Annie E. Johnson, January 21, 1826, January 8, 1894

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Annie E. Johnson.

A Memorial.
ANNIE E. JOHNSON.

JANUARY 21, 1826.
JANUARY 8, 1894.

"Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world."

Boston:
PRESS OF SKINNER, BARTLETT & CO.
1894.
ANNIE ELIZABETH JOHNSON

Was born in Alna, Me., into the household of a country pastor, Jan. 21, 1826. She died in Bradford, Mass., the beloved and honored Principal of its Academy, Jan. 8, 1894.

Miss Johnson’s father, the Rev. Samuel Johnson, was an able and well-known clergyman, for some years pastor of the Congregational Church in Saco, Me., and, at the time of his death, the Secretary of the Maine Missionary Society. He died while his children were all young, and Annie, the eldest daughter, early became the devoted helper of her family. When she was only ten years old she wrote to her mother, “I will study hard and help you take care of the children,” a promise nobly fulfilled. Mrs. Johnson was a Whittier, of the same stock with the poet, between whom and this daughter there developed a hearty and lasting friendship. Both parents were people of marked individuality, and their daughter combined the best traits of each.

She began to teach before she was fourteen, in a private school in Hallowell. With slight exceptions, a break in her early work, and two brief European tours, she taught to the end. “I should never have taught if I had not been obliged to,” she used to say. It was characteristic of her that, being “obliged to,” she put her heart into the work; and she always added, with kindling eye and ringing tone, “I have had a good time out of it.”
Soon after her husband’s death Mrs. Johnson took her little family to Brunswick, and Bowdoin College became an important factor in their mental history. No woman’s college, not even the seminary of those days, assisted Annie’s growth. Called upon to teach trigonometry, which she had never studied, she said to Prof. William Smyth, one of the most influential of her early helpers, “I cannot do it.” “Yes, you can. Come to me and I will help you if you get into difficulty.” Nobody who knew Prof. Smyth or Miss Johnson will doubt that that work was well done. She used to be asked where she graduated. Prof. Smyth told her to say Bowdoin College. His son, Prof. Egbert C. Smyth, has a strong impression that, while her younger brother was in college, Miss Johnson practically took the course, so that Prof. Smyth’s direction had a broad basis in fact. Before she was twenty she had taught in Brunswick, Gardiner, and Winthrop, and in Methuen, Mass., and then she went to Virginia to be a governess. She came home to teach in the Brunswick High School. One of her pupils there, afterward a college graduate and professor, writes: “School was always a terror for me except those blessed days when Miss Annie taught our class and gave me the first idea that a teacher might be a companion to her pupil. I have always had the deepest love and respect for her ever since.” Prof. Smyth afterward secured for Miss Johnson a position in Poughkeepsie, N. Y., whence she was called to the State Normal School at Framingham, Mass., of which, in a few years, she became principal. She was the first woman ever chosen to be the principal of a Normal School in this country. She filled that place for nine years, only leaving it to accept the headship of Bradford Academy, at the beginning of the school year of 1875.

The records of the Alumnae Association of the Nor-
mal School at Framingham thus testify to the value of her work there:—

"She was put at the head of the school when it was at the lowest ebb of effectiveness, and very few women would have had the nerve and force with which she held on through manifold trials till she had lifted it out of the depths and laid broad and sure foundations for its prosperity."

When she came to Bradford she was given the highest salary known to be paid to any woman among the teachers of our land.

In Miss Johnson four characteristics were pre-eminent: good sense; the variety of her information; the readiness with which she could use it; piety. Her good sense was her own and never forsook her. Everything was brought to its severe practical test.

Her versatility showed itself in word and in deed. She could pass from talk on metaphysics with Dr. Hopkins to talk about astronomy with Prof. Young. If a hymn were named, she could repeat it; or a word, she could discuss it; or a flower, she could tell its habits and its home. She understood her own powers and she did not foolishly depreciate her knowledge, but she held it in slight esteem. To one who said, "One of my great sorrows is that circumstances have forbidden me to be a scholar," she answered, "I understand what you mean; I feel just so myself." The fact that she had covered so much ground and covered it so well sometimes disheartened and sometimes encouraged those who worked with her. I remember to have heard one woman say, "I expect Miss Johnson to be a better scholar and a better teacher than I am, but I cannot be content to see her do prettier needlework and make a better oyster stew." Her piety was as much a part of her as her intelligence. It was both conservative and liberal; conservative of the
essentials of Christian faith; liberal in interpretation, in methods, in spirit. The way in which she met sorrow and trouble was the way known only to those whose lives are "hid with Christ."

Miss Johnson's sympathy with girls was deeply impressive to those who taught with her. In her early days at Bradford she had not left off playing active games with them, and some of the pupils of that time will recall the fox and geese in her own parlor; while many of later years must remember her delight when the gymnasium and bowling alley were ready for them. The girls could not always recognize her sympathy. "I have to represent authority too much to get at them as easily as you can," she used to say. In one memorable instance of school discipline, I suppose one girl thought Miss Johnson was severity incarnate. She did not see the other side; she did not hear her say, "I have been justice; now you go and be mercy; I can't leave her feeling so." The girls did not see into the teachers' meetings. They did not know how quickly when mischief or evil was reported of some scholar Miss Johnson was roused to the defensive. "Let us be very careful to look at it from the girls' point of view." How familiar words like those grew to us. How often I have heard a teacher new to her methods say, "It is of no use to report anything to Miss Johnson, she always takes the girls' part." Every such teacher came to know better, to know that Miss Johnson took no "part" but that of charity and truth and right.

The religious services that opened the day's work in the schoolroom were made to be of the greatest help to that work. Miss Johnson's reading of the Scriptures was wonderful. "How real she makes those old stories," somebody whispered when she was reading in Genesis. She made even schoolgirls follow and get a great deal out
of the Book of Job. Those morning exercises were never monotonous. Sometimes there was rapid comment upon the Scripture; sometimes there was none. Any special experience of the household met its treatment there. “I used to wish to be able to write shorthand so as to take down her talks and prayers, so much more appropriate and helpful than those of most ministers,” writes a fellow-teacher, of these services. Those prayers uplifted us, but they never carried us to any unreal world; rather they brought down a little of heaven’s strength and peace into our lives. That we might do our work well, that we might be faithful in the place where the Lord had set us, that was the burden of her prayers for us. But how far they went beyond our needs—how many things we learned to pray for!

Sometimes we had entertainments of a Friday evening in the school hall. It was more convenient then to have our evening worship after the amusement instead of directly after supper. I used to marvel at the power which could turn so many girls so quickly from merry-making to devotion. One night a gay girl, who had been taking a brilliant part, said, “Oh, I can’t bear to stop and have prayers—it seems so incongruous.” Ten minutes later she whispered, “This has been the best of it all.” Some of the village people who were occasional spectators of the simple entertainments said that the part they enjoyed most was “Miss Johnson’s prayer at the end.”

Our Sunday night meetings—how many a woman struggling under heavy burdens, rent by sore temptations, has longingly remembered them. Only the Lord knows how many they have comforted and helped.

Miss Johnson never was content without rousing and interesting the girls. She never was content with the mere stirring of emotion. Religious sentiment with her
counted for very little. Practical piety was what she sought to promote. Faithfulness in the relations of daily life; right living the test of belief; growth,—these were what she emphasized.

One of her scholars, Mary R. Hamlin, a teacher at Hampton, Va., and the daughter of Rev. Dr. Hamlin, so well known east and west, allows me to quote from an article contributed by her to *The Outlook*, which shows Miss Johnson from the pupils’ standpoint.

“As a teacher she possessed the Mark Hopkins power of ‘generating thought’ and independent conclusions in her students. In her were united marked firmness and decision of character with great breadth of view. She had a habit of going to the core of a matter and of forming impartial judgments on the merits of a case, regardless of her own tastes or of conventionalities and unworthy traditions. Her intellectual ability was varied and remarkable. A drive with her in early spring was a liberal education in botany, as the haunts of hepatica and adder’s-tongue were pointed out, the beauty and meaning of stamen and pistil unfolded, and the way home shortened by quotations from her rich treasure-house of floral poetry. Or did we gather in her parlor for a chat on Saturday evening, after showing a lively interest in the many trifles so important to youthful minds, out would come a volume, perhaps of the ‘Biglow Papers,’ ‘Bird o’ fredom Sawin’s’ raciness would be brought out as never before by her rendering, and she would join in the laughter over it until the tears ran down her cheeks. Or else we were delighted with Whittier’s mountain and river music, or Milton’s organ-swell of words.

“I think she governed us by her confidence in us. There was a great freedom of detail about that Bradford life, for we were put upon our honor. If we betrayed the
trust, a certain look in her keen, penetrating eyes was the most potent reproof, and more effective than a volley of rebukes from other authorities.

“She expected us to take an interest in politics. Was there a strong Democrat or Republican in the ranks? Woe to her if she could not give a reason for the faith that was in her! She generally made haste to study up the matter after a few trenchant questions from the Principal.

“The mental and moral philosophy classes gave a wide arena for her peculiar abilities. One could not be caught napping there—the results were too disastrous. We learned to use all our powers in answering her questions, for if she had the slightest suspicion that our conclusions were taken second-hand, even from herself, she would so knock away the ground that there was nothing left to stand on.

“She put us at work in Foreign Missionary Societies and Home Missionary auxiliaries; she started us in the history of architecture; she caused us to become familiar with parliamentary law in the management of our own school affairs; she believed in an all-round development even for the non-collegiate girl.

“Perhaps her strongest influence over us was in her religious teaching. Her Sunday evening talks opened up to us the spiritual realities of life. In a very unusual way she brought the deepest thought and poetry to bear upon the most practical affairs.”

Missionary work was something in which Miss Johnson’s soul took delight. The call to the front never came to her, but she was one of the leaders in that great division of Christ’s army which replenishes those who do frontier service. Her pupils will remember how she stimulated them to help the poor, the neglected, and the ignorant everywhere. Those who became missionaries know how her helpfulness followed them. One who was never her
scholar, Miss Proctor, once the highly valued principal of the school for girls in Aintab, Turkey, says, "I met Miss Johnson first in 1869 when on a visit to my Alma Mater at Framingham. She sent me, in 1873, one of her best girls, Corinna Shattuck. Miss Johnson's friendship was very precious to me. She was so sensible, so true, so free from cant. She was very benevolent, 'a hilarious giver,' after Dr. A. J. Gordon's own heart. She told me to let her know whenever I had any special call for aid which I deemed worthy, and also told me what time of the year her funds would be most available. She never declined any call I brought to her notice." Miss Shattuck, now in Oorfa, Turkey, writes, "Dear Miss Johnson! She lives in many a life on earth. She was so good and so able. Few could so impart to others. She held a peculiar place in my heart, and perhaps no teacher has done so much for me mentally as she did. I had her four blessed years! In the twenty years since coming to Turkey, next to being true to God, I have had as my impelling motive the desire to honor my two teachers of the Normal School, Miss Johnson and Miss Hyde. Not only to have had her as my teacher in school, but all these twenty years since as my correspondent, I consider one of the high privileges of my life. This, too, when, in answer to my inquiry, she told me, several years ago, that she estimated the number of her pupils at about three thousand."

One of them, from Bradford Academy, now Mrs. Robert A. Hume, of India, writes, "Nothing gave Miss Johnson deeper satisfaction than to know that her pupils were doing some good work. She lent wholehearted interest and help to all such. Those engaged in Mission work, whether Home or Foreign, always had her special sympathy and co-operation. I have never written her a letter telling of my work and its needs without getting
an encouraging letter, accompanied often by material aid which she had solicited and obtained. I never sent her a letter asking for aid which was urgently needed without feeling sure that she would never fail me. When she heard of any aggressive work, her animated eyes always told of her entire attention and interest, and if she could help carry forward any such movement she seemed so much more glad. While under her care I remember hearing much about missions from her lips. Only once do I remember her reading us a missionary letter, in which the lady described a difficult journey among an unlettered people in a most humorous way, yet so setting forth her true and noble motive that it gained Miss Johnson's entire approval. She believed in a cheerful missionary life, and in letters that were not too prosy and did not show too much the dark side.

"I cannot shed tears for Miss Johnson, for I have from the first been able to think of her as in a place where her large-hearted nature and spirituality could find perfect scope; but when I think of returning to India and entering again upon my work without her sympathy, her letters, and her aid, I have no words to tell how I shall miss her, and no one can take her place. She more than kept her promise to me when on one of the saddest days of my life she took me in her arms and said, 'Katie, you are my daughter now!' A mother could not have been truer to an own daughter than Miss Johnson was to me, and I doubt not many and many of her pupils looked to her as their spiritual mother. She shall be remembered for what she hath done."

The Board of Directors of the Woman's Home Missionary Association have on their records a minute from which we make the following extract:—

"Miss Johnson was one of the most earnest and active of the women who founded the Woman's Home
Missionary Association. Having learned through personal participation the value of organization in woman's work for Foreign Missions, her Christian zeal and foresight led her to enter with characteristic energy into the endeavor of enlisting all the women of our churches in prayer and efforts for Home Missions. At a meeting held in the vestry of Park Street Church, on the 4th of November, 1879, Miss Johnson was appointed to form a committee to draw up a constitution and take the other preliminary steps necessary to the formation of the Woman's Home Missionary Association. She was elected one of its first Vice-presidents, and the next year became a Director, holding the latter office during the remainder of her life. She was also, for some years, Chairman of the Board, resigning this position only when constrained to do so by the pressure of other and prior duties.

"We are unable adequately to express our appreciation of what Miss Johnson has been to this Association, nor can we cease to wonder at the generosity with which she gave herself to its service, as we remember the responsibilities which rested upon her in the successful conduct of a great school, and the multitude of beneficent activities into which she poured her life.

"Endowed by nature with a vigorous constitution, with intellectual gifts of a high order, and a great heart, she had also the firmness of purpose requisite to the careful cultivation and discipline of her varied powers. Loving her Lord with ardent devotion, she loved also the growth of his kingdom and gave herself gladly to its upbuilding. This was the secret spring of her consecration to the interests of this Association. How warm was her sympathy for the work and the welfare of our missionaries, how broad her outlook, how unwearily she gave of her time, her thought, her power of patient investigation,
her cheerful courage and her ripened wisdom, is known to us all.

"In the public meetings of the Association Miss Johnson's voice was often heard in wise counsel, in inspiring address and earnest petition, and her pen was active in our literature, in correspondence with our missionaries, and in stimulating the zeal of our Auxiliaries. She had much at heart, also, and labored effectively in the gradual development of our organization through the formation of the Alliances."

The home and the foreign field were alike to her, for "the field is the world." Yet with her the near was never lost in the far away.

The largeness of Miss Johnson's nature made her many-sided, and so she was enabled to touch many people at many points. One who was with her at Hancock Point, last summer, said, "Miss Johnson carried Hancock Point by storm. I never met so many bright women at a summer resort. With them she discussed college settlements and new theology; to them she read Browning, and repeated hymns of a Sunday night; and she charmed them all. For those who were less intellectual she had new styles of fancy-work, and she charmed them too."

To the child of the party she was as much as to the elders. Another woman said of those impromptu Browning readings, "They were wonderful to me in their adaptation. She made one piece set off another so well." Indeed, to hear her pass from "The Spanish Cloister" to "Love Among the Ruins" was a revelation of the power of the human voice and of the versatility of the human mind.

Browning was a great favorite with her, and in their broad range, their keen sense of humor, their intense sympathy with human nature, and their fulness of life, they had much in common.

Among American poets, she had deep sympathy with
the spirituality of Whittier, and unfailing enjoyment in the keenness, the breadth, the depth of Lowell. She read equally well "The Biglow Papers," "After the Burial," and "The Commemoration Ode."

To hear Miss Johnson talk was sometimes funnier than a comedy, and sometimes better than a sermon. To live with her was an inspiration.

This world was very rich and full to her. She was in no haste to leave it. But she was always mindful of "a better country." The delicious scents and sights of a spring morning, the rapture of a summer day, the glory of an autumn landscape, all turned her thought toward the heavenly land. Art in its varied expressions was a joy to her. She delighted, above all, in people.

Yet from the great cities of our own and other lands, from picture-gallery and cathedral, from the revelations of human history and human life and human nature in which she revelled ("Nobody ever had a better time in Venice than I," she wrote from her last European journey), her quick imagination flew to "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Long ago she used to say, "I dread nothing but the passage," and in these later years I believe she ceased to think much about that, though it was easy to see that she listened more intently for the call, that she was growing more ready to go. Her letters show this. Here is an extract from one written to a dear friend, Dec. 31, 1892: "How good it will be to come to the country where the beloveds do not fade from us. And yet I like this world still. It holds so many good things, but not so many as the other land, and the balance is constantly growing there."

Before she wrote those words, in January, 1892, there came the first slight seizure, the precursor of that stroke of apoplexy which has taken her away. Her physician told
her what it meant and advised her to leave teaching for rest. She answered, "Doctor, I believe the Lord has put me here, and I am going to 'occupy till he comes.'" And she did. With the work of a term freshly ended, and the packing of her Christmas gifts just done, she laid down all earthly cares. There were a few weeks of quiet sleep and calm waking. There was no pain. She knew her friends. Her sister and her niece were with her, and from those who were at the Academy she received the tenderest care. Sometimes she talked a little. "All right," or "It will all come out right," were among her most frequent words.

The end came peacefully just before noon on the second Monday of January. It was significant of her life that she wore for burial the gown into which her own hands had just basted the lace for a wedding, her last bit of sewing. All life was consecrated to her, and it was no long step from the wedding to the funeral, from marriage festivities here to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

On Tuesday morning, at eight o'clock, there were brief services in the school hall, conducted by Prof. Egbert C. Smyth, of Andover Theological Seminary, the dear friend of almost a lifetime. The school had gathered for its winter term, a few days before, so that teachers and scholars were all there. So were some of the trustees, among them Hon. George Cogswell, M.D., President of the Board, who has thrown so much of his life into Bradford Academy, who brought Miss Johnson there, who had efficiently supported her, and who came now to mourn her loss. Many friends from Bradford and Haverhill joined the school, going first to the room in which Miss Johnson lay, majestic in death.

Prof. Smyth read selections of Scripture, and they sang:—

"For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.

Alleluia."
Prof. Smyth’s prayer was "sermon and prayer in one. . . . The summing up of the traits of character which made Miss Johnson such a power was masterly and impressive and so true." A few of the teachers nearest to her followed other friends to Brunswick, where, at half past three, there were services in Miss Johnson’s own home, conducted by Dr. Mason, her pastor; Scripture selections, the hymn,

“One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er,
Nearer my parting hour am I
Than e'er I was before,”

and passages from Browning, with prayer and benediction.

Dr. Mason chose from Browning what he felt expressed Miss Johnson’s character, this stanza, with others, from "Reverie":—

“I know there shall dawn a day,
Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
That Power comes full in play?”

and this, from the Epilogue to "Asolando":—

“One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.”

Fit tribute to one who for sixty years had lived out God’s words to Joshua:—

“Be strong and of good courage.”

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them.

M. F. P.

May, 1894.