

[Montgomery, George Washington]

Death of Rev. Dr. Montgomery

Serene End of a Beautiful and Useful Life

A UNIVERSALIST LEADER

Born in Portland, Me., a Little Over 88 Years Ago, He Was
for Many Years a Powerful Force in Christian Life

In the quiet of the magnificent Sabbath morning yesterday the Rev. George Washington Montgomery, D.D., peacefully passed into the glory of the great beyond, at the ripe age of 88 years and 11 days, leaving behind him the record of an industrious, ennobling, progressive Christian life.

The deceased was born in Portland, Me. April 6, 1810. As a boy he was devoted to study of a serious character, with a fine memory, whose tenacity never dimmed under the accumulation of years. He early entered the ministry of the Universalist denomination, in days when it required unusual courage to expound the faith of that church, and his first settled pastorate began at Salem, Mass., in December, 1830. He remained there but one year, when he went to Buffalo. In 1833 he was called to Auburn, where the denomination to which he belonged had exhibited unusual strength and became the owner of a church edifice of its own. He was the pastor of the Auburn congregation for eleven years, and then he accepted a call to Rochester to found a society, in which mission he was successful, the organization being perfected on the first day of December, 1845, and he remained its pastor for eight years, when he was forced to retire from active work on account of throat trouble.¹ In the two cities last named he did the greatest and most important of his life work, not only in spreading the doctrinal theory of the overwhelming and universal love of the Almighty, but in carrying out the glory of a universal kindness and deep consideration for the beliefs of those who could not agree with him into his lonely life, until he had the friendship, sympathy and love of those who came near to him, and the respect of all, even those who were bitterly opposed to the tenets he espoused. In the days of his activity there was a rancor against this denomination that is now hard to realize. When the Universalist church in Auburn was rededicated in 1876 an authority on that occasion said: "Rev. G. W. Montgomery may be called the founder and builder, under God, of this congregation. For ten years he labored with a zeal and faithfulness above praise, and succeeded in laying the foundations of the same deep and enduring."

His diligent and exhausting work in Rochester, which so few are left to remember, is written to his credit on Time's eternal page. Of his labors here let his eminent successor in the Rochester pulpit say a few words. In June, 1890, when Dr. [Asa] Saxe was compelled to take a vacation, Rev. J. H. Tuttle, the pastor of the church from 1853 to 1859, came from his present location in Minneapolis, to supply the desk for two weeks, and a large part of the time he was here he spent

¹ a severe case of aphonia, or the inability to speak, at that time commonly called "clergyman's sore throat" since it was so widespread in the ministry profession

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with Dr. Montgomery, a visit which he recounted in one of the denominational papers, in which he said:

"The younger people in our denomination to-day are, in most instances, unprepared, for the reason that he withdrew so early from the most public place in the ministry, to be told how immensely popular Brother Montgomery was as a preacher and orator in the days of his prime; how intently, enthusiastically and profitably audiences hung upon his rare eloquence; how warmly his name and his sermons and his success were talked about through the land, through Central New York especially. The church or hall where he was announced to speak was, under favorable circumstances, generally crowded. He was the central influence often at associations and conventions; the voice that set others in tune; the scepter that ruled in the councils; the umpire in the discussions, and the oracle in doctrine; and the Demosthenes after whose entrancing style the young students in the ministry aspired. His first meetings in Rochester were held in a large hall [Minerva Hall], which was generally filled to overflowing by the crowds eager to hear him. Through his leadership a church was soon erected on Clinton street, and not only built but paid for. Here for years came the multitudes to listen to his persuasive logic, to his clear, irresistible explanations of doctrine, to his affectionate appeals to repentance and a better living; here he and his faithful congregation prospered until the forced and saddening separation came. His success as a preacher was paralleled by his success as a pastor, a combination of gifts too seldom found in the same person.

"No minister among us was then more praised for his pulpit efforts, or more loved for his kind and Christian conduct everywhere. He won and kept every heart which came into contact with him. He was a familiar and welcome figure in the streets of Rochester. His name was everywhere spoken with reverence. He appeared often at the city's public gathering, when social or municipal questions were discussed, lending his name and his voice when called for or needed. He was exceedingly popular at weddings and funerals, and of course in all the homes of his people. Joining church signified a greater thing when he extended the right hand of fellowship; children were especially blest, so their parents felt, when he had taken them in his arms and baptized them."

These facts cited in Dr. Tuttle's faithful tribute were realized by all who came in contact with Dr. Montgomery, though, perhaps, all didn't see that they grew out of the absolute convictions founded on a granite belief, on the glowing kindness of a soul illuminated by the knowledge that "God is love," which was his favorite church motto, and a belief that man should ever be as Godlike as possible. This was beautifully illustrated by a book he wrote and published entitled "The Law of Kindness," a book that had a wonderful sale in its day, a book that so appealed to the heart that it was translated into more than one foreign tongue, but a book from which the author never got one cent of revenue. Tributes of admiration and love for the man could be cited by the column, but they can all be summed up in a touching quotation from Fitz Greene Halleck, which will be echoed by all who held an acquaintance with the departed:

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Green be the turf above thee,
Friend of my better days;
None knew thee but to love thee,
None named thee but to praise.

It is proper to say that, after his enforced retirement from the regular pastorate, Dr. Montgomery was never idle until his frame failed—his mind never did. He occasionally preached in Rochester, but more often in neighboring churches, being especially interested in the weaker members which he labored so far as he could to build up and strengthen to the self-sustaining point, when he would leave them with the injunction to go and do likewise so far as opportunity and strength permitted, whilst he would devote himself where aid was needed. All his active life he was a contributor to the denominational literature of his church, a clear, decisive writer, a manly and worthy debater, a close reasoner, a stout champion of his cause, with a catholicity of feeling that embraced the world without a taint of bitterness for those who were the furthest from him in religious belief.

Dr. Montgomery was married on the 9th of September, 1847, to Mary Bliss of East Avon [his second marriage], when he went to reside in the house which he occupied continuously thereafter, No. 51 Chestnut street, and where his friends and acquaintances were always cordially welcomed. This was true always, but particularly during the last few years of his life, when, his eyes so dimmed that he could scarcely distinguish the shadow from the sunlight, he depended largely upon these visitors to bring him news of the denomination and of current affairs, in which he was keenly interested until the very last, and upon the faithful wife and daughter of his house to read the publications of the day. Besides the two members of the family just mentioned he leaves two sons, George B. Montgomery of this city, and Frank M. Montgomery of Chicago.

Democrat and Chronicle, Rochester NY, Mon. 18 Apr 1898

[written by Samuel D. Lee, per record of the Lee family
in the First Universalist Church archive]

Transcribed on 30 Jan 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

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GEORGE WASHINGTON MONTGOMERY

Entered into rest, at his home in Rochester, N. Y., Sunday Morning, April 17,
George Washington Montgomery, D. D., aged 88 years and 11 days.

When I received my commission as a minister in the Spring of 1859, the name oftenest on the lips of the Universalists of Western New York was that of the clergyman whose departure I here record. Other ministers were held in high esteem in particular districts or by certain classes. This was especially true of his successor in Rochester, and lifelong friend, James H. Tuttle. It was true also of the late Alanson Kelsey, of Elhanan W. Reynolds, of Isaac George, and of Jacob Chase. John M. Austin, who shared with Mr. Montgomery for so many years the admiration of congregations in a portion of the same field, belonged rather to Central New York. But the man who was always and everywhere spoken of with a peculiar note of personal regard, in the territory of which I am speaking, was George Washington Montgomery.

When I was yet a novitiate, and a few weeks under twenty-one, I met Mr. Montgomery, who had shortly before been laid aside from active professional service by an obstinate affection of the throat. I recall that he was, like David the son of Jesse, of a ruddy countenance and comely to look upon. His manner was in no wise effusive. He received me cordially but quietly, looked me over and apparently through with his lustrous eyes, and won me instantly and forever by his sincerity and unpretentious goodness. In after years I had much knowledge of him and close intimacies with him. He recovered his voice and somewhat of his former wide usefulness; but the career of large denominational activity and influence for which he was so finely fitted by his talents, his enthusiasm tempered with prudence, and his rare power over his fellow men, was checked. Owing to this circumstance and to his almost complete retirement for twenty years past, the present generation has but small appreciation of the power and popularity of the man in his "glorious prime." This record is intended not so much to revive the memory of a former efficient laborer in our vineyard, as to put in his place in our history one of the most symmetrical lives ever lived amongst us.

George Washington Montgomery was born in Portland, Me., April 6, 1810. He began his ministry in Salem, Mass., when a youth of twenty, in 1830. The apostolic habit of missionary service in pairs was common with our ministry in those days, and young Montgomery joined himself with William I. Reese, of sainted memory, and conducted Universalist services as opportunity could be found in various parts of New York. They made their headquarters finally in Buffalo, where the Court House was utilized, a congregation gathered, of which Mr. Montgomery became pastor, and where he built the first Universalist church of that city in 1832. In the following year he was called to the new parish in Auburn in the same state. Here he remained eleven years, building the house of worship since and now occupied by the congregation in that city, and making a household name in the city and in all the region round-about. A short ministry of two years was given in Portsmouth, N. H., where there are still echoes of his splendid enthusiasm and memorials of the organizations he instituted for public charity.

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The Universalist movement in Rochester had not been prosperous and its supporters were somewhat depressed. This was just the situation to appeal to Mr. Montgomery's love of the cause. He was not deterred by financial or personal considerations from undertaking the task. Going to Rochester in Dec. 1845, he soon infused his energy, hope and practical wisdom into the church's affairs. A new house of worship, the present edifice, was planned, built and paid for, and overflowing congregations waited upon his inspiring word. It was here in 1854 that his throat failed him and he was at length compelled to surrender the pastorate. But the affection of his people would not let go of him. He was made to feel that Rochester must be his home, and here through the long period of forty-four years he has lived in the unabated honor and love of all who knew him.

Although Dr. Montgomery did not feel that he had sufficiently recovered to make it safe to undertake full work again, he responded to calls for his services to the limit of his health. In this way he bore his message into many places and even assumed the care of churches during intervals when, for one cause or another, pastors could not be settled. His relations to the people in Fairport, Victor, Clifton Springs, Conesus, Middleport and some other places thus became scarcely less tender and strong than with those of his former flocks. At the same time he was active in the counsels of the church, punctual at conventions and trustee meetings, the friend and counselor of pastors and parishes, and a gracious presence wherever wisdom and consolation were required. He was one of the original trustees of the St. Lawrence University and so long as strength permitted was one of its most diligent and interested curators.

The funeral of Dr. Montgomery was attended from the First Church in Rochester on Wednesday afternoon, April 20th. The house was filled with his friends and admirers. The grey heads were noticeable in the assembly. Rev. Asa Saxe, D. D., between whom and Dr. Montgomery the most loving relations had been maintained for nearly forty years, conducted the memorial service, which was tender and sweet throughout. Dr. Gannett of the Unitarian Church and Dr. Landsberg of the Jewish Congregation, offered their personal and fraternal tributes. Dr. I. M. Atwood of the Canton Seminary, whose ordination sermon Dr. Montgomery preached, and to whom he had been a spiritual father as well as a dear personal friend, made a brief closing address.

Dr. Montgomery leaves a widow [née Mary Jane Bliss], to whom he was married in 1847, and three children—George B. of Rochester, Frank M. of Chicago, and Carrie, who has always been in the home, her father's comfort and joy. In his home life he was peculiarly happy. The picture of him in that loving circle, serene and content though denied so much that the world counts necessary to enjoyment, is one of the fairest my memory holds.

I have always regarded Dr. Montgomery as a typical fruit of the Universalist faith. If ever a man lived whose religion had mastered him, he was that man. Strong and persistent as were his inherited traits, the thing you felt when you came to know him intimately was that his religion saturated him and ruled his life. His little book, "The Law of Kindness," which had so unexpected a popularity and was translated into other tongues, was but one among many illustrations of the fact that his religion was to him a

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practical guide in conduct. He talked it as well as preached it, he practiced it as well as prayed it, showing us again, that

He prayeth best who loveth best, All things both great and small,
For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all.

In the symmetry of his character, in the beauty of his daily living, in the spirit of his aims and acts, and in the ideal measure in which he filled the office of the Christian preacher and pastor, Dr. Montgomery stands out like a Doric pillar in the temple of organized Universalism. I was about to add that his faith exactly matched his life; but it is truer to say that his faith made his life. To him the blessed Gospel of his risen Lord was as real as to-morrow's sunrise; and he fell asleep as trustingly as a babe in a mother's arms.

I. M. A. [Rev. Isaac M. Atwood]

From an unknown, undated Universalist paper in the archives of the
First Universalist Church of Rochester, probably the *Christian Leader*

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

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NECROLOGY

GEORGE WASHINGTON MONTGOMERY, D.D., born in Portland, Me., April 6, 1810, died in Rochester, N.Y., April 17, 1898. He began his ministry in Salem, Mass., in 1830, and a year later had moved to Western New York, where he was helped in fitting himself for his work by association with Rev. William I. Reese, who had entered the ministry some eight years before that time. Mr. Montgomery was ordained at the session of the Genesee Association at Penfield, N.Y., Oct. 13, 1831. Very soon after his ordination he went to Buffalo, N.Y., where an organization had been effected as early as 1823, but which, owing in part to its not having an altogether suitable place for worship, had not made much progress. Under Mr. Montgomery's ministry, a church was built in 1832. The next year the new parish at Auburn, in the same State, called him to minister there, and responding to their call he went to them and did a similar work to that done at Buffalo. His next settlement was at Portsmouth, N.H., in 1843, from whence, after a brief pastorate of two years, he settled in Rochester, where he found a greatly discouraged people whom he soon lifted into happy prosperity. During the tenth year of his successful labors in this growing city his throat [voice] failed him and he was obliged to relinquish his work. "But the affection of the people would not let go of him. He was made to feel that Rochester must be his home, and here through the long period of forty-four years he has lived in the unabated honor and love of all who knew him." As his health improved he ministered in many places within easy reach of his home and his ministry was greatly blessed. In 1871, St. Lawrence University, of which he was a trustee from its organization, greatly honored itself by conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Wise in counsel, an able expounder of the Universalist faith, a Son of Consolation to all the sorrowing who could be reached by him, he was a "living epistle" of the truth and excellence of the Christian religion.

Not with his voice alone, but through the printed page also, Dr. Montgomery served and enriched the Universalist Church and served his fellow-men. An associate several years with Dolphus Skinner, D.D., and Rev. A. [Aaron] B. Grosh, in editing *The Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*; an always welcome and able contributor to *The Universalist Quarterly*; the author of several valuable tracts and other pamphlets; the compiler, in 1838, of an *Appendix to Universalist Hymn Books*; the author, in 1839, of *An essay on the Law of Kindness*, first published as a small pamphlet and afterwards enlarged and passing through many editions in book form; and the publisher, in 1850, of a volume of his own *Sermons on*

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Doctrinal and Moral Subjects,—he thus left lasting memorials of his religious zeal and unmistakable proof of his philanthropic spirit and efforts.

Rev. Dr. I.M. Atwood closed a published tribute to this good man's life and work, in these words: "I have always regarded Dr. Montgomery as a typical fruit of the Universalist faith. If ever a man lived whose religion has mastered him, he was that man. Strong and persistent as were his inherited traits, the thing you felt when you came to know him intimately, was, that his religion saturated him and ruled his life. His little book, 'The Law of Kindness,' which had so unexpected a popularity and was translated unto other tongues, was but one among many illustrations of the fact that his religion was to him a practical guide in conduct. He talked it as well as preached it, he practised it as well as prayed it, showing us again that 'He prayeth best who loveth best all things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all.'

"In the symmetry of his character, in the beauty of his daily living, in the spirit of his aims and acts, and in the ideal measure in which he filled the office of the Christian preacher and pastor, Dr. Montgomery stands out as a Doric pillar in the temple of organized Universalism. I was about to add that his faith exactly matched his life; but it is truer to say that his faith made his life. To him the blessed Gospel of his risen Lord was as real as to-morrow's sunrise; and he fell asleep as trustingly as a babe in a mother's arms."

The Universalist Register, Boston MA, 1899, pp. 97-99

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