

[Halsted, Magdalen Ritter Harsen]

MRS. MAGDALEN RITTER HALSTED

BR. AUSTIN:—The death of the lady whose name stands above has been already announced, I believe, in the *Ambassador*. She departed this life at her residence in the city of New-York, on the 8th of November last.

Many circumstances connected with her life and death, her faith and her actions render it highly proper that some further notice should be taken of the departed, and this notice cannot fail to attract the attention and secure the gratitude of all Universalists in the city and state of New-York, and through them of the denomination at large.

Mrs. Halsted was the fifth daughter of the late Cornelious [sic] Harsen and Joanna Henrietta Ritter, his wife. She was born in New-York on the 3d of August, 1819. On the 21st of April, 1841, she married William M. Halsted, Esq., son of the late eminent lawyer of that name of New Jersey. No very remarkable incidents distinguished her brief existence, but she possessed great moral worth [and] a deeply religious character, and exhibited a consistent and beautiful life. In her was happily blended firmness of purpose, resulting from a reflecting and well balanced mind, with great deference for the opinion of others. She was naturally very benevolent, and cultivated this disposition of her heart in accordance with lofty christian principles, till it was as much a matter of habit as it was of inclination. Yet her benefactions were not careless and indiscriminate. It was her custom to seek out the poor and needy, and anticipate their wants rather than wait for the calls of her suffering fellow creatures.

She was eminently social in her disposition, possessed most agreeable manners, and being ardently attached to her family and friends, she was of course deeply loved in return. In her friendships she was firm and unwavering. As a daughter, sister and wife she always sustained an elevated position, and performed the duties involved in such a manner as to secure the respect and admiration not only of her family, but of all that knew her. To her husband she was bound by the strongest affection, and devoted herself with unwearied industry to his welfare and happiness. This was the more marked when disease invaded him at no distant date after their marriage, and compelled him to seek a milder climate, in the vain hope of regaining his health. Though herself a suffering invalid, she sacrificed every personal consideration to that of love and duty, and accompanied him to the South. They returned early in the summer of 1849, he to die the following autumn, and she to linger under constantly failing health till the day of her death in November last.

Though born to affluence and surrounded by a large circle of loving friends at the commencement of her existence, she had still been made to drink deeply of the cup of affliction. In the course of a few years she had seen her father and mother, a sister and brother, her only uncle, and her beloved husband, borne away to the grave, and felt that the grasp of the Destroyer was already fixed upon her own heart. Half of those she most loved had already entered the spirit land.—She had no children, never had, to draw her irresistibly back to earth, and a deep, irrepressible desire arose in her heart to rejoin her lost friends in the world above. This feeling was no doubt in part the effect of her disease, consumption, which left her no hope of restoration to health, nor of relief, except from the brief and deadening influence of opiates. It was heightened by a

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perhaps morbid state of her ever sensitive spirit, which shrank from the thought of subjecting those she loved best on earth to the continued watchings, cares and anxieties that her protracted sickness naturally called forth, and which no entreaties of hers could induce them to devolve on other and less affectionate and faithful hands. No doubt, too, her cheerful and sustaining religious faith conspired to make the future world more attractive. She was a firm and happy believer in God's impartial grace, and the final salvation of the whole human family. In this faith she never faltered. It had been instilled into her heart in childhood and youth by her parents, and matured and verified by her own study of God's word and the experience of her tried and serious life. This hope and trust in God and his universal grace in Christ Jesus constituted, as she often expressed herself, the only remaining joy of her life, and though happy to see her friends around her, and though unable to suppress her tears at the thought of leaving them, still she was not only resigned to death, but joyous in the expectation of meeting her father, mother, husband and other loved ones of her kindred, on the shores of a blessed eternity.

[one paragraph omitted]

The denomination will be gratified to learn that one who so honored our blessed faith in her life and death, was mindful of its interests for the future, and in her will made some noble bequests to promote the cause in which we are engaged. I have been permitted to publish from her will the following particulars.

"Thirdly, I give and bequeath unto the Moderator and Clerk of the New-York State Convention of Universalists, and also three laymen, chosen, or to be chosen by the State Convention, and who together at the time of my decease shall constitute the committee of trustees to take charge of the New York Universalist Relief Fund¹, the sum of One Thousand Dollars, to be added to the said Fund. And in case the said Committee of Trustees of the said fund shall at any time previous to my death become incorporated, then and in that case the said sum of one thousand dollars I authorize and direct to be paid over to the said Corporation.

"Fourthly, I give and bequeath [sic] unto the Universalist Theological Seminary located in Clinton, Oneida Co., N.Y., the sum of One Thousand Dollars, to be paid to the President, Treasurer or managed of said Society [sic], whoever may be authorized to receive the same for the use and benefit of the said Institution.

"Fifthly, I give and bequeath unto the Universalist Missionary Society of the city of New-York, the sum of Five Hundred Dollars, to be paid to the treasurer thereof, for the use and benefit of said Society.

"The three legacies last above mentioned, I direct my said executor to pay out of the first moneys which shall come to his hands belonging to my estate, and not otherwise appropriated."

I cannot express the satisfaction and gratitude I feel in contemplating these very generous and well directed bequests. *The Relief Fund to which Mrs. Halstead here*

¹ This fund is the original incarnation of the present-day Service Gratuity.

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*bequeathes one thousand dollars, was founded by her late lamented father, who bequeathed six thousand dollars for the benefit of superannuated and sick clergy, their widows and orphans.*² He contemplated two objects in this noble bequest: first, to relieve in some degree the hardships and trials of poor clergymen of our denomination in the State, and secondly to strengthen the bonds of union between the brethren by attaching them firmly to the State Convention from which formerly many parts of the State dissented. It has proved a great blessing and in several instances smoothed the way of the worn-out servant of Christ, and made the widow's heart sing for joy. This addition made by the founder's daughter will increase the benefit, and lays the denomination under increased obligations to that family. Let their memory be cherished.

[2 paragraphs omitted]

I could wish that the example set before us by the amiable subject of this notice, might be imitated by many others, who would thus make provision for the dissemination, after their death, of that truth which they loved in their life. For years and years, perhaps for generations yet to come, Mrs. HALSTED, though dead, will speak to her race, and exert an influence over the welfare and happiness of thousands, through the instrumentality of her noble charities.

I need only add that her brother, Dr. Jacob Harsen, is the executor of Mrs. Halsted's will, and that the bequests above named will be promptly paid as soon as the forms of law in the settlement of her estate can be complied with.

THOMAS J. SAWYER

Clinton, Jan. 1, 1852

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 10 Jan 1852
[a Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 9 Apr 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

² The italics were added by the transcriber.