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Death of Rev. Pitt Morse

It is with emotions of sorrow we can but poorly describe, that we insert the following announcement of the death of Rev. Pitt Morse of Watertown, Jefferson co., N. Y.: —

Br. Austin:—It becomes my sad duty to inform you that Rev. Pitt Morse is with us no more. He died this morning after a painful illness of some five months, occasioned by a disease of the heart. I have no time for comment or reflection, except to assure you and all his distant friends that he endured his lingering sickness with signal patience, and died in the serene assurance of the Divine realities he had preached for forty years.

Very Truly Yours,
E. W. Reynolds

Although we were aware that Br. Morse had been for more than a year in ill health, and that for the last few months he had been suffering and wasting under a painful and dangerous disease, yet we could not but indulge the hope that his life would be prolonged many years, and that he might be allowed once more to lift his voice in behalf of the great salvation. But a Providence infinitely wise and good has otherwise ordered...

Br. Morse must have been some sixty-four or five years of age, and with one exception (Rev. Seth Jones of Sackett's Harbor, N. Y.), was at his death, we think, the oldest Universalist clergyman in the State, both in years and in ministerial labors. It is now over forty years since he delivered his first sermon in Watertown; and with the exception of a few years' abode in Henderson, N. Y. he has made that place his residence to the time of his death. His early labors in Watertown were very successful and highly blessed of Heaven. Under his faithful and able ministrations a Society and Church of devoted believers in God's impartial grace were organized, and they have continued to gather strength and magnitude until they now take high rank among the largest, the most intelligent and influential Universalist organizations in the denomination. Nor were his labors by any means confined to Watertown. He traveled extensively, especially in the early years of his ministry, through the counties of Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Lewis and Oswego, everywhere sowing the good seed of the kingdom so plentifully and thoroughly that it took deep root and sprang up, and has already produced broad and rich harvests. We believe there are now more Universalists in the two former counties, in proportion to their population, than in any other counties in the State or Union...

As a preacher, Br. Morse held a high rank in our denomination. His intellectual capacities, naturally of a superior order, were developed and strengthened by a good education; his logic was clear and consistent, and his sermons, characterized by these qualities, delivered with a pleasing voice and

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deliberate and distinct enunciation, and rising often into strains of the purest and sublimest eloquence, were highly convincing and satisfactory to the minds of earnest and candid listeners. Many hundreds, yea, we may say literally thousands, among the living and the dead, have been enabled through his instrumentality to walk forth from the darkness of limited theories to the light, liberty, and peace of the Gospel of the world's redemption.

In moral character, Br. Morse was above all reproach and all stain. He was an honest man, a useful citizen, and earnest and [illegible] a most true and loving friend. Firm and immovable as a rock in behalf of religious opinions; true and unflinching as steel in carrying out his convictions of duty, even though it [w]ould bring him into collision with his best friends; tenacious, unwearied in his efforts to maintain his point when he believed he was right; at the same time he had a heart as tender and loving as a child's, and the trembling lip and tearful eye would often speak most movingly of the fountain of sweet waters that welled up in his soul. These were the characteristics which made him so useful as a citizen and neighbor, and so successful as a preacher, and which surrounded him with hosts of true friends in the place of his abode and in all the regions round about.

Personally, we have for most of our life been strongly attached to Br. Morse. Indeed, we revered and loved him next to our own father. He was the first Universalist clergyman we recollect ever to have seen or heard preach. During several years of our boyhood we sat under his ministrations, and our highest and best conceptions of the character of God, and of the duty and destiny of man, were received from his eloquent lips. As we have listened many and many a time with every faculty of our mind roused to the strictest attention, and every good quality of our heart warmed into a vivid glow, his words would drop on our ears and sink into our soul with all the grateful influence and stimulating power of the still rain upon the tender grass.

Although many long and changeable years have since fled away, yet we can still repeat texts and arguments and eloquent passages from his sermons to which we then listened, and with which our young spirit was enraptured and our ambition for the right and the true fired to intense activity. Our father and mother were among the original members of the church organized by Br. Morse in Watertown. We well recollect the scene of the first communion. Notwithstanding our boyhood, the solemnities of the occasion, the tender and thrilling words of the young pastor, and especially the passing of the emblems of the body and blood of Christ to the communicants, by the hand of our own father, made deep, and we trust salutary, impressions upon us.

We have spent very many happy hours in the presence of Br. Morse, not only in his own ever hospitable dwelling, but in the families of mutual friends, at public meetings, and in the sacred pulpit. A vein of rich lore, of great good sense and practical wisdom which characterized his conversation—an ever genial flow of kindly feelings, of chastened wit and humor, and of child-like

mirthfulness, made his presence always like sunshine to our heart, however weary it might have become under the heavy cares and responsibilities of life.

We vividly recollect the first time we set eyes on Br. Morse. It was during his first visit at Watertown, while we were a bashful boy. Mrs. Woodruff, (a lady still living in that place, and whom we esteem one of our best friends,) sent us with a letter to the residence of Dr. G. where he was sojourning, with a request that he would convey it on his return, to a relative of hers near New Hartford, N. Y., where Br. M. was still pursuing his studies with Rev. Stephen R. Smith. Mrs. G. took the letter and proceeded to the parlor to deliver it, while we, urged by an irresistible curiosity to behold so strange a non-descript as a *Universalist minister!* stealthily followed her footsteps, and peering through the crack of the partially opened door, beheld—not a being with hoofs and horns, as we almost fancied we [w]ould—but a gentlemanly appearing youth, with closely cut and peculiarly curled hair, sedately pacing the room, and meditating, undoubtedly, on the sermon he was to deliver that evening—the first he ever preached in Watertown.

A year or two after, being in the presence of Br. Morse and moved by some irritation or excitement, we involuntarily used the word *almighty*—something was almighty good or bad, great or mean—"Tut! tut! John," said the youthful minister, "that is a very *large* word for a very *small* boy to utter!" This kindly reproof, uttered in a firm but tender voice, and accompanied with a look of sincere affection, produced a deep and life-long impression on our young heart.— We doubt not it aided in saving us from the vice and folly of profanity, which, under the counsels of a loving mother, had not reached us, and which we have ever since despised, and from which we have been mercifully preserved.

Well do we remember the circumstances of our last meeting. On our way to attend a session of the Board of Trustees of the St. Lawrence University at Canton, we spent a short season in Watertown. It was a beautiful day in August last. We called at his residence, rode with him through various streets of that beautiful village, (city, we might say), and visited old and well-remembered scenes, conversing the while of the events of years long passed by, and of the present interests of the kingdom of righteousness and¹ truth.— At evening we took tea with him and his respected family, in company with Rev. Dr. [Thomas J.] Sawyer and Rev. L[ewis] C. Browne—a most pleasant circle, in which we passed a very happy hour. Although then quite feeble and languid, yet he was cheerful, humorous and happy, as usual, and his interest in the welfare of our Zion and all that pertained to its prosperity, was as strong apparently as in the days of his meridian vigor and zeal. He accompanied us to Canton, and at the conclusion of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, we [bade] him adieu—he pursuing his journey to Massena Springs for the improvement of his health, and the remainder of us to our several fields of duty. It was our last earthly meeting and parting with this eminent servant of

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Christ... While his ashes rest in peace, may his memory and the example of his devoted and useful life linger for many years in the hearts of his associates and friends, to stimulate them to the service of God and the upbuilding of righteousness!

[by John M. Austin, Editor]

The *New York Reformer* (Watertown), speaks in the following terms of the death of Br. Morse:

DEATH OF REV. PITT MORSE. — It becomes our painful duty to announce the death of this widely known and highly esteemed citizen—an event that occurred on the morning of Monday, the 19th, after a distressing illness of more than four months, occasioned by a disease of the heart. Mr. Morse was born in Brooklyn, Conn., Feb. 21st, 1796, and consequently had recently completed his 64th year. He was educated at [Woodstock], in his native State, and in 1816 removed into New York, where he was occupied some three [illegible] of Universalism, he began to preach that doctrine in the Spring of 1819, and was ordained to the work of the ministry in the Summer of the following year.

Mr. Morse came into this county in the fall of 1820, and established meetings of his faith in Watertown, Brownville, and Henderson. In this vicinity he has labored for almost forty years—being absent from his chosen field but a single year (during which he occupied the pulpit of the Lombard st. church, Philadelphia). His life has been active and laborious in the extreme, and no other man in our community perhaps has exerted a wider influence. He is justly considered the founder of the large and flourishing Universalist Society in this village, by whose members his zeal and fidelity will long be remembered; as will his rectitude and purity of character by all our citizens.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY: 31 Mar 1860
[a Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 8 Jan 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

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Rev. Pitt Morse died at Watertown, March 19th, 1860, aged 64 years. He was born in Brooklyn, Ct., Feb. 21st, 1796—educated in Woodstock Academy—taught school in that State from 1812 to 1816, except one winter—in 1816 became interested in a revival in that section, and was led by his inquiries into Universalism—in 1816 commenced teaching school in Palatine, N.Y., where he found many Universalists and was induced to commence preaching—was fellowshiped Oct. 7, 1819 and ordained June 8, 1820. In Nov., 1820 he visited Jefferson co., and commenced preaching stately in Henderson, Watertown and Brownville, shortly after. In 1821 he held a public oral discussion with the Methodist presiding elder of that district, which placed him in the highest rank as a fair and powerful debater, and gave a new and lasting impetus to our cause in all that region. He also commenced a religious periodical about this time, "The Herald of Salvation." In 1826 he became pastor of the Lombard street Church, in Philadelphia City, and in conjunction with Rev. S. R. [Stephen Rensselaer] Smith (then at Callowhill street), revived the "Herald" for a brief period. In 1827 he returned to Watertown, where he continued as pastor until 1838, when he removed to Henderson, but after a few years again returned to Watertown, where he resided until his decease. Mr. Morse's ripe scholarship, calm and clear speech, ready use of his knowledge and abilities, and quick perception of the bearings of an argument, made him a tower of strength in all that Northern region, during his active years, in which he held many oral and written discussions with our ablest opposers, who essayed in vain to gain a triumph over our cause in his hands. Of blameless life, and sound practical faith, he illustrated in all the relations in life, living and dying, the virtues he recommended in the pulpit and from the press.

Universalist Register, Boston MA, (1861) P. 40

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