

[Clinton Liberal Institute]

In the early history of our own denomination, we were so busily and earnestly engaged in doing battle for truth against the hosts marshalled under the banner of what we believed to be error and falsehood, of the most pernicious kind, that we found little time or opportunity to think of, and less to do anything effectually for the cause of education. True, both our fathers and we often felt the need of a better education, of a more thorough discipline of the mind, and of schools, academies and colleges for our children and the rising generation; and often and ever, when we thought of the humiliating fact that all the high schools and colleges of our land were in the hands and under the control of the votaries of religious error, and were constantly wielded to vindicate and build up error, and make truth more unpopular, and give all the high places of our land to those who have been educated within their walls, we have mourned over such a destiny, and hoped, and prayed, and looked forward to the time when we should [would] be able to do something effectual towards establishing institutions of learning for ourselves and our children, and exercising our proportional share of influence in directing the education of the youth of our land, and securing to our denomination and the votaries of truth their due share in all the important and influential places of trust in our country.

These things have often been thought of and talked of among us for the last half century, but nothing effectual was done in relation thereto until about the years 1831 and '32, when by the zealous efforts and self-sacrificing labors of the sainted and lamented Stephen R. Smith, the liberality of one prominent individual in Clinton, and the contributions of some hundreds of our friends scattered abroad over our land, but mostly of this State, the *Clinton Liberal Institute* was built and opened for the reception of pupils. Though this was not all that it was desired that it should be, yet it was a beginning, and a good beginning, of a good and necessary work; it was a step, a great step, forward. It formed, as it were, an era in our history...

We cannot discharge our duty to the Universalist public in this report, without calling the special attention of this Convention, to the present condition of the *Clinton Liberal Institute*. This being the first institution of the kind established in this country, by our denomination, and the only one yet existing in our State, it is quite important its true condition should be known, and if it is not what it should be, that the denomination should take it in hand and make it such.

It is pretty generally and well known that this school has from its beginning needed a more liberal endowment of funds to give it its proper position and influence among the literary institutions of our land, that though it has done much good, it might with such endowment have done much more. It is also well known that some eight or ten years since an

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earnest effort was made to raise a fund of \$10,000, to be invested, the annual income of which, leaving the principal untouched, should be applied to the interests of the school, and thus secure it against further pecuniary embarrassment. That sum was subscribed but never all collected. Somewhere between \$7000 and \$8000 was collected and invested by the Trustees, and it was hoped at the time that it would suffice to prevent any further embarrassment.

But now a new want made itself known, or rather a want which had long been felt, but hardly allowed to be breathed openly, was uttered aloud, and became clamorous for immediate attention and satisfaction; we mean the want of a larger and better building for the Female Department of the Institute, the want of such a building and such an establishment as might deservedly bear the name of Female Seminary, or Young Ladies' Boarding School. But where were the funds with which to build it? Would it do to call again so soon on the Universalist public for \$10,000 or \$15,000, when it has taken *years* of unremitting labor to raise, and that but partially, the permanent fund before named? What were the Trustees to do? They were urged to build, but had no means at their command wherewith to build. The lady at the head of the Female Department was very urgent for the new building, and assured the Trustees that with such a building and establishment as was proposed, the income would be so large that it would not only suffice to meet all current expenses of the school, but would soon pay for itself, and extinguish the debt incurred for its erection.

Thus urged, the Trustees, with a very small amount of funds in their hands subscribed or donated for that purpose, commenced the building. A beautiful site had been in part donated in the south part of , and overlooking, the entire village; and here they erected a spacious and commodious edifice, fitted it up and furnished it with every necessary appendage for a boarding school. But its cost ran up to more than had been expected; the Trustees involved themselves and the Institute in debt and embarrassment; creditors became clamorous for their pay; and the Trustees must either pay them out of their own pockets, or sacrifice the whole establishment, or make use of the permanent fund for the purpose of meeting these pressing demands. They chose the latter alternative. But even the permanent fund was insufficient to meet the entire expense of the new building—which with its furnishing, had cost about \$15,000—and hence a considerable debt for the new establishment remained unpaid, besides some old debts previously due, for the first erected buildings of the Institute.

In the mean time the new Seminary was opened for the reception and instruction of young ladies, and was for a season as prosperous and successful as had been anticipated. It somewhat more than paid current expenses, and began to yield some aid toward liquidating the old debts. But

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some new and yet unanticipated difficulties arose. The Principal¹ of the Female Department assumed authority not conceded to her by the Trustees, in dismissing some of the best Assistant Teachers, and in other affairs pertaining to the School, till much dissatisfaction existed, which resulted in her sudden resignation, and the establishment of a rival school directly by the side of the seminary, which was opened for the reception of pupils in September last.

Saying nothing of the motives which prompted the establishment of said School, it has undoubtedly tended to draw away, and somewhat diminish, for a time at least, both the local patronage of our school, and that from a distance, which legitimately belongs and would otherwise naturally come to the latter. But for this cause the School, which for the last year has barely paid expenses, would have yielded a handsome surplus towards liquidating debts. Its condition and prospects, however, are now improving, and under its present most excellent Board of Teachers, it bids fair to be well filled for the coming term, and we confidently believe with such teachers, and the prompt aid and liberal patronage of the Universalist public, the Female department of the Clinton Liberal Institute will become not only eminently successful and extensively useful in, but justly the pride and glory of, our denomination.

A few words here respecting the Male Department. The large stone edifice in which this is kept was erected 23 years ago; and some of the materials were not sufficiently seasoned when they were put together. The consequence of this and of the long usage to which the building has been put, is, that parts of the building have become much dilapidated, especially the stairs, doors, partitions, and floors of the students' rooms, many of which are quite unfit for occupancy.

During the past year the work of repairs and renovation of the building was well began [sic]. A spacious and beautiful dining room, kitchen and store room in the basement have been finished off, convenient for boarding the students, and a parlor and suitable rooms on the first floor for the occupancy of the Principal and his family—a most excellent arrangement for keeping the students under the constant care and control of the Principal, which has been much needed from the first establishment of the School. The great desideratum now is to procure funds to repair and put in first rate order the

¹ This was Louisa Maria Barker, daughter of Col. Lester Barker of Clinton and a third-generation Universalist. She founded the Home Cottage Seminary in 1854, next door to the Clinton Liberal Institute [CLI], and remained there until 1861, when she sold the building and it was renamed Houghton Seminary. Ironically her father was elected to the Board of Trustees of the CLI in 1855, as noted in these Proceedings. Louisa Barker died in September of 1861. The *Clinton Courier* of Jan. 8, 1913 says of her, "Miss Barker was a member of the Universalist Church so far as a person of her original and forceful type of mind can subscribe to any church creed."

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stairs, students' rooms and balance of the building—which will require from \$1,500 to \$2,000—and when this is done, as we hope it will be soon, the school now having at its head a competent Principal, and one of the best of men, (Rev. J. A. [Joseph Aikin] Aspinwall,) and a corps of well qualified Assistant Professors, we see no reason why the School may not be filled up at once, and become not only one of the first and largest schools of the kind, but one of the best in the whole State—one of which our denomination may well be proud, and which Universalist parents will delight to patronize. It will thus be seen that more funds are indispensably necessary for the prosperity of the *Clinton Liberal Institute*. Both the subject and method of raising those funds we leave to the better judgment and discretion of the Convention, to whose patronage and care the Institute is committed.

Since writing the above we learn that the work of repair and renovation of the students' rooms has been began [sic], and is being vigorously pushed forward to completion, so that they will be in readiness for the accommodation of students at the opening of the next term in September proximo. But still the funds are wanting with which to meet the expense, and must be raised by the denomination.

With regard to the location of the proposed Theological School, your Committee have no desire to forestal [sic] public opinion, or influence in the slightest degree the decision of the Committee having that subject in charge. At the same time we deem it proper to state that we understand the Trustees of the Clinton Liberal Institute are willing, for the sake of having the Theological School located in that pleasant village, to give over to the Educational Society the stone edifice erected and occupied by the Male Department of the Institute, together with the grounds belonging thereto, both of which would be quite valuable to said Society should Clinton be fixed on as the proper location.

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