

THE GOSPEL MESSENGER,

OR UNIVERSALIST ADVOCATE.

[AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT, FOR BEHOLD ! I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH SHALL BE UNTO ALL PEOPLE.—Luk 2 : 10.]

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ENDLESS PUNISHMENT VERSUS UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

"Search the Scriptures."

O how weak
Is mortal man! How trifling, how confined
His scope of vision!—Puffed with confidence,
His phrase grows big with immortality.
And he poor insect of a summer's day,
Dreams of eternal honors to his name;
Of endless glory and perennial bays.
No idly reasons of Eternity.
As of the train of ages,—when, alas!
Ten thousand thousand of his centuries
Are in comparison, a little point,
Too trivial for account.

Man is a strange being. Were there no other evidence of this fact, the opposition which is every where manifested to the doctrine of Universalism would be sufficient to prove it. The untiring efforts to destroy the holiest faith and sublime truth that ever inspired the mind of man for angels—the immortality and blessedness of a world—are, in almost every instance, but so many evidences that man at best is but a grovelling, selfish being—a like blind to his best interests, and ungrateful to the God who made him!

It is not the mere fact, however, that this doctrine is opposed, and opposed, too, by good and pious men of which I would complain. There is nothing strange in this. Indeed it would be far stranger if it were not the case, seeing there are so many whom we are bound to allow are honest and sincere in believing it to be a doctrine both false and dangerous in the extreme. But it is the character and style of this opposition, which to the candid and generous mind, seems so strange and unnatural—so entirely out of character with the importance, the tremendous importance, of the subject: The unbelieved zeal—the disingenuousness—levity—intrigue—ridicule—the unfairness, and want of respect for those who think differently—the exulting tone, and the evident disposition to conquer at all hazards, right or wrong, which, to a greater or less degree are so manifestly apparent in almost every opposing effort—whether written or oral. Facts like these speak wonderfully of the weakness and frailty of human nature. With such evidence before me, I am, at times, almost inclined to admit the doctrine of Total Depravity, and to say as did one of old—"the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!"

That men should be slow to believe in Universalism—a system so diametrically opposed to all their long-received and established ideas of God, Religion, the Bible, and the Object and Destiny of Man—is not to be wondered at. They have grown up in the bosom of a Church which recognizes as one of its fundamental principles the doctrine of *Endless Punishment* as the penalty of sin. They read the Bible as they have been taught to read it, as their fathers before them read it, and find there a Heaven—Eternal Felicity for the Faithful, and Unending Torments for the Wicked! And however deeply they may regret that such should be the fact, and however much

they may desire in their benevolent hearts a different state of things—"a consummation more devoutly to be wished"—something that would be more honorable to God, and desirable for man—yet there is the awful doctrine, running through their entire creeds, and so interwoven with every fibre and tissue of their faith, that they cannot get rid of it, without the same time cutting loose from every thing they have been accustomed to consider sacred and divine. Such is the power of early education, and such the tenacity with which long established doctrines and opinions cling about the mind—connected as they often are with some of our holiest recollections and associations—the teachings and admonitions of a venerated father, the prayers and tears of a sainted mother, the happy scenes of youthful days, when all was innocence and purity, Sabbath school lessons and academic reminiscences; and last, though not least, the religious sanctuary, where first the mind was awakened to the truth and importance of divine things—where first the heart was melted with penitence and love, and the beauties of the Eternal World broke in upon the enraptured soul, filling it with visions of glory and of Heaven—together with a thousand other golden links in Memory's sacred chain, which go to make up our world of the Past—that they become, as it were, part and parcel of ourselves—constituent elements of our very nature, so that to discard them seems almost as impossible as to blot out the faithful records of the mind! A doctrine however erroneous, cruel and absurd, by long familiarity, clerical sanction, and sacred association, may come to be considered of divine origin, and as well authenticated as any article of religious faith, or even as the Bible itself. It is not strange therefore that men should turn away from Universalism and shake their heads in distrust and doubt; or that the sentinels upon the towers of their Zion should sound the alarm, the ensigns of the Cross set up their standards against it, and the defenders of the Faith, like the valiant knights of old, come forth with shield and buckler, sword in hand, to give the enemy battle! So long as the doctrine of endless punishment and its kindred notions are held to be doctrines of Divine Revelation, so long will men oppose a system which proposes at once and without disguise, to set them aside as vagaries of the imagination—relics of Barbarism and Heathen Superstition—too monstrous and absurd to admit of a Heavenly origin, or to be entertained by an enlightened Christian! This is no more than we expect. To oppose our faith is a privilege belonging to those who differ with us, which we cheerfully recognize. But at the same time we demand, and we claim the right to demand, that this opposition shall be characterized by a becoming degree of solemnity, candor and fairness; that it shall bear some proportion in character at least, to the awful importance of the subject. This is all we

ask.

But turning from what ought to be, to what is, how sadly we are disappointed in the reality! How vastly out of character is nearly every thing that has been written or said in defence of the monstrous dogma of endless woe, or in opposition to the doctrine of Universal Redemption! Instead of being, as we should expect, sober disquisitions and arguments, clothed in candid, solemn and respectful language, and marked with grave and serious deportment—evinced the author's sincerity as well as his humanity, showing that he was fearfully aware of the shocking conclusions he was laboring to prove, and giving evidence of a realizing and feeling of sense of the awfulness of his subject—the tremendous consequences that must follow if his views be correct; instead of all this, and often without any thing of the kind, they are more like the effusions of political partizans—times serving demagogues, and worldly aspirants, who seek to acquire fame and fortune by the down-fall of their rivals, filled with, light sayings, jests, ridicule, witticisms, cutting sarcasms, low cunning and vulgar abuse, to say nothing of the unfair and dishonest maneuvering, the false issues, and the under-handed advantages, the seemingly wilful perversion of reason, the Bible, and common sense, and the reckless, don't-care disposition, indifferent to the consequences however ruinful—betraying a mind ready to rejoice at a fancied victory, though it be at the expense and ruin of a world! Such it must be confessed is not the character becoming the opposition on so grave a question as the one under consideration—a question fraught with such fearful int rests to humanity; yet go where you may, you will scarcely find an honorable exception. In all the wide range of controversies all works and debates on this subject, I know none that rises entirely above it! Whether it be simply a book of defence, or of offence; or whether a written or oral discussion—it will be found wofully defective in this particular. And such, I am compelled to say, is to a great extent, the character of such works as M. H. Smith's, A. Hall's &c. Universalism against Itself, and many others might be named. They abound in gross errors, sophistry, and perversion of Scripture. It is not on account of these defects that we would be understood to complain; to the author's mind, they may have appeared sound and logical. But it is their inappropriate and bombastic style, and the want of candor and seriousness which they betray on almost every occasion, the exulting manner in which they speak of what they have done, and what they are going to do; the satisfaction and pleasure they exhibit in dressing up, in clothes of their own making, a man of straw, and calling it "Universalism," and in repeating the process, counting up each particular case and setting it down as an additional proof of a hell for their neighbors!

It can hardly be supposed that such men ever think of the sighs and tears, the doubts and forebodings, that are occasioned in this world of sorrow and death, by a contemplation of this horrid doctrine; the silent burning anguish and exquisite suffering which many a sensitive soul endures from a dread of its truth—the maniac shriek and mad raving of those whose minds have been destroyed by a realizing sense of its horrors; much less can it be supposed that they have any just conception of their subject in its awful reality: the heart rending scenes of a Judgement Day, when families and friends will separate forever; and the indistinguishably wretched condition of the damned, who are to be hurled down, down to the abodes of unending woe—there to suffer on and on, age after age, throughout the cycles of eternity! No! they surely cannot think of these things: Or if they do, their hearts have become callous; and their ears closed up to the cries of the suffering and distressed—so that they can even contemplate the infinite agonies of hell's hapless victims, perfectly indifferent, without a tear or a sympathetic sigh! Nay, they can in view of it all, laugh and rejoice and exult in their might and skill, and their wonderful achievements in proving that there is such a hell and that people, and enough of them too, will have to go there—thus glorying in their own shame!

But reader, how stands the case with you? Do you believe, or think you believe, in *endless punishment*? And have you ever reflected seriously upon this monstrous subject? Did you ever in your sober thoughtful moments try to get a realizing sense of the dreadfulness of the doctrine, of the awfulness of the idea? Endless misery! interminable torments! immortal agonies! infinite and unceasing woe,—inflicted too by a Being whose name, whose nature whose very essence is Love! Carry your mind forward, my friend, into the future; imagine yourself at the Judgement! The last day has come! The countless millions of earth's children are now assembled, anxiously awaiting their final doom. Hell is thrown open to view—the flames lash up and envelop their devoted victims, their groans and shrieks piercing the air and reverberating throughout the fiery domain! The Almighty, in flaming vengeance, is seen giving command, while the pale, trembling victims of his wrath are thrust down, down to the dark abodes of eternal ruin—crushed with the weight of Almighty vengeance—tossed on the billowy surges—racked with unutterable torment—shrieking in hopeless despair! "There—days, months, years, and ages will circle away—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of years and of ages will roll over their heads; this number multiplied by all the stars that fill the azure vault of heaven; this by all the sands that line the ocean's shore; this by the drops of all the water in ocean, sea and river; this by every