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Two Hundred Years in the Hartland Churches

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THE history of Hartland's churches is a history repeated many times in the towns of the New Hampshire Grants and indeed reflects in minuscule much of the history of Protestantism throughout rural New England in the 200 years since the chartering of the towns. For all saw the early effort to duplicate the church-state of the "Standing Order" of the older New England, the planting of those sects dissenting from it and, after the Revolution, the many new ones; all shared in the prolonged period of bitter, divisive, often fanatic, preoccupation with creed and doctrine, only to witness later the fading from sight of the very rocks upon which the sects were founded, and many split. It seems salutary then to recall this local chapter in a common history.

The largest portion of Vermont pioneers were of Connecticut origin and as such they were the heirs of their churches and of their quarrels.¹ If conformist, they had been Congregationalists; if independent, Baptists, Quakers, or Episcopalians, molested in worship and taxed for the support of a church and clergy not theirs. Before the Revolution practically every village in the Green Mountains had its small groups of Calvinist Congregationalists, Calvinist Baptists, Quakers, Episcopalians, and by 1800 its anti-Calvinist rebels, Arminian Methodists, Freewill Baptists, Universalists, and Christians,

* I wish to thank the many Hartland townspeople who have helped me in preparing this paper. I particularly appreciate the privilege of consulting the Records of the Congregational Church and the Town Proceedings as well. The early volumes of each, faithfully kept and in a flow of style and expression that are admirable, are worth remarking upon.

1. David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (Montpelier, 1948), 5.

all errorists and spreaders of unsound doctrine to the orthodox "true believers."²

Before 1780 twenty-one Congregational "Churches of Christ," including Hartland's, had been gathered in Vermont and only two of these were west of the mountains; the Connecticut Valley was long to be the stronghold of the orthodox and the conservative.³ Before 1783 there were sufficient numbers of Baptists in the Woodstock area to form the Woodstock Association, of which the Hartland Church was a member.⁴ A few Quakers were in Hartland during the Revolutionary years and by 1792 there were seventeen "certificated" to hold meetings elsewhere and excused from church taxes in the town.⁵ Episcopalians, weary of fines and exactions for nonattendance at Puritan worship and the use of the Prayer Book in the older New England, attracted by the glebe grants made to their church in the town charters, had settled in small groups in The Grants. Some twenty of these groups existed within the borders of the state prior to 1790, and in 1785 there were sufficient numbers for a temporary organization of the churches in the Connecticut Valley consisting of Strafford, Hartland, Norwich, Bradford, Thetford, and Corinth.⁶ Governor Wentworth's charters (including Hartland's) had included one glebe for the Church of England and one for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. It is thought that after the Revolution there was a concerted effort on the part of the Episcopal Church in America to establish missions in the wilderness in order to secure these lands.⁷ Methodism came late when, after the Revolution, the missionary movement within the Church of England was organized as a sepa-

2. Ludlum, *op. cit.*, ch. 2.

3. Raymond A. Hall, "Congregational Churches of Vermont," *Vermont History* (Jan. 1956).

4. Rev. Henry Crocker, *History of the Baptists in Vermont* (Bellows Falls, 1913), ch. xv.

5. Nancy Darling, "History and Anniversary of Hartland," *The Vermonter* (Nov. 1913), 227. Also, Hartland Town Proceedings, Vol. 1, 90.

6. Walter Hill Crockett, *History of Vermont* (New York, 1921), Vol. v. J. E. Goodrich, "Immigration to Vermont," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* (1907), 96. The Rev. Charles Folsom-Jones, "Short History of the Episcopal Church in Vermont," *Vermont Quarterly* (Jan. 1953), 23.

7. J. E. Goodrich, *op. cit.*, 83. *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Vermont (1790-1832)*, 218.

rate church and spread rapidly; by 1800 their circuit riders were crisscrossing the state of Vermont and in 1802 their missionaries were in the Woodstock-Hartland area.⁸ Universalist preaching was heard in the Woodstock, Hartland, and Barnard areas as early as 1786 and won many converts. The first Hartland Society, named then the Catholic Benevolent Society, was formed in 1802.⁹

Before meeting houses were built, when there were no more than ten settlers to the square mile, and possibly fewer, these groups met in cabins, in barns, in fields, to hear itinerant preachers and missionaries expound the minutiae of doctrine and exhort to conversion.¹⁰ The humblest man, reading his Bible, quoting chapter and verse, his own theologian, felt qualified to participate, and did, to censor the sermon or combat his neighbor's heresies. Religion was dialectics, and pamphlet sermons circulating widely helped make it so. It was the time of the pulpit wars when, with finespun "logick-ing" and the printed word, the Edwardeans, followers and disciples of Jonathan Edwards, fought to hold their Calvinist citadel against the attacking heathen. Religion, like politics, was a fighting matter and it was news.

Calvinists were of course Trinitarian; Universalist and Unitarian preaching of a Son, subservient to and independent of the Father, was blasphemy to them. Predestination of the elect only to salvation was challenged by the Universalists' Salvation for All and by the Methodists' Freedom of the Will and man's own responsibility for his salvation. Congregationalists held to infant baptism to avoid future damnation but Calvinist Baptists believed it unscriptural and baptism a symbol of adult conversion and regeneration. There were differences in thoughts of and attitudes toward the sacrament of the Lord's Supper—Congregationalist churches differed in this from an early attitude, for church members only, as a "seal of the Covenant," which was changed by "Stoddardism" to open communion as a "converting ordinance"; regular Baptists held to closed communion, for their own; Freewill Baptists held it open to all believers

8. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 509. Lewis D. Stilwell, "Migration from Vermont," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* (1937), 110. "Joel Winch's Diary," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* (Dec. 1941), 254.

9. Nancy Darling, *History of the Universalist Society of Hartland, Vermont* (Castleton, 1902), 10.

10. Earl of Dunmore Census, 1771. Stilwell, *op. cit.*, 79, for census of 1781.

and a declaration of faith. Quakers rejected all sacraments and, too, protested their reliance on an "Inner Light" for guidance. This Inner Light was a supreme court of appeal to them in all civil matters, in oaths of allegiance, taxes, and war, and early marked them as "peculiar" and unpopular with others. Episcopalians, with their Book of Common Prayer and Thirty-Nine Articles, their beliefs and practices long established, were aloof from the disputes of the evangelicals. "They had not come to New England to be Puritans but continued stubbornly to hold Anglican services to the stately decorum of which they were much devoted."¹¹ Their rituals and liturgy were empty formalism to those who had fought for the "Truth of the Word"; they were "Popery" to the heirs of the Puritans and "Tory" to fighters of the Revolution. Polity, too, was a matter for disagreement. The complete autonomy of the local church in both belief and practice had been jealously guarded by all Congregationalists since the founding of their churches; this attitude was shared by Baptists, Quakers, Universalists, and Christians, and made the ecclesiastical hierarchies of the Episcopal and Methodist churches not only uncongenial but suspect. As for any educational or theological standards for the ministry, only Congregationalists, fearing an illiterate ministry since the days of the founding fathers, and Episcopalians pretended to any. For Methodists and Baptists vigorously expanding on the new frontiers, there were the short cuts that asked only for an easy familiarity with Scripture and that the Holy Spirit should mark their men with the "convincement of a call"—all of which too often gave the churches an illiterate, highly emotional, and unreliable leadership.¹²

To compound this confusion, to add to the controversies, to indicate "the enormous amount of energy Vermonters gave to religion,"¹³ there were the Deists. They were strong and their principles popular in Vermont, as in the nation, during and after the Revolution. They were not an organized sect; the movement was a response to the rationalism of the eighteenth-century Enlighten-

11. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, quoted in the obituary of John R. Fisher, *Rutland Herald*, Apr. 1959.

12. Goodrich, *op. cit.*, 96. A. L. Drummond, *Story of American Protestantism* (Boston, 1951), 236, 241.

13. Stilwell, *op. cit.*, 112.

ment. Revelation, with the divine inspiration of the Bible, was denied and, instead, there was the strong assertion of faith in Man, his natural rights, his "Perfectibility," and a spirit of inquiry in all matters spiritual as well as secular. They were not irreligious but were, rather, opposed to all organized religions which, based on authoritarianism and otherworldliness, they considered hostile to man's progress in this one. Tom Paine's pamphlets sold everywhere for a few pence to help spread the new gospel, and Ethan Allen, Vermont's own pugnacious apostle, contributed his *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man*—both to be labeled infidel by many. All of this was the first widespread protest against the claims of all sects, and their controversies, but more particularly against the hyper-Calvinism of the day with its doctrines of original sin and man helpless in the hands of an angry and sovereign God. Most of the founding fathers of the nation were either Deists or infected by their spirit. Man's "unalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" had a different ring from "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever," and the principles of Toleration and Freedom of Worship, incorporated in the constitutions of the United States and of Vermont, are debts we owe this new liberalism.

With the end of the Revolution, the Republic and Constitution established, and a great increase in numbers of settlers, the Vermont Legislature turned its attention to the churches and practices of religion, determined that, though freedom of worship had been guaranteed, worship itself should be assured and the new state a godly one. In 1779 a law enforced the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day, and prevented the disturbance of religious worship through prohibition of all labor, trading, sport, travel, or disorderly conduct, under heavy penalties including the stocks and whipping post.¹⁴ In 1783 there was an "Act to enable Towns and Parishes to erect proper Houses for public Worship and support Ministers of the Gospel"; this "empowered towns to vote a tax sufficient to defray the expense and to hire a minister to preach, provided there are twenty five legal voters in the affirmative and *every adult of legal age shall be considered as being of opinion with the major part of the inhabitants* within such town until he, she or they shall bring a cer-

14. Zadock Thompson, *History of Vermont*, Part II (Burlington, 1842), 175. Goodrich, *op. cit.*, 73.

tificate signed by some minister of the gospel, deacon or elder, or the moderator in the church or congregation to which he, she or they pretend to belong, being of a different persuasion. . . .”¹⁵ In 1807 this act, with later amendments, was repealed and all support of ministers and preaching left to individual church groups.¹⁶ Because the majority in each town was usually Congregational, there had been opposition to the original act on the part of the smaller dissenting groups, especially the Baptists. With its repeal Vermont returned to the complete freedom of worship for all, guaranteed in its first constitution, and a complete separation of church and state in matters spiritual.

On May 10, 1779, the town of Hertford (renamed Hartland, June 1782) “Voted that a committee of nine persons fix a place for a Meeting House spot.” In July there were “leases to 3 acres or more for land for Common around meeting house” and “committees appointed to provide the town with preaching” and “voted to raise three pennies on the pound on the list of poles and Ratable Estate to be paid in wheat at five shillings per bushel to defray charges which may arise for preaching in s^d Town.” “Voted that the Town meet the first three Sabbaths in which Mr. Tullar shall preach with us at Doct^r. Spooner’s Barn, the next three at Col. Symes’s Barn.”¹⁷ Though there is no record of it, tradition has it that the Meeting House was built this same year, 1779, at the Centre. Old and unpainted at the turn of the century, it was always known as the “old black meeting house.”¹⁸

It was a large, square building with a double row of windows and had a small belfry with spire; the bell, however, was wanting as the worshipers had never felt themselves able to buy one. Within, there was a gallery around three sides and a high pulpit with a sounding board. . . . Stocks were kept outside of the house for disciplining unruly members and there were two tithing-men to preserve good order during the services.

15. William Slade, *Vermont State Papers* (Middlebury, 1823), 472.

16. *Acts and Laws Passed by the Legislature, 1807*, 22. *Journals of the General Assembly, 1807*, 164.

17. Town Proceedings, Hartland, Vt., Vol. I. Martin Tullar was Yale '77. His brother, David Tullar, Yale '74, preached at Windsor.

18. “July 22, 1799: The question was put whether the town would raise money to paint the meeting house and passed in the negative.” Town Proceedings, *op. cit.*, Vol. I.

The tithing-men had a pew in front of the pulpit, facing the congregation. No stoves were used in the building; old ladies carried hot bricks and foot-stoves or spent the noon hour between services at the Sabbath-Day House, a small building near the Meeting House where all could go to eat their luncheon and warm themselves by the fire.¹⁹

The audience stood and faced the choir at the back when there was singing. Doubtless this was from the hymns of Watts, together with the old line-singing from the Psalm Book (since the prejudice against "human composure" had long since given way); but, in good Puritan tradition, worship was still "Prayer, Praise, The Word, The Sermon."²⁰ Here the town held its meetings and here, with Sabbaths allotted according to need and numbers, Congregationalists, Universalists, Methodists, Baptists held theirs until each could depart to build a house of its own. And here the embattled settlers took their stands in a Battle of Doctrines, which was to engage them and their churches for many years.

"Hertford, 6 Sept. 1779. This day the Church of Christ was gathered here in the presence of the Reverend Isaiah Potter, David Tuller & Peletiah Chapin. Chose Elias Weld Moderator & Clerk & Members, Joseph Grow, Elias Weld, John Hendrick, Samuel Abbott, Zebelon Lee, George Back, Joseph Grow Jr., Abigail Lull, Hannah Hendrick, Rhoda Capen."²¹ These ministers were from Windsor, West Windsor, and possibly Lebanon. (According to Congregational procedure in the forming of churches, installation and ordination of ministers, and all disciplinary matters requiring advice, a council of delegates from sister churches in the area was called by "letters missive.") Among these first ten members one looks in vain for men notable in the town's affairs—for a Spooner, a Taylor, a Willard, a Gallup, or for Moses Webster, whose descendants for six generations have been staunch supporters of the church—all names to appear later on the church rolls. With the exception of Elias Weld, Assistant Judge of the Windsor County Court and later Town Clerk, these names are of people obscure at the time. Joseph Grow, early made a deacon, was soon in trouble for "disci-

19. Darling, *op. cit.*, 13.

20. Drummond, *op. cit.*, 161, 162.

21. Records of the Church of Christ in Hartland, formerly called Hertford, Book 1.

plinary offenses” and defected to the Baptists; Samuel Abbott defected to the Baptists; Zebulon Lee to the Universalists; George Back was excommunicated. A feeble start for the infant church!

About the knoll where the Meeting House stood was clustered a small settlement.²² There was a schoolhouse, the large Campbell house serving as a tavern, a blacksmith shop, the houses of Timothy Grow, a Baptist deacon, of Joseph Grow, a Congregational deacon, and of Jason Winch, another Congregational deacon, the houses of the large Cotton family, and of Elders Breck and Cheever, the first two Congregational ministers, each of whom would later, in 1800, be assigned one half of the “first settled minister’s” lot.²³ Rough roads to the north and south parts of town, to “the Plain,” to Windsor and to Woodstock, passed through, but distances isolated the scattered settlements and it was not long before the north part built its own meeting house and the south part asked for its own preaching. Settlers in the west of town early attended meetings and preaching in South Woodstock.

Some Episcopalians had settled in the north part of town and a Mission of the Holy Comforter was established in 1793. Major General Roger Enos, while commander of Vermont’s military forces, 1781–1791, lived in North Hartland and, together with Major General Benjamin Waite of Windsor, is thought to have helped establish it. It was served by the Reverend J. C. Ogden and later, 1801–1809, by the Reverend Russell Catlin. Both of these men attended the annual conventions of the Diocese of Vermont. In September 1807 the convention met in Hartland but “only a few members being present, no business was done.”²⁴ Sometime during these years the meeting house was built but various records differ to such an extent that the date cannot be determined.²⁵ It was always known as a Union Church; only in its earliest days could it

22. Darling, *op. cit.*, 64.

23. Land Records, Town of Hartland, July 20, 1800.

24. *The Diocese of Vermont Protestant Episcopal Church, Historical Records Survey* (Montpelier, 1940), 141. *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Vermont (1790–1832)*, 16. Services were resumed, for short periods only, much later in the century.

25. The records of the church itself were destroyed by fire. Nancy Darling gives the date as 1790; W. P. A. *Historical Records Survey* as 1796; *Child’s Gazetteer of Windsor County* as 1830.

have been called Episcopal and this Mission was discontinued in 1809.

There were eighty-six "certifications" filed with the town clerk from 1789 to 1793, in accordance with the state law permitting inhabitants to worship elsewhere and giving relief from payment of taxes for the support of the meeting house and of preaching: seventeen Friends to Woodstock, Baptists to Bridgewater and Woodstock, Episcopalians to Lebanon and Claremont, Universalists to Woodstock, Congregationalists to South Woodstock, Baptists of the Baptist Church in Hartland, who possibly did not support town preaching.

For Relieving some of the inhabitants of s^d Town who have requested from paying taxes to support the Standing ministry—ample provision is made in statute of state for every person of different sentiments from the majority and that it will not be expedient for the town to interfere in this matter. With regard to the persons who have joined at Woodstock for public worship and produced their certifications and who are of the same denomination with the majority, we humbly give it as our opinion their certification is illegal. As to the denomination called friends we humbly give it as our opinion they be forever released from paying taxes to the town to support ministers of the Gospel on condition we are not troubled with their presents [sic] or any further meetings of their kind.

The following is a typical certification:

Lebanon 17th Nov. 1790. This is to certify that Mr. Benona Webster has for a number of years past joined himself to and been a member of the Episcopal church in s^d Lebanon and paid his proportion of taxes for the support of Public Worship. Certified per order of the Episcopal church. Noah Colman, Church Moderator.²⁶

It was ten years before a minister was settled at the Centre by both town and the Church of Christ.

From the town records:

The Rev. Daniel Breck regularly installed by ecclesiastical council 11 Nov. 1789. Committee reports preaching shall be in not less than three places nor more than four and that the first be at the Meeting House in the centure [sic] of the town and the second on the Road be-

26. Town Proceedings, Hartland, Vt., Vol. 1.

tween Gov. Spooner's and Capt. Asa Taylor's and the third at the crotch of the road at the south part of the town where the old school house was formerly built. And the others where those assist in supporting the gospel shall choose, each part shall draw their proportion of the preaching in proportion as they will pay towards the support of the minister.

From the church records:

Nov. 11, 1789. The *Council* met and proceeded to the instalment of the Rev. Mr. Breck as *Pastor and Teacher* of the Church of Christ in Hartland & *received him into the Church* [emphasis my own].

Here is the council, the significant title for the pastor and the customary election to membership in the church body to assure his being *of* them, yet not *over* them.

The Reverend Daniel Breck was a graduate of the College of New Jersey, 1774, and had been a chaplain with the Revolutionary expedition to Canada in 1775.²⁷ His theological training was of the best and the most orthodox for the time; he had been a student of Joseph Bellamy, friend and disciple of Jonathan Edwards. After leaving the army he visited what was then called the Northwest Territory and preached the first Protestant sermon ever delivered north and west of the Ohio River—at the spot where Marietta in Ohio now stands. He was ordained in November 1779 as pastor of the church in Topsfield, Massachusetts, where he continued until May 1788, when he removed to Hartland, becoming its first settled minister on November 11, 1789. Though he served the Hartland Church but six years, he continued to live in the town until his death and acted as Town Clerk for thirteen years. In a letter received by the Topsfield Historical Society in 1861 there is this tribute to Daniel Breck from Samuel Delano, a later pastor of the Hartland Church: "The Rev. Mr. Breck was a good scholar and a very accomplished gentleman. . . . He was greatly respected by all who knew him and by many even venerated."²⁸

A Congregational Church was, and is, an independent, "free,"

27. Princeton University Archives. William Allen, *American Biographical Dictionary* (Boston, 1857), 135. "David Breck was chaplain in Col. Elisha Porter's regt. He was a pensioner, Windsor Co., Vt. 1831 for service in the Mass. Continental line." D.A.R. Lineage Book, vi/5689, 231. Also, xiii/12265, 102.

28. Historical Collections of the Topsfield Historical Society, Vols. vi-vii (1900-1901).

group of believers, covenanting with the Lord and one with another "to walk together in all God's ways according as He is pleased to reveal Himself in His Blessed Word of Truth."²⁹ The independence was of any external authority over the church; the individual member was anything but free. His church was a close fellowship and he under its "Watch and Care"; civil lapses, as well as spiritual, were the church's business. "As the church considered their Duty carefully to attend to the Burdens of every individual in Their Body and Remove them if possible," it is not difficult to understand how a device, conceived in a spirit of loving kindness, could degenerate into a too close surveillance and into that "interfering spirit of righteousness" of which Calvinism is so often accused. The following entries in the Church Records, of which there are many and of like kind, illustrate this:

JULY 3, 1791

George Back was admonished for intemperance in drinking, absenting himself from the house of God, and disregarding the ordinances of the Gospel. Deacon Grow was admonished for marrying a couple whom Rev. Breck declined to marry and of being greedy of filthy lucre in selling beef that was objected to.

JULY 10, 1792

Judge Weld, one of the committee to visit Bro. Sumner and inquire the reason of his absenting himself from the Lord's Supper, reported that he offered as his reasons his dissatisfaction with Bro. Lee's conduct and not being clear as to infant baptism. It was the mind of the brethren that by reason of his age and infirmity he be treated with tenderness.

JULY 10, 1792

It is publicly reported that the Deacon holds sore contentions with the wife of his bosom, in which she may be said to be as blameworthy as he.

SEPT. 19, 1801

Sister Susannah Brown attended the meeting of the Brethren & confessed her falt in joining with the world in Dancing & vain Amusement.

OCT. 30, 1827

Bro. Tinkham presented a charge against . . . Bro. and Sister Noyes that they neglect household religion.

29. Salem Covenant, 1629.

This sort of charge and accounting, always followed by public confession, penitence, and restoration to fellowship, is recorded through the 1850s; it gradually slackened, with fewer and fewer entries, and, we trust, fewer occasions for them! For membership in the church, candidates were, after a "public relation of Christian experience" and "an entertainment of a Christian hope," "pro-pounded" to the whole church body. "Household religion," that is, family prayer with the reading of Scripture and a strict observance of the Puritan Sabbath, was enjoined on all. There is no reason to infer that the attitude of the Hartland Church to baptism of infants was other than the orthodox one, "for children of believers only"; it is not referred to in the records until in the Church Manual of 1880 a most conciliatory tone appears: "The neglect of infant baptism will not be considered a breach of covenant obligation."

The Confession of Faith of the Hartland Church of 1797 contained nine Articles, all statements of classical Protestantism with the exception of Article 6, which was distinctive Calvinism. "God according to the dictates of infinite wisdom has elected some to inherit everlasting life and leaves others to work out their own ruin by sin; but not in such a sence [sic] as excludes moral agency or free will in the creature." (Dodging the Calvinist dilemma here!) The Confession ends, "For a more full and particular declaration of our faith, we refer to the Assembly's Shorter Catechism which contains a good summary of Christian Doctrines founded on the Word of God."³⁰

After a lapse of two years following Daniel Breck's resignation and dismissal, Samuel Cheever, a man of no formal education, was called to the church in 1797 and ordained. He had been a preacher in Townshend and a "Doctor of Physic" in West Windsor.³¹ There was a great ingathering of new members (67 in all) but this, alas, was but the promising start for a pastorate that would provide such fireworks in the Battle of Doctrines that, after six years, the pastor

30. The Westminster Shorter Catechism was taught in the Congregational Sunday School in 1863 per Mrs. Lucia H. Webster.

31. "This Doctor Chiever (for so he was cald) was a smart Preacher. He did not read and call it Preaching: but he Preached. And his words ware with power; he gained the attention of the People more then any that had been before him. There ware a few warm fatalists that said he was an Arminian becaus he held forth free salvation" (Winch, *op. cit.*, 241). Also, Comstock, *op. cit.*, 127.

would excommunicate the church, the church the pastor, and the church itself be left prostrate on the field of battle, not to recover for twenty years! It all started with the new Universalists and Methodists just appearing on the scene. The Congregational Church records, together with Joel Winch's Diary, tell the story.³²

CHURCH RECORDS, AUG. 6, 1801

The church took into consideration the matter of Bro. Thomas Cotton & Sister Cotton, wife of Mr. Samuel Cotton, and Sister Brown, wife of Mr. Solomon Brown, who upon the Sabbath attended Mr. Beloo's [Ballou] Preaching at the meeting house all day to the neglect of the church, who were assembled for Public Worship at Bro. Grow's, and the church, considering it a breach of Covenant engagements and a countenancing of false Doctrine and false teaching, chose a committee of three to wait on them and acquaint them that the church were grieved with their conduct and desire them to heal the breach they have made.

CHURCH RECORDS, AUG. 14, 1801

Sister Brown said it was her privilege to hear Mr. Bellou [Ballou], that

32. Joel Winch was the son of a family which had come to Hartland when he was a young boy. His parents joined the Congregational Church; his father was made deacon; he himself was a member for a short time before leaving to join the Methodists. He later became a Methodist circuit preacher. His diary, written in 1802, of his years in Hartland and of his sampling of the various churches with their conflicts in doctrine, reveals in a most disarming way the religious temper of the times. For example, these:

"The Baptist said that I was not baptised but the Congregationalists said that I was The baptist told me that the scripture said that we must believe and be baptised, but I have never found it yet" (240).

"I went to work with Oliver Daverson (he was Deacon Daverson Son) . . . we got talking on Doctrine. I asked him if he believed that God had foreordained whatsoever came to pass The old D-n tried to make it look plain to me, but I could not see it, he therefore told me that the church I belonged to (Congregational) held so as much as he did. No, said I, for they altered the Articles of Faith for that reason, not to destroy the freedom of the will, but he still affirmed that I profest as strong fatality as he did I could not make my Bible talk like my minister for when I began to read I found . . . that a person might fall from justifying grace & perish everlastingly, but my minister said that if a Soul was brought into a union with God he could no more be lost than God could be himself And finding no way to make Scripture read consistent with scripture I believed that there was a reality in the possibility of ones being lost after conversion. . . . It also appeared to me that there was a freedom of will given to man to except of this Salvation" (252-253).

"Then Mr. Dow came along In his Sermond he made a digression and went on to prove the possibility of falling from grace . . . but as soon as Mr. Dow had done the Doctor (Cheever) got up and opposed him testifying that there was no such thing as falling from grace . . ." (251).

she did not think the church had been so superstitious and that she never was satisfied with the covenant. The church voted unanimously not satisfied.

JOEL WINCH'S DIARY, 259

In October there was a Methodist Preacher. . . . Preached one evening at Jacob Tuksbury's west part of Hartland. It was a good time, some praid, some exhorted. . . . I was surprised to see how the Poor Doctor [Cheever] felt, he exprest a grate conserne lest the wild fire should spread all over the Town. He said that they were agitated, and knew not what they did. The Doctor therefor tried to git the Church to vote that they would not go to any more of there Meetings. This hurt many good members of the Church.

JOEL WINCH'S DIARY, 260

I now began to find my mistake respecting the Articles of Faith in Hartland Church. I found that the adition mad to it did not turn it from the Faith of John Calvin (viz) "that we believe God both from all Eternity Eleted some to ever lasting life and left all the rest to work out there ruin by sin." I borrowed the Covenant and articls of Faith of Doctor C-r and found it a peace of inconsistantey . . . I mention these things it may appear that Doctor C-r has altered for he was condemned for not being strong in Eletion. . . . Some of the Calvenist cald him an arminion. But from this time that I talk with him he began to preach fatality.

CHURCH RECORDS, MAY 1, 1802

Pastor informed the Chh. that under present circumstances he could not come forward and administer the ordinances of the Lord in the Chh. respecting setting open the Door on Communion Day to the Methodists and until the Chh. could be agreed there was a manifest impropriety in attempting to administer.

CHURCH RECORDS, AUGUST 1802

Bro. Joel Winch left the church and joined the Methodists. Also Sister Currier in renewal of her request for dismission to the Methodists.

CHURCH RECORDS, JUNE 1803

The Pastor withdrew his fellowship from the Chh. by letter . . . reported to an appointed committee he would not join the Chh. in counsel for he had excommunicated them. . . .

CHURCH RECORDS, JULY 1803

Voted that this Chh. have no further service for the Rev. Samuel Cheever as a minister of the gospel in Hartland.

CHURCH RECORDS, AUG. 1804

. . . communication from Doct. Cheever to the brethren was laid before them proposing an accommodation the substance of which is for the Chh. to renew covenant with this additional explanatory clause (viz.) they will not hold religious fellowship or communion with the Universalists and the Methodists and that they will not go after them on the Sabbath or make a practice of attending upon their preaching on other days and that all such members as will not renew covenant with this additional explanatory clause we will consider them no longer of us.

The church apparently tried to conciliate its warring factions, as well as its pastor, but after the refusal of advice from three councils, called from neighboring churches, Mr. Cheever would have none of them and departed. We next hear of him in Bridgewater where doubtless he continued to wield his doughty Calvinist sword against Methodists, Universalists, and other such heathen.³³

There was opposition to Universalist preaching in the Meeting House. "But Hosea Ballou preaches the truth and no heresy," answered old Captain Williams.³⁴ The great Hosea Ballou came to Hartland and did succeed in preaching in the Meeting House to the satisfaction of many. In September 1803 he, living in Barnard, was installed as pastor of the united Universalist societies of Barnard, Bethel, Bridgewater, Woodstock, and Hartland. He remained six years, preaching and writing. His *Notes on the Parables of the New Testament* and *Treatise on the Atonement* have since become reference works for Universalism and he himself considered one of the founders in New England. In the latter work he rejected the doctrine of the vicarious atonement of Christ for man's sins and the doctrine of the Trinity as held by the orthodox. This book was the first published in America openly to renounce it.³⁵ Together with salvation, punishment after death was of much concern; Ballou preached that it was limited to this life since it is implicit in the sin itself. He wrote:

33. The Rev. Mr. Sage of Westminster, as late as 1838, warned against "the Soul-destroying doctrine of universalism." "Diaries of Seth Shaler Arnold," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, Vol. VIII (June 1940), 136.

34. Darling, *op. cit.*, 9.

35. Richard Eddy, *History of Universalism*, American Church History Series (New York, 1894), 434.

The doctrine of man's native depravity, of original sin, of the deserts of eternal misery, of the vicarious sufferings of Christ, by which he endured in man's stead the divine penalty of God's law whereby man could escape the punishment due to his sins, was believed by those, who called themselves Universalists, as well as by Calvinists; also the doctrine of the Trinity, holding that Christ is equal to God, or, in other words, is God, being the second person in the holy Trinity. All these notions, as it appeared to me, were essential errors, constituting a mass of confusion. I soon renounced all these views and preached only God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.³⁶

The Winchester Profession of Faith, adopted by Universalists at their 1803 Conference, was adopted by the Hartland Society. It was simple and short, in fundamentals unchanged today, with the heart of it in the felicitous phrasing:

We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness and that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected.

While this new and stirring assault on Calvinism gathered in its many converts in Hartland, Methodism, too, moved in to the attack. They met "Election" with "Salvation for All" and "Predestination" with "Freedom of the Will" but, more important to the lonely pioneer, they offered the warm heart and the "glad hand." They early gave themselves to a hearty approval of emotional conversions and took over the camp meeting and revival as a means to this end. Though the general public regarded Methodism as an outrage and had no scruples against breaking up their meetings by force, it continued to grow in numbers and strength.³⁷ Jesse Lee and Lorenzo Dow, preaching in the South Woodstock area, came to the Hartland Meeting House and to homes in the southwest part of the town.³⁸

I went to a meeting [Methodist] in the west part of the town at C. McKinsey's [McKenzie]. We had a Glorious time. One Asher Smith

36. Hosea Ballou, quoted in *Biography of Hosea Ballou*, by his son, Maturin M. Ballou (Boston, 1854), 70.

37. Stilwell, *op. cit.*, 109. Thompson, *op. cit.*, 181.

38. Henry Swan Dana, *History of Woodstock, Vermont*, Ch. xxii. Winch, *op. cit.*, 250-251.

Preached. . . . The meeting began at 2 o.c. and lasted till twelve and by Sunrise next morning they ware coming again. . . . (And, at Elisha Ransom's in S. Woodstock) The preacher exhorted till the power of God came down in such measure as I never knew it before. I saw tears running from almost every eye . . . soon my heart began to melt like wax. I went around a number of times to hear the Methodist. I found the more I got acquainted with them the better I loved them. . . . I felt my Soul united to them and determined to join the Methodis and be one. . . . For it appeared to me that the Scripture proved there Doctrine and Discipline the most of any I had ever found.³⁹

A Methodist "class" was organized in Hartland in 1829; a "circuit" in 1834.⁴⁰

Baptists, early comers to the Grants, were early in Hartland and had then sufficient numbers for two churches, one organized in 1789, the other in 1794. Both were extinct by 1837. Timothy Grow was long pastor of one of the churches, 1809-1834, and Silas Davison was an Elder, who later departed for Waterford, where he founded a Baptist church, composed largely of Hartland people who went with him.⁴¹ "The Baptists as they originally presented themselves in this community were revolters against certain externals of the established priesthood, including black coats and surplices, college degrees, salaries to ministers, and written sermons; but they held on to church discipline and strict forms of doctrine, and wore the distinguishing badge of close communion."⁴²

The Christian sect, an entirely new and spontaneous protest against all sects, all creeds, with a belief in the Bible alone as a source of faith and practice and the need for a return to the simplicity of the early primitive Christians, was first heard of in the Hartland-Woodstock area in 1806. When the Woodstock Christian Church was organized under Elder Plummer in 1811, he served in Hartland also and the numbers of these believers increased sufficiently to warrant a pastor of their own. W. Tewkesbury is recorded

39. Winch, *op. cit.*, 254, 263, 265.

40. *Historical Records Survey of the W.P.A.*, Bates School District Records, Hartland.

41. Rev. Henry Crocker, *History of Baptists in Vermont* (Bellows Falls, 1913), 226, 227, 244, 314, 319. *Vermont Registers*, 1809-1834.

42. Dana, *op. cit.*, 384.

as pastor of the Hartland Christian Church in 1828, 1845.⁴³ Our old friend, Charles McKenzie of the west part of Hartland, who had welcomed Methodist preaching in his home, who had earlier been a deacon in the Congregational church of Hartland and a deacon in the Congregational church of South Woodstock, then became a deacon in the new Christian church of South Woodstock parish.⁴⁴ (Surely the most adaptable of deacons! Or possibly just popular—excellent potato whiskey was distilled at his home on Densmore Hill!)

In 1825 Hartland had been for twenty years the second wealthiest town in the state; in 1820, when its population was at its peak of 2,553, it was the fourth largest.⁴⁵ These years and the decade following were a time of continuing growth in the churches and a time for church building. The Union Meeting House served the town and churches for well over sixty years until it was razed in 1846. Universalists built their brick meeting house at the Four Corners in 1822, Congregationalists theirs at the Three Corners in 1834, and the Methodists theirs, also at the Three Corners, in 1839. Church societies, organized as auxiliaries for financial and legal arrangements, collected monies through subscription lists. Contributions were promised in cash, much in produce, some in doctoring, blacksmithing, shopwork, shoemaking.⁴⁶ There were also subscription lists for slips; the slips then might be put up at auction to raise "choice money." They were always considered ratable property and, as such, records of ownership were filed with the town clerk.

For the Universalist Meeting House built in 1822, "many townsmen lent a hand and much of the work was given"; "south of it lay The Common, a part of the land deeded to the Society by Nathaniel Smith. This was used as a parade ground for the militia, as had been a portion of the land belonging to the old Union Meeting House."⁴⁷ For some reason, which the past does not disclose, a new church was built in 1854 and this brick one razed. The white chapel we know today was built in another section of the Four Corners on land deeded by James Hyland.

43. *Ibid.*, 388. *Vermont Register*, 1828 and 1845.

44. Mary Grace Canfield, *The Valley of the Kedron* (South Woodstock, 1940), 206.

45. Darling, *op. cit.*, 21. Thompson, *op. cit.*, 209.

46. Congregational Society, Hartland, Vt., Book 1. 47. Darling, *op. cit.*, 19, 20.

The thirty years of the Universalists in the old Brick Meeting House was marked by continual growth. . . . The preaching was at first largely doctrinal to accustom the congregation to Universalist principles. . . . There were always two long sermons, with a noon recess of an hour a part of which was given to the Sunday School when there was one. . . . The members of the congregation averaged about two hundred. . . . The spirit of comradeship among the worshippers was something beautiful to look upon. . . . It produced an atmosphere and zeal that was healthy and which brought the Society to the end of its first half century with little to regret.⁴⁸

The Church of Christ, Congregational, broken and about disbanded after the dismissal of Samuel Cheever, rose again, dauntless and determined, when in 1820 eight members met to renew the Covenant and sign their Confession. In 1828 the First Congregational Society, "for the purpose of settling and supporting a minister," was organized and there were 112 members who signed the subscription lists.⁴⁹ This same year Mr. Samuel Delano was called to be "Pastor and Teacher" and was ordained in the Hartland church. (He was to serve the longest pastorate of any of its ministers, eleven years.) In October 1833 there was a "meeting of proprietors, or signers for slips, at Wm. Hills Inn and voted to build a meeting house"; in October 1834 a "Warning for meeting to hear the report of the building committee as respects the building of the new meeting house at the Three Corners so called." (Cost, \$1,618. Collected, \$1,590.25.) In August 1834 there had been a meeting "to see if the proprietors of the meeting house will set off a part of their common for a burying ground, to see what method shall be taken to fence the common and burying ground if there should be one set off."⁵⁰ The meeting house was built on land deeded by David H. Sumner; it was of bricks made in Hartland.⁵¹ In 1836 there were 108 members.⁵²

The lively Methodists, so long a thorn to orthodoxy, continued

48. *Ibid.*, 33-37.

49. Some names appearing on these lists are duplicated in the membership lists of the Universalist Society.

50. Congregational Society, Book 1.

51. Extensive repairs in 1871, 1894, and 1906 have obscured the original aspect of the church. The old slips were replaced by new pews made at A. A. Martin's shop; memorial windows and steel walls and ceiling were installed in 1906.

52. *Confession of Faith and Covenant of the Congregational Church in Hartland, Vt.* (Chronicle Press, 1836).

to increase in numbers and in 1839 built their meeting house, also at the Three Corners, on land deeded by Joseph and Sylvester Marcy.⁵³ Town meetings, before the building of Damon Hall and before the use of the old arsenal at the Four Corners, were held in the basement of the church.⁵⁴ Though this church served the town for 100 years (its last service was in 1938), it has left no records behind it. In the north part of town also, Methodists were increasingly active until what had been an Episcopal church, and then a Union one, became more particularly a Methodist one in the last years of the century and until 1930, when the church was closed temporarily.

The one Hartland church organized in the twentieth century, but destined to a life of but thirty-five years, was that of the Seventh-Day Adventists, one of the several groups to survive the Millerite excitement of the 1840s. At that earlier time it was not a matter of a new denomination but a message, preached in many orthodox churches, emphasizing the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments of the Second Coming of Christ, the Day of Judgment, and the Millennium to follow. One group officially became the Seventh-Day Adventists, believing in the seventh day as the Sabbath, but otherwise sharing the classic fundamental beliefs of Protestantism. These they subscribe to literally; a fiat creation, rejecting all evolutionary theories of the development of the earth and man, and the imminent return of Christ to the earth with the consequent judgment of the righteous and the damned. Wherever possible they have established schools with churches to educate their young in their own principles. Through Edwin Clayton and George Williams they established a small community in the Bates school district in Hartland. There they established a school for fifteen to twenty pupils in 1900 and later, on a new site, began a building for both church and school. Though the sanctuary and some classrooms were finished, the structure was never completed. "Some members died and others moved away, and the hurricane of 1938 added the final touch of discouragement."⁵⁵

53. Hartland Land Records, 59.

54. Nancy Darling, "History and Anniversary of Hartland," *The Vermonter*, xviii (Nov. 1913), 227.

55. Mr. Roger Holton, Principal (1956-1960) of the Seventh-Day Adventist Estabrook Academy, West Lebanon, N. H.

The period of expansion, of bloom, of the 1830s and 1840s was fated to be short for the frosts of western migrations throughout the century were to reduce the numbers and strength of all churches. There were continuing dismissals of members "about to leave for the West," those leaving for Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, New York State, or to "some regular orthodox church at the West."⁵⁶ There were then the struggles of small parishes everywhere to find ministers and to pay them. Ladies' societies, with much diligence and devotion, held fairs and suppers and "sociables" and contributed substantial sums. "Donation parties" were a common resort for raising funds, when all kinds of farm produce, as well as cash, were brought to some home and the occasion made an all-day social one. Pulpits and preaching were shared by Universalists with neighboring church groups of their faith—Universalist pastors held services as late as 1878 in the North Hartland Union Meeting House; at other periods they shared the pastors of the Windsor Unitarian and of the Woodstock Universalist churches; later, at the end of the century, there were Tufts or Canton Divinity School students for summer pastorates. Winter services were given up when the pastors were non-resident. With the Congregationalists the story is similar, though winter services were never abandoned. Pastorates were, on the whole, of short duration and, after 1880, many were for two or one year only; there were "supplies" or acting pastors or young divinity school graduates, occupying the pulpit while they studied for an undergraduate degree at Dartmouth (this singular reversal of a course of study in the early 1900s). There were frequent councils of sister churches called for dismissal of pastors because of "pecuniary exigencies." A council of 1838 recommended that the Reverend Samuel Delano "be dismissed from his charge unless his church and people resure [sic] to him an adequate annual salary. That in the opinion of this council an adequate salary cannot fall short of four hundred dollars and the necessary supply of firewood with hay sufficient for the keeping of a cow and horse."⁵⁷

The early Universalist ministers were largely self-educated men. They were devout and rugged characters, conservative, and not given to that "enthusiasm," which marked many of the Baptist and

56. Congregational Church, Book II.

57. Congregational Church, Book II.

Methodist clergy on the frontier.⁵⁸ Though a formal education, or lack of it, can never guarantee the qualified man, Congregationalist tradition had always expected intellectual, as well as spiritual, leadership from their clergy. Because this leadership has been lost today to such a disquieting extent by all denominations, it is of interest to give the past record of the Hartland Congregational Church.⁵⁹ Of twenty-two ministers, in the years 1789-1914, fifteen were college graduates (Princeton, Dartmouth, Middlebury, University of Vermont, Yale, Amherst) and all but one had had theological training, either privately as a student of some established divine, or at a theological seminary (seven at Andover).⁶⁰ Ecclesiastical councils of churches, called for the purpose of ordination, always asked for an account of the candidate's "knowledge of theology, his ability to *teach* and his experiential acquaintance with religion."⁶¹

It would be misleading in this connection not to recall that a college education in New England throughout the eighteenth century, and later, was largely one of indoctrination in orthodoxy; or that all frontier parishes did not relish Mather Byles' picture of the ideal preacher as "a most graceful, polished and fluent speaker, a perfect gentleman in manner, and a deep scholar."⁶² Asa Burton of Thetford (he had delivered the sermon at the installation of Daniel Breck), a noted theologian who trained many ministerial candidates, wrote of them in 1779: "They appeared to me to be very litigious, quarrelsome, intemperate, immoral, clownish and vulgar."⁶³ There can be no doubt that these frontier parishes, removed from the outlook and restraints of the older settlements and with a second generation poorly and only fitfully educated, had "little use for schol-

58. Darling, *op. cit.*, 33.

59. "In 1700-1725, 100% U. S. ministers were college graduates; in 1946, 49% had had neither college nor seminary training. Among Congregationalists, one-half had had the full professional training of college and seminary with one-quarter having neither. It is a retrogressive movement of one of the historic professions and away also from the steadily rising level of public intelligence." Willard L. Sperry, *Religion in America* (New York, 1946), 175-176.

60. J. M. Comstock, *The Congregational Churches of Vermont and Their Ministry* (St. Johnsbury, 1915), 127-179.

61. Congregational Church, Books II, III. Ordinations of 1828, 1839, 1893, 1904.

62. Clifford K. Shipton, "The New England Clergy of the Glacial Age, 1682-1725," *Publications of The Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, xxxii, 53.

63. "Memoir of Asa Burton," *American Quarterly Register* (Boston, May 1838), 324, as quoted by Ludlum, *op. cit.*, 21.

arship or humanized theology . . . ; they desired a violence inconsistent with even brilliant logic and a fiery intolerance which education bred out of a man."⁶⁴ In looking back to the early and apparently inexplicable dismissal of Daniel Breck, a man well educated and venerated by many, and the subsequent installation of Samuel Cheever, uneducated but gifted with the powers of exhortation and zeal (so highly admired), it is not difficult to know that this was but the blunt expression of frontier taste.

I went to an aneversory Meeting at C. McKinseys [McKenzie] whare the Reformation began the eleventh of August one year before. . . . The meeting lasted all night and was quite noisy. Doctor Chever was there well engaged in the work as I thought, but at that meeting the Doctor undertook to number the people that had set out since the Reformation began to serve the Lord. So they ware to pass through a room whare one stood to count them. I could not believe them all converts that went through & besides many went through that had been Professers a number of years. I believe it was hear that Doctor Chever began to die, for it plainly appeared that he was lifted up with pride thinking what a fine story it would be in his favor in the Magazene that so many had been converted under the Preaching of Doctor Samuel Cheever Paster of the Congregationalist Church in Hartland Vermont.⁶⁵

Great waves of Revivals beat upon Vermont throughout the nineteenth century. The first, that of the early 1800s, was largely an effort on the part of a frightened but resurgent Calvinism to combat the many threats to orthodoxy and to win "professors of religion," that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose."

Hartland shared in this work. . . . The good work appeared glorious in Cornish [N. H.]. Multitudes of men, women and children have experienced the grace of God. . . . While the Spirit moved upon the hearts of hundreds in Cornish, the people in Windsor appeared unconcerned and given over to frolick along the broad road to hell. On one side of the Connecticut River, all seemed engaged in religion; on the other all engaged after worldly emoluments, honours and amusements. . . . Meetings began to multiply. . . . The peals of Sinai's thunder fell and souls began to see and feel themselves in danger of hell fire. . . . The revival gradually advanced, sinners were alarmed, and Christians greatly en-

64. Shipton, *loc. cit.*

65. Winch, *op. cit.*, 259.

gaged in prayer and exhortation. . . . One man said that in the morning of life he was often thoughtful and very seriously inclined; but towards the meridian of life he embraced the sentiments of the Universalists and became very careless. He was lately brought to a sense of his wretched condition.⁶⁶

This sanctimony did increase church membership and was possibly the very practical reason for more of the same, though, with the whipped-up fanaticism of protracted meetings, "anxious seats," "inquiry rooms" and public conversions, thoughtful people turned from them.⁶⁷ "Conversion and Salvation" versus "Hell-fire and Damnation" began the downgrading of the spiritual significance of the old doctrines; the competitive "saving of souls" whittled denominational loyalties into bigotries; and all of this determined the quality of "being religious" for a long time.

There is but one instance of a church-sponsored revival in Hartland.

JAN. 10, 1840

The church in view of the low state of religion in the church and the Moral Desolation around us Voted to appoint a day of humiliation, fasting and Prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and for a revival of Religion in this place.

OCT. 1842

The Rev. O. Parker commenced Labor with us as an Evangelist and held meetings for two weeks. . . .

JAN. 7, 1843

The church received to their communion and fellowship 22.⁶⁸

Revivals also fostered that spirit of activism, that general going-about-doing-good, which too was to characterize much of the American mode of "being religious." A multitude of societies for Good Works and Good Causes sprang up; the pulpits became engaged in their propaganda, congregations in their activities and in their col-

66. Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818. Collected from Numerous Publications and Letters from Persons of Piety and Correct Information* (Albany, 1819), 84, 85, 98.

67. The notorious Jedediah Burchard, evangelist, held meetings in Woodstock for two weeks in 1835 and, though church membership increased, was soon discredited by the folly of his religious fervor and methods. Dana, *op. cit.*, Ch. XXIII.

68. Congregational Church, Book II.

lections. There were Temperance societies, Mission societies, Masonic and Antimasonic societies, Bible societies, Tract societies, Choir societies, Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavor, Young Peoples Unions, in all churches.

JUNE 1, 1866

The following brethren were appointed committee to solicit contributions to the various benevolent societies: A.B.C.F.M.—Dea. Bates, Vt. D.M.S.—Bro. Cleveland, Am. Missionary Ass.—Bro. Webster, Am. Congregational Union—Bro. Pratt, Tract Society—Bro. Harlow, Bible Society—Bro. Woodward, Education Society—Bro. Ainsworth, Seamen's Friend Society—Bro. Jacob Bates.⁶⁹

Slavery, the supreme issue of all, divided churches into "graduals" or "immediates," the former sponsoring the Colonization Society, the latter becoming full-fledged Abolitionists. Hartland had its Anti-Slavery Society and there was strong feeling over the Fugitive Slave Law but in spite of the bitter controversies raging throughout the state in pulpits, in newspapers, within the Anti-Slavery Society itself, as to the best means of securing emancipation of the slave, and a consequent division of many churches, the Hartland records of the period are strangely silent, reflecting none of it. The *Vermont Chronicle*, published in Windsor and actively engaged in the conservative opposition to the Abolition movement, was most certainly read by the townspeople.⁷⁰ In the Underground Railroad effort to transport escaped slaves to Canada, the Reverend "Lame" Smith, Hartland's Methodist minister at the time, did conspicuous work.⁷¹

After Revivals, Good Works, Good Causes, and War had occupied the churches, had externalized them, doctrines, which once roused minds and hearts and souls to battle, were forgotten. "Sin, theologically, may have been a fatal and universal infection of the human personality dating from the Fall, but Sin, practically, was unbelief and not going to church and profanity and licentiousness and intemperances and worldliness."⁷² Those churches which had

69. Congregational Church, Book III.

70. Darling, *op. cit.*, 36. Ludlum, *op. cit.*, 156-158.

71. H. G. Fairbanks, "Slavery and the Vermont Clergy," *Vermont History*, xxvii (Oct. 1959), 308.

72. Atkins and Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism* (Boston, 1942), 170.

been most rigid in creed now transferred their rigidities to behavior and in the last half of the century banned all "worldly amusements"—drinking, smoking, dancing, cardplaying, gambling—until, by some irrational quirk, conformity to these bans became the measure of religion. This spirit of narrow religiosity stalked the land the second half of the century until Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (and the Y.M.C.A.), all listed their forbidden amusements and the Hartland Congregational church with them. In 1852 there had been a division in the church on the matter, "whether a member should open his house for scenes of popular amusements or in any way to encourage & especially to be instrumental in induring [sic] them is wrong & more or less countenancing that which is demoralizing in its tendencies & ruinous to the religious welfare of the young." By 1880 there was no division; the Manual states unequivocally:

The following practices that prevail in the world are regarded by this church as inconsistent with Christian character (to so great an extent as to forfeit the impenitent offender's right to membership in the Church of Christ) and therefore censurable a) The sale or use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage b) The frequenting of assemblies convened for the purpose of revelings, banquetings, and dancing by the sexes promiscuously; and, in general, all such dissipating amusements of the carnal mind as are either sinful in themselves, or inconsistent with Christian character and duty by reason of their usual concomitants, or necessary consequences c) The profanation of the Sabbath, or any part of it, in labor for worldly gain, or in seeking worldly amusement.⁷³

This was not the voice of the town speaking, for dancing and balls had been held since the earliest days when the spring floor of the old Pavilion House was famous; nor was it that of the Universalists, whose Annual Festivals, instituted in 1863, and Fairs and Socials, always included dancing along with the many plays and pageants.⁷⁴ But this was that "cloud of Calvinism which enwrapped the whole valley of the Connecticut in spiritual gloom."⁷⁵ It had been gather-

73. The 1906 Manual omitted these forbiddens, possibly forgave them!

74. Darling, *op. cit.*, 65-67. J. Howard Flower, "Memories of Former Times in the Four Corners," *The Free Soul* (July 1959), 92, 93.

75. Henry Steele Wardner, *The Birthplace of Vermont* (New York, 1927), 93.

ing since the early days of the "Watch and Care" and had long been fostered in the climate of evangelism.

This pseudo-Puritanism with its demands for outward evidences of piety now became the practice, without the substance, of an earlier Calvinism which was dying. That austere doctrine, since the days of the Reformation and before, had been rather a reach of spirit to give meaning to the "pilgrim's journey" and an expression for the human situation in a world not made by man. Its discipline was an inward, not outward, one and lay in a Calvinist's intensely introspective concern with his own worthiness and the right. In its 100 years, its spirit spent in wrestling with the honest doubt of increased knowledge, and but flimsily patched with the absurdities of "logicking" and emotional revivals, it had outlived its usefulness and any significant meaning.

At this time, too, the churches lost their way in the mazes of controversy occasioned by the new Biblical scholarship and the new outlook of scientific evolutionary theory which filtered through to them at the end of the century. In rural districts, as elsewhere, people divided into fundamentalists, resisting any enlarged view of their God, or liberals, cultivating a more secular spirit of inquiry. But, whichever way, the result of it all was that from now on, in most churches, belief was to be removed from the field of any authoritarianism into that of private conscience.

In so far as a national point of view can express that of a local community, denominationally, it is pertinent here to tell of a few of the resolutions adopted by the National Council of Congregationalists in 1865 and in 1913. These were in time to apply to the Hartland church and illustrate the changes that have overtaken it in 100 years. The National Council buried Calvinism, for Congregationalism, appropriately enough, with their Burial Hill (Plymouth) Declaration of 1865 when, acknowledging that the affirmation that Congregational doctrine is Calvinism would seem unduly divisive and sectarian to a respectable minority, the Declaration was made an expression of the essential unity of the whole Church of Christ and the considered omission, of course, of the phrase "Calvinism."⁷⁶ In the Creed of 1883 the National Council stated more explicitly what

⁷⁶ Williston Walker, *History of the Congregational Churches in the United States* (New York, 1894), 398.

had been implied in the earlier Burial Hill Declaration and it was this creed the Hartland church in its 1906 Manual stated as the substance of its doctrine. There is no predestination, no election, no distinctive Calvinism; there is, in Article 11, this complete capitulation to the Arminian heresies the church had had to defy for well over 200 years:

We believe that the providence of God, by which he executes his eternal purposes in the government of the world, is in and over all events; yet so that the freedom and responsibility of man are not impaired and sin in the act of the creature alone.

A new note, a new emphasis, obtained in Congregational church literature thereafter. The Kansas City statement of 1913 stressed *the striving to know* the will of God, *the spirit of inquiry, the rights of private judgment and belief*, the striving for human brotherhood and the unity of the one Catholic Church of Christ—and this was to be the spirit of all later pronouncements. Its spokesmen attribute this advanced liberalism to the polity of the Congregational church, the flexibility of which has allowed for the evolving life of the individual church, yet signally fail to pay tribute to the many heresies that contributed to it.

Most rural churches throughout Vermont were faced with the disheartening decline in population of the towns to such an extent that the problem of survival became a serious one. When many were forced to close, these Hartland churches continued active through the devoted service and dedication of very small congregations. By 1880 Congregational membership had dropped to 48 (as opposed to 108 of 1836); the Universalist to 31 (as opposed to 200 of 1840); and this situation was to worsen through the remaining years of the century and well into the next. In 1931 the Hartland Congregational and Universalist churches formed an Association "for the purpose of engaging a minister together, to provide Christian instruction and public worship, and to promote social service." The meeting houses were shared; the Congregational open in winter and the Universalist used in summer. In June 1959 the Universalists withdrew to establish their separate church life once more, sharing the pastor of the Windsor Unitarian church. The North Hartland Church, which had operated as both a Union meeting house, and

more particularly as a Methodist one, throughout the nineteenth century, was closed for any but occasional preaching about 1930; it was reopened in 1946 to operate again, as a Methodist church under the Troy Conference but preferring to be known as a Community church, so signifying its purpose to serve all Protestants in the community.⁷⁷

While men may battle for doctrines and churches be founded upon them, it is always the warmth of fellowship and community goodwill that sustain them. Three Hartland churches survive to-day—the Congregationalist at the Three Corners, the Universalist at the Four Corners, and the Methodist at North Hartland. In the remarkable similarity of services, in the wide diversity of personal beliefs, and in the common lack of any doctrinal interest or content, the particularity of each has been lost, and of the zeal of creed that planted them in the wilderness, only denominational loyalties now remain to tell of their once embattled and disparate origins.



77. Report of the Rev. H. L. Stimmel to the Fourth Quarterly Conference, Troy Annual Conference, of the Methodist Church, Feb. 23, 1947.