitted to have her say and end the controversy. Mrs. Bennett is a daughter of Capt. Hawkins of Stony Brook, and a sister of ex-Senators Edward and Simeon Hawkins of Jamesport.

*Newtown Register*, Newtown NY, Thu. 13 Sep 1894

[Bennett, Ella May]

NO HOPE FOR ELLA MAY BENNETT

Stony Brook, Sept. 13.—The condition of Ella May Bennett, the Universalist preacher of this place, who has gone insane, does not improve. She walks the floor and appears to know no one except her husband. For three weeks she has eaten no solid food, and is only kept alive by means of subcutaneous injections of stimulants. She declares that these injections are given to her for the purpose of killing her. Her arm has become swollen where the injections have been made. The family say [sic] there is no hope of saving her life. They will keep her at home unless she becomes too violent for them to control her.

*Waterville Times*, Waterville NY, Fri. 14 Sep 1894

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REV. MRS. BENNETT INSANE.—Rev. Ella May Bennett, a Universalist preacher of Stony Brook, L.I., who was incensed by an alleged declaration of Isaac S. Remsen, of this village, at a Methodist camp meeting, that “all Universalists belonged to the devil,” was taken to the insane asylum at Poughkeepsie on Monday. After demanding a retraction from Mr. Remsen, which he refused to make, her request to reply to him at the camp meeting was granted. When she appeared before the large congregation that assembled to hear her speak she was so overcome that she was unable to say anything, except that she forgave Mr. Remsen. After the meeting she became morose and during a severe thunderstorm walked about the streets, thinly clad, unmindful of the rain that fell in torrents and muttering to herself. The next day she rushed from her house and knocked her daughter down with a broom. Then she attacked her aged mother and afterward ran into the street. In her mad flight she ran against a tree and fell senseless. She was taken to her home and carefully watched, but became so violent that it was decided to remove her to an asylum for treatment.

Mrs. Bennett was ordained about four years ago as pastor of the Setauket Universalist Church. She has always appeared somewhat eccentric, but it was not thought that her mind was seriously affected. She is a half-sister of ex-Senators Simeon S. and Edward Hawkins and is about 60 years of age. —*Jamaica Standard*.

*Newtown Register*, Newtown NY, Thu. 4 Oct 1894

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