

[Binghamton, Broome Co. NY]

BINGHAMTON, April 19, 1868

To the Editor of the Ambassador:

The Universalist church in this place was burned last night. The religious home of our people here, and the only gathering place of Liberalism in Binghamton and vicinity, is now a mass of smouldering ruins. The probabilities are that it was the work of an incendiary, and it is undoubtedly true that many who are thronging to the various churches in the place to-day are not sympathizing with the few Liberals in their regret at the loss of their house of worship. Orthodoxy has thus far had almost undisputed possession of an extensive field in this section, and it has grown to think that its right is indisputable.

A year and a half ago the few Unitarians, and a number of Spiritualists united with a part of the Universalists here in the establishment of a Liberal Christian Society. Meetings were kept up for a year, but the effort proved a failure for the time being, at least. But it disclosed the cheering fact that there are many minds of intelligence and culture—and many noble spirits who are longing for something larger and freer than they find in other churches. While with many there is a vague desire for something more expansive than they know how to define to themselves, these two classes comprise an element which forms no small proportion of our population. Then we have large numbers who have no special attractions anywhere and no positive convictions on religious subjects—only a *disbelief* of all that is narrow, sectarian and illiberal. In addition to these there are multitudes of young people and children growing up that are not gathered into any fold, and have no religious home; the poor, who need to be taken kindly by the hand and a religious home opened to them, and those who are not poor, nor ignorant, nor degraded, but who would immediately form an interesting accession to our members; for the young, if left unbiased, become a promising soil in which to sow the seeds of a beautiful faith, which has for its basis the Fatherhood of God, the nobility of human nature, and the brotherhood of the race.

Now what will the friends of Liberal sentiments in this place do? Since last fall our church has been closed, with the exception of an occasional Sunday's service. I have had but little acquaintance with those who worshipped there. When I came to Binghamton, two years ago, I was in feeble health—unable to engage in public duties, or even to extend acquaintance; and to be a silent witness of scenes and events was all that was possible to me. But I gained certain impressions and arrived at certain conclusions, and have waited for time to demonstrate their truth. Experience and observation have convinced me that wherever there is

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earnestness, reality and devotion on the part of Universalists and Unitarians, they will work, and they will sacrifice, and they will succeed; but where there is a disposition to compromise, or where there is indifference, if they have sailed out of the smoother current of a popular theology for a while, they soon "drift" back into the current, and are known no more as those who are set for the defence [sic] of truth, and having foregone their most precious convictions, feel henceforth their inefficiency, and occasionally sigh as they review the past.

Were there on the part of those who really are liberal in this vicinity, the zeal and ardor, the self-sacrifice and devotion, and the joy and pride in the most noble and reverent sentiments that have blessed humanity, there would be no difficulty about unity. Union would be strength, strength would be put forth in effort, such effort as should win position, command recognition, accomplish a great and a needed work in our community in ways which, at some future time, I will try and indicate.

The few times I have addressed the people here they have given me a favorable impression of their intelligence and sincerity. And I cannot but hope and believe that although their church is now in ashes, as a result of a spirit which is antagonistic to truth and progress, there is strength, and zeal, and self-respect enough to unite and harmonize them, and to make this the opportunity for a new effort, which shall lay a broad and deep foundation to build a substantial Society upon which shall make itself known, felt and respected, and bbe the school of a spiritual growth and religious life, beyond what has heretofore been realized.

Other facts or events may from time to time call forth farther [sic] communications from me.

L.[Lydia] A. Jenkins

The Ambassador, New York NY, Sat. 2 May 1868
[a weekly Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 19 Oct 2006 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY