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Death of Br. Reese

In our last paper, just as it was going to press, we inserted a very brief notice of the decease of this estimable and much lamented brother. We have just recovered from the stunning shock to feel more acutely and sensibly the loss we have sustained. And now, in accordance with our promise, we proceed to give detailed statements of his labors, illness, and departure, gleaned from the recollections of his intimate friends in this city, and contained in a letter received from Br. Kneeland Townsend, who has been favored with the melancholy pleasure of paying his last respects to the deceased, and tendering the holy consolations of the Gospel to the bereaved widow and mourning friends.

WILLIAM I. REESE was born in Charlestown, Montgomery county, in this State, on the 25th of December, 1799, so that, at the time of his death, he had not yet attained to the age of thirty-five years. Of his early life we know nothing. After he had attained to manhood he came to this city, where he worked at his trade of saddle and harness making. He was a singer in the choir, and, it is believed, a member of the Baptist church in this city. He was then, as in after life, remarkable for his affectionate and friendly demeanor, his strict moral deportment, and nice sense of decorum and propriety. About the year 1823—perhaps a little earlier—he embraced the faith of universal salvation, and immediately resolved to proclaim its glad tidings to the world. In company with Br. Amni Bond, (now of Carroll, Chautauqua Co., then a fellow-workman with Br. Reese, in this city,) he commenced studying English grammar. This fact may appear astonishing to those who were acquainted only with the stores of excellent and useful knowledge so correctly possessed by our excellent brother. But to those acquainted with his industry, application, and ready discernment, it will be but confirmation of their previous good opinion. It would appear also, from this fact, that Br. Reese was but little favored in early life with the advantages of a good literary education—that he was his own instructor, the architect of his own temple of knowledge, and what is commonly called “a self-made man.” He did no discredit to the expectations generally formed respecting such men. He was prompt—ready—precise in all he knew and in all he did, almost to a proverb. His exactitude in writing and speaking, whether we have reference to the facts communicated, the arguments advanced, or the language in which he clothed them, was a prominent trait in his character—one which, though it made him appear, on a first and partial acquaintance, cold, formal, and even pendantic, could not long conceal from view that peculiarly amiable and affectionate good-will to all, which was a yet stronger, higher trait in the man, and which won for him, in despite of first prejudices, deep, fervent, and lasting esteem, and an affection which but increased as the man became longer known and understood. But grief and memory make my pen diffuse.

In 1824 he obtained a letter of fellowship from the Western (now Central) Association of Universalists, convened at Madison, June 2d and 3d, after which period to the present time the records of our order, his own labors, and the various Universalist periodicals since published, make known his highly useful course. Suffice it to say that he was ordained shortly after, (by the Genesee or Cayuga Association, it is believed, though no minutes of their sessions are at hand to refer

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to,) and after a residence of several years in the western section of the State, he received and accepted an invitation to settle with the Society in Portland, Maine. It is believed that this arrangement was made with the societies in Ontario county, on the express condition that in two years he should return to them again. Accordingly at the expiration of that time, he again commenced his labors there, residing in East Bloomfield, until last Spring, when he received and accepted an invitation to settle in Buffalo, where the sun of his life has set before it attained the meridian.

Br. Reese was twice married, and his domestic life was most happy and exemplary. Two children—one by each union—and a bereaved widow will long lament their loss, while they cherish with fond remembrance his estimable and numerous virtues—virtues without a stain—for even his failings (if he had any, and he was but mortal) “leaned to virtue’s side.”

The closing scene is so feelingly portrayed by Br. Townsend that we shall suffer his letter to speak for itself, without comment.

G. [Rev. Aaron B. Grosh]

Buffalo, September 8, 1834

Brs. Skinner and Grosh—The melancholy duty devolves upon me of informing you that our worthy brother and fellow-laborer, WILLIAM I. REESE, Pastor of the First Universal Restorationist Society of Buffalo, is no more! He departed this life in the full possession of his mental faculties, with the most perfect composure and resignation to the will of God, on Saturday evening, the 6th instant, at 9 o’clock.

Since the breaking out of the cholera in this city, every moment of our lamented brother’s time has been devoted to his truly arduous duties, and a large portion of it has been spent among the sick and dying—administering relief to the one, consolation to the other, and sympathy to all. He has at length himself fallen a victim to the disease—fallen in the path of duty; and it is almost superfluous to add that Christianity has lost one of its most able defenders—our denomination a faithful, talented and devoted servant—the poor a sympathizing friend—society one of its brightest ornaments—his bereaved widow a most devoted, affectionate husband, and his children one of the fondest fathers and kindest friends.

The sickness which terminated his labors here, and his mortal career, commenced on Friday evening. All that medical science could do was done in his behalf. But it soon became apparent, to himself at least, that the hour of his departure was at hand. He spoke of his decease to his family and friends, with that mildness and composure which was a particular characteristic of the man. On Saturday he joined in prayer with Elder Tucker, of the Baptist denomination, and at the close of his pathetic appeal to the throne of Grace, twice raised his hands to heaven and twice audibly repeated the deep, solemn Amen. After having made such brief arrangement of his affairs as the circumstances would admit, taken leave of his weeping family, and repeating, “Come, Lord Jesus! O, come quickly!” he resigned his spirit to the God who gave it.

At 4 o’clock in the afternoon of Sabbath, a large multitude of people assembled at his late residence to attend upon the necessarily brief services of the occasion, and to testify their respect for the departed worth. A portion of I Cor. xv was read,

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the throne of Grace addressed, and a few words of consolation tendered to the mourners, by the writer. At the grave, the 444th hymn of Streeter's collection ("Deem not that they are blessed alone") was sung, and the service for the burial of the dead was read by Mr. Shelton of the Episcopal church, and the body of our deceased brother was committed to the silent house for all living.

During the short period (four months) he has resided in Buffalo, he had (as he had previously done in all the places where he was known) succeeded in securing the friendship and unqualified esteem of a large circle of friends, who manifested their attachment by an attendance in the chamber of sickness, at the bed of death, in the house of mourning, and at the last sad offices of respect. Among the many who were conspicuous for their acts of Christian kindness, we would particularly remember the Reverend clergy, generally, of the different denominations in this city. Their attention to all the offices of consolation and respect was honorable to themselves and demands our thanks.

To each—to all who in the least aided in the duties of the occasion, the writer would tender his gratitude, [and] to the afflicted, bereaved, disconsolate widow, his heartfelt sympathy. May God bless her—bind up her broken heart, heal her lacerated bosom, be a father, protector and guide to her fatherless children, and finally, bring us all to meet in the regions of immortal bliss—no more to part!

Such, Brs. Skinner and Grosh, is the melancholy task which has fallen to my lot. Much, very much fatigued with riding fifty miles yesterday in the rain—needing consolation myself—I beseech you, excuse inaccuracies, supply deficiencies, and believe me your friend,

K. T. [Rev. Kneeland Townsend]

Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate, Utica NY, 20 Sep 1834

Br. W. I. Reese

A funeral discourse on the death of Br. W. I. Reese was delivered in the Universalist church in Portland, Maine by Br. Menzies Rayner on last Sunday afternoon. It will be remembered that Br. Reese was, for two years, the pastor of that society, and will long be affectionately remembered by its members.

In addition to the notice already given of his death, and to the statement of the estimation in which he was held in Buffalo, I cannot refrain from adding the following feeling and faithful tribute to his memory, taken from the *Buffalo Whig*.

G. [Rev. Aaron B. Grosh]

The deceased fell a victim to the prevailing scourge—the cholera. From its first appearance among us, the deceased devoted himself almost entirely to the wants of the sick... While thus employed, he was overtaken by the destroyer, and

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numbered with its victims. Mr. Reese had resided but a few months in this town, having but recently been settled in the pastoral charge of the above church. Amiable and exemplary in his life, he had rapidly won upon the affections and friendships of the community: a preacher of God's universal goodness and benevolence, he carried out in his walks with his fellow-men the principles he zealously inculcated from his desk. In death as in life, the deceased was calm and composed, yielded up his spirit "to God who gave it" with a firm reliance on that faith which taught him that "God is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." He has left a wife and two small children to mourn their early bereavement; while a numerous congregation and a still wider circle of friends join in sympathizing with them in their loss.

His remains were interred from his late residence on Sunday last; and amid the very great concourse of people assembled on the occasion, it was gratifying to Christian charity to behold in attendance, it is believed, every clergyman in the city.

Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate, Utica NY, 11 Oct 1834

[Married, on 13 Oct by Rev. L[inus] S. Everett, Rev. William S. Reese, pastor of the Universalist Society in West Mendon, Monroe Co., and Sarah Satterlee, daughter of the late Hon. William Satterlee of Sempronius. (*Gospel Advocate and Impartial Investigator*, Auburn NY, 20 Oct 1827)

Married, In Auburn on the 22^d ult. by Rev. Rudd, Rev. W[illiam] I. Reese of Portland, Maine and Maria Satterlee of Auburn. (*Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate*, Utica, 12 Jun 1830)]

Transcribed on 6 Mar 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY