

[Freeman, John]

DEATH OF REV. JOHN FREEMAN

It becomes our melancholy and heart-rending duty this week to record the death of our amiable, devoted and faithful brother in the ministry, Rev. John Freeman. He departed this life at his residence in Hamilton [NY] on Saturday evening last [19 Oct], about 6 o'clock, after a distressing illness of about three weeks, aged 33 years. He had recently returned from a journey to the East, undertaken mainly for the benefit of his health; and thinking his health somewhat improved, he scarcely reached home (barely arriving on Saturday and preaching on Sunday) ere he left his residence again for the West, to attend the Cayuga Association [of Universalists] at Genoa. Here (although able to preach the first day of the Association) he was taken quite ill with a violent head-ache and strong affection of the nerves, insomuch that he was unable to endure the journey home, and remained about a week. After consulting a physician and taking some medicine, feeling, as he thought, a little better, and extremely anxious to reach home, he started on the following Wednesday, though still severely exercised with nervous head-ache and considerable fever, and wholly unfit for the journey, and reached home on Friday, much exhausted and in a very dangerous condition.

Medical aid was immediately called, and ultimately a council of physicians was held, in reference to his case. but all to no effect. Possessed of a naturally feeble constitution, with great nervous weakness and irritability, with a burning fever raging within, and more particularly affecting the brain, his frail earthly tabernacle was gradually wasted and dissolved, and one of the loftiest minds and purest spirits with which we were ever permitted to converse on earth, took its departure for the unseen world.

During most of the time after his return from Genoa, owing to the severity of pain in the head and the affection of the nervous system, his mind was either in a state of partial lethargy, or else floating as if in a sort of reverie. There were, however, several lucid intervals, when he seemed perfectly composed, self-collected, [and] conscious of his situation, and [he] conversed with perfect ease and freedom. Death had no terrors to him—his faith was strong and unwavering—the great salvation was his theme in sickness as well as in health—his mind seemed wholly absorbed in the great work of the ministry and plan of universal reconciliation—and he was often heard, during his sickness, to break forth in devout thanksgiving, praise and prayer to God, always expressing the strongest confidence in his Maker's love—for this had been the most delightful theme of his ministry while in health.

In the death of this faithful minister of Jesus Christ, his family, consisting of an amiable wife, four small but promising children, and aged mother, and a sister, have sustained the irreparable loss of a fond and affectionate husband, a kind and provident father, a dutiful and loving son, a faithful and tender brother; the church and society in Hamilton have lost one of the best of pastors and most devoted ministers of the New Testament; the inhabitants of the town, a kind and sympathizing neighbor; our denomination, one of its brightest ornaments; and the world at large, one of its best citizens and most devout and exemplary Christians.

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With Br. Freeman we had been long and intimately acquainted. We knew him well before he entered the ministry, and while yet a member of the Presbyterian church. We had witnessed the struggles in his mind in regard to that faith in which he had been educated... and marked well the lighting up of that heavenly joy in his eye, and the fervor of devotion in that faithful voice, as he caught a full view of the boundless love of God... So full was his heart, so fervent his soul, so strong his faith, that he could not be denied the privilege of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ to the world. In despite of a want of education, a growing family to provide for, and a meager fortune, he commenced the work of the ministry a little more than four years since. And by close application to study, by untiring zeal and perseverance, his progress was rapid... Possessing a fruitful imagination, a warm and philanthropic heart, a retentive memory, and a strong mind, he succeeded in the ministry beyond all the expectations of his most sanguine friends. Of all subjects, to him the love of God was the most dear, the most inspiring. Here he seemed to be in his element, and to be divinely inspired with more than mortal energy and eloquence... Under his preaching the hearer could never measure time, and a sermon of half an hour would seem less than five minutes long.

But alas! his voice is now hushed in death, and his eloquence will no more be heard on earth... Though we mourn his loss, we mourn not as those without hope...

His funeral was attended at the Universalist church in Hamilton on Tuesday the 22d, by a crowded congregation of friends and brethren, whose deep drawn sighs and tearful countenances showed how sensibly they felt their own loss, as well as sympathized with the bereaved widow and fatherless children, to whom the writer of this notice delivered a discourse from 2 Samuel xiv:14. May a merciful God kindly visit and bless the bereaved mourners with his own consolations...

S. [Rev. Dolphus Skinner]

Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate, Utica NY, 26 Oct 1833
[a Universalist newspaper]

LETTER FROM BR. GEORGE SANDERSON

Genoa [NY], October 31, 1833

Br. Skinner—You can hardly imagine the surprise and sympathy that was excited on hearing of the death of our worthy and amiable Br. Freeman. Our friends were not prepared for this melancholy news. Br. F., while here, hushed all anxiety with the assurances that his complaints were not new—that he had frequently experienced such ill turns. We had reason, therefore, to look for a speedy recovery; but alas! how great the disappointment! The loss is a serious one, not to

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him whose sudden exit we lament, but to the band of brothers whose fraternal affections can be estimated only by those heartfelt expressions of grief which are everywhere heard. Hallowed be his memory....

Brother, your remarks on the death of Br. F. are just... To the truth of all you have said, I can cheerfully bear testimony. I write merely to express my own feelings. Some little variations I might make, in what was written as to his being detained here a week on account of illness. Previous to his complaining much, I made arrangements with him to supply for me the Sunday following the Association. His illness increased so that by Sunday it was with difficulty that he could preach—he observed that he would, if he fainted in so doing. His exertions on this day evidently hastened the progress of his disease. I would observe here, that on the Friday previous, he was called to attend a funeral about twelve miles distant. In his then present state, it was too much for him. On Monday he would have left here for Hamilton, had not another death occurred, of a young lady in the neighborhood. [My] being absent myself, he seemed to feel it his duty, at the urgent request of the friends of the deceased, to stay until Wednesday and attend the funeral.

Although suffering by a severe headache and an extreme nervous affection, still he preached with power and effect to the assembled multitude, and this too from the text you selected for the occasion of his death... This was the last time of his being permitted to [preach]... It was not, therefore, his illness that detained him—all that our friends could do was done to render him comfortable.

Thine in faith and love,
George Sanderson

Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate, Utica NY, 30 Nov 1833

Transcribed on 28 Jan 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY