

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

The Rise and Development of the
Congregational Polity and Spirit in New England

History Manuscripts, -1907

Lecture Eight: John Murray and the Beginning of the Universalist Movement

Earl Clement Davis

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/history_manuscripts_2

1

John Murray, and the beginning of
the Universalist movement.

We have already seen how Calvinism was losing its hold on the popular mind, and was rapidly caving to its end under the disintegrating influences of the changing New England life. The rise of the liberal party within the church, who held to uncalvinistic views, was brought to public attention by the controversies of which Char. Chauncy was the ^h champion of the liberal side, and Jonathan Edwards the champion of the reactionists, Edwards' cause was taken up by Hopkins & Emmons, and carried to its logical conclusions. All this brings us up to about the year 1800 or just at the dawn of the Unitarian controversy, which a few years later divided the New England Evangelical body

into two factions known by the names Unitarian
and Unitarian Congregationalists.

At this time the religious world of New
England was well split up into factions. Besides
the liberal branch of the Congregational churches
and the two clearly defined factions among
the conservatives, there was the Methodist
movement, the Deistic movement, the best
known exponent of which was Low. Paine, and
whose essential views represented the religious
movement outside the church. In addition to
this array of forces, there was the Universalist
body the nature of whose ideas, and the begin-
ning of whose history we shall be interested
in to-day under the name of John Murray.

The nature and general character of Murray
appear in a few extracts from his autobiography,
which I will quote for the main outlines of
his life. He says "I think, if I mistake
not, I was ushered into this state of being
on the 10th day of December, 1741,"
I drew my first breath in the island

of great Britain, in the town of Alton, in
Hampshire."

His school days and early life were not
unusual, but a bit of insight comes into
the conditions of the times in the following. The
doctrines taught by that gloomy reformer (Colburn)
they (parents) undeviatingly taught to their
family; and hence my soul frequently
experienced the extreme of agony. Naturally
innocent, to implant religion among my
juvenile pleasures required the most vigor-
ous and uniform effort:.... Hence
religion became an object of terror. I was
not ten years old when I began to suffer;
the discovery of my sufferings by my father
gave my father much pleasure: he cherished
hope of me when he found me suffering from
my fears, and much indeed was I tor-
mented by the severe unbending discipline
of my father, and the terrifying appre-
hensions of what I had to expect from

4

the God who created me. The second son of my parents was naturally of a sensitive gloomy disposition. He was more seriously disposed, and less fond of amusement than myself: and hearing much of pain as the eldest son of Adam, and Eras as the eldest son of Isaac, and of Abel and Jacob as the younger sons, my soul was frequently filled with terror, verily believing my brother was the elected, and my own the rejected of God. This appalling consideration, even at this early period, frequently devoted my days and nights to tears and lamentations.

Life of Murray. P. 17.

~~Murray was indeed an~~
Shortly after this at the age of when John was about 11 years old the Murray family moved to Ireland in a town near Cork. Here they came under the influence of the Wesley's

and became Methodists, and young Anney⁵
at the age of 16 became a very zealous and
religious youth. The death of his father while
he was still young, ~~threw~~ the burden of
~~the family on him~~, and the general influence
of his somewhat adventurous nature, he left
Ireland for England.

Marriage, the death of his wife, and the
fact that his creditors forced him to prison
for his debts, the bereaved and discour-
aged man leaver England for America,
where he was to become a promulgator of
the Gospel in America, this was about
1770. He had become converted to the tenets
of Universalism through the influence of one
James Kelly.

Against his own will he became a preacher of
the Universalist ideas in America, and
soon aroused considerable opposition
among the Calvinistic clergy of Philadelphia,
and gained something of a following.
Earnest solicitations lead him to go

to New England. He visited and
preached at Newfort, where he came in
contact with Samuel Hopkins, and had
some bitter words with him

By Oct. 30, 1773 Mury had reached Boston
and preached his first sermon ~~at~~ in Boston
on that date.

This ~~jour~~ journey to New England lead to
his receiving a call to become pastor
of a church in Portsmouth N. H. He declined
in the Christmas day of 1780. Mr. Mury
first preached in a small neat building
erected for his use by the people of Gloucester
which had organized as an independent
Church of Christ. Here he labored until
1793 when he was installed in the
Universal meeting house in Boston.
He died in Boston in 1815.
John Mury was the first ^{pastor} of the

of Universalism in America, the Uni-
versalist body differed from the Calvinists
in this one essential ideal. Where the Calvinists
believed in the salvation of the elect, the
Universalists believed in the salvation
of every ~~man~~ man, through the atonement
of Christ. But under the influence of
Hosea Ballou, whose famous sermon
of 1805 was the immediate cause,
practically the entire Universalist
group became Unitarian. The two
bodies were kept apart by virtue of the
fact that there were present ^{among} in the Uni-
versalists, a certain kind of mystical
or possibly superstitious embellishments
as illustrated in the life of Thurey, (Godbold,
giving him money etc), which was very
obnoxious to the Unitarians of that time.

[Rise and Development of the Congregational Polity and Spirit]

[VIII.] John Murray and the Beginning of the
Universalist Movement

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

No Date¹

We have already seen how Calvinism was losing its hold on the popular mind, and was rapidly coming to its end under the disintegrating influences of the changing New England life. The rise of the liberal party within the church, who held to un-Calvinistic views, was brought to public attention by the controversies of which Charles Chauncey was the champion of the liberal side, and Johnathan Edwards the champion of the reactionists. Edwards' cause was taken up by Hopkins and Emmons,² and carried to its logical conclusions. All this brings us up to about the year 1800 or just at the dawn of the Unitarian controversy, which a few years later divided the New England Congregational body into two factions known by the names Unitarian and Trinitarian Congregationalists.

At this time the religious world of New England was well split up into factions. Besides the liberal branch of the Congregational churches, and the two clearly defined factions among the conservatives, there was the Methodist movement, the Deistic movement, the best known exponent of which was Thomas Paine, whose essential views represented the religious movement outside the church. In addition to this array for forces, there was the Universalist body, the

¹ Earl C. Davis wrote a good number of manuscripts concerning the history of the church. All are hand-written dating them before 1907—so Pittsfield or Harvard. Some, including this one, are pretty clearly part of a series provided to a congregation—so probably Pittsfield.

² Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840) were all New England preachers. Earl Davis has written short individual pieces about each of these men, which can be found in his historical writings.

nature of whose ideas, and the beginning of whose history we are interested in today under the name of John Murray.

The nature and general character of Murray appear in a few extracts from his autobiography, which I will quote for the main outlines of his life. He says, "I think, if I mistake not, I was ushered into this state of being on the 10th day of December, 1741, ... I drew my first breath in the island of Great Britain, in the town of Alton, in Hampshire."³

His school days and early life were not unusual, but a bit of insight comes into the conditions of the times in the following,

The doctrines taught by that gloomy Reformer (Calvin), they (parents) undeviatingly taught to their family: and hence my soul frequently experienced the extreme of agony. Naturally vivacious, to implant religion among my juvenile pleasures required the most vigorous and uniform effort. Religion was not a native of the soil, it was an exotic, which when planted, could only be kept alive by the most persevering attention. Hence Religion became a subject of terror. I was not ten years old when I began to suffer; the discovery of my sufferings gave my fond father much pleasure; he cherished hope of me when he found me suffering from my fears, and much indeed was I tortured by the severe unbending discipline of my father, and the terrifying apprehensions of what I had to expect from the God who created me. The second son of my parents was naturally of a pensive, gloomy disposition. He was more piously disposed, and less fond of amusement than myself, and hearing much of Cain as the eldest son of Adam, of Esau as the eldest son of Isaac, and of Able and Jacob as the younger sons, my soul was frequently filled with terror, verily believing my brother was the elected, and myself the rejected of God. This appalling consideration, even at this early period, frequently devoted my

³ John Murray, *Records of the Life of the Reverend John Murray*, Boston: Marsh Capen & Lyon, and Waitt & Dow, 1831, p. 10.

days and nights to tears and lamentation. (*Life of Murray*, p. 17).

Shortly after this, when John was about 11 years old, the Murray family moved to Ireland in a town near Cork. Here they came under the influence of the Wesleys and became Methodists, and young Murray at the age of 16 became a very zealous and religious youth. The death of his father while he was still young, and the general influence of his somewhat adventurous nature, he left Ireland for England.

Marriage, the death of his wife, and the fact that his creditors forced him to prison for his debts, the bereaved and discouraged man leaves England for America, where he was to become a promulgator of the Gospel in America. This was about 1770. He had become connected to the tenets of Universalism through the influence of one James Relly.

Against his own will he became a preacher of the Universalist ideas in America, and soon aroused considerable opposition among the Calvinistic clergy of Philadelphia, and gained something of a following.

Earnest solicitations led him to go to New England. He visited and preached at Newport, where he came in contact with Samuel Hopkins, and had some bitter words with him.

By October 30, 1773, Murray had reached Boston and preached his first sermon in Boston on that date.

This journey to New England led to his receiving a call to become Pastor of a Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He declined. On the Christmas day of 1780, Mr. Murray first preached in a small neat building erected for his use by the people of Gloucester, which had organized as an independent Church of Christ." Here he labored until 1793 when he was installed in the Universalist Meeting House in Boston. He died in Boston in 1815.

John Murray was the first great apostle of Universalism in America. The Universalist body differed from the Calvinists in this one essential idea. Where the Calvinists believed in the salvation of the elect, the Universalists believed in the salvation of every man through the

atonement of Christ. But under the influence of Hosea Ballou, whose famous sermon of 1805 was the immediate cause, practically the entire Universalist group became Unitarian. The two bodies were kept apart by virtue of the fact that there was present among the Universalists a certain kind of mystical or possibly superstitious embellishment as illustrated in the life of Murray (Landlords giving him money etc.) which was very obnoxious to the Unitarians of that time.