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In Memoriam.

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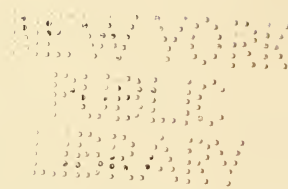


In Memoriam

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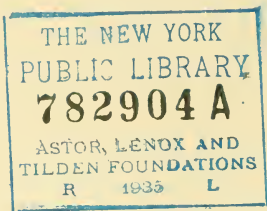
REV. JOHN SHEPARDSON,

"He being dead yet speaketh."



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The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., Printers.

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REV. JOHN SHEPARDSON.

BORN AT ROYALSTON, MASS.,	APRIL 12, 1820
BAPTIZED AT WEST ROYALSTON, BY REV. THOS. MARSHALL,	1831
ORDAINED AT NEW SALEM AND PRESCOTT,	JUNE, 1842
PASTOR AT NEW SALEM AND PRESCOTT,	1842-1849
PASTOR AT PETERSHAM,	1849-1872
PASTOR AT WALES,	1872-1876
PASTOR AT GREENFIELD,	1876-1887
SUPPLIED AT NORTON,	1887-1889
DIED AT TAUNTON,	DEC. 14, 1889

A glance at the above dates is sufficient to show that the career which they outline was in many respects a remarkable one. It is given to but few to realize, as he did, more than fifty years in active, fruitful Christian service, nearly all of it in the pastorate. And few, it is safe to say, have left behind at death a larger number stricken with a sense of personal loss.

In this case, as in most, the key-note of life was early struck. His parents, Daniel and Prudence Shepardson, were both exemplary members of the Baptist Church, and they brought up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In after years he often spoke of

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their influence upon him, and especially of the deep impression made upon his mind by the solemn tones of his mother's voice singing often the now almost forgotten hymn, commencing,

"Oh! there will be mourning
At the judgment seat of Christ."

Of these early days he once wrote as follows: "My parents were of the Puritanic type, fully believing that Sunday was the Lord's day, and that it was their duty to worship God in His sanctuary on that day, and, although living five miles from church, all must go. As their family was large, consisting of six sons and four daughters, some must necessarily walk, but none were excused from going. They believed in early piety, and encouraged their children to give their hearts to Jesus while they were young.

"I decided to serve God the winter before I was eleven. All my brothers and sisters older than myself had previously united with God's people. My parents were Baptists, and so were all the children. When I united with the Church, I resolved that on all proper occasions, I would witness for the Lord, and very early in my new life I began to think of the work of the ministry."

Thus at the age of eleven he heard and heeded the call that was to shape his future. But there were difficulties in the way, arising from the slender means at the command of the family, and he had at one time so nearly abandoned his half-formed purpose as to enter into

contract with his parents to remain at home and manage the farm during their life. But a painful accident, which disabled him for several weeks, led to serious reflections, and he became convinced that he was not in the path of duty. His father, learning his state of mind, generously released him from the contract, saying: "I cannot pay your school bills away from home, but I will give you your time, and you may make the best use of it that you can."

Thus was the great question of his life-work settled, and now in his seventeenth year began the struggle to secure an education. Already, four years earlier, he had commenced to teach. His first school consisted of forty scholars, several of whom were over twenty-one years of age; yet he held it under strict discipline and carried it through with marked success—a truly marvelous feat for a boy of thirteen. The pay was fourteen dollars a month and board round.

For eight successive winters after this he taught, working on the farm, for the most part, in spring and summer, and studying or teaching in the autumn.

Three of these terms of study were at Shelburne Falls, where was then a flourishing academy. He boarded himself, and the bill of fare was mush and milk, varied at times by the luxury of bread and butter, and sometimes doughnuts, the gift of kind friends. Odd hours out of school were employed in work at a scythe-snath factory. And thus by severest economy he succeeded in paying his way.

In teaching he was uniformly successful. One large school of seventy scholars, which had been broken up the previous winter by unruly boys, was speedily reduced to order by him, and he was engaged for a second term at greatly increased pay.

But the most notable thing in these schools was the religious interest among the scholars, which seems always to have been deep, and which frequently culminated in powerful revivals. The first of these was in Royalston, resulting in the addition of twenty-five members to the Baptist Church.

Another occurred in a private school taught in the autumn of 1841 near the New Salem and Prescott meeting-house. One day a pupil earnestly requested him to hold a meeting for the school in the school hall. He consented; opened the meeting with singing, reading of scripture and prayer; and then followed this with an exhortation, which we may be sure did not lack in unction or personal application, whatever else it may have lacked. At any rate, the impression was such that when he tried to dismiss the meeting, after singing again, all fell back into their seats as if spell-bound. Perceiving the hand of God, he conquered his embarrassment, and proceeded to talk with each one separately. The result was a series of meetings in which nearly all the scholars, and many of the other young people of the village, were happily converted.

In the following winter a similar work broke out in a

school which he taught in the eastern part of Royalston, known as the Cutler District. The mother of a family, whose husband was not a Christian, had recently died, and in her last farewell had said to her five children, "Children, I have no fear but that you will always have enough to eat and wear, but who will care for your souls when I am gone."

He was much affected by hearing of this circumstance, as three of the children were in his school, and in the night season seemed to hear that departed mother saying to him, "will you care for the souls of my children?" The result was that in two weeks all five were converted, and the work spread through the school.

At one of the meetings a girl convert who had induced her aged father, who was a man of wealth, and a prominent citizen, to attend, rose when the invitation was given to rise for prayers, and turning to the unconverted parent, exclaimed with tearful earnestness, "Father, do get up. Dear Father, you must die pretty soon, and I would rather know when you come to die that you are a Christian than to have all the money you can leave me. Father, do get up." The appeal was irresistible, and slowly the old man rose to his feet, and became one of the converts, and a powerful impression was produced upon the entire community.

Such scenes as these filled the heart of the young teacher with joy, and through all his after life remained as among the most cherished of memories, and a source

of ever fresh inspiration. Naturally they led him to feel that he ought not much longer to delay entering upon his life work, especially as lack of means seemed to forbid any extended course of study. Accordingly, in the following June (1842), he yielded to the earnest desire of the Church in NEW SALEM AND PRESCOTT, and was ordained as their pastor.

In close connection with this event came his marriage to Miss Maria A. Chamberlain of New Salem, a most estimable lady, who, to the highest qualities of the wife and the mother, added rare tact and ability as a helper in pastoral work.

The meeting-house stood at a cross-roads, and the line between the two towns (New Salem and Prescott) passed longitudinally through its center. Around was (at that time) a thriving agricultural community, and the church services were well sustained. Here he labored seven years, beloved by his people, successful in winning souls, and growing in grace and in knowledge of the scriptures. Considering the meager preparation with which he entered upon the work it is certainly surprising that this pastorate was so prolonged, especially as the constant decrease of the population rendered any considerable church growth impossible.

During the latter part of this period he occasionally held services in the neighboring town of PETERSHAM. Here was no Baptist Church, but only a few devoted men and women who held "the truth as it is in Jesus" and

mourned over the low state of religion in the town. They urged upon him the importance of establishing a church, and at length he was induced to attempt the work, and moved thither in the spring of 1849.

It was no light task which he thus assumed. The devoted band that gathered around him were few in numbers, wholly without wealth, and surrounded by a community decidedly averse to Baptist views and ways, and inclined to look upon them as impertinent intruders. It was no ordinary faith that enabled them to face such difficulties; but they caught the spirit of their leader, and, inspired by his example, it was successfully done. It would be a pleasing task, did space permit, to speak at length of the labors that were put forth by him both in public and in private; of the heroic battling with financial obstacles that would have appalled any but the most stalwart faith; of the many and varied self-denials and sacrifices undergone rather than to yield the ground, such as teaching school winters and toiling in the hay-field summers, while abating nothing of pastoral work; of the alternations of hope and fear; of the blessed revivals that came from time to time like special interpositions from heaven; of the seemingly presumptuous attempt to purchase a fine church property left unoccupied by the Universalists; of the final success of the plan; of the dark days of the civil war, when resources failed, and he accepted an invitation to take charge of the Oread Institute in Worcester, yet returned weekly for the

Sabbath service now almost gratuitously rendered; of the brighter days that followed; of the founding of the Highland Institute in Petersham, a school of high grade, which he managed, in addition to church work, till the close of this remarkable pastorate of twenty-three years, when he left the church one of the three largest in the association with which it was connected. But this cannot be attempted here. A full record of the multiplied labors of those memorable years would make a volume of thrilling interest, and one full of instruction to all who would know what it costs to do pioneer work, and to lay the foundation of solid growth.

It was during the latter half of this pastorate that those labors in aid of neighboring churches, which formed so large a feature of his life work, began to abound. He was called for in many directions, and held meetings of great power in many places. Among these was one held with the Baptist Church in WALES, which resulted in a call to the pastorate which he felt to be imperative, and entered upon his labors there in the spring of 1872. This pastorate was marked by the same features of earnest toil for souls, of revivals, of remarkable conversions, and of much labor in the regions around, as had characterized the preceding.

It will be specially remembered as the period when the old and somewhat incommodious house of worship was replaced by a new and beautiful church edifice furnished with all modern conveniences.

But the sunshine was mingled with shadows of the darkest hue. It was here that the faithful and beloved sharer of his hopes and toils sickened and died, after a union of thirty-one years. She had borne him two daughters, both of whom had grown to womanhood and become married, the elder to W. T. Leonard, A.M., and the younger to Rev. F. E. Tower. Before the close of this pastorate he was married to the wife who survives him, Mrs. Maria B. Shepardson, a well known and much esteemed resident of Taunton, Mass.

To these changes another was soon added. A financial crash destroyed for a time the business of the village, and so diminished the resources of the church, that he felt impelled to accept a call extended by the Baptist Church in GREENFIELD, to which place he removed in the autumn of 1876, assuming charge also of the church at Turner's Falls. Both these interests were in a feeble and declining state, but under his efficient management matters soon mended, and at the end of five years each church felt able to have a pastor of its own, and Turner's Falls was turned over to other hands, while he concentrated his efforts upon the home field, though not to the exclusion of some other outposts. Additions were multiplied, a parsonage was built, and finally the meeting-house was enlarged, beautified, and furnished with excellent accommodations for every department of church work, a fitting crown for a successful pastorate of eleven years.

But an insidious disease had been silently doing its work for several years, and sadly both to pastor and people came the conviction that the burdens of the pastorate must be laid down, and he removed to Taunton, the former home of his wife, assuming charge, however, of the Baptist Church in Norton so far as to supply the pulpit on the Sabbath, which he continued to do till with two weeks of his death, which occurred Dec. 14, 1889.

The death angel did not find him unprepared. His end was peace. "I am happy," "I am nearer home," were among the last expressions that fell from his lips.

The funeral services were on Dec. 17th, in the church at Taunton, the pastor, Rev. J. K. Wilson, having charge, and Rev. Messrs. H. C. Graves, D.D., A. M. Crane, G. W. Gile, R. J. Adams, D.D., and W. H. Eaton, taking part in the services and acting as bearers.

HIS CHARACTER had many sterling traits, always recognized by his acquaintances.

His integrity was unquestioned and unswerving. Of this he gave one memorable proof that deserves to be put on record. In a business venture that did not prove successful, but in which others were so interested both as debtors and creditors that he would have been fully justified, according to current business maxims, in taking refuge behind the law of insolvency, he declined to do so, assumed all the debts of the concern, and paid every creditor to the last dollar, both principal and interest, though it required years of close economy to effect it.

Connected with this upright and downright honesty, was a deep sense of the authority of truth, an unshaken faith in the moral government and sovereignty of God, and a general moral earnestness, that stamped him as a true son of Puritan sires. No man was ever readier to cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye, rather than offend, than was he. And yet with all this sternness in repelling from himself whatever he thought wrong, there was great charity and patience in dealing with the faults of others.

His versatility was a striking trait. He could turn his hand to anything to which he felt called. He could be pastor, preacher, teacher, evangelist, business manager, all at the same moment, while his sound practical judgment and ready tact enabled him to deal discreetly with all classes of men.

AS A TEACHER, his work was by no means unimportant. It commenced in his fourteenth year and continued with intervals for thirty-eight years, and his services were always in the highest degree acceptable. The efficiency with which he managed the Oread Institute (1864-1866) and saved it from threatened collapse elicited much commendation at the time. And the good work done in the Highland Institute (1866-1872) has left its impress on many minds. It was emphatically a Christian school, and it is believed that no one of the regular students left it without having come into the light of a renewed experience. What other seminary of learning can show a similar record?

AS A PREACHER, he had unusual gifts. A commanding figure, an expressive countenance, appropriate gesture, and a voice singularly deep and melodious, combined to give him immediate favor with his audience. But beyond these externals there was an air of calm and settled conviction, of vivid and undoubting faith in the truths which he proclaimed, coupled with an unusual depth of spiritual feeling that seemed to be in very deed "an unction from the Holy One," which rendered his appeals often irresistible. None who were favored to hear him in his best moments, when presenting some of the more solemn themes of the gospel, could ever forget it. Of one such sermon, on the judgment, delivered during a series of special meetings, a brother minister who was present testified that it surpassed anything he had ever heard in solemnity and impressiveness.

As to matter, his sermons were evangelical and scriptural, and were illustrated freely from reading and from his own wide experience.

AS A PASTOR, he was assiduous in labor, wise in counsel, tender and sympathetic in feeling. No man was ever more welcome in the homes of the people, or at the bedside of the sick and dying, and no pastor ever drew his people to himself in stronger bonds of personal friendship. And few homes have approached nearer to the ideal of what a happy Christian home should be, than did his.

He was mighty in prayer. In public it was not infre-

quent to see a large congregation wholly subdued and melted to tears as he led them to the throne of grace ; and not a few will forever remember some such season as the very time when the light of a Christian hope first dawned in their souls. It could be said of him, as of another eminent servant of God, that he was often enabled to "pray souls into the kingdom."

In private he wrestled with God as did Jacob of old, and, like him, often knew that he had prevailed. The well remembered incident, when, sometime after retiring heavily burdened for a member of his congregation, he suddenly exclaimed, "it is well with W——" (as it, indeed, proved to be), was but one of the many instances when "the secret of the Lord" was revealed to his servant in the very act of prayer,—fulfilling the promise, "before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

The prayer meeting was the place in which, above all others, he took delight, and in conducting it many have expressed the opinion that he was without a peer.

His strong constitution, inherited from long-lived sires, and confirmed by early years of toil on the farm, enabled him to endure toils that would have overwhelmed many of his brethren, and he poured out his energies without stint in the work of the Lord. At Petersham on Sunday he frequently preached twice at the church, filling the interval with labor in the Sunday-school, then preaching again at a school-house in one of the out districts, and

returned for a meeting in the evening. On other nights he would hold meetings at private houses in different neighborhoods, sometimes the whole week through. In connection with these meetings there were many happy conversions. And among those received by him into the membership of the church, are preachers, teachers, Sunday-school workers, and men and women useful and prominent in the various walks of life.

AS A HELPER to other pastors in seasons of special interest, his services were always regarded as of the highest value. His power in prayer, his sympathetic address, his tact in dealing with inquirers, and withal his mighty faith, made him a leader whom all were glad to follow.

It is impossible in any brief compass to give an adequate idea of the amount and value of his labors in this department. In a single year (1870-71) he assisted in five series of meetings, besides a lengthened effort in his own church. In one of these meetings he preached each evening continuously for two weeks, in another four weeks, and in the others for longer or shorter periods, amid marvelous displays of divine power, the conversions numbering twenty-five, thirty, forty, and in one case fifty souls, and all in connection with churches of comparatively small membership, to whom such accessions seemed like Pentecostal blessings, as in truth they were. And this is but a sample equaled by many and surpassed by some of the years of his maturer ministry.

In one meeting, never to be forgotten, held with a

church near Boston, he preached every evening consecutively for four weeks, and there were new cases of interest at every meeting, till the conversions numbered over eighty.

At a similar series held with a church in New Hampshire no less than seventy persons presented themselves as inquirers in a single evening.

On one occasion a man was so deeply convicted that he cried out aloud, interrupting the sermon, until Christian friends took him to the vestry to pray with him, and the preaching and the prayer-meeting went on simultaneously.

On another occasion while appealing to Christians to remove all hindrances to the Lord's work, a brother suddenly arose, stepped across the aisle to the seat of another member of the church, made humble confession of wrong, and asked forgiveness; other confessions immediately followed, and the result was a precious work of grace that swept the village.

In dealing with inquirers he was always at home, and his tact was equal to any emergency.

On one occasion a young lady told him that she hated Christ. "Stop a moment," said he, "fix your eyes on yonder wall; imagine that you see him there nailed through his hands and feet, and stained with blood; he turns his dying eye upon you, and says, 'I am bearing this for you,' and can you hate him?" "No," exclaimed the inquirer, the tears gushing forth in a sudden revul-

sion of feeling, "No, I love him," and from that hour lived as a Christian.

On another occasion he visited a man at his home and urged upon him the importance of attending to the concerns of his soul; but he was met coldly with the rather uncourteous suggestion that he had better be attending to his own business. "But what is my business?" was the instant question. "To preach the gospel, I suppose," was the reply. "Well," said he, "that is precisely what I am trying to do,—preach the gospel to you." The result of this happy turn was a friend gained and a soul won to Christ.

On still another occasion he found an aged inquirer stumbling at the doctrine of future punishment, and declaring that he could not believe that God would create men and then prepare an eternal hell to receive them. "But this He has never done, and I can prove it to you," was his ready reply. "If you will prove that to me, I will become a Christian," said the troubled man. Opening the Bible at Matt. 25 : 41, he read the words, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire *prepared for the devil and his angels,*" adding, "you see that hell was prepared originally only for fiends; if men go there it is by their own choice and fault." The objector was caught in his own net, and speedily gave evidence of conversion.

A volume might be filled with incidents like these proving him to have been indeed "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

With such varied and consecrated activities was his long life filled, and his death came in good time. He loved his work, and often expressed a wish not to outlive it. This wish was granted. He died "in the harness." But two Sabbaths intervened between his last public service on earth and his departure to fields of nobler service on high, leaving behind him a "great company" who with feelings of mingled sadness and joy are ready to exclaim, "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

"Beneath the banner of the crucified
He bravely fought and nobly died,
And more than conqueror now,
All that to victory belong —
The wreath, the palm, the song —
Fill his triumphant soul,
Bind his immortal brow."

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