

# Horatio Stebbins: Growing Unitarianism Beyond the Boundaries of the Boston Elite

## Arliss Ungar

*He was reverent in thought, but utterly fearless in following where the truth seemed to lead.*  
Unitarian Club of California

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MARCH 3, 1889—Evening worship at the San Francisco Unitarian Church, Dr. Horatio Stebbins presiding (as he had done for the last twenty-five years):

Let thy blessing be upon us, O God, according to thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindness, according to thy wisdom and thy grace. We thank thee for the pleasant day, for the gentle night, for thy hand that supports the morning and evening, that leads forth the glory of noonday and the majesty of night; in all we see thy power, thy wisdom, thy goodness, thy love.

We come each one from his place and duty and his dwelling to this our common meeting place of prayer and teaching and song. Let our hearts be in a devout mood of pure feeling, of clear intelligence, of devout faith and earnest hope. We give thee gratitude for all our blessings, the blessings of thy word spoken in all places of thy domain and of thy kingdom, and spoken in all times and all ages, among every race of man in the common human earth....

Horatio Stebbins was “the leading divine of San Francisco and one of the most eloquent pulpit orators in America” (*Visalia* newspaper). “Dr. Stebbins was ever the kindest of men, and his friendliness and consideration were not confined to his social equals. Without condescension, he always had a kind word for the humblest people” (Murdoch, *Eighty*, 218-219).

Horatio Stebbins “was over six feet tall,” Arnold Crompton said, and “rugged of body and features. In bearing he was dignified and austere. He was a kind man, but he lacked that ebullient warmth which had drawn people to Starr King....In his fashion he accepted responsibility for the organized growth of Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast” (Crompton 46-47). Charles Murdoch, a friend and biographer, explained that “He was at times stern, and was always fearless in uttering what he felt to be the truth, whether it was to meet with favor or with disapproval from his hearers.” Murdoch continued:

He served the community as well as his church, being especially influential in promoting the interests of education. He was a kindly and helpful man, and he was not burdened by his large duties and responsibilities, he was never hurried or harassed. He steadily pursued his placid way and built up a really great influence. He was, above all else, an inspirer of steadfast faith.

On the 8th of August, 1821, Horatio Stebbins was born in a small town in Massachusetts now called Hampden. It was first settled by his ancestors in 1741. He was one of the eleven children of Calvin Stebbins, a country squire and Justice of the Peace and Amelia Adams Stebbins, a woman of deep religious feeling and poetic nature. His son Roderick claimed that there were more books in his father’s house than in any other house in the parish, save the minister’s; and the father’s gentle tenderness and wise severity were perpetuated in the son. His mother, too, was a woman of charming temper, good sense, fine sensibility (R Stebbins).

Although it was reported that Stebbins once told a group that he grew up Methodist, his was a family of Unitarian ministers. His cousin Rufus Stebbins became the president of the American Unitarian Association and President of Meadville Unitarian Theological Seminary, his half-brother was minister in both Charleston and Detroit, and his son Roderick was a minister.

His early years were spent on the family farm. But for high school he went into Springfield where he lived with a family in exchange for doing chores. Eventually he went to Philips Exeter Academy, and on to Harvard and Harvard Divinity School (where people like to tell that he raised potatoes on wasteland at the school to earn \$100 toward college expenses). His obituary in the *1902 Unitarian Year Book* commented, “Never a close, certainly not a sedentary student of books, he yet had a way of cracking the nut and extracting the sweet, nutritious kernel out of the toughest shagbark of them all that was fairly phenomenal.” He often had to stop school long enough to earn the money to continue his education. A hand-written notation by his son Roderick claimed that Stebbins studied medicine before he studied for the ministry in 1848 (Bancroft Library). Perhaps he did.

After graduation from Harvard Divinity School, he became the minister of the First Parish Church, Fitchburg, Massachusetts where he was ordained in November, 1851. He chose Fitchburg over an important church in Boston because he felt he could be of more help there. After three years, he went to be minister in Portland, Maine with Ichabod Nichols. After four years Nichols died and Stebbins was the sole minister. He was their fourth lead minister since the founding of the church in 1727, 124 years earlier. He remained a total of nine years.

During the Civil War years there, Stebbins attracted attention for his independence of thought. His son tells:

On the Sunday morning after Sumter fell he preached with the flag unfolded upon the pulpit. Some of his parishioners were alarmed, and thought him indiscreet; and he was warned. But he replied with firmness and characteristic independence, “I have great respect for the people, and it gives me pain to come in collision with their convictions; but there is one man whose respect I must have, and his name is Stebbins.”

In November 1851, he married Mary Ann Fischer in Massachusetts. They had two children who survived infancy, Mary Louisa and Roderick. His first wife died in 1875, in San Francisco.

In 1852 Stebbins had received a call to the two-year-old Unitarian Society in San Francisco, but declined. But when Thomas Starr King died in San Francisco in March 1864, Henry Bellows stepped in for six months and Stebbins did supply preaching in Bellows’ New York Church, then left for California as the called minister in San Francisco, hand-picked by Bellows. (*California Christian Advocate*, 4/12/02)

SAN FRANCISCO, July 13.

Rev. Horatio Stebbins, New York:

By a free, spontaneous and unanimous vote, you were last evening invited by our society to become their pastor. There was but one voice, and that for you. The call is earnest, and your welcome will be warm and generous. Please answer as soon as possible if you will accept. If you do, it is important that you leave Aug. 13. Your salary will be the same as that given to Mr. KING.

ROBERT B. SWAIN, President of Trustees, San Francisco Unitarian Church.

NEW YORK, July 13.

Robert B. Swain, Esq., San Francisco:

I accept your call heartily, and shall call 13th August. God willing.

HORATIO STEBBINS.

(Boston Advertiser, July 22, 1864)

Stebbins first preached in San Francisco on September 7, 1864. He served the congregation there for thirty-five years, until January 1900. He preached twice each Sunday, rarely taking a break. Stebbins explained, "The beloved King had died six months before; the air was fragrant with his name, and the vanishing echoes of his voice for God and Country were still heard. The fires of war cast their lurid glare from shore to shore, and grief and victory wept for the sorrows of the land." (Stebbins, Eliot installation).

Charles Murdock, his biographer, tells us that Stebbins "indulged in no illusion of filling Mr. King's place. He stood on his own feet to make his own place, and to do his own work in his own way, with such results as came, and he was undisturbed (190).

The day after his installation in San Francisco that first Sunday, he wrote:

Yesterday morning the services of installation were held, and were attended by a most vast audience, hundreds going away unable to gain admission. I preached a straight, simple little sermon, which my wife was immensely delighted with. The trustees of the church and the Governor of the state were in the pulpit, and an audience before me of plucky-looking, come-if-you-dare, magnanimous, tenderhearted people (1st UU Society of SF archives).

Sheri Prud'home writes,

Stebbins' Unitarianism was engaged with the world, and he consistently used the power of his post to shape the development of society according to his view of the "world as a school...God as a father and teacher... mankind as creatures of development and education...[and] paradise as a future attainment." (Prud'home 23)

In October 1864 (a month after he first preached at the Unitarian Church), he spoke at the huge Platt Hall in San Francisco about the war. He took an active interest in the civil war, throwing all his powers on the side of the Union (unnamed obituary).

In 1865, at the fifteenth anniversary of the Society of California Pioneers, Stebbins said,

The leading characteristic of the present age is the continual aggression of man upon nature, material perfection, physical science (7)...the presence is distinguished for the moral and religious aspects of all discoveries in, and triumphs over, the material world.

He felt that scientific inquiries influence religious theories and that the central thought which ensures the onward movement of the race is the unity of mankind (9). He believed in the theory of progress by which this earth is to be occupied by man as the ultimate object of creation (Pioneers).

"Stebbins had few companions," Prud'home tells us, "in his insistence (1) that there was one common human family and the Chinese belonged in it, and (2) that people of different races could, and in fact should by way of God's instructive plan, live alongside one another" (Prud'home 15). However, she adds, "He believed in a vision of humanity made in the image of the Christian God" (Prud'home 19) and that "...different peoples were located on different rungs of the ladder of moral development" (Prud'home 20).

Stebbins consistently articulated a belief in the unity of the human race. He prayed:

Almighty God, let thy blessing be as broad and wide as the shadow of the night, as the beams of the day, resting upon thy common human family, the common race of man, in all climes, in all countries, in all nations, and wherever man lives, even though he lives in darkness and ignorance, if he lives according to the best light that is in him, may he be received by thee, the universal Father (Stebbins, Prayers 12).

In an unidentified article in the *Evening Post Magazine* entitled "Christianizing the Philippines," Stebbing looked on some of the indigenous people there as of an inferior race, but felt that all should have an education and freedom of religion. He felt the United States has the right to put an end to oppression and "the duty to ameliorate and improve the condition of mankind."

Stebbins played a major role in the establishment of public education in California. He was Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the College of California, a precursor of the University of California. He served on the Committee of Three which managed the new University of California until a president was elected (Crompton 66). He served on the Board of the University of California for twenty-six years and on the Stanford University Board from the founding of the University until his death (though the Stanford Board had little power at that time). He served on the Board of James Lick California School of Mechanical Arts from 1887-1900, during the time of the formation of the school and litigation of the Lick estate. The school started classes in 1895.

A letter from the University of California Regents, dated Feb. 18, 1894, on his retirement from the Board expresses thanks for "services rendered eminent by his acquaintance with the best university ideals, by his rare gift of speech in enforcing his sentiments, by his high character as a man, and by his influential position in the community."

In education and in all moral questions his voice is strong and influential.... It was largely through his wisdom and ability that the present beautiful site of the University at Berkeley, looking out of the Golden Gate, was secured (*Unitarian*, v. 12).

Stebbins explained,

During the year 1866-7 the Trustees of the College of California agreed to convey their property at Berkeley, then unnamed, to the State, if the State would establish there an university equal in the range of its studies to eastern universities, and including an Agricultural department founded upon the Congressional grant of fifty thousand acres of land for the purpose of an Agricultural College (*UC Magazine* 1899).

Andrew Hallidie, an influential San Francisco Unitarian, the inventor of the San Francisco Cable Car, and a Regent of the University of California, continued,

The "College of California" was fortunate in having at the head of its trustees a man of great strength of mind, clear perception, broad ideas and culture, and impressive eloquence, and who was for many years an influential Regent of the "University," and it is nothing more than justice to place Dr. Horatio Stebbins at the head of the benefactors of the "University" (*UC Magazine* 1899).

At the University of California Charter Day Celebration, Stebbins said, "This, then, is our vocation – to make men more manly, and humanity more humane; to augment the discourse of reason, intelligence and faith, and to kindle the beacon fires of truth on all the summits of existence...and to this end and for this cause, may our University stand so long as sun and moon shall endure" (72nd Charter Anniversary).

In 1895 when controversy arose about the University of California charging tuition. Rev. Stebbins wrote:

Doubtless the policy of the University should be liberal, but it should not be infantile. The University is not a nursery, nor an orphan asylum nor an alms house nor a place to get something for nothing. It is a place for liberal education and everyone who resorts there should pay something for the great privilege.... (*Call* 6/19/1895.5).

Stebbins helped to establish Unitarian churches throughout California. In April 1866, he went up to Portland for three weeks to preach to the liberal Christians there, challenging them to pledge to support a church and a minister. They did, and \$1600 was pledged to establish the church, and \$1700 was pledged for a minister's salary. A

society was organized, subscriptions were started, and land was purchased (Harvard Square, Eliot).

As Charles Murdock, wrote, "On one matter, at least, Dr. Stebbins had a well-settled opinion that was quite at variance with popular prejudice. He was not at all in sympathy with the Chinese exclusion legislation and he never missed an opportunity to express his feeling that a man of China is still a man" (Murdock, 56).

At a December 1866 banquet by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, he expressed appreciation for Chinese merchants,

I but reiterate the sentiment of every man here when I express the pleasure I feel in meeting merchants of China in the mutual exchange of good-will with merchants of San Francisco. May that interchange never cease, so long as value seeks equilibrium on the earth, or the wind of popular liberty rushes to fill the vacuum of despotism (Shuck, 595).

Stebbins received two honorary degrees, a Master's Degree (AM) from Harvard, and a Doctorate (STD) from Bowdoin in 1869.

In the early 1870's the church tried "Theater Preaching." They rented the Metropolitan Theater where Stebbins preached for twelve consecutive Sunday nights. The theater was always crowded with a "reverent and attentive audience" (Davis).

In 1871, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in the West to visit Yosemite, preached several times in Stebbins' church.

Edward Everett Hale said of Stebbins, "He was afraid of nothing and nobody and quite indifferent whether he stood alone or with a circle of friends around him" (467).

In 1872, the people of San Francisco overwhelmingly approved measures to exclude Chinese immigration. Stebbins did not agree. He told a group at an elegant dinner put on by the Japanese embassy,

While we are here tonight wooing the commerce of the old empire, your Governor (pointing to Governor Booth), as the head of one political party, and Ex-Governor Haight as the representative of the other, are committed to a policy to exclude these people from our shores. The position is absurd and ridiculous; as a policy it is nonsense; as a principle it is nowhere—it is rag-tag and bobtail. If any of your cheap politicians have won a penny by it in the passions of an hour, beware; beware when you put that penny in your purse, lest the eagle on the reverse side of the coin sticks his talons through and scratches the face of Liberty (*Missionary* 3/1874, 64).

The next year the San Francisco Church organized its Society for Christian Works which conducted benevolent works, established a sewing school for up to 400 persons, and distributed reading materials to hospitals and jails.

In 1876, Stebbins married Lucy Ward of Chicago. A local newspaper suggested that she "will not only be a valuable helpmate to the Reverend Doctor, but a desirable acquisition to the congregation and society of this place. Stebbins' son Roderick sent her a note to "prepare her for the 'semi-barbarian civilization out here.'" Stebbins had, Murdoch said, twenty-six years of "perfect sympathy, devoted love, solicitous care" (81). Stebbins and Lucy had two children. Their daughter Lucy Ward Stebbins became a Dean of Women at UC Berkeley, where she served for thirty years, and son Horatio, Jr. graduated from Berkeley and MIT and became a professor at Stanford.

Mrs. Stebbins told the California Woman's Unitarian Conference of the Pacific Coast, "The trend of Society of the present day is to overwhelm the mother and disqualify her for the discharge of her home duties. But wisely used it makes her bring brightness to the home." She said that "Club life fostered trivial ambitions and was apt to unfit her for the patient devotions which was needed in the care of her home...[She] accentuated the need that a mother felt for contact with the outside world, for the mental help and recreations it wrought."

In 1879 Stebbins went by sea to Portland for the first gathering of Pacific Coast Unitarians. He preached the dedication sermon of the Portland church and helped to organize the Pacific Coast Unitarian Conference.

On June 12, 1880, Stebbins's daughter Mary Louisa "Minnie" Schroeder, who had been married for eight years to the man with whom she had eloped, confessed to her father that she was seduced by her dentist, Dr. Alfred Lefevre, a married man with four children. They had an affair for two or three months, she said. (Some speculated at first that the "seduction" was really hallucinations from chloroform administered during the dental procedures, a not unknown occurrence, but this later proved untrue.) Edward Schroeder (the daughter's husband) and Dr. Stebbins confronted Lefevre, who neither affirmed or denied the charge. Stebbins said that he was unarmed, but that if he had carried a gun, he would have shot Lefevre right there. (He did strike him several times.) He said Mr. Schroeder was "out of his mind" after June 12. Mr. Schroeder shot and killed Dr. Lefevre. He was arrested and taken to prison (*Morning Appeal* 7/30/1880, 2). After eleven days of trial and seventy-two hours of the jury deliberation, he was acquitted on grounds of temporary insanity. It was a very unpopular decision. By March 1881, Schroeder was engaged in mining in Arizona. Stebbins, the papers said, exposed his daughter as an adulteress in order to save the life of his son-in-law (*Daily Globe*, 12/ 27/ 1880, Image 3).

Stebbins delivered the sermon at the dedication of the first church building of the Unitarians in San Diego in 1882. That same year, Stebbins had pneumonia and went to Sisson Meadows near Shasta to recover. It was one of his few vacations.

At the laying of the cornerstone for Stanford University on May 14, 1886, Stebbins prayed,

"...may wise master builders and skilled workmen of God build from generation to generation upon the foundation which thou has laid..." (Stanford). He was a friend and trusted advisor of Leland Stanford, who occasionally attended Stebbins' church. In 1893, Stebbins gave the sermon to the four thousand people gathered on the Stanford University quad for Stanford's funeral.

That same year he assisted with the re-founding of the Unitarian Church in Sacramento. And it was largely through his efforts that the Unitarian Club of California was organized.

The Unitarian reported in 1887,

Perhaps, aside from his daily and weekly services in and out of the church, the most important single event of Dr. Stebbins' ministry in San Francisco is the building of the new church. The church edifice to which he came in 1864 was on Geary street, between Stockton and Dupont streets. With the growth of the city this location became undesirable, and in 1887 the property was sold, and an eligible site a mile west was purchased. The present church building, of which the corner-stone was laid December 25, 1887, was dedicated on Sunday morning, February 9, 1889 (v. 12).

The old church was torn down to make way for a business block. The new site was nearer the homes of church members. While the church was being built, services were held for a year in Temple Emanu-El and the Sunday School met at the First Congregational Church.

The book *Robert Elsmere* by Mrs. Humphrey Ward was a best seller. It told of a young man's loss of faith in his traditional Christian upbringing and a turn to what were essentially Unitarian beliefs. It ridiculed Evangelism. Stebbins endorsed the book. A Presbyterian minister, Rev. Francis Horton, took the opportunity to use this to protest the "takeover" of the University of California by the Unitarians. (The President of the University, Horace Davis, was a member of Stebbins's church; Stebbins was a very influential Regent of the University.) Stebbins pointed out the considerable Presbyterian influence at the University; the controversy eventually died down. Stebbins remained a regent for many years (Marsden, 145).

In 1889 Stebbins celebrated his 25th year at the San Francisco church. He was presented with a purse containing \$1,864, representing the year when he came to San Francisco.

Stebbins aided Charles Wendte in advocating for the establishment of the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, along with a seminary in Berkeley, at the September 1890 meeting of the Pacific Unitarian Conference. Their proposal was accepted unanimously. Stebbins later withdrew his support for the seminary, saying the time was not right. He was correct! In the 1890s Depression which soon occurred, money once pledged for the seminary was no longer available. [Pacific Unitarian School for the Ministry, which later became Starr King School for the Ministry, opened its doors in 1904.] When he died, Stebbins left his library to what is now Starr King School.

In June 1890, he spoke at the Unitarian Church in Seattle. The local paper reported that his sermon was “closely listened to and much appreciated.” He said that “All human experience confirms the words of Jesus that there is nothing so morally helpful as faith in God” (*Seattle Post Intelligencer* 6/30/1890, 8).

At the Unitarian National Conference in 1891, Stebbins told the group, “...those who have gone from First Church of San Francisco have gone inoculated at least with truth that preserves them from the miserable diseases of Christendom (Murdoch 109-110).

Stebbins was on the original publications committee of the Pacific Unitarian, which started publication in 1892, when its name was changed from the *Guidon*, and it became the official publication of the Pacific Unitarian Conference (Crompton 145).

Stebbins explained in *The Pacific Unitarian*:

God forbid that I should decry learning, refinement, intellectual culture, in any form in which these adorn human life with beauty, luxury and power. But these are not supreme, and they are not the climax of individual greatness, or of the nation's glory. What we want as individuals, what society wants, is not so much increased intellectual force, but awakened *moral sensibility* (v. 2-3, 361).

Stebbins was against prohibition, but favored high taxation on liquor licenses. “It is not brandy that kills the drunkard, but want of character – absence of self-control,” he said. “Don’t put it on the brandy bottle, but take it on your own shoulders” (Unidentified clipping at Bancroft).

In January 1893, Stebbins preached at the installation of Rev. Thomas Horner of the First Unitarian Church of Sacramento. “He dwelt at length on the necessity for liberality in religion and outlined what he was pleased to call a bird’s eye view of Christendom....Religion and spiritual belief like everything else was undergoing constant change and could not remain stationary” (*Record Union* 1/26/1893, 4).

In 1893, he addressed the Unitarian Club in Boston on American Christianity. Stebbins stated at the dedication of the Unitarian Church in Alameda:

We are here in the name and for the sake of those who seek an interpretation of human life in the light of religion that accords with reason, and the natural healthy sentiments of conscience and the affections; who regard life as a school rather than a court, and trust that out of the wrong, sorrow, struggle and virtues of the world there will come eternal good (*Pacific Unitarian*, Vols 2-3, p. 10).

Stebbins presided and delivered an address on behalf of the Regents at the University of California Charter Day celebration.

In 1894, he spoke at the tenth session of the Pacific Coast Conference.

On Feb. 5, 1894, Stebbins sent the church board “a relinquishment of his claim for salary due.” It was not accepted. He had been at the San Francisco Church for thirty years. Rev. W. G. Eliot, Jr. resigned as pastor of the Seattle Unitarian Church in order to accept an invitation to become associate minister with Dr. Stebbins of the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco. At Eliot’s installation, in the Autumn of 1896, Stebbins offered the Ordination Prayer. *The Pacific Unitarian* reported,

It was very tender and searching, the inmost utterance of a soul swayed by deep emotion. The organ-like tones rose and fell responsive to thought and feeling, thrilling their hearers and bearing them on in sympathy and devout aspiration. When, in conclusion, he placed his hands in benediction upon the head of the young man consecrated his helper, tears on many cheeks testified to sensibility deeply stirred (v. 2-3, 363).

Eliot left less than two years later.

Stebbins declared,

There are but few rich, but the great influence and power of wealth in ways of the world, in foolish distinctions, upstart pride and vulgar display, is so manifest that some are betrayed into the fallacy of thinking and saying that laws are made for the rich (5) ....Law is for the protection of the people, and not of a few (6).

In 1894 Henry Miller of Miller & Lux sued Stebbins in court for \$2,189 (principal and interest), an amount he claimed he loaned Stebbins who never returned the money. Stebbins claimed he knew nothing about it! (*Call* 12/18/1894).

At the anniversary of his thirty-one years in the San Francisco pulpit, he said, “To this end every true teacher and preacher of religion is born, and to this end he comes into the world: to be the interpreter of human life in its sublime relations and terrible glories” (31 Years, 21).

In May 1896, Stebbins was appointed to a committee to study public health in the city and county of San Francisco. The committee recommended more money for the Department of Health and the establishment of an ambulance system.

In December 1896, Stebbins played the part of Peter Ruggles in the Sunday School performance of *The Birds’ Christmas Carol*, which Stebbins arranged from the story by Kate Douglas Wiggin. Stebbins preached at the chapel at Stanford in September 1897.

His letter to Harvard’s fiftieth reunion of his class of 1848 stated that “...learning does not carry wisdom, nor does scholarship give assurance of common sense” (*Pacific Unitarian* 300). He also told them:

I have been as happy as is common to human lot under a Divine Providence, and have had as good success as a man like me can reasonably expect....I have taken great satisfaction in my vocation, and, maybe, have rendered some service to my time, and to the welfare of my fellow men (299).

In December 1898, Stebbins suffered a heart attack.

In early 1899, Stebbins was quoted in the *San Francisco Examiner* explaining to a joint meeting of the San Francisco Unitarian Church and the First Congregational Church in San Francisco, “Morality and religion are not the same thing, but they are mutually dependent, and unless they go together they are as a stone in the shoe and a foot out of joint” (2/5/1899).

Horatio Stebbins once described God “not as an external power – an embodiment of excellence outside of the world and extraneous to humanity – but rather existing in the world and representing the finest and noblest qualities that rule our life on earth.” This view, he said, “is purity, moral, not metaphysical rational and practical, not mythical or transcendental” (unidentified clipping at Bancroft).

On the thirty-fifth anniversary of his ministry in San Francisco, he explained:

I think a minister should know the world without being worldly, understand the wickedness of the world without partaking in its wickedness, though he himself is weak; sympathize with men of all ranks and conditions, severely upright, yet tender-hearted. Beyond that there is not much I would tell anybody of.

*The Pacific magazine* of the Congregational Church reported:

Though not orthodox, he had much—by far the greater part of his teaching—in common with orthodoxy. He was, on the whole, nearer to orthodox views of the essential principles of our Christian religion than he was to the views of modern, flippant rationalism. In the higher speculative phases of Christian doctrine he was Unitarian, but in all the vital principles affecting human character and responsibility he was biblical (4/17/1902).

He advocated the establishment in San Francisco of a Sanitary Commission/National Red Cross in case war was declared (Spanish-American War). “There may be no war,” he said. “I hope so and half believe it. But if there is to be a war, patriotism, honor and humanity alike suggest that good citizens should do all they can to relieve its horrors and sufferings” (*Call* 4/8/1898, 5).

In January 1899, Dr. Stebbins sent in his resignation.

Dearly Beloved:

I am admonished by time and events that the hour is come for me to resign the trust which I have held as your minister into your hands; and I do hereby resign it....This ministry has been devoted to these great human interests that belong to man as man, and to human nature in its great common experiences and events, rather than to a provincial ecclesiasticism or parochial policy....this ministry has reckoned human valor and the divine nature of kindred blood and has never despised any man because he was rich or poor or ignorant or black, but has esteemed him as holding some mysterious and eternal reaction to the father of all.

The article concluded: “The people of the First Unitarian Church is loath to part with their beloved pastor, whose long service in that pulpit has endeared him to their hearts” (Unidentified news clipping 1/22/1899).

The congregation would not accept his resignation. A supply preacher, Rev. Stopford Wentworth Brooke from First Church Boston was brought in for six months. Brooke was the son of an illustrious British divine and Shakespearean scholar.

In September, Stebbins submitted his resignation again. It was accepted, and he was elected Minister Emeritus, though he preached again from July 1899 until January 1900.

In January 1900, he was elected as a director of the San Francisco Lying-in Hospital and Foundling Asylum.

In March, he wrote an open letter in the newspaper to Rolla V. Watt, who the week before had severely criticized Methodism in the newspaper. Stebbins said, “I am inclined to think, my dear sir, that Methodism is not dead, nor has it lost its energy. It has only changed its methods but it is still Methodism, a way of doing it that has divine sanctions that keep time with the progress of the mind of man” (*Call* 3/16/1900, 6).

At the end of May 1900, Stebbins moved back to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to be near his family. He lived with his son, Horatio Jr. In October, the letter he wrote on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the San Francisco Unitarian Church began:

My Dear Dr. Leavitt:

We do well to celebrate with praise, thanksgiving and gratitude the half-century anniversary of our church. It has been a most honorable and much loved institution, and under God kept alive the sacred fire kindled by his inspiration and replenished the fountain of that stream that flows from age to age (*Call*, 10/22/1900, 5).

Stebbins died on April 8, 1902. Murdoch tells us, “The event of his death was not unexpected. It has been imminent and threatening for years. His feebleness and the intense suffering of his later days relieve the grief that must be felt, and there springs by its side gratitude that rest and peace have come to him” (Murdoch, *Eighty*, 218-219).

His obituary in the *San Francisco Call* pointed out that during Stebbins’ time in San Francisco, Unitarian churches grew in number from no other Unitarian churches in California to over twenty churches, stretching from Seattle to San Diego, “to all of which, none more than himself bore a guiding and helping hand or counseled in wiser words” (*Call*, 4/10/1902).

This remembrance also said that “Dr. Horatio Stebbins was for nearly forty years one of the best known and most influential ministers on the whole Pacific Coast; in fact, in the whole country. A man of fine education, a high degree of cultivation, broad and liberal in his views and modest but courageous in their expression, he was ever to be found battling for the best, and was generally recognized as one of the strongest personal factors in elevating the standards of life and citizenship in the community that boasted his membership.”

Stebbins once declared, “... my proud humility and gratitude are, under God, that men and women from every condition and circumstance of life have come to me simply because they thought I was human” (31 Years 22). He was human, a wonderful educator, pastor, and human being. He was a builder of churches and schools. And he was, as Charles Murdoch said, “above all else, an inspirer of steadfast faith.”

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