

[Sawyer, Thomas Jefferson]

Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer, L.L.D., the venerable dean and professor emeritus of Tufts college, died at Medford, Mass., Monday, July 24th. He was born in Reading, Vt., on Jan'y 9th, 1804. He was graduated from Middlebury college in 1829, and at the time of his death was one of the two oldest alumni of that institution. After leaving college he studied theology under the direction of the late Rev. Wm. S. Balch at Winchester, N.H. In 1830 he was ordained a clergyman at the session of the New England Universalist convention, and soon after took his first charge over a small congregation which worshipped in Grand street, New York city. Among those who attended services there was Horace Greely. In 1831 Dr. Sawyer married Caroline M. Fisher of Newton, Mass., whose denominational writings, as well as her verse and translations, have made her well known throughout New England. She died in 1884. From 1831 to 1845 Dr. Sawyer edited the Universalist Union published in Utica and New York. In 1884 he was instrumental in organizing the Universalist Historical society.

In 1845 Dr. Sawyer was called to the head of the Clinton Liberal Institute in Clinton, N.Y. During the seven years he was in charge of the Institute he brought it up to a high standard as a school, and made it very influential in the Universalist denomination; and Dr. Sawyer was the teacher in theology of several students preparing for the ministry, a place for which he was well fitted.

Dr. Sawyer returned to his charge in New York city in 1852. In 1856 he was active in establishing the theological school at St. Lawrence university, Canton, N.Y. The presidencies of St. Lawrence university, also of Tufts college and Lombard university were offered him and declined. From 1863 to 1866 he edited the Christian Ambassador in New York city.

At the opening of the Tufts divinity school in 1869 Dr. Sawyer was called to its professor of systems in theology. He retired in 1891 and was made professor emeritus. During his connection with the college he was very active in its behalf, and was greatly revered by the students.

Besides his contributions to denominational periodicals, Dr. Sawyer was the author of several books of a denominational character, one of which was the life of Rev. Stephen R. Smith. He ably defended the doctrines of his church in the press, and in public discussions with clergymen of other denominations.

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Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer, D.D.

A brief announcement was made in the COURIER last week of the death of the Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer, formerly a prominent Clinton resident, who was worthy of a more extended notice in the COURIER, his death occurring at Malden, Mass., in his 96th year, July 24, 1899.

Dr. Sawyer became a resident of Clinton in 1845, accepting the charge of conducting the Clinton Liberal Institute to which he added a theological department, which he conducted, and also the pastorate of the Clinton Universalist Church, which positions he resigned in 1852, and went to New York to preach. He returned to Clinton in 1861 and made his home here until 1863. During his residence in Clinton he was greatly interested in the welfare and prosperity of the village. It was also largely through his efforts that the "White Seminary" [named after Caroline White Soule, a former principal] was erected and furnished for the ladies' department of the Clinton Liberal Institute. Through the united efforts of Dr. Sawyer and the late Judge O. S. Williams, Meadow street and Franklin avenue were opened, and grounds purchased for the Clinton Cemetery. Dr. Sawyer was the last survivor of the three first officers of Clinton Lodge No. 169, F. & A.M., organized by himself and a few others in 1849, and chartered in 1850, and held the office of Worshipful Master for four years. The excellent portrait published in connection with this article was made from a photograph taken two years ago and presented by request to the Lodge and kindly loaned us by E. D. Mills for publication. For nearly 30 years Dr. Sawyer has been associated with Tufts College at College Hill, Mass. The deceased was born at Reading, Vt., Jan. 9, 1804, and graduated from Middlebury College in 1829.

Personally, Dr. Sawyer was a man of remarkably pleasing address and physique. Every lineament of his pleasant face revealed the kindly nature of the man, attracting the admiration of strangers as well as friends. As a preacher, his eloquent and scholarly sermons left a salutary impression upon his hearers. In all points of character it will be many a year before the people of Clinton will meet his equal. The following tribute to Dr. Sawyer is copied from the Boston Transcript of July 25:

"In the death of Rev. Thomas Jefferson Sawyer, D.D., LL.D., at the rare age of ninety five and a half, there has passed from earth one of the foremost men of the generations in which his active work was done. Taken all in all, he was one of the two or three greatest men that the Universalist Church has produced. Beginning his work in New York city in 1830, when his position was relatively to then prevailing beliefs almost as revolutionary, at least so regarded by the ignorant and bigoted, as the late Robert Ingersoll's, he lived to see the orthodox churches so reconciled to it that

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Ingersoll's attack was absurd, because aimed at dogmas nobody longer defended. Universalism, in its upholding of the divinity of Christ, takes its place rather with conservative than radical influences today. But in his prime, Dr. Sawyer did for his chosen faith something analogous to what Hosea Ballou had done in Boston. He was, literally, a pioneer, not only in proclaiming what was then a new and strange dogma, but in laying the foundations of an effective religious organization. For the undertaking which he assumed he had some qualifications which the elder Ballou lacked. With him the highest intellectual endowment was enriched by high culture—with the attendant graces of elegance and a genial humor—strengthened by profound training, and all made effective by exact scholarship.

"As a controversialist he was without a peer. No man ever met him in argumentative combat but to suffer defeat. Moreover, the defeat was so skillfully accomplished that his opponent was hardly aware of it until it was done. In the pulpit or on the platform, when in his best mood, he had a grace and charm of manner that put him in the rank of the great orators of his time. But he was equally skilful with his pen. For a period of forty years he was accustomed to furnish regularly to the quarterly magazine of his church articles which were a contribution to the theological discussions that have marked the century which his life had so nearly spanned. As editor, first of the Christian Messenger, and later of the Christian Ambassador, he wrote articles which would repay perusal today, if only for their style, a style which has often been likened to Addison's. His editorship of the Ambassador covered the period of the war of the Rebellion, and the paper was the repository of a fervid patriotism that rendered good service to the Union cause.

"Not only was he a pioneer of a new doctrine, but he was a pioneer of educational institutions for his church. In 1844 he removed from New York city to Clinton, and there laid the foundation of what is now known as the Clinton Liberal Institute. He aimed, of course, to give a general academic education, but he also conducted a class in theology, and many men who have since achieved eminence in the ministerial profession, received their training at Clinton under his skilful guidance. Very soon after the commencement of his enterprise at Clinton, he began the agitation among the Universalists which, by the aid it received from Hosea Ballou, 2d, Otis A. Skinner, and later A. A. Miner, resulted in the establishment of Tufts College. What perhaps rendered his efforts the most effective in behalf of the higher education was the fact that he was the embodiment of the training which he advocated for others.

"Naturally, when Tufts College was organized, he was offered the presidency. But for reasons which to him seemed satisfactory, he declined the office. For similar reasons, no doubt, he declined the tender of the same

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office in connection with other institutions of collegiate rank. Nevertheless, when in 1869 it was determined to organized a theological school in connection with Tufts College, he accepted the invitation to become its head. Since then—a period of thirty years—he has been identified with the Tufts Divinity School, though by reason of the failure of his eyesight, some twelve years ago, he was forced to abandon the work of teaching and supervision.

“In 1834 he organized the Universalist Historical Society, through the instrumentality of which he has succeeded in collecting a unique library of between three and four thousand volumes relating to the doctrines of Universalism in ancient and modern times. This library is now practically incorporated with the library of Tufts College. Dr. Sawyer enjoyed, for more than sixty years, the companionship of a woman of the rarest order of intellectual refinement, and yet endowed with all the charming qualities which make home attractive. One does not often see in this world a more perfect union. His mental gifts were of the first order. His scholarship was of the “all around” sort—such is not often seen in this age of specialization. He was a man of perfect poise, never overcome by gusts of passion, and never swept away by enthusiasms. To the young men who came under his care he was ever the type, not only of the clear-sighted and far-sighted intellectual leader, but the refined and cultivated Christian gentleman. His geniality, patience and serenity remained with him to the last moment of his life. Such a man is one of the forces which make our civilization happy and glorious.

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