[Chapin, Edwin Hubbell]

DR. CHAPIN'S LIFE ENDED

Last Illness and Career of the Eminent Pulpit Orator

THE NEW ENGLAND STOCK FROM WHICH HE CAME—
EARLY ATTEMPTS AT THE LAW—PREACHING IN BOSTON—
HIS LIFE IN NEW-YORK—FAME AS A LECTURER

The Rev. Dr. Edwin Hubbell Chapin, Pastor of the Church of the Divine Paternity [Fourth Universalist Society of the City of New York], died of asthenia at his late residence, No. 14 East Thirty-third street, late Sunday night. His death, although not unexpected, was somewhat sudden. He had been confined to his room since Thursday, and although he took food with an apparent relish, he derived scarcely any benefit from it. All day Sunday he sat, apparently in a stupor, in an easy-chair in his library, and after taking tea with his family, roused himself sufficiently to engage in conversation, during which he spoke pleasantly and jokingly in his familiar manner. He retired early, and about 10 o'clock his nurse observed an unfavorable change in his features. The members of the family were summoned, and Mrs. Chapin, their son Frederick H. Chapin, and their daughter [Mary] assembled at the bedside of the dying man. The son spoke to his father, and Dr. Chapin, opening his eyes feebly, looked at his son, but made no response. He passed away peacefully at 11:45 o'clock.

Dr. Chapin's health began to fail in the Spring of 1878, but he experienced no serious trouble at the time. Dr. James R. Wood, his physician, pronounced the disease progressive muscular atrophy. While he was passing his vacation, in the Summer of 1879, at his country seat, near Cape Ann, Mass., he was seized with a hacking cough, which gave him considerable pain. Still, he was not prevented from attending to his ministerial duties until Sunday, March 21, when he began to feel that his strength was leaving him. On that day he made his last appearance in the pulpit. By advice of Dr. Wood he made preparations for visiting Europe, and sailed on May 22. But foreign travel did not benefit him and he returned early in August. After spending three weeks in the City, he went to his country seat, and from that time gradually sank until his death.

Dr. Chapin came of a ministerial family. No fewer than 16 descendants of Japhet Chapin, his Springfield ancestor, were clergymen. The father of Japhet, who was the first of his line to settle in the New World, migrated from the South of England just 16 years after the landing at Plymouth Rock, in the thirteenth year of the reign of the Stuart King who persecuted the Puritans and lost his head. Thomas Chapin settled at Roxbury, a town the people of which were early famous for their honorable lineage and courteous deportment... Samuel Chapin's descendants settled in the valley of the Connecticut, then the extreme western limit of civilization, at a time when the still formidable savage tribes of New-England continued to press upon the flanks of the enfeebled colonists. In this hardy school of life, half savage and half civilized, the early ancestors of the Fifth-avenue pastor were born and reared. It was a school that early developed those qualities of manhood and self-reliance for which Edwin H. Chapin was ever distinguished.

In the wars with King Philip's Indians, and a century later in the Revolutionary struggle against the Crown, the Chapins took a prominent part. They intermarried

with some of the best of the Colonial families, and the mother of Henry Ward Beecher...was descended from a daughter of Samuel Chapin, of Springfield. Shortly after the Revolution several of the family moved to Bennington, Vt.... From here one of their number, pushing still further into the wilderness, settled in Union Village, Washington County, N.Y., where, on the 29th of December, 1814, Edwin H. Chapin was born.

From boyhood his taste for higher pursuits was marked. He studied with a lawyer, but from a desire to become something better than a village attorney he manifested little interest in the profession. He had received a good academic education at Bennington Seminary, and soon turned this to account by removing to Utica and becoming one of the editors of the *[Evangelical] Magazine and [Gospel] Advocate* [a Universalist publication], adding to his editorial duties those of an earnest and effective preacher. His first sermons were studied and polished, and marked him as one fitted for assuming high honors in his new calling. In 1837 he was ordained a Universalist minister, shortly afterward accepting a call to the pastorate of the Independent Christian Church of Richmond, Va., a society made up of both Universalists and Unitarians. His work at Richmond was so successful that in 1840 the Universalists of Charlestown, Mass., called him to take charge of their growing congregation, then left without a pastor by the death of the lamented Thomas S.[F.] King. His first sermon, entitled "Faith," was noteworthy as a most eloquent and touching tribute to the beloved dead. For six years the talented young clergyman continued to fill the Charlestown pulpit, rising rapidly in reputation both as a preacher and a powerful advocate of the reforms which were then agitating the public mind. His efforts in the cause of temperance and education were distinguished by great talent and ability, and proved widely influential. It was well said of him that his eloquence was ever at the call of humanity. The years that passed were fruitful in self-culture to the young and aspiring pulpit orator. It was a great thing for him, not yet in his thirtieth year, to number among his constant auditors such men as Richard Frothingham, the eminent historian and journalist; Prof. Tweed, perhaps the most finished literary critic of his day in New-England; and Thomas Starr King, full of talents and promise, and just on the verge of entering the ministry of which he afterward became so great an ornament. Seldom were Pastor and people in thought, taste and aspirations more fittingly adjusted to each other. His sermons and lectures at that period are by common consent adjudged to be fully equal in force and brilliancy to those which afterward marked his Metropolitan career.

In 1842 Mr. Chapin was appointed a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, and two years later was selected for the honor of preaching the annual election sermon before the Legislature. From Charlestown he was called to share the charge of the School-Street Church of Boston with Hosea Ballou. This was in 1846. Two years later, after displaying the same sterling qualities that had won such admiration in his Charlestown pastorate, he received a call from the Church of the Divine Paternity, then worshipping in Murray-street, New-York, with which the rest of his career was so intimately associated. He accepted the call, removed to New-York within the month, and preached his first sermon on the 20th of May, 1848. In the first as well as in all the subsequent years of his ministry he

won golden opinions of his people. In the Summer of 1849 he sailed for Europe, visiting among other points of interest, the Peace Convention then in session at Frankfort-on-the-Main, where he delivered a memorable address, which received, as it merited, the warmest commendation. Of this eloquent effort the London *Nonconformist* of September following said: "M. A. Cocquerel, the active and eloquent son of the famous Minister of the Oratoire, in Paris, elicited much applause by a spirit-stirring address. To him succeeded various speakers, the time of the meeting fast expiring, among whom was the Rev. Mr. Chapin, who by masculine eloquence, ready utterance, and apt imagery fairly carried away the audience with him. He is decidedly the most effective American speaker whom it has ever been our lot to hear." These words, it must be remembered, were written at a time when transatlantic views of America and Americans were the reverse of flattering, at a period when the note-books of Basil Hall and Charles Dickens had given a low idea of Americans and things American to the society of Europe.

On his return from abroad Mr. Chapin resumed preaching in the Murray-street church with all his old force and eloquence, the mutual regard of Pastor and people ripening into an attachment which has few parallels in the religious history of New-York. On political as on theological questions he did not hesitate to speak his mind boldly and manfully whenever he thought it incumbent on himself to do so, and even when his so doing was liable to be attended by unpleasant consequences. The Kansas-Nebraska legislation, by which the Territories, once made sacred to freedom, were thrown open to the advancing strides of the slave power, were denounced by him in eloquence which aroused a responsive echo in the heart of the anti-slavery North. His speeches later on, when the encroachments of slavery was fast precipitating the civil war, had the true ring of free thought and free aspiration about them, and commanded the respect of his opponents equally with the admiration of his friends. In his new church, at Spring-street, formerly occupied by Dr. [Henry] Bellows, he gathered each Sunday congregations representative of the best, freest, and most progressive elements of Northern life. Among those who thronged to hear him were eminent statesmen from the North and West, many of whom, it is said, timed their visits to the Metropolis so as to include a Sunday of his preaching. In addition to his pulpit labors, which were formidable enough, he added the exhaustive work of a lecturer, traveling thousands of miles, and addressing audiences in every part of the East and North. He was indefatigable in fulfilling his engagements, and made it a point of honor never to disappoint an audience. On one occasion after lecturing at Watertown, in this State, he took a sleigh and drove all the way to Ogdensburg, on the Canadian border, in time to lecture there on the following evening. Under this accumulated load of duties his health showed signs of waning, and a second journey to Europe, with its consequent change of scene and air and rest from absorbing labor, was deemed necessary.

It was in the closing months of the Winter of 1860-61, when State after State was breaking away from the Union, and the insolent slave power was gathering its force for the coming struggle, that the greatest effort was made to muzzle the pulpit of the North. Through all that long and gloomy Winter Dr. Chapin never hesitated to define his position frankly. In the cause of loyalty and order he never

scrupled to utter sentiments that to some of his hearers seemed akin to that dreadful bugbear of conservative church-goers—"political preaching." On one occasion, just before the firing on Sumter, and when he had urged upon his people the necessity of standing firmly by the national Government, and against the outgoing traitors, certain Southern sympathizers filed down the aisle, banging their pew-doors after them, to show their contempt for the Pastor's utterances. Heads were turned in all directions, and everybody was disconcerted save the man in the pulpit. With a wave of his hand he quelled the rising confusion, and quietly said: "It is all right, my friends. You need not be startled. Those who hold pews in this church are entitled to do what they please with them, but if they think such ownership implies any stock in my conscience, I want to correct that idea on the spot." He never was troubled again with signs of dissent, and the vast majority of his congregation enthusiastically upheld the position he had taken. Throughout the war the Union arms and the principles of freedom had no more powerful advocate than Dr. Chapin. He early foresaw the outcome of the conflict, and rightly predicted that when the first strength of the Confederates was exhausted, the superior force and staying power of the North would conquer.

In 1866 Dr. Chapin removed with his congregation to the present elegant brown-stone church at Fifth-avenue and Forth-fifth street, erected, with the land, at a cost of nearly a quarter of a million dollars. In this church such men as C. P. Huntington, of the Central Pacific Railroad; George C. Lake, Collector Merritt, David Dudley Field, Silas C. Herring, Frank Carpenter, the artist; William Belden, and Charles L. Stickney, were among the regular worshipers. The music and appointments were on a very liberal scale, and the Pastor's salary was fixed at the handsome sum of $10,000 per year. It was also under his auspices that the Chapin Home for the Aged was, in 1869, erected at Sixty-sixth street and Lexington-avenue, at a cost of $83,000, with the principal members of his church as officers and Directors. Miss Emma Abbot and Miss Thirsby first won distinction as members of the choir of Dr. Chapin's church. The late Horace Greeley was another member of the church, and humorous stories are told of his falling asleep during service. It was said of him that he could half slumber through the sermon and repeat more of it afterward than the most wide-awake of the audience. George Kellock, the warm-hearted Superintendent of Out-door Poor in the Department of Charities and Correction, used to sit next to Mr. Greeley, and, it is said, was accustomed to nudge him when he fell asleep.

As a preacher, Dr. Chapin was ripe, scholarly, and eloquent. His sermons, while abounding in original thought, were polished to the last degree, and in language as in sentiment were models of elegant and perspicuous English. Most of them were prepared elaborately and with care, and were enjoyed when read or when heard from the author's lips. While a liberal of the liberals, always favorable to wise reforms and progressive ideas, he carefully avoided all doubtful beliefs which tended to lower man's conception of the Creator and of his own dignity. Though belonging to an unorthodox church, he never swerved a hair's breadth from true religion. He believed in God and immortality, and never yielded a single one of the fundamental truths of the Bible. In a beautiful sermon on "The Immortality of the Soul," published in "The Chaplet of Thorns" many years since, he met the

arguments of the scientific school who deny God by the argument since polarized by Buckle, namely, that the self-consciousness of man is the best evidence that he is really immortal. His views on these topics tended to make him a favorite with clergymen of opposite schools, and in the silver wedding celebrated by his church on the 20th of May, 1873, in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his installation, ministers from almost every denomination in the City took part.

Dr. Chapin was not only a polished pulpit orator, but a profound student and exhaustive reader. Few clergymen were better versed in English literature and theology, and his magnificent library of from 15,000 to 20,000 volumes, selected with great care and taste, testifies to his rank in this regard. The collection occupies the whole of the second story of his late residence, and is regarded as one of the most valuable private collections in New-York. He was constantly adding to it, and it was a great hobby with him to buy and read everything of merit that was published. He used to bring home books in carriage loads, and spent weeks in reading them. One of his favorite sayings was that when he left the pulpit he would be able to enjoy life in his library.

To the last his mind remained clear, the only evidence of waning power being his nervousness and regard to trifling matters connected with the church. He preached his last sermon on Palm Sunday of last year, and was so weak that it was feared he would not be able to finish the service. He went to Europe shortly afterward, but came back unrefreshed. Since then his powers have gradually failed, and his nervousness has increased until it ended in his sudden and peaceful passing away.

Dr. Chapin received the degree of D.D. from Harvard University, and that of LL.D from Tufts College. He was a member of the New-York Historical Society and of the Century Club, but belonged to no other clubs or societies outside of those connected with his church. His list of published works is long, and embraces "Duties of Young Men," "Duties of Young Women," "Characters in the Gospel," "Communion Hours," "Discourses on the Lord's Prayer," "Chaplet of Thorns," "Moral Aspects of City Lie," "Humanity in the City," "True Manliness," and "Discourses on the Book of Proverbs." His last work was "Lessons of Faith and Life," published a few months since. He leaves, besides a widow, a family of two sons, one daughter, and five grand-children. Frederick H., one of the sons, is a dry-goods merchant doing business in this City; the other is Dr. Sydney H. Chapin, a physician at Castle Garden. The daughter [Mary] is the wife of Mr. Charles Davison, a produce merchant in Broad-street.

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