

[Gibson, Schuyler J.]

Death of Rev. S. J. Gibson

We are pained to announce the death of Rev. S.[Schuyler] J. Gibson, of Sheshequin, Pa., well known both as a preacher and writer to the Universalist Denomination. The following brief note from Rev. Mr. DeLong was the first intimation we had of his death or even of his dangerous illness. We trust the partial promise of a more extended notice of the life and labors of our departed brother may soon be fulfilled.

BR. SAWYER: It is my painful duty to announce to you the death of our much esteemed brother, Rev. S. J. Gibson. He departed this life on Sunday morning, the 13th instant, at 7½ o'clock, at his home in Sheshequin, Pa. Had he lived until next Thursday he would have been 48 years of age. The disease from which he had suffered for long years was pulmonary consumption. He has left a wife, two daughters, and a large circle of warm friends to mourn their loss. His funeral was attended at the Universalist Church in Sheshequin, where he has so long and faithfully labored, on Tuesday, the 15th inst. The consolations of our holy religion were tendered to the bereaved relatives and friends by the writer.

A more extended notice may be given soon.

W. M. [William Millins] DE LONG

BINGHAMTON, Nov. 16, 1864

The Christian Ambassador, New York NY, Saturday December 3, 1864

The Rev. S. J. Gibson, whose departure to the land of the ever-living was noticed in the *Ambassador* a few weeks since, was born in Norwich, Chenango County, N.Y., on Christmas day, 1816, and was therefore at the time of his death nearly forty-eight years of age. Of a nervous, thoughtful temperament, in childhood he evinced great pleasure in reading and study, and was remarkable for his entire truthfulness, and earnest scorning of whatever was wrong, in word or deed, and in this respect the child was indeed "the father of the man." In early youth he manifested a great love of debate, and in harmony with all his other tastes, Scriptural controversy possessed for him a peculiar charm. In the high-ways and in the by-ways, at his work and in the social circle, he was ever ready with the inquiry or strong weapon of defence [sic], which [would] provoke or carry on the discussion in which he so much delighted; and from the age of fifteen until long after he entered the ministry, he was never known to be without the Bible or Testament in his pocket.

A constant but ever respectful attendant upon the ministrations of Elder Swan—the noted Revivalist of that day—who was for years located as Pastor in his native town, he yet has been heard to say that he did not remember the time that he did not believe that God was, in character as well as in name, the Father of all Spirits, and that Good and not Evil was the designed end of His economy. And many were the controversies he had with this singular Divine, while he had but yet just entered his "teens." A frequent and attentive reader of the Bible, he knew whereof he affirmed, and was ever put forward by his companions as their defender of the "better faith." And if he did not at all times controvert the doctrines of his much older and more experienced opponent, he could successfully expose the fallacies and unmask the sophistries by which they were upheld, and he could ply him with questions, which left the young inquirer master of the field. And though the Elder ever spoke of him with kindness, yet it soon happened that he avoided such controversies as "unprofitable" for the upbuilding of his

[Gibson, Schuyler J.]

cause; and however great the “excitement,” the seat in which young Gibson and his companions were found was left undisturbed.

But the interest of the young hearer did in no wise abate. In church and at the “anxious” and “experience” meetings, he was always present...and before he was seventeen he had written several sermons for his own gratification and his own eye alone, in reply to the fallacious reasoning and unsound doctrines to which he was accustomed to listen in silence.

Of course there was small chance for him to choose a profession, reared as he seemed to have been a preacher of the Gospel. But while he was yet in his minority, he was stricken down with disease. In consequence of exposure by bathing while over-heated, consumption laid hold upon him, and for months he was deemed on the brink of the grave. Possessed, however, of a strong constitution, he rallied—the disease was confined to one lobe of the lungs only, and though this was mostly wasted away by ulceration, he arose again to go forth to the active duties of life, henceforth to be afflicted by that most distressing of diseases, asthma—and with but little more than half the life power which all public speakers, fully endowed, feel at times to be all too little. This was a great detriment: he lacked the voice, the power of utterance, and few indeed knew how much he suffered in mind as well as in body in consequence of this deprivation.

And none but those who have suffered frequently from asthma, aggravated by general ill health for weary years, can imagine the difficulties through which Mr. Gibson struggled along the whole course of his after life, with a patience and perseverance as unflagging as his disease. And yet the deep sympathy of his friends was frequently interrupted by the quaint, quiet humor which often flashed across his pale anguished features, and moved to mirth his hearers as well as the readers of his literary sketches.

He entered the ministry, preaching his first sermon in Columbus, Chenango County, under the encouragement of Rev. T.[Thomas] J. Smith, and receiving his letter of fellowship from the Otsego Association at its session in Cooperstown [in] June, 1840, under the “hand and seal” of Rev. H.[Henry] B. Soule, then acting Clerk. Both these brothers passed years before him into their Rest, though his pale face and enfeebled appearance then gave but small hope of long continuance in an earthly ministry. Unlike the general rule, he was a “prophet” having “honor in his own country,” for his first settlement was in his native town, and with a people who had known him from his infancy up. He subsequently supplied the pulpit of Rev. M. [William J.] De Long in Binghamton, for three or four months, while the latter traveled South in search of improved health, but with this exception, he continued to labor with the Society in N. Norwich on each alternate Sabbath, devoting the remaining portion of his time to other pulpits in the “region round about,” until January, 1842, when he accepted an invitation to remove into Bradford County, Pa. That his labors were acceptable in his native town may be judged by his being afterward again invited to return.

In the new field to which Mr. Gibson was called, he found ample opportunity for wide spread labor, but having meanwhile married Miss S. Eliza Hancock, of Oxford, Chenango County [on 29 May 1842 in Oxford]—then also known as an acceptable correspondent of the “Magazine and Advocate,” he concluded to make his home in the beautiful valley of the Sheshequin. With the church in this place he continued to labor during the whole of his sojourn in Bradford County, devoting a portion of his time to the supply of other societies in that vicinity. Here amid scenery rendered widely known to our denomination by the sketches of Rev. George Rogers, and the inspired strains of Mrs. Scott, he purchased a small piece of land and erected thereon his “castle” and his home. He traveled much, attending weddings and funerals far beyond the boundaries of his own societies, and preaching on each alternate Sabbath to congregations from five to twenty five miles distant.

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[Gibson, Schuyler J.]

In 1846, he was engaged as Corresponding Editor of the Magazine and Advocate, then published by C. C. P. Grosh and A.[Albert] Walker, at Utica, N.Y. He furnished nearly all the editorial matter which appeared in its columns for two years, not only to the satisfaction of its publishers but of its numerous readers. But many of these labors in pulpit and press were gratuitously performed, and none were adequately rewarded with “those things needful for the body,” and the support of his family. A debt contracted in building his home weighed heavily on his sensitive spirit, and his infirmities made him continually mindful of the condition in which his family would be placed, should he be called away.

A relative in Kentucky, knowing that he was already well read in Law, made him an offer to remove there and become a partner in his legal business. As this promised a sure relief from these increasingly oppressive cares and forebodings, and as the climate promised a mitigation of his bodily infirmities, he at last concluded that duty required him to go. Accordingly in April, 1854 he removed to Crittenden County, Ky., where he was admitted to the Bar, and engaged earnestly in his new pursuit.

But his heart followed not the change of labor. He was faithful to the interests of his partner, and diligent and laborious in the transaction of business—but the love of the Gospel and its proclamation rose above all pursuits, and asserted its power amid all employments. And ever and anon, while walking in the dusty ways of legal pursuits, his pen sent forth the warm appeal, the strong argument, and the humorous sketch, in favor of God’s truth, and against human perversions of his Gospel and its Righteousness. Indeed, no clergyman in our denomination, outside the “chair editorial,” furnished as many columns for our periodicals as he did during that year in Kentucky, whose every working DAY was actively employed in the duties of his new profession.

It needed not a prophet’s ken to predict the result. He yielded to the strongest love, and before the year for which the co partnership had been formed was at an end, he had signified his determination of becoming again at its close, only the preacher and advocate of the “Law and Testimony Divine.”

He accepted an invitation to remove to Terre Haute, Ind., and become Pastor of the church in that city. Here, in addition to the labors of his pulpit, he was engaged as regular correspondent of the “Herald and Era” at Indianapolis, and ere long became one of its associate editors. In this capacity the eccentric style of many of his communications as “Duell Dow”—his singularly keen talent and pointed and ever ready pen, soon made him widely known. Probably in all our ministry there is not a man his equal in sharp criticism.—And let it be noted for the benefit of those clergymen who never write an article for our papers, and are nearly “worn out” with one sermon a day, that here was a man with but little more than one lung, bowed down with a complication of diseases, and yet performing with acceptance not only the duties of preacher and pastor, but furnishing from three to six columns weekly for a paper nearly the size of the AMBASSADOR, and this not for a month only, but for a term of three or four years.

During the winter of 1859 his former parishioners and friends in Bradford County, knowing his warm attachment to his home and friends there, and finding the plan that had removed him now abandoned, took measures to secure his return. —Accordingly in April of the same year he accepted an invitation to become again the pastor at Sheshequin, and occupy his old home.

It may be proper here to remark that Mr. Gibson always acknowledged all the claims humanity and his native land had upon him. In becoming a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, he did not cease to be a man and a patriot. On the contrary, his duties as a citizen were made more clear and imperative by the light Christianity shed upon his pathway—and as the minister, it became more strongly his duty to apply the Gospel he preached to every business of life, and illustrate by his example how his parishioners should live and act in every relation of society... Though the infirmities of nature may have caused him to err, yet with a

[Gibson, Schuyler J.]

love of country and humanity, inspired by a love of the Gospel and its Righteousness, he honestly endeavored so to preach and so to act, that only Error and Wrong should suffer thereby. Truth and Right, in word and deed, were the great end and aim of all doctrine and precept, never to be forgotten or trampled under foot in pulpit or at the polls, at the dictation of individual or of party.

His ardent temperament quickened into nervous activity by the effects of illness, undoubtedly led him to speak more strongly or to act more quickly than more moderate men would follow, or opponents would approve; but none could excel him in purity of motive or conscientiousness of purpose. And thus Temperance, Freedom, and every great cause of virtue found him, if not in the very front of their advocates, at least not far in the rear of any.

His residence and travels in slave states and among slaves and slaveholders, and the "poor whites" inseparable from both, had given him an inside view of "the peculiar institution," which he was not slow in communicating to all around him, when that giant evil made its later advances to absolute dominion over our whole Union. Nor did he confine his opposition to mere conversation. And thus his independent, earnest energy estranged some whose interests or prejudices arrayed them among the advocates of the evils he combatted [sic]. The time, so gradual in its approach, had fully come, when those who could not control the utterances of our pulpits and our religious press for Temperance, Freedom, and the Right, generally abandoned their support—some even preferring to sit under the ministrations of religious error where slavery was not censured, nor freedom applauded, rather than worship God as a universal Father, where they deemed the preacher politically wrong!

His feeble health was not improved by these continually recurring excitements and attendant anxieties—though they never caused him to halt or waver in his duty. But decreased support and increasing years and infirmities made him more anxious about the debt yet hanging over his home, and about the support which he should provide for himself and family in coming years. Indeed, since the opening of the war this debt was constantly enlarging, and he reluctantly resolved to suspend for a time his ministrations, and accept a situation which promised sufficient compensation to enable him, after a few years, to disencumber his home, and to resume again his ministry, freed from pecuniary cares.

Accordingly in February last, leaving his family, he entered the Pension Bureau of the Department of the Interior in Washington as a Clerk. His industry, fidelity and integrity were noted—the former was remarkable for one of his feeble health—and there is no doubt that promotion would shortly have rewarded them. But an attack of obstinate diarrhea in September irreparably reduced his strength, and was followed in October by an attack of asthma, complicated with dyspepsia and probably other failures of the enfeebled organism, which compelled him to cease from his too arduous labors about the 28th of that month. On the 3d of November—a dark, dreary, rainy day—he started with full resolve to go home, where he might be nursed back to better health. The cars were crowded with soldiers and sojourners hurrying home to vote, and he failed to get a seat at Baltimore in the morning train, and was thus compelled to lay over at Harrisburgh to avoid a night ride. The next day he got on the platform of a moving train, but the car door being locked he was kept standing in the drenching rain until the conductor made his rounds and admitted him to a seat. He reached Athens [PA] on the 4th, weary, exhausted and sick indeed—where he was met by his faithful companion, and on the 5th was removed to his anxiously desired home.

A few days of careful nursing and needed rest enabled him to bear the carriage to the polls on the 8th, when for the last time he solemnly and joyfully discharged the most precious and responsible duty of a citizen to his beloved country and its cherished government. That done, his will relaxed, and he failed more rapidly amid continued suffering. But as he neared the mysterious boundary between the mortal and the immortal, he became easier in body, and his

[Gibson, Schuyler J.]

spirit, drinking largely and freely from the inspiring fount of his sustaining trust in God, he went on his journey to the unseen world peacefully and even happily—the earth and its cares lessening as he passed to the bosom of his Father and Savior.

Mr. Gibson's powers as a fair, clear, and strong reasoner were of a very high order, as evinced by all his theological writings. As a writer he excelled in the description of persons and events, and the use of a quaint broad humor. But his unobtrusive and even retiring manners—his aversion to anything like display—unfortunately kept his merits and talents obscured from hundreds of casual acquaintances who would have warmly admired and highly appreciated them and him.

As a preacher he was earnest, ardent and effective, and in argument clear, poised and conclusive. Thoroughly read in Bible history, and entirely familiar with all parts of the sacred Scriptures, few arose from his exposition of any controverted passage without feeling that in this particular instance at least his interpretation was correct; and fewer still were willing to engage with him in a discussion upon any doctrine in dispute. But it was on subjects enforcing the practical precepts of Christianity that he was most inclined to speak and write, and Sin and Wrong, whether in high places or low, were stripped of their gloss, and held up in all their ugly deformity. Sabbath breaking and profanity, intemperance and love of gain, the neglect and oppression of the poor and unfortunate, and all the long catalogue of evils and sins ever received from him their merited rebuke. And it mattered not to him that his dearest friend were obnoxious to a charge, he did not hesitate to speak the strong word of condemnation or utter the severe reproof. And very severe he sometimes was, for his sense of duty in this matter was equalled [sic] only by his unfaltering trust in the triumph of Justice and Right—and if he sometimes blamed where another would be more lenient, it was because he had clearer perceptions of what was just and right. There never was a human mind more entirely conscientious than his—no self-interest could bias his judgment, or passion sway his reasoning; and hence his guidance among his parishioners was always in the pathway of Right—while his counsel never gave sanction, even for a moment, to that which was not thoroughly and entirely for justice and the well being of humanity.

And it is as the man of this strict integrity among his neighbors—as the man of broad, ready humanity among the suffering or oppressed—as the faithful friend and candid adviser—and above all, as the fond, confiding husband and the loving, judicious father, that he will be longest remembered and most feelingly mourned by those who knew him well, and most by those who knew him best.

He was graciously spared to die where he most wished—at home in the bosom of his family, and surrounded by his dearest friends. And after years of much toil, amid great suffering, cares and anxieties, he sleeps the last sleep of his exhausted frame, amid the scenery he admired so much and loved so well.

It is a great consolation also to those who sympathised with his anxieties of former years, that he was spared to see his elder daughter happily settled in life—and the younger, now eight years old, so far grown up as to be the aid as well as comfort of his justly beloved and excellent companion. May the Holy Spirit, which is the Comforter, ever be near them all, with its dearest hopes and tenderest consolations.

Rev. A.[Aaron] B. Grosh

Christian Ambassador, New York NY, Saturday 4 Feb 1865

Transcribed on 11 Jan 2007 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY