

Fire Recalls Story of Formation of Minneapolis Unitarian Church

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By Izella M Dart.

The destruction of the interior of the Unitarian church by fire is felt by its congregation to be a great calamity. Nor is it merely from a financial standpoint that its people view this loss. The church home has been greatly loved, and while practically all within that was rendered dear by association has been converted into blackened ruins, the old walls are still intact, and the sentiment is strong for remaining within them and upon the spot that was chosen by its founders. This was proved by the enthusiasm shown at the first meeting of the congregation held at the public library on the Wednesday evening following the fire.

Though within this building has developed the religious life of more than one generation, there are still left some of those who have been with the church during all of its history, who with voices scarce to be controlled speak of it and what it has meant to them. While to the younger members, this inheritance of the past is very dear.

Spirit of Church Lives.

At the meeting held Sunday, May 5, following the morning services in the Jewish Temple on Tenth street and Fifth avenue S, there was much thoughtful discussion. Later, the final decision was left to the trustees, who expect to rebuild in the same place. The chief desire is to so act as to remain true to what the church stands for. There is a feeling far deeper than mere sentiment for the building.

"Ours was a temple" said the minister that first Sunday morning after the fire, "a temple of truth, of freedom in religion. All that was within its walls was of brotherhood and uplifting. We have our saints, sweet, beautiful, noble, true men and women. This is why we are sorry that the place where we worship is totally a ruin. We feel that the temple has been desecrated. Yet the church visible is a very slight thing to the church spiritual. But the spirit! Ah! That is different. It lives on so grandly that the great Peace society can send out as its noblest utterance a message signed with the name "Henry M Simmons" long after his body has mingled with the clods."

The Birth of the Church.

Away back in the early seventies, about 1872, a geologist named William Denton, a man of much scientific knowledge, gave a course of lectures in the Pence Opera house at Second street and Hennepin Avenue, at that time the only theater building in the city. These lectures attracted many persons, and caused much adverse criticism.

It was apparently as a direct result of these lectures that the Liberal league, an organization composed of independent thinkers, had its beginning. And it seems also to be true that individuals from the same Liberal league formed the nucleus of the group of men and women that Mr. Simmons afterward organized into a Unitarian church.

The Liberal league met every Sunday afternoon in Harrison's hall at Washington and Nicollet avenues. It was said to have been made up of a mixture of all kinds and degrees of liberal thought. S.C. Gale conducted these meetings, and through the power of his personality harmonized the different elements as far as possible. The organization, however, is said to have been too iconoclastic to endure. But this was only a necessary step. It was not the end.

Later, many of these persons, reinforced by others from less liberal churches, gathered in this same hall to listen to Mr. Washburn, a young Unitarian minister from Massachusetts, who had been secured to address them for a time. But no permanent organization was formed and the meetings were finally discontinued for some reason, probably financial.

The real history of the church, however, was to begin with the advent of Mr. Simmons, and no account of its organization and early development can even be touched upon without bringing into it at every step the life of one who for nearly a quarter of a century was its pastor.

Rev. Henry M. Simmons.

Rev. Henry M. Simmons was a native of New York. In his early life he was a teacher and an editor. He was graduated at the Presbyterian Theological seminary at Auburn, N. Y., and for a brief time remained in the Presbyterian church, preaching at Syracuse. After uniting with the Unitarians, he had charges successively at Ilion, N.Y.; Kenosha, Wis., where a memorial church has been erected since his death, and also at Madison, Wis., from which place he came to Minneapolis.

The sermons of this man attracted much attention and at times aroused strong opposition in the city. He sometimes differed pointedly with many of his own congregation in his methods of dealing with the problems of the times. And yet, though a man of quiet, studious habits, he became so well known and liked in the community

that, at the exposition of 1888, he was voted the most popular preacher in Minneapolis. He had none of the superficialities of oratory, though, in a remarkable degree, he possessed strength of thought and beauty of language.

Outside of his own community, Mr. Simmons was a well-known scholar. His writings have been translated into several languages. "The Unending Genesis", and "New Tables of Stone" are often mentioned. He was well known as a great peace advocate, and a tract on peace written by him has recently been published by the International Peace Society, this being one of the three pamphlets chosen for such publications.

Arrival of Mr. Simmons.

In 1900, nearly twenty years after its organization, Mr. Simmons delivered a sermon dealing with the history of the church, in which he told in a humorous manner of the great hesitancy, yet resistless inclination with which he committed himself to the building of a liberal church in Minneapolis, while at the same time he commented on the conditions here at that early period.

He said: "Twenty years ago next summer, O. P. Whitcomb, then state auditor of Minnesota, wrote Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones of Chicago, then our western secretary, that there seemed some possibility of starting a Unitarian society in Minneapolis if a minister of the right sort were sent there. No minister of the right sort was then at liberty; and, in the lack of one, Mr. Jones was driven to the necessity of sending me, who, after various pastorates in New York and subsequently in Wisconsin, after a long one of eight years in Kenosha and another of some three years in Madison, was getting rather old and superannuated and felt the need of the change and a sinecure somewhere. So I came here to look, the first Sunday in the next September, nineteen years ago, driving over from St. Paul that morning with Mr. Whitcomb. There seemed promise of a good audience, for the newspapers had well advertised the meeting; and, out of that supply of eulogistic adjectives which they always keep in store to welcome new ministers, they had adorned me with some very handsome ones, and I felt safely confident that no reader would know enough about me to contradict them, as my name had never got across the Mississippi before. But notwithstanding this effort to entice the public, it was quite indifferent and did not come. We met in the hall of the Adventists on the second floor down below Third Street. But the little room was too large that morning. I suppose some twenty five persons were present, of whom, however, quite a large fraction had come over from our church in St. Paul. Of our subsequent trustees, only one was there, a man who for twenty years had been generously working for liberal thought in the town. But he seemed to have little hope that the meeting would lead to anything, and still less after the sermon was over. The little audience endeavored to look cheerful and everyone tried hard to feel that we had had a good meeting. One or two, indeed, talked

bravely about the possibility of having another, and Mr. Whitcomb was so rash as to prophesy that we should yet have a church here."

Mr. Simmons went on to relate his own discouragement and his determination to accept a call to Denver after his return to Madison. But somehow he could not forget Minneapolis, neither were the people willing to give him up. They wrote asking him to try it again. This time he sent Jenkin Lloyd Jones, whose judgment he considered better than his own, to look over the field. Mr. Jones didn't greet him with much enthusiasm when, on his way home, he stepped off the midnight train at Madison to talk the matter over.

Mr. Simmons said: "I am not even sure that he had much faith in the town. I remember how he told me that he had illustrated a point in his sermon by the pavements. He had seen a smile sweep over the audience and had been afterward told that there was not a foot of pavement in the city. For Minneapolis with its 50,000 people to still be walking in the mud did, I dare say, seem rather unpromising to a citizen of Chicago."

Persisted in Effort.

Nevertheless, Mr. Jones had arranged for meetings to be held on the two following Sundays.

"I came back," continued Mr. Simmons, "and held a meeting on October 9. That date may be taken as the beginning of our church history, for my preaching here has never since been interrupted except on vacation. * * * We met that Sunday, as we continued to do for some months afterward, in a little hall (Elliot's Hall) back of the jewelry store down near Washington Avenue."

However, Mr. Simmons went away again undecided, but returned before another Sunday and remained. He told of a conversation with a citizen of St. Paul during this period of indecision.

"A friend checked my expressed disposition to trust the people here without any definite promise by replying very decidedly 'don't you do it.' And he vaguely hinted that in speculative Minneapolis even definite promises were not so sure as mere suggestions in the soldier city down the river. Not yet knowing the depth of animosity between the two cities, I was somewhat influenced by what he said and went on my way thinking that probably I would better not rely too implicitly on Minneapolis promises, especially as I hadn't received any."

But the people were too anxious for a church and too anxious to secure Mr. Simmons as their pastor to delay long in making promises. The result was that he gave up the

offer from a well-established church clear of debt for the "mere chance of a church meeting in a hired hall and not owning even a hymnbook or having any organization to own one."

Those weeks of indecision are described as a time of unprecedented rainfall when "the wheels sank to the hubs on Nicollet and Washington Avenues" while all the time lingered in his mind thoughts of "the cloudless Colorado climate." But one day when the sun came out for a few minutes, the decision was made. About this decision Mr. Simmons remarked "I have never been sorry for it for a second and never felt the faintest wish to be anywhere else."

Organization of the Society.

"We then at once began to take steps for organization," continued the narrative. "On the last Sunday of that October, the committee was appointed to draw up and report a plan; and the next Sunday, November 6, they reported a Constitution and bylaws which were, after a little discussion, adopted by the congregation; and the society was soon legally incorporated and organized. It took the name of the "First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis", but disclaimed any sectarian spirit and declared in its constitution that it aimed to be one where "people without regard to theological differences may unite for mutual helpfulness in intellectual, moral and religious culture, and humane work; and that all persons whatsoever who sympathize with these aims should be welcome to the society".

The organization was completed before the month was over and officers were chosen. The articles of incorporation were signed November 18, 1881. The signers were; S. C. Gale, O. C. Merriman, C. C. Jones, A. Barnard, F. Von Schingel, R. B. Squires, W. H. Nudd, C. Ford, W. W. Parker, Gilbert H. Howe, C. H. Dubois, Robert Hale, M. R. Baldwin, John B. Bartlett, James A. Lovejoy, Woodbury Fisk, C. A. Mitchell, A. C. Austin and James W. Griffin. The first board of trustees consisted of Samuel C. Gale, James A. Lovejoy, Robert Hale, Woodbury Fisk and Orlando C. Merriman. The latter was president.

What Unitarian Means.

The sermon of Mr. Simmons on "What Unitarian Means," given on the Sunday following the organization of the Unitarian Society, again at the time of the dedication of the church, and in substance again twenty years later when he said he had not changed his definition, shows his viewpoint as well as that of such men as Edward Everett Hale, Dr. Martineau, and of the great body of Unitarians today.

"I care little for names," he said "I shall seldom use this one. Though Unitarianism may have a good record as a denomination, its greatest glory has been in its undenominational spirit. As Dr. Bellows says, it is a sect only in its opposition to sectarianism. The best thing which Unitarian means to me is not even the principles of religious liberty, but the idea of religious unity which the name suggests.

"Its root and fundamental idea is unity. So we have long been wont, in pronouncing the name Unitarianism, to pass lightly over the "-arianism" and lay all the emphasis on the unite. And now, dropping the -ism, we are turning to the word in which its historical meaning and real spirit lie; we proclaim our faith in unity, the unity of religion in righteousness, the unity of men with each other and with nature, and the unity of all in God. It is this flag of unity in religion we are trying to wave in Minneapolis. With my prejudice for the name I was in favor of calling the organization 'Unity Church' but the rest of the committee thought that so many of you had an ancestral and tender regard for the denominational name, it would be better to call it the Unitarian Society. So you have decided, but, as I have endeavored to show, there is nothing sectarian in the name. And so we shall enjoy that religious liberty which seeks to build, not on the license of man, but on the laws of God. The idea of unity will guide and consecrate our liberty, making us see the rights of all, increasing our charity for all, and deepening our religion by showing the divine law and the life filling and connecting all. So seeing the unity of men with each other and their unity with nature below, and the divine spirit above, we shall come nearer to a comprehension of the old truth of the unity of God, who is above all and through all and in us all."

Early History of the Society.

To return to the history of the church: it now moved from Elliot's Hall, which had become too small for the congregation, to the Jewish synagogue, located at that time where the Farmers & Mechanics' Savings bank now stands. This is interesting taken in connection with the fact that it is the same Jewish society that has again opened its doors to the church now rendered homeless by the fire.

The narrative says: "we left the little hall and, on New Year's Day, 1882, began to occupy the Jewish synagogue, and continued to for four and a half years. The synagogue was on Fifth Street, much less commodious and pleasant than now; and the disadvantages we suffered there show that there must've been some worth in us. Some days we were nearly frozen, some days roasted, and some days smoked. These sufferings were also symbolical of more special days we were called upon to endure. Outside the synagogue there was much smoke by misjudgment about us and some rather freezing contempt, and, now and then, some remarks."

But there is no trace of bitterness in the words of Mr. Simmons referring to the criticisms during those struggling days, nor when he jokingly adds that even now he occasionally meets those who are evidently surprised to find him less satanic than they are supposed.

Different departments of church work were inaugurated and carried on amid great difficulties. Notwithstanding the difficulties, however, it was "a growing and happy church" then the idea of the building took root and began to develop.

Building the Church.

To again quote Mr. Simmons: "the trustees had talked from time to time of a church of our own, and even secured a lot and started a subscription. We were so few in number that the project seemed impossible, and the subject had been allowed to drop. But one April day in 1885 there was a memorable trustees meeting to discuss the subject further. The meeting opened rather dismally, as if the project were hopeless. But one trustee began to tell what he would give, and it was so much as to make the others open their eyes in amazement. The example was contagious and the rest of them immediately began to follow it as far as they could and for a time it looked as if we were going to get the whole thing done that afternoon. More subscriptions were added through the week, and still more the next Sunday, April 12, and, very soon after, the work began for the new church. You remember how it went on, month after month, while the hard quartz was slowly cut and laid in the beautiful walls. Of course, it cost more than twice as much as had been expected. The amount of money that was given by a very few men – most of it by one man – was so great that I suppose medieval churches would have regarded it as a miraculous help from Providence. We began to meet in the basement in September 1886, just five years after my first sermon here. We met there through the winter and spring; and very flourishing meetings we had, with the audience filling the room and the stairs, and sometimes running over into the connected rooms, standing in the kitchen, and even sitting on the sink.'

"Finally the upper part of the building was finished and furnished; and one beautiful June Sunday in 1887 the church was dedicated, with a great audience, with addresses from Mr. Crathers and several other ministers, and with the general happiness of the society. The building itself was considered a triumph in those days. A prominent architectural critic from New York, in writing for Harper's magazine an article on Minneapolis buildings, selected this as the church to be honored with a picture. Visitors from outside the town used also to admire the auditorium and sometimes told me it surpassed in quiet but tasteful beauty that of any other church they knew."

A Well Built Church.

It was certainly a well-built church. Oliver T. Erickson, the superintendent of construction said: "If there were any stones laid in the walls of that church which Samuel Gale and Robert Hale did not examine with critical care they must of been very small." Both were men of good judgment and exquisite taste, and their services were given as freely as if they were building homes of their own. And dear Mr. Simmons would come and protest that they were building too fine a church for his work. The plan of the auditorium as well as of the entire first floor was highly praised, and the interior finishing was of the best material.

What the Newspapers Said.

There was much comment upon its homelike appearance as well as upon the informal attitude of the congregation. "It was spoken of as a "Minneapolis homelike church which teaches love, not fear." "From the absence of a spire to the fireplace in the main auditorium, the building is a home and not a temple," said one paper at the time of its construction. Yet it has been both to its people through all its history.

For many years Mr. Simmons kept a scrapbook in which he preserved newspaper clippings on all matters relating to the church. Here is one describing the building at the time of its completion.

"The First Unitarian church, regarded as one of the most handsomest and most complete temples of worship in the northwest, is situated at the corner of Eighth street and Mary place. The church has been built under the direction of Messrs. O. C. Merriman, S. C. Gale and R. E. Grimshaw and a building committee, with Oliver Erickson superintendent of construction. The ground measurement is 50 x 115 feet. The material used is what is known as "broken ashlar" or Indian red Luvern jasper. The design of the church is a combination of Queen Anne and Italian. In the interior arrangement the high basement or first story contains besides kitchen, toilet rooms, boiler rooms and other apartments, a music hall, 31 x 64 feet, with the stage at one end. On the second floor is the main auditorium, 47x65 feet, with two galleries; elegant parlors, pastor's study, library and classrooms. The galleries are but little above the main floor, do not extend over it, and can be reached either from the interior or exterior of the auditorium. The ceiling is flat and paneled with hardwood. The interior finish is of birch. The doors and windows are hung with curtains. The parlors have easy chairs, fireplaces and other attractive features. The pulpit is located on one side instead of at the end, and the 600 seats are so arranged in an amphitheatrical form that on the main floor no person can be more than thirty five feet from the speaker, and in the galleries more than forty two feet. The entrance is through a vestibule from which open parlors,

and reception rooms look into the auditorium. The heating is by steam. The gas fixtures are of antique brass. In one corner is a fireplace, and in the niche above this will stand a bust of Emerson. The decorations are of a modest character, but highly ornamental. Rich olive tints prevail as body color, with outlines of gold, lemon and copper bronzes. The halls and side rooms are decorated in harmony with the chapel. Of the features of the church one of the most prominent is the main entrance. This is from the old Italian, having a double arch with massive pillars of polished St. Cloud granite. The pastor's study in the southwest corner on the gallery floor is the most charming room in the church. It has a fireplace, an oriel window and one end is completely taken up with a bookcase. The furnishing is cozy and attractive. In the opposite corner on this floor is the Unity or young people's clubroom. This is furnished in antique oak with a tiled fireplace. The auditorium has five large brass chandeliers, with a profusion of smaller lights wherever needed. The organ is a very fine instrument and was presented to the church by Mr. S. C. Gale. In the reception room is a small but especially handsome window, much of it being of settings of gems."

Dedication of the Church.

June 5, 1887, was a great day for the Unitarians, for on that day, as already stated, their church was dedicated. Mr. Simmons himself made the chief address. After giving a brief history of the society he told what the new church stood for. In conclusion he said: "The upward look of man toward the Infinite cannot be stopped. As one says: 'churches come and go; creeds are formulated and forgotten, but the heart still ponders the mysteries of life and hands are being always lifted to the Eternal.'"

"To this eternal religion we dedicate our new church; not indeed, to any special religious name, but to those principles which are common to all religion and are the best things in Christianity.

"We dedicate it to justice and love, which are the best earthly names of God. We dedicate it to the trust and hope which God has given to all races. May it be the home of virtues as solid and enduring as its own quartzite and of graces as beautiful as its own architecture and decorations. And may all who inhabit it inherit the love and devotion shown by you who have built it with such sacrifice."

The beautiful dedicatory service prepared by Mr. Simmons followed the sermon. The keynote of the entire service was Unity.

Mr. Gale's Part in the Work.

The church feels that it owes a large debt of gratitude to S. C. Gale, an old and influential citizen of Minneapolis, for his substantial aid in organizing and providing a home for the society. The building of the church was made possible at that time only through the contributions of Mr. Gale, although there is also much credit due to others. In December of last year the church held a memorial meeting at which his life and services were reviewed, in order that he might know, while still living, that his work had been appreciated. He is thought of as one who has done many good deeds in quiet ways.

Striving to Stand By Principles.

Mr. Simmons in speaking of the years following the dedication of the church, said:

"We were true to the principles for which the church was founded and that was the essential thing. We have heard in our meetings speakers of all sorts of religious beliefs; Congregational, Presbyterian, Jewish, Armenian, Parsee, Buddhist, Brahman, and are ready to hear a Mohammedan when he comes. This is something; and I suppose one of the most religious things that can be done to help heal the divisions that have separated honest men."

Departments of Church Work.

Days of great prosperity came after the completion and occupancy of the new building. The auxiliaries of the church were in a flourishing condition. From the very first there had been a woman's society which gave much time and energy to charitable work, both in its own community and elsewhere. This body accomplished wonders in earning money to furnish the new church. So it was decreed that for a time the contribution box should not be passed to the women. As a result of this decree, a woman visiting the church one day was somewhat mortified when, reaching out to drop her offering into the box, she saw it abruptly withdrawn. She confessed afterward that this was a new experience to her.

"In 1893 there was a more definite organization under the name "Woman's club," and the scope of the work was enlarged. Classes in sloyd [Wikipedia: Sloyd (Swedish slöjd), also known as educational sloyd, is a system of handicraft-based education started by Uno Cygnaeus in Finland in 1865.] were conducted, both for the children of the congregation and as charitable work, long before it was taken up by the public schools. This club also provided valuable lecture courses, securing as speakers men of such ability as John Fisk of Harvard, the noted historian, and Jenkin Lloyd Jones of Chicago.

Unity club had many departments, charitable, social and literary. It conducted a free kindergarten for a time and sewing school. Its literary department was popular outside the church. The dramatic section was an important branch of Unity club. A successful play was staged during the spring of 1888 under the personal direction of Sol Smith Russell. This was given in connection with one presented by the Church of the Redeemer, the proceeds from both going to the Universalist Society, whose church had just been destroyed by fire.

Among the early benevolences helped by the church were Maternity hospital, Unity Settlement House, and the Associated Charities.

New names had appeared from time to time on the Board of Trustees. Dr. A. H. Barnard, Dr. George F. French, Charles T. Harris, E. S. Corser, Charles W. Brown, S. R. Child, A. Uland, W. H. Bennett and T. J. Dansingberg were all members during the life of Mr. Simmons.

In the sermon already referred to, Mr. Simmons spoke of the financial troubles that came upon the church during the period of great financial depression [Federal Reserve: the Panic of 1893 was one of the most severe financial crises in the history of the United States.] after it had been weakened by the death or removal of many of its best helpers. Death had taken three trustees, Robert Hale, Woodbury Fisk and Dr. George French. Judge Von Schlagel, Mr. Barnes and Henry Menage had also died. Altogether it was a time of discouragement, through which a brave and devoted spirit was manifested by the people.

The sermon closed with a more hopeful outlook for the church. The finances were in a better condition after the general depression was over, and all seemed bright.

Death of Mr. Simmons.

That was in 1900. Gradually deafness and worse, the terrible disease with which he was struggling, encroached upon the life and work of the pastor. Assistants came, but they could not fill the place of the beloved minister. Slowly he grew weaker, yet clinging to his labor, always preaching except when he was so utterly weak that he could not stand in the pulpit, continuing his work even when unable to go to and from the church. And so there he lived and died, in the church that had become his very life. In one of the upper rooms across the hall from the study, the tortured body was relieved and the strong spirit passed out and on. This was on May 26, 1905 after a life of not quite sixty-four years.

"Through the years you have met here before your minister's face", said the Rev. W. C. Gannett in addressing the congregation afterward, "he has been steadily consecrating

this building with his high thought and faith. He has left his life in the building. He lived out his modesty, his patience, his gentle cheer, within these very walls. This is the day of rededication for your church." As he himself had said of someone else, "This power of spirit to work on after death strengthens our faith in spirit and in the loves and hopes with which it is filled. Such a life is too divine to die, and the love you feel for him is the whisper of a higher law which has produced it and will not be false to it."

At the funeral Dr. Marion D. Shutter struck a fundamental element in his character by saying:

"No one illustrated more splendidly in all the relations of life the gospel of love."

Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones of Chicago spoke of him as "the man who made science and religion synonymous, revelation a present fact, inspiration a living demonstration, work a joy, death a friend, with whom he spent in familiar intercourse long days of patient suffering and unflagging work."

Andrew D. White, in writing of him in his own autobiography, said that it was such as he who made life beautiful and worthwhile.

Rev. E. Stanton Hodgin.

The work begun by Mr. Simmons went on. Rev. E. Stanton Hodgin was chosen to succeed him. Mr. Hodgin was born of Quaker parents, and he retained the simplicity, and the sincerity of his ancestors, if not their religious tenets. He was a westerner and was graduated at the University of South Dakota. Later he attended the Unitarian Divinity school at Meadville, Pa. His first pastorate was at Humboldt Iowa. From there he went to San Francisco, where he remained but a few months, returning to his former church at Humboldt for another year. Then he took charge of a church at Helena, Mont. While in Humboldt, he married Miss Clara Bricknell, who died at Helena. In 1905 he came to Minneapolis to take up the work laid down by Mr. Simmons. Mr. Hodgin was peculiarly fitted to succeed a man possessing such a gentle modest nature as that of Mr. Simmons, because he was possessed of like qualities.

Mr. Hodgins Sermons.

There is much of the philosopher about Mr. Hodgin. He sought as far as possible, to analyze and formulate his religious conviction. He is well remembered for a series of sermons which he designated "An appeal to Reason in Religious Faith." As to the Christ idea he said:

“Ours is not a religion with the Christ idea left out, but rather a religion in which the Christ idea has been so expanded that the people as yet fail in a large degree to recognize it.”

Mr. Hodgins Work.

Mr. Hodgins took up and ably carried on the various departments of church work that Mr. Simmons' failing health had obliged him to discontinue. He continued with the church nearly three years, when he decided to accept a call to Los Angeles, where he still remains. Toward the close of his pastorate here he married Miss Ida Woodworth, an active worker in his congregation. With much regret the church saw him depart, for he had found his own place in their lives, even though he had succeeded one whose peculiar place could not be filled.

Rev. Wilson M Backus.

But the people turned with a hopeful and sincere welcome to the new pastor, who was their unanimous choice. He did not come a stranger among them, for he had visited them more than once before. And he came in the same spirit in which they received him. He said to the people: "I was drawn to this church because of its history. I am proud to be a successor of the men that have gone before."

The ministerial career of Mr. Backus began in the Methodist Episcopal church in which he had been reared. He was connected with the upper Iowa conference of this church when strong conviction forced him to withdraw from it. He then took charge of the Universalist church at Blanchester, Ohio. His next pastorate was also a Universalist church at Sharpsville, Pa. His connection with the Unitarian church began with his work at Alton Ill., where he remained five years. From there he went to Streeter, Ill., for two years, after which he became pastor of the Third Unitarian church of Chicago. He gave up this charge to become secretary of the western Unitarian conference with headquarters in Chicago. This position was held for five years until, in 1908, he came to Minneapolis to succeed Mr. Hodgins.

The Work of Mr. Backus.

Mr. Backus has been with his congregation long enough for them to know him well, and thus knowing him, to believe even more strongly in humanity. They are glad to claim him as their leader. His inherent sincerity and thorough consistency force him to seek the root of things. He feels strongly that all the conditions of the life of today which inevitably prevent physical purity and moral uprightness are religious problems. Under such

conditions "Godliness is impossible." To endeavor to remedy them is the best religious work.

On the minister falls perhaps the hardest part of a church disaster, especially when he is by nature self-sacrificing. The congregation realizes this fact and is rallying to his support. Then too Mr. Backus has suffered an individual loss in the ruin of his choice library by water, a third loss of that kind which he has sustained. This means much to one whose books are dear friends.

There was no break in the activities of the church with the change of ministers. In fact, when Mr. Backus came he brought with him another minister in Mrs. Backus, who at once gave herself unreservedly to the work.

The auxiliary organizations of the church at the present time are the Sunday school, Woman's alliance, Men's club, Unity club, Dramatic club and Browning club.

The Sunday school meets at 12pm. S. A. Stockwell is superintendent. An important feature of the Sunday school is the adult class. Its object is to study the problems of the day with the special aim of civic betterment.

The Woman's club is now known as the "Woman's alliance." An important organization before, under the presidency of Mrs. Backus it has become one of the chief bulwarks of the church. Its aim is partly literary and social, and partly to give financial aid to the church and to charitable organizations. It holds all-day meetings on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. There is a special topic and speaker for each meeting.

The Men's club was organized Dec. 14, 1900. It was a pioneer in the movement for men's clubs in the churches as far as Minneapolis is concerned. Many of its members have been active in organizing and carrying on the Saturday Lunch club. The meetings, held on the third Friday of the month, are devoted to the discussion of vital questions of the time or community, political, economic and social.

A speaker, who is considered an authority on the subject chosen, is invited to lead the informal discussion. These meetings are characterized by the utmost freedom and frankness of expression and by the greatest variety of individual opinion. At first the part of the women was simply to provide the banquet; but a present, known to be a strong woman suffragist, invited the women to take part in the discussions, so that, after all, the name Men's club is now something of a misnomer. The interest in the club has been unflagging from the very beginning. J. W. Bennett is the president.

Unity club is at present confined to literary and social activities. It is more largely composed of the younger members of the congregation than are the other organizations. It meets Monday evenings, holding three literary and one social meeting

each month. The past year has been devoted to a critical study of Victor Hugo's masterpiece, "Les Miserables." The Dramatic club, which has recently given an excellent entertainment under the direction of Miss Clara Theisen, is an adjunct of Unity club.

During the last year there has been a Browning club among the women of the church. This meets informally. Dancing classes are conducted, both for children and adults, the former under the charge of Mrs. H. F. Mead and the latter directed by John Lonis Horn.

No new names appeared on the board of trustees until 1909, when the number of members was increased. Since that time, John H. Garland, Albert Dollenmayer and Frederick V. Brown have served. The present board consists of S. R. Child, Charles E. Cottrell, S. C. Gale, Stiles P. Jones, Samuel L. Sewall, Allan L. Weeks, George S. Wilson and Mrs. Maud Conkey Stockwell. J. A. Larrimore is clerk, Allan L. Weeks, treasurer.

An indebtedness to the American Unitarian society was rapidly decreasing before the fire. Now, however, a sufficient number of pledges have been made to show that the congregation will probably rebuild the church and pay the old debt without leasing the building in the future. They are glad that it has been of service as a convenient place for many excellent lectures and concerts.

Now as always that gatherings of the people are pervaded with the informality and spontaneity of the home atmosphere. On the 19th of last January they met for a backward look, and, to those gathered to review the church history, many letters came, some from distant cities, telling of the place this church still holds in the memory and affection, of the free, happy spirit that had pervaded it from the beginning, of the lasting ties formed there, and of its influence for good on their lives.

The pastors have one and all been men of marked individuality, yet without that self-assertion that would cause them to act as censors over the thoughts and acts of the members of their congregation. They have one and all been men who were not afraid to stand up in the pulpit and tell the truth as they saw it. At the same time, they have been men who could, when they stepped down from the pulpit, listen to and respect the honest opinions of others, no matter how different from their own. In fact, they have stood logically upon the ground for which their church stands, recognizing in each man or woman an independent searcher for truth, yet at the same time recognizing the unity of the fellowship in the search.