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Death of Father Rayner

Rev. Menzies Rayner died in this city [New York] on the morning of the 22d inst., at the advanced age of 80 years lacking one day. He has been in feeble health for some time past, and life has gradually wasted away. Father Rayner was a Methodist preacher for two years and preached in the Episcopal denomination 30 years. About 25 years of his life have been directed to the ministry of universal reconciliation. He has left a large family of grown sons and daughters, and many friends in the city and country, to mourn the departure of this aged father and friend. His last hours were calm and peaceful and he died in hope of a blessed immortality. His funeral was attended on Sunday the 24th inst., by a large assemblage of sympathizing friends.

Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate, New York, 29 Nov 1850

Notice of the Rev. Menzies Rayner

The following remarks formed the concluding part of a sermon preached by Rev. W. S. Balch on the death of Mr. Rayer, in the Bleecker street church, Dec. 1st, from the text—*"Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like a shock of corn cometh in his season."*—Job V, 26.

"I conclude with the following brief outline of the life, death and character of Father Rayner.

"He was born at South Hempstead, Long Island, Nov. 23, 1770. His advantages for learning were principally derived from private instruction. Endowed by nature with a quick perception he made good progress, and showed early signs of superior talents and future eminence. When very young he became a convert to Methodism, and joined that church, and before the age of twenty-one commenced preaching as an itinerant of that denomination. He received letters of commendation from the Conference in this city, and two years after, was ordained in that connexion at Lynn, Mass. by Bishop Asbury. He continued to itinerate, according to the rules of that order, for over two years, when he received and accepted an invitation to settle with the Protestant Episcopal Church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, where he was ordained a minister in that church by Right Rev. Bishop Provost of New York. He continued as pastor of that church about six years, when he accepted a call to the rectorship of the Episcopal church in Hartford, Conn. where he continued ten years. He next removed to Huntington, Conn. and took the joint rectorship of that town and New Hartford (now Munroe). He remained there sixteen years, when from patient and prayerful inquiry and study of the Scriptures, he became convinced of the truth of the doctrine of universal salvation. He asked for and obtained an honorable dismissal from Bishop Brownell of that diocese. It may here be remarked that Father Rayner continued until his death to enjoy the respect and esteem of several distinguished clergymen of that sect, with whom he had been intimate whilst a co-worker in their communion.

"Soon after becoming known as a Universalist, he received an invitation to settle with the society in Hartford, Conn., left vacant by the removal of Br. Bisbee to Portland,

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Me. He accepted the invitation and removed there Nov. 1, 1828, sixteen years from the time he left it as an Episcopalian. He continued with that society nearly four years, when he was earnestly solicited to remove to Portland and take charge of the society there, left vacant by the death of Br. Bisbee. He accepted the call and remained there four years, excepting one winter which he spent in a journey to North Carolina, where, and in intermediate places, he preached the Gospel of the Grace of God.

"Soon after his return he visited Troy, N. Y., to which place he removed and took charge of the society, with which he labored for two years; after which he removed to Lansingburgh, and preached in that village and neighboring towns, in Schenectady, Fort Ann, Hartford, and some other places.

"In the latter part of August, 1840, he removed to this city, where he had two sons residing, and where he has continued till the time of his death, which occurred at 30 minutes past seven on the morning of Nov. 22, 1850, at the 'full age' of eighty years, lacking one day.

"Since residing in this city he has been engaged in preaching a large portion of his Sabbaths, and frequently on weekdays in different places in the region round about. For about a year and a half he labored with this society [Third Universalist], after the removal of Br. LeFevre, and after the settlement here of your present pastor.

"During the last year and a half of his life, Father Rayner may be said to have been growing feeble, showing signs of decrepitude and decay. But his mental vigor held out wonderfully, till a few days before his death. For some months he considered it unsafe to venture far from home unattended; but when calls came to him to preach at a distance, he would cheerfully say it was rather too far for him to go, but he would fill the place of any preacher who would go for him.

"It was only a few days before his death that any perceptible change took place, sufficient to create any anxiety about his immediate dissolution. When I saw him, two days before his death, it was manifest that his race was well nigh run, for the sands of life were ebbing fast. He was rational, but there was a cloudiness over the horizon of his intellect, which indicated that the final storm was fast gathering. He made a few requests, and spoke of his confidence and his hope. His mind could not be fixed but a few moments at a time upon a subject before it would wander into the hoary mists which border the darkness of death. It was plain he could not long survive.

"The next day I found him much weaker with not a gleam of hope for his recovery. The power of speech had left him, and he was suffering considerably in body. I remained with him that night. It was evident it would be his last. Just before midnight the messenger came, and a rather severe struggle ensued during which he thought he must yield at once, and depart from us. His pulse faltered. The light of life flickered convulsively. His family were called, and we waited momentarily to see him breathe his last. During this time I asked him if he was conscious of my presence. He pressed my hand; he could not speak. The struggle was soon over, and he continued to breathe less and less heavily, shorter and shorter, until just as the sun rose the next morning, when without a struggle or a groan he ceased to breathe at all, and lay calm and silent in the embrace of death.

"It is not needful that I speak at length of the character and labors of our venerable and departed friend, whom we all called familiarly Father Rayner. His whole life has been spent before the public scrutiny; twenty-two years of the last of it in our ministry, and ten in this city. We have known him intimately and loved him well. And now that he has filled up the measure of his years..., we cherish for him a grateful and affectionate memory, and many hearts will long continue to do so. He was worthy of

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esteem [from] his firm and devoted attachment to the ministry. His unwavering adherence to the authority of revelation, and his ardent zeal in the defense of what he believed to be truth, won the respect and confidence of a wide circle of friends who admired his honest frankness, abiding trust and resolute devotion under trials and discouragements, which would have overcome those of less fortitude and perseverance.

"Our venerable friend has left behind him several works by which 'he being dead, yet speaketh....' These works, as well as his ordinary sermons, exhibited a clear, logical and comprehensive quality of mind, which employed simple and significant forms of utterance, without any studious attempt at display by the employment of rhetoric and verbiage to bewilder the wise, or tickle the foolish. Good sound sense characterizes his labored productions, and keen wit and burning satire many of his fugitive pieces. He possessed a vein of genuine poetry, though he did not often depart from his proper vocation to display it. It was only at rare intervals that he laid aside the sacerdotal robes to quiz the follies of the age. But when he did, he made thorough work of it, as some of his satires plainly show.

"Father Rayner was a social man. He had a willing heart and a ready hand, and a fund of anecdote for every man and every occasion. He had a faculty to interest everybody, even children, and his company was always agreeable at the domestic fireside, in the conference room, or at the social circle. He was also a man of deep feeling. He entered at once and warmly into the feelings and sympathies of others. He brightened the darkest scenes by his presence and words of faith shedding a ray of hope and comfort around the sick bed and the bier. He will long be remembered by the stricken hearts he has consoled and cheered, and many, very many, will bless his memory.

"It is just three months since he stood before you in this place for the last time, and delivered his message of peace and love, and sound doctrine. That was a grand and venerable spectacle, a beautiful specimen of Christian fortitude and devotion. An old man whose locks were silvered by the frosts of eighty winters, standing up at the altar of God, teaching and admonishing a whole congregation! He stood here in solemn, almost solitary grandeur, like the old forest oak of past generations, whose hoary head still towers above the surrounding saplings, through whose withered branches the wintry winds have whistled their bleakness, and the fierce storms have howled their desolation, till the gnarled trunk, all scathed and dying, bends and totters to its fall...

"We carried him away—his body—when God had taken his spirit, and made for it a bed in Greenwood [Cemetery], when we laid it softly down to rest—to its last, long sleep. We said over it, the words he had chosen, and asked the blessing of God upon the living. We could do no more...

"But he is not there. He is risen in the likeness of him who said, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' 'As I live, ye shall live also...' May God sanctify this event to us all for our good, and if it be his will, may we like the departed 'come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.'"

Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate, New York, Fri. 13 Dec 1850

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