

# JOSEPH BENSON MATHER.

Many of our readers will hear with regret of the death on Saturday, 17th May, 1890, of our old and respected fellow citizen, Mr. Joseph Benson Mather, at the age of 76. Mr. Mather was one of our oldest surviving colonists, having arrived in Tasmania in the year 1822. He was born in London in May, 1814. His father, Robert Mather, was of Scotch birth, and when a young man came up to London, where he became a freeman of the city and carried on business as a hosier in Sun-street, Bishopsgate-street. His mother was a daughter of the Rev. Joseph Benson, a man whose name is still held in honor as one of the chief friends and fellow workers with John and Charles Wesley in the great religious movement of the 18th century, and author of a commentary on the Bible, highly esteemed in the Wesleyan Church. In this work his daughter gave him valuable help.

About the year 1820, the colony of Van Diemen's Land began to attract attention in England as a desirable field for settlers with capital. The Rev. Wm. Horton—brother of Captain Horton, the founder of Horton College—was then the Wesleyan minister at Hobart, and he sent urgent representations to his co-religionists in England to induce an emigration of industrious and God-fearing men as settlers, whose influence and example might help to raise the tone of the community and to neutralise some of the evils rampant in a penal settlement. Amongst many others Mr. Robert Mather was induced to try his fortunes in the new colony, and selling off his London business, he sailed with his wife and family of young children in the barque Hope, towards the end of the year 1821. The ship proved unseaworthy, and had to put back to Ramsgate, where she was seized; the conduct of the owners in sending such a vessel to sea becoming the subject of a Parliamentary inquiry. After a three months detention, the barque Heroine, was provided by the Government to convey the passengers to their destination. Amongst those who sailed with the Mathers in the Heroine were several persons afterwards well known in Tasmania, viz., Messrs. Geo. Carr-Clark, John Walker, Henry Hopkins, John Dunn, James Turnbull, Lieut. Steele, and the Rev. George Clarke (father of the Rev. Geo. Clarke of Davey-street Church). After an eight months voyage, in the course of which the vessel put into Rio de Janeiro for water and provisions, the Heroine arrived in the Derwent 10th September, 1822. There were no wharves in those days, and passengers and cargo had to be landed at a little wooden jetty on the site of the present Old Wharf. The Mathers could not find a house in the "Camp" or "Settlement," as the town was then called, but secured as a temporary home a house on Potter's Hill, nearly opposite to the present Memorial Hall, Brisbane-street. A few cottages stood between it and the confines of the town, which did not then reach beyond Bathurst-street, but around it and beyond, up what is now Elizabeth-street, stretched the original bush, with one or two scattered dwellings towards Providence Valley. Robert Mather had brought a stock of goods with him, and built a store for his business at the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool streets, opposite Welch's, where Lloyd's-buildings now stand. The new store was the first shop of any pretensions which had been built in Hobart, and its size and handsome appointments excited much interest amongst the townspeople. In this shop, which he called "London House," Robert Mather commenced business. As in all newly-settled countries the stock-in-trade comprised all goods likely to be required by the colonists. There being no bank established, the storekeeper had to supply its place by issuing paper currency; and by receiving wheat and wool in exchange for supplies, he had also to discharge the duties of a merchant.

The eldest son, Joseph, who was eight years old when the family reached Hobart, received his first lessons at a school kept by a Mr. Stone in premises afterwards well-known as the office of the late Mr. Thomas Young, and occupying the spot where Heathorn's Hotel now stands. On the arrival from Scotland of Mr. James Thomson—a noted schoolmaster of those days, from whom many of our older colonists received their education and who was a competent and able man—the boy was transferred to his care. Robert Mather had come to Tasmania with the intention of fol-

lowing a country life, and after a few years he obtained from the Governor free grants of land, which were then allotted to settlers in proportion to their capital. The location, which contained 2,500 acres, was chosen at Muddy Plains, near Ralph's Bay Neck. Here Mr. Mather sank large sums of money on improvements which proved unremunerative. His young son, the subject of this notice, had in the meantime the principal care of the business in town. The farm did not prosper. Robert Mather, by his resistance to some arbitrary requirements of Colonel Arthur, had aroused that Governor's hostility, and the injury which his sturdy independence brought on him, in days when Governors were all-powerful, added to his other losses, compelled him to give up his property at Ralph's Bay, and eventually to wind up his affairs. On his return to Hobart in the year 1836, liberal friends came forward to help him, and he made a fresh start in partnership with his son Joseph as a woollen draper and hosier in the premises in Liverpool-street, which have ever since been occupied by the firm. It may be mentioned that when the new business began to prosper, not only were all the old creditors paid in full, but the moneys which had been subscribed by his friends were faithfully refunded to them.

Up to this time the family had belonged to the Wesleyan Church, but coming under the influence of Messrs. James Backhouse and George W. Walker, the well-remembered Quaker travellers and philanthropists, Mr. J. B. Mather, with others of his family, joined the Society of Friends. From that period he has devoted the earnest labour of a long life to the service of that religious body, to whose principles and practice he has always been warmly attached.

From the year 1836—with the exception of a short interval which he spent in a business house in Sydney—down to within a few years of his death, Mr. J. B. Mather's energies were almost wholly absorbed in his business. He was naturally of a retiring disposition, and never took any part in public affairs. But he had a large fund of quiet energy, and of the steady persistence derived from his Scottish ancestry, and in spite of frequent ill health he found opportunity to do no inconsiderable amount of religious and benevolent work in an unobtrusive way, and to pay occasional visits to the other colonies in connection with the religious work of the Society he loved so well. In the year 1874, he took his son, Mr. J. Francis Mather, into partnership in business, which has since been carried on under the name of "J. B. Mather and Son." From this time Mr. Mather began gradually to withdraw from the active management which he left to his son, and gave more time to the benevolent work which was always near his heart, and for which he, as well as his younger brother, the late Mr. Robert Andrew Mather, was so generally esteemed. In the Bible Society he had for many years taken a deep and active interest, and a few years since accepted the position of secretary, an office to which he gave much time and attention. In the management of the Ragged School he has also taken a prominent part, but his labours of late years have been chiefly occupied in the establishment and management of a training school for young criminals at the Cascades. The founding of this institution was largely due to the efforts of the father of the late Judge Giblin, but the carrying out of the work, which claimed much tact and thoughtful care, has fallen to a Board of Managers appointed by the Government. To this Board Mr. Mather has acted as secretary, grudging no time or trouble for the welfare of the boys committed to the care of the institution. Of the lads who have left this Reformatory, many are now in various parts of the country apprenticed to farmers, and apparently giving evidence of the good effect of the training which they have received.

Mr. Mather's interest in education was not confined to charitable and elementary schools. He entered warmly into the project of establishing a school having for its special object the superior education of the children belonging to his own religious community, on the wide and liberal lines for which the higher schools of the Society of Friends in the Home Country are so distinguished.

He lived to see his exertions crowned with a success far above his expectations in the establishment of the Friends' High School in premises of its own, not merely supplying the want for which it was founded, but attracting to it a large number of pupils from the general public. He was an active member of its committee and his face was familiar to the pupils, for scarcely a day passed without his visiting the schoolrooms.

Within the last few months advancing age was plainly telling on Mr. Mather. Several attacks of illness, especially of defective action of the heart, warned him that his days were drawing to a close. On Monday last he was attacked by influenza, and in his enfeebled condition he gradually sank under the depressing effects of that malady, till after only three days' illness he quietly expired at noon on Saturday.

Mr. Mather married in 1842 a daughter of the late Mr. Francis Cotton, of Swanport. Four children survive him; one son, Mr. J. F. Mather, who carries on the business, and three daughters, one of whom is married to Mr. O. H. Robey, and another to Mr. Wm. Benson, of Waratah, New Town.

Of Mr. Mather it may be emphatically said that he was a good man. He never came before the public, but his life was occupied in the daily round of homely duties and unobtrusive effort for the welfare of his fellow men, especially of those who were poor and needy. Such a life has little to show in the way of incident which can be recorded in the columns of a newspaper. But it is to such men, more perhaps than to those who hold a prominent place in the public eye, that a community owes its advancement in those things which go to build it up in the more important elements of national well-being.

Mr. Mather has been gathered to his fathers in a ripe old age, universally respected as a good citizen, and sincerely regretted by a large number of friends. His slight figure, clad in the quaint old Quaker garb, to which through all the changes of fashion he steadfastly adhered during 50 years, will be missed by many from the streets of Hobart, and by none more than by the poor and friendless, amongst whom he went about doing good.

## THE FUNERAL.

The universal respect in which Mr. J. B. Mather was held, was unmistakably evidenced in the large and representative gathering of every class of the community, who assembled at his late residence in Colville-street, and accompanied the remains to their final resting place in the burial ground belonging to the Society of Friends. The morning was brilliantly fine, and the impressiveness of the scene, as the large numbers both on foot and in carriages slowly followed the hearse, was heightened by the presence of a numerous band of boys, comprising the scholars of the Friends' School, and the inmates of the Boys' Reformatory, in whose welfare the deceased gentleman took such a warm interest. Around the open grave, on the side of which the coffin had been placed, there stood the relatives of the deceased, representative ministers of nearly every religious denomination, and many a man and woman, who, though deeply feeling their loss, could, through it all, bless God that such a man as Joseph Benson Mather had lived. For some minutes all remained silent, the large concourse reverently waiting the utterances of those who should be moved to address the assemblage. The first to speak was Mr. Henry Propsting, an old and valued friend, who was followed by Mr. J. Kidley Walker. Then Mr. S. Clernes, the master of the Friends' School, spoke of the joy that should fill all true hearts on such an occasion, when to depart was "far better," and that though "our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens," concluding with prayer. The Rev. George Clarke followed, testifying in eloquent words to the great and exceeding value of the quiet, Christ-like life, declaring that the Church of Christ owed more to such lives than to those of the gifted and eloquent whose fame filled the world. The last speaker was Mr. Francis Mather, son of the deceased. This most impressive service was fitly concluded with a hymn, sweetly sung by the children of the Ragged School, and then the large assemblage gradually dispersed, not unimpressed with a service, so reverently, so quietly, and so happily conducted.