

Charles Elliott St. John: Moral Enthusiasm and the Social Question, 1892-1900

Kathleen R. Parker, Ph.D.  
First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh

Mailing Address:  
531 Peebles Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15221

Phone:  
412-243-4487 (home)  
412-779-7648 (cell)

E-mail  
[Kparker4487@comcast.net](mailto:Kparker4487@comcast.net)

## Unitarian Conscience: The Utopian Vision of Charles Eliot St. John

Kathleen Parker

### Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, when massive immigration, labor exploitation, poverty, and government corruption plagued industrial cities in America, Utopian reformers imagined ways to make a more perfect world. Among them were Utopian clergy who called for perfection in moral and ethical relations. In 1891, a utopian-minded Unitarian minister arrived in Pittsburgh, where he employed himself and his church in bringing “moral enthusiasm” to the city. Expansive, earnest, and energetic, his accomplishments were many. Nonetheless his dream of “unselfishness and brotherhood” was less attainable than was practical reform achieved through data collection and expert analysis. In this way, Charles Eliot St. John exemplifies the liberal minister with Utopian ideals who had to settle for Social Gospel outcomes. It is concluded that the latter was more possible, in light of the self-serving reality of human nature.

Charles Elliott St. John: Moral Enthusiasm and the Social Question, 1892-1900

Utopian aspirations inspired the imaginations of late-nineteenth century reformers as intractable disparities in wealth and poverty heightened the alarm of observers in the educated middle-class. Clergy responses to the inter-related crises of mass immigration, labor exploitation, and urban dysfunction were muted to the extent that clergy no longer held the social clout of their pre-Civil War counterparts. This essay explores the response of a theologically liberal Unitarian minister who found among the coal mines, steel mills, and corrupt city officials of Pittsburgh a field in need of utopian remedies. His approach on two fronts—labor unrest and water filtration—constituted an expansive religious prescription that was utopian in its articulation, if not in its effect, extending beyond his small congregation to engage the city of Pittsburgh and the Unitarian denomination.

For much of the nineteenth century, Pittsburgh offered a cultural climate that was inhospitable to Unitarians.”<sup>1</sup> When Charles Eliot St. John arrived in 1891, he was aware that strict Calvinist Scotch-Irish Presbyterians had dominated the religious life of the city, giving “little charity for such as differed from them in religious belief.”<sup>2</sup> He knew that the hopeful Unitarian congregation begun in 1820 lost heart over transient ministerial leadership, as well as lack of constituency, and disintegrated at the close of the Civil War. Hailing from Northampton, Massachusetts, this highly cultured New England son came to what had been described by an earlier Unitarian minister as the “nastiest place in creation” to revive the lost church.<sup>3</sup> There was, he believed, “not another place in the United States with such a challenge to a man’s powers.”<sup>4</sup>

For St. John, reviving the church was merely the place to start. Beginning with thirty persons meeting in a rented hall, St. John soon appealed to the American Unitarian Association (AUA), the Boston-based association of member congregations begun in 1825, for funds to build the new church. He wrote “What is the chief thing at stake in Pittsburgh? Is it the moral culture of the seventy families and one minister who now constitute the only Unitarian church in all this region? If so, they will be content to work out their own salvation in true congregational selfishness and isolation. The magnificent achievements that will result here, if the denomination lays its strong and loving hand upon this city, are the things actually at stake.”<sup>5</sup> Church members pledged \$3000, but more was needed. St. John mounted a grueling campaign to secure pledges from established Unitarian churches in cities ranging from Chicago, Illinois to Washington, D.C., to Brooklyn, New York to Northampton, Massachusetts. At one point, he was writing fifteen letters a day to appeal for support to build a church at Pittsburgh.<sup>6</sup> With \$7000 promised, a lot was purchased and the desired church building was constructed at a total cost of \$20,000 in the heart of the city’s University district. Soon it attracted scientists, engineers, educators, and managerial elites—a rising upwardly mobile segment in Pittsburgh’s post-Civil War population. Here came the highly educated upper middle-class congregants usually drawn to the Unitarian denomination.<sup>7</sup> The *Pittsburgh Times* took note of it in self-congratulatory terms as “an event in the religious history of Pittsburgh” comparable to the World Parliament of Religions coming to Chicago that same year. It was the “hour of Channing,” noted the writer, come to “one of the chief strongholds of orthodoxy” and it was here to stay.<sup>8</sup>

For St. John, the method of his mission was “to give men moral enthusiasm... It is because we have found that Unitarian beliefs do this for all who nobly and deeply accept them that we work for Unitarianism.”<sup>9</sup> In this regard, he was drawing on the splintered trajectory of Unitarian thought that ultimately led to practical Christian aims as the honored place to find common ground. Drawing on three centuries of opposition to the Calvinist doctrines of human depravity, election, and predestination, those in the liberal wing of Congregationalism identified themselves as Unitarian finally when William Ellery Channing’s famous 1819 sermon, “Unitarian Christianity,” legitimized what many already quietly believed. God was one entity—a loving parent rather than a vindictive judge—whose ways were demonstrated in Jesus, the human messenger sent by God. This view of God corresponded with the conviction that human beings were by nature good and had the potential to improve their lives. Then, in 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Divinity School Address” promoted the transcendental notion of divinity in nature and the human soul, which offended those who held a more “traditional” Unitarian belief in God.<sup>10</sup> Thus was born fifty years of controversy between traditionalists and radicals within Unitarianism, reconciled finally in the 1894 revised Preamble to Constitution of the National Conference that invited all to join who were “in sympathy with our spirit and practical aims.”<sup>11</sup>

Building on the principle of practical Christian aims, St. John embraced “the world” as the proper arena of work. The distinguishing mark of the progressive church, St. John declared, is that it “understands that the world is the important thing... In the daily intercourse of man with man lies the broadest sphere for the church’s activities.”<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, this “daily intercourse of man with man” soon presented itself in the

form of labor unrest. In December 1891, St. John attended the Friday night mass meeting of the striking printers of the city and reported on it in his sermon. The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* announced, “One Clergyman Takes the Present Printers’ Strike as his Text.”<sup>13</sup> He had been impressed with the strikers’ eloquent and earnest speeches—calling for liberty of speech, freedom for self-culture, and a fair share of the comforts of life. What he questioned was the lack of a “certain note of broad understanding of life” and a “recognition of labor as the broadest opportunity of life.” He was disappointed that he heard no words celebrating labor as “a noble opportunity for self-culture.” Self-culture was for decades the cultivation of that which would enlarge one’s inner spirit. Among Unitarians, self-culture served to counteract the Calvinist doctrine of innate human depravity. “What a failure to understand the true dignity of labor!” St. John lamented.

St. John’s sympathy toward labors was mixed. The fact that he attended the printers’ strike was remarkable in itself, yet his admiration for their values fell short of an appreciation for the hardships of their lives. His equivocations found further expression in his response to the strike at Homestead. In a letter to the editor of the *Pittsburgh Press* on July 8, 1892, he condemned the strikers at Homestead on two grounds: (1) they had begun a battle they could not win, yet would destroy many lives as valuable as their own; and (2) they had committed a moral wrong in taking possession of property belonging to others and had shed the blood of men who were going into that property upon orders of the owners. Having said this, he allowed that it may not have been “just” for the employers to reduce the wages of these men. Further, he agreed with “righteous public opinion” that “when profits decrease, the rich should bear a very large proportion of the

diminution...before they touch the miserably small wages on which all workingmen have to live.”<sup>14</sup>

Several other area clergymen preached on the crisis, as summarized in the *Press*. The Rev. David McAllister (Eighth Street Reformed Presbyterian) denounced the laborers’ abuse of the Pinkerton men after their surrender as “barbarous.” He warned, “I think God is dealing with our people for national sins. This year calamity after calamity has befallen the land [because] the law has been scoffed at.”<sup>15</sup> Others shared his view. The Rev. DeWitt Benham (Point Breeze Presbyterian) berated the laborers’ defiance of constituted authorities in the discharge of their obligations. “Mob rule is to be deplored.” Again, the Rev. J.W. Sproud (Central Reformed Presbyterian in Allegheny) stressed the supremacy of law. “When law is violated with impunity, all is lost.” Other clergy were more sympathetic to the laborers. Rev. W.S. Stanton (Shady Avenue Baptist) argued that, while property had been destroyed and blood had been shed, the “broader rights of common brotherhood have been ignored.” It was clear to him that “both sides have done wrong.” In a veiled criticism of Andrew Carnegie, the Rev. Father Suehr (St. Peter and Paul’s in Larimer) asserted that “giving a great amount of money to build a big library upon which the name of the donor is carved in stone is not charity as God sees it.” The Rev. J.D. Sands (Seventh United Presbyterian) defended labor’s right to “protect itself against greed.” He lamented the actions of the mill men at Homestead on the grounds that they were “liable to prejudice the minds of the community against even just claims.” Finally, the Rev. Father Bullion (Fourth Avenue Catholic in Homestead) called for all parties to submit to arbitration. “My friends, this must not continue. ... Above all, let us have peace.”<sup>16</sup>

Intriguingly, the *Press* printed the entire sermon of the Rev. W. T. Galloway (First Baptist Church of Homestead) as “the most interesting discourse delivered from the pulpit” on the “all-absorbing question now before the people of this section.”<sup>17</sup> Galloway took as his text Matt. iii, v. 5: “I will be swift against those that oppress the poor,” and spoke of capital having become increasingly “dictatorial, tyrannical, and oppressive.” To those concerned with law breakers, he denounced the laws that allowed manufacturers to become millionaires and at the same time defraud workers of their wages. People like St. John, who argued that workers could leave and work elsewhere, were “shortsighted conservatives,” in that “capitalists combine to lower the [workers’] wages wherever they go.” In a forceful indictment against the company owners, Galloway declared, “We do not have government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The fact is this: We have government of the money kings, by the money kings, and for the money kings.” The remedy lay in changing the legislature. With graphic emphasis, he advocated, “By the sound power of the ballot, and the heroic execution of righteous laws, we may in time drive from our land the trust thieves [and] the unprincipled sharks, whose great mouths are wide open to swallow the filthy lucre that falls from the hands of the heartless vampires who are sucking the blood of the poor.”

The *Press* assured readers that Galloway spoke “in a clear and concise manner throughout.” He was “a very pleasant mannered gentleman.” The next week, a “Press Reader” wrote to praise Galloway and criticize St. John, asserting that “no intelligent man will deny the fact that monopoly is today the curse of America, and so long as there is absolutely no protection for a poor man, riots and bloodshed will surely be necessary.”<sup>18</sup> Testimony before the Congressional Investigative Committee lent support

to Galloway's view when a labor leader charged that the difficulty stemmed from a "gigantic conspiracy on the part of the company to aid and abet in depriving the workers of their just rights." The McKinley Bill had "reduced tariffs on the item upon which [the workers'] compensation was based, namely billets; and raised tariffs on other articles such as beams and structural iron."<sup>19</sup> Such a measure would indeed have led to increased importation of billets, thereby decreasing the need to manufacture them at Homestead.

In the swirl of these charges and counter charges, St. John appears to have given the matter more thought, reasoning out and defending his views in an August letter to the *Christian Union*. He observed that "labor unions have done good and achieved many necessary victories in the past," but they "should now learn the lesson of moderation and justice." He acknowledged cautiously that if the war between capital and labor was to continue indefinitely, of course labor unions must exist as the working man's army. "We all wish to see laborers paid as much as possible." On the other hand, he believed that labor unions were mismanaged and had become "a menace to the best interests of laborers and employers alike." Further, he opined in the popular economic wisdom of the day, "There is such a thing as forcing wages up faster than the general business condition of the world will allow." He concluded, "the trouble with labor unions is that they never will believe that an employer speaks the truth, and they aim, not at fairness, but at all they can forcibly grasp, just or unjust."<sup>20</sup>

In the end he called all parties to a moral resolve. "Is it not a fact that this problem has no solution save the Christian one? Nothing will avail except the introduction of unselfishness and brotherhood as the basis of all adjustment." While showing some sympathy for laborers—advocating that cuts not be taken from workers' "miserable

wages” and acknowledging the need for unions—he nonetheless maintained that owners had the right to defend their works in whatever way they saw fit. It was an outrage for the strikers at Homestead to attack the Pinkertons, he pointed out. His ambivalence reflected perhaps the awkward dilemma of his occupation, whereby clergy were dependent, ever since the end of the Standing Order, upon congregational support. Several Westinghouse managers were members of his church. Henry Clay Frick would contribute two subscriptions toward the construction of the church building, and Andrew Carnegie would eventually donate a pipe organ, albeit after St. John left the congregation.

St. John, it appears, had no religious or ethical quarrel with citizens of wealth, even during the years of economic depression. Millions of dollars were being spent on libraries, he pointed out; in like manner, what was needed to build more Unitarian churches was “one ardent Unitarian millionaire!”<sup>21</sup> In regard to labor, his call for “the Christian solution” was directed toward all parties involved, yet in the end, gave little real ground to the dire realities that lay behind union demands. Meanwhile, with no apparent sense of irony, the women of the church took the trolley to each other’s homes month after month to sew clothes for the Charity Hospital in Homestead, and St. John chaired the Board of Directors of the Kingsley Settlement House, which ministered to the children of Pittsburgh’s rapidly growing hordes of immigrant poor. Women at the church also volunteered their time at the Kingsley House, giving sewing lessons and such. Meanwhile, Kate Everest, who headed the House, became a member of the Unitarian Church, where she gave a series of benefit lectures at the church to raise money for the House.

St. John's aging contemporary, Edward Everett Hale, a New England-based Unitarian minister (and coincidentally an uncle/cousin to his wife, Martha Elizabeth Everett St. John), had produced in 1888 a utopian novel entitled, *How They Lived at Hampton*. The book gained little following. It was, in any case, one of many utopian novels authored by clergy or sons of clergy, and its approach to the economic disparities of an industrial economy is strangely predictive of the words of Charles St. John. At the Hampton Mills, Mr. Thankful Nourse, the capitalist in the story, agrees to a scheme by which profits will be shared fairly with the workers. Having gone this far, however, Hale's narrator argues against communistic schemes and unionism. What's more, each of the seventeen chapters concludes with an explicit reminder that the ultimate good for society is found in "the moral principles of the Christian spirit."<sup>22</sup> Such language is not far removed from St. John's call for a "Christian solution" to the conflict between owners and laborers. Hale's narrator describes his characters, "They had done their best, on the whole, to carry out the Christian law of love...If any community of brethren would trust first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all the little things of time, for which petty men are selfishly anxious, will certainly be added to the endeavor of the community."<sup>23</sup> In denouncing child labor, Hale's narrator argues for a "Christian state," which "cares for its people, and does not care, except for them, for its things."<sup>24</sup> In his study of Hale's novel, George Mariz shows that such a resolution is the common pattern for clerical utopians, who wrote of an ethical alternative, not an economic one.<sup>25</sup>

Mariz suggests that late nineteenth-century clerical utopian novels were anchored in a conception of society that pre-dated the Civil War, when clergy were "the foundation stones of society."<sup>26</sup> As newer groups replaced them, they became more marginalized.

Through their novels, these clerical writers offered stinging criticism of the new order. Not given to writing novels, it seems from the evidence that Charles St. John revived that pre-Civil War clerical status by reclaiming a place in the main currents of society and living out by action and exhortation the liberal religious call to “moral enthusiasm.”<sup>27</sup> On the question of labor, St. John’s moral enthusiasm appealed for a state of ethical perfection, not economic. Like Hale and other ministers of his station, he expressed sympathy toward workers, but was nonetheless put off by unions and rejected socialistic remedies. It would be left to other Unitarian successors to proclaim socialism as “the religion of Jesus.”<sup>28</sup>

St. John’s mission to convey moral enthusiasm was more tangibly manifested in his leadership role in the birth of the Pittsburgh Civic Club, which led a campaign to learn about and promote water filtration. It was becoming clear that Pittsburgh’s polluted drinking water was responsible for high rates of death from typhoid fever, yet powerful city officials refused to accept this argument.<sup>29</sup> In 1893, a Joint Commission made up of the Engineers’ Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Allegheny County Medical Society, the Chamber of Commerce Committee on Water Supply, and the Iron City Microscopical Society launched a study of the problem of water pollution. Their report, issued in 1894, showed that Pittsburgh water was not up to proper standard and was in fact “pernicious.”<sup>30</sup> St. John worked with James Otis Handy, one of the foremost chemists in the country and director of the chemical and metallurgical investigations of the Pittsburgh Testing Laboratory, to educate the community about the merits of sand filtration. Not incidentally, Handy was a member of the Unitarian Church. From St. John’s podium, Handy explained, “Our water is in fact quite pure, chemically speaking. But it contains

small amounts of organic matter which could contain typhus.”<sup>31</sup> Handy’s lengthy presentation described the mechanism by which water would be filtered through a cylindrical filtration system, layered inside with stones and pebbles, beginning with larger stones at the bottom and decreasing in size in each succeeding layer, culminating at the top with four feet of Allegheny River bottom sand.<sup>32</sup>

Soon an ad hoc group calling itself the Citizens’ League, made up mostly of First Unitarian Church members meeting in the church parlor, contributed their own money for the purpose of designing and constructing an experimental model water filtration mechanism.<sup>33</sup> The resulting filter, measuring 6’6” in height and 6’9” in diameter, was set up on a corner of the church lawn. It soon demonstrated “great bacterial efficiency” as Handy reported, and water from the filter was offered free of charge to any in the city who wished to get it.<sup>34</sup> In the water filtration project, St. John’s utopian spirit found practical application through scientific development. In light of its success, in June of 1896, the League voted to install a similar filter at the Kingsley Settlement House, where St. John and several church members served as volunteers and/or Board members. Kate Everest, a Ph.D. social worker who headed the Kingsley House in its early years, had been active in the filtration campaign since the first meeting of the Civic Club.<sup>35</sup>

St. John believed the chief obstacle to achieving filtered water in Pittsburgh was corruption in the city’s government. His sermon of December 8, 1895, which was fully quoted in the *Dispatch*, leveled accusations at city officials for misappropriating funds and at contractors for enlarging their profits by not fulfilling the specifications of Public Works contracts.<sup>36</sup> Reports from a reliable source, said St. John, showed that citizens and businesses had to pay bribes in order to get fair treatment from the city. The root of these

evils, he declared, was the fact that “the city is ruled by a ring under an energetic leader, who is, in reality, the dictator of Pittsburgh. No ordinance, however good, can pass through the Councils without the consent of that man.”<sup>37</sup>

“That man” was Christopher Lyman Magee, Pittsburgh’s city boss from 1882 to 1899. Magee had a close working relationship with a neighbor, William Flinn, a contractor who also won seats as Representative and Senator in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Magee and Flinn had succeeded in changing the city charter at the state legislature to take the power of appointment away from City Council and give it to Department heads. They also arranged for public monies to be held in banks and financial markets, which won them instant support from Pittsburgh’s business community. In this way, they acquired the power to award thousands of jobs and develop their political machine. With no-bid contracting, Flinn’s firm of Booth and Flinn, Ltd. was awarded the lion’s share of Public Works Department contracts. Working in concert, Flinn and Magee arranged for the new zoo to be built at the end of one of Magee’s trolley lines; likewise, the Mount Washington trolley tunnel built at the west end of the city made housing development possible on the hilltops of the South Hills owned by Flinn.<sup>38</sup>

In regard to the proposed water filtration project, city officials refused to accept the validity of the scientific analysis connecting the water to the incidence of typhoid fever.<sup>39</sup> They remained unmoved even after a contingent of physicians and scientists spoke in 1895 before the Allegheny Water Committee on the necessity of counteracting disease from contaminated water. Allen Hazen, who formerly directed a Massachusetts water experiment, visited Pittsburgh and declared its water supply the worst of any city in the country. Despite this show of evidence, Edward Bigelow, the Director of Public

Works, argued that impugning the quality of the city's water would discourage investment in the city. At year's end, 1895, the Water Committee defeated a resolution calling for a vote to authorize a \$500,000 bond issue for water filtration. Hazen surmised that certain interests stood to profit from a patented—though less effective—method of water filtration. Sand filtration was unpatented and could be constructed by anyone. There was a report in fact that Handy's employers had been persecuted because of Handy's advocacy of sand filtration.<sup>40</sup> This was perhaps the point of St. John's complaint about businesses needing to pay bribes. Pressure such as this may also account for why Miss Everest was relieved of her position at the Kingsley House after she was quoted in the paper speaking in favor of filtration.

It would not be until 1899 and 1904 that voters approved two bond issues to bring filtered water to Pittsburgh. Even after that, construction was delayed due to political infighting between Republican Party factions. With filtration completed finally in 1907, the rates of death from typhoid fever dropped precipitously, from over 120 per 100,000 population to under 40 the next year, and finally down to two. A report published in 1909 accused city officials of causing 1,538 needless deaths from typhoid fever due to unnecessary delay.<sup>41</sup>

It was not as unlikely as one might think that a faith as creedless and individualistic as Unitarianism inspired St. John's vision of practical Christianity. With little consensus on the sources and nature of divine revelation, Unitarians in the nineteenth century found agreement in the conviction that practical religious aims modeled the teachings of Jesus. Indeed, at key points in their development, this tenet constituted the only glue that enabled Unitarians to stand together as a religious

movement. Then, the labor upheavals of the 1890s led Unitarians, along with other religious groups, to embrace with greater urgency what became known as the Social Gospel ideal.

A leading Social Gospel pioneer was the Unitarian minister and scholar, Francis Greenwood Peabody. His book, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, is described as “a milestone of the Social Gospel Movement and a major influence on liberal religion in the early twentieth century.”<sup>42</sup> Peabody was “convinced that theology could engage the problems of the contemporary world” and in his teaching, pressed “the theological importance of the social question.” The social question for Peabody was “an economic question,” issuing from “a sense of wrong.”<sup>43</sup> St. John began his studies at Harvard Divinity School in the same year that Peabody joined the faculty. Peabody’s popular course, the Practical Ethics of Social Reform, used a case-study approach to engage students in an examination of charity, temperance, labor, prisons, and divorce.<sup>44</sup> Peabody would surely have had an influence on St. John at Harvard. In Peabody, as in St. John, the lessons of self-culture became ethical in nature—“a matter of self-sacrifice and service to others.”<sup>45</sup> [relate to Tholuck in Germany?]

St. John left the Pittsburgh church, its membership now at 165, in 1900 to accept a position as Secretary of the American Unitarian Association in Boston. Here was visible recognition at the national level of his standing in the denomination. The *Boston Journal* reported, “Mr. St. John went to Pittsburgh eight years ago. His Pittsburgh church was weak and unknown, but he made it a center of much religious and secular influence.”<sup>46</sup> St. John had indeed overcome great odds in Pittsburgh, impressing congregants and the community alike with his exhortation toward Unitarian reform. It seems he really did

believe that Unitarian moral enthusiasm “stimulates human nature to be pure and great.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, however, his accomplishments were more limited and practical. He had strengthened and made permanent a liberal church in one of the “chief strongholds of orthodoxy” and had brought liberal religion to bear upon the social and political wrongs of the city. Still, while recognizing that laborers were grossly underpaid, he offered little understanding of the realities that would drive them to attack a force of armed Pinkerton guards determined to break a strike. He more easily addressed the issue of water filtration. Perhaps he knew that the bottled water consumed by most Pittsburgh residents was not affordable to poor immigrants, half of whom “became sickened with typhoid fever within the first two years of arriving in the city.”<sup>48</sup> More likely, he and others saw that filtered water would be a health benefit to every household in the city, irrespective of income level or education.

Utopian clergy and Social Gospel clergy found a moral imperative in the role of government to resolve questions of societal injustice. They perceived arenas of wrong and envisioned in religious terms ways for making things right. This paper asks: Is it possible to draw a distinction between them? The former believed idealistically in “unselfishness and brotherhood as the basis of all adjustment;” the latter utilized chemical and metallurgical investigations to urge policy reform. As for the proper arena of ministry, both approaches assumed, in St. John’s words, that “the world is the important thing.” As for strategy, I suggest, the difference between Utopian-minded clergy and Social Gospel clergy was akin to the difference between what one might imagine and what one could actually accomplish.<sup>49</sup> St. John appealed for new Unitarian churches in cities across the country. “Our religion, all quivering with its truth, its hope, its

confidence, could bless the nation,”<sup>50</sup> he argued. Here he articulated the high scope of his utopian aspiration. Unitarian moral enthusiasm, if only there was more of it, would save the metropolis. The problem for him, as for any one who held such an expansive vision, was that the “daily intercourse of man with man,” as he called it, involved company owners, union leaders, and corrupt city officials who were driven, as any right-thinking Calvinist would have reminded him, by self-serving ends, potentially intersecting with one’s own. In that light, Social Gospel outcomes prevailed while Utopian ideals remained out of reach.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Henry Miles, who had served in Pittsburgh in the 1830s, wrote, “Two rivers of Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism, like the two rivers of the town, rushed so strongly in those days that hardly anything could withstand them.” Letter to Charles Eliot St. John, written from Hingham, Massachusetts, January 9, 1893. Archives of the First Unitarian Church, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

<sup>2</sup> Unitarian ministers, born and bred in the high literary culture of New England, found in Pittsburgh the usual “western” isolation, and more – an unmistakable hostility from the conservative Calvinist Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who were said to have “little charity for such as differed from them in religious beliefs.” A.F. Marthens, Letter to Mary Lyman, recalling the first years of the church, December 1891. Archives of the First Unitarian Church, Heinz History Center. According to data collected by Joseph Rishel, Presbyterians dominated the city’s religious make-up throughout the nineteenth century, claiming two-thirds of founding families in 1820 and one-half by 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Even William Greenleaf Eliot, a New Englander who pioneered the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis and founded Washington University, wrote in 1834 to James Freeman Clarke of Boston, “Were you ever in Pittsburgh? Then congratulate yourself, for you have escaped the nastiest place in creation.” Earl Holt, *William Greenleaf Eliot: Conservative Radical*, (St. Louis: The First Unitarian Church, 1985) 32.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Martha Elizabeth Everett St. John to her mother, Mrs. George D. Everett, July 16, 1891. Archives of the First Unitarian Church, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

<sup>5</sup> Charles E. St. John, *Christian Register*, December 15, 1892.

<sup>6</sup> Letters, Martha St. John to her mother, Dec. 4, 1892; Jan. 15, 1893, Archives, Heinz History Center.

<sup>7</sup> David Bumbaugh, “Reflections on Class in the History of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism,” an Address to the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly of 2000, published by Meadville Lombard Theological School, July 2000.

<sup>8</sup> *Pittsburgh Times*, “It Ranks as an Event”, Oct. 2, 1893. The *Times*, it should be noted was the paper most in sympathy with the conservative industrial establishment in Pittsburgh.

<sup>9</sup> *The Christian Register*, April 6, 1893.

<sup>10</sup> David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 229, 253.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 122. It is worth noting that no one was yet talking of Humanist Atheism, which would again disunite religious liberals, and Unitarians, after WWI.

<sup>12</sup> *Pittsburgh Leader*, March 24, 1895. Report on St. John’s sermon.

<sup>13</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, “The Dignity of Labor...” Dec. 14, 1891.

<sup>14</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, July 8, 1892

<sup>15</sup> “Voice of the Pulpit: Homestead Troubles Discussed at Several of the Churches: Views Vigorously Expressed,” *Pittsburgh Press*, July 10, 1892.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* All of these sermon excerpts were listed in “Voice of the Pulpit,” *Press*, July 10.

<sup>17</sup> “Capital and Labor: A Homestead Clergyman’s Plea for the Workingman,” *Pittsburgh Press*, July 10.

- 
- <sup>18</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, July 14, 1892 (Press Reader).
- <sup>19</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, July 14, 1892.
- <sup>20</sup> *Christian Union*, 13 August 1892.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Christian Register*, June 21, 1894.
- <sup>22</sup> George Mariz, "Towards a Socio-Historical Understanding of the Clerical-Utopian Novel," in *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2003, 51-73.
- <sup>23</sup> Edward Everett Hale, *How They Lived at Hampton* (1888), reprinted, Arno Press & New York Times, 1971, 56-57.
- <sup>24</sup> Hale, *How They Lived at Hampton*, 124.
- <sup>25</sup> Mariz, "Clerical Utopian Novel," 71.
- <sup>26</sup> Mariz, 52.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Christian Register*, April 6, 1893.
- <sup>28</sup> John Haynes Holmes had helped found the NAACP and later the ACLU. He broke with the American Unitarian Association in a disagreement over its support for U.S. involvement in WWI. Holmes went on to found the multi-cultural Community Church of New York, which by 1930 attracted a congregation of 1800. Holmes expressed great satisfaction in the fact that his church was comprised of "rich and poor, black and white...orthodox and agnostic, theist, atheist, and humanist, Republican, Democrat, Socialist, and Communist. All of this means...we are a community church in the true meaning of the phrase." Quoted in Kathleen R. Parker, *Sacred Service in Civic Space: Three Hundred Years of Community Ministry in Unitarian Universalism* (Chicago: Meadville Lombard Press, 2007), 164.
- <sup>29</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Oct. 8, 1895.
- <sup>30</sup> It was in fact true that pollution in Pittsburgh's drinking water gave the city the highest rate of death from typhoid fever among the nation's large cities – well over 100 deaths per 100,000 people from 1873 to 1907. In contrast, in 1905, the average for northern cities was 35 per 100,000 Joel A. Tarr and Terry F. Yosie, "Critical Decisions in Water and Wastewater Treatment" in *Devastation and Renewal*, Joel Tarr, ed., 2003, 70-75.
- <sup>31</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 17, 1895.
- <sup>32</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, "Filtration versus Fever", July 28, 1895.
- <sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Citizen's League, Oct. 2, 1895. Archives of the First Unitarian Church, Heinz History Center.
- <sup>34</sup> The *Dispatch* reported, "Pulpit Against Ring: Forceful Demands in Favor of Better City Government: Sin in High Places Reproved". Also in this sermon were accusations against the Department of Public Safety for not enforcing the law against houses of ill fame, saying that certain police were compelling payments by the keepers of these houses in exchange for their not enforcing the law. Finally he accused the City Council of being bribed by owners of stock in the street car companies with the aim of exempting the companies from paying revenue for use of the streets.
- <sup>35</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, "For the City's Good", Oct. 8, 1895, reports on the formation of the Civic Club, where Charles St. John was the first speaker and Kate Everest the second. St. John spoke against the city "ring" and Everest stated that the "worst effects of corrupt government were fearful sewers, badly paved streets and filthy alleys." The connection of the Unitarian Church to the Kingsley Settlement House was evident in other ways. Everest spoke on various subjects at the Unitarian church and St. John encouraged church involvement at the settlement. These connections mirrored a similar relationship maintained between Jane Addams of Hull House and Jenkin Lloyd Jones, minister to the Unitarian All Souls Church of Chicago. Jones lectured at Hull House on subjects such as the need for labor unions, and Addams preached frequently in Jones' pulpit.
- <sup>36</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, December 9, 1895. St. John was referring here to political boss, William Flynn, owner of a construction firm that was typically awarded contracts on a no-bid basis.
- <sup>37</sup> Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 133-134. Peabody's book, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, was published in 1900. It became, Robinson states, one of the milestones of the Social Gospel movement and of twentieth-century liberal religion.
- <sup>38</sup> "William Finn" Bridges and Tunnels of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.
- <sup>39</sup> Tarr and Yosie, in *Devastation and Renewal*, Tarr, ed., 72-73.
- <sup>40</sup> John Lofton, "Building for the Years," in *Pittsburgh's First Unitarian Church* (Pittsburgh: The Boxwood Press, 1961) 59.

---

<sup>41</sup> Tarr and Yosie, in *Devastation and Renewal*, Tarr, ed., 72-73. The report referred to is “Thirty-five Years of Typhoid,” written by Frank E. Wise and published in *The Survey Magazine* in 1909.

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, 135-137.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Levering Reynolds, Jr., “The Later Years, 1880-1953” in *The Harvard Divinity School: Its Place in Harvard University and in American Culture*, ed. George Huntston Williams (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 180-181.

<sup>45</sup> *The Boston Journal*, April 13, 1900.

<sup>46</sup> *The Christian Register*, April 6, 1893

<sup>47</sup> *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 25, 1900.

<sup>48</sup> Tarr and Yosie, in *Devastation and Renewal*, Tarr, ed., 70.

<sup>50</sup> *Christian Register*, June 21, 1894.