

[Austin, John Mather]

Rev. John Mather Austin

Rev. John Mather Austin died at his residence, 15 William street, at 2:30 o'clock this morning, after a long and painful illness. The deceased was born in Redfield, Oswego county, N. Y. September 26th, 1805. His parents were Benjamin and Jerusha Austin. His mother's maiden name was Mather, and she was an original descendant of the Mather family who arose to positions of prominence in the early history of this country, among whom were Dr. Richard Mather, Rev. Increase Mather, and Dr. Cotton Mather. At the age of one year Mr. Austin's parents removed from Redfield to Watertown, N. Y., where he passed his boyhood attending school at the village school until 15 years of age when he went to learn the printer's trade in the office of the *Independent Republican* remaining there until arriving at man's estate. He was a zealous scholar and worked at the case through the day and applied himself to his studies at night. He afterwards spent many years at his trade working in Lewiston, Buffalo, Albany and Troy. From an early period he had strong religious impulses and in the year 1830 he connected himself with the Universalist society of Troy, N. Y., where he engaged in the printing office of the *Gospel Anchor*, a Universalist paper. He pursued his literary labors and was admitted to the Universalist ministry and preached his first sermon in Albany, N. Y., February 5th, 1832. He afterward removed to Montpelier, Vermont and was ordained pastor of the Universalist church of that place January 17th, 1833. He removed from Montpelier to South Danvers, Massachusetts where, after a successful pastorate he came to Auburn in the year 1844, in response to a call from the Universalist society of this city. His pastoral labors closed eight years later, when he resigned to accept the editorial chair of the *Christian Ambassador*, a paper published in Auburn, in the interests of the Universalist denomination. He did not leave the ministry but continued to preach until the year 1862, when he vacated the place of editor of the *Ambassador* and closed his ministerial labors to enter the army as paymaster, a trust he acceptably filled until 1866, when he was mustered out. A short time afterward he again took up his labors in the ministry and preached occasionally until the year 1875, when he began to suffer the first of his physical infirmities which terminated in his death. At that time he was smitten with paralysis, and owing to an impediment in his speech was obliged to leave his chosen profession, much to his deep regret. He carried on an insurance agency until he became so enfeebled in health as to be unable to do any business.

Mr. Austin was an extraordinary person. He was a man of fine literary abilities and besides his pastoral labors, was the author of "Golden Steps for the Young," "Austin on the Attributes," and "Voice to the Young." The life of

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John Quincy Adams was begun by Secretary Seward, who, owing to the pressure of official business, turned it over to Mr. Austin for completion. Mr. Austin was a sound theologian and one of the greatest efforts of his life was his debate with Elder Holmes, a Methodist divine, which was held in the village of Genoa, in this county. The able manner in which he conducted his side of the discussion was instrumental in bringing many new converts to his religious faith. Mr. Austin was a great friend of the late Secretary Seward and their friendship was more than of a personal kind. This can better be illustrated by an incident which occurred shortly after Mr. Seward entered upon his duties as secretary of state, when without any solicitation on Mr. Austin's part, he tendered him a consulship to the West Indies Islands. This was declined, as was also a similar position to Prince Edward Island. Mr. Seward was bound to remember his faithful friend who stood by him with unswerving fidelity all through one of the darkest periods of his life; i.e. the Freeman trial, and lastly sent him a commission already signed by the secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton, as paymaster in the army, with the rank of major. Mr. Austin greatly disliked to abandon his ministerial labors, but finally accepted the position. The deceased was a person who always enjoyed vigorous health, and like many other professional men, failed to save himself but worked with a will at his God chosen profession. His sufferings for the last three days of his illness were agonizing in the extreme. A few moments prior to the visit of the white winged messenger all pain left him and he dropped asleep and passed into everlasting bliss. He was a good man, a highly respected citizen, an affectionate father and a kind husband. Of his large family of children four remain, three daughters and one son. He also leaves a wife. The bereaved circle have the consciousness their father and husband was a Christian in the fullest realization of the word, and that he has gone to his reward. Peace to his ashes.

Auburn Daily Advertiser, Auburn NY, Mon. 20 Dec 1880

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The Remains of the Late Rev. John M. Austin Consigned to the Grave

The funeral services of Rev. John M. Austin took place at the Universalist church, yesterday afternoon at 2 o'clock, after prayer at the house. The remains were escorted to the church by a portion of St. Paul's Lodge, F. & A. M., and were borne up the aisle while the organ sounded a funeral march. The bearers were Charles Standart, Col. L. E. Carpenter, Alexander McCrea, Jesse Babcock, David Wetherby, and David Wilder. A plain black casket with heavy velvet mouldings and silver trimmings contained the remains. The face looked quite natural and the hands clasped a copy of the Universalist liturgy. Reposing on the top of the casket were a wreath of flowers, and a sheaf of wheat which was encircled with a floral sickle on which were the words "Ripe for Heaven." Another floral sickle bore the word "Father." Vines of similax drooped from the edges of the casket. The plate bore the inscription "Sep. 20th, 1805—Rev. John M. Austin—Dec. 20th, 1880."

As the casket was deposited before the altar, the music of the organ ceased and the Rev. T. E. St. John rose and began the solemn funeral services from the church liturgy, in carrying out which service he was assisted by the regular church choir. Mr. St. John then spoke a few words in relation to the life history of the deceased clergyman and his own recollection of Mr. Austin and his work. He concluded by presenting Rev. Dr. Asa Saxe, of Rochester, long a friend of the dead pastor. Dr. Saxe said it was with feelings entirely inexpressible that he stood in the presence of the mortal remains of Brother Austin and thought of him as dead and realized that he could no more behold his genial face or hear his kindly, encouraging, friendly words. It was his good fortune to meet Brother Austin for the first time at Scipio, in May, 1847, at a Universalist general meeting there held. It was while the speaker was a young man, before he had entered the ministry, and it was an occasion such as to leave a deep impression on his mind. There he met the great men of the church, and among them was Brother Austin with his keen eye, and ready speech and a warm grasp of the hand. He was then in the fullness of his power, was pastor of the church in Auburn, and was even then engaged in the work of rearing the church edifice which stands today. From that time the speaker had known him well.

Rev. John M. Austin was emphatically a able, powerful preacher; he was pre-eminently a Christian preacher—a bible preacher; and the scripture of the new testament was always the foundation of his belief and hope. He filled the largest place in this portion of the country for over a quarter of a century; and from miles east of Auburn to Lake Erie his name was a household word, and his voice was heard at some time and on some occasion in every village and hamlet. He was remarkable for the

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encouragement he gave to young men about to enter the ministry. The speaker had lasting remembrances of the aid, advice and support he had received from him. Brother Austin was a man of great courage. Through storms as well as sunshine, he seemed to wear the same smile and possess the same courage and hope. He was a man of great faith and warmth and profound emotion. He put all these into his preaching and that was what always obtained for him so strong a hold on the faith of Universalists everywhere.

But his career as a minister is finished—his record is made up; but he has left his mark on the doctrines and literature of his church. He being dead, yet speaketh, and will speak for years to come.

Rev. Richmond L. Fiske, of Syracuse, then paid a glowing tribute to the dead pastor. He could but recall, as he stood there, the faces and names, once so familiar to him, of those who had been prominent in their day, in the work in and for the church, and he recalled, too, many grand utterances in that church which had fallen from lips now dumb. Going back to the days when the deceased began his pastoral labors, the speaker said those were times when ministers of his faith went forth in the full outfit of the Christian warrior. To them it was given to fight a battle—to enter the fields of controversy and to seek to prove that the scriptures did not teach that which they had, for ages, been supposed to teach. Mr. Fiske then went on to show how Mr. Austin had been one of the leaders of those of liberal belief, and how by the power of his thought and words he had left his impress on the belief and aided its progress. The speaker believed that the words of ministers of his faith to-day were more of an echo of, and the faith itself owed more of its firmness and grand comprehensiveness to, the deeds and thoughts of John M. Austin, than to the utterances, by pen or tongue, of any other man, unless it be Dr. [Thomas J.] Sawyer. Mr. Fiske's whole address was a beautiful and earnest eulogy and was listened to with silent appreciation. At its close, the service was completed by a chant by the choir, a brief prayer and benediction by Rev. Mr. St. John.

As the service concluded, the funeral procession was formed under the direction of Homer P. Bender, and with the masonic escort proceeded to the cemetery where the remains were committed to earth with the brief, sad ceremonies of the masonic order.

The Evening Auburnian, Auburn, Cayuga Co. NY, Thu. 23 Dec 1880

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