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Norman Hapgood, Editor [The Christian Register]

Earl Clement Davis

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THE CHRISTIAN REGISTER

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BOSTON, MASS., MAY 21, 1936

UNITARIANISM REDISCOVERS ITSELF

THE large number of delegates at the 1936 meetings is a witness to the fact that Unitarians are keenly interested in their denominational future. They are aware that the issues before them are exceptionally complex and cannot be settled without the maximum of thought and the maximum of patience. At the same time they are also aware that they are all desirous of giving new life to the church to which they belong.

The early addresses of the present May Meetings, given by speakers of the most varied interests, agree remarkably in inspiration and in content. The pressing danger of the times is seen by all to lie in the growing menace of the use of force, physical and economic, in a general Fascist tendency, that would make the American nation into a "servile state."

The speakers also agree that the only force that can combat physical and economic force is moral force, arising either from religion or from some firm conviction that the maximum of moral freedom is the finest atmosphere for the promotion of human happiness.

The time has come when the American people must either place its unwavering confidence in the

possibility of enlightened action on the part of a democracy, or renounce its faith in democratic procedure, and openly admit that the few who claim to see the light that shines through the universe have the right to lead their duller brethren forcibly in the direction in which they claim it shines, and force them to the happiness they blindly seek, whether they will it or not, no matter how painful the process may be for the obstinately independent.

The responsibility now rests upon the forces of liberalism to solidify the moral forces of religion, education, and political guidance in order that its faith in freedom and in democracy may be maintained.

The current May meetings, beyond all others, are significant for the forceful and fearless manner in which leaders of insight and of courage have thrown out the challenge to the delegates that they immediately understand the spirit of Unitarianism and act in accordance with its vital principles.

Unitarianism is finding its hidden self.

Miles Hanson, Jr.

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NORMAN HAPGOOD, EDITOR

THE trustees of *The Christian Register* take great pleasure and satisfaction in making known to its readers and all others interested in our common purposes, that Norman Hapgood of New York City and Petersham, Mass., has been elected Editor of *The Christian Register* on a half-time basis for the year beginning August 1, 1936. He will be in the office part of each week.

Mr. Hapgood, widely known through a distinguished career as dramatic critic, journalist, editor of *Collier's Weekly* and *Harper's Weekly*, author, and lecturer, will bring to *The Register* not only the fruits of a broad experience and technical training, but an attitude of mind generous and sympathetic in its nature, controlled and disciplined by the fundamental principles of the liberal tradition and method.

Mr. Hapgood was born in Chicago, and has always maintained business and professional ties in the Middle West. Educated at Harvard University, he was profoundly influenced not only in the general problems of intellectual and social import, but also by President Charles W. Eliot's marked interest in religion and the churches. As an active member of the First Parish in Petersham, he carried on a tradition of the Hapgood family which has continued since the church was organized.

Difficult problems are before us: the gathering clouds of partisan conflict in the political order; the complicated and compelling character of social questions; the still almost untouched task of reinterpreting religion under conditions imposed by our modern world which science has been discovering and describing; and our own particular interest in improving the standards and increasing the influence of our liberal churches, and transmitting the great tradition of freedom and fellowship in religion.

With all these considerations in mind the trustees of *The Register* feel especially happy in bringing to the Editorial Chair a man of Mr. Hapgood's experience and character, and one whose confidence in liberal principles and methods is so marked.

At a time when liberal principles and methods are under a cloud the world over, the trustees believe that the influence of such an Editor will strengthen our faith in fundamental tasks and bring reassuring results.

In the contribution to our common interests that may be made through *The Christian Register* we ask for an increasing confidence and even more generous support, not only in the matter of subscriptions and financial backing, but in our efforts to maintain the high standard of *The Christian Register* as a liberal journal of religion, fair-minded, honest, and courageous.

The Trustees take equal satisfaction in bearing witness to the cooperation which *The Register* has received from the entire staff in the office; from Miss Sanger, the Managing Editor, whose able and conscientious work deserves special mention, and from the men who have served as interim part-time editors: Rev. Miles Hanson, Jr., Prof. W. Linwood Chase, Rev. James Luther Adams, Rev. Stephen H. Fritchman, Rev. Frederic J. Gauld, and Rev. Lyman V. Rutledge. We are under obligation to these men, as well as to all those who have supported and aided them.

Earl C. Davis,
President of the Board of Trustees.

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A SHOALS ANNIVERSARY

NINETEEN THIRTY-SIX marks the fortieth year of Unitarian meetings at the Isles of Shoals. Even during the two years—1917 and 1918—when the hotel was closed due to the submarine warfare scare, a meeting was held each year in the Old Stone Meetinghouse. Again, 1936 marks the twentieth year of joint ownership of Star Island by the Congregationalists and Unitarians. Each succeeding year finds this friendly cooperation more securely cemented.

The meetings this summer begin June 27 and continue until September 3. During those weeks there will be only six days when no conference sessions are scheduled. Each group has formulated a strong program of religious, educational and social value. In the beauty and serenity of the Shoals one will find relief from the humdrum of daily life which casts itself upon one in the heated summer months. Refreshment of body and relaxation of mind restore one to greater vigor for the work that is ahead. And yet there are plenteous opportunities by which one may find sufficient exercise of body and mind. Thoughtful addresses, frank discussions, helpful conferences, delightful renewals of old friendships, cordial contacts with new friends—these are the ingredients of that stimulating tonic which has become known as the "Shoals Spirit."

Herein one may find many of the elements he must have if he is to rethink Unitarianism. Here one may appraise not only the work which the individual churches are doing through their various organizations, but also one may appraise himself. To experience the "Shoals Spirit" means a renewal of life.

Carl B. Wetherell.

JUST ANOTHER ORGANIZATION?

AN interesting task for the social historian would be studying the relationship between church and community during the past fifty years. While at first the relations were often anything but cordial, in response largely to overtures made by representatives of secular community life, the situation became greatly changed, especially in the smaller towns and villages. Meanwhile, such representatives came to hold the authority of formal organizations.

So much progress—if it was progress—has been made in the direction of coordinating church life with community activities that one may now wonder if any real advantage resides in this development. The mushroom growth of formalized activities has resulted in communities that are plainly organization-ridden. One marked effect of this circumstance appears in the added difficulty of giving the organizations, including the church, adequate support. The church is frequently the first group to be slighted when community resources run short. What is of greater significance is the general and apparently inevitable damaging of churches by uncritical transfer of thought content to them from the organizations. In many localities this transfer has worked to the detriment of the churches.

When the Chamber of Commerce gives free memberships to ministers, is there no hint in this of an expected return? When conflict of dates or some equally petty cause prompts curtailment of a church's program out of deference to the Parent-Teachers' Association or some patriotic organization, is it not at least passing strange? And when those church members who are also members of other organizations become habituated to the attitude that the church is one organization among (and by implication, on a par with) a lot of other organizations, is it not time to call a halt?

These questions, which represent pressing issues in innumerable small communities, fall short of suggesting the actual scope of the conflict, already under way, and already too often lost. The last one, concerning the effect of general community standards on the church, is the most crucial one. When the church comes to be regarded by its own membership and by the community at large as "just another organization," its unique function is in grave danger of being abolished. This may be said without prejudice to the objective worth of the other organizations, whose work may be valuable enough in their own direction. But the church is, or is supposed to be, something essentially different. The fact that religion cannot be separated from life in no way implies that religion should not rise above the general run of living.

Here is one more example of the spread of a suffocating mediocrity, or, what is worse, of a possible reactionary trend. Ministers can do little to resist the pressure put upon them, considering the duplication of memberships. The problem must be dealt with by congregations, and as the religious problem which it is. Otherwise this one more blow at organized religion may in time prove fatal.

Howard Davis Spoerl.