

## [Cook, James Munroe]

Rev. Uriah Clark, DISCOURSE on the late Rev. James M. Cook,  
Pastor of "The First Universalist Society," Baltimore, Md.,  
and formerly of the "Second Society", Providence, R. I. [excerpts]

....It is not to the greatest men alone that we are always the most indebted—and not to those who are the most extolled among the learned, the conservative, and the coldly fastidious of the world. Here and there will rise one who comes like John from the wilderness, with worn sandals and dusty attire, at the censure of some and the admiration of others, lifting a loud voice for the multitude to prepare the way of the Lord. Such men have a wide mission to accomplish among the masses of the people. They have been needed in the ministry of universal reconciliation...Whatever peculiarities may distinguish men of this character, and expose them to the intellectual criticism of the fastidious, they are men of apostolic fervor—they are baptized by an enthusiasm that gives a propelling power to their labors which is almost irresistible; they leave behind them a deep and long felt impression among those who were moved in sympathy with their message; and when they depart from the scenes of their temporal toil, the mournful shadow that settles over many a heart attests the strong hold they had upon the affections of a Christian people.

Among this class of Gospel laborers we may number our lately deceased brother, Rev. James M. Cook, Pastor of the Universalist Society in Baltimore, and formerly of this Society. His removal from this city was so recent, and many remembrances, now mournful, are so fresh among you, that I cannot neglect the duty of uniting with you in the expression of some humble tribute to his memory, and in drawing some profitable reflections upon his brief life and ministry. I regret, however, that I am not better prepared with details; and I must therefore confine myself to some general points of the most leading interest....

Brother Cook, at the date of his departure, was little past the age of thirty. Born of parents whose religion was of the rigid limitarian school, educated under the influence and associations of that religion, with a moral nature inclined to religious enthusiasm, his early life was spent in the bondage of fear and superstition, and oppressed by those clouds which must always overshadow the minds of those who sincerely believe the dark and foreboding tenets of a long accepted theology. The painful oppression under which he suffered in youth undoubtedly made him a more earnest seeker after the Gospel of illimitable grace; and having embraced that Gospel, as he remembered how he had suffered for its light and hope, and the multitudes who were lying down in darkness, he was impelled to go forth in its advocacy and defense. He began his ministry at an early age in Western New York, in the neighborhood of Rochester [the town of Chili], where he became united to the companion whom he now leaves bereaved and widowed, in charge of two sons.

Shortly after the commencement of my ministry, in 1843, while located at Canandaigua, I met Mr. Cook for the first time. He had then been engaged in the ministry about six years, and was on the point of settling at Fairport, where he soon after began his labors, supplying half the time at Victor, a short distance from my own settlement. I well remember the first conversation that passed between us, while riding in the cars between Canandaigua and Rochester. He spoke of how long he had been laboring, of how little he had accomplished, of the great field before us, and of his determination to put on the Gospel armor with mightier zeal and ardor. His words to me were full of animation, and I caught the fire of a more earnest devotion to the cause of liberal Christianity. The purpose which he then and there expressed soon became manifest in his labors. Moved by a revival spirit, his ministry began to tell as it had never done before. At that time a new interest seemed to break out among ministers and people in Western New York. Associations and two days' conferences were largely attended, as they still are in that glorious

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region of the Master's kingdom, and the warmest enthusiasm pervaded all hearts. Mr. Cook always became zealously enlisted in those meetings, and to the last of his life, he often referred to them as among the happiest seasons of spiritual enjoyment. The first time I heard his voice in public was at a conference at Fairport, where, at the conclusion of a discourse by the speaker, he united in a voluntary prayer; and I shall never forget the deep and fervent tones of supplication which rose up from the altar where he knelt and thrilled the hearts of the waiting audience. On those occasions he was always expected to preach, and he would frequently hold the large congregations for an hour, listening with emotion and often melted to tears, as some scene of sympathy was described, or the Gospel was rolled forth with that great volume of voice, which few speakers could exceed either in power or compass.

Whether the excitement at that period created in Western New York was healthy, or altogether profitable to our Zion, is a question which has since demanded serious consideration. Like all other agitations it was followed by some evils consequent upon the reaction that ensued. Yet many were aroused, for the first time, to consider the claims of Universalism—many were waked up from spiritual apathy, and many warmed into a holier and better life of Christian exemplification.

After a very successful ministry in Fairport and Victor, during which time that whole region of the country felt the influence of his labors, he was called to take charge of this society, at that time just organized and under peculiar circumstances. As the civil elements were then subsiding from a wide commotion, and many from various considerations were warmly enlisted in the establishment of a Second Universalist Society in this city, it was a most favorable period for the introduction of a man of his fearless zeal and power, and he was enthusiastically received by the people. Of the success of his labors, and the obstacles that interposed, but through all of which he at last passed, I need not speak to you, who stood faithfully by his side, through every season of trial, of devotion and sacrifice. His ministry was blessed in the conversion of many, in the confirmation of others, in the permanent upbuilding of a large and able society, in the organization of a church, in the erection of this commodious house of worship, and in filling it with interested and established worshippers. It was feared by some, that the fruit of his labors might not wholly remain after his departure, but that many would drop off in interest, and in their Sabbath attendance. It has been a matter of congratulation, however, to learn that the interest of this people in our Gospel is still fervent and unabated, and that few have fallen off from that love of the truth which our departed brother inspired; while almost every place in the house for whose erection he labored with such untiring zeal is now filled...

Worn down by the labors through which he passed in your midst, and placed in some peculiar circumstances, to which I allude without being called to praise or censure any brethren of our common household, Mr. Cook was induced to change his field from this city to Baltimore. It was with a sad heart that he turned his face from Providence to leave behind the many friends who had stood so long and faithfully by his side, and to seek a new home among comparative strangers. The strongest endearments had grown up through the trials and labors through which you had mutually gone hand in hand. And after his removal, it was with the warmest expressions of gratitude and love that he often referred to his stay in your midst, as the happiest social season in his life...

He began his work in Baltimore with the most auspicious prospect of good success. New friends flocked to his side and upheld his hands. The languishing and lukewarm was revived, and the old and faithful were encouraged. The congregation was filling the large Calvert Street church, and many were hoping for better times in that remote city of our Zion. Through the unwearied exertions of their pastor the society had liquidated a long and burdensome debt, and the friends were looking forward to fiscal freedom and spiritual prosperity. But in a few brief

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days, alas! the final messenger comes, and their laborer is called away from the field already ripening for the harvest!...

...He was often cautioned in regard to the excess of his labors, but he forgot all in the hour of his enthusiasm; and taking his life in his hand, seemed willing to consecrate it to his appointed mission. He was of that order of men who "live not in years, but in deeds," and to him life would have been death without an earnest activity in the work of God and man. He lived out his mission before the meridian of his days, yet during his brief ministry he accomplished more than many a man drawing out his years to the number of threescore and ten.

Though the departure of our brother was quite sudden, he was conscious of its approach, and prepared to meet it with Christian faith and fortitude. Often he had endeavored to convince the world that Universalism afforded the highest ground of hope and trust in the last of earth, and now he was ready to leave his own dying testimony. From a letter to Mr. Fenner from Mr. J. L. Camp, we learn some interesting details related to his exit. On the morning of August 4<sup>th</sup>, the weather being stormy, Mr. Cook preached in the vestry of his church, mainly to the children of the Sabbath School, from the words, "Feed my lambs." He was in excellent spirits, and spoke with unusual interest and animation. Returning home, after dinner, he visited some sick members of his parish, and administered to them the consolations he was so soon to need himself. In the evening, feeling somewhat indisposed, he retired early, and never rose again from his couch. On the Tuesday following he grew worse, and his case began to be apprehended as dangerous. On Thursday night, Mr. Camp together with the Rev. A. C. Thomas watched with him and before morning his physician abandoned all hope of his recovery. Mr. Thomas performed the painful duty of breaking to him the solemn news. He received it calmly and composed. He made a disposition of his secular affairs and papers, and suggesting an arrangement for his funeral obsequies, requested Revs. W. S. Balch and A. C. Thomas to officiate in the service at Baltimore, and Rev. G[eorge] W. Montgomery to preach the funeral sermon at the interment of his remains in Rochester [Grove Place Cemetery, Chili]. Lingering along under the painful disease of bilious dysentery until the following week, on Wednesday, Aug. 14<sup>th</sup>, he at last departed in peace. Resigned to his exit, he endeavored to encourage and console the dear wife and children in prospect of their affliction. He was surrounded by kind friends who labored to meet all his wants and alleviate his pains. But above all, he was sustained by that faith and trust which he had so earnestly commended to others. To Mr. Thomas he said, with firmness, "The doctrine I have preached and loved has ever been the chief theme of my heart. It is so now, it will be in death, and in heaven forever." Calling to the bedside his physician, with whom he had often conversed, he said, "Doctor, I want you to understand distinctly, I die as I have lived, a Universalist..." His last words, uttered about two hours before his death, were, "God, thou art merciful."

A Christian minister of wide influence and usefulness has gone from our denomination, and the lessons of his life, his character and his departure are left for our instruction. That he was not without his imperfections, and those which sometimes marred his ministry, and affected the sympathy of some of his brethren, is undeniable; yet these are all forgotten in this hour of bereavement, when we remember the common liabilities of our nature, how prone the best are to err, and when we remember the many excellencies of heart and life which shone so conspicuously in view of all who loved and admired our lamented brother.

As a preacher, but few in our midst have commanded greater attention from the multitude. Claiming but little as an original writer, he was eminently practical and successful in reaching his hearers with off-hand appeals sent home to the head and heart with a power peculiar to himself alone. In moving the passions he was seldom excelled, and would often sway them to and fro like winds and storms playing with clouds and billows. His discourses, whether written or

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extempore, were always flaming with a zeal that never tired, and came forth as if leaping from a soul overcharged with divine enthusiasm. Although his imagination was not under the culture of the schools, it often glowed with the poetry of the heart and life of human nature, and delighted most to dwell upon the common ties and affections of our being. Whether in the pulpit or the parish, he was ever alive, and impressed all who met him with the fact of his earnestness and energy. With but little relish for the incessant confinement of the library, he preferred the study of men and things, and familiarized himself with the social and secular scenes of society. Free and open, frank and communicative, cheerful and animated in his manners and intercourse, wherever he went he was found at home, and made all within his reach feel themselves in the presence of a friend and brother. Plainhearted and outspoken, he seldom disguised either his faults or his virtues, his opinions or prepossessions or feelings; and though his frankness, his freedom, was received by some with disfavor, by others it was commended, and secured him a large circle of devoted friends. Strong in his feelings and affections, he received the words of those who could encourage him with joy and gratitude, and was stimulated to renewed zeal. Confident in his own powers and ambitious of success, he would never suffer himself to fail in whatever duty he undertook to perform, but drove on with perseverance and fortitude. If he was sometimes impulsive, his impulses were often of the frank and generous kind, and leaned on the side of charity, except in what he regarded as a just rebuke of wrong and a vindication of right. If he had some who regarded him with disfavor, he made many of the warmest friends who saw his virtues in a light that reflected charity upon whatever were regarded as failings. And now that he has gone from these scenes of strife and turmoil, friends and enemies alike will bow in bereavement; and burying the past in that grave which must finally close over all the imperfections of earth, remember him as a sainted spirit joined with the great cloud of witnesses that encompass us in all our pilgrimages, and urge us onward in the high way of duty and holiness.

Mr. Cook was a man of singular mental and physical constitution. With a temperament bilious, nervous and sanguine, each nearly equally developed, and a mind disposed to religious enthusiasm, he was one of the most remarkable somnambulists ever known. His habit of preaching and praying in his sleep, especially while from home, and after having been agitated by any religious interests, became a phenomenon which excited the wonder and curiosity of all who ever heard him...

Our brother will long be remembered as one of the most faithful advocates of Bible Universalism. He knew its value too well ever to conceal it from an open, explicit declaration. He had no sympathy with a half-compromising indefinition of doctrine, nor with a covert infidelity, which in the name of reason and philosophy would undeify God and disrobe the Gospel of its divinity. What he believed he preached out plainly, though seldom in a spirit offensive to those who occupied opposite positions. His words were direct, and his arguments pointed, whenever he endeavored to reach those of a different faith, and he would generally succeed in leaving a distinct impression, if not in fastening conviction. As a controversialist he was ever ready and efficient; and in several instances of a public character, he achieved a noble work for the truth of impartial benevolence. Familiar with the evidence related to prevalent theologies, and having suffered a bitter experience under the influence of a fearful religion...he was generally successful in seizing some prominent point to arrest the attention of the inquirer and fasten it upon the mind. He was not only an advocate of liberal theology, but a reformer, though not of an ultra school. He spoke out earnestly against the popular evils—war, slavery, intemperance and legal vengeance. He was friendly to benevolent and fraternizing organizations, and a member of the widely useful order of Odd Fellows. As a man he labored for humanity, and as a citizen he loved his country and institutions. Liberty in thought and

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speech, and life, and equality in civil rights and privileges, without respect to caste, color, creed, or exclusive tests, were themes often enlisting his enthusiasm, and sometimes, perhaps, leading him into the party, political arena. But if he ever erred here, it was because he had no public or private opinions to disguise, and none could suspect his love of liberty and patriotism.

But I must hasten to close. I might here allude to the many scenes and associations which so deeply endear, to this people, the memory of our brother. But while I stand before you, and endeavor to realize the depth of your emotions, in view of a bereavement so sudden and unforeseen, I cannot dwell upon the melancholy theme without allowing myself to be carried away in sympathy, and become faltering in speech. You will pardon me, then, if I pass on with only a few, brief reminiscences. Those of us who labor in the Gospel ministry may deeply feel what it is to have a strong co-laborer and brother struck down by our side, and can sympathize with those who have taken sweet counsel with him, and have been blessed by his love and devotion....

And in this hour of subduing sorrow, we may remember, with deepest condolences, the bereaved companion and children of that husband and father. While we cannot realize the depth of their affliction, we may sympathize with them in a measure, and commend them to the God of the widowed and fatherless. And to the same source of reconciliation we may direct those bereaved brothers of the deceased, who are still left behind as ministers of the new covenant, and the wide circle of friends who mourn not without hope. The time hastens when we must all part from these transient scenes, and with trembling lips pronounce the mournful farewell of earth. But the gate that closes upon all these scenes opens to those which are glorious and eternal; and the sigh, the sob, that breaks over the tomb, is but the prelude of everlasting songs in heaven.

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Transcribed on 1 Nov 2004 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY