

Title: The Convention Conundrum

A One-Act Play in the Spirit of 1825

Written in homage to "He Said, He Said" by Nancy McDonald Ladd

## CHARACTERS

- The Parliamentarian - Keeper of order and voice of procedure.
- Andrews Norton - Harvard professor, theological heavyweight, unimpressed by whimsy.
- William Ellery Channing - The quiet center of moral gravity.
- Henry Ware (the Younger) - Earnest, industrious, constantly drafting something.
- Judge Jackson - Formal, skeptical, resistant to institutional innovation.
- Rev. Dr. Pierce (of Brookline) - Passionate defender of rural orthodoxy.
- Mr. George Bond - Boston merchant and voice of practical generosity.
- Mrs. Abigail Ellis - Lay observer from Roxbury with a quill and sharp insight. (Fictional addition.)

## SCENE: THE CONVENTION CONUNDRUM

Setting: A chilly Boston meeting hall, February 1825. The windows rattle slightly in the wind. A faint scent of pipe smoke and cinnamon.

The Parliamentarian (rapping gavel):

Order, gentlemen, order. The matter before us: Shall we call into being a Unitarian Convention, or is this entire endeavor a noble folly?

Andrews Norton (rising):

Let us proceed without delay. Gentlemen, the Transcendentalists are stirring. If we do not formalize our theology and our gatherings, we risk being mistaken for something dangerously... poetic.

William Ellery Channing (gently):

I confess, I do not despise poetry. But I would frame this not as defense but as aspiration. Let our convention be not merely an institutional shell but a vessel for our light. The world awaits liberal religion--it would be inhospitable not to deliver it.

Henry Ware (the Younger) (waving papers):

I have drafted a charter. Annual meetings, a publication society, committees on education, social reform, rural outreach. And perhaps--though this may be premature--a hymnal board?

Judge Jackson (rapping cane):

A hymnal board? What next? A Unitarian militia? I stand opposed. These proposals smell faintly of bureaucracy and exactly like Boston.

Rev. Dr. Pierce (handkerchief raised):

Have any of you asked the western parishes what they think of all this? I spoke with a farmer from Worcester who said, and I quote, "What's a Unitarian?" That, sirs, is your outreach problem.

Mr. George Bond (chewing thoughtfully):

All respect, Reverend, but the Boston merchant class is ready to fund such a convention. I'd like to see my coin used for more than bricks. I'd like to see it build a faith. Also--excellent buns, thank you, Abigail.

Mrs. Abigail Ellis (from gallery):

And what of the voices not yet invited to your table, sirs? This convention may be your birthright--but if it is to last, it must become broader than any one room in Boston.

(Pause. The men turn. Channing bows slightly. Norton scribbles.)

William Ellery Channing (softly):

Perhaps the lady has given us our first charge.

The Parliamentarian:

Shall we vote on the formation of a Unitarian Convention--open to clergy and laity alike, to meet annually for the propagation and preservation of our shared faith?

(Hands go up. The motion passes. Rev. Dr. Pierce sighs audibly.)

#### EPILOGUE: THE FIRST CONVENTION

Scene: A year later, same hall, but with polished floors, better chairs, and a well-fed audience. A new sign reads "Unitarian Convention Hall."

Mrs. Abigail Ellis now sits at the main table, flanked by Channing and a reluctantly impressed Judge Jackson. Ware passes out pamphlets. Norton is already arguing about sermon standards. George Bond unveils a donation ledger.

Rev. Dr. Pierce stands and declares, "Well, I suppose Worcester now knows what a Unitarian is."

(Curtain)