



ROBERT ATKINSON

## Rev. Robert Atkinson.

In the death of Rev. Robert Atkinson Ottawa University loses not only a faithful friend and generous supporter, but the service of one to whom more than any one else the institution owes its very existence. Mr. Atkinson became related to the school in its time of dire distress, and from the first has made the interests of its work his first consideration. In 1868, under commission of the American Home Mission Society, of the Board of which he then was a member, he came West to investigate the complicated affairs of the institution, and with such care, insight and skill did he conduct the inquiry, and so satisfactory was his report, that he was prevailed upon to return, as the representative of the Society, to adjust its difficulties. This proved to be no easy task, but one in which a man of lesser capabilities must surely have failed.

The Society had undertaken to carry out for the Government the terms of its treaty with the Ottawa Indians, by which they were to cede a large tract of land upon the condition that their children should be cared for and educated in the arts of civilization. The scheme proved to be impracticable, and the Society became involved in

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secured in the east. But this proved to be the least of his burdens as secretary of the college. Its property rights were soon questioned in the courts, and even Congress was called upon to act concerning the matter. There were not wanting interested persons to aid the opposition, and the battle was long and fiercely contested, and many times seemed to have turned against the institution. But the sagacity of the secretary was equal to every emergency, and his perseverance so tireless, that the cause eventually was won, at least so far as that the present estate was secured and the integrity of the college preserved. A single incident in this contest will suffice to show how extreme was the danger and how intrepid was the representative of the college. It became necessary on one occasion to secure the personal action of the president to stay execution of a congressional order, and Mr. Atkinson pursuing General Grant to his private residence at Long Branch secured a personal interview and the desired restraining order. By such heroic effort and determination were the fortunes of the

institution saved when its foes were many, and its friends were few

In many minor exigencies since that time, Mr. Atkinson has shown his fidelity and affection. When the first building was destroyed by fire and there were scarce funds for its replacement, he not only personally superintended its erection, but as well assisted in the getting out of the new materials for the purpose.

His gifts also, not to speak of the large measure of time he gratuitously bestowed, were generous and many. One thing in this connection should not fail of special note, he gave continuously, as occasion required and his means permitted, to the general work of the institution, and not specifically to any particular part which thereby should bear his distinctive mark. Such modesty should be memorialized, and it doubtless will be the pleasure of the University corporation at its first meeting to designate some suitable remembrance of Mr. Atkinson's distinguished devotion.

In the matter of ministerial education, closely connected with the general interests of the University, Mr. Atkinson had a deep concern, and the young men who will ever remember him in gratitude for encouragement, moral and material, are not a few. Since the organization of the educational society he has been the secretary, giving to it earnest attention, in seeking by voice and pen to enlist the churches in a more hearty support of this important phase of our work.

Beside his labors for Ottawa University the service he rendered in behalf of the denomination in the state was notable. With the permanent organization of the state convention he had much to do, and of its Board of Directors he has always been a most valuable member. His business pursuits calling him much about the state, he, through broad interest in the churches, became most intimate with their condition. Having also served as general missionary during the term of his service as secretary of the University, thus having much to do with the earlier work of many of the more important churches, his knowledge of their entire history was full and accurate. Of the convention itself he was several times president.

For this extensive usefulness he had peculiar qualifications. He possessed a physical constitution which enabled him to perform work which would quickly have crushed a man of ordinary powers. His mental capacity was large, and the range of his vision wide. His train-

ing also was peculiarly fortunate. Passing in early life through a business experience, he was able to make the most of his college opportunities, and profited largely by his association with the strong men who were his instructors, and who seem to have regarded him rather as a companion than as a pupil. His early college work was done in Bucknell. Later he entered Madison, now Colgate University, from the theological department of which in due course he graduated. He pursued a supplementary course in Union Seminary of New York, meantime engaging in missionary work in the city, in the prosecution of which he came into personal contact with the leading pastors.

At the conclusion of his studies he became pastor of the North Church of Newark, N. J., then a mission of the First Church, of which the celebrated Dr. Fish was then pastor. This work he undertook in preference to accepting the pastorate of either of two prominent churches to which he was called, because of the apparent needs and opportunities of the field. In eleven years of service here he developed a strong and influential independent body, with a splendid material equipment. For the building which was erected during this time he, by personal solicitation, secured \$65,000 outside of the membership of the church.

While in this he gave himself to a hearty interest in denominational affairs in the city, and became a member of the Board of Home Mission Society. His name was also connected with an influential temperance movement which brought great good to the city.

During the civil war he took a strong position, and more than once jeopardized his life in local demonstrations, and while not officially connected with the army, on special occasions he rendered notable service, visiting battlefields and giving heroic help.

Thus associated with the leaders in all great movements of the day, his naturally large mind and great heart were expanded, and all his powers trained for peculiar accomplishment.

In business affairs he was successful, especially in difficult undertakings. He thus secured a competency, and to the end of life figured prominently in commercial circles.

Since coming to Kansas Mr. Atkinson has been a faithful and honored member of the First Baptist Church of Ottawa, and nothing but the most extreme circumstances kept him from his place in all the services and

business meetings of the church. He never was able to understand why trifles should interfere with duty, and it at times his exhortations were strong even to the heroic, they were but the utterance of the convictions which governed his own life. He laid no sense of obligation on others which he himself did not gladly assume. His financial support was systematic and generous, never falling short of his share of the burdens.

For many years he was the leader of the large and successful adult Bible class, a work in which he took peculiar delight. He was also a life member of all the missionary societies of the denomination and annually enriched their treasuries by goodly contributions.

While intense in all his religious convictions, and strong in his denominational beliefs, he was broadly catholic in his attitude to others, and his inter-denominational fellowships were close and hearty.

Mr. Atkinson was born, of Scotch parentage, in Toronto, Canada, on the 24th of August, 1824, and died in Ottawa, Kansas, on the 17th of January, 1899, thus well on in his seventy-fifth year. His sickness was of short duration, and his end peaceful indeed. In 1858 he was joined in marriage to Miss Margaret Northup, by whom he had four children. Mrs. Hudson B. Topping, Mrs. Harry Brown, Robert Jr., and James N., all of whom survive him, and whom he was permitted to have about him in his last moments.

From this brief sketch many interesting incidents have necessarily been omitted, and only a most inadequate estimate can be made. Mr. Atkinson was a man of wide vision, clear perception, strong convictions, intrepid will, and indomitable perseverance; while to those who knew him best he was not lacking in great sympathy and tenderness. Concerned with great things, he had no interest in what seemed to him short-sighted measures, and many times, through his devotion to the interests involved, and his convictions of duty, he took strong positions the necessity for which to him personally was distasteful indeed.

As the days pass by, his splendid abilities will be increasingly missed and an appreciation of his character and service will constantly grow.

W. R. W.