

[Skinner, Dolphus]

REV. DOLPHUS SKINNER, D.D.

Twenty-five years ago, when the number of Universalist clergymen known to us by name, were "few and far between," Dolphus Skinner was one of the few. In New England and in Ohio, we heard of Dolphus Skinner. The report came to us that he was an orator. His place was the pulpit. He was a "born speaker." He was a criterion—the power of other pulpit orators was measured by his power. Few of our clergymen have put so much labor into the same number of years. He has been, as in war-time it was said of [?] working generals [obliterated]. As preacher, pastor, editor, itinerant, Dolphus Skinner's professional life, especially in the days of his perfect health, has overflowed with toil. Those Universalists in Central New York, having reached middle life, will testify to all we have said.

Dolphus Skinner was born in Westmoreland, N.H., May 18, 1800. He was one of a family of nine children—eight sons and a daughter—of whom the eldest is Rev. Warren Skinner, father of Rev. Charles A. Skinner. He was reared on a small farm, and was favored with only limited opportunities of a common school education till the age of 17, when the privilege was allowed him, for a short season, of attending a neighboring Academy. Here he made an acquaintance with Latin and Greek. He taught school winters to help pay expenses—a common practice in New England. At the age of 22, in company with Lemuel Willis, of the same town, and of nearly the same age, he entered the study of Rev. S. C. Loveland, of Reading, Vt., to prepare for the ministry of reconciliation. Soon after, both of these then young men commenced preaching. At the session of the General Convention of Universalists in Warner, N.H., September, 1822, both received Letters of Fellowship, together with Thomas F. King (father of T. [Thomas] Starr King), Massena B. Ballou (son of Hosea), Linus S. Everett, George W. Brooks, Joseph Bradley, Hiram B. Clark, Asa Wheaton, and Hubbard H. Winchester, ten in all.

For about two years he resided in New Hampshire, preaching most of the time in Cheshire County, occasionally in Vermont, and teaching school winters. In December, 1824, he removed to Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and broke ground, in that celebrated watering place, for the establishment of a Universalist Society and Church. A neat brick edifice was erected in the summer of 1825. During this year a small paper (semi-monthly) devoted to the doctrine of the Restitution was started in Troy, by Barzillai Streeter, of which Mr. Skinner agreed to be Corresponding Editor. But as Mr. Streeter left Troy immediately after the first number was issued, the whole labor of conducting it devolved on him. He now divided his time in preaching between Troy and Saratoga. The paper was continued only one year. In April, 1827, by invitation of the Universalist Society in Utica, Mr. Skinner

removed from Saratoga Springs to the then village of Utica, where the Society was then languishing for want of a pastor. He immediately began the editing and publishing of a semi-monthly paper, entitled the *Utica Evangelical Magazine*. This he continued about three years, when he made arrangements for buying out and uniting the *Gospel Advocate*, published at Auburn, with the *Magazine*, thus making a weekly paper. This was done Jan. 1, 1830, the *Advocate* having the previous year fallen into the editorial hands of Orestes A. Brownson, just before he joined the Fanny Wright, of Free Inquiry (Atheistic) party of New York. The published preferred to sell the paper to a Christian minister to continuing it in the editorial hands of an Atheist.

From the time of his removal to Utica, Mr. Skinner's labors became very arduous. He generally preached three full sermons every Sunday—morning, afternoon and evening. He also attended to the necessary domestic duties and cares, funerals and weddings. He was often called to dedications, ordinations, installations, Conferences, Associations and Conventions, all over the State; and sometimes beyond its boundaries, riding day and night, by stage-coach and canal-boat—railroads were unknown then. When at home he often sat up until after midnight to write editorials, make selections, correct articles from correspondents, read proof-sheets, kept accounts himself with 7000 subscribers scattered from Maine to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Canadas to the Gulf of Mexico. From forty to fifty letters a day were read and answered if necessary, all orders for papers were filled, all notices prepared and inserted, with all the details of business. The paper at first had but a small circulation, and yielded no profit. Indeed it was rather a bill of cost. But though there were three or four other denominational papers in the State, it obtained a circulation of 7 to 8000, and became a source of fair income. He finally depended on it for a living, as the Society became so largely indebted for their church, he in order to enable them to apply all they could raise towards the extinguishment of their debt and saving their house, actually received less than \$200 per year for salary during the eleven years he was their pastor.

So arduous and trying were his labors that they began to make serious inroads on his health and constitution. For this reason mainly, after publishing three volumes of the *Evangelical Magazine* and six volumes of the united *Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, nine volumes in all, he sold out the proprietorship at the beginning of 1836 to Rev. A. B. [Aaron Bort] Grosh and O. Hutchinson, and thenceforward ceased to be the publisher. He continued, however, to occupy the editorial chair—mostly without any pecuniary compensation—for years. Indeed, there were few years from that time till 1851, when the paper was finally merged in the *Christian Ambassador*, and removed to Auburn, but what [sentence is unfinished].

[Skinner, Dolphus]

In January and February, 1837, owing to a succession of severe colds and much speaking, day and evening, in a journey to Auburn and back, and speaking about every day and evening for ten days, either on temperance or religious subjects, he contracted that terrible malady, bronchitis, from which he has never since been entirely free. To find relief he spent two winters at the South. The first he spent in Richmond, Va., but continued to preach for the six months he spent there, and succeeded in reviving the Unitarian-Universalist Society in Richmond. When he left in the spring of 1838, he secured for the place the labors of Rev. E. C. [Edwin Hubbell] Chapin, who had then just commenced preaching, for the next eighteen months.

From the time of leaving Richmond, he was obliged to suspend public speaking for about four years, and spent the winter in the West Indies and South America. It was during these years, 1837 and 1838, principally, that he held the written discussion with the somewhat celebrated Alexander Campbell, on the questions of endless misery and universal salvation. In the spring of 1840 he retired from the city to a farm [in Westmoreland, Oneida County] about two miles distant, where he remained a number of years, and where, by out-door exercises and the avoidance of sedentary habits, he was enabled, after four years' suspension, in the spring of 1842, to resume his ministerial labors, which were generally performed in [?] Societies and localities where they had no settled pastors, believing as he did that he could be quite as useful so as by confining his labors to one Society. He was thus instrumental in organizing quite a number of Societies and building churches in places where otherwise they would have had none. Two or three times since he resumed his labors in the pulpit, he has been obliged, on account of ill health, to suspend them for a longer or shorter period—from three to eighteen months at a time. He has, however, officiated on many funeral and other special occasions.

From 1857 to 1860 he devoted much of his time to efforts to redeem from debt and put into an efficient, wholesome and useful condition the Clinton Liberal Institute, which had become deeply involved, and must otherwise soon have gone to ruin, and been sold under the hammer. In this time he raised and collected over \$1800 in cash, redeemed the Institute from debt, repaired and refurnished the buildings, procured an excellent philosophical apparatus and a new corps of well qualified teachers; and from that time the school has been in a flourishing condition.

The six months from November, 1863 to May, 1864, he spent at Minneapolis, on the Upper Mississippi, mainly with a view of trying the effects of that dry and bracing atmosphere on his health. Though he received no benefit from the change, he had the satisfaction of founding there one of the best Societies and churches in the Northwest, which has since built a beautiful church-edifice, settled an excellent pastor, and is in a

[Skinner, Dolphus]

most flourishing condition. Immediately after his return from that Northwestern sojourn, he was taken very sick, and for eighteen months was utterly prostrated, and lay much of the time apparently at the brink of the grave, neither himself nor his friends believing it possible for him to recover. But he slowly recovered, and for eighteen months past has not missed a single Sunday but what he has preached the glorious Gospel of a world's salvation. Indeed he cannot endure idleness on Sunday when able to preach.

During the late rebellion Mr. Skinner refused to have his tongue tied or his lips padlocked on the subject of patriotism and the rebellion. He has spoken out on behalf of his country, with no uncertain sound, in ecclesiastical councils, in the pulpit, at all funerals of soldiers and officers dying for their country, at many of which he has officiated, whether his hearers liked or disliked; and on several important occasions, in political campaigns, has addressed the public on behalf of the right, on great fundamental and national issues.

In common with his classmate, Lemuel Willis, Mr. Skinner was in very strong sympathy with the Restoration movement, until that moment, unwisely led, attempted a schism in the denomination. He saw no occasion for separate ecclesiastical organization; and his dissent from the Paul Dean faction was intense. He has, however, always kept the candle of his faith, in this regard, in the candle stick. He is now, we are glad to say, favored with a sufficiency of this world's goods. His health, also, though not strong, is by no means infirm. And while the physical ability lasts, he will have the harness on. A busy life, beyond, far beyond that of most mortals, is the motto for Rev. Dolphus Skinner, D.D.

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