

## [Hillyer, Shaler J.]

### Death of Rev. S. J. Hillyer

It becomes our painful duty to announce the death of Rev. Shaler J. Hillyer, of North Salem, Westchester Co., New York, which occurred after a protracted illness, at his residence in that town, on Tuesday, the 26th ult.

Mr. Hillier was a native of Connecticut, and was brought up in the orthodoxy of that state as it existed half a century or more ago. We first made his acquaintance in Newark, N. J., in the winter of 1830-31. He was residing there, and engaged in teaching a private school. He had already become an earnest and intelligent believer in the doctrine of God's impartial grace, and the final salvation of the whole human family. In the Spring of 1831 he removed to this city [New York] and conducted a private school in connexion with the Grand street Universalist society, afterwards so widely known as the Orchard street church. Here he became Superintendent of our Sunday School, the first, or certainly the second, organized in the denomination in the state of New York.

In the Autumn of 1831, Mr. Hillyer began to preach the doctrine which he so much loved, and toward the ministry of which he had for a long time been directing his thoughts and his prayers. He was successful, and after laboring as opportunity offered for some time in different places, and performing much missionary work through this part of the State and New Jersey, he received and accepted an invitation to become pastor of the North Salem and Long Ridge societies in 1834. And here for more than thirty years he continued to live and labor, surrounded by friends and loved and respected by all who knew him, till death terminated the relation.

Mr. Hillyer maintained through life an unspotted reputation... His conscience was enlightened and tender; we never knew a man more scrupulously honest and truthful, or more careful to do nothing that could injure anyone, or give them just cause of offense. He adopted literally the exhortation of the Apostle to "avoid all appearances of evil."

Mr. Hillyer was a clear and logical thinker, and his reasonings often assumed much the character of mathematical demonstration. His talents were of the solid rather than the superficial order, and his worth and influence partook largely of the same character. Long will he be remembered as "a good minister of Jesus Christ." Long will his many virtues be cherished by a large circle of attached friends; and long will his benign influence be felt wherever he was known.

He has left a devoted wife [Catherine], who has walked faithfully by his side through nearly half a century, to mourn the irreparable loss here, but sustained by the confident hope of a blessed reunion hereafter. Three daughters, all married, also mourn the departure of a most affectionate and devoted father.

His funeral was attended in the church where he had preached so long, on Friday, the 29th ult., by Rev. A. C. Thomas of Bridgeport, and Rev. G. L. Demarest of New York. Owing to a failure in receiving the telegram in time, it was impossible for us to be present, and mingle our sympathies and tears with his family and other friends over his remains, and aid in performing the last duties we could render to our old and valued friend.

*Christian Ambassador*, New York NY, 7 Oct 1865  
[a Universalist newspaper]

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

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Rev. S. J. Hillyer

SHALER J. HILLYER was born in Granby, Conn., on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of December, 1799, two days before the death of the great Washington. His parents were Calvinists, after the straitness of the Connecticut school, and in their sentiments the son was faithfully trained. At the age of 12 he was deprived of his father by death, but when about 17 years of age, he removed to the house of his uncle, Rev. Dr. Hillyer, a Presbyterian clergyman, at Orange, N. J. When quite young, he engaged in the business of teaching, commencing at North Orange. He afterward removed to Newark, and thence to New York, still following the vocation he had accepted.

Mr. Hillyer was led to distrust the darker testimonies of Calvinism, and to accept the faith and blessed spirit of Universalism, under the preaching of Rev. Thomas F. King. He became earnest in the support of the new views he entertained, and while teaching began, as a layman, to preach the word in places destitute of the ministry. Before adopting the clerical profession, we find him officiating at Norwalk, Conn.; Middleville, Camptown, and Newark, N. J.; and Rye, Mamaroneck, Portchester, and Brooklyn, N. Y. In the *Christian Messenger* of January 14, 1832, the announcement is made of his accession to the ministry, with a commendation justified by his whole after-life. "He brings to the aid of our common cause," it is said, "a mind disciplined by study and matured by reflection, and a character that is above even suspicion." Br. Hillyer's labors continued of an itinerant or missionary character. We find notices of his trips in various directions. It may be noteworthy that he was to preach for the first time at Long Ridge, on the 3d of June, 1832, and at North Salem on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November of the same year. The following sketch from his journal intimates something of the extent of his labors during this period of his life:

"From March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1832 to March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1833, traveled 4622 miles—preached 174 times—81 places—22 where Universalism never before was proclaimed by preachers of our order—19 where from one to three lectures have been delivered previously. Preached in 8 Universalist churches, 3 Baptist, 2 Presbyterian, 3 Methodist, 1 Episcopal, 1 Christian, 7 Free churches, 9 Court houses, 3 Town houses, 44 School houses, 5 private dwellings, 6 public houses, and once in the open air. Visited 7 places with an intention to preach, but bigotry prevented. (This did not happen in the summer, otherwise my purpose would have not been frustrated). Preached in the State of N. Y. in 37 places, N. J. 21, Conn., 20, Mass. 2, and Penn. 1, making in all 81 different places."

We find the record of Mr. Hillyer's ordination to the work of the gospel ministry, at the meeting of the New York State Convention [of Universalists] in Utica, May [?], 1833. The sermon was preached by Rev. Pitt Morse, while other services

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were performed by Rev. Jacob Chase, T[homas] J. Whitcomb, S[tephen] R. Smith, I. D. Williamson and Job Potter. After his ordination, Mr. Hillyer continued his itinerant work until May 1, 1834, when he was invited to the care of the churches at North Salem, N. Y. and Long Ridge, Conn. He accordingly removed from Brooklyn, N. Y., where he had resided for a year or two, to the former place.

And what shall we say of his life since his settlement with these parishes? For more than thirty-one years he served the people in sacred things, living twenty-nine years in the parsonage at North Salem, and regularly making his needful journey to his Connecticut family. The purity of his life, the affection of his sympathies, the serenity and certainty of his faith, tended to the overthrow of all prejudice in the neighborhood where he was so familiarly known. He had the confidence and esteem of all acquainted with him. He won the friendship of the adherents of other Christian sects; and being a peacemaker, he lived in beautiful harmony with his fellow-men. Yet he did not realize this peace through any sacrifice of principle. His convictions were clear, and his announcement of them positive. But he lived down, by the force of his personal excellence, all bigotry and intolerance, and achieved a popularity reached by few.

His spirit was serenely religious. He loved the Gospel, and delighted in its ministry. His work was always a labor of love, and it yielded him a joy which compensated for all anxieties and cares.

In March or April last, he was taken down with typhoid fever, which had assailed other members of his family. The disease took strong hold of his bodily system, but in August hope was entertained of his recovery. The fever had been suppressed, and though he still continued weak, he seemed to be gathering strength. During his apparent convalescence, he attended to some correspondence which seemed to press upon him. Among other matters, he noticed, in a letter to Rev. A. C. Thomas, an article which Mr. T. had prepared for *The Universalist*, containing some reminiscences of times long past. As this is among the last letters he ever wrote, and as it contains an allusion to his religious experiences during the tedious hours of his sickness, we quote it entire:

North Salem, August 27, 1865

Br. Thomas: My dear friend, I have been waiting for some time, hoping that I might so improve in health as to pay a proper attention through *The Universalist* to your very kind letter to me. But instead of improving, I have for about five weeks been on the descending grade. I have no organic disease about me now, but am very weak—a poor wreck. That terrible disease, the typhus fever, shook my system so severely that recovery must be a slow and tedious process. At present I am not as well as I was weeks ago; still I think I shall recover.

I have much that I would like to say to you about my experience during the dangerous part of my sickness, but have not strength now to write it.

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Never before had I realized so fully the worth of our faith. I found nothing that I could desire to have changed.

I was much pleased to learn that you have preached to my friends in Long Ridge. I hope we shall both live to meet there again; and I also hope you will come and preach a Sunday in North Salem. I think you have never been here.

I am getting fatigued, so you will excuse me if I here close.

S. J. Hillyer

Mr. Thomas did have the opportunity of preaching at North Salem on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, and took occasion to call upon Mr. Hillyer, who had relapsed into a very critical condition. Mr. H. expressed to his visitor his sure reliance upon the Father and Savior for hope of immortal and universal blessedness. Mr. T. saw that his death could not long be delayed, and that event took place on the following Tuesday. Mr. Hillyer was in the 66<sup>th</sup> year of his age. His funeral was attended at the church in North Salem where he had so frequently ministered. Rev. A. C. Thomas and G. L. Demarest conducted the services, the latter delivering the sermon, and the former leading the exercises. The congregation was very large, embracing not only Universalists, but those of other churches whose respect and friendship he had won. A feeling of profound sorrow pervaded the community. A faithful friend, a genial companion, a loving pastor, a Christian man, had passed away. But consolation is to be found in the truth that he has attained to a noble mansion in the Lord's house.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1823, Mr. Hillyer was married to Miss Catherine Tichenor of Orange, N. J. His widow [and] three married daughters survive him. Their affliction is indeed great, but they have the memory of his many excellencies to sweeten the cup of their grief, while they too enjoy his confident hope in a blessed futurity.

G. L. D[emarest]

*Christian Ambassador*, New York NY, 14 Oct 1865  
[a Universalist newspaper]

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