

I FELT LONELY AND YET HOPEFUL

On a bright Saturday in April 1860, a ship entered the Golden Gate and docked that afternoon at San Francisco. On board were a tired minister, the Rev. Thomas Starr King and his ill wife, Julia. They had come from Boston, called by the Unitarian Church of a raw San Francisco. The couple were driven in a carriage, as Starr King recalled it, "to the Oriental Hotel, a forlorn looking wooden building in a wretched part of the city, but the best house kept in the place." Their old friends in the East were behind them, and here awaited a new home and a new mission.

The church officers had made no arrangements for services for the next day, Sunday, thinking their new minister would be too tired after a long sea voyage, but Starr King was eager to begin, and a brief notice was inserted in the Sunday morning paper that the newly arrived minister would preach in the Unitarian Church.

Sunday, April 29, 1860, was cool and sunny as a crowd of townspeople converged on the Unitarian Church. A hundred had to be turned away, there being no more room inside. The choir sang beautifully. All waited for Starr King to speak. Recalling the moment, he wrote, "I felt lonely enough, and yet hopeful. I couldn't help crying like a baby when I first went into the pulpit in thinking of all that I had left behind at the east, and then, I hope, I cried no less intensely to the Lord."

"The first feeling with many, on seeing Mr. King," wrote one parishoner, "was disappointment. He was so diminutive, looked so young, and was so very different in outward appearance from what was expected. The crowd went to hear him out of curiosity, expecting never to go again; thinking perhaps to leave before the service was over. They entered the church timidly; with compassion it may be for the youth who was to undergo such a sharp test of powers. They filled pews, aisles, porticoes, and the street; but when Mr. King began, there was no restlessness; his voice charmed them, and before he finished they knew that they had a great man before them."

The next morning, the front page of the *Daily Alta California* carried a prominent editorial in praise of the Unitarian minister now in their midst. "A broad and liberal Christian charity," it said, "flowed through the discourse, which was set off by a manly and sonorous voice, penetrating to the remotest corner of the building. We may be permitted to congratulate the congregation upon the acquisition of an earnest, able, and unaffected pastor."

Starr King wrote to his Eastern friends, "I shall like it here, I am sure." His wife, Julia, regained her health. The congregation was in high spirits and grew in strength. And Thomas Starr King was now a Californian.

Ref.: Charles W. Wendte, *Thomas Starr King: Patriot and Preacher* (Boston, 1921), pp. 83-88; Arnold Crompton, "Thomas Starr King: Apostle of Liberty," *Uniquist*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1975), pp. 33-34.