

[Williamson, Isaac Dowd]

III. Rev. ISAAC Down WILLIAMSON, D. D., son of Ransom and Jerusha (Miller) Williamson, was born in Pomfret, Vt., April 4th, 1807, and died in Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 26, 1876, in his 70th year. In his death, the Universalist cause has lost one of its ablest advocates. He was one of those great and gifted men who achieve success and attain distinction by virtue of their native talents and energy, in spite of all obstacles and without opportunities for early education. It appears that he learned the clothier's trade and had no other schooling than that of the common district school; but his ardent thirst for knowledge, his force of character and enthusiasm made amends for lack of external aid. He preached his first sermon Oct. 1, 1827, in Springfield, Vt. After supplying the pulpit a short time in Langdon, N. H., he settled in the spring of 1828, in Jaffrey, N. H. He was admitted to fellowship, as a preacher, by the N. H. Association, at Sutton, May 26th, 1829, and was ordained by the Franklin Association, at Townsend, Vt., Sept. 10th, 1829. In June of the same year, he removed to Albany, N. Y., where he lived 7 years, and here he published his first book, "An Argument for Christianity." In 1837 he removed to Poughkeepsie, remaining there about a year and a half; from there, in 1839, to Baltimore, where he spent two years; thence to N. Y. city, where he lived about three years; thence to Mobile, Ala., for two winters, spending his summers at the North; thence to Memphis, Tenn., for a season or two; next to Lowell, Mass., in 1850, for a year; and from thence to Louisville, Ky., for about two years; thence to Cincinnati, Ohio, for three years; from there to Philadelphia where he spent three years, and which was his last regular pastorate, although he supplied in Cincinnati after his return from Philadelphia. He and Rev. C. [Clement] F. Le Fevre began to publish the *Gospel Anchor* at Troy, N. Y., about 1830. This periodical was merged in the *Religious Inquirer*, published at Hartford, Conn., Mr. Williamson continuing to act as one of the editors of that paper. He was one of the editors of the *Herald and Era*, published at Louisville, Ky., and Madison, Ind., and at one time was one of the proprietors thereof, but in what years or for what length of time we cannot say; we know only that he was connected with the paper in 1852. He was for about ten years connected with the *Star in the West*, as joint proprietor and editor, though for several of his last years performing no editorial labor.

His published works, as far as we know, are the following: 1. "An Argument for Christianity, in a Series of Discourses." New York: 1836, 18mo. pp. 252. 2. "An Exposition and Defence of Universalism, delivered in the Universalist Church in Baltimore." New York: 1840. 18 mo. pp. 227. 3. "An Examination of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment." Cincinnati: 1847, 18mo., pp. 225. 4. "Sermons for the Times; and the People." New York, 1849, 18mo., pp. 252. 5. "The Universalist Church Companion." Boston: 1850, 18mo., pp. 216. 6. "The Crown of Life: A Series of Discourses." Boston: 1850, 12mo., pp. 407. 7. "The Vision of Faith: a Series of Sermons on the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer." Madison, Ind.: 1852, 18mo., pp. 263. 8. "The Philosophy of Universalism, or Reasons for our Faith." Cincinnati: 1866, 12mo., pp. 96. 9. "Rudiments of Theological and Moral Science." Cincinnati: 1870, 12mo., pp. 377. He also published several (we know of 7) sermons and discourses in a pamphlet form, but we cannot give their titles.

Dr. Williamson was essentially a pioneer, traveling extensively and everywhere preaching "the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men." We can hardly name the man in our ministry who has been located at so many and widely separated points; moving from Vt. to N. H., to N. Y., to Md., to Ala., to Tenn., to Ohio, to Pa., to Ky., acting as preacher, editor, publisher, missionary, and scattering the seed of Truth broadcast over the land. His labors were very fruitful. He was emphatically a self-made man, and, had his

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great natural gifts been improved by thorough scholastic training, he would have shone as one of the bright lights of the American pulpit. Afflicted ever after his 17th year with asthma in its severest form, he bore an uncommon amount of suffering, but he never shrank from work until compelled to do so by the terrible attacks of his disease and the burden of old age. He delivered nearly 4,000 sermons, published 9 volumes beside many pamphlets, and for 40 years was editorially connected with our periodicals. He once crossed the Atlantic and preached the Gospel of Impartial Grace in Great Britain. He took 7 voyages of 2000 miles coastwise by sea, on the same errand. He was a man of strong and positive convictions, of a very robust intellect, and bravely grappled with the deepest, darkest problems in metaphysics. The first article of his creed was, "Before all things, God, as the centre and soul of the universe;" so that whatever force or factor comes into play in the course of ages and whatever secondary causes spring up in the working out of the plans of Deity, they all have their origin in the Divine idea and purpose. He thought with Archbishop Leighton, that, in respect to God, "Knowing is decreeing." He agreed with John Foster in thinking that "He, who fixed the first great moving cause, appointed all their effects to the end of the world." This idea gives tone to his last published work, "The Rudiments of Theological and Moral Science," the metaphysics of which have attracted so much notice and elicited so much controversy.

He was a prominent and highly-respected member of the Society of Odd Fellows, lectured far and wide in exposition and defence of their principles, and crossed the Atlantic, 30 years ago, mainly in their service. He was for many years Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows of the United States, and the ritual now in use by the Order was largely from his pen. His piety was not showy, but deep, sincere, and solid. He counted all ostentation in religion, all pietistic emotion, as dross, unless accompanied and attested by practical charity and moral virtue. He was steadfast in his friendships, and having once taken a friend to his heart he clung to him to the last.

He had not only rare logical powers, but also a style of writing at once copious and compact, a lucid method of presenting a subject, the unmistakable but undefinable power of genius and a magnetic personal presence; and he has made his mark broad and deep on the public mind of his time. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from the Norwich (Vt.) University, in 1850. He was married, Sept. 3, 1826, to Miss Adaline Eliza Guernsey of Mount Holly, Vt., who survives him with four children—one son and three daughters—all of whom are married and settled in life. Two of them reside in Cincinnati, and two in Philadelphia. The second daughter is the wife of Rev. Dr. Cantwell.

Universalist Register, Boston MA, 1878, pp. 82-85

Transcribed on 3 Dec 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY