

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

### Letter from Rev. B. S. Hobbs

BR. AUSTIN:—I deem it a matter of justice and duty to myself and the denomination to which I belong, to say a few words, by your permission, in the columns of the *Ambassador*. I have now a painful and unpleasant duty to perform.

It is proper that I here state that my recent efforts in the ministry have again met with failure. Yes, brethren, this is the hard word I am obliged to write. I should not here do this were it not for the fact that the circumstances surrounding me at present, render this necessary on my part, in order that I may be better understood by my brethren in the ministry, and by all Universalists who have known me, or may hear concerning me, and the work in which I am now engaged.

It is well known to some of the brethren in the ministry, as well as many others, that I have long been subject to great and strange affliction and trial. This trial has been of that nature that it has for years destroyed my usefulness as a gospel minister, and made existence little else than living death! None who have intimately known me for the past six years will wonder at the language I make use of in this communication, to describe the great sorrow and trial of my life.

Suffice it here to say that my trial has been of that character which has led many, if not most of my friends, to consider me not only diseased in body, but in mind. It is also well known that from the first my sorrows have been of no common character. My insanity, if such it was, only claimed to be spiritual in origin- I mean spiritual in the modern sense of the term.

I am well aware that my own opinion as to the sanity of myself in my past afflictions, is of little worth; yet I feel it proper her to say, that so far as I have been able to judge in the matter, my insanity has been of no common kind, but of that character now so common almost throughout the world. But whatever it may have been, it has been something that has caused me by far the severest and most terrific trial I have ever been called upon to endure, and as before remarked, almost utterly destroyed my usefulness in the ministry for the last four years. But, brethren and readers, I shall not here attempt to give in detail, to much extent, the great sorrows that have long fallen to my lot. Suffice it now to say, that I have passed through severer and stranger things, than I once believed *could* have fallen to the lot of a human being.

When I first entered the ministry and took upon myself the arduous and responsible duties of that high vocation, I meant to be a volunteer for life. If I know my own heart, I engaged in that work, not for ease or profit, but solely for the purpose of doing good. Then, as now, I loved the sacred calling, though I distrusted greatly my qualifications for the sacred office.

For the first two or three years, my success was equal to my expectations, and I cherished the ardent hope that it would be mine to live and die in the great work of unfolding to a dark and sinful world a Father's loving character, and persuading my fellows to walk in that *better* path, where only true wisdom, and lasting happiness are found. But it was not mine to go on my way rejoicing, but for a short time. Soon the hand of misfortune was visible, and could I have seen then what was before me, I should have, like the blest one of Nazareth, exclaimed, "O Father! if it be possible let this cup pass from me!" My afflictions have since that period been such as to prevent me from doing anything to advance the cause of truth and gospel salvation among my fellows. I have passed through, seemingly, every form of humiliation and sorrow that mortal possibly could endure.

About two years after my first, strangest, severest trial befell me, I again entered the ministry, and continued to perform its usual duties in a very feeble manner, for the period of eighteen months. But it seems the cup was not full. Then it was that affliction in a new form was mine to bear, and my speech was placed beyond my own control, and again I was compelled to utter strange prophecies and sayings, and make an exhibition that led some to call it spiritual, and others believed me insane. Broken hearted, crushed, and almost discouraged, I again ceased my labors in the ministry, and relaxed my hold on its duties for a longer period than before.

Soon after this, that great sorrow in the loss of a dear bosom companion, in addition to all my burdens of existence, fell to my lot. How hard such a trial is, only those who have had the experience,

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

are prepared to affirm. What then should I do? I was again alone in the world; my family was broken up; the light of my home had departed; and notwithstanding all the trials and failures of the past, perhaps it might be possible that I might, even yet, succeed in that vocation to which I have devoted my feeble talents, and in which I felt willing to spend my life.

Suffice it to say, that with the consent and advice of some of my brethren in the ministry, those who knew my history in some degree, and some others, I came to this place. Must I now write the result? Yes, brethren, I must do this; for justice to you and myself, under existing circumstances, demands the more than painful duty at my hands. You have it in few words- it is failure as before.

I must now give more in detail, something of my past history for the past four months. On my fourth attempt at preaching here, I lost the use of my speech while in the act of solemn public prayer. But it was only this; and after a few moments I was able to say a few words in explanation of the past concerning me, and then preaching a discourse. At the conclusion, I gave a further explanation of the strange trials to which I had been subjected, and told the audience that if under such circumstances, they wished me to make another appointment, I would do so. By a unanimous request, I made an appointment for the ensuing Sabbath, and I succeeded in preaching and going through with all the services of the occasion, without difficulty.

By the request of the friends here, I soon assumed the pastoral duties of this Society, and continued my labors for a period of nearly six months. I had then nearly come to the conclusion that the days of trial were nearly past, and a better and brighter future would soon be mine. But the cherished hope was vain. In a moment when I least expected it, the bolt again fell, and I was crushed in great sorrow, humiliation, and anguish, to the dust!

It is proper here to say, that this exhibition was the most painful, if not the strangest of any I have experienced. My speech was first controlled while in the solemn act of prayer; and then again I was compelled to speak in a manner that as before led some to think it spiritual, and others to think me strangely diseased, if not partially insane. Before, when these more than dreadful trials were mine, the strange influence was of short duration. Not so, however, in the present instance. I was obliged, in spite of all my *efforts* to prevent it, to exhibit the character of the speaking medium in full, by addressing an audience on two different occasions, and going through the strangest ordeals common to the spiritualism of the present age.

Nor did it end here; nor is it my duty now to say, is the end apparent. Soon my hand, as often before, was seized by the strange spirit power, and I was obliged to write its prophecies and sayings.- This has continued for a few months past, and the same work is yet going on; and from Sabbath to Sabbath I am acting, not as a Gospel minister, but as a spirit medium.

By this time the reader will inquire, does not the writer believe in the fact of spirit intercourse? The question shall be answered. I am unable to understand my strange experience in any other manner.- It has from the first been my opinion that no derangement of mind could possibly do the work with which I have long been acquainted. But the ordeal has been so terrible that I have tried to account for it in some other way than it has ever claimed to originate. And, readers, and brethren in the ministry, if I believe in the fact of spirit intercourse, it is only because long-protracted experience has made it a necessity, and because, if I believe, I also believe that the severest and strangest trial that mortal can endure can come by purpose and design from the spirit spheres. But if I know my own heart, I would prefer at present to keep this opinion for myself alone. If what I have long endured can by any possibility come from above, certain I am that few can believe it or regard it as possible truth.

And now brethren - brethren in the ministry - what shall I say more in relation to this matter?- Shall I say, like some others, that I have found a purer faith? This I cannot do; for it must be a man of keen sight indeed, that can discern in "modern spiritualism" a purer faith than that contained in the Gospel of Christ. With the light I have at present, I ask for no purer, better faith than I have long believed, and to the best of my feeble ability, tried to preach. It is true, I am not at present engaged in the ministry. The reasons for this I have given. It is because the work is now impossible with me.- The

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

future I know not; and from present appearances, my work as a minister in the denomination to which I now belong, is nearly, if not altogether, finished.

Must I, then, take my leave and withdraw from your ranks? This would pain me greatly to do, and for the present I ask you to bear with me.- Should I be compelled to pursue that course that will be to you an injury, I will, for your sakes, take the parting hand. But allow me still to say, that if I know while I write the feelings of my own soul, nothing could be to me a greater happiness than to be an active, useful laborer in the ministry of the Gospel of the Great Salvation.

I commend myself into the Father's hands, and to your christian charity and brotherly love.

*B. S. Hobbs*

Webster, N.Y., April 27, 1857

*Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 16 May 1857*

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

**Rev. B. S. Hobbs**

In another column will be found a letter from Rev. B. S. Hobbs, narrating his trials and sorrows. It is calculated to excite the sympathy of every compassionate heart. We know of no one in our ministry in a more unfortunate and discouraging situation.- He has for some years been a moderate believer in Spiritualism, and some spirit as he thinks, controls him in a most extraordinary manner. If he attempts to preach, this supposed spirit will frequently and suddenly close his mouth, so that he cannot utter another word. If he endeavors to engage in any manual occupation, his tormenter (the spirit, as he imagines) soon interferes, throws the implements of industry from his hands, and prevents him from gaining a livelihood by the sweat of his brow - or in any other way. His condition is very peculiar and trying, viewed in whatever light it may be.

Believing Br. Hobbs to be justly entitled to aid from the "Universalist Relief Fund," Br. A. B. Grosh made application for his relief in 1855. For some reason, of which we are not aware, the effort failed. At the last session of our State Convention, we renewed this application. It was generally conceded, we believe, that Br. Hobbs' necessities called for aid, and that he was justly entitled to it, provided he was in fellowship with the Convention. As he had resigned his Letter of Fellowship during a severe attack of the disease, which affected mind as well as body, it was uncertain whether he had renewed his fellowship or not. As this was a point which could not be determined by the Council, the application in his behalf was passed by, without farther action.

We since learned that Br. Hobbs received a new Letter of Fellowship from the Mohawk River Association, at its session in Mohawk in June, 1857. Thus he is in full fellowship with the State Convention, and he is in every sense entitled to assistance from the Relief Fund. But he failed to obtain it, and can receive no benefit from it until the next meeting of the Convention, in August, 1858.

In the meantime how is he to subsist? Although enjoying very good bodily health, yet he cannot preach, neither can he labor, as he would most willingly, had he the power. He has no means, and no relatives to assist him. We confess our sympathies are deeply excited in his behalf. Recently we have seen and conversed with him. It is rarely we have met a brother who is more in need of sympathy, and who is more deserving of assistance. We have witnessed his anxiety to labor in some way, and his inability to do so. It is a very singular case - and one we feel would awaken pity in the hearts of the truly benevolent.

Is there not some Universalist of ample means - some farmer whose barns, and cellars, and larders, are well stocked, who could take Br. Hobbs into his family, and give him board and shelter during the present Autumn and coming Winter? Or is there not some neighborhood of Universalists in comfortable circumstances, where the brethren would share his maintenance for a few months between them? He is perfectly sane, so far as it is possible to perceive. In appearance, deportment, and manners, he is gentlemanly and affable. He would make a sociable and pleasant member in any family, and could be useful in many respects - perhaps preaching occasionally, if an opening offered - being willing, as he would, to do anything in his power to repay those who would afford him a home.

If any of our friends feel able and willing to extend to Br. Hobbs a kindness of this nature in his day of adversity, they will please drop a line to the editor of the *Ambassador*.

*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, Sat. 17 Oct 1857

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

**Letter from Rev. B. S. Hobbs**

BR. AUSTIN:- Circumstances, I am pained to say, again compel me to ask a little space in your columns, for the purpose of laying before your readers another recital of the trials of my suffering life. I am moved to do this from the force of circumstances at present surrounding me, and, as the sequel will show, for the purpose of explanation and personal justice.

I see by the published minutes of the New York "State Convention," lately held at Canton, that my name has been brought before the Universalist public in a manner that justice to you, Br. Austin, and to myself, demands an explanation.

I had not asked for aid from the Universalist "Relief Fund" myself, and was not aware that any brother intended to do so for me at the last sitting of the Board of Trustees, whose office it is to give relief to needy applicants that come within the limits of the provisions specified in the liberal grant, and to none else.

I have to thank you, Br. Austin, for your kind and brotherly effort in my behalf in this hour of poverty and great trial. But it seems your effort for me was unsuccessful. It appears also that application was made for me by Rev. A. B. Grosh, which was not favorably received.

It is extremely painful for me to refer to the sorrows and trials of the past, or speak of the present. I would fain, if possible, struggle on alone, without the eyes of the world gazing upon me. But it is no longer possible; and humiliating and hard as the necessity is, nevertheless, I will bear it- if it must be so, and I cannot help it. Have patience, then, reader, while I give you a few additional facts in my trying history.

When application for aid in my behalf was kindly asked by my beloved friend and helper, Br. Grosh, in 1855, my circumstances were simply these:- I had then for the first time been driven from the pulpit a few months before, in consequence of the strange control of speech which, as the readers of the *Ambassador* have before been informed, has since that period, been a great trial of my life, and in consequence of this, I was not able to earn a sufficient support for my family, which then were mine, though soon indeed the tie was rudely broken.

I must here make another revelation of the kind of trial to which I have for more than six years been subjected. It is painful, but justice demands the sacrifice. It is this: My *hands* as well as my speech are subject to a control that has for years deprived me of the power of doing but very little by manual labor for my own support, or the support of those connected with me by family ties. In consequence of this control at that time, I could do but about one half as much for the support of my family as I could have done under other and more favorable circumstances. It is true she that then was mine, tried to bear part of the burden, and to accomplish this, started a milliner shop in company with another lady, hoping thereby to keep the family together, and to get along without literally begging our bread. But the burden was too great for her to bear, and when application was made for aid in my behalf, from the "Relief Fund," she was unable to labor, and after a few months was released from a world of sorrow and went to rest. And now, if I speak truly, I am obliged to say that my means were so limited that I had not the wherewith to pay the expenses of the internment, and am yet, it is with pain I write it, indebted in part for them to a good and generous brother of the Society in Little Falls. I must add even more than this. I am indebted to two or three individuals still, in small sums, for necessaries for my family's support during the time of trial of which I have thus spoken, and to this hour it has been impossible for me to pay them, though in order to do so, I have disposed of every available thing in my possession, except a little remnant of what I once called a library, even to the last article of my bedding, and the few things that are needed in a very humble family in keeping house.

Thus much as it regards my circumstances when application was made for me in 1855.

In respect to the present, duty and necessity will compel me to paint as dark a picture as the other.- After the decease of my companion and the breaking up of my family, which was immediately after the light of my home had departed, I was invited by Br. Grosh to make my home with him for a

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

season. I had then no place to lay my head, and I gladly - as gladly as the circumstances would permit - accepted of the invitation. I tarried with him a few weeks, and am still indebted for the favor, for thanks and gratitude are all I have yet been able to give. I then made the effort to preach in Webster, N.Y., and as the reader is already aware, that effort was a failure, after about six months trial. The compensation that I have received for that six months labor in the desk, is a trifle less than one hundred dollars.

And now what shall I say more. More, reader, must be given, for the necessity is laid upon me. Suffice it then to say, that I have, since I was obliged to leave the pulpit, made several trials to labor with my hands, to earn something for my support; but in all I have been unsuccessful; and since last November I have not been able to earn the sum of ten dollars in all the trials I have made to labor.

If I must tell the truth in this matter, it is this:- For the last six months, I have eaten the bread of charity, and at the present writing the scene is not changed. After making every effort in Webster, within my power, to do *something* to pay my weekly expenses, and after failing in each attempt, and being obliged to ask others for a place to lay my head, until it seemed no place was open for me, I came to this city. Since I have been here, I have again made the effort to labor, and again failed, after a few days of trial. And, if more must be added, it is this:- I am now *helpless*, and unable at present, to earn a dollar at any employment I have tried, or so far as I can perceive, any which is possible for me to obtain, and as a consequence, I am wholly dependent upon others for my daily food, or a place, like the blest one of Nazareth, where to lay my head.

My family is not all gone. I have a son and daughter growing up to manhood and womanhood, in whom I am deeply interested, and for whom I would gladly do something to prepare for the scenes of life. But the privilege is denied me - even the favor of paying them a visit, as they are in a distant part of the state, and I have not the means to reach the place of their stay. My other relatives are nearly all gone, and from none can I receive help. I have an aged father, who is himself on the verge of want, and were it possible, I would delight to make easier his pathway to the grave. But even the privilege is denied me of seeing his face, much more of trying to help and comfort him in the departing hour.

This, brethren and readers, must close for the present my recital of the strange, severe and complicated trials of my earthly lot. How long these strange and inexpressible sorrows are to crush me in the dust, I know not. But still I will hope! Still I will believe sorrow is not eternal, and though clouds and darkness surround me now, yet I, with others, shall yet behold the light of coming day.

Once I could not have believed what is now proved by the daily experience of my life. But I have learned that human knowledge is yet limited in the dark mysteries of Providence, and I am led to believe that suffering has a purpose and a work, in the dispensation of Heavenly Wisdom, not perceived by the sons and daughter of men.

As it regards myself, I speak in language that but few can understand, for none but those who have witnessed or experienced similar things can even regard what I have learned by long experience as really possible.

But enough! I resign myself into the Father's hands, for He doeth all things well.

*B. S. Hobbs*

Auburn, N.Y., Oct. 7, 1857

*Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 17 Oct 1857*

[Hobbs, Benjamin S.]

Rev. B. S. Hobbs

It is with much satisfaction we learn that Rev. B. S. Hobbs has accepted a unanimous invitation to become pastor of the Universalist Society at Braman's Corners. For several years Br. H. has been greatly afflicted and incapacitated for his labors in the ministry by a complication of bodily ailments of a very discouraging nature. During the past year he has resided in Auburn, N.Y. and has been slowly recovering his health and strength. He is greatly encouraged in the belief that his recovery is permanent. We trust it will prove so, and that he will be blessed with many years of health and usefulness. The Society at Braman's Corners, having now secured an earnest and devoted pastor, we pray it may prosper in its spiritual and temporal interests, and become a fruitful vine in the garden of the Lord.

Br. Hobbs desires his correspondents to address him at Braman's Corners, Schenectady Co., N.Y.

*Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 27 Aug 1859*

(Transcriber's note: Rev. Benjamin S. Hobbs eventually became a Spiritualist.)

Transcribed on 18 Apr 2007 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY