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MEMORIAL

TO

PETER SMITH BYERS, A.M.,

FIRST PRINCIPAL OF THE PUNCHARD FREE SCHOOL,

AT HIS FUNERAL, IN CHRIST CHURCH, ANDOVER.

GOOD-FRIDAY, P. M., MARCH 21, 1856.

BY THE RECTOR,

REV. SAMUEL FULLER, D. D.

"The sweet remembrance of the just
Shall flourish when he sleeps in dust."

PUBLISHED BY HIS COLLEGE CLASS MATES.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRINTED BY ALLEN AND FARNHAM.

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MEMORIAL.

THE death of a young person awakens peculiar emotions in our bosoms. We expect that the old will die. With them the allotted period of life is spent. The sands in their hour-glass have run out. Their bodily frame, like an exhausted stream without a springhead, or like a piece of mechanism from which the motive power is taken away, ceases at length to perform its functions, and the aged expire by some inherent law of their physical existence. Filial respect, fond affection, and hallowed recollections will cause us to mourn their departure, and yet we are not disappointed that they do not longer stay in this sinful and imperfect condition.

But when a friend or a relative is in his youth snatched by death from our midst, we are, in a measure, taken by surprise. He seems to have died too soon. He stops before the usual life-journey is ended. His hand drops before he has finished the labor of this world's pilgrimage. His opening blossoms are blighted before fully expanded. His rich and attractive fruit falls to the earth before perfectly matured. We are startled by the sight. The unexpected occurrence per-

plexes us. Disappointment as well as grief seizes and overshadows our hearts.

These are the pungent feelings which now pervade not only our own stricken breasts, but this whole community; for we are about to carry to an early grave one whose brief career as a son, brother, husband, student, teacher, and Christian, has been honorable to himself, gratifying to his family and kindred, useful to others, and commendatory of our heaven-born faith itself. We are soon to bury a respected and beloved fellow townsman, whom, on account of his talents, attainments, and virtues, we should all have gladly retained among us for many a coming year. But a mysterious Providence has seen fit to deny our earnest wishes, and to blast our dearly cherished anticipations —

“ Warm with hope, and learning’s sacred flame,
 To bless our youth this ardent scholar came.
 Unconquered powers the immortal mind displayed,
 But worn with anxious toil the frame decay’d.
 Pale o’er his books, and in his home retired,
 The martyr student faded and expired.
 O Learning, Taste, and Piety sincere,
 Too early lost, midst duties too severe !”

The short life of him who lies before us, devotee of knowledge as he was, was marked by few remarkable incidents; and yet in his character and example he has furnished a model of scholarly and religious excellence, which we heartily recommend to the study and imitation of every person, but especially of every young man.

Our lamented friend and brother was a native of Scotland, having been born in the ancient town of Brechin, where he was baptized in the Episcopal Church, of which a paternal ancestor was for many years the Rector.

At an early age he manifested a fondness for books, and had made striking proficiency in learning, when in his ninth year, he came with his parents, younger brothers, and only sister, to this town.

Until he reached the age of sixteen, the only literary advantages he enjoyed in this country were such as were provided by the district school. But at this time, his heart having been, as we must believe, renewed by the Holy Spirit, the purpose and aspirations of his soul were entirely changed. He strongly desired to receive a collegiate education, and this, that he might, as he said, be more useful to others and to his precious Saviour, whom he now adored and loved with mind and heart.

In July, 1843, it was my delightful privilege to present him to Bishop Eastburn for Confirmation in this Church, and from that time to the hour of his death, he was a faithful, devout, and worthy communicant.

Soon after, he connected himself with the classical department of Phillips Academy in this place, and completed the full course of three years. He afterwards passed through the entire course of four years in Harvard University, at Cambridge, where, in 1851, he graduated with high honor, being the third scholar in a class of sixty-three members.

In the autumn of this year, he was engaged as an Assistant Teacher in the Greek and Latin School, where

he had prepared for college. There he continued for two years, discharging the laborious and exhausting duties of this station with great credit to himself and acknowledged usefulness to the pupils. During most of this period he was a devoted teacher in our own Sunday School, where the grateful remembrance of his faithful services is still warmly fostered. He also frequently in this desk assisted the Rector in reading the service; an acceptable duty, which was congenial with his pious tastes, and in accordance with the ultimate object of his beloved pursuits.

He had now, by his indefatigable exertions, won for himself a wide spread reputation for accomplished scholarship, apt and effective teaching, and Christian principles and character; and discriminating and appreciating guardians of schools were on all hands eager to secure his valuable services.

In the spring of 1853 he was elected Principal of the Abbot Female Seminary in this village, a position, however, which he did not long occupy, as he was appointed to the like office in the High School of the city of Providence.

There he continued but a single term, since his declining health induced him to listen to overtures tendered by the Trustees of the Punchard Free School, who, in choosing him its first Principal, showed the exalted estimation in which they held him and his attainments, by offering him a salary till their building should be erected, that he might, by relieving himself of all labor and anxiety, have the opportunity of regaining his strength.

But, alas! the bow of his energies had been too long

stretched to its utmost tension; for as we see to-day in his wasted and dead form, the steel of his might was broken beyond either repair or restoration. For nine years of ceaseless application and unyielding toil had he permitted the growing desire of knowledge to burn without restraint in his bosom, and the increasing flame, though delightful in its light and warmth to his enraptured spirit, had hopelessly consumed him.

Our lamented friend was, indeed, a martyr-student. As I visited him during his protracted illness, and observed his bright eye, his pale visage, his weakened frame, and his faltering step, I often in mind applied to him those masterly lines of a titled poet upon the death of Henry Kirke White, whom our departed scholar in his devotion to study, in the constituents of his humble and fervid piety, and in his untimely end, strongly resembled:—

“Unhappy WHITE! while life was in its spring,
 And thy young muse just waved her joyous wing,
 The spoiler came; and, all thy promise fair,
 Has sought the grave, to sleep forever there.
 Oh! what a noble heart was here undone,
 When Science’ self destroyed her favorite son!
 Yes, she too much indulged thy fond pursuit,
 She sowed the seeds, but Death has reaped the fruit.
 ’T was thine own genius gave the final blow,
 And helped to plant the wound that laid thee low:
 So the struck eagle, stretched upon the plain,
 No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
 Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,
 And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart.
 Keen were his pangs, but keener far to feel,
 He nursed the pinion which impelled the steel;
 While the same plumage that had warmed his nest,
 Drank the last life-drop of his bleeding breast!”

Our deceased friend remarked that the unexpected failure of his health, the frustration of his cherished plans, and the extinguishment of all his earthly hopes, was to him, at first, a severe and excruciating trial. The mood of his chastened soul at such times may have been similar to that so feelingly portrayed by the young bard of Nottingham, when he thus exclaims:—

“ Fifty years hence, and who will hear of Henry?
 Oh ! none ; another busy brood of beings
 Will shoot up in the interim, and none
 Will hold him in remembrance. I shall sink,
 As sinks a stranger in the crowded streets
 Of busy London:— Some short bustle ’s caused,
 A few inquiries, and the crowds close in,
 And all ’s forgotten. On my grassy grave
 The men of future times will careless tread,
 And read my name upon the sculptured stone ;
 Nor will the sound familiar to their ears,
 Recall my banished memory. I did hope
 For better things ! I hoped I should not leave
 The earth without a vestige ;— Fate decrees
 It shall be otherwise, and I submit.
 Henceforth, oh world, no more of thy desires !
 No more of hope ! the wanton vagrant Hope !
 I abjure all. Now other cares engross me,
 And my tired soul, with emulative haste,
 Looks to its God, and prunes its wings for Heaven.”

Fifty years hence, and who will hear of *Byers*? To this thrilling question, inspiration returns a cheering answer, “The *righteous* shall be in everlasting remembrance.” Our Christian brother, whose premature death we deplore, *will not be forgotten*. Imperishably has he by his example, his labors, his virtues, his Christian

graces, associated his name with our town, with our schools, and with this Church and congregation.

In the district, where he for years attended the common school, he will be remembered as the conscientious pupil and good boy, who diligently improved all the advantages of learning with which he was furnished.

In the venerable and celebrated institution, where he was both a pupil and a teacher, he will be remembered as an inquisitive and untiring scholar, and as an intelligent, judicious, winning, and efficient instructor. As a teacher, his excellent qualities were, indeed, singular. He not only thoroughly mastered the subject he was impressing upon others, but he possessed the rare and yet essential faculty of deeply and constantly sympathizing with the learner; placing his own mind in the situation of the inquirer, seeing and appreciating his difficulties, and patiently and gently striving to remove them.

Both as a scholar and as a teacher, he will be remembered as the bright youth and the investigating man, who loved truth, wherever found, for its own sake, recognizing it as the offspring of God himself, and therefore to be welcomed to his bosom, and embraced by his affections as the beloved child of the Almighty Father of all wisdom.

As the Free School which is now rising in our midst, shall open its doors to waiting candidates for its privileges, and shall in the long vista of the future enroll upon its lists its scores and hundreds of accomplished graduates, Mr. Byers will be remembered as the first chosen of the overseers to initiate and shape its eventful history.

In this congregation he will be remembered as the courageous and consistent Christian, who in his youth feared the Lord, and loved and obeyed his Saviour; who was one of the first among the young to offer himself for confirmation and to commune at the table of Christ's body and blood; and who, the longer he lived, the more understandingly approved and heartily loved the evangelical doctrines, conservative standards, and spiritual formularies of our scriptural and primitive Church.

Such delight did he take in remembering our Redeemer in his Holy Supper, that this very week he was intending to partake of this sacrament next Sunday, the festival of our Lord's resurrection. But he who so often knelt with us at our communion seasons, is now, as we trust, an accepted and rejoicing guest at a higher feast, even the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

As a Church, we shall also remember him, as the first young man, who, from our congregation, desired to become a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. That Mr. Byers aspired to the ministry of reconciliation, that this sacred office was the endeared object to which all his pursuits, acquisitions, and desires tended, was well known to his intimate friends, who could not but cordially approve his noble purpose, and anticipate for him a ministerial career of distinguished usefulness.

He will likewise be remembered as the submissive, patient, praying, and confiding disciple, who, when he perceived that the hand of God was severing him from this world, girded his loins and trimmed his lamp anew, in order to be completely ready for the summons

calling him away, whenever it might come. The last two years of his life he did little else besides study the Scriptures and commune with his Saviour in fervent devotion; the Bible and the Prayerbook being always at his side, and almost the only volumes he latterly opened. To those whose privilege it was to watch his Christian progress, it was most apparent, that he was constantly growing both in divine knowledge and in conformity to the image of Christ, and therefore in meetness for the holiness and peace of Paradise.

His bereaved family and relatives will remember and treasure his Christian advice, and the earnest supplications he for so long a time offered in their circle, and on their behalf.

Remembered, moreover, will he be, for the calm and triumphant manner in which he passed through the valley of the shadow of death. For weeks he had expressed a glowing desire to depart, and to be with Christ; remarking only last Sunday, "With what rapture will the disembodied spirit enter upon the bliss and glory of the heavenly world!" When on the morning that he died, he was told that he could not live through the day, he replied with unbroken composure, "It is all right; my work is done:" while the last whisper that escaped his lips becoming mute in death was this endearing ejaculation, "Precious Saviour!"

Surely, such a relative, such a scholar, such a citizen, such a man, such a Christian, *ought to be had in everlasting remembrance.* For myself, I can only say, that while my life lasts I can never forget him. He is one of the

brightest stars that has arisen and shone upon the path of my ministry, cheering me in my labors, and beckoning my feet towards the throne of God and the Lamb. Many Christian young men have I known, and known them intimately, but in very few, if in any, have I found intellectual endowments, attractive moral qualities, Christian tempers and graces, and pious habits, so equably blended and delightfully harmonized.

Similar is the impression he has left upon the mind of every person who associated with him familiarly. Says one of his class mates, "In his threefold character, as a scholar, a gentleman, and a Christian, he had the entire respect and confidence of all our class. If I were to single out any one, who had a more uniform and higher respect from all, and who had a higher influence than any other upon the class, I should certainly single him. Until the grave shall have closed over the last of his friends and class mates, the direct influence of his Christian example will live upon earth."

Will not, then, all of you, and more particularly all the young, ever remember him? Some of you have enjoyed the blessings of his instructions. Be grateful to God for this favor, and remember and practise the pious counsels you received from his lips. Remember and follow the excellent example he has left you. Like him be careful to improve the numerous advantages which are yours in this land of heavenly light and Christian privileges. Like him, remember and love your Creator and Saviour in the days of your youth. Like him, learn to esteem and cultivate knowledge and goodness for their own sake. Like him, live to do

good to your fellow men, and to bring their precious souls to Christ. Like him, prepare to die and to meet your Judge; for much sooner than you expect, will your own lifeless body rest where his now does, and your soul, either laden with the burden of unforgiven and unsubdued sin, or bearing the holy likeness of his divine and incarnate Son, will have gone to God who gave it. Strive and pray so to follow in the footsteps of Christ's most perfect life, and so serve his Church and the world, that when you die, the survivors may delight to embalm your memory, angels may engrave your name indelibly in the Lamb's book of life, and he himself in the hour of your departure may answer your dying prayer, "Lord, now in thy kingdom remember me," by fulfilling to your unspeakable joy and felicity his most consoling assurance, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

"Lord, remember how short my time is. O remember that my life is wind. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; but according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake."

Our importunate plea for the divine favor we prolong in words which were very dear to him who now in our presence sleeps in Jesus: —

"Rock of Ages! cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in thee;
 Let the water and the blood,
 From thy side a healing flood,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Save from wrath, and make me pure.

“ While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyelids close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold thee on thy throne;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee!”

APPENDIX.

THE subject of the preceding memorial was the eldest child of James and Mary Smith Byers, and was born September 12, 1827. He and his brother James were baptized by the Rev. William West; his brothers John and Joseph, and his sister, Agnes Ferguson, by the Rev. David Moir, afterwards Bishop of Brechin, one of the dioceses still existing in Scotland.

His first and only teacher in Brechin was Mr. James Heberton, who for many years kept a private school.

His grandfather, James Byers, the father of our respected fellow-citizen, James Byers, was the third who, in a direct line, bore the name of James, and also the first of the family who, from the Presbyterians, conformed to the Episcopal Church. He died in 1846, aged 73. His father died in 1833, at the age of 84.

The third James Byers married Miss Jane Sevwright, daughter of Robert and Ann (Jack) Sevwright, and niece of the Rev. Norman Sevwright, who, for some forty years, was the esteemed and able Rector of the English Episcopal Church in Brechin. This clergyman employed his pen in the stirring controversies of those trying times, and, in a discussion with Bishop Skinner of Aberdeen, published a volume upon the differences between the English and Scotch Episcopal churches. He died about the year 1780.

His father, who was also named Norman, lived at Money-musk, on the river Dee, and about sixteen miles from the city



of Aberdeen. Besides Norman, Jun., and Robert, he had four other sons, the names of three of whom are still remembered, William, Charles, and George.

After the battle of Sheriff Muir, in 1715, the father of the elder Norman Sevwright lost his lands in that neighborhood, as a forfeiture for his sympathies with the Pretender, James III. His family being in consequence scattered, at least one of his sons established himself on the Dec.

Robert Sevwright, who for many years was chorister in the Episcopal Church in Brechin, was eleven years old at the time the battle of Culloden was fought, in the year 1745. He died in 1808. His wife, Ann, daughter of Alexander Jack, was five years old at the time of the battle, and remembered the passing of the Duke of Cumberland through the town of Brechin, on his march towards the Highlands. She died in 1824, aged 84. From the earliest days of the Reformation both the Sevwright and Jack families were Protestant Episcopalians.

Mary, the mother of P. S. Byers, died in the triumphs of the Christian faith, February 7, 1855. She was the only daughter of Peter and Janet (Middleton) Smith; and her brothers are Messrs. James, John, and Peter Smith, whose names are inseparably connected with the mechanical, manufacturing, and religious enterprise and prosperity of Andover.

November 24th, 1853, Mr. P. S. Byers was married to Miss Sarah, daughter of Oliver and Catherine Underhill, of Ipswich, Mass.

At his funeral, Messrs. Eaton, Wardwell, and Packard, teachers in Phillips Academy, Mr. Dickerman, a former school mate, Messrs. Clarke, S. A. Green, and Haynes, college class mates, and Mr. Powers, acted as bearers.

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