

Reminiscences of Universalism in Western New-York

No. III

In the old school house in Hopewell, Ontario Co., N.Y., to which I have so often alluded, once preached that erratic, meteoric, Rev. J. [John] S. Thompson, who, it was for a short time hoped, would shed a brilliant halo around the cause of truth. He, however, soon passed from view, and left a dark cloud on our religious horizon. In due time there came out in a Presbyterian periodical what was called his "renunciation of Universalism." It was handed to me by a gentleman of that denomination, who seemingly considered it an all-conclusive argument against the truth of Universalism. I cast my eyes over the article and remarked that I had a work written by Rev. J. S. Thompson, in which he had by scripture proved Universalism to be true, and that he could not then, by anything he could write or say, *disprove* it. The gentleman and a lady present simultaneously replied, "*It cannot be proved true.*"

In those early times there occasionally passed that way our lamented father, Rev. S. [Stephen] Miles, who, in Rochester, N.Y., was so suddenly called to the mansions of rest a few years since. True to his sense of duty as the needle to the pole, he was the first preacher of our faith who understandingly gave to me a glimpse of a reason from Scripture, for his belief in the holiness and happiness of the whole family of man. This occurred 44 years since, in the fall previous to my becoming fully convinced of its truth. His heart was ever in the work in which he was engaged.

Also in the same old school house preached that self-sacrificing Rev. W. [William] I. Reese, who died a martyr to the cause of humanity in the city of Buffalo, N.Y., during the fearful ravages of the cholera in Sept., 1834. What a thrilling shock upon the minds of all true believers, did the news of his death produce.- Yet even youthful in appearance at the time of his death; possessing a high order of intellect, he had then become a very useful laborer in the Gospel field. We felt that we could not well spare him. But He who had a higher claim called ... He left a disconsolate widow and two almost infant children to battle with the storms of life; yet he could composedly leave them in the care of "Him who is the orphan's Father and the widow's God."

Most of those early pioneers have passed away.- They did much, very much, towards dispelling the clouds of error. Their memories yield a sweet fragrance to those few left who knew them well. Not a vestige of the old school house remains. Nearly all of the congregation then and there assembling have passed that bourne which admits of no retracing of footsteps. Thus brief is life. Ever it has been so ...

In 1825, in Parma, N.Y., for the first time in my life, I had the extreme pleasure of entering a Universalist church. Although it was in an unfinished state, merely temporary seats having been prepared, yet we could enjoy the preaching quite as well as though it were a palace. The Ontario Association was then in session at that church. Those convocations were apparently sources of much gratification to all believers in the great salvation, who would seem to listen, spell-bound, to the gracious words that fell from the lips of the messengers of truth.- Then, it was no very great task for nearly all preachers and believing hearers to become acquainted.- How encouraging it was to us to find those meetings each year more numerous attended. This said to us that more souls were being liberated from the bonds of the dark prison house of partialism. The

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soul which has been loosened from its galling chains can alone feel with thrilling horror from what it has escaped.

In those times it was a rare privilege to find and read Universalist books and papers. I recollect to have heard a Universalist gentleman say that he had made an effort to obtain the life of Rev. John Murray, on visiting Albany or New-York. This was about 1820. He said he called at every bookstore in the city, but could not find one. He was told by a bookseller that he would not allow such a work upon his shelves. He [the Universalist] replied that the thought [the bookseller] very unwise, as he should [would] at that time have purchased at least three of them.

In 1822 I had the privilege of reading the life of Father Murray. It was a much larger book than the present one. The cost of it, I was informed, was \$3. I have never seen one of the kind since. Now, any one who wishes the life of Murray can send 50 cents to a Universalist bookstore and obtain it, by mail or otherwise. *A Universalist bookstore!* In those early times a Universalist bookstore would have been a rare curiosity. Now they are quite common, and a few dollars will purchase a goodly number of excellent works on the subject. No one who has a little to spare need be without at least a small library of Universalist works ... And who that is a Universalist would do without the *Ambassador*, or some similar paper? ... When I say this, I would not underrate other periodicals. There are many excellent ones. But the *Ambassador* is published in my home State, and I hail it as a faithful old friend, coming from my former home. I would more willingly omit one meal a day each year, than be denied the perusal of its pages.

Mrs. L. I. T. [Lasira I. Torrey]

Grand Marsh, Wis.

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