

Universalism in Western New York

The following letter from Br. J. R. Johnson was addressed to Br. Gurley and published in the Star in the West from which we copy.

It is now above three years since I left my native Ohio. I have formed many agreeable acquaintances in my adopted New York, where the cause of Universalism is more prosperous and respected than at any former period. In Victor we have a large, wealthy and influential Society and Church, good meeting-house, organ, and constant [full time] preaching. Victor is on the Railroad 100 miles east of Buffalo. Rochester is 17 miles west of me; we have a splendid house and large society, of which Br. G. W. [George Washington] Montgomery is pastor. They are prosperous. Br. Montgomery is a man of medium height, 38 years old, healthy and active.—He is a speaker of good abilities, and as a pastor, he is successful.

Fairport and Webster, north of me 10 miles and 18 miles, we have good Meeting-Houses, and fair Societies, of whom Br. H. [Henry] L. Hayward is Pastor. He is a man above medium height, and quite spare of flesh, aged 33 years. He is in rather poor health. Br. H. is a man of a fine mind, agreeable and energetic as a speaker, rich, full voice, and of a commanding, dignified deportment.

In Newark, 20 miles north-east of me, we have a meeting-house, organ and preaching every Sabbath. Br. J. J. Austin is pastor. Br. Austin is under medium size, aged 26 years, has a fine, logical mind, and is a successful preacher.

Geneva, 30 miles east of me, we have a small Society, which has, until the past six months, been dead for a few years, but efforts are now being made to revive it. There we have a good Meeting-House and organ. Br. E. Case, jr., is Pastor. Br. Case is 28 years of age, rather tall, and fair speaker.

Auburn, 45 miles east of me, we have an excellent Society, splendid house and equipage, where our cause is very prosperous. Br. J. M. [John Mather] Austin is Pastor there. He is about 38 years old, of medium size, fine mind, and eloquent as a speaker. He is a man very generally esteemed for his good social qualities.

Bristol, 10 miles South of me, we have a good Society and Meeting-House; and at Livonia, a little south of Bristol we have a society and Church; both of which support preaching.

Alexander, 60 miles west of me, we have a good Society, Meeting-House and Church. Br. S.[Samuel] Goff is the Pastor. He is about 35 years old, medium size, and a man of fine qualities of mind and heart.

Middleport, 70 miles west of me, on the Canal; we have a fine cobblestone house, organ, and a church. Br. H. Van Campen is Pastor. He is about 26 years old, pleasant speaker, small of size, and successful as a preacher.

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Lockport, 80 miles west of me; we have a good Meeting-House, and Br. W. [William] B. Cook is Pastor there. He is about 38 years old, of medium size, and an eloquent preacher. I know him well, and call him one of our best men.

Buffalo, we have two Societies and Meeting-Houses. Br. S. R. [Stephen Rensselaer] Smith is pastor of the *first*, Br. L. S. Everett of the *second* Society. Br. Everett is above medium height, about 50 years old, and a powerful preacher; of his present prospects I know but little. Br. Smith, rather, 'Father Smith,' is about 57 years old, is a powerful and eloquent preacher, and a walking edition of Theology. He is above medium height, very thin of flesh. Before I had seen him I was informed that he resembled Henry Clay; and when I first saw him I knew him by the resemblance between his face and Clay's portrait. He is a good man, and profoundly esteemed by his acquaintances.

Perry, 45 miles South-west of me; we have a Meeting-House, and a good Society. Br. J. [John] S. Brown is Pastor. He is about 32 years old, of medium size, and excellent abilities as a preacher and Pastor.

Pavilion, 50 miles south-west of me; we have a good society and Meeting-House. Our cause is prospering there under the very judicious labors of our younger brother Fisk—25 years old.

Ridgeway, 80 miles west of me; we have a large Society, good Meeting-House. Br. T. J. [Thomas Jefferson] Smith is Pastor. He is a very tall man, about 45 years of age, eloquent, profound, and logical as a preacher. The cause there is prosperous.

In addition to the above, we have Meeting-Houses in Portage, Nunda, Gainville [Gainesville], Sandusky, Boston, Aurora, Churchville, Clarendon, Cowlesville, Morganville, Gaines, Lakeville, N. Bloomfield, Corning, Genoa, Springville, Parma, Mottville, Carroll, Scipio; and as Preachers in these churches we have Brs. A. [Alanson] Kelsey, B. F. Gibbs, F. [Francis] M. Alvord, N. [Nelson] Brown, O. [Orrin] Roberts, O. [Oliver] Ackley, J. [Jacob] Chase (now in ill health,) T. L. Clarke, C. H. [Charles Heman] Dutton, J. S. [John Solomon] Flagler, I. [Isaac] George, G. [Gideon] S. Gowdy, C. [Charles] Hammond, J. [Jacob] Whitney, J. Heacock, B. Hunt, D. Pickering, S. [Seth] Remington, J. B. Sax, S. Adams, M. [Moses] B. Smith, L. L. Spalding, G. S. Abbott, I. B. [Ichabod Blakeslee] Sharp, and perhaps others.

Thus, within the range of one hundred miles of Victor, from whence I write, there are about 40 Universalist Meeting-Houses, of which I have some knowledge of location; and about 40 preachers, the most of whom preach every Sabbath. In some places preaching is sustained where we have no Meeting-Houses.

Salaries vary from \$300 to \$1000. Preachers of Universalism are about as well supported as any other Pastors—with but slight exceptions.—

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Partialism hardly holds its own; is rather on the decline, while Universalism is firm and prosperous.

The style of preaching here differs from that in the west. In Ohio our preachers generally speak extempore—in N.Y. they generally write their sermons. In Ohio our preachers say much against the dogmas of Partialism; here they labor to prove the doctrine of Universalism, and enforce the moral precepts of the Gospel. Stated congregations here are critical, and admire animating, eloquent discourses—full of convincing Truth, sent home to the soul with zeal and power. Men who lack the ordinary powers and attainments of the pulpit orator find it difficult to succeed here, as preachers of any denomination.

This town has but three religious Societies: Methodist, Presbyterian, and Universalist, and I believe that with two exceptions, every religious family in town have, at some time during the past two years, heard me preach. These are Presbyterian Deacons! We have a liberal community, growing more liberal. Accept what I have written.

Yours truly,

J. R. JOHNSON

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Transcribed on 10 Oct 2012 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY