

# GOSPEL MESSENGER,

OR, UNIVERSALIST ADVOCATE.

"And the Angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold! I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all People."—Luke 11.

Vol. 1.

LONDON, C. W., JANUARY, 1849.

No. 1.

## The Gospel Messenger,

It Published Monthly, at

LONDON, C. W.

TERMS.—One Dollar a year—payable in advance.

J. R. LAVELL, Editor & Proprietor.

All Communications concerning the paper, must be directed to J. R. LAVELL, Editor, London, C. W., and if sent by Mail, post paid.

### INTRODUCTORY.

Come, now, and let us reason together.—Isaiah 1, 18.

Reason is the highest faculty of the mind. It is that especially which distinguishes humanity from inferior creation. And yet men in their ignorance labor to prevent its perfect development and appropriate exercise. Many yield to the influence of passion and prejudice, and become the ministers of desolation to themselves, kindling within, a strange fire, to scathe that which is most beautiful, and to blight and consume the blossoms of the Spirit.

In the wide field of physical science, man has been comparatively free. He has reared monuments of truth and wisdom that will stand forever, bearing witness to distant ages of his progress and his power. But men too often enter the departments of revealed truth, with doubt and irresolution. Here, many imagine that they are on forbidden ground, and every step is with fear and trembling. So long have men been taught to believe that the exercise of human reason, is incompatible with the interests of religion, and dangerous to the soul, that they dare not prosecute their inquiries on rational grounds. In their judgment it is safe to remain where they are—to live on in ignorance of what God has revealed, and to wonder at His ways, which are past finding out. With all the evidence of progress in man and the world around, they dare not venture beyond the circumscribed sphere of present acquirements. Whatever is without the limits already defined, is treated with as much caution and reserve as though it were a magazine of curses, containing the elements of the soul's destruction. We know that some will more when truth finds an utterance from mortal lips; others wait for an angel to

"stir their stagnant souls."

Those who have been the first to submit to the authority of tradition, and the last to relinquish their confidence in the absurd and improbable speculations of visionary minds, have been most alarmed for the safety of the bold, free spirit that dared to scan the Creator's works, and the record of His word. Some men impose a most effectual restraint upon their reason, while they leave the imagination to wander uncontrolled in the regions of conjecture. The religion of such persons is a species of fanaticism that serves to obscure the interior vision, and to prevent an accurate perception of things. Under this influence they readily believe the wildest chimeras of heathen poets, while they reject the sublime results of reason and analogy.

If we look at the theology of the church, we shall hardly fail to observe the traces of a corrupt and speculative philosophy—of dark mysteries and unfounded speculations, long blended with the precepts of heavenly wisdom. The increasing light and knowledge of our time is rapidly disclosing these errors to the world. A veil that has long covered a multitude of sins is torn away. Many of the church dogmas are found to be mere phantoms. One after another, like shells, they explode, and the people are alarmed when the danger is past. Men cling to their errors with a firmness and resolution only equalled by the force of their early propensities. Still it must be acknowledged there are many indications of

reform. It is true that men are beginning to entertain a higher regard for whatever is consistent and reasonable, even in religion. There are some intrepid spirits who will no more be driven from this field of inquiry. They will venture to examine the doctrinal superstructure of the church, and if it consist of "wood, hay, and stubble," it will be given to the flames and consumed with the multitude of human devices. What though the whole be cast into the fire? The truth has nothing to fear. Christianity has nothing to lose. Like the fine gold it will only shine with a purer lustre, when separated from the commingling elements of ignorance and superstition. We regard it as part of our mission on earth, to assist in removing these errors and corruptions. The truth long buried beneath the superabundant mass, must be exhumed. We desire to follow Truth, though it leads amidst cloud and flame, or through the unyielding earth. This shall be the object of our pursuit, for the experience of every day evinces that nothing but truth can pass the ordeal which is to try every man's work.

There is a power employed that is rapidly changing the faith of the church, and the opinions of the world. We live at a period in which the mere dictum of arbitrary men is not mistaken for the oracle of God. The *ipse dixit* of the church is not the foundation of faith. Evidence is necessary to produce conviction, and nothing short of this will command our assent.

There are many Christians who are disposed to subject the doctrines of the church to the test of a rigid examination. He reasons falsely who is led to suppose that this characteristic of the age indicates a growing spirit of irreligion: on the contrary, we regard it as the surest evidence that man is beginning to feel a deep and abiding concern in the investigation of revealed truth.

We have observed that there are in the doctrines of the church, evident traces of Pagan Theology. The heathen believed in a vast number of Deities, who were armed with the elements and prepared for the work of destruction. He saw their angry frowns in the darkened sky, and heard their voices in the deep thunders, and the raging floods. These he worshipped in order to appease their wrath, and conciliate their favor. Thus far there is one particular, that may serve to distinguish the Pagan from the Christian. The latter worships but one God, but that one he has made infinitely more terrible than all that were dreamed of in Pagan Philosophy.

As to the nature and object of religious worship among Christians, it is not unfrequently the same as in pagan lands. Much of it is propitiatory. The Christian is too often influenced by the same motives that actuate the heathen in their devotions. It is their chief design to pacify the supposed wrath of their capricious divinities—they would make the gods more compassionate. These ideas are none the less Pagan in their origin, because they have been baptized in the name of Christ.

The heathen had also his Tartarian Gulf, corresponding to the hell of modern Christians. There may be this essential difference between them:—Possibly the horrors of the Christian hell exceed the conceptions of the most denigrated heathen. We have no disposition to speak of the results contemplated by the system of partial theology—the picture would shock the virtuous sensibilities. Great abominations have been cherished and defended under the insulted name of Christianity. Many of the pretended followers of Christ have been ignorant of the Father. They have worshipped the tyrant—a being begotten of their follies and their fears; and as destitute of compassion as the stone at which the heathen bows. These are some of the ideas of the church that they were conceived in ignorance, brought forth in iniquity, and nursed in the lap of the dark ages, is not a matter of history. A formal

refutation of these gross absurdities would do violence to our ideas of propriety, and be a poor compliment to your intelligence. That they, are the monstrous offspring of the human mind, in its far distant wandering from God and heavenly things, must be evident to the rational mind.

What, then, has the popular theology accomplished in the great work of removing the existing evils? What have all the old theories in morals and religion done to refine the nature and improve the condition of man? Have they been instrumental in working out a higher destiny for the race, or is the world become more debased in morals, and in the exigencies of its social condition, with each succeeding generation? It is our privilege to press this question. If you had a friend sick, you would have an undoubted right, not only to inquire into the nature of the remedial agents employed in his case, but also to witness their operation. If he continued to grow worse, or the disease to assume a more aggravated form; or if he failed to recover under the peculiar mode of treatment adopted, you would naturally conclude that the physician did not understand his case, or that his prescriptions were not adapted to the condition and wants of the patient. In such a case you would most certainly resort to other remedies. But this mode of illustration will equally well apply to universal humanity. That there is derangement and disease in the great body will not be questioned. But that there is any proper adaptation of the treatment to the nature of the case, is not sufficiently evident. If the world is possessed of an evil spirit will you send forth legions of like spirits to cast him out?—If the involuntary motion of the great system is irregular—if the whole body is fearfully convulsed—is it likely that any galvanic process, such as the ordinary religious exertions, will restore a proper action? If some of the members are greatly inflamed, will you expose them to the action of fire to reduce the inflammation? If the patient exhibit symptoms of madness, will you persuade him out of his reason? We know that this is the characteristic treatment of the Church, and thus its doctors have tried for ages to cure the world; and what is the result? Is there any improvement? Is the system generally in a better condition? Why those who feel the patient's pulse affirm that there is but little hope—that the world is waxing worse continually. Many think that the one true faith is in danger from the influence of a vain philosophy, that is closely allied to idolatry. Indeed, if the world be half as vile as some would have us believe, surely the poet hath described it well:

"Good men are here and there, I know; but them—  
— the world,  
Like a block of black marble, jagged with white,  
As with a vein of lightning petrified,  
Looks blacker than without such."

But we are not without faith in man. We are not prepared to relinquish our confidence in God. We believe the world is advancing—that the general tendency of things is upward. In our judgment, the past history and present condition of society indicate, at least, a gradual improvement. Whether this is to be pledged to the credit of popular theological influences, or whether it is the result of other causes, we shall not stop to inquire. But if it be true that the present tendency is downward—that the general movement is retrogressive, we desire to know who is to be held accountable for the results. How can the advocates of the received theology escape from this responsibility? They have had every opportunity to direct the course of the world, and to remove the existing causes of evil. They have opposed the channel in which the current of human affairs is rolling on from age to age: they have explained the duty of man, and determined his destiny; they have fixed the standard of faith

and defined the limits, beyond which there is no hope. Around the domestic fireside, and in the schools, where the young mind receives its first and most enduring impressions—in religion and morals—in all the departments of business—indeed in every field of thought and action, they have wielded a controlling power. For centuries they have guided the church and state. The voice from the altar has found a response in the hearts of millions, while the audience that have gone out from the throne has been felt by the remotest subject of the empire. In their hands, they lodged the power which has ruled the world. Their authority is so extensive—so generally acknowledged, even now that truth itself will only pass current when under seal of the church; and, to practice on her own account, may have a license.

The power of the church has been felt in all the departments of government, and in every walk of life. And yet, with all these means and opportunities at command, instead of performing a great work for humanity, they have, according to their own confession, accomplished nothing. If any one is disposed to question the entire correctness of this remark, let him listen to the communications from the pulpit and read the popular religious journals. The great theme is the moral declension of morals, and the general apathy in religion. The church apprehends that it is in danger, and as for the world, it is about to experience a relapse, alike fatal to its present happiness and future salvation. If there is any ground for these apprehensions, we may repeat the question, on whom is this fearful responsibility to rest? If society is in a bad condition, why have they not made it better? If the standard of morals is lower it is well to raise it up. They have the power, and they have had ample time and opportunity to exercise it. A period of centuries is quite sufficient to give any system a fair trial. If their principles have been preached and practiced thus long, and still the condition of society is so wretchedly improved, it is surely high time for the doctors to take their own nostrums, and for the world to test the efficacy of other means. There must be something intrinsically weak in a system that is productive of no better results. Is it the part of wisdom to attempt to regenerate the world by means so long employed in vain? An illustration in this place, will enable the reader to form an independent judgment. Suppose you were ill and in a condition to require the professional services of a physician;—let it be supposed that the first prescription is *calomel*;—the second day being no better, you are directed to continue the same;—the third day, finding that you are still worse, and the symptoms more alarming, he deals out double the number of grains of calomel, and orders the same prescription continued every day for one year. If you were alive at the end of that time, you would doubtless think it advisable to change the treatment. Now the world has long been ill. There is a diseased moral action, that affects the whole body. The church has applied its remedies to check the disease. With little variation it has pursued the same mode of treatment from year to year, through a long succession of ages, and what is the result? Is the world any better? Why, the doctors being judges, it is in the condition of the woman who came to Jesus:—She "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." We therefore submit to the judgment and common sense of the reader, whether it is not time to give up the patient. Let others try their skill—for every century of the past give them only ten years, and if in the period thus allotted, they do not effect a great and happy change in the physical, the intellectual, the social, moral and religious condition of mankind;—why let them also resign, and spend the remainder of their days in penance.