

1888

The Unitarians in the United States

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Class of 1888

Subject

The Unitarians in the
United States.

The Unitarians in the United States.

The early settlers of New England were stern in life, and exhibited sterling character. The life they lived was one of the great factors to make them such a people. In their social, political and religious history the sterner element entered in very strongly. Born to endure hardships, inured to the cold blasts of winter, to the perils of pioneer life, and the continual struggle for a bare existence in a new country, they exhibited, naturally, and ~~optional~~ appearance which was not as pleasing as would otherwise have been if outward

Circumstances had been changed.

They were also of the strict Calvinistic school of Theological Teaching. This also had much to do with their social make up and every thing in their religious life.

The word of God was law to them, and there was no appeal from its authority. It was considered heresy for a man to set forth his own opinion concerning the teaching of the bible, and the interpretation put upon it by the church. He must take, without murmuring, whatever the church said was truth, and raise no question or objection concerning such teaching. "The church, state, court, members of society and the bible, all, in their view, was strongly impregnated with the strict Calvinism of the day. Strongly entrenched in

These ideas, fully persuaded of their truth; they never seemed to waver from them for a moment. It was from such stock, and surroundings that the Unitarians sprung -

----- One of the greater causes, which had more to do in causing the split, was the type of theology of the day. As we said, it was of the strict Calvinistic type. It was taught somewhat after this manner. In the eternity gone, God determined to create a universe. To make living ^{beings} in that universe, and among these living beings man - That He determined that man should fall as decreed the fall should take place.

That there was to be a saviour for the elect, of men, those whom God had chosen from all eternity to be saved, who should save them and

- Giving them to everlasting life and
 - joy - after they had come with
 - this world. The other portion of
 - the family of man, the number, says,
 - according to the decree, suffer to all
 - eternity for their sin. That the little
 - children if they did not happen to
 - belong to the elect must be damned
 - forever. That hell was paved with
 - with the skulls of infants who were
 - not a month old. That one of
 - the marks of the new birth was
 - to be willing to be damned
 - forever for the "ineffable glory of God."

This kind of teaching was to be
 - found almost everywhere, in the
 - New England states at least.

Another cause which
 - led to the rupture was that some
 - of the men began to think and
 - to read for themselves. They began
 - to form opinions and to discuss those

opinions at home and in public.

They studied the bible to find out what it taught, and some of them became convinced that the teachings of the day were wrong.

The spirit of search

work took hold of the people and

they began to question if the old teachings were right or not.

These searching men had no idea, at

that time of making any division

in the church. They preferred to

remain in the church where they

were rather than come out and leave

the old organic body. But their

theology had, in the mean time, changed

to the Arminian type, and teaching

of the whole redemptive scheme.

They, however, did not long stop at

this point, for the momentum which

they had acquired, carried them over

to Arianism & Socinianism, This led

to a denial of the divinity of Christ,
and the vicarious atonement made
for man by Him. This only
added fuel to the fire. The controversy
grew fiercer and fiercer, all the while.

In the year eighteen hundred
the church at Plymouth came near
being ruptured, because a "liberal"
was to be settled over it as pastor.

This was not the first church to
cut away from its old moorings to
take the first step in this movement
of church revolution. That was to be
and was taken by an Episcopal church
in Boston known then, and now as
"Kings Chapel". Then followed the
Plymouth church, and after that,
the "old South".

Another factor enters right
here which helped matters along, namely
the appointment of Henry Ware to the
chair of divinity at Harvard Divinity School.

Harvard College. — This was an orthodox school. Henry Ware was known to be an Arminian, and suspected of being an Arian. The words which passed between the two parties at this time were sharp and severe. — Into this storm a waft by — Dr Morse, dropped, like a thunderbolt, "calling them liberal heretics like Belsham of London; and that they had adopted his low views of Christ. That they had mutilated the New Testament, and were systematic hypocrites" Dr Channing replied. They reply unavail them, the heresy was out. Four years later Dr Channing put the finishing touch upon the whole by a sermon he preached in Baltimore. Soon after this in 1819 The Church broke up, split into, and swung apart never again to be reunited as a body in this world.

The Transcendental Movement...

scarcely had the strife with the Congregational churches ended, and the noise of their battle ceased, and the guns grown cold. Beyond this was heard among the Unitarians the low distant murmur of coming conflict. This murmur grew louder, clearer and more distinct, until it struck the body with fury.

The shock at first ^{was} severe, the leaders of the church were staggered, and the people stood amazed not knowing where to go. At length, however, came a reaction and the struggle began which was to last for some years.

This movement was caused to a great extent by the fearfulness which the new church had acquired in its struggle for its own organization, and in the break with

the old church - It was from
 strict Calvinism to Arminianism.
 Then to Arianism, and then to Socinianism
 - then onward to the end. The free-
 thought of the day, the critical study of
 the bible - the explaining away all of
 the supernatural of the bible, served
 as an incentive also to this movement.

Such statements, as that Moses
 had no hand in writing the Pentateuch
 that the Old Testament was full of error
 and also stuff not fit to be read, only
 carried them farther on beyond the bounds
 of reason and common sense.

"The miracles of the New Testament
 faded from the sacred page before
 these critics, like dew before the
 morning sun" The divinity of
 Christ was flatly denied, and he was
 said "to have been as much the
 son of Joseph as the son of
 Mary" Thus he was brought to

down by them to the very level
of any man.

The soul of man, by
these thinkers, ^{considered} was almost if
not quite divine. It was a great
factor in the study of all truth.

Resolutions were made to swear as
men's men, as when the prophets
forecast what was to come in the
history of the.

The intuitive
faculty of man was the only sure
guide in matters of this life, both as
to faith and morals. There can be
no doubt but that, together with all
of the above mentioned factors entering
into this country, the study of the
idealistic philosophies of Europe greatly
enriched and advanced the movement.

It reached its culminating
point in 1844 when the "Brook Farm"
at West Roxbury was purchased, and
this company went into partnership

in faring interests. "People laughed at
and wondered, how these pupils of
Plato and other would make it faring"
--- Idealism never did, and never can
as much as faring. ---

--- Out of the "Transcendental
movement" grew the Concord
school of philosophy. At the
first, and for some time its
tendency was wholly pantheistic
in nature and teaching. Ralph Waldo
Emerson, who was one of the leading
idealists, by his skill at last
turned these teachings from this
tendency, and made them theistic
in their nature -

. It was taught, and still is
that there is one Great Allpowerful
Being, knowing and seeing all things.
Holding all things by His hands.

That He made and holds these
for His glory; and that the work

of this being declare Him to
 be God. This school, the
 child of this movement has
 had a great deal to do in
 unifying and shaping the
 mind, heart and teaching of
 this denomination. There was
 no split in the church because
 of this, but an assimilation of
 one by the other, and the
 transferring of some of the
 teachings of the church to the
 school, and the teachings of
 the school to the church.

Teachings concerning Christ.

The old controversy as to the nature of Christ is not yet dead.

The Arians and Socinians still live and are at their work. They live in Unitarianism of today.

The Unitarian teaching of Christ's life, nature and work is no new thing. It is many centuries old, dating from an early period in the history of the Church; and will no doubt last as long as time lasts.

At the first, as a denomination, the Arian doctrine was predominant. Christ was higher than any other being, except God, in the universe. The angels and archangels were far below him in rank, but still he was not coordinate and equal with the Father. He was subordinate to God and formed no part of the Godhead.

This form of teaching did not long
 last. The tide set in still stronger, and
 they went over farther, and the Socinian
 view came to be adopted. — That Christ
 was simply a man, perfect in life
 and character. — That he was wonderfully
 endowed with the Holy Spirit, and that
 all of the divinity there was about
 him was the endowment of the Holy Spirit.
 He was as much a man as
 any other human being. That
 he was the son of Joseph, as much
 as he was the son of Mary. Conceived
 in the ordinary manner, and ~~therefore~~ ^{if he was thus} conceived
 because of this he could not be, and
 was not "God manifest in the flesh."

This view of Christ is the prevailing
 one of the denomination of today.

All of the work he did was
 done by the power which was upon
 him, and not in him. He raised the
 dead, healed the sick not by his own

authority, vested in himself; but by
 the power which had come upon
 him. They claim, then, the Bible is
 silent as to the divinity of Jesus; and
 that there is not one place, or
statement, which declares him to be
the eternal God, anywhere to be
found in the gospels. That the doctrine
 of Jesus' divinity grew up long after
 he taught, and finished his work, and
 went to heaven.

He himself to show us how to live; and
 by his life has declared it possible
 for any man to gain eternal life,
 by being obedient to God and keeping
 His holy law. A thing that so far
 as can be shown, has never been done
 by any human being.

The life of Jesus was a life of filial
 obedience ^{to God}, and love for his fellow and
 brother man. That he died; not
 as a sacrifice for sin, to make an

atonement for man, the innocent for the guilty; - but he attests the divinity of his life, and teachings, and works. In a word he was a martyr to what he had taught, and by dying for what he had so earnestly set forth shows that his teaching stands approved with the approval of God the Father.

The doctrine that Jesus was the God-man is not for a moment entertained by them.

Thus Christ was ^{not} of one and the same substance with the Father, that he has, said, will live forever. That he is a part of the God-head. That in nature he was the "divine human being, the God-man, God manifest in the flesh", that he alone has had and still has control of all things, that this power was not delegated to him, but his because he was in God. They can not and do not hold at all.

His teachings they regard with a great degree of faith. They call them the best moral precepts the world has ever known, or heard. Far surpassing anything that man has ever produced before Christ came as since he came. They say, he saw the need of man, as a moral being, and adapted his teaching to their needs. - This of course is true. That they are to be followed and taught as the best means of lifting the human family up to a life of higher and purer morality.

The resurrection of Jesus is regarded by them in a variety of forms. No two seem to think alike on this subject. One man sets the whole affair aside together with the angelic accompaniment, and represents Christ as rousing

hurried from a deep sleep, implying
 that there had been no death in his
 case. Another holds that the ^{risen}
 body of Christ, if it was such a body,
 became attenuated by degrees, during
 the forty days. He remained on the
 earth, attenuated, spiritualized and
 ready for the ascension. Thus
 attaining to the resurrection body.

Another regards the resurrection of
 Jesus as an example of usual laws
 and his appearance as illustrating the
 conditions under which the departed may
 manifest themselves to a spiritual body
 or to man either. His real body
 was stolen by the soldiers, or priests, or
 disciples and carried away. Thus
 repeating the old falsehood of the
 Jewish rulers. "The disciples came
 by night and stole him away while
 we slept". Another that the
 resurrection of Christ is the personal

impression, or conviction of his living presence on the minds of his disciples by his own spiritual manifestations and contact with them; and that there was no resurrection, or if there had been there could have been no ascension. This latter view is the one now held as a Church and to which "the most thoughtful and intelligent appear to incline".

The imagination and faith of the disciples created these visions which are written in the gospels, and in later legends; and that this grew out of a vivid fancy, a living faith, and a great reverence for their teacher and redeemer, and hope of his return to establish his Kingdom on the earth.

As with the resurrection of Jesus so also with ~~the~~^{of the} whole human family. Such in fact is doctrine of the.

resurrection of the dead. as taught by
 this denomination. Such teaching
 of this doctrine is nothing more
 or less than a plain denial of the
 resurrection in any form. It
 looks very decidedly as though is
 pointed more toward a
 spiritualism than toward any
 true and just exposition of the
 doctrine of the resurrection of the
 dead as taught in the scriptures.

They teach that God is one
 being. Their name indicates the doctrine
 they teach. That God is not to be
 divided into three. That the Son and
 holy Spirit do not belong to the Godhead.

That this one being is the creator,
 preserver, and upholder of all things.

That in and of himself, with no other
 being to consult with him. He made
 every thing which exists. He is a
 Father to men as Christ taught

His love for and toward us was manifested in Christ who came to show us how to live; and also in the many mercies which he bestows upon us each day. These all teach the Fatherhood of God.

The Bible is the revelation of God to man. It is that work in which God has set forth his will concerning man and given him many precepts with which to govern his life here in this world.

In the early days of the denomination they held quite a strict theory of inspiration which was somewhat *egiptic* in manner.

The men who wrote the bible did because moved by the Holy Spirit of God; and ~~that~~ what they ^{taught} was therefore correct even if it was in human language; later it became evident that this view was ^{being} superseded by

another which prevails today, to wit
 that the men who wrote the bible were
 no more inspired than saintly
 men of this day, and that their
 teaching are to be followed, as
 much as the teaching of the
 prophets and apostles. They claim
 that there are many contradictory
 statements in this book, but fail
 to point out one of them, even
 when teaching in the class room
 or in any other places. One has
 said that he would "as soon
 take his text from a part of some
 play in Shakespeare as from the bible
 for the one was about as good as
 the other". This theory of the
 inspiration and authority of the bible,
 that is, ^{that} the book is of no great value,
 only as a literary work, has been the
 natural and growth of the tendency
 to a rationalistic view of the scripture

and also a rationalistic manner
of criticism.

Sin. The doctrine of sin
taught by this denomination is
an ~~the~~ wise. Sin is not a
taint of the moral nature of
man, it does not inher in
the will, sin is the effect and
result of a bad example. In
their early history they taught
that man was a sinner, that his
moral nature was tainted, that
he must repent in order to be
saved. That he must be regenerated
and become a new creature so
he could have peace with God.
Such teaching as this has been
superseded by the above & following.
They wholly ignore their early
teaching of the doctrine of justification
& regeneration and claim that man

can if he will by his own act
 get rid of his tendency to do
 wrong, if he has such a tendency.
 In fact he has no such tendency
 and what is called sin is not
 sin at all, but simply, as some
 of these teach, a change through
 which man is passing, and the
 day will come when what is
 called sin will be found to be
 only a state through which man
 has passed from his savage
 condition to his high position as
 an intelligent human being.

Their Theory of the atonement
 is the ethical Theory. They teach
 that the atonement was in no sense
 whatever vicarious. That Jesus did
 not die for man, but he died
 to vindicate his teaching, and prove
 his divine mission, which was
 to teach man the way to God.

The atonement was not in his dying but in his living. By his life he became, by perfect obedience to God a perfect example, which if followed by man as Christ set forth, will result in his salvation here & hereafter. It was and is not possible for one to die for many, or the innocent for the guilty, and the many and guilty be saved by his death.

Punishment here and hereafter.

God loves man to well to do him any harm, or punish him for any thing he may do or has done. Thus those circumstances which to us seem adverse, in this life, are corrective, and meant to be only for our good. Some think that we get all the punishment, we ever

shall have, in this world. - Others
 that in the world to come we
 shall be punished for our
 wrong doing, but that that
 punishment will be of such a
 nature as to lead us to repentance
 and when we repent at any
 time in eternity God will pardon
 and save us bringing us to
 enjoy his presence and those things
 prepared for pardoned men -

In a word, - as a body they
 teach that all men will
 be finally saved; and come to enjoy
 eternal life, even if they do
 wrong here.

Rewards. They teach that those
 who live noble lives in this world
 will of course enjoy more of
 heaven than those who do
 wrong all their days and go into
 the other world not good men,

and in the future would seek
 after God, leave off their wrong
 doing, God will save them. I mean
 he says they have been punished
 long enough. The first class were
 pure and went to heaven to enjoy
 it. The second passed through
 purgatory, to burn out their sin
 can not enjoy as much, and
 his reward will not be as great
 as the good man. But he
 will receive a reward from God
 when he repents.

Some of the Representative Men.
 William E. Channing, D.D.

It may be safely stated
 that Dr. Channing was one of the
 chief men of the early days of
 the Unitarians. To him, as much
 if not more, than to any other
 one man they owe the
 dogmatic basis of their belief.

It was his brains which
 formulated them, and his
 voice gave them utterance, and
 caused them to take deep root in
 the minds of those whom he
 served as pastor. He was the
 first to sound the note of advance
 and to lead the people off from the
 congregational connection.

A man with a sensitive nature
 tender in heart, blameless in life,
 mild in disposition, firm in
 character, and elevated in thought.

Brought up in the strict Calvinistic faith taught in his boyhood days the doctrine of election, eternal predestination, and reprobation for the whole human family. That every man's fate - was sealed as soon as born, yea even before that event, from all eternity.

"His whole nature," says one, "rebelled against these teachings when he began to think upon them"

"When a boy he heard a sermon on the Terrors of the Law,[†] which to him seemed to wrap the whole world in gloom, and if true no one ought ever to laugh again, but seeing his father apparently unmoved by the sermon he thought ~~that~~ there could not be much truth to the matter, and soon became convinced that the whole thing was unreal and untrue."

There are elements entering into
 his life - which tend to modify
 his belief; somewhat in God,
 Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin and
 the future - would he grow up
 amid the very best surroundings
 he knew nothing of the struggle
 that many a man has with
 usury. His life's stream was
 placid and serene as could well
 be. From this kind of life
 came his teachings such as
 would be characteristic of the
 man so surrounded. No deep
 conviction for sin such a man
 feel. He had not experienced the
 better of such a life, nor the
 joy which comes, to a soul,
 from the sense of pardon.
 Even for all of this he
 was deeply interested in the
 welfare of his fellow men.

and entered with great zeal into any scheme which was sure of helping man. Out of his love for man grew his theology, and source of his most distinct teaching. "The dignity and divinity of human nature" was a theme on which he dwelt a great deal.

In fact this topic seemed to be the centre of the "circle radiating from which he reached out to uphold right and attack wrong."

A man of great influence, giving his aid in support of many a reform for the benefit of those whom he saw needed help, and those with whom he mingled. An Arian in ~~the~~ theology and teaching -

Theodore Parker - was
 another of their leading men -
 Almost exactly opposite in nature
 and disposition - & in behavior -
 He was left his impress as
 deeply as any other man upon
 the denomination. The younger
 of eleven children, made to study
 hard when a boy carefully trained
 in religious things by his mother,
 when his mind was young and
 receptive. He tells how, when a
 boy of eight years, his father
 made him give his boyish
 analysis "Plutarch's Cicero," before
 he was allowed to read further in
 the book. He was not so critical
 a scholar as many in school
 with him. But he had stored
 his mind with much useful
 knowledge which was always
 fresh, and always at his

Command. His nature was strong and positive. He seemed to be uncompromising in argument and sometimes seemed scornful and intolerant to his opponents.

"Independent of consequences, confident in assertion, sharp in denouncing the folly of those who did not see and think as he saw and thought on theological and moral questions." Still he was willing for all to have the right to speak as they thought. He entered heart and soul into the contest for every great moral reform. He ceased not to plead and argue for any and all reforms for man, until he died.

In his religious teaching he was exceedingly dogmatic. He would state his proposition in

such a way as if one had only
 to hear and at once accept the
 view which he set forth. "Where
 some men would have trembled
 he was ardent and confident"

Immortality with him was not
 a dream but a fact to be believed
 As with other truths so with
 God's love to man we were not
 to wait for it but take it, not
 with fear and trembling, but to embrace
 and have as man's rightful
 possession.

His Theory of Christianity and of
 the judgment of men was far from
 being perfect. It was his own.
 There was, as he taught, judgment only
 in this world, in the world to come
 all men would be saved, and
 that Christianity was simply ethical
 in nature. He seemed to himself
 to think he had the truth and

the man who did not think
 out believe as he did was wrong
 entirely wrong. He has left his
 personality an acc of his work.
 says one of his friends. "His life
 came to an end while in his
 prime. A nature strong like his,
 always active, - pushing into the
 forefront of the conflict, standing
 at the front of his denomination
 as the time he lived. Throwing his
 whole soul into his work, to which
 he felt himself called, must give
 way under the strain before the
 work was done at least so it
 seemed"

Henry W. Bellows

If Dr. Channing gave the Unitarian this early theology, and inspired them with a love for the critical study of the Bible. If he, more than any other man, gave them about all of the dogmatics they have had; and if Dr. Parker inspired them with a desire to seek a life soon up if he was one of the greatest debaters they had his mind richly stored with useful information which was always at hand ready for any emergency. If these two these two men figured largely in the literary work of the denomination. They did not give the church any organization. What they were in the line of teaching. Dr. Bellows was in organizing

Dr Bellows was a man of broad education, well skilled in the arts of diplomacy, knowing how to control, and to command men. He was able to bring this heterogeneous mass into form and organic relations. A man who was a good preacher, eloquent in his manner of speaking. One who read and understood men, a man who wanted to be popular putting forth every effort to gain such an end, and he gained that end.

Of course such a man must be able not only to speak and control, and command but to utilize his forces to the best advantage, and to organize them for the best work possible.

The Militarists are second to Dr Bellows than any other man among them. Joe. This

organization as a body. He conceived
 the idea of a national convention
 and association, sent out the
 call for such a meeting, and
 the people came. They organized
 themselves into a conspiracy
 and met yearly at Saratoga.

But with all of his rare
 attainments, for he had them
 with all of his power as a
 preacher, for he was a ready
 speaker even eloquent at times.

It would seem from what
 could be gathered from
 various sources, that he was
 commander-in-chief of the
 whole body, and they as a
 body obeyed him as willingly
 as soldiers obey their
 commander. In a word

he was Pope of the Unitarians
 of the United States.

Another of the men who figured largely in the early, and in fact the later, history also was Ezra S. Garrison. Born of the old Puritan stock thoroughly indoctrinated into the most severe forms of Calvinistic teaching of his early days, taught that it of more importance to obey "his duties" than come to you, than to love your friend, and God, to serve Him and them through fear and not love was the highest attainment possible for man.

While a boy the great controversy was going on. Of course he was more or less influenced by it. As he heard what was being said on either side.

Being away from home at school at Andover, to fit for college, he came into close

contact with the thought then
stirring the church.

Having finished his preparatory work
he entered Harvard College and

graduated four years later with
honors. Here in college life,

he saw more directly what

the movement was, his Calvinistic
teaching ~~and~~ training began to be

questioned soon doubted, and

finally abandoned. He also

graduated from Harvard Divinity

school, and was soon called to

be assistant pastor, with Dr

Channing, of the Federal St. Church.

It was here that he made himself

felt as one of the leading

men of his day in his church.

He would do things to himself

careful, yet not too much so, in

all of his doing and teaching.

"Setting forth, only what says on

"seemed to him to be the thrust of God, in its clearest light".

As a writer he was clear, terse, sharp, yet not severe, as an organizer he was one of the leaders, and always knew what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

As a preacher dignified simple plain pointed, As a friend always constant, as a man in society always interested in that which would benefit his fellow man.

As a Theologian clear, on his side, Arian in theory never ranking Christ ~~above~~ as a mere man, but always considering him greater greater and ~~above~~ the angels, but not equal to God, or of the same substance as God, but of like essence and nature as God. Says one - "He has left

his thoughts upon the chuch
 of his choice. and his
 name is held in grateful
 remembrance by those who
 knew him for the work
 he did while he lived.

Institution under the control
of the Unitarians.

Harvard University is now one
of their schools. It has had for
years and still has a great
influence on them as a people.
From it have gone forth
some of their strongest men
who have had a hand in
moulding the people with
whom they associated and whom
they taught.

In 1825 they founded a
publishing house, and have ever
since that time sent out great
quantities of literature, setting forth
their peculiar teachings as a
church. This literature has to
a great extent been given away.

They also publish nearly all, if not
quite, of their own works. They
have also a publishing department

at Chicago from which they send out much of their printed matter, and also some of their periodicals. They publish the "Unitarian Review" "Christian Register" and some other works of a like nature ^{to} which are the mouth pieces of the denomination today.

It is a fact, worthy of note that they have grown very slowly as a denomination. They are but a little larger now than they were when the split occurred in 1819 when they became a distinct sect. Why they have not grown faster is not easy to say. It may be because they have not had the true mission spirit of a church. (They have one missionary in Japan). It may be

because they have worshipped at the shrine of culture star as the altar of God. or because they have failed to preach directly to men's hearts. and thus cause them to feel the force of real need of divine truth and help: It may be the whole of these things combined ^{together} with their ideas of Christ, God the Bible sin salvation which stand in the way of a vigorous growth. They have not yet passed much beyond the New England states. There are, however, a few societies scattered here and there ~~over~~ ⁱⁿ most of the state.

They have not affected badly at all the other denominations, only in so far as to modify some of the old ways of putting things. They number today only about thirty-five thousand members in ^{of} the United States.