

[Fletcher, Luther Jacobs]

THE DEAD CLERGYMAN
Funeral of Rev. Dr. Fletcher—Services at the Church
of the Messiah—Address by the Rev. Dr. Saxe

The remains of the late Rev. Luther J. Fletcher, D. D. reached Buffalo yesterday at noon by the New York Central from Franklin, Mass., for interment in the family lot at Forest Lawn. In the Church of the Messiah, of which the deceased was for nine years pastor, a large company of mourners awaited the arrival of the relics. Dr. Fletcher joined De Molay lodge of Free Masons in 1871, and demitted in 1881 to become a member of the lodge at Franklin, Mass., where for the past three years he has ministered with acceptance in the Universalist denomination.

The funeral was accordingly celebrated with Masonic honors, Messrs. Sommers and Wiggin, members of Franklin, accompanied the remains on the journey hither and at Buffalo delivered them to the representatives of De Molay lodge, by whom they were escorted to Farwell's undertaking rooms and thence to the Church of the Messiah. The Masonic bearers were Albert Jones, R. H. Bickford, A. H. Adams, G. W. McCray, William H. Baker and C. Dodge, all of Buffalo. Punctually at two o'clock the procession of mourners entered the church, preceded by the Rev. W. E. Gibbs, its pastor, reading scriptural selections appropriate to the occasion. The casket, draped in black with silver mountings, was deposited in front of the minister's platform where were many beautiful floral tributes. Among these were a pretty design representing gates ajar, of white roses, camelias and carnations, offering of the Franklin parish; an anchor of different kinds of roses, tulips, and heliotrope, from the Dean academy; square and compass of beautiful white flowers, the "G" in red flowers showing effectively among carnations and roses with a bed of violets, from the Masonic brethren; a crown placed on the casket, consisting of white roses, and a cross of heliotrope at the top, the beautiful tribute of Mrs. Fletcher; another crown, presented by the Church of the Messiah, of camelias and roses; a pillow of carnations and roses, from the daughter and son of the deceased, showing the word "Father" in violets. The silver plate on the casket bore the following inscription:

Rev. Luther J. Fletcher
Born November 25, 1815
Died January 20, 1884
Aged 65 years

As if to match the tasteful tribute of the church at Franklin the "gates ajar" were engraved over the plain inscription. Among the chief mourners were the following relatives: Mrs. Dr. Fletcher; Mrs. Bartlett, a daughter of the deceased; Miss Carrie Bartlett; and F. H. Greenwood of Boston, brother of Mrs. Fletcher.

The services were taken part in by the Rev. M. W. Tabor of Fort Plain, where the deceased ministered for a time; the Rev. Dr. Saxe of Rochester and the Rev. Mr. Gibbs. It is a somewhat singular fact, it may be mentioned, that the deceased, during his pastorate in Buffalo, arranged a burial service and specially requested that Joseph Mischka, who was then organist at the Church of the Messiah, should officiate at his funeral, and that the well known hymn, "Abide with Me," should be sung. Mr. Mischka accordingly presided at the organ, and the vocal music was undertaken by a quartette.

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The Rev. M. W. Tabor read the scriptural portions of the service, after which Dr. Saxe pronounced the following eulogy:

ADDRESS BY REV. DR. SAXE

I came to this service at the request of my departed friend. It was his dying request, and it has touched my heart more deeply than I can express that the friendship of so many years should be crowned by the direction of his dying thoughts to an old friend. I can think of nothing more solemn than a scene like this. The mortal remains of one who was for so many years the beloved and faithful and able pastor of this church, brought here for a funeral service; the heart which for so many years beat with anxiety and love for his people, for ever still; the tongue which eloquently proclaimed from this pulpit the gospel of our Saviour, for ever silent; no more in the flesh to persuade men to come to Jesus and taste of his spirit and his life; no longer to administer the consolations of the gospel to souls in sorrow. From our standpoint our church has met with a great and irreparable loss. One of its foremost leaders has fallen. One of its bravest and truest defenders has departed. Twenty years ago I made the acquaintance of our departed brother. It was at the dedication of a church in the city of Brooklyn, which had been built under his ministry. He preached the dedicatorial sermon and I shall never forget how deeply I was impressed and moved. He was in the prime of his manhood: a man of splendid physique, of robust health, of an iron mould, with a live intellect and a warm and fervid heart. I marked him then as a man of power, and from that time forward I have been an interested observer of his career. After a few years he took charge of a church in the state of Maine, and we heard of him in all parts of that great state, preaching the gospel and defending the great reforms of the day. In a little while he took his stand in the state of Michigan, and there his eloquent voice and his great ability were made to tell for the cause of his Master and humanity. Next we find him in this city, standing up in defense of the same church and the same great cause; and doing his work—you know how ably and faithfully it was done; you know how he carried in his heart all your interests, above all the interests of his Master, to whom he was ever loyal. You know with what fidelity and delicacy he discharged all the sacred and tender duties of a pastor; with what cheerful face and warm sympathy he entered your homes in seasons of joy and in seasons of sorrow as well. You know what a worker he was, how very energetic he was; you know how he wore himself out as it were in this city and in the surrounding regions, for he was known all over western New York—there is scarcely a Universalist home anywhere where his name is not a household word in all this wide region. I have met him in all the circumstances peculiar to human experience. I have heard him preach, I have heard him speak in deep earnestness of measures commending themselves to his judgment and conviction on the floor of our state and general conventions. I have met him in my own home, and I have always found him in all these circumstances the same loyal Christian and faithful friend. But he has passed beyond the bounds of mortal life to the great home over the river, and we shall see his face no more.

It is interesting to note how this gospel which he preached so grandly to others when in trouble, affected and supported him when his hour of trial came. It is blessed to know that it was all to him that he ever proclaimed it to be to others in

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trial. Dr. Fletcher died as he lived, the confiding, hopeful Christian that he was. He desired me to say to his friends in Buffalo that according to his dying belief he is not dead but only asleep. The eloquent preacher, the loyal Christian, the tender friend is not dead. It is only his mortal body that sleeps in dull, cold marble, but he himself has passed on, as I solemnly believe, according to a beautiful vision he had before his death, to join loved ones in the world immortal. He had a vision of some place like this—a church where he had been the pastor, which had been somewhat reconstructed, with the choir in another place and lower down, and in the dome white doors opened and he beheld the angels and the loving face of the Saviour more beautifully than any picture he had seen of the Saviour in the great art galleries of the world, and beloved dear, dear ones by his side welcoming him to his rest, to his home and to his God. Oh, how can we mourn such a glorious departure as this! Such a death is more eloquent than any sermon, and the most impressive sermon of all the moving and mighty sermons of his life was his sweet Christian resignation and hope in the hour of his departure.

And so mourning members of the church of the Messiah in the city of Buffalo, and mourning members of the household, we will simply say over the ashes of our departed dead, Farewell! Farewell! we shall meet in that world to which so many blessed spirits have gone before. Oh, what a beautiful and blessed world it must be where so many of our beloved friends are gathered, and what a glorious privilege it must be to meet them when we bid farewell to beloved ones here! May God in all the riches of his great love bless and sanctify you all. Amen.

The Rev. W. E. Gibbs then engaged in prayer.

The closing selection, "It is well," was rendered with exquisite taste and feeling by a Masonic quartette consisting of Messrs. A. H. Adams, R. H. Bickford, J. S. Moore and C. A. Pooley. Many of the congregation at the invitation of the Rev. Mr. Gibbs now took a last look of the face and form of him who was once their spiritual adviser, the casket having been opened for this purpose. The placid features were readily recognized, and many tears of affection were shed. After the service, which extended over an hour, the remains were removed from the church by the following bearers: Niles Case, E. J. Newman, D. B. Sherman, Henry Spayth, E. L. Ferguson, George W. Townsend, George A. Moore and D. S. Austin. All of these, excepting Messrs. Newman and Moore, are trustees of the church. The cortege proceeded to Forest Lawn, where the body was interred in the family lot, and many floral tributes were strewn over the grave where rests he who was in life a strong, kindly and true man.

Buffalo Courier, Buffalo NY, Fri. 25 Jan 1884

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DEATH OF THE REV. L. J. FLETCHER, D.D., OF FRANKLIN, MASS.

Although not entirely unexpected, the news of the death of the Rev. L. J. Fletcher, D. D. at Franklin, Mass., Sunday evening, was received in this city yesterday with feelings of profound sadness by the members of the Church of the Messiah, to whom he ministered, and to the many warm friends he made while a resident of Buffalo. Very early in life Dr. Fletcher became a minister of the Universalist church, but afterward withdrew and studied law. He began his practice in the city of Lowell, Mass., and was during that period of his life associated with Gen. Benjamin F. Butler. Afterwards he became and was for several years a judge of the municipal court. As a lawyer he maintained an enviable [sic] standing, and while in Lowell gained for himself a comfortable competency, amounting to nearly \$40,000. After the death of his wife he was persuaded by his own feelings to re-enter the ministry, which he accordingly did. He came to Buffalo from Grand Rapids, Mich., in May, 1870. In the October following the church was destroyed by fire, but under his efficient leadership it was immediately rebuilt [sic] and was re-consecrated in September, 1871. In 1873 Dr. Fletcher obtained leave of absence for a visit to Palestine. After his return he continued to fill his pulpit ably, zealously and to the satisfaction and edification of his hearers. In April, 1879, he preached his farewell sermon.

Dr. Fletcher was a man who was particularly efficient, not only in his pulpit but in all efforts of reform, and was particularly zealous in all temperance work. His interest in educational matters led him to accept the principalship of the Clinton Liberal institute at Fort Plain, N. Y., at the same time filling the pulpit of the Unitarian [should be Universalist] church there. The duties of the two offices conflicted somewhat, which made his stay there very brief. He filled the principalship for but a year, leaving to accept a call to Franklin, Mass., where he lived until the time of his death. His malady was quick consumption. This is hard to believe when his broad shoulders and former strong constitution are remembered, but he fell under a self-imposed task. He worked incessantly, and it is supposed that this so broke his health that he fell a prey to consumption.

Luther Jacobs Fletcher was born about the year 1820, was ordained in 1843, and received the degree of doctor of divinity from St. Lawrence university. He was a member of De Molay Lodge, F. and A. M., of this city, and was also a member of the order of Odd Fellows. He leaves a widow and a married daughter, his son having died eight or nine years ago.

Mr. Fletcher was a gentleman of magnificent physique and his manners were a compromise between the courtliness of the past and the free-and-easy style of the present. He rather sympathized with the stateliness of the

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olden time, but there was no severity in his manner, nothing that was pompous or inflated; but he never forgot his dignity whether in the pulpit or in his daily intercourse with men. He was a sincere man, and when he had anything to offer he meant that it should be accepted as his honest conviction. He was a man of marked breadth of character and of undoubted honesty, but he could work diligently at times in a narrow vein and with all the zeal of a man moved solely by one arbitrary idea. His attainments were such as could only be reached by a man of fine intellectual gifts and ripe scholarship. He was what is regarded as a full man, and as a religious teacher he did conscientiously and enthusiastically all that his duties devolved on him. Mr. Fletcher was not only a well read and scholarly man, he was also an eloquent man and many of his efforts while occupying a pulpit in this city were exceedingly brilliant. Some of his sentences in his discourses were full of beauty and feeling and a collection of them would be a genuine revelation of his qualities as orator and poet. He was a reasonable man; his judgment was excellent, and the truth of a thing was that he most diligently sought.

Although a Universalist, he was tolerant of the faith of all others, or nearly all others; but in his makeup as a man and in the general run of his thoughts, there always seemed to us to be considerable good old-fashioned orthodoxy. He was naturally serene and self-contained but beneath the calm surface of his nature there were fires that could show themselves volcanic if needs be, and when his fine enthusiasm was in play or the pent-up fires were stirred, there was no gainsaying his power or avoiding the force of his argument. Mr. Fletcher was a thoroughly religious man, although he would have made an excellent lawyer or statesman, and he believed in his mission. His life has been an earnest one and, we believe, as efficient for good as it has been earnest. His many friends in Buffalo will join with us in sincere regret over his all too early death, and all who ever knew him for the man he truly was will reverence his memory sincerely and long.

The remains will be brought to this city, and the funeral services will be conducted by the present pastor of the Church of the Messiah, the Rev. W. E. Gibbs. Notice of the day and hour of the funeral will be given hereafter.

Evening Republic, Buffalo NY, Tue. 22 Jan 1884

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