

AN UNIQUE CHURCH.

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The Unitarian Guild-House in Chattanooga.

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A Church Home, With the Home First—Where Home Pursuits Are Allowable.

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OUR YOUNGEST RELIGIOUS SOCIETY.

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Something About Unitarianism as Related by a Unitarian—Principles of the Unitarian Church Briefly Set Forth—The Growth of the All Souls Congregation in Chattanooga—The First Unitarian House of Worship Ever Built in the State.

Written for the Chattanooga Times.

The approaching dedication of All Souls Church calls special attention to the youngest religious organization of this city. This is the first Unitarian house of worship ever built in Tennessee, and one of a half dozen found south of the Ohio. Six years ago missionary services were held for a month by Rev. G. L. Chaney of Atlanta, and a similar experiment tried two years later. In January 1889, the American Unitarian Association authorized Rev. E. D. Towle, of Boston, to remain here until May in order to make a more thorough survey of the field. His favorable report resulted in his return in October, 1889, since which time the movement has certainly gained a right to be classed as one of the permanent religious factors in the community.

Unitarianism is of course a new thing in the South, but it has been familiar to the most cultivated classes of New England for two generations. In the early part of this century, under the leadership of Channing, 100 of the oldest and strongest churches planted by the Puritans broke loose from their theological moorings. The defection occurred concerning

the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ's nature and wisdom. The Bible was the arsenal from which the leaders brought their weapons of warfare equally with their opponents. Whether the laurels of success rested upon the brows of the orthodox or heterodox theologians in these combats, may be still a disputed question. There so-called heretics took their stand with Arius, Bruno, Milton and the long list of equally independent souls who from earliest times have claimed a right to think for themselves. They fought well, but those who inherit their names have chosen a different battle-ground and take little interest in any warfare of texts. Emerson—himself in early life a Unitarian minister—has taught America that the soul of man is the grandest of revelations.

The following affirmations, so beautifully stated by W. C. Gannett, have commanded widespread attention and may be of interest to our readers:

UNITARIANS ASSERT:

The naturalness of religion to the human soul.

The supremacy of character above belief in religion.

The dignity as against the depravity of human nature.

They worship the One-in-All, and name that one "Our Father."

They trust the universe as beautiful, beneficent, unswerving order; to know whose laws is liberty and stronger life.

They revere Jesus as the greatest of the historic prophets of religion.

They honor the Bible, and all Bibles, so are as each accords with reason and right.

They rejoice in the hope of immortality.

They believe that all things work together for good; that no good thing is failure and no evil thing success; and that no evil can befall a good man, whether he be alive or dead.

And they believe that we ought to join hands and joyfully work to make the good things better, and the worst good, deeming nothing good for ourselves that is not good for all.

They trust free thought, and trust it everywhere; they only fear thought bound.

Therefore their beliefs are still widening and growing, as science, history and life, reveal new truth; while their increasing emphasis is still on ethics and the Great Faith to which ethics leads—Faith in the moral order of the universe, faith in all ruling righteousness.

All names that divide “religion” are to them of comparatively little consequence. Whoever loves truth and lives it, is, in a broad sense, of their religious fellowship; whoever loves it and lives it better than themselves, is their teacher, whatever church or age he may belong to. So their church is wide, their teachings many, and their holy writings large.

Unitarianism has been intimately associated with all that is best in American literature. Its thought constitutes the very fibre of the writings of Bryant, Whitier, Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell and Holmes. That Unitarians are the Protestants of Protestants is evident from the tracing of the lineage of more than one of these writers back to the little band of pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock.

Thomas Jefferson predicted that in forty years from his time there would hardly be any other faith in America among the educated than the Unitarian. Perhaps the failure of this prophecy is due as much to an instinctive dislike to proselyting as to anything else, although men and women of kindred thought are always welcome.

The humanitarian movements of the day find especially fit channels in the Unitarian Church. Its traditional interest in all broad educational and philanthropic work has ever been its glory. Its emphasis upon the worth of human nature is finding expression in attempts to meet the many needs of the modern man, whether of body, mind or soul.

THE CHATTANOOGA CHURCH BUILDING.

Perhaps the building the Chattanooga Unitarians are erecting upon Houston street, near McCallie avenue, is as satisfactory an exponent of this aim as any to be found. A single glance at the structure discloses the fact that it is to be a church home, with the home first. The parish of guild house fronting as it does upon the street, is architecturally more important than the church proper. The guild house is a two-story building, besides containing in the attic space for a hall forty feet square, to be finished off when needed. The first story, with two hand-

some arches, is of Kentucky free stone, the second of shingles.

The hall into which entrance is had from the tiles porch is a commodious room in itself. At the right is the infant class room; at the left is the ladies parlor, separated from the auditorium by rolling shutters, and capable of adding to it a seating capacity of 150.

Upstairs are the pastor’s cheerful study, a dining room 40x26 feet, to serve also as play room and gymnasium for the children, kitchen, pantry and ladies cloak room. Whatever pursuits are allowable beneath the home roof will be sanctioned here. Man’s physical, social and intellectual needs will be provided for, the last by study classes in history, poetry, science, and by a reading room, for which one generous friend has already promised half a dozen magazines. A fine bust of Theodore Parker, the gift of All Souls Church, of Chicago, to All Souls Church, Chattanooga, only awaits the completion of the building to be properly placed upon its pedestal. For this gift the church here is especially indebted to Rev. J. L. Jones, who, in a letter to Mr. Towle, writes “my heart beats warm toward Chattanooga. Strange as it may seem I have a home feeling towards it. There I spent the happiest, and at the same time the most intense months of my soldier life. I should be glad to touch elbows with you and your church.”

The idea of a two-story guild-house in front and a one-story auditorium in the rear—less expensive but substantially constructed—is original with the building committee, and judging from the conveniences and amount of room secured, would seem to commend itself to societies desiring to invest their moderate means in a manner to do the most good. The auditorium has a bowled floor and is finished into the roof. It will seat 300. It is understood that it will be rented as occasion may offer for lectures, thus providing the city with a needed hall of this [1g]. The guild-house will be kept constantly open. In time it is to be furnished in as attractive a manner as any of the city’s best houses. Here all strangers will be welcome. The saloons, always open and inviting, are evidently to have a rival in a church whose doors are never barred. UNITARIAN.