

[Jones, Seth]

Father Jones, as he was familiarly and justly called by all his acquaintances in this region, was born in the town of Cheshire, Berkshire Co., Mass., on the 15th day of March, 1778, and was married to Miss Deborah Bennett, of the same town, in June, 1798. They have lived together in uninterrupted harmony and conjugal affection for the almost unprecedented period of sixty-four years. Two years after his marriage he began to preach, and on the 28th day of May, 1803, he was ordained to the important work of the ministry, by a council assembled by the 3d Baptist Church of Cheshire—Elder Leland, Moderator, Matthew Bliss, Clerk. He moved from Cheshire in 1808 to Newport, Herkimer Co., N.Y. and preached to the Baptist Society of Newport until the 15th of February, 1812. About a year previous to this time, while engaged in the investigation of subjects in connection with his ministerial duties, he found reasons to doubt the eternal duration of the punishment of the wicked, as set forth in his creed.

Like a great multitude of his fellow men, the more he investigated, the more firmly he became convinced of the weakness of his former views of the Divine Government. These doubts gave rise to a more critical, prayerful, and thorough examination of the Holy Scriptures, which resulted in a complete change of the current of his thoughts, the manner of his communications, and the motives to worship the Father.

No sooner was his mind illuminated by the fullness of the blessings of the gospel of Christ, than he began to preach to his own loved congregation the unlimited, impartial and changeless grace of God which the gospel had unfolded to his mind. He now saw in the Revelation what he had before seen and admired in the great and glorious volume of Nature... The eloquence and earnestness with which he presented his newly discovered views of the character and government of God, captivated and took the congregation by storm. Some of the members of the church, however, were alarmed, and accused him of heresy. He was arraigned before a Council of the church, which terminated in the withdrawal of Br. Jones and twenty-one of the church members from the fellowship of the Baptist denomination.

The history of his early labors as a preacher of Universalism presents to the present generation a rich theme for reflection and admiration. Without other supports than his Divine Guide, a strong and robust constitution, an indomitable will, a firm belief and assurance of the glorious truths he had received from his Master; the winter's storm, or the summer's heat, were but trifling obstacles in his way, as he journeyed on foot, from place to place, to preach the Gospel to poor and small congregations, assembled in private dwellings, groves, school-houses, and even barns. Little pecuniary aid was received, or expected, from those who were as poor as himself; but both were rich in faith, and in the hope that "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

The penury, and even want, which he experienced in the support of his family while thus engaged, are clear and strong testimonies to us of his moral courage—of his love of the truth and of humanity—of his indomitable resolution to live up to, and be guided by, the convictions of his own soul. He manifested a perseverance worthy of all acceptance and imitation in the promulgation, under such circumstances, of doctrines then new and startling to the misdirected religious mind of the day, and which were every where spoken against, bitterly opposed, misunderstood, misrepresented, and persecuted. Few men by nature, or by the influences of the Divine Spirit, were better prepared to bear and forbear than he.

Rev. S. R. Smith in his "Historical Sketches" says of Father Jones' early ministry: —

"He was perfectly enamored of the doctrine of illimitable grace, and he preached it in all its fullness and power, at all times, in all places, and on all occasions—in sermons of almost interminable length. For when his tongue was once set in motion, the theme was so vast, the subject so grand, so good, so transporting, that he seemed never to know when to stop. Of all our number at the Western Association in June, 1813, he was

[Jones, Seth]

possessed of by far the most natural eloquence, of the most commanding figure and most interesting and prepossessing appearance. He had a noble face and an expressive countenance, and when lighted up by the animation inspired by his subject, and accompanied by the music of a most flexible and powerful voice—few men appeared to better advantage, and none commanded more profound and fixed attention. His constant practice of delivering a whole body of divinity in every discourse, gave a sameness to his desk labors that was unsuited to the wants of any single congregation; but this very circumstance rendered him eminently useful as an itinerant preacher.”

“Father” Stacy says of him:-

“Mr. Jones was one of the most successful itinerant preachers our State ever produced; and for many years he traveled extensively and preached with the zeal of a Paul, and the eloquence of an Apollos. I have never seen a crowded congregation more captivated, more enamored, sit more with ease, under the preaching of any living man, than under him, in a discourse two or three hours long.”

On the 3d of June, 1813, he was received into the fellowship of the Western Association of Universalists, and was duly qualified as a minister of the denomination—the venerated names of Richard Carrique as Moderator and Nathaniel Stacy as Clerk, are attached to his Letter of Fellowship.

During the war with Great Britain in 1813, Br. Jones was appointed Chaplain in Collin’s Brigade, and served in that capacity on the frontier for three months only, as he received some personal injury which disqualified him for further duties in the army. He received an honorable discharge and returned to his home. For the injuries he received, he afterward obtained a pension from Government.

In 1815 he removed from Newport to the town of Madison, Madison Co., N.Y., where he remained three years. From thence he moved to New Berlin, Chenango Co., where he also resided three years; after which he preached twelve years in the town of Augusta, Oneida Co., N.Y.

In 1832 he removed from thence to the town of Ellisburgh, Jefferson Co., N.Y. There he remained twenty-two years. How long he preached to the Society in the latter place, I am not informed.

In 1854 he removed to Sacket’s Harbor, and made his last residence and home on earth with his son-in-law, Mr. Lewis Colburn, who married his third daughter Matilda.

Within the bosom of this quiet and respected family, Father Jones and the aged partner of his joys and sorrows passed by far the happiest years of their lives, in the enjoyment of all the physical comforts which the age and country afford, and all the family endearments that the most devoted filial attachment and reverence could bestow. He often expressed himself to his intimate friend, T. S. Hall, Esq., to whom we are indebted for much of the above data, as well as to the writer, that his enjoyments had been less interrupted or alloyed by the disappointments and troubles incident to humanity, while a resident of Sacket’s Harbor, than during any portion of his life. He had a few choice friends nearby with whom he enjoyed much of social life, receiving from, and giving to them, that which is admirable in all stages of life and so needful in declining years, and which he was pre-eminently qualified to impart—a cheerful, hopeful spirit.

There was to him yet one great lack of enjoyment, which one of his social nature and devotional feelings greatly needed, especially at his age; and that was, that in that vicinity of his residence there was no congregation of worshippers who could unite with him in saying of God, “We love him because he first loved us,” or with whom he could unite on each returning Sabbath to praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.

[Jones, Seth]

He retained his mental faculties with remarkable vigor, to within a few weeks of his departure, and even during his last sickness, he had lucid intervals, and the conversation with his friends at those times showed little indication of decayed faculties.

His unwavering confidence in the exalting and purifying, and therefore happy influence of the distinguishing doctrines of Universalism, was a prominent feature in his life, character and communications with his fellow men, and to the last moment of his stay on earth, he retained an unshaken faith in the sublime doctrines he had so faithfully proclaimed. Even while this world with all its wondrous beauties, interests, and joys, was receding from his view, he would have gladly said to the world what Paul said to the Romans, and what he had, while in health and strength, often said to many:—"The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; the word of faith which we preach."

He was "born again" at the residence of his son-in-law, on Monday morning at about 3 o'clock, June 2d, 1862—having journeyed on the checkered pavement of human life eighty-four years, two months, and eighteen days.

The members of Sacket's Harbor Lodge and Chapter, with many individuals from a distance, attended his remains from his late residence to their last resting place, in accordance with his request. An address was delivered on the occasion by Rev. J. [John] H. Stewart, of Watertown, and the ceremonies at the grave as well as the funeral cortege, were conducted by the proper officers of the Lodge and Chapter, of which institutions he had been the Reverend Chaplain for a number of years, universally loved and deeply lamented by the whole fraternity of those bodies, of which he had been an interested, interesting and honored member.

Peace to his ashes, honor to his memory, sympathy with his bereaved family, and submission to the holy will and unerring wisdom of Him in whom we all live and move and have our being.

J. H. S. [Rev. John H. Stewart of Watertown, NY]

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 11 October 1862
[a Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 10 Jan 2007 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY