

Lysander Spooner:  
One of the Old Guard of Abolition Heroes, Dies in His Eightieth Year After a  
Fortnight's Illness.

Boston Daily Globe, May 18, 1887.

**John Boyle O'Reilly Predicts a Monument to His Memory**

Yesterday Afternoon, at 12.50 o'clock, one of the most remarkable men who has ever walked the street of Boston departed this life at his residence, 109 Myrtle street. His name, Lysander Spooner, is known to but a few - to fewer perhaps than 30 years ago - but, as John Boyle O'Reilly says, it will some day be honored by millions. The illness which was the immediate cause of his death began about three weeks ago, but did not confine him to his house and bed until a week later. Since then he had been gradually sinking under the combined influence of rheumatism and bxxxxx fever. He would not consent to the calling of a doctor until a few days ago, having bitter antipathy to the medical profession of whatever school, and feeling that he knew his own constitution better than any on could know it for him, and finally when on was summoned he would not take his medicines. However, it made no difference, as the doctor said there was no hope of his recovery. Being of a very sanguine temperament, he would not believe that his illness was fatal until Thursday last. Friday he lapsed into a comatose condition, and from Friday evening till Saturday noon, when he died without a struggle, he was entirely unconscious.

MR. Spooner was in his eightieth year, having been born in Athol January 19, 1808. A farmer's boy, he left agricultural life on becoming a man, and at the age of 25 entered the law office of John Davis in Worcester, continuing his studies later with another distinguished lawyer of the same city, Charles Allen. At that time there was a law on the statute books requiring three years' extra study from men not college bred as a condition of admission to the bar. Then it was that he first displayed that

**Preference for Natural Justice**

over artificial legislation which ever characterized him in after life. In defiance of the statute, he opened a law office in Worcester, and began his career as a pamphleteer by supplying each member of the Legislature with an address which made the objectionable statute so ridiculous that it was straightaway repealed. The next six years of his life he spent in Ohio, where, among other notable acts, he attempted, with the aid of Noah H. Swayne, who afterwards sat on the United States supreme bench, which his then coadjutor has since held up to unsparing ridicule, to restrain the State Board of Public Works from draining the Maumee river, a navigable stream. The effort failed, but Mr. Spooner never allowed failure to daunt him in his life-long battle with injustice.

His next attack upon the cohorts of evil was far more successful, and the resultant benefits are shared today by every American citizen. In those days, the rate of postage were inordinately high, and he determined to lower them by subjecting them to competition. He first tried to convince the people that the government should not monopolize the mail business, but, not succeeding, he determined, as when he opened his law office, to strike out for himself. Therefore in 1844 he established an independent mail from Boston to New York, afterward extending it to Philadelphia and Baltimore, carrying letters at the uniform rate of five cents. The business grew rapidly, but the government officials soon overwhelmed him with prosecutions. Every letter he carried could be made the basis of a suit. He tried to get the attorneys of the department to let the question go to the last tribunal on one test east, waiving the proceedings on the others for the time being, but this did not suit their purpose, which was to crush him with the weight of legal expenses, and thus sooner drive him from the field. This they succeeded in doing in the course of seven or eight months. He had not the means to defend the numerous cases piled up against him and was compelled to surrender. Others, following his example, had established private mails, and they, too, were forced to retire. But the moral victory was his. He had demonstrated that a low rate of postage would support the department, something of which the people, but for his action at that time might not have been convinced for many years afterward. So well had he done his work that in the next year Congress made the first reduction in postage rates, followed in 1851 and in subsequent years with still further reductions, until now a letter weighing an ounce is carried from Maine to California for Two cents. If it be asked who is

## **the "Father of Cheap Postage"**

in this country, the answer is that the honorable title belongs to no man so much as to Lysander Spooner.

In all the years that he was engaged in such active warfare he found time for vigorous controversy upon all questions of interest, religious, political or social. In 1835 he published a pamphlet entitled, "A Deist's Reply to the Alleged Supernatural Evidences of Christianity," and another entitled, "The Deist's Immortality and an Essay on Man's Accountability for His Belief," both of which are very vigorously written and indicate striking independence of mind, but which in the light of modern science and later researches are seen to be of little value. Though a disbeliever in all the accepted systems of religion, including Christianity, MR. Spooner was not an atheist or a materialist. He firmly believed in the existence of a deity, and had little doubt of a future life.

Apropos of his religious views, the following anecdote may be interesting. At the time when the Millerite craze was at its height, and the end of the world was expected momentarily, some of the believers abandoned all work and neglected their crops, in view of the approaching catastrophe. At Athol several of these were arrested on a charge of vagrancy, the complain being made by the more orthodox sects. The prosecution secured lawyers from adjoining towns and prepared to crush the victims, who were non-resistant, would employ no counsel, and had to be carried bodily into court. Mr. Spooner was present, and at the critical moment pointed out a flaw in the indictments which set the prisoners free. The orthodox were highly indignant at this result, and one of the ministers said to Mr. Spooner:

"What do you get for your conduct in this matter?"

"The satisfaction," answered Mr. Spooner in a tone of sarcasm so subtle that probably the minister did not appreciate it, "of doing everything in my power to establish the Christian religion."

## **In the Anti-Slavery Conflict**

Mr. Spooner was a veteran, and in connection with it he produced the work which won greater fame than any other he ever wrote, his remarkable essay on "The Unconstitutionality of Slavery." His conclusions were bitterly opposed by the Garrisonians, who held that the Constitution was "an agreement with death and a covenant with hell," but Mr. Spooner, though denying the authority of the Constitution even more fundamentally than Garrison, maintained - and successful, it is now generally believed - that it contained no sanction of the institution of slavery. His book became the text-book of the Liberty party, and was warmly supported by Gerrit Smith, Elizur Wright, and all the anti-Garrisonians.

Another important work was his treatise on "Trial by Jury," in which he showed that juries should be drawn by lot from the whole body of citizens, and that they should always be judges of the law as well as of the facts.

One of his later pamphlets, entitled "Revolution," was published anonymously, and dealt with the Irish question in a letter to the Earl of Dunraven. An edition of 100,000 copies was published by some Irishmen of this city and New York, most of which was distributed among the English aristocracy and official classes, and in the democratic circles of England, Ireland and Canada. This was intended as the first of a series, but circumstances prevented the completion of the plan.

Space cannot be spared for separate treatment of each of his voluminous writings, among which are the following: "Poverty, its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure"; "A Defence of Fugitive Slaves," against the fugitive slave act of 1850; "Address to the Free Constitutionalists"; "A New System of Paper Currency"; "The Law of Intellectual Property"; "Considerations for Bankers and Bondholders"; "No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority"; "Illegality of the Trial of J.W. Webster"; "Our Financiers: Their Ignorance, Usurpations and Fraud"; "The Paw of Prices; A Demonstration of the Necessity for an Indefinite Increase of Money"; "Gold and Silver as Standards of Value," and "Universal Wealth." In the New Age, a weekly established in this city some dozen years

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### **His Latest Works**

Hear the following long titles: "Natural Law, or the Science of Justice: A Treatise on Natural Law, Natural Justice, Natural Rights, Natural Liberty, and Natural Society; Showing That All Legislation Whatever is an Absurdity, a Usurpation and a Crime," and "A Letter to Grover Cleveland on His False Inaugural Address, the Usurpation and Crimes of Lawmakers and Judges, and the Consequent Poverty, Ignorance, and Servitude of the People." The latter, which is no in pamphlet, but was originally published in the Anarchist organ, Liberty, is the greatest he ever wrote in the opinion of his friends. Though Mr. Spooner did not call himself an Anarchist, his political and financial views coincided more nearly with those of the Individualistic Anarchists than with those of any other school.

Mr. Spooner left many manuscripts, and was engaged until his last sickness in daily labor upon his writings, which was performed cheerfully in the Athenaeum Library.

Upon almost every subject, this large-hearted man was at odds with his day and generation. He was intensely in earnest and far in advance of the average sentiment. While he was possessed of many lovable qualities, his personality was so pronounced and his convictions of duty so strong that he had few lasting affiliations with friends. But such as he had were of the strongest. Like John the Baptist, he performed his chosen mission alone and by his own peculiar methods accomplished his work and lived to rejoice with the friends of freedom over the total abolition of the accursed and hated system of human slavery. His contemporaries one and all bear glad testimony to his uncompromising honesty and integrity of purpose and to the transcendent nobility of his manhood. After a stormy and troubled life, a life full of sacrifices and bitter strifes he sleeps his last sleep. He has gone, and there is one less of that rapidly-dwindling number of heroes who counted their lives and their fortunes as nothing in the scale against the rights of their weak and oppressed brethren. Deceased leaves no family, never having been married.

His funeral will be held at his late residence, 109 Myrtle street, at 2.30 o'clock, and among the several addresses will be one by

### **John Boyle O'Reilly**

That gentleman, in commenting yesterday on the character of the deceased, said he was one of the greatest men the world ever saw. A man whose nature was so large and his love for humanity so great that he distinguished no race or creed or nationality. In his own way, in his humble living, as an anchorite, he made his beneficence felt to every hand. Still, with all his power to do good to his fellow men, but few had ever heard of him, and fewer still were privileged with his acquaintance. His loss to the country was the greatest since the death of Emerson.

He was even a greater man than Emerson, and Mr. O'Reilly prophesied that a monument would be erected to perpetuate his memory in 20 years, or 50 years at the farthest.