

[Soule, Henry Birdsall]

### Death of Rev. H. B. Soule

It is with feelings of inexpressible grief that we announce the death of Br. H. B. Soule. Oh God! how mysterious is thy providence, and thy ways past finding out! It will be remembered by our readers that some two or three months since, Br. Soule received and accepted an invitation to become the pastor of the Universalist Society in Lyons, N. Y. The 2d or 3d day of Jan. he arrived in Lyons, without his family—it being his purpose not to remove them from Granby, Ct., his recent place of residence, until next spring. On the first Sunday in January he commenced his labors in Lyons—alas! how brief they were to be! He preached but that day. During the following week he was seized and prostrated by that dangerous disease, the *small pox*. It is supposed he must have contracted it in the cars, during his journey. [Illegible sentence]. The friends entertained fears of a fatal result, from the commencement of his sickness. Still they did not wholly despair of his recovery. In answer to a letter of inquiry from us to a friend in Lyons, we received the following, dated the 28<sup>th</sup> of Jan.-

Rev. J. M. Austin:-

Dear Sir and Br.: – Yours of the 26<sup>th</sup> inst. was received last evening. I called upon Dr. Pierce, Br. Soule's physician, for the purpose of ascertaining his true condition. In answer to my inquiry, he stated that he considered him a very sick man, and his case a hazardous one. But he had thus far escaped some of the symptoms which usually accompany this disease, viz: pain in the head, back and joints. —His throat is not so sore as it was. The disease is of the confluent form, and has about reached its crisis. —His face, head and limbs are much swollen, and eyes are closed up. His physician thinks the chances are in favor of his recovery. Dr. Pierce says he is exceedingly patient, and bears the affliction most heroically. Should Br. Soule's symptoms be not as favorable, I will inform you.

Yours very truly,  
Wm. H. Sisson

Our anxiety was increased on the receipt of this letter, and we waited with much solicitude for the next intelligence that should arrive. Ah! it came all too soon! On the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> Jan., a telegraphic message announced to us that our beloved brother had departed from earth. Peace to his spirit! We have not a doubt that it has already heard the plaudit—"Well done, good and faithful servant!" His memory will be dear to us through life, and will linger in our denomination for long years to come.

The death of Br. Soule, called away as he has been, in the prime of life, will be an irreparable loss to the denomination. It is needless to say that he stood in the front rank of our ministry. He was well educated, an able writer, an admirable sermonizer, and a good speaker. As a pastor, few if any excelled him in dignity of deportment, in a prudent and exemplary walk among his people, and in all those qualities which give success to the preacher, and inspire respect and confidence for the sacred profession. Moreover he was a warm-hearted brother, genial, sociable and affectionate in

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disposition, and a devoted and truly pious Christian. How many among our ministering brethren, and the friends in his former fields of labor, will feel and lament his loss, as the departure of one of the dearest friends of earth. We shall be able to give, in our next, a brief memoir of our departed brother, from the pen of one who is fully familiar with his history.

For the mournful gratification of those who lament the loss of Br. Soule, we desire to say that the best of care was taken of him through his entire sickness. The hospitable mansion of Hon. L. Sherwood received and sheltered our dear brother, notwithstanding the terrific nature of his disease. All that human skill, energy and faithfulness could accomplish—all that the tenderest friendship, the deepest solicitude, the most untiring watchfulness could do was done by him and his affectionate and devoted lady, and Dr. Pierce, the skillful and experienced physician. May God abundantly bless them for their care, their labor and fidelity. We can write no more. Our eyes are blinded with tears that cannot be suppressed, and our struggling feelings search in vain for words to give them utterance. We will seek to bow in resignation to this severe bereavement, and exclaim in trustfulness of Him who cannot err—"Not my will, but thine, O God, be done!"

*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, 7 Feb 1852  
[a Universalist newspaper]

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF REV. H. B. SOULE

The announcement of this brother's decease, in the *Ambassador* of last week, will send a thrill of sorrow through many a heart that esteemed and loved him; and will awaken a laudable desire in our denomination generally, to know more of his early history and ministerial life than is now within their reach. To gratify this reasonable wish, we have hastily prepared the following brief and imperfect sketch, drawn from the memories of a few who knew him and loved him well, and from our own recollections of days gone by.

As some of our impressions cannot be traced clearly to their sources, and are rather indistinct, it is possible that errors may be discovered in them; nevertheless, believing them to be mainly correct, we do not withhold them, deeming them necessary in filling out our sketch.

REV. HENRY BIRDSALL SOULE was born in the town of Dover, Dutchess Co., N. Y. on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1815. His early years were spent on a farm, in a comparatively newly settled country. As his parents were in humble if not embarrassed circumstances, his days were spent in healthful toils suited to his years, which sent him wearied to the refreshing sleep of the laborer, and made his coarse fare as sweet to his palate as it was nourishing to his frame.

His early education was of the simple kind usually obtained in those days, in the log school house of the settlement; and some of its incidents and associations are recorded in that beautiful tale, published a few years ago under his assumed name of "Schoolcraft Jones," called *Ellen, or Forgive and Forget*.

As he approached toward manhood, the possession of considerable manual dexterity, and the love of exercising it in working wood, led him to select carpentry as his trade for life. He labored for some time at learning this trade; but we do not remember if he completed his apprenticeship. But the skill acquired thus, he loved to exercise later in life, when occasion required its use, or opportunity invited. But he had a stronger desire for knowledge than he could gratify as a carpenter's apprentice in a secluded section of the country; and with this desire, an ambition to use it. Accordingly, in 1835 he entered the Clinton Liberal Institute as a student, intending after a time to enter on the study of law. But becoming a fellow boarder with Brs. J[ohn] T. Goodrich and W. H. Griswold, in the family of Rev. S[tephen] R. Smith, he was finally induced to change that intention into a resolve to enter the ministry of reconciliation. At what time, or under what circumstances Br. Soule embraced the Gospel in its fullness of hope and consolations, we are not informed. But he thus narrates the circumstances which led him to devote his life to its ministrations, in this Biography of Rev. W. H. Griswold:

My acquaintance with Mr. Griswold commenced in March, 1837. During that season until his removal, I also was a member of Mr. Smith's family, and from the opportunity thus offered, Mr. Griswold and myself soon became very intimate. At that time I was strongly inclined to the profession of Law, and endeavored to persuade Mr. Griswold to join with me and become a student of the legal profession. But my pleas were all in vain; he probably never for a moment entertained the idea of "turning "pettifogger," as he facetiously termed it. In November of the same year so great a change had been wrought in my feelings<sup>1</sup>, that I began to think seriously of preparing myself for the

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot forbear mentioning here a scene which produced a deep impression on my feelings, and I have no doubt, led my mind to the subject of the ministry – singular as it may seem to the reader that it should do so. Rev. S. R. Smith was bidding me adieu as a member of his family (as we did not expect to meet again before his removal to Albany,) and among other remarks, said to me: - "You are going to preach, brother! Indeed, I know you are." I replied that I had never thought of doing so, but was inclined to the profession of the Law. "You'll preach," said he, in a tone of the most unwavering confidence: "remember, that the

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ministry. The denomination had no Theological Seminary; the want of which I then and have ever since deeply felt; and I was at a loss what course to adopt, to prepare myself for the duties and trials of that responsible office. One day while walking on the banks of the Oriskany, my thoughts busy with the new vocation toward which I was looking with increasing interest, I met Mr. Griswold, and revealed to him the state of my feelings in regard to the ministry; and proposed to him that he should lay [illegible] was then engrossing my own thoughts.

It was nearly sunset; we sat down on an old moss-grown log and weighed probabilities and canvassed difficulties; expressed our hopes and fears, and alternately resolved and yielded to doubt, until long after the moon had been visibly climbing the eastern heaven. We finally concluded, however, to enter the ministry, and doing the best we could, leave the result with Providence. The future was dark, but we felt that when it should approach us, it could not be without some light to guide and cheer us.

It was an interesting and imposing scene; two youths, inexperienced, and without anyone in the world to counsel them, sitting beside a storied stream that murmured softly in the night air, the solemn heavens bending in silence above them, with no eye upon them but God's, and no ear to hear them but His—resolve with anxious and half-doubting hearts, conscious that they must depend upon themselves alone whether the undertaking be prosperous or adverse, to enter the ministry of an unpopular and persecuted sect, and become the messengers of Heaven's truth. The impression which it made on the feelings could never be forgotten. When we had mutually pledged ourselves to the resolution, and implored the sanction and assistance of Heaven, a long silence ensued, when I looked up, and in the pale moonlight, saw the tears trickling down my companion's face. Not a word was uttered—we looked at each other—rose—I took his arm, and in silence we left the spot.

Another circumstance may have given increased values to his religious views, and led to this change in his purposes. At some period of his early life, certain domestic trials and afflictions (of which so little is known, and that of so delicate a character, that we can barely allude to them) taught Br. Soule that nearly every cup of *earthly* enjoyment has in it some dregs of bitterness. In his, these rested not at the bottom of the chalice, but floated on its surface, and mingled in its substance. By them he was drawn nearer to the only Source of true aid and comfort, the sole Refuge from the evils earth cannot cure. By them too, the care of looking after the interests of his mother was thrown upon his heart.

Meekly and earnestly was this burden accepted, and with loving fidelity it was discharged to the end of his life. It was a subject he seldom, *very* seldom, named to any—never to strangers, or in the social circle. Several times in the course of a year, modestly he shrank from his wonted place and usual duties, and journeyed to the interior of Onondaga county, to minister to the wants, or aid and counsel in the affairs of his mother's home-circle. That duty performed, he returned again to his study and his pulpit, and mingled with those who wondered at his absence and welcomed his return; but no word, no sign indicated the sorrow or the care he endured with those he loved, or the filial and fraternal labors he had performed for them.

Probably this sacred sorrow and silent bearing extended a reserve into his manners generally, and became, to a slight extent, a *habit* in his other thoughts and feelings. At least, we always thought there was a tinge of sadness in his character, which we ascribed to this cause.

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next time I meet you, I shall see you standing in the pulpit." The next time we met, (nearly three years after, in Fort Plain,) he preached my ordaining sermon! When he entered the house I was sitting in the desk, so nearly was the prophecy literally fulfilled!

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After acquiring the rudiments of a higher education, he went to Oxford. Br. J. T. Goodrich, a fellow student, was pastor of the Universalist Society there, and Br. Griswold was preparing for the ministry under Br. Goodrich's direction. Br. Soule completed a trio, who became boarders under the hospitable roof of a most genial spirit, Br. David Brown, giving and receiving sympathy, and affection, and social influences which were ever afterwards fondly remembered.

Here he resided, making excursions in company with Br. Griswold to various settlements and societies of Universalists in that section, whom they supplied with occasional preaching. We much regret that we have not the information to record the circumstances and character of Br. Soule's first efforts, as faithfully as he has given those of Br. Griswold. We only know that many persons noticed the strong resemblance of his early style and manner to those of Br. S. R. Smith—and a few who did not know the power and integrity of the young man even suspected him of "borrowing" Br. Smith's manuscripts. His admiration of this much revered man's character for intensity of thought and nervous power of expression, may account for some of this resemblance of style and manner; but it was most noticed when Br. Soule, forsaking the composure of a studied delivery, broke the reserve that shadowed his feelings, and abandoned himself to a warm, free, extemporaneous utterance. As his mind became more matured, and his style more cultivated, the resemblance grew less, and his character of thinking and feeling made for itself a style more peculiarly his own.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1838, the Chenango Association, held at North Norwich, granted him and Br. Griswold letters of fellowship. He continued to reside in Oxford, preaching to several Societies in that section, as opportunities and preparation allowed.

On the last Thursday and Friday in September, 1839, a Conference was advertised to be held at Ford's Bush, on the promise to our few friends there, that the Lutheran church would be opened for their accommodation. But when the day came near, the church was refused! Br. Conrad Snell, the father of Rev. Nelson Snell, immediately had seats arranged in his *barn*, the most convenient place to be had, and tendered its use for the meeting. But alas! when the day came, a cold rain storm came with it, and Br. J[ohn] D. Hicks was the only preacher present. Discouraged, chilled, feeling almost forsaken, what was their joy to see a young man who was greeted by Br. Hicks as a preacher, enter the meeting in the afternoon. It was Br. Soule. He was put on the preacher's stand, and speaking extemporaneously, abandoned himself to the feelings of the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and carried all captive by his eloquence. Br. Belding arrived on the second day, and such was the gratification of that gloomily commenced Conference, that before it closed, resolves were formed and plans projected which resulted in the erection of a neat, comfortable Universalist church at that place, which was dedicated Oct 14<sup>th</sup>, 1840.

Br. Soule had an engagement at Fort Plain on the Sunday following, the fifth Sabbath of September, 1839. An invitation to settle with them followed, and was immediately accepted. These, his *first pastoral* labors, were highly appreciated by the friends generally, and were productive of much benefit in softening the stern features of bigotry, checking the fanaticism of revival operations, and building up the congregation in social and fraternal feelings.

He was prevailed on to remove to Troy in 1841. Of his labors there we possess no definite information. But he was not permitted to remain there long, as his services were needed in a new capacity. The Clinton Liberal Institute, without endowment, and poorly supplied with means, was a heavy and embarrassing charge to its various Principals and Officers, and passed through many changes in the hope of improving the condition of either the School, or its retiring teachers. Br. Soule was invited to become its Principal in 1842, and accepted the office with much distrust of his own ability, but solely with the hope of effecting some changes in its financial affairs, by which its condition might be permanently improved [illegible]. [The]

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persuasion of Br. S. R. Smith was the strongest inducement to his acceptance. Here he became acquainted with Miss Caroline A. White, then the youthful and unassuming Principal of the Female Department. Mutual pursuits drew them together, and mutual esteem ripened into an affection which subsequently resulted in a perfect and happy union in marriage—now, alas! suddenly broken by his death.

Failing to receive the aid he expected in the affairs of the Institute, after about one year's arduous, discouraging toil, he removed to Utica, in the Spring of 1843, and assumed the pastoral charge of the Society in that city. The change was but one of evils. The Society, loaded down with the hopeless fragment of a large debt, discouraged by repeated, fruitless efforts and sore disappointments, was not to be extricated; and Br. Soule was relieved from being present at its death, a year or two later, by an invitation to become assistant pastor to Father Ballou at Boston. His labors at Utica were affected, undoubtedly, by the discouraging circumstances that had preceded his removal and attended his stay there; but his sermons were generally of a superior order, and among those who became acquainted with him, he was highly valued as an intelligent and interesting companion.

He was united in marriage to Miss White at Albany, August 28<sup>th</sup> 1843, during his residence at Utica; and found in her "an help meet" indeed. During his stay there, also, he made one or two journeys to visit and sympathize with his afflicted bosom friend, Br. Griswold, at Dudley, Mass., and assisted in settling his affairs and arranging his papers, after the depart from earth of that singularly noble and much enduring spirit.

Br. Soule removed to Boston in the Spring of 1844—fully aware that there were many and great difficulties in the new station, but cheered by the prospect of greater facilities which that city would furnish him for self-improvement than he had ever yet enjoyed. But alas, in despite of unwearied labors and courtesy—in despite of the aid and counsels of many wise and faithful friends—in despite of the encouragement and kindness of his senior colleague, Father Ballou, the Society was then in such a state of social feelings, interests, plans, and manoeuvres of its different [illegible] were so diverse and clashing, that he had but little enjoyment during his stay with them. [To] add to all, his intense love of study, earnest desire to improve his ability as a public speaker, and a perhaps injudicious system of physical training, [?] to him by a popular elocutionist, finally broke down his health, and fastened on him a train of intense sufferings, which made life itself a burden for several years. There was no hope for him but in extricating himself from this unhappy position, and a retreat from city life with its exasperating rivalries, cares and perplexities, its unhealthy excitements and unfavorable physical influences.

During his stay in Boston, he wrote the *Biography of Wm. H. Griswold*, published by A. Walker, Utica, N.Y., [and] *Ellen, or Forgive and Forget*, by Schoolcraft Jones, besides a series of articles in the "Ladies Repository," under the assumed name of Schoolcraft Jones, and occasional articles for other papers.

He removed to Gloucester, Mass., in the Spring of 1845 and he remained there about one year, endeavoring to [restore?] his deeply injured health by inhaling its pure and bracing ocean breezes.

In [1846?] he accepted an invitation to settle in Hartford, Ct. Of his labors here, and their results, we cannot [say] definitely. An indication of their acceptable value may be found in the fact that he continued as pastor of the Society for about five years, [and left] it in good condition for his successor – its debts reduced, if not extinguished, and its congregations not lessened, if not greatly increased.

Having now fully restored his mind with greatly varied fruits of careful study, and formed the design of writing a series of moral and religious tales or novels, he devoted nearly a year to traveling, supplying the desks of destitute Societies in Connecticut, New-York, Pennsylvania,

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etc., and occupying his time during the week in observing characters, and gathering materials for his future labors.

With a view to arrange his materials and compose his mind for its future labors, he accepted an invitation to settle at Granby, Conn., a beautifully retired situation where, amid the harmonies of nature, and the social kindness of affectionate friends, he could enjoy comparative quietness and peace.

But the necessity of journeying several times each year to Central New-York, to attend to business connected with the welfare of his family, led him to desire a location nearer his early home, that he might attend to these duties more conveniently, and with less loss of time, money and travel. He therefore reluctantly sundered the many strong ties that bound him to the Society at Granby, and last Fall accepted an invitation to settle with the new and prosperous Society in Lyons, N. Y.

On the way to his new location, he stopped over one day with me at this place, and unfolded freely his past studies and acquisitions, and future plans and labors. He had boarded in my family during the year he resided at Utica, and acquaintance had ripened into friendship. He had visited me in Philadelphia in the fall of 1851, and spent several days with us in social intercourse. But never did I see him in better health—in greater spirits—never so freely joyous in speaking of his plans and prospects, as during the past New-Year's day he spent with me here.

He had stored his mind with much minute information on the circumstances and scenes amid which the Scripture personages spoke and wrote—on Bible phraseology, its peculiarities and meanings—and felt that these would enable him to discharge his pulpit labors more acceptably and usefully than ever. He had gathered and arranged much material for several religious and moral novels, which he believed would do still more in the way of spreading our faith in community, and commending its principles and practices to the hearts and minds of the people. For these he was promised an immediate liberal remuneration, besides an interest in the sales, which would in a few years enable him to provide abundantly for all the reasonable wants of his family.

Then the pleasant aspects of his new home in Lyons—the able helpers he hoped to find among the amiable and intelligent members there—the abundance of means to secure their prosperity and save them from incurring debt—the social qualities of the people to be added to the pleasures of his domestic circle—all these were dwelt on with unwonted freeness and delight, and we all rejoiced with him. His wife and four children—one daughter and three sons, the first in her eighth year, if I mistake not—he would not remove from their pleasant home in Granby until next spring; and we all anticipated the pleasure of seeing him and them together on their westward way. Alas! the sad reverse—the first tidings we receive of him is his death by small-pox! May God temper this bitter, stunning blast to his poor wife and her tender lambs!

Fort Plain, N.Y.

A. B. G. [Rev. Aaron B. Grosh]

*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, Sat. 14 Feb 1852

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