The closing speech was made by Rev. Dr. Bellows of New York, on "The True Denominational Spirit, as a Means of overcoming the Obstacles in the way of our assuming a leading Position in the Church of this Country." —

Dr. Bellows spoke as follows:

I speak of the true denominational spirit to be cultivated by Unitarians.

"We have commonly denied, and I think with a true instinct, that we are a sect, although having an organization which doubtless gives us the usual sectarian appearance. But if we have had sectarians among us, it is still true that we have not been, as a body, characterized by a sectarian spirit. Had we possessed that spirit, we should have done a much more showy work; for sectarianism is zealous, effectual, persevering, confident, and popular; but it is also narrow, exclusive, partial, imperfect, and short-lived. It deepens its channel, drains a large section of country, and becomes a broad river; but it stands separated by great mountain barriers from all other waters, and never grows to an ocean connecting the great continents, and flowing into the common circulation of the globe. "We have aimed, not so much at advancing our own body, as at advancing Christendom; not at achieving sectarian triumphs, but moving forward the theology and Christian thought of the whole world. Our ambition has been a noble one, — to be and to represent, not a section of Christendom, but the whole body, — to assume the wide dominion, claimed by the Roman Church, on true and more tenable grounds, — in short, to be the new Catholic Church, including all Christian bodies in our charity and fellowship, and stoutly maintaining the identity and unity of the Church Universal. How to unite: practical organization and a lively zeal with the toleration, flexibility, freedom, hope, and humble waiting on providence, which our principles demand, is our difficult and pressing problem. It is possible to be a denomination, a body united within itself, wise in plans, zealous in labour, eager in propaganda, fertile in expedients, creative in forms, and still avoid a sectarian temper, and a narrow, self-enclosing, excluding creed.
and policy? I believe that it is; that we may and ought to cherish a denominational spirit, while we discourage and disown a sectarian attitude and temper.

"We are a denomination. Providence has forced us into an advanced position,—a position which, by theological affirmations and denials, separates us from Christendom, though it does not separate Christendom from us. We are cut off by our Christian brethren from communion and fellowship with them; but we maintain, in disregard of their fences, that we occupy the common Christian domain, and are tilling fields which they will presently occupy and thank us for redeeming to their use. We claim to be laboring and suffering in a cause common to Christendom, and accept our seemingly isolated and enclosed denominational position as a post of vantage,—an advanced post, mistaken for an enemy's, but in reality one which is pioneering the way the main army is to pursue. It is the special duties belonging to us as a body unwillingly forced into a separate existence, which constitute our denominational responsibilities. What can we do to make our pioneer labors more efficient, how broaden and smooth the road for our successors, how persuade more of those who half sympathize with our labors to give us a full-hearted support and co-operation?"

"Up to this time, our denominational existence and prosperity have been weakened by the disintegrating power of the yet unharmonized elements that compose our liberal body. Three different schools have developed themselves most naturally and honestly among us,—the Progressives, the Hold-fasts, and the Reactionaries,—the philosophic, the historical, and the pietistic Unitarians,—those who are looking for light to the future, those who are satisfied with the light around them, and those who are looking for light from the past. Each of these schools is genuine, and represents an indispensable element of our true life; but up to this time their independent action has been fatal to denominational energy. For, first, the Progressives, feeling and maintaining that our cause is thoroughly in the spirit of the age, have been disposed to throw it utterly upon the current of the times, and trust it to the generous impulses and struggling instincts of humanity. The large and hopeful minds in our body have been so confident that..."
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that this school stands for an indispensable element in our denominational power, when it shall presently develop itself. Meanwhile, however, it is our weakest side, proclaiming our fears and exhausted resources, holding up flags of truce, and encouraging the enemy to think we intend to surrender. Moreover, it probably is our most deceptive and deleterious side, since it embodies an attitude least natural and most fatiguing, and one which is sure to disappoint those who expect any Orthodox fruits from it. The tree has been pretty well shaken, and has not yet yielded a single windfall to those who seemed to see our fairest fruits hanging over their side of the wall. We are, confident that the Reactionaries have reached their philosophy without losing fidelity to their own sun, and must now swing into closer neighborhood to their sister planets.

"Thus we have our three elements, each of them, for different reasons, acting diabolically for the time upon our denominational prosperity. First, the Progressives and philosophers, who won't work denominationally, because they think it unnecessary, not believing in organization, and thinking the world only a spirtal gravitation. Second, the Hold-fasts and historical Unitarians, who will only work in their own technical way, with one cold shoulder towards the Progressives and another towards the Reactionaries, still, dogged, provincial, and with a disposition to give the grip of despair and death to their heritage of Faith. Third, the Reactionaries, disgusted with the philosophers, and with no hope in the Hold-fasts, speaking a foolishness which deceives nobody, and seeking to reanimate old phraseology and old methods in a way which is sadly discouraging to those who think the dead should be left to bury their dead, whilst we go and preach the Gospel.

"Now, to overcome the obstacles in the way of our taking a leading position in the Church of this country, these three elements must be harmonized and united. It must be seen and felt that they form the three natural and grand dimensions of the body, and that they must learn to tolerate, respect, and love each other. Intellect, heart, and will -- speculation, memory, and action -- the future, the past, and the present, are to be represented and united in this, as in every vital, spiritual body. We may thank
the great instincts which have maintained the existence of those elements, in our denomination, even in their struggling and mutually confounding shapes. Where should we have been to-day, if the whole army had marched in any one of its three corps! We owe it to the Progressives that our denomination has been kept broad and large and in sympathy with the times, that our wings have been strong and bold; to the Hold-fasts, that it has not grown all wings, without body or legs; — that our denomination has retained shape and organization, however rudimentary, and now presents a skeleton regiment of faithful and well-drilled officers, waiting only to be filled up with men drawn from the people; to the Reactionaries, that we have not lost our relations to the rest of Christendom, our filiation to the past, and our right to claim the heritage of religious experience, symbolic truth, and sacred prestige delivered down by the Christian generations gone to their reverent successors.

"And now, to take our true position and do our grand work, we must have all these three elements in still larger measure, and in conscious harmony; — a faith not only in the liberal tendencies of the Church, but also in the religious tendencies of the world, with a confidence that the future is ours, which will keep us broad, open, and brave; — a faith in ourselves, as the representatives of an historical necessity, a providential body, separated for a special work, having universal relations, which will give us shape and order, vigor and 'edge,' organic and positive existence; and so create the germinal beginning of a Protestantism, carried out so thoroughly that it perfects itself in an affirmative-ness in which all negations are 'frightened;' and a faith in the divine and providential character of the past history of our religion, a sympathy with the actual Church which shall teach us respectful appreciation of its opinions and symbols, and enable the rich experience, the holy union, the gnostic fragrance, the precious significant traditions of the historic Church, (the real organic body of Christ, the living vine full of Christ’s blood, the line of true apostolic succession, aside from which no church life is possible,) to pour themselves into our veins.

"The true denominational spirit will teach us how to unite these three elements — honest, natural, necessary, each and all — in one vital whole. We need larger justices done, by the Hold-fasts and the Reactionaries, to the temper and mind of the Progressives. Let their nature and tendency be freely admitted to be rationalistic, philosophic, optimistic, pantheistic, fatalistic, and, so far dangerous, but still Christian in spirit and intent. So only could freedom of inquiry, so only the rights of the intellect and the aspirations of the soul, be vindicated. So only could a mountain-weight of discouraging, ethical, dry, and merely logical conclusions, enthrall in e occupations and creeds, and intrude in custom and years, be overthrown and pulverized. It is a justly justice done to the world, as God’s world, to human nature; as God’s image, to history, as God’s chariot, to external nature, as the garment we see God by; to society, commerce, life, as divine products and instruments, that has exaggerated itself in these tendencies. It must not be concealed, that we have got back the immediate presence, the imminent spirit, the Holy Ghost, — which had seemingly been grieved out of our creed, — by means of this philosophy, and what we will of it, the greatest and most thriving end of our rod that is full of transcendent sap. Nay, this philosophy, which threatened to dissipate and destroy us, distancings us hopelessly from Christendom, is perhaps the closest tie we have to other living Christian bodies, and the medium of the easiest communication with them, since the most oppositional-actively of it, translated by philosophic Christian theology from both sides into a Platonic language, common to all. Certainly many must have ceased to be Christians at all, nay, must have placed themselves in direct opposition to Christianity, as a system of thought, had they not found in this philosophy, so easily sliding into pantheism, a means of reconciling faith and philosophy, authority and freedom. But notwithstanding the most hearty confiscations to the merit of the Progressives and their influence, it is certain that they furnish such very poor materials for a practical and working faith, very few beams and rafters for a Church. People already Christianized and churched may find enlargement and elevation in this school. Sweet dreamers, charming poets, fine scholars may flourish on this thin soil and on this
rare atmosphere. But the common people cannot find their bread, nor their raiment, nor their rest here. There is nothing positive, fixed, visible; nothing commanding, arresting, and direct; nothing tender, domestic, familiar. All is generalization, impersonality, and vagueness. The critical and pressing facts of personal sin, individual weakness, and want, are ignored by this grand philosophy, and human nature cries out from the midst of it, 'I freeze, I tremble, I faint.'

"And here ought to come in the Hold-fasts, with their positive and sharply-defined ethics and theology, offering moulds to the vague thoughts which the Progressives have aroused; tying up to the stall and feeding the wild creatures that forget that philosophy has a sharp winter that yields no food, as well as a balmy summer with fruit on every bush; supplying working apparatus and handy machinery—thoughts, reasonings, and methods, level to the ordinary and sound understanding,—and hardening into substance and shape the fluid and wandering notions of the liberal body. When the vigorous, practical understanding, the practised skill in organization, of the conservative Unitarians, who so fearlessly, learnedly, and bravely—yes, and so successfully,—led the old battle for a rational creed, and carried off and established so many free churches in Massachusetts, shall arouse itself to its old courage and zeal,—shall call the new philosophy to sharp account, receive its inspiration while it corrects its vagueness, acknowledge and accept its magnificent force, while it insists upon confining it within a working channel and directing it upon the wheels of a specific church institution; we shall have a new and glorious denominational revival. At present, the Hold-fasts are saying, 'We see no prospect of doing anything; we have no visible future. But we will be faithful to our convictions; we can set our teeth, stiffen our joints, and die Unitarians. God may call for this testimony, which is all we can offer. He perhaps will, hereafter, turn our faithfulness to his own account, and, if he do not, at the worst, it shall not be our fault.' It is a noble fidelity. But why this despair? Why not say, and learn to think, that Unitarianism as such did not, at the start, embrace all the elements necessary to become a popular, and if not a popular, then not a catholic and universal faith! Why not acknowledge that ethical, positive, and critical qualities prevailed fatally in historic Unitarianism, and that, in spite of its undeniable truth, its equally undeniable partiality,—its want of passion, power, all-inclusive experience, of faith in the great imponderable and inscrutable elements in the life, social, ecclesiastical, and individual,—it was, with all its fine working machinery and admirable hereditary order, incapable of propagating its existence beyond two generations? Still, it has a quality which no other part of our body possesses,—a formative, systematizing, ordering faculty. It is solid and impregnable; and it has fairly commenced that coral island in the midst of the ocean of modern agitation and unrest, which is to become a continent in time.

"But neither Progressives nor Hold-fasts can give us a leading position in the Church of this country, without the aid of the instinct and ideas imparted by the Reactionaries. This school is unwilling to be cut off from the Church Universal. It refuses to see only folly and mistake, superstition and ignorance, in the creed of the past and in the formulas of living Christendom. It wisely maintains that the dogmas of the Church have not been absurdities of capricious, and that the great outlines of the Catholic or Universal Church,—the doctrines which have won the heart, touched the conscience, and elevated the life of ages,—cannot but contain, and roughly at least shape faith, the essential and permanent truths of the Gospel. It unite, therefore, in none of the sweeping charges of fanaticism, irrationality, absurdity, which have too often disgraced our criticism of Christendom. It deifies all hostility to, or rivalry with, Orthodoxy. It claims that the nurture of our branch is derived from its connection with the main vein of which it claims to be only the latest growth; and instead of desiring to be cut off and planted in fresh soil, it becomes every section and knot and twist and turn of the dear and sacred stock which bears it, and tastes in its own sap a fragrance and exquisite distillation of juices which nothing less than the Christian life of ages could have communicated to the heavenly plant. It understands that a religion cannot be grown once a century, and a Church built every thousand years. It despises the shallow talk about the Church of the past and the Church of the future, the old
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Church and the new Church, the religion of our ancestors and our religion. It knows nothing of a church, and a religion, but only the Church, and the religion. The old Church renewed, the one religion revived, is its hope and its aim. It would just as soon think of refashioning society from its foundations, as of rebuilding the Church from its cornerstone, or recasting religion from its clay. And in all this, the Reactionaries announce and represent precious, indispensable, urgent truth, too often sadly overlooked and superciliously ignored by the Progressives, and only imperfectly understood and felt by the Hold-fasts. But this is in part due to the offensive and indiscriminate way in which the Reactionaries urge their ideas, and to the disposition they show to pay more attention to the joint than they make with the old stock, than to the growth they reach afterwards. They have forgotten that our main virtue and mission lie in the change we produce in the general direction and character of the Church Universal; that ours is a providential era of reformation, a crisis and juncture in the common Christian life of the world; and that, while we determinedly keep up our vital connection and identity with the whole past, we must insist upon an ecclesiastical metempsychosis. The vine demands a new trellis; the old truth claims a fresh expression; the Church, a thorough rehabilitation. Tenderly, reverently, with careful preservation of every sound part, of every still significant phrase and symbol and form, ought this renewal to be made. But made it must be; and not without offence, not without controversy, not without much passionate earnestness and Protestant vigor, can it be made. There must not, therefore, be too good an understanding, too tender a billing and cooing between the liberals and the leaders of the Established Orthodoxy, if anything radically useful is to be effected.

Again, we have tenderness to the past, and solicitude ingrafting of the liberal shoot into the parent vine; but unhappily it is usually connected with timidity of progress and disparagement of reason and human nature.

Again, we have organization, strenuous and energetic, but too prosaic and unimpassioned, too spectral and colorless, too much afraid both of the new and of the old, of memory and of imagination, to satisfy the wants of the people, or to captivate their religious affections and spiritual passions. We have consequently made no significant and encouraging mark upon the country up to this time as a Church, whatever we may have done as a principle, a sentiment, or a protest. Either of the other branches of the liberal body, Universalism or Christianism, has succeeded better than we in winning the popular heart, as a Church; for the reason that passion and organization will always outstrip, and ought to outrun, thinking. But neither of these can carry the country. No thin, one idea system, no mere recital on old extravagances, no mere embodiment of a temporary phase of political and social life, no lower-class, nor middle-class, nor upper-class adaptation of faith, can carry the country. Nothing short of a faith broad as humanity, rich as history, comprehensive as society, and capable of meeting and unifying all political, social, and national circumstances, will take the leading place in the Church of this country. We must look for, other allies than the outlaws and recidivists of Christendom, cordial as is the welcome and brotherhood we have
with them. Our allies are not sects; but minds and hearts everywhere that acknowledge God and Christ in history and in the Church, and are resolved to lay liberty and life at their feet, because they believe God and Christ the most devoted friends of liberty of thought and of a living faith.

No hope is more futile than the expectation of building the mere humanitarian and philanthropic instincts and passions of the age into a church, or a substitute for a church. The honest zeal to realize political equality, the honest indignation at the arrogance and authority of privilege, the general desire to comfort, heal, elevate, which are distinctive of our age, although continually asserted to be based on religious convictions, and to be derived from religious aspirations, are really ideas not in or from the region of divine faith, but in and on the plane of use, of morality, of economy. Political and social philanthropy, and Christian brotherly love, are not even similar ideas; for the most earnest, zealous, and hearty political and social reformers are often painfully deficient in, and ignorant of, the whole spirit and conduct of the second commandment. There is a great reason for saying that the self-dependent and democratic temper of the times is highly unfavorable to the sense of God, the habit of worship, and the recognition of man's need of Christ. We are to hail the philanthropy of the times as beautiful, hopeful, and praiseworthy on its own independent grounds, but not as the matrix or the product of faith; — on the contrary, as often simulating it, or deceiving those who receive and represent it, as if it were the substance of religion, which it is more and more proving itself every day not to be. Nor is the half-poetic, half-prosaic attempt and promise to convert the soul into an altar, nature into a Christian temple, and life into perpetual worship, entitled to any better confidence, when offered as a substitute for positive religious institutions, customs, habits, and symbols. When experience becomes the only schoolmaster, and stars and trees take the place of primers and spelling-books, the woods may become our only temples and the leaves our only Bible. But while the positive and professional secular education of man continues to be thought more and more necessary, his religious education will

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hardly be abandoned to instinct and accident. Too long have we been drifting at the mercy of general principles, carried wherever a bold generalization, a generous abstraction might lead. We have been forced by a mereless logic based on assumptions to concede silly god, a pernicious conclusion, more anxious to be consistent than to be sane and sensible. The only thing in which man is really strong is in common sense; and when in his pride he affects to have better sources of guidance than this, he invariably philosophizes himself into absurdity. The healthy and balanced mind clearly delines all charges of inconsistency, so long as common sense justifies its separate, and contending assertions. It may not see how the truths it adopts are capable of harmony, but it does not doubt that they are both truths for all that. When a principle leads to a practical absurdity, it is no more to be followed than a good road when it brings up against a dead wall or ends in a bog. Unitarians have, continually impelled and lost their cause, because of their great ambition to be consistent philosophers, rather than men of common sense and practical wisdom; and until the council of following great principles into little conclusions is exorcised, they will not the reputation for good sense which is the real touchstone of public confidence.

Am I not right in saying, that in religious statesmanship, generality, and episcopal skill we are weak and futile? How little have we done to comprehend our mission, and to fulfill it? How poor the bond that unites the clergy with the laity in any common action, exterior to mere parish-going! How small the number of active laymen who feel any interest in, or responsibility for, our cause, as a public one! The pursuit of the body does not hang inside the church, and that is the only pendulum that can truly measure the interest or the confidence of the laity in the operations of the organizing portion of the denomination. I believe the laymen think the clergy a set of impractical men, — excellent and devoted in their private places, but without, any wisdom to contrive, or much faith to execute, any scheme of public and united action, — riders of horses, slaves of sick consequences, poor politicians, more afraid of losing their own independency than of not gaining the heart of the world. How alacer the hope, how
frigid the enthusiasm, of our best laymen! They seem to think the Unitarian denomination will hold out about as long as they shall, and 'after us the deluge.'

"Of the immediate practical measures to be adopted, to give success to liberal religious principles, I will suggest in conclusion two,—one bearing upon the attractiveness and power of our faith where it is known, the other upon its diffusion in regions where it is wholly unknown. The first is to supply the need of a liturgy, embodying a worship rich, musical, symbolic, as much as possible after the pattern of the liturgies already in use, courageously improved, and then as far as may be universally adopted, and especially in all new churches. Protestantism will die of anti-formality, which is anti-human nature. Catholicism can float all her errors on the mighty tide of her human and wise ritual, especially when stupid, philosophic, utilitarian Protestantism ventures to ignore nine tenths of human nature in her religious usages and ministries. In the decay of dogma and the truce of controversy, the Church which has the best worship will have the most disciples. Even now the Episcopal Church, opposed by its origin and associations to the tastes and spirit of this country, has the healthiest and most promising growth of all churches, by mere force of her liturgy.

"To unite the preaching of a progressive and independent creed with the worship of a symbolic, fixed, and multifarious liturgy, would be a combination of attractions quite irresistible. A liturgy would suitably resist the unwholesome individualism of our churches and our people, furnish a basis for theindoctrination of children, connect the public and private worship of households by a common book, correct the disturbing influence of idiosyncrasies and defects of taste, diminish the labors of ministers, dignify feeble parishes and imperfect administrations of religion, enable congregations without preachers to carry on public worship by readers, add variety, charm, and dignity to our Sabbath services, and form a general denominational bond throughout the whole country. If great difficulty is anticipated in framing a liturgy by reason of diversities of sentiments and ideas, let as many as can agree in a broad, historic, and ecclesiastical statement unite in a liturgical expression of it, and leave the minority to go on in their independence.

We should, in my judgment, gain ten times over all that could be lost.

"The second measure suggested is, the immediate adoption of an itinerant ministry. Itinerant ministers are not called for in all states of society, nor in all crises of opinion. Nor are they the best. But considering the present state of religious opinion in this country, the wide-spread indifference to prevailing sects, the general complaint of the current creed, it seems to me that masses of common people are waiting for a word that we only are prepared to speak, and that clear, strong, earnest voices, enunciating the results of Unitarian thinking, would find a vast and cordial and blessed welcome among the common people. I do not see how anything short of a movement like Wesley's can accomplish the results we aim at, and I believe that the first truly earnest man, who is called by the spirit of God to make devout proclamation of Liberal Christianity on the hill-sides and in the groves of the country, particularly in the Middle States, will find himself unexpectedly at the head of a magnificent reformation. Let those who deny the power of our ideas to animate men to this kind of self-sacrificing and faith-trying labor give them up at once. If they have not this power, they are worthless; more show-ideas, fine-weather Christianity,—not working ideas, not living and triumphant ideas, not ideas worth our further thought. I believe in them as having all the power of the Gospel of Christ, all the missionary urgency, all the imperativeness, all the saving efficacy, all the ability to raise up and send forth their own teachers and propagandists. If an itinerant ministry do not soon arise from an inward necessity among us, the sceptre will have departed from us, and other bearers will be left to carry the ark of the Lord into the wilderness that waits for its coming. May God give us grace, while it is yet time, to seize our great opportunities,—for never was so glorious a work waiting to be taken up; never was so mighty a host ready, to be given into the hands of so small an army, as that which now stands all over this country, unconsciously inviting the summons of Liberal Christianity to a glad and complete surrender."