

**A CENTURY OF VILLAGE
UNITARIANISM: BEING A HISTORY
OF THE REFORMED CHRISTIAN
(UNITARIAN) CHURCH OF TRENTON
ONEIDA COUNTY, N.Y. 1803-1903**

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A Century of Village Unitarianism: Being a History of the Reformed Christian (Unitarian)
Church of Trenton Oneida County, N.Y. 1803-1903 by Charles Graves

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(UNITARIAN) CHURCH OF TRENTON
ONEIDA COUNTY, N.Y.

1803—1903

By CHARLES GRAVES

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PREFACE.

In the following pages I have tried to tell the story of a church which, as Robert Collyer says, "is held in pure regard wherever her story is known." I do not flatter myself with the thought that it is free from faults. I can only claim to have followed faithfully the official records and correspondence and contemporary documents, and with one or two exceptions have scrupulously refrained from speculating as to what might have been. My aim has been to simply tell the story of the church, and to exclude from these pages all that did not bear directly upon that story. This has led to the exclusion of almost all biographical features. The history of the church is of course dependent upon the lives and experiences of the people who made it, and sometimes contributing causes reach far back in the lives of these people; but to examine these causes is beyond the purpose of this narrative. Another and perhaps the chief reason for deciding to exclude biographical material is the injustice which the admission of it would do to the "lesser lights." It is clearly impossible to "notice" all who have labored faithfully and sacrificially to make the church a living force in the community, and so attention is generally centred on two or three prominent ones. While I would not underrate the enormous value in the life of the church of the Mappas and Van der Kemps,

and while I must and do gladly acknowledge the shaping and sustaining power of such families as the Guiteaus, the Moores, the Woodbridges, the Millers, and many others whose support was so freely and lovingly given, yet I must not forget the equally loving and free service of the families of lesser note. In the story of a church for the support of which the prominent and the obscure have each labored with equal devotion and sacrifice it seems only fair that all should be put on an equal footing.

It has been no easy task to collect from widely scattered places the documents and information needed. It has, however, been a pleasant one; and I am deeply indebted to many for their assistance so freely and kindly given. I am especially indebted to the Rev. Howard N. Brown for kindly placing at my disposal the material which he had gathered with a view to writing the story. I am also indebted to him for kindly revising the manuscript before it was put into the printers' hands, and for other substantial assistance in getting it published. I would also acknowledge my indebtedness to Mrs. Helen L. Fairchild for valuable material gathered from the correspondence of Judge Van der Kemp; to Mr. John W. Guiteau, Mr. F. M. Hollister and Mrs. Fairchild for aid in securing three full page portraits; to Mr. H. B. Philleo for the loan of a goodly batch of letters written to the Rev. I. B. Peirce; to the late F. W. Guiteau for his "Reminiscences"; and to the Rev. W. C. Gannett for the loan of portions of his father's private diary.

CHARLES GRAVES.

BARNEVELD, N. Y., Oct. 15, 1903.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

The question has often been raised, How came it to pass that in the midst of a population predominantly Presbyterian the first church to be established was Unitarian, or at least designedly unorthodox? What influences were at work to produce so unusual a result? Some have insisted that, because the population of Trenton was largely Presbyterian, therefore the church must have been originally of that faith. Others, arguing from the fact that the Unitarian movement did not take shape till a later day, and that most of the churches that became Unitarian were originally Orthodox Congregationalist, insist therefore that this "church was organized as an Orthodox Congregational church."

But the answer and explanation rest upon two or three very clear, well-known facts of local history. When Mr. Taylor visited this part of the country, charged with the duty of studying the religious condition of the people and reporting thereon, he was careful to note, where he found preaching being carried on, the special theological brand to which the preaching belonged. Now in the report of his visit to Oldenbarneveld he did not specify the theological brand of the preaching he found here. This is significant. Mr. Taylor described the person he found preaching here as a "sensible, judicious man who appears to be doing great good." This "sensible and judicious man," we learn, was a liberal Presbyterian. Undoubtedly, the character of his preaching

had much to do with the organization of this society, but it does not explain all.

Oldenbarneveld was evidently the only place in this part of the country where "liberal" preaching was then tolerated and encouraged. The secret of this is to be found in the name of the village and in the history and character of two or three men most prominently associated with its early history.

The name Oldenbarneveld was chosen at the founding of the village in honor of the great Dutch patriot and martyr to the cause of religious liberty, John of Oldenbarneveld. Barneveld had fought and died for the cause of human liberty and equality in politics and religion, and the founder of the village desired that it should be a memorial to so great a man and such splendid principles. So from the start the village was headed toward liberalism.

When Gerrit Boon returned to Holland, the "Holland Land Co." chose Colonel A. G. Mappa to be their agent in his stead. He was joined in 1797 by that scholarly and remarkable man, Francis A. Van der Kemp. Both these men had been exiled from Holland for their efforts to "substitute for the oligarchical constitution a representative government which would secure to their country the blessings of civil liberty." This radicalism extended to their religious views. The religious activities of Mr. Van der Kemp were even greater and more important than his political activities, and equally objectionable to the authorities. He had pursued theological studies in the Baptist Seminary at Amsterdam, and finally became minister of a Baptist church in Leyden. The church there asked him to subscribe to "a creed which all former ministers had complied with." He stubbornly refused to "subscribe," and finally the

church decided "to annul forever the articles of subscription." It appears to have been always his "fate to oppose domineering powers in Church as well as in State."

Here were two men, of high social standing and culture, who had been exiled from their home by political and ecclesiastical tyranny. Colonel Mappa's position as agent of the "Holland Land Co." and Mr. Van der Kemp's superior abilities and his intimate relations with the foremost men of the country (the Adamses, Governor Clinton, and Jefferson were his intimate friends) naturally put them at the head of the social, intellectual, and religious life of the community. Not only did their position thus enable them to shape the life of the place, but they were born leaders of men. They were giants intellectually and morally. They had opposed political and religious tyranny at home, and had done this at great sacrifice. It goes without saying that they would exert the full power of their position and character to exclude from the life of their new home everything that savored of the old oppression. Political freedom was assured them,—there was no more trouble on that score; but it was still necessary to stand guard against ecclesiastical domination. Orthodoxy was pushing its men into these newly settled regions, to capture them and bind the souls of the inhabitants thereof in the fetters of dogma. Calvinism was establishing itself in the various settlements roundabout. The reason it had failed to get a foothold in Oldenbarneveld was due most of all to the determination of Messrs. Mappa and Van der Kemp that the religious life of the village should be kept free from the tyranny of any creed. Under no pretence would they allow any person or institution to dictate what another's creed should be. In the following pages