

**SEQUEL TO "OUR
LIBERAL
MOVEMENT"**

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Sequel to "Our Liberal Movement" by Joseph Henry Allen

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JOSEPH HENRY ALLEN

**SEQUEL TO "OUR
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MOVEMENT"**

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TO

"OUR LIBERAL MOVEMENT"

BY

JOSEPH HENRY ALLEN

LATE LECTURER ON ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY IN
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS

1897

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SEQUEL TO
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I.

THE OLD SCHOOL AND ITS WORK.¹

ONE year ago William Henry Furness, then in his ninety-fourth year, — the widest known, the most venerated, and the best beloved name among us, — was appointed the speaker of this occasion. It was an act of confiding trust in his perpetual youth; for of him that may be said more literally than of any other whom we have known, which Homer says of Nestor, that "from his tongue flowed speech more sweet than honey, yet already two generations of mortal men were passed away, while he stood as a prince among the third." And, when some of us heard him at the conference in Washington, four months later, we listened to a voice as resonant and firm, if not quite so mellow, as when he spoke to us in his earlier prime.

It is, as you will easily understand, with much diffidence and reluctantly that I have consented to occupy the hour which that voice should have filled;

¹ An address before the Alumni of the Harvard Divinity School, June 23, 1896.

and I did not promise to undertake the task until it proved impossible to be undertaken by some one at once more nearly contemporary with Dr. Furness and more closely associated with his earlier life-work. Besides, it was thought fitting that this should be an occasion not only or chiefly of personal commemoration, but for bringing into a single view the work of an entire period, which the passing away of that one life seems suddenly to have thrown back in the perspective, and to have made a scene in history by itself.

Two circumstances, which I will not dwell on, set this view of our topic in special relief to-day, — the recent passing away of so many of the "Old Guard" among our ministers, making a death-list in the last eighteen months of ten, whose average age was considerably over eighty, and the average length of their ordained service nearly sixty years;¹ and, second, the completion of seventy years since the building and consecration of this Divinity Hall in which we are now met. And I may add that the reason of my speaking is that what I shall offer is in the way of personal testimony rather than an historical survey simply or a general essay, since every name I shall have to recall in these memories is that of one toward whom I have stood in some direct personal

¹ Their names in the order of seniority are: Thomas T. Stone (1801-95); W. H. Furness (1802-96); J. H. Morison (1808-96); H. A. Miles (1809-95); G. W. Briggs (1810-95); F. W. Holland (1811-95); E. B. Willson (1820-95); J. F. Moors (1821-95); O. B. Frothingham (1822-95); Augustus Woodbury (1825-95). Dr. Stone had been associated with our body since 1846. The others were all members of the Harvard Divinity School.

relation of respect, gratitude, affection, kindred, or mutual help.

The history of this School properly begins with the time when a regular post-graduate course of theology was established here under the presidency of Dr. Kirkland. The class of 1811, I believe, was the first to which this course was open. But the Divinity School apart from the College was not formally organized till 1819, with the appointment of Andrews Norton as Professor of Sacred Literature. It will be proper, therefore, to begin our survey by considering briefly what that first appointment signified in the teachings and character of the School.

The date here given was, as you may remember, just twenty years before Professor Norton led the way in vehement protest against the newer liberalism heralded in Emerson's Divinity School address, which he denounced as "the latest form of infidelity." Here it is difficult for us of a younger generation to do justice to his position, or perhaps even to understand it. It is one of the tragedies of the intellectual life when a sincere and able leader of opinion finds his maturest work already outgrown before it has reached its final shape by the advance of general thought, and outlives, as Mr. Norton did for fifteen years, his own cordial sympathy with that advance. Till he gave up his professorship in 1830, his was unquestionably the dominating mind in this school, which was largely guided by his influence till the new tide of opinion had well set in. Even then his sharpest opponents spoke — Theodore Parker, for example, spoke to me — with a singular

deference of his unchallenged scholarship and rare mental ability. We are apt to think of him as merely a defender of Unitarian opinion on its negative side, in "a statement of reasons for not believing" certain articles of the popular creed, or else as holding an advocate's brief for "the genuineness of the Gospels," which he maintained, with laborious erudition, in an argument whose sense has grown obsolete and even unintelligible in the light of later criticism, — nay, was already clearly seen by many to be so before the argument appeared in a printed book. I remember a conversation with him in 1850, in which this topic (it is true) was not touched upon, but which left on my mind the impression of a certain intellectual loneliness, if not despondency, which one grieves to find in a spirit so brave, clear, and widely accomplished as his. He was then sixty-four years old. But we should think rather of the work he did at twenty-six: the strenuous and tonic quality he gave then to the earlier liberalism in the "General Repository;" his great service as the pioneer of a wider literature and a higher criticism among us in the "Select Journal" conducted by him and that accomplished scholar, his friend, Charles Folsom; the welcome he gave to some of the purest and tenderest voices of the modern muse; and the share he has contributed, as a true religious poet, to our own treasuries of devotion, in a few hymns that are among the very finest of their class. And we should remember, too, the filial respect and gratitude with which his pupils in theology owned their debt to his grave and