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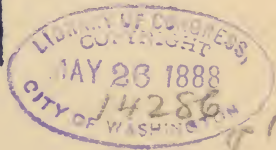
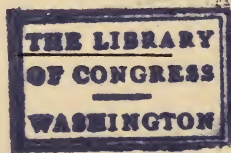


# A UNITARIAN OBERLIN;

OR,

*copy*  
THE STORY OF JASPER L. DOUTHIT.

*copy*  
BY  
*Putnam*  
A. P. PUTNAM.



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THE materials for this story of a singularly brave and useful man are mostly gathered from a variety of brief personal sketches and reports of missionary work which are found scattered through Unitarian papers, magazines, and other publications for the last quarter of a century, and therefore must be more or less familiar to many minds. I have thought it might serve a good purpose to cull from these numerous accounts what might best illustrate his life and character, and present it in this simple and connected form. If the record, as thus given, shall have the effect, in any measure, to strengthen the hands of the friend and brother who is still battling for truth and righteousness, or to encourage others to live nobly and victoriously, even under most adverse circumstances, my object and wish in writing these pages will not have been in vain.

A. P. PUTNAM.

CONCORD, MASS., April 25, 1888.



## A UNITARIAN OBERLIN.

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JASPER L. DOUTHIT.

IF I remember aright, the first time I heard or learned the name of Jasper L. Douthit was when, with some dear friends, I was in attendance at the sessions of the Western Unitarian Conference, held at Meadville, Pa., in June, 1864. The meetings were very interesting, and were marked by all the peculiar freshness and earnestness of spirit that have so often characterized such occasions, in that part of the country. At one of them, some speaker made mention of a certain young preacher, who, not long before, had withdrawn from one of the older and larger evangelical communions, and who, having fought his way alone out into a larger freedom and into a simpler faith, had begun, on his own account, to do very earnest and self-denying missionary work, in and about his native place, in Shelby County, in

Southern Illinois. It was said of him that he had enjoyed but very limited advantages for education, that he had been much inured to poverty and hardship, and that out of his deep love of God and man, and his intense desire to be a most useful minister of the Word, he wanted to go through a regular course of theological study, and so be fitted for a higher service and wider influence in his chosen profession. The brief account that was given of his plain, unaffected, rustic simplicity of manner and character, his brave spirit and hard struggles, his ardent religious zeal and his noble aspirations, and his exceptional natural gifts for the kind of labor which was required of an apostle of Christ in the region where his lot had been cast, and where he would fain renew or continue his life-work in the years to come, — all this touched every heart in the audience, and when it was suggested that money should be given on the spot to enable this young man to go at once to the "School of the Prophets," at Meadville, Pa., the response was immediate, and the contributions were generous. With a constantly growing number of liberal believers, I have followed Mr. Douthit with not a

little personal interest and admiration, from then until now, and have observed how fully, at every succeeding stage of his career, the testimony and confidence of that assemblage of 1864 have been justified in this brother's continually increasing power and helpfulness and consecration in the Lord.

#### ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE.

THE story of his life is pathetic and instructive. He was born October 10, 1834, in Shelby County, Ill., about four miles and a half from Shelbyville, where he has long resided, and where he still has his headquarters. At his native place, surrounded by a flat, prairie country, he grew up and toiled on his father's farm, until he was seventeen years of age. In that vicinity he buried his mother and grandparents, while many others of his kindred and name are still there among the living. All the latter, old and young, have been known to be present, again and again, to hear Jasper preach in the meeting-house, which stands on the very spot where was once the old unhewn log school-building in which he learned his A B C.

His grandfather and great-grandfather Douthit were born in South Carolina, but his father in Tennessee. The great-grandfather was a "hard-shell" Calvinistic Baptist minister, and was one of the first preachers in Shelby County. But before Jasper was born, or in the year 1832, or thereabouts, he and all his family except Jasper's grandfather moved to Texas, then a part of Mexico, and they were with the army that finally captured Santa Anna, and made Texas a free state or republic. Influenced by the large land grants offered to settlers, the grandfather himself removed thither, and with him his son, Jasper's father, Andrew E. Douthit, with all his family. This was in 1843, and the subject of our sketch was then about the age of nine. The roads were rough and dangerous. The little band of emigrants rode in wagons, and it took them about a month to accomplish the journey. It was nearly a twelvemonth later that the boy of ten—as he has ever since well remembered—heard his great-grandfather, then very old, feeble, and trembling with palsy, give a short exhortation one Sunday, while a man stood on each side of the aged apostle, to hold him up as

he spoke. Jasper cannot recall what he said, further than that he counselled all who were present to be faithful Christians to the end. The picture of the venerable patriarch, with his snow-white locks and long gray beard, made a deep impression upon the lad, and has often brought to his mind, very naturally, the well known story of St. John, how, in extreme old age, he was accustomed to be borne to church by his disciples, and would there say to them: "Little children, love one another." This ancestor of the Douthit family lived past his four-score. He was of Scotch descent. His wife was Irish, with a mixture of Welsh blood, and was a bright, wiry little woman, surviving until after our civil war, and until she was one hundred and fifteen years old. Both died near Palestine, Tex. Back there in the past there were several other preachers of the same stock, but they were mostly Methodists. Jasper's mother, a daughter of Francis Jordan, was born in Franklin County, Ill., at a fort built as a protection against the Indians, her people having come there, through Kentucky, from the South. She was early an orphan, was quite illiterate, and, weak and frail of body as she was,



had to work hard in keeping house for her father, who had a large family to support. They dwelt in the backwoods, where there were no schools; but, after the day's toil was over, she learned to read and write, by herself alone. She was very conscientious, and was very courageous in denouncing slavery and intemperance, when, at the time, and in the neighborhood in which she lived, it cost dearly to be that. She was one of the millions who have been Channing Unitarians without knowing it. She never heard the name until she heard it from her son; and when she first listened to his sermons, in which he expounded its meaning, she would say to him; "Why, my child, that is just what I have always believed!" Her friends and acquaintances, of other sects, were inclined to excuse her heresy, saying that, though her *head* was all wrong, her *heart* was right. Aside from this bright faith, and beautiful devotion to truth and duty, her life was one of pain and sorrow and endless care. Greatly loved while yet she was in the flesh, she was triumphant in death, and, as her spirit was taking its flight, her face was that of an angel.



## HARD WORK AND SCANT EDUCATION.

This branch of the family had remained but a short time in Texas. They were there long enough to pick one cotton crop with the help of negroes, and then returned by water, first going by way of the Red River down to New Orleans, and then ascending the Mississippi from that city to St. Louis, a journey of twelve tedious days by steamboat. Thence they rode in wagons, over a hundred miles, to their home in Shelby County, arriving in season to plant and raise a crop of corn and oats for the year. For a long time, Jasper was to enjoy but small opportunity for reading and study. Young as he was, he was obliged to work constantly on the farm, except as he varied the scene by a brief winter at school, such as it was. The first words he had ever learned to read were these, "The Holy Bible." It was a lesson as prophetic as it was sacred, and it was caught from the title-page of an ancient copy of the Scriptures, handed down in the family. He has been known to tell how his grandmother was wont to hold him, as a little child, in her lap, and tell him stories from the dear old

volume, and the impressions which were thus made upon his mind were never effaced. Among the books that earliest engaged him were "Robinson Crusoe," the "Life of Davy Crockett," Weem's "Life of Marion," Grimshaw's "History of the United States," etc. But all such pursuits were deemed a misfortune, rather than an advantage, by many around him, and when he had mastered the "three R's," his father thought he had secured a sufficient outfit. Jasper thought otherwise, and decided to run away from home and seek his own fortunes. In order to get money for more education, he first let himself out to work in shovelling dirt, on the Illinois Central Railroad. His parents were distressed at his departure, and persuaded him to return, with the promise that he should have more of his coveted privileges if he would only come back. Back he came, and for two years attended the Shelby Seminary, building its fires and sweeping its rooms for his tuition, and teaching and doing a variety of other work for his board, while his mother managed to keep him in clothing. While thus connected with this institution, he united with the Methodist Church, stating, at the same

time, that he did not endorse all its articles of faith. Nevertheless, when it was seen what a deep and earnest religious faith possessed him, and how much he was fitted by "grace," and by "nature" also, to preach the Gospel, a license was freely offered him to engage in the work. This, however, he declined, from conscientious scruples. After being diverted from various wishes or plans to continue his studies at Antioch College, Ohio, and Asbury University, at Greencastle, Ind., he repaired to Wabash College (Presbyterian) at Crawfordsville, Ind., where, for the most of the time, he lived on plain bread and roasted potatoes, and, as before, swept the rooms for his tuition. At length he fell sick and must needs return home; but, just as he was about to start, he was told that he might have a free course through Lane University, if he would study for the ministry. Joyfully he accepted the offer, having wished from very boyhood to make that his profession. But it was with the understanding that he was not to be bound to preach contrary to his own convictions. It was not altogether a satisfactory arrangement, and it is hardly surprising that when

he reached home and his father made him a tempting offer of a place in a book and drug store, he consented, for the time, to remain and enter into that business. But soon came the financial crash of 1857, when failure and debt seemed the fate of all. Mr. Douthit was no exception. Jasper was now married, and both he and his wife were obliged to teach school to pay their current bills, and cancel all money obligations of the past.

#### MARRIAGE AND EASTERN ADVENTURES.

The lady whom he had married, during that very year, was Emily Lovell, of East Abington, now Rockland, Mass. It was presently felt that the limited sphere of their united service was too small for their support, as well as for their aspirations. Something else must be done, and what should it be? There was no opportunity around him. All were poor, and he himself was among the poorest. He knew but little of the great outside world, and there were none to counsel or help him. Yet he felt within a high ambition to take some worthy part in the moral and spiritual struggles and movements of his

time, and how was he straitened until he should be more fully qualified to do it! He went forth, not quite knowing whither he went, but believing that there was yet some good work for him to do, and that God would lead him in the way to it. This was in 1858, and we first find him studying and working with Prof. D. P. Butler, for Fowler & Wells, phrenologists, in their branch office, 142 Washington Street, Boston. During his connection with that establishment, he travelled through Massachusetts, and lectured on Phrenology and the Science of Health. While thus employed, he made the acquaintance of numerous abolitionists and spiritualists, many of whom attended his lectures. But he met no Unitarians. He heard no Unitarian preacher in all that time. Yet his profound interest in the anti-slavery cause led him to read such sermons about it by Theodore Parker and James Freeman Clarke as appeared occasionally in the Boston papers and came to his hand. He had an intense desire to hear Mr. Parker preach his farewell discourse to his people. He was eighteen miles from the city, and set out to walk the whole distance for the purpose; but at the

end of seven miles he was too much exhausted to proceed, and so, greatly to his sorrow, was obliged to retrace his steps. He had no money for rides not required for his regular daily work. In 1859, he returned home to Shelby County, poorer than ever. There, in a little farm cabin, the future preacher and his wife, with the babe, went to housekeeping. The very first time he had a chance to speak in public, he declared himself an abolitionist. This, in addition to the offence of having married a Yankee woman, was a crowning sin with the pro-slavery Democracy that was then rampant in Southern Illinois, especially as it involved an utter renunciation of the ruling party, for whose last elected candidate for the presidency, James Buchanan, Douthit had cast his first vote. At the opening of the Rebellion, he became associate editor of the *Shelby Freeman*, which had advocated the election of Abraham Lincoln, and was the first paper in that section of the State to maintain the cause of "free soil, free labor, and free speech," but which was some time afterward given up, when its senior editor entered the army. In its issue of February 15, 1861, Jasper said: "With a hatred of slavery



equal to our love of freedom, we cast our first vote for *James Buchanan*! O what a blunder was that! Why commit such a blunder? Manifestly, because we were cradled in Democracy, and believed it could be no wrong." Full soon he saw the true light and was destined to make ample rectification of his mistake.

#### POLITICS AND RELIGION AT HOME.

He was now living with his family in a remote district, about eight miles from Shelbyville, where he was surrounded by "Knights of the Golden Circle" and others, who were banded together to resist the draft. Rumors were rife that whoever should allow himself to act as a government enrolling officer would be shot. Douthit was appointed to the position and at once accepted it. As he was about to start on his business, which would take him through a large part of the county, he was strongly advised to go armed, but this he refused to do. At many of the places he visited or passed through, there were kind, wise, peace-loving people, who used their influence to prevent scenes of bloodshed, and this, in connection with various precautions observed by Jasper

himself, doubtless saved his life amidst manifold dangers. One night a dozen shots were fired through the open doors of his house, and on other occasions persons threatened him with death, face to face, but he went on, calmly and fearlessly, in the performance of his duty, and neither himself nor his family suffered serious harm. He was often called to speak at meetings held in the interest of freedom and the Union, and, publicly as well as privately, he continued unto the end to plead and act in behalf of the soldier, the bondman, and the nation.

Mrs. Douthit, previous to her marriage, had often, with great delight, heard Thomas Wentworth Higginson speak upon the various subjects of reform that have always so much engaged him. East Abington, her former home, had been a favorite resort of anti-slavery orators, and perhaps she had not seldom listened there to his eloquent words for liberty. She knew then that he was or had been a Unitarian preacher. And now, when, after a lapse of years, the thought in some way came to her and her husband that the latter might be permitted to preach in Unitarian pulpits, taking none but Christ as Master, the only



one to whom they felt they could write and apply for counsel and friendly offices in regard to the matter was the noble man whom we have named above. How slight the acquaintance, yet how fortunate the appeal! What a slender thread it is that sometimes holds securely for us a rich store of blessings, and how wonderful, indeed, are the ways in which we are often led from darkness into light by a Power that is not our own! Mr. Higginson wrote to Mr. Douthit that he himself had left the ministry, but that he would refer him to Robert Collyer, then a minister-at-large in Chicago, saying, "I don't know how *radical* he is, but he is *liberal*, which is better." Jasper, accordingly, turned to the kindred spirit at the great Lake City, and the voice came back to him, *Come and see me, and let us go together to the Conference soon to be held in Detroit.* Well might he afterwards say, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

#### ORDINATION, STUDY AND PREACHING.

There at Detroit, June 22, 1862, he was regularly ordained to the ministry, as a preacher of liberal Christianity, Mr. Collyer, Rev. Dr. Geo.

W. Hosmer, Rev. Charles G. Ames, and others taking part in the service. On his return home, he continued to preach there and in the region round about, in schoolhouses, groves, private dwellings, or wherever else he could get a hearing. Then came the felt need of a higher preparation for his work, and then came also the help that was given to him to make sure of it, as described at the beginning of our sketch. Passing through a three years' course of theological study at the Meadville school, he was graduated in June, 1867. Immediately afterward, for a brief time, he was minister at Princeton, Ill., where he preached to a people composed mostly of those who had been members of the Congregational church of which Hon. Owen Lovejoy, brother of the martyr, had been pastor, and where among his parishioners were three brothers of Wm. C. Bryant, the poet. But his heart longed for the old scenes of his childhood, and thither finally he went, to find there henceforth the permanent scene of his activity and usefulness.

With the help of his brother, he now built a shanty, which he occupied with his family, until not long afterward, when he erected a small but

more comfortable dwelling-house, in which they lived until 1875. His first preaching in this vicinity as a Unitarian clergyman, for two years (1867-1869), was mostly at "Log Church," an old building, situated three and a half miles east of Shelbyville, and first used by the Predestinarian Baptists.

All about this old log church, it was a wood-chopping people to whom he ministered. They were very poor and had been accustomed to the worst sort of Calvinistic teaching, those who essayed to instruct and guide them being about as ill educated as themselves. On one occasion, when a Baptist preacher occupied the desk, he declaimed against an educated ministry as being of the devil and as calculated to "deceive the very elect," and inveighed generally against the need or uses of learning, especially in connection with religion. Douthit was present, and, at the close of the service, rose and invited all who might be interested to come to the place at an appointed time and help organize a Sunday-school. The response was most gratifying. A large number met and the enterprise was a success. In the evenings he preached to crowded houses, but his

hearers had not been in the habit of paying ministers, nor were they able to do it; and all the material aid which the new liberal evangelist received for his first year's work was a *big jug of molasses*, given by a poor foreigner who thought that the laborer was worthy of his hire! The next year the local contributions amounted to about ten dollars. Meanwhile Mrs. Douthit taught a subscription school, to eke out a support for the family. Help began to come from other quarters. Rev. Dr. Lothrop, of Boston, sent a hundred dollars. About a hundred and fifty valuable books were received from other friends of the same city, for a Sunday-school library. The gift was most thankfully accepted, notwithstanding certain opposition from some on account of the Eastern source whence it came. "Horse-racing and card-playing were less frequent on Sundays, and the dramshops grew less popular and began to feel the penalty of violating the law," says a printed report, that tells us of the good effect which the increased reading of those books produced upon the people of the neighborhood. There was need enough of it, surely.

## SCENES IN THE OLD LOG CHURCH.

Several fights took place during sessions of the Sunday-school, and one time Jasper himself, while opening the exercises, was ruthlessly attacked by a drunken man, who was incensed against him for his strong advocacy of temperance principles. Quite a vigorous struggle ensued, but soon the brutish fellow, by the help of the larger boys, was put out-of-doors, lifted upon a horse, and sent away. Superintendent, teachers, and pupils then returned to their places and sang "Wine is a Mocker," and proceeded with the lessons of the hour. In that old log church was heard, for the first time probably in Shelby County, the hymn, "Nearer, My God, to Thee," which has had such a remarkable history. Jasper's now sainted brother, George, had learned to sing it while a student at Antioch; nor must we fail to add, just here, the tribute paid to the latter in 1873, by Dr. Hosmer, who was then president of the college at that place: "George W. Douthit, whose death we mourn, rose up in the light of Jasper's noble life. Quickened, inspired, and aided, he came here for education to prepare

himself for usefulness in helping Jasper scatter darkness. He has distinguished himself here, showing large ability and fine intuitions; always grave, earnest, and manly, he prompted his fellow-students to true, noble life. The departure of such a young man is a sad loss to us, to his home, and to his country." And there in the old log church, too, it was that the first Christmas tree was set up in Shelby County. But long since the woods were quite cut away, the choppers went to other parts, and the building was no longer used.

#### SALEM, EAST AND WEST.

Another place which at the outset witnessed Mr. Douthit's labors as a preacher of Liberal Christianity was *Salem*, now *Oak Grove*. The church which he planted there was duly organized, June 1, 1868. The meeting, at that date, took place in the old schoolhouse; but the structure was too small to accommodate the crowd of people who were present, and accordingly, the weather being warm and pleasant, they adjourned to hold the service immediately afterward in the shade of an old elm near by. Elder John Ellis, of the sect of

the "Christians," or Campbellites, who had rendered Mr. Douthit efficient help at the Log Church, preached the sermon. On the 6th of July, Mr. Douthit announced to the assembled friends that it was proposed to erect a house of worship, to be held jointly for the use chiefly of the Campbellites and Liberal Christians. The edifice was completed in time for dedication, September 29, 1870, when Robert Collyer "preached an eloquent sermon, which will long be remembered by those who heard it." The covenant which this infant church adopted earlier in the year was, for the most part, in the very words of that which was drawn up for, and accepted by, the First Church in Salem, Mass., in 1629, the author of it being the pastor, Rev. Francis Higginson, ancestor of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who here appears again as a wise friend of the Douthits and their work. The old colonial progenitor and his worthy descendant, though distanced from each other in time by a space of nearly two centuries and a half, meet in giving from the old Salem of the East to the new Salem of the West, "Puritanism's Original Declaration of Independence in America." This Declaration, or Covenant, is simple, liberal,



practical, Christian. In 1881, over sixty members had joined this Oak Grove church, under this form, but some of them have since moved away, or transferred their connection to another of Mr. Douthit's organizations of like character. The chapel which was thus here built and consecrated has a peculiar interest for us as having witnessed the thrilling scene of Robert Collyer's very touching and beautiful "Story of the Prairies," as published in a small tract by the American Unitarian Association; — a tract which has been widely read on both sides of the Atlantic and has even been translated into another tongue. It consists mostly of a literal report of a speech which was made by a Mr. John Oliver Reed, in October, 1872, and in which he "gave his experience of a wonderful and radical conversion, and made a public confession of Christian faith, which those who knew him believed to be sincere, and which by his after life proved to be quite real! Although an humble farmer, and unlettered man, yet his words on this occasion seemed inspired, and they kindled a warmth and light that like all true words continue to burn in the hearts of men, and are destined to shine on forever." The lips from which fell those



simple, heartfelt, melting words are silent now, but their ministry still works on, and if Mr. Douthit had never done aught else than to bring such a preacher under his power and influence, and evoke from him such an utterance, he would not have lived and wrought in vain. It should be added, with reference to Oak Grove Chapel, that those who could not subscribe money for its erection gave their contribution in work, and a Mr. Jacob Sittler generously volunteered to superintend and assist the carpenters in their labor.

#### MATTOON AND LITTLE IDA LANE.

One of the early places that engaged Mr. Douthit's missionary labors was *Mattoon*, which is now a thriving little city of about ten thousand inhabitants, and is distant from Shelbyville about twenty miles. He began to preach there in 1868, at first hiring a hall himself, and then in the same spirit advertising the services and making other arrangements. The attendance at the outset was small, but the interest deepened and widened as the meetings continued to be held. In December of the above year, the village was visited by the illustrious philosopher and bard, Ralph Waldo

Emerson, who delivered a lecture there and was asked by Mr. Douthit to assist him in connection with the regular public worship on the next day. This he cheerfully consented to do, agreeing to read the Scripture lesson and a discourse, if Mr. Douthit himself would do the praying! The sermon was on the *Immortality of the Soul*, and made a great impression on those who assembled to hear it. A week later, *Unity Church* was organized. The numbers and the enthusiasm still increased, and ere long a brick house of worship was erected, at a cost of ten thousand dollars. The infant society had built beyond its means, and this fact, in connection with other circumstances, explains the embarrassments that ensued. Rescue came in a most unexpected and touching way. Little Ida Lane was wont to call the church her own and she loved it dearly. By and by, she sickened and died. Mr. Douthit officiated at her funeral, and after the service her father, who had been deeply interested in the new enterprise and edifice, told him that he would give his departed daughter's share of his own estate towards the payment of whatever debt was due, if the balance could be raised among other friends. All was done that

could be done at Mattoon itself, before any thought was entertained of help from abroad. One day, as Mr. Douthit returned to his home, he found a letter from Miss Addie Brown, of Providence, R. I., asking him to come on to the Ministerial Union, soon to convene in that city, and saying that his expenses on and back should be paid if he would do so. He accepted the invitation, and when he told there the simple story of little Ida, another lady, Mrs. Anna Richmond, gave him the larger part of the thousand dollars still due. The remainder was soon contributed, principally by Robert Collyer's Chicago Society, and by Miss Dorothea L. Dix, who in this case and at other times manifested her warm sympathy and friendship for the philanthropic preacher. The dear child's church, after many a change and struggle, still lives to share her blessing and to rejoice in the ministry of its founder.

Among other enterprises which have commanded the energy and zeal of our Shelby County apostle has been the *Christian Union Church*, near *Mode*, for which a house of worship was finished and dedicated in 1873. And again Mr. Collyer preached the dedication sermon. An Indepen-

dent Christian Organization was established here in 1875, and it has been ministered to by Rev. James F. Brown, who resides in the village of Mode, and who has preached to other congregations in the vicinity. But it is not necessary to detail all the missionary work of this kind which our brother has wrought in the county that gave him birth and that has known him so well. There are few places within its limits which have not been blessed by his presence and by his words and deeds.

#### SHELBYVILLE, THE CENTRE.

The most important of the societies he has founded is the Liberal Christian Church at Shelbyville, which is still his own special charge. At this place he began regular preaching, February 15, 1874, in the old court-house. Various unsuccessful attempts had been made in this direction before. But now a more vigorous and persistent effort was to be put forth, cost what it might. One or two dozen persons were present at the first service. As the meetings continued, the attendance grew larger and larger. A Sunday-school was organized in the spring, and that, too,

increased to more and more. Rev. Dr. James Freeman Clarke's Church of the Disciples, in Boston, sent to it a donation of books for a library, and Jacob C. Smith (then a deacon of the Presbyterian Church), of Marshall, Ill., aided the mission effectually by his services in teaching a popular singing-school. On the 13th of May thirteen persons united in church covenant by signing the following statement: "We who have here subscribed our names do unite ourselves together as the body of communicants in the First Congregational Church of Shelbyville, Ill. By so doing, we profess our faith in Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and the Saviour of men, and acknowledge the Bible as the divinely authorized rule of faith and practice to which it is our duty as Christians to submit. By thus uniting ourselves together, we claim no right to exclude any one from this communion on account of difference of doctrinal opinions, nor for any reason except undoubted immorality of conduct." In November of the same year, the members had increased to twenty-one, and the church was more fully organized under a proper form of government. About this time the congregation was

visited by Hon. George Partridge, of St. Louis, who was impressed with a sense of the need of a more fitting place of worship, and offered five hundred dollars towards the erection of a suitable edifice. The friends at Shelbyville, encouraged by the generous gift, responded nobly to the appeal that was now made to them to contribute to the enterprise. The corner-stone of the new church was laid on Monday, November 21, 1875, ministers of various orthodox as well as liberal denominations assisting in the ceremonies. As an indication of the extraordinary interest which was thus awakened, it may be stated that, during the months of the following February and March, meetings were held every evening in the court-house, at which Mr. Douthit was greatly helped and cheered by Elder John Ellis, who, at other places as well as here, was one of his most sympathizing and devoted colaborers. Through the influence of this protracted series of meetings, the membership of the church rose almost to the number of one hundred. Meanwhile the work of building made rapid progress, and the eighth day of the next May saw the new house completed and dedicated. Dr. Clarke, of Boston, preached the dedication



sermon in the morning, and Dr. Eliot, of St. Louis, preached in the evening, when Mr. Douthit was duly installed as pastor. The building was made to accommodate about four hundred persons, and the church and the Sunday-school have since witnessed to a healthy growth and to continued and unabated interest in its Christian faith and life.

#### “OUR BEST WORDS.”

One of the most important features of Mr. Douthit's work, during his regular pastorate of the church at Shelbyville for twelve years, has been the establishment and editing of his brave and somewhat famous little paper, *Our Best Words*, which he started in 1879, and which he has ever since conducted with all his well known ability and unflagging zeal. While engaged in his incessant labors, in preaching and lecturing, in addressing public meetings and talking to Sunday-schools in Shelbyville and the surrounding towns and villages and hamlets, he came to know the people and their circumstances better than any one else, and he felt the need of some such winged messenger of truth and love, by

which he could constantly come into communication with them all from week to week, giving them his written word when he could not reach them with his spoken, and stately supplementing the latter with the former. It did not seek to be a learned, labored exponent of the Liberal Faith, dealing largely with hard and dry theological and metaphysical problems. Another service than this was first called for, and one for which our friend Douthit was specially fitted. It had been and still was his mission to acquaint the people around him, who had known only the harsher and gloomier forms of religion, with the simplicity that is in Christ, to proclaim to them the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, to present to them Jesus of Nazareth as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and to teach the supreme lessons of purity, justice, holiness, and love. That had been the essential message of historic Unitarianism, but *Our Best Words* went and found a joyful welcome where no other paper or magazine of the denomination could. Everybody knew the editor, and all were to know him more by and by. They liked the little organ for what it was, and they liked it also for the man who had charge of



it and was its very soul. And during these eight years of its existence the copies of its successive issues have entered hundreds of homes throughout the county, and have been to them a ceaseless supply of comfort and inspiration; and they have found their way, too, to the ministers and churches of our faith in many other parts of our own land, and on the other side of the Atlantic, everywhere enlisting the sympathy and evoking the *Godspeed* of good and true men and women for the heroic brother who, down there in Southern Illinois, was battling so courageously and faithfully for a free, living, and large-hearted Gospel.

#### FIGHTING THE DEMON.

One of the most prevalent evils he has had to contend with in and about Shelbyville has been that of intemperance. He has seen it in all its worst forms, and has been made to feel, with Gladstone, that it is the cause of more woe than is produced by war, pestilence, and famine combined. It was quite a happy plan which he devised when he proposed to alternate each issue of his paper, devoted to the general interests of

doctrinal and practical Unitarianism, with one particularly meant and adapted to combat this greatest scourge of the land. This plan he has carried out for several years, and with telling effect. With voice and pen, as editor, preacher, and lecturer, he has fought a good fight with this terrible destroyer of human homes and hearts. Strong and cheering testimony comes to him from near and far, witnessing to the beneficent influence he is thus exerting. Mrs. S. T. Hunter, president of one of the W. C. T. Unions, wrote to him, January 21, 1888, "Your paper comes to me weekly as a sort of inspiration. I like your clear, ringing notes for prohibition, and your outspoken utterances for the right." And here is what had been said a short time before by the *United States Monthly*, published far away in the East, at Fitchburg, Mass.:

"The good effects of the circulation of even a small Prohibition paper were strikingly shown in Shelby County, Ill., at the late election. This county is one of the strongest Democratic counties in the State, and there was no organized Prohibition effort in the county, and but few public meetings were held. At Shelbyville, Rev. J. L. Douthit published a fortnightly paper called *Our Best Words*, and eight weeks before the election he commenced the publication of a weekly prohibition edition, which was sent to a large number of voters in the

county; and, as a result, the prohibition vote was increased from 81 for St. John, in 1884, to 436 for the prohibition candidate for treasurer this year, and 800 for legislative candidates. *The Lever*, Chicago, Ill., well says that a candid prohibition paper, going quietly into the homes of the people, read not only by the voters in these homes, but by the women and children, will do more for the cause than any other one agency."

### A SOLDIER OF CHRIST.

In all this varied warfare against sin and evil, and in behalf of truth and righteousness, Jasper very well knew where and what had been the secret of his strength and joy; and his faith in, and love for, God and Christ, and the religion of the New Testament, were too deep and abiding to admit of any essential change or disastrous shipwreck of his trust, amidst the fluctuations of opinion and tendencies of thought, that only had the effect, at last, to unsettle and set adrift so many of his brethren in the liberal household. Here was no dogmatist; no worshipper of mere creeds and forms; no lover of discord or schism; no foe to truth and progress. A thousand times, no! Here rather was one who emphasized mightily the spiritual and practical in religion, and whose belief and service were simple and real; who was a genuine and passionate devotee of freedom, and

had a warm and large heart for all sects and parties, classes and races; longed for the widest possible fellowship compatible with honesty and self-respect, and believed, without a doubt, in the ultimate and universal reign of holiness and happiness. But he was a Christian, and, with the immortal Channing, he held that there could be no Christianity without the Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of men lay at the very foundation of his deepest convictions and of his best work. He had incorporated it into the covenant of his own church at Shelbyville. It was something that had entered as a vital and life-giving element into his own richest personal experience, and it was something which he had learned from the great teachers of Unitarianism, as well as from the Book of books, and which had commended itself to his reason and was in finest harmony with his sense of the need of man and the lessons of history.

#### WESTERN UNITARIAN CONFERENCE.

When, therefore, in May, 1880, the Western Unitarian Conference — with which he was connected — disowned such a simple confession,

there was but one course for such a man to pursue, and that was to withdraw from the body. This he did; and subsequent events, as we shall soon see, have only shown how well he understood the situation, and how clearly he foresaw what must be the continued tendency and ultimate action of an organization that had renounced the Christian name. A few days after the meeting of the conference just referred to, he wrote: "The name *Christian*, and all it signifies to me, is as dear as life — as dear as my mother's name — and I cannot, I must not, agree with my brothers to hide that name under a bushel, or seem to ignore it, merely to please some dear brethren, who, if they do not despise the name, still seem ready to believe that they have 'grown' beyond the need and love of it. I know many of these brethren are better than I am: but I know too, with the burden of temptations which I have to struggle against, Jesus Christ is more to me than all other beings that ever trod the earth; and I must, I *must* commend this great Master to other people, and *with no uncertain sound*. To my mind it is giving an uncertain sound, to acknowledge, or intimate, that the

name Unitarian means any more or less than the religion of Jesus Christ. I can welcome all others to the best I have of faith and love, without identifying myself as a Unitarian minister with a so-called Unitarian organization that refuses to call itself Christian, or recognize the leadership of Jesus Christ." And again: "Freedom in Christ is the fullest, truest, most glorious freedom I can ever hope to obtain on earth. I covet no larger fellowship, no greater freedom, no truer character, no more blessed experience than that which the faithful and loving discipleship of Jesus can give." Three years later, seeing how the conference continued in its free-religious and radical tendencies, he wrote concerning those who were directing its affairs: "I have less and less faith in their theological position, and less and less hope of any permanent Christian institutions being established under their policy;" "There are too many sad facts and failures that stare me in the face, as I look over the past twenty years' history of Unitarian missionary work in the West;" "The general attitude and drift of Western Unitarianism is, so far as I can see, more of a hindrance than help to



the sort of work I feel called to do ;” and, in the same connection, he said, in proof of this statement, that the renunciation of the Christian name, he had reason to think, had “not only chilled the interest of many earnest, believing Christian men and women among Unitarians,” but had “also alienated many others, eminent for Christian zeal, outside of the denomination, who would have been identified with us to-day had the Western Conference (and all other Unitarian conferences and associations) taken an unequivocal and affirmative Christian position.”

#### JASPER TRIED, BUT TRUE.

What with the growing sympathy of portions of the denomination with the new theological departure, Mr. Douthit was more and more left out in the cold. Papers in which he had a right to be heard were closed against him. Others, like the *Advance*, were far more hospitable. There had been no change in *him*, except that, if possible, his love to God and man, and his zeal for the Master’s service, had waxed stronger and stronger. He was the same dear, honest, indefatigable, unselfish, helpful servant of the



Lord and of humanity as he had been in years before, when ministers and editors and secretaries, and all, praised and befriended him most. He had only preached right on. Yet there were now averted faces and cooling hearts. Some who had worn the Christian name, or had given him much encouragement, were soon found to be in sympathy, not with him, but with the other party. "I am forewarned," he writes in 1884, with reference to his withdrawal, "that if I make public the facts in the case and the reasons that led me to such action, it is likely to bring me, and the work with which I am identified, into disfavor with some who have hitherto been friends and supporters." It may well be believed that the man who had faced the "Knights of the Golden Circle," and had feared not their menaces and machinations, was not likely to be frightened into silence and acquiescence by such threatened ecclesiastical boycotting as that. It had been tried before, and has been tried since. It was the self-same tempter that confronted the Holy One in the long ago. It found nothing to its purpose in the Master, and it found as little in his disciple. "If such," continues the latter, "must be the

result of speaking the truth in love (and I do not feel like speaking the truth in any other spirit), then all the more is it my solemn duty to speak for the sake of self-respect, as well as for the cause's sake." He had now a paper of his own, and its successive issues certainly gave forth "no uncertain sound" in relation to the matter in controversy. Old friends, or some of them, might desert him, but others rallied to his side, and many of the most prominent and venerated ministers and laymen of the denomination sent their heartfelt words of cheer, and also their more substantial aid, to this brave toiler of the prairies.

With Dr. Clarke and others who have been named in our sketch as Mr. Douthit's helpers, such strong and faithful representatives and servants of "pure Christianity" as Rev. Dr. Thomas Hill, Hon. George W. McCrary, President A. A. Livermore, Rev. J. H. Heywood, Rev. Henry W. Foote, and William H. Baldwin, and a great number beside, were his steadfast supporters, and are still his comfort. Here is what the saintly, now ascended Dr. Eliot, of St. Louis, wrote to him, under date of July 25, 1885:—

“DEAR BROTHER DOUTHIT:— I congratulate you upon becoming your own publisher, with the assistance of your sons, and predict increasing success. Your *Best Words* are good, and such as need to be spoken. Speak them gently, firmly, forcibly. There is seldom need of being aggressive, but always the truth must be spoken. It can be spoken ‘in love,’ as the apostle commands, but a faithful testimony must be borne, for our own souls’ sake. To deny that faith in God and in Immortality is essential to religion, simply proves, not that one has gone beyond his depth in speculations too profound for him, but that he has not yet wet his feet in the great ocean of Truth before us. To attempt the building up of a Christian church, Unitarian or other, with the name of Christ carefully omitted and with discipleship to Christ denied, is like child’s play instead of manly work. Let us stand for what we are. If we have outgrown Jesus Christ, let us openly avow it, as we have a right to do; but we have no right in that case to hold to the name of ‘Unitarian,’ which implies and has always implied ‘Christian.’

Yours with Godspeed,

“W. G. ELIOT.”

Nor can we forbear making mention again of Miss Dix, the philanthropist, who shrank from the public gaze in all her Christlike labors, but to whom *Our Best Words* paid a fitting tribute after her death. Said the editor in his paper of September 15, 1887:—

“When *Our Best Words* felt compelled to take the course it did by insisting that Unitarianism should not be diverted from its historic line, but continue to be known as synonymous with pure Christianity, her letters were frequent, warm, and full of

sympathy. Very frequently manuscript would come from her, or cuttings which she desired to be printed in *Our Best Words*. The variety and interest of our little paper have been due in a good degree to the selections she has sent us from her sick-bed. Once we put her name to a communication, but the next mail brought a request that everything from her be anonymous. She interested herself in getting subscribers for this paper, and several of our subscribers are due to her exertions while lying on her sick-bed, 'too ill to write but a word,' as the message comes on so many of her later missives. So loving and kind were her expressions, always, that, although we never saw her face, yet we felt toward her as if she were mother, sister, and friend all in one."

#### THE SURRENDER AT CINCINNATI.

The action of the Western Conference, while dropping the Christian name, had still retained a simple theistic basis. But that this, too, would sooner or later be abandoned, was evident to all who were familiar with the facts in the case, and who had eyes to see. At the meeting in Cincinnati, in May, 1886, the following resolutions, which, if adopted, would have put the conference into substantial harmony with the Constitution of the American Unitarian Association, were voted down:—

*Resolved*, That the primary object of this Conference is to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity.

*Resolved*, That, while rejecting all creeds and creed limitations, the Western Unitarian Conference hereby expresses its purpose as a body to be the promotion of love to God and love to man.

In place of this very simple and reasonable statement, those who favored only an ethical basis proposed and carried, by more than a three-fourths majority, the following resolution, which, it will be seen, makes no distinct recognition of God or Christ, and leaves out all express reference to religion and worship; and this, too, avowedly, with the object in view of including any or all who have no faith in these things:—

*Resolved*, That the Western Conference conditions its fellowship on no dogmatic tests, but welcomes all who wish to join it to help establish truth, righteousness, and love in the world.

On such a platform, deists and atheists, materialists and agnostics, Spiritualists and Salvationists, Mohammedans and Mormons, and all, might consent to stand, for none of them, probably, would say that they do not hold to truth, righteousness, and love. All men accept in theory these general principles. Is there, then, nothing more or other than what all sorts of religionists and non-religionists can thus unite

in saying, which shall stand henceforth for Unitarianism, and receive Unitarian sanction, and bear the Unitarian name? Nothing, declares the Western Conference; and Mr. Gannett faithfully represents that body, when he insists that one may be a Unitarian who is not a theist, nor a Christian, nor a worshipper at all. What would the Fathers of our Israel have said to that? One thing is certain: they would not have been so blind to what is going on in the churches as are many of their descendants. Says Mr. Sunderland, in his very able pamphlet, "The Issue in the West," in which he so thoroughly exposes the true character and disastrous effects of what an eminent authority has well styled *the swiftest decline of faith of which we have any record in Christian history*: "Belief in the Christian religion, or belief in any such high form as distinctly recognizes a conscious intelligence and goodness over the world inviting man's worship, — this must not be held to be essential. Even for the ordination of men to the ministry — to be recognized teachers and preachers of Unitarianism — theistic belief must not be required: our pulpits and pastorates must be as distinctly



open to the agnostic or the atheist as to the theist or the Christian." Mr. Douthit could well claim that he had had no part or lot in this matter. Mr. Sunderland justly adds: "I need hardly say that, for a number of years past, warning voices have not been few in the West, telling of trouble certainly ahead if the attempt was persisted in of thus revolutionizing Western Unitarianism. Mr. Douthit, after several years of protest inside the Western Conference, withdrew from that body because of its extreme non-Christian tendencies, and established his paper the more effectively to voice his protest." And he instances others, such as Mr. Clute of Iowa, Dr. Eliot of St. Louis, the Meadville men, Mr. Cutter of Buffalo, Mr. Gordon of Milwaukee, Mr. Batchelor and Mr. Herford of Chicago, and Mr. A. N. Alcott of Kalamazoo, Mich. (the last at length withdrawing from the denomination in consequence of the marked and rapid changes referred to), — all of them among the best ministers of our churches in that section of the country — who also sought to arrest the fatal drift, and foretold the evils that would ensue unless the tide was checked and made to set in



a different direction. And he adds again: "It would seem that all these protests and warnings" (in which Mr. Sunderland himself, we may say, also took a calm, strong, and manly part) "surely ought to have caused our 'freedom, fellowship, and character' friends to reflect how revolutionary a thing they were undertaking, and how certainly, if persevered in, it must bring discord and division all over the West, where there used to be, and ought to be still, union, harmony, and peace. And if there are any voices of controversy beginning to be heard in any quarter among us to-day, or if anywhere the harmony and unity of spirit among churches and ministers is less than we could desire, can any one mistake as to where the responsibility rests? Surely it can rest only in one place and that is with the innovators."

#### NEW MOVEMENTS AND HOPES.

And these "innovators," ostensibly or profess- edly seeking the broadest and most loving fellow- ship, proved to be the narrowest, extremest, exclu- sionists, shutting out, not only God and Christ, or all distinct recognition of them, but a large num-

ber of brethren whom such a recognition had drawn into membership and who could not conscientiously remain after it had been so unwarrantably blotted out against their protestations and in violation of their right. As our readers are aware, the excluded party proceeded to establish a new *Western Association*, founding it on a more Christian basis. And about the same time was started the Western monthly magazine, *The Unitarian*, published to voice more freely and widely the simple Gospel which had been wounded in the house of its friends, and most ably edited by Rev. J. T. Sunderland, of Ann Arbor, Mich., and Rev. Brooke Herford, of Boston, Mass. The new organ, most admirable in its spirit and interesting in its contents, leaped at once into full life and large success. It is not without its danger, evident at times, of sinking its Christian faith into some simple form of theism, or of losing its more positive and aggressive force through an undue desire or disposition to compromise with the other side. For instance, the *Unitarian*, referring, in the January number (1888), to the constitution recently adopted by the Minnesota Conference, says of it: "We

are unable to see how anything less than this can give a basis for real religious work on the part of any conference or organization. This does give such a basis. We believe that if the Western Conference will consent to place itself upon this basis, there is still ground for hope that it may unite the West again." The reader who may be curious to see what this "basis for real religious work," as presented by the Minnesota Unitarians, consists of, will find it set forth in the December number (1887) of the same magazine, in the following words: "This Conference is formed to bring the churches into closer coöperation, and aims to help preserve and strengthen religion in Minnesota, by working to make it more reverent, rational, just, charitable, and humane. Since the idea of Divine Unity, expressed in the Unitarian name, has assumed so large a meaning and importance in modern thought; and since its included duty to Human Unity and Love is the nearest one in religious life, the Conference adopts this name. For the same reason it uses the name in no sectarian sense; but will gladly unite with any churches, of any other name, that

work for the above aim, — and cordially invites them to its meetings and membership.”

However this somewhat labored and nebulous statement may contain the words *Churches*, *Religion*, and *Divine Unity*, — on which account the editors of the *Unitarian* regard it with so much satisfaction and hope, — it fails utterly to reach the high-water mark of the following declaration by Mr. Sunderland, as contained in his little pamphlet already quoted from: “I believe and maintain that no religion which does not root itself down in those deepest faiths of man — those natural, ineradicable faiths that have been the life and power of Christianity — faith in God, faith in prayer, faith in immortality, faith in such a life lived on earth, of consecration to holiness and felt sonship with God, as Jesus lived — can ever move, much less renovate human nature, or make anything more than a ripple on the surface of human society.” And words of like meaning and emphasis, it is unnecessary to say, might readily be taken from one and another of Mr. Herford’s writings. And it is this clearer, stronger faith which will prevail in the end. Truth will not be less bold and determined than the error with

which it disputes the field; and the Unitarian Church, at large, will still hold to the Christ.

#### LET HIM FLY HIS BANNER.

Widely useful and greatly needed as is the *Unitarian*, let Mr. Douthit also keep his banner flying. Both give cheering indications that there are large and influential numbers in our churches in the West, as in the East, that still mean Christianity and mean to say it. *Our Best Words* has peculiar claims to encouragement and support. Its "no uncertain sound" is inspiring far, far beyond the limits of Shelby County, while there in Southern Illinois it is a helpful and beneficent agency which the editor has established at much cost of time, toil, and care, and such money as he could command for the purpose, and which, in connection with the mission he is called to fulfil, he cannot well do without. No amount of opposition has availed to crush out or silence this little organ of Gospel truth and practical righteousness. Denominationalists, who have never thought of asking their more radical brethren to cease from publishing anti-Christian papers, have earnestly

desired Jasper to discontinue the one which he was making so pronounced in its loyalty to the Master. But the work has still gone on. They have stopped their subscriptions, or sent him angry letters, or, most likely, have done both, in token of their idea of free thought and broad fellowship. He has generously opened his columns to their complaints or aspersions, and has answered them by fresh plans for enlarged service of the Lord. Anonymous servitors and accomplices of the Rum Power have threatened him and his office with destruction, unless he should let them alone and permit their infamous business to go on unmolested. He has replied to them and confounded them by offers of reward for the disclosure of their names, and by a more strenuous warfare against their iniquity. Mr. Douthit has known well what he was about, and has had indeed the courage of his convictions. No rose-water jets, no flowery pellets here, but hard cannon-shot and downright battle for the good of souls and for the glory of God. No more devoted missionary has ever been in the ranks of the Unitarian body, or of any Christian denomination.

His life has been one of poverty, hardship, toil,



struggle, pain, and suffering. He has known, from many a bitter experience, what is meant by reproach, and denunciation, and misunderstanding, and frowns, and neglect, and contempt, and persecution. Yet he has had royal friends, and he has kept the faith, and, out of a great, loving heart, he has toiled on, with much weariness, yet with a thankful and hopeful spirit, to save the tempted and the sinful, and to widen the kingdom of God. And this is the prophecy which we put on record and ask the reader to remember, that in some future time, when all these discordant voices have ceased, and men shall go back into the past to inquire into the history of American Unitarianism, and shall ask who have best borne witness to the truth as it is in Jesus, who have been its confessors and martyrs, and who have been the Oberlins to them that were in sore need and had few to counsel and comfort, to guide and bless them, they will surely make their pilgrimage to Shelbyville and its neighboring settlements, and learn more than we have told here of Jasper L. Douthit, and will

“Glean up the scattered ashes into history’s golden urn.”



## WHAT ROBERT COLLYER SAID OF HIM.

Not that there have not been those who have seen what sort of a man he was or is, who have strengthened his hands and heart, and whose words about him have in some measure anticipated the verdict of the future. Good Robert Collyer was the first to welcome him to the West, as we have seen, and all the way along has spoken and written many a just tribute to him, and also rendered him generous assistance in his work. Here is what he said of him in the *Christian Register* of October 15, 1870: "I can hardly tell how much good Mr. Douthit has done in that region. It is to me simply wonderful. A slender, gentle-eyed man, born there, raised there, and so situated as to make the work he has been called to do peculiarly painful and perplexing, he has wrought with such a manful and Christian valor as to win his way where any other man, one thinks, must have failed. He was an abolitionist when the abolitionist was no better down there than a mad dog. A Republican when his vote was the single Republican vote of the precinct — I think, of the district. He carried the steady flame of loyalty through

the darkest days of the war; was denounced in the local papers; shots were fired at his house; everything was done that could be done to drive him out of the country; but he went on his way doing his duty, standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free, and ended by winning. He has two congregations now; one at this Oak Grove, and one at the Log Church, a few miles away. Religious men and women of other persuasions join with him and help him in the singing and prayer. Everybody, now, believes in Jasper. He has tackled some of the vile whiskey-shops that were spreading ruin through his land, and torn them up by the roots. His brothers, splendid, stalwart fellows, are on his side, and maintain his cause. He goes to Mattoon once a month when he is strong enough, and has a small hearing there. He writes a religious column for one of the papers, and has a small farm beside; but I doubt whether he is much of a farmer, and small blame to him." And Mr. Collyer adds this fitting word: "Is it worth my while to say that his best helper and inspirer, after God, is his wife?—a small, slender woman, from Abington, in Massachusetts, who is proud and glad, in her quiet

way, of the good work ; works herself, also, I fear, beyond her strength, but does not seem to know it ; a poet and a thinker, doing her own house-work, a woman's work on a farm, caring for her little brood of children, and almost not regretting that she is five or six hundred miles from a mountain, and eight or nine from the sea."

#### REV. DR. HOSMER'S TRIBUTE.

In the *Liberal Christian*, of June 7, 1873, is a letter from Rev. Dr. George W. Hosmer, who was president of Antioch College, and who was at the time on a visit to Shelbyville, at Mr. Douthit's. He writes of the "quiet country" and the "beautiful grove around the simple home," of the "large case of some of the best books usually found in a minister's library," the pictures of Channing, Parker, Collyer, and George Douthit, on the wall, and the "calm, sweet dignity" of the wife, who was "not a stranger to books and the muses." And then he goes on to say: "We really have an Oberlin here in Southern Illinois. Brother Douthit strives to supply the spiritual wants of the people anywhere within six or seven or ten miles. He has four principal preaching stations, and, by

his large, catholic spirit and fine, sharp thought, he is winning hearers and fellow-workers, and a great enlightenment already appears. People are collected for worship; schools are better managed and more cared for; the whole tone of life is improved. Our missionary has a very loving spirit towards all; but he is fearless, aggressive, and strikes well aimed blows at error and vices that stand in the way of improvement—a John in sweetness and benignity, but a Paladin in courage to stand forth against wrong in opinion or custom. . . . Here Mr. Douthit is reaching out to this whole country, making ganglionic centres of influence, and keeping them all charged with the pure, liberal, powerful spirit of Christ; and if he could have two or three helpers, in five years a dozen Liberal Christian churches would appear in a circuit of twenty miles in villages and country neighborhoods. But it is a work of great sacrifice, and I know not where helpers can be found. It will not be easy to multiply Oberlins, but this one — born and brought up here amidst privation and hardship, whom the Lord has sent us, so providentially fitted for the difficult work — we must know and encourage.”

## TOUCHING WORDS BY GOVERNOR LONG.

In the March number of the *Unitarian Review* (Boston), for the year 1875, there was an admirable article by Hon. John D. Long, late Governor of Massachusetts, on "The Relation of Church Observances to Religious Life;" and the writer, towards the close of his paper, illustrated his subject with this fine and touching description of our Oberlin as he had lately appeared and spoken in public, before a large audience and on an important occasion: "At the recent National Conference at Saratoga, where, with the few usual exceptions which prove the rule, everybody was brilliant and fervid and kindling; where some denominational questions were argued with rare eloquence; where orators spoke, unsurpassed in graceful persuasiveness or magnificent declamation; where elaborate thinkers searched the obscurest enigmas of theology and science, the audience groping to follow,—you who were there remember that one evening, at a sort of missionary meeting, there came forward a young man, slender and tall, and as lank as Abraham Lincoln. His straight hair ran down

behind his ears to the collar of his coat. He rambled in his speech, as if he were timid before that cultivated assembly, and stumbled over the minutes which at first he held in his hands. But his voice somehow was of that sympathetic, human sort that you couldn't help listening to it; his eyes were so honest and soulful and saintly that you couldn't look away from them; and as he narrated in a homely way his labors among obscure men in obscure places, his preaching in barns and taverns and court-houses and school-rooms, in that Egypt which is the Nazareth of his State, going about doing good, literally following in the steps of the Saviour, with scarce other compensation than his own sense of doing the Master's work, — so worn with his labors that he was almost too ill to be at Saratoga, — the heart of every man and woman in that audience went out to him and loved him; and more than one cheek was wet with tears. Human nature, which loves warm existences and generous deeds, and wearies of philosophy and talk, seemed to assert itself with a glad sense of relief; and this genuine Christian warrior and holy pilgrim became from that hour the very



hero of that great conference, though himself all the time utterly simple, unaffected, and unconscious; and as I looked at his pale face and listened to the sweet Methodistical appeal of his voice, which rose into the eloquence of truth, when he threw his notes aside and uttered his soul in the freedom of his own quaint, natural exhortatory style, like a bird singing in its native forest; and as I thought of the Jim Bludsos, the rough natures, the hungry souls, whom no white choker or clerical pedant could have touched, but to whom he had brought a gleam of the higher light and life, and in whom he had implanted the springing seeds of Christian charity and culture, of the homes he had blessed and the hearts he had lightened, — then and there it was that, walking on the plains of Judea, healing the sick, blessing little children, feeding the poor, and comforting the sinning and the sorrowing, I saw, with my own eyes, once more upon the earth, a living disciple of the blessed Jesus of Nazareth. Such a spirit and such a life, adapting themselves of course to every variety of circumstances and society, are what, if there is any worth in Christianity, the Christian Unitarian



body wants to-day; for such were the life and spirit of Jesus Christ, its founder.”

## TESTIMONY OF ELDER ELLIS.

The gifted and honored ex-Governor has said many noble and beautiful words in his lifetime; but he has rarely, if ever, said anything that has done more credit to his mind and heart than that. And let us hear, too, from prominent men of evangelical communions; for there are plenty of them who are not slow to recognize a Christian brother, in one who truly loves and serves the Master, however he may bear the Unitarian name, and there have not been wanting ministers of such denominations who have gladly coöperated with Mr. Douthit in his labors, or have rejoiced to welcome him to their pulpits, however much they dissented from his liberal views. Elder John Ellis, whom we have already mentioned, wrote from Shelbyville, February 29, 1876: “Brother Douthit has labored in this field for about eight years past, and, although it was a most unpromising vineyard to commence with, as much so, I think, as I ever saw, yet, by dint of persistent and earnest effort, he has succeeded beyond his

most sanguine expectations. He has, by the assistance of our great Father in heaven, gathered up, and organized into successful operation, some four or five very respectable societies, within a radius of ten miles, and I found them so nearly on the platform of the old Christians that it is difficult to see any difference between them. He is a Channing Unitarian, and sails under that banner, and yet is what I would call a real, out-and-out, old-fashioned, Orthodox, Evangelical, Congregational, progressive, liberal Christian. I assisted him in the organization of his first church long years ago, and rejoice to find the good work still going steadily on under his efficient labors; and as the harvest here is truly great, and faithful laborers are few, I expect, the Lord willing, to remain perhaps for years and work as a colaborer with him."

IN THE TRUE "APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION."

We might easily multiply here such testimonies, from orthodox and liberal believers alike, but it is not necessary. Yet we cannot forbear quoting the following, which was written lately by a well known Episcopalian, and which we take from

*The Unitarian*, of March, 1887, with the Editor's own words of introduction : —

“ In an attractive memorial volume, just published, of the Shelby Seminary, Shelbyville, Ill., we are given a graphic sketch of the life and work of our esteemed brother, Rev. Jasper L. Douthit, whose devoted and heroic labors and self-forgetting spirit shine so beautifully in our Western missionary annals. The sketch is from the pen of Hon. George R. Wendling, the well known public lecturer, who is a fellow-townsmen of Mr. Douthit, and has known him intimately since boyhood. We gladly give our readers a short passage. After presenting a somewhat detailed account of Mr. Douthit's life, Mr. Wendling says : —

“ For seventeen years this man, with frail bodily health, has been a poor Unitarian preacher here at our doors. Seventeen years, long years, of self-sacrifice and ceaseless toil, in sunlight and by starlight ! and, upon my word, I believe he has suffered it all and done it all for Christ's sake. In a vague sort of way many good people thought, until of late years, that Unitarianism was a thing not quite so vulgar as Ingersollism, but every whit as bad as Voltairism, and not nearly so comforting a thing as damnation for infants and sulphurous hell for adults. And so Jasper was not received for a while in any of our orthodox pulpits on Thanksgiving Days and such like occasions. I used to think in those days, and I must have been a coward or I should have said it aloud, that just that sort of orthodoxy made war on Christ, Luther, and Wesley. This poor Unitarian heretic went his quiet way, as I saw him year after year, lived down a senseless prejudice against his church, erected a beautiful house of worship in our town, gathered about him a large congregation, most of them sadly needing the influence of a good man (almost to the same degree as other congregations in town), and now has a splendid Sunday-school,

maintains a country mission, edits a pure newspaper, and I will testify everywhere that his whole life-work and example in this county have been an evangel of peace, temperance, and purity. He believes in Channing and calls himself a Unitarian! I believe in the Apostles' Creed, take some stock in the "apostolic succession," and am an Episcopalian; but, taking it altogether, when we all meet at the judgment day, to answer for our deeds as Christians and as citizens, I think I would like to exchange places with him. It is the life we lead, more than the "isms" we hang to, and so I write it down as my calm judgment that Jasper Douthit, by his pure, self-sacrificing, and unostentatious life, has furnished a better example of genuine heroism and nobility than any man our county has given birth to.' "

#### THE PROSPECTUS.

While writing the last pages of this sketch of Mr. Douthit, we have received a copy of the prospectus of a new series of *Our Best Words*, and we know not how better to close our review of his life and labors than by presenting to the reader its full contents. It is another illustration of his spirit of enterprise. It reveals, better than we can express them ourselves, the thought and faith which have given character to his work, and which are the outcome of his own deep and living personal experience. As showing what he stands for and what are his aims and purposes, it has the Gospel ring, and is fresh and vital, and breezy and

free with the noblest life of the great West in which he has lived and wrought, and with the truly liberal and progressive spirit of the age. And we give it place, also, that those who would like to encourage our brother may have a better opportunity to know what sort of a paper he edits, and so be led to assist him by becoming subscribers to it if they are not already, or by extending to him a helping hand in such other ways as their judgment shall approve. We know of no one who more richly deserves the sympathy and support of the good and the true; no cause that is more instinct and accordant with the very heart of Christ. Jasper is still at his post. He has, at various times, been asked to enter the service elsewhere, with offers of a larger salary. Twice he was tendered honorable and lucrative appointments under the administrations of Presidents Lincoln and Grant. But all such inducements or temptations have been declined. He has preferred to remain in charge of his much loved mission and to bear its burdens, trusting, not in vain, to the American Unitarian Association and the friends of Liberal Christianity, and most of all to God, for succor and success.

“OUR BEST WORDS” (*Semi-Monthly*).

FOR CHURCH AND HOME.

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It stands for a church membership broad enough to welcome all sincere followers of Christ who desire to worship together and work together for the Kingdom of God.

(While the editor is a missionary of what is known as Unitarian Christianity, and claims the right to frankly but courteously speak his honest convictions, he gladly grants the same privilege to all who would speak in its columns "with malice toward none and charity for all.")



It stands for free speech on any subject of human welfare. It aspires to be a periodical in which (to a reasonable extent, within its sphere) all sides can be fairly and candidly heard. However, it would always "speak the truth in love," and criticise persons and things only to create more interest in goodness, and to reveal truth more clearly.

It stands for fair play to all people of both sexes, every race, class, party, and sect.

It stands for helping the poor and needy to help themselves and others.

It stands for temperance and social purity, and for Christian union in all good words and work.

It stands for human progress, spiritual life, and the eternal hope.

#### ITS AIMS AND PURPOSES.

In this age of open questions in theology, when men are breaking loose from old forms of faith, — seeking rest and finding none, — *Our Best Words* would emphasize the foundation truths of morality and religion. In other words, it would strengthen the things that must ever remain unquestioned among all who would be good and grow better.

It aims to emphasize the Christianity common to all sects, and would be sectarian only in its opposition to all unchristian sectarianism.

It holds that religion is something more than ethics or morality — it is "morality with a divine emphasis," "the enthusiasm of humanity" or God in man a quickening spirit and redeeming power.

It seeks to put the new wine into new bottles; and thus it would free men from the embarrassment of assenting to creeds which they do not believe.

It would accept all the good and true, both old and new, and

cherish the good roots of the past for the sake of the flower and fruitage of the present and future.

It would Christianize a false liberalism and make bigots and ultraists, in all sects and parties, more liberal and Christian.

It means to be so radical as to strike at the root of sin and error, and so conservative as to hold fast to all the good and true.

It recognizes no "culture" as true culture, and no thought as "advance thought," that does not make the heart more pure and the life more consecrated and Christlike in seeking to cheer the faint, comfort the sorrowing, and save the lost.

*Our Best Words* especially seeks to translate the dialect of a scholastic, thought-burdened Unitarianism into the everyday thought and language of the common people.

It condemns no one for honest doubt; but urges every man to be honest before God, and with himself and his neighbors, in his business relations, and in politics and religion. In a word, it urges men to think, speak, and live truly.

It does not recognize any growth as healthy, nor any progress as true, that does not make men and women better according to the Christian ideal of goodness — better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers, better brothers and sisters, and better fellow-citizens — more pure socially, more faithful in married and family life, more chaste and reverent in speech, more honest in dealing, more Christlike in temper, more humble before God, and more kind and helpful to all people, everywhere.

And thus *Our Best Words*, in its little way, would earnestly help in the glorious endeavor

"To build the Universal Church  
Lofty as is the Love of God,  
And ample as the wants of man."

## COMMENDATION.

*Our Best Words*, Brother Douthit's excellent fortnightly paper, comes to us considerably enlarged — but keeping still the old price, \$1.00 a year. We are glad of the enlargement, if the publishers can afford it; and certainly we shall regret if the Unitarian body of America does not give it such support as will enable them to afford it. It is an excellent home paper, containing matter for old and young. It is bright, pure, intensely in sympathy with all reforms and good causes, deeply in earnest in its efforts to build up a living Christianity. While its courage is exceptional, and its loyalty to the simple fundamentals of Unitarianism is perfect, its charity is unfailing. Indeed, we know of no periodical that may better bear at its head the motto, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Though *Our Best Words* is not the largest or most widely known of our periodicals, we doubt if any in the denomination is doing a more needed work, or doing it with a spirit of more conscientious fidelity. — From *The Unitarian*, April, 1888.

# A UNITARIAN OBERLIN;

OR,

## THE STORY OF JASPER L. DOUTHIT.

BY

A. P. PUTNAM.

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