

[Spooner, Maynard L.]

Sudden Death and Bereavement

The readers of the *Ambassador* will remember an extract of a letter published a few weeks ago in these columns, from a father relative to a young and promising son, asking my advice as to the course to be pursued with him, and my remarks thereon, and my advice to send him to the Clinton Liberal Institute. I did not then give the name and place of residence of my correspondent, because we did not desire the boy, in reading the article, to know that it related to him, but as he has now passed to the other and better land, we give the name and residence of the bereaved father, together with the tragic event which causes his deep sorrow, in his own language, in the following pathetic letter:—

COHOCTON, N.Y., Sept. 6, 1859

REV. D. SKINNER:—It is well for the human family that there are those who will listen patiently to a recital of our sorrows, and sympathize with us in our grief. You have no acquaintance with me, and probably never heard of me until a few weeks ago. I addressed you a line in relation to my son, but nevertheless I have been quite well acquainted with you from my childhood, and have learned that you possessed a generous heart and a sympathetic soul, and hence it is, that on this occasion I speak to you with confidence as a son to a parent.

My son, and only son, Maynard L., of whom I made mention in the letter above alluded to, is dead. On Friday morning he asked liberty of me to assist a neighbor for a day in threshing with a machine. I replied to him that he might act his own pleasure about it, but at the same time I told him I had rather he would not go; but he went.

On the same morning I went to an adjoining town on professional business, and sad and strange, as I returned home at sunset, I met at my gate a company of neighbors bearing upon a couch the mangled body of my son to die. The machine crushed a leg to atoms and soon after the amputation, the immortal spirit took its departure.

Through the whole scene (though some twenty minutes elapsed ere he was liberated from the machine) he behaved like a philosopher, scarcely uttering a groan, though perfectly conscious to the last. While confined in the gripping and cruel cylinder he exclaimed, "Oh, my mother!" and again, "Had I taken my father's advice I should [would] not be here."—Oh, cruel fate! Why should that boy of so much promise, so manly beyond his years, so full of vigor, life, and health, and soul, be thus early called away? Why could he not have been spared for future usefulness, and to close his parents' eyes in death, instead of their closing his.

[Spooner, Maynard L.]

I was making all preparations to send him to the Clinton Liberal Institute, at which he was much pleased. He had promised me that he would be, not only a *scholar*, but a *man*, and I believed him; but alas! he is gone, and with him a thousand bright hopes have fled away. Oh, the speechless, tearless, burning agony of that last gaze upon the sleeping dead! I cannot but remember the clay gold cheek, palid [pallid] countenance, and seraph smile that yet lingered upon his lips, as if the fond angels were hovering around the lifeless form to convey the immortal spirit to our Father and our God.¹

My wife [Mariam Webber Spooner] and I are firm believers in impartial grace, but our only child and daughter left (Adele) [later Mrs. Adele Way], is a member of the Methodist church, and language is too poor to convey to you any idea of the grief that rends her sister's heart at the loss of this her only brother. Her love for her brother carries his spirit to heaven; but her fear, generated by that accursed teaching which I hate, carries it to hell, and there the dear child stands hovering between the felicities of heaven and the agonies of the damned. I hope the scales will drop from her eyes, so that with an eye of faith she can look away to heaven and behold her brother there.

Had he lived ten days longer he would have been sixteen years old. How sad and desolate is our home! Always cheerily and gay, never sullen or sad, he lighted up the whole household. But "passing away" is written upon the works of earth, and though sometimes hard, we must learn to submit to God's will.

Pardon me, brother Skinner, for what I have written. I wanted to unbosom myself to some one who could sympathize with the afflicted, and at once my mind rested upon you, and this is my apology.

A. M. [Adin Maynard] Spooner

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[a Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 18 Feb 2013 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

¹ Maynard and his parents are buried in Highland Cemetery at Avoca, Steuben Co. NY.