

have very excitable materials in my moral composition, and I suppose every body did not feel as I did.

The sixth session of our Association, (1811,) was holden in Bainbridge, Chenango county. As no meeting-house could be obtained, our friends fitted up a newly-built barn in as convenient a manner as possible, for the occasion. Such meeting-houses as that, we often had to occupy; and we felt ourselves highly accommodated when we obtained a clean one; nor did we think it a disgrace for Christians to worship God in a barn, inasmuch as a stable was the birth-place of the Captain of our salvation. Mr. Dean then resided within the territorial limits of the Association, and was consequently with us; and five others, heretofore named, who were members of this ecclesiastical body, were present, and a single individual, Nathaniel Smith, bearing credentials of appointment from the General Convention, with two other preachers of the Great Salvation, who had never before appeared among us; and singular as the circumstance may appear, one was a female.

Maria Cook, then about thirty years of age, was escorted to that place by two gentlemen of the first respectability, from the town of Sheshequin, Bradford county, Pennsylvania, where she had been visiting for several weeks, and holding meetings. They introduced her to the council as a person of irreproachable morals, and with high encomiums upon her public labors. Some of our brethren and friends were a little fastidious about allowing a woman to preach, supposing St. Paul forbade it, where he says, *he suffered not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority, &c.*, while others thought differently, believing he would not have applauded the labors of so many female *helpers in the Lord*, if he did not, under suitable circumstances, approve of their public ministration. But as the phenomenon of a female preacher appearing among us was so *extraordinary*, and curiosity was on tiptoe among the mass of the congregation, to hear a woman preach, our opposing brethren finally withdrew their objections, and she very cheerfully obliged us with a discourse. And there was not a sermon delivered with more eloquence, with more correctness of diction, or pathos, or one listened to with more devout attention; nor was there another delivered during the session so highly applauded by the whole congregation, as the one she delivered. And so excited and animated were many of the brethren by the novelty, and so highly pleased and edified with her public discourse, that a letter of fellowship for her, as a preacher of the Gospel, was almost peremptorily demanded. She, herself,

appeared quite indifferent about it. But as she came well recommended, both as to her religious and moral character, and as she certainly exhibited sound faith and a becoming zeal for the promotion of the cause, was well educated and possessed more than ordinary speaking talents, an informal letter was presented to her, which she modestly accepted. This letter of fellowship, however, she destroyed in a few weeks afterwards, because she thought some of the preachers, especially Mr. Dean, did not treat her with that kindness which the letter betokened ; and she conscientiously destroyed, (so she told me,) what she considered an insincere token of fellowship.

She there received numerous and earnest requests from the delegates from all the societies, and from nearly every visiting brother, to come to their respective societies and towns and hold meetings ; and she readily complied with as many of these calls as her time and health would permit. She possessed no means of conveyance of her own, nor did she desire it ; some friends always accompanied her, and helped her from place to place. Her meetings, for a season, were the most numerous attended of any preacher of any denomination, who had ever traveled through the country, and were certainly quite advantageous to the cause of truth, as they called out many who, had it not been for the novelty of the circumstance, could not have been induced to attend a Universalist meeting ; and who, after obtaining some ideas of the doctrine from her discourses, were inclined to hear others ; and her remuneration by contributions was far more liberal than any preacher of our order received, or perhaps any itinerant preacher of any denomination. But Miss Cook had numerous opposers to the course she pursued, irrespective of the doctrine she inculcated, and especially among her own sex, who thought it very improper, and even indecent for a woman to preach, and especially to itinerate as she did. She was quite sensitive ; and the vituperations and uncharitable remarks which were constantly falling upon her ears considerably discomposed her, and soon began to give quite a tone to her public discourses, by leading her into long arguments in vindication of her right to preach ; which would not unfrequently constitute the whole burden of her discourse. This rendered them rather stale and uninteresting ; the novelty of the circumstance subsiding, invitations became less frequent, and her congregations vastly decreased in numbers. She however remained in the counties of Chenango, Madison, Oneida, Otsego, and Herkimer, something like a year. She then made a visit to the region of Troy ; and

quite a lengthy stay, (several months I believe,) among the Shakers; and then returned to her friends; for she had a mother, brothers, and sisters in Geneva and vicinity. After the lapse of a year or more, she made our part of the country another visit; but her reception was not so cordial and flattering as on her first tour; still she had many warm friends in different parts of the country. She preached but little; and, in the fall of the year, took up her residence among some friends in that part of the town of Otsego called Pierstown, with a design to spend the winter. But some malignant spirit, who wanted to spit his venom against Universalism in some form, and no doubt thinking that, by disturbing her, he should injure the feelings of some of her friends, and thereby ingratiate himself into the favor of the Orthodox aristocracy, entered a complaint to the proper authorities, stating that such a vagrant person was in town, and liable to become a town-charge. Nothing could have been more untrue. It was generally known that she had a sufficient income to maintain her, secured to her by the will of her deceased father—to amply provide her a support under any circumstances. Her brother, on whom I once called by her request, when traveling in Western New York, told me that, at any time when she wished to return home, he would send for her; and, at any time when she needed money, let him know it, and he would send it to her; notwithstanding, he and all her relatives were very much opposed to the course she was pursuing, and considered her under a mental derangement.

But a precept was issued by Esquire F., of Cooperstown, and put into the hands of a constable, who immediately went in pursuit of her. Her friends remonstrated with the officer—told him there was no possible necessity for disturbing her, that they would become responsible that she should not be chargeable upon the town—but all to no purpose; he had received his “letter of authority,” and “haul her to prison” he would. He went where she had taken up her abode, and a ludicrous scene ensued. He was with a wagon; and he informed her, that the law required him to take her to Cooperstown, before Esq. F. She told him, he must do it then. “Well,” said he, “will you take a seat in the wagon?” She replied, “No.” “Well, how will you go?” She answered, “I will not go at all.” “But the law requires me to carry you there.” “Well, I have nothing to do with the law; and, if you have, you must do your duty.” But how he should carry her, was the question, if she would not get into his wagon. “That,” said she, “is your business—not mine.” The

man was completely put to his trumps—she moved not, nor would she move, or make any preparations. It was about five miles where he wanted to carry her. He was finally compelled, as a last resort, to take her in his arms, and set her in his wagon, to which she made no resistance. The friend who gave me the information, circumstantially, took his horse and followed them, to see that she met with no personal abuse ; for he felt confident they never could extort an answer from her to a single question. The constable drove to the door of the office, stopped his team, and remarked, “ This is Esq. F.’s office. Will you get out of the wagon, and walk in.” She replied, “ No ; I have no business with Esq. F. ; if he has business with me, let him come to me.” No persuasion could make her move from the wagon ; and the constable left her, went into the office, informed the magistrate of the circumstance, and asked him what he should do. The magistrate told him to bring her into the office. So he was again compelled to take her in his arms, carry her into the office, where he seated her in a chair ; when the following dialogue ensued :

*Magistrate.* Miss Cook, inasmuch as a complaint has been entered, I have been obliged, by law, to issue a precept, and have you brought before me, not to abuse you, nor to injure your feelings, if I can avoid it ; but to ask you a few questions, relative to your place of residence, means of subsistence, &c.

*Miss C.* You can ask me any questions you please ; but I feel under no obligation to answer you, nor shall I answer any of your questions.

*Mag.* But will you not tell me your place of residence ?

*Miss C.* No.

*Mag.* But the law requires it, madam, and I have but one course to pursue. If you will not answer the necessary inquiries, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity to commit you to jail, until you will answer.

*Miss C.* You can do as you please. I have seen demons in the seat of justice before now—I have a brother who acts in that capacity.

Not being able to obtain any thing like an answer to a single question he proposed, the magistrate wrote a *mittimus* for contempt of court, read it to her, and handed it to the constable.

*Miss C.* You have worded it right, sir, for you and all your proceedings are perfectly contemptible, in my view.

*Constable.* Miss Cook, will you walk out, and take a seat in the wagon ?

*Miss C. No.*

The constable was, therefore, under the necessity of taking her into his arms again, and seating her in the wagon. He then drove to the jail, carried her into the building, and delivered her to the jailer. The keeper was a friendly man—his family resided in one part of the prison-house; and he told Miss Cook, that she was welcome to his table, and gave her liberty to visit any apartment of the prison, or other part of the building she was disposed to see. There she remained, perfectly contented and happy, for several weeks; and, while in these circumstances, she sent word to me, that she was preaching to the spirits in prison. After some weeks, finding they could neither drive nor flatter her to pay any respect to their authority, the magistrate hinted to the jailer to get rid of her the easiest way he could.

In the spring following, if my memory be correct, she made another visit to Troy, then returned to her friends, gave up traveling and preaching, and remained in retirement the rest of her life. I never saw her but once afterwards, which was many years since she had relinquished preaching. In the year 1829, I called on Mr. O. Ackley, in Hopewell, Ontario county, where I saw Miss Cook for the last time, and received from her tongue the most severe castigation that I ever received from any mortal, male or female. When I entered the house, I received as cordial and friendly greeting as I ever did, and that was as affectionate as I was in the habit of receiving from any person living; but she immediately remarked, "Now I know what I was sent here for." She then proceeded to inform me, that she had an irresistible presentiment that it was her duty to come to Brother Ackley's, and to come that morning; and so powerfully was it impressed upon her, that she had walked the whole distance of ten miles before breakfast. She felt confident she had a call from the Lord to perform some important duty; but what that duty was she had no distinct perception until she saw me; but now the whole was unfolded to her—it was to admonish, to exhort me, in the name of the Lord, to be more faithful to my duty. She said, preaching was no longer of any use—she had been convinced of it for a long while, and she was persuaded I must be also convinced. She firmly believed the doctrine—she believed it was God's truth, and would ultimately prevail—but it must be through other means than preaching. It must be done by work; that is, by organizing into an apostolic society—a community of interest, of property. This had been a favorite topic for many years; and she had made a number of efforts to get

such a society established. She now said, that I had sufficient influence to establish such a society, and it was my imperious duty to do it—that my preaching was of no use, nor had it been for years—that I had been losing ground for a good while past—that the Lord had begun to curse me for neglect of duty, and he would still heap curses upon my head; and she devoutly prayed that he would curse me more and more until I would do my duty in that respect, &c., &c. This was the last interview I ever had with Miss Cook. She lived a number of years after this in retirement, and, indeed, pretty much secluded from the world: but lived and died in full faith of the ultimate universal purification and happiness of mankind.

Mr. Smith, in his "Historical Sketches," has made some very appropriate and just remarks, in relation to this eccentric woman.

The other individual, heretofore mentioned, was Dr. Lewis Beers, of the town of Spencer, Tioga county, but now Danby, Tompkins county, New York. It is not strange that Mr. Smith, in his "Historical Sketches," should have made some trifling mistakes in his notice of this individual, inasmuch as the incidents to which he alludes took place prior to his connection with the Universalist denomination; and as it is presumable that he never had much, if any, personal acquaintance with him.

Dr. Beers was an eminent and successful practitioner of medicine, a native of the State of Connecticut, and educated in the most rigid school of Presbyterianism; and I am strongly impressed with the belief, that he lived a number of years in the communion of that church. He was an early settler in that town; and by skill in the practice of his profession, and his successful financiering, had amassed a large property. His mind, however, was too inquisitive to be content with the incongruities of Calvinism, and his soul too capacious to be satisfied within the narrow limits of Partialism; and by dint of Biblical study, with the help of a few books that fell in his way, he arose, I am persuaded, without ever hearing a discourse from a Universalist preacher, above the fog of educational prejudice into the clear light of Gospel truth; and, without stopping to confer with flesh and blood, immediately began publishing it to the world. He had, I think, obtained Mr. Ballou's Treatise on Atonement; and, having ascertained the place of his residence, addressed him by letter, requesting information concerning the state of our organization, and what steps would be necessary for him to take in order to unite with the denomination of Universalists. Mr. Ballou immediately replied, (the Doctor showed me the letter,) and