
WHY I AM A UNIVERSALIST.

BY HON. PHINEAS T. BARNUM.

**WHY I AM A
UNIVERSALIST.
BY HON.
PHINEAS T.
BARNUM.**

I WAS educated in the strictest So-called "orthodox faith." When I was from ten to fourteen years of age, I attended prayer meetings where I could almost feel the burning waves and smell the sulphurous fumes. I remember the shrieks and groans of suffering children and parents and even aged grandparents. I would return to my home and with the utmost sincerity ask God to take me out of the world if He would only Save me from hell. I professed to love God, Said I hoped I loved Him as I heard my elders do. Necessarily before this seething sulphurous sea of flame my love must have been similar to the love a woman would feel to a tyrant who with a loaded pistol pointed at her heart bade her love him or die. I grew to know that true love cannot be forced. We cannot love the unlovely. "We love Him because He first loved us."

In speaking of my Universalist faith I shall not stop to defend those basal beliefs on which it rests in common with all other Christian doctrines. I shall assume, without giving my reasons, the being of God, the authority of Jesus, the truth of the trend of Scripture, and the immortality of all Souls. I shall speak chiefly on only those points which differentiate mine from other Christian sects. I can make no argument for a universe finally obedient which will have any force to one who denies the being of God. An argument for endless discord can be made which all atheists would accept : indeed, all modern arguments for that idea play into the hands of atheists.

These arguments assert a God who either cannot, or will not, bring the creation of His hands to order; hence he is not God -not infinite. His name should begin with a small letter. The atheist accepts the argument, and if there is an arch-fiend he certainly laughs. No argument for a finally harmonious universe can be made save on the basis of Christian theism. I do not, indeed, insist that a man must accept my definition or conception of Deity; but some conception which does not rob Him of the necessary attributes of His being. He may say with Arnold, " A power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." Very well; if only Arnold's God continues to make for righteousness, Universalism is assured. If, however, one is able to say with Jesus, "Our Father who art in heaven," the argument is still stronger. To him

who believes neither of these ideas of God nor their equivalent, I can make no argument which will avail.

I will say a word in regard to the use I make of the Bible, for that use which will have force with some will be wasted space to others. To those in sympathy with that brilliant rhetorician, Mr. Ingersoll, of my land,* a word will weigh no more for being Scriptural, if indeed it be not entirely ruled out of court on that account. Others will not accept any word not Scriptural. I have only contempt for a fusilade of texts, or a culling out one here and one there regardless of contexts, or an exegesis which makes one text which is a statement of some old fighting Hebrew's conception of God as "angry endlessly" outweigh fifty texts stating his better conception that "His mercy endureth forever." The preacher against absurd fashions in headgear who took for his text "top not come down" (Matt. xxiv. 17) made a use of Scripture I can hardly endorse. So far as I have read I find no doctrine supported by the general trend of the whole Scriptures which is not also supported by reason and experience, and therefore to be believed. The Word of

* the allusion to "my land," may need the explanation that this article was first printed in the Christian World, London. The following also explains in part the occasion of the article, -that it was partly in answer to an English Secularist who had just issued a tract which he called 'The Christian Doctrine of Hell.' A very remarkable and able article appears this week in the Christian World from the pen of the great showman, Mr. P. T. Barnum. It is a very clear and satisfactory answer to a Secularist who has just issued a tract on what he calls, "The Christian Doctrine of Hell." Mr. Barnum should be thanked by all Christendom for his able answer to the question, 'Why I am a Universalist. "'

God began to be heard by men and a record made of it even in much despised Genesis. Possibly we have heard clearer words since, but that was, on the whole, a very good beginning. The bearing of His Word is progressive and cumulative until, in the fulness of time, it was "made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." The New Testament system of religion is not true because Jesus said so; but Jesus said so because it is true. Its confirmation is not chiefly in inspiration and miracle but in the deepest experience of the best souls in all ages. The Word of God to men did not cease when the New Testament canon closed. Still is the best thought of the best men in all lands the ever-speaking Word of God.

As Robinson of Leyden said, "The Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word." Said Lowell in his "Cathedral," "I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou walking Thy garden still commun'st with men." I shall appeal with confidence to God's Word in the trend of Scripture, in Jesus and in the nature of man. That all may know definitely what a

Universalist believes I will give our written official creed; for we present the anomaly of having a written creed we dare to preach and which fairly represents the principles we build on.

Our Confession of Faith is as follows: -

ART. I.-We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain a revelation of the character of God and of the duty, interest, and destination of mankind.

ART. II.-We believe there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

ART. III.-We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men.

Not a few are prejudiced against the Universalists because they have seen only a distortion or caricature of their belief. Many attacks taken to be against us have really been against only a wilful or ignorant parody of us. Dr. Talmage may be quoted as a representative of a class frequently declaiming about the incongruity of all saints and sinners alike going to heaven together. An honest glance at our written creed or our current literature will show any one that we know "that holiness and happiness are inseparably connected." The incongruity exists in conceiving of heaven as only locality, and salvation as getting into a good place. It is rather absurd to suppose saints and sinners shut up all together within four jewelled walls and playing on harps, whether they like it or not. I have faint hopes that after another hundred years or so, it will begin to dawn on the minds of those to whom this idea is such a weight, that nobody with any sense holds or ever did hold it. To the Universalist, heaven in its essential nature is not a locality, but a moral and spiritual status, and salvation is not securing one place and avoiding another, but salvation is finding eternal life. Immortal life is merely endless existence after bodily death. All souls, saints, and sinners, do go together into immortal life just as they were together in this life. Eternal life has primarily no reference to time or place, but to a quality. Jesus said, "This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Immortal life is existence regardless of quality. Eternal life is right life, here, there, everywhere. Men may be locally together in this or in immortal life, and still be spiritually and morally separate. The murderer at death enters immortal life; " but ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him " (I John

iii. I5). Why did John say " abiding in him," if eternal life is a place men go to ? So long as man harbors the spirit of murder or any other evil spirit he has not eternal life abiding in him, and locality has nothing to do with the matter. I believe that finally every created soul will be drawn, not forced, to choose to seek, and when he chooses to seek will be helped to find eternal life. I have no knowledge of place or time. I have the great hope. I will condense into a narrow space a few reasons for this hope.

I. I base this belief - for my belief and hope are one -on the attributes of God as admitted by all Christians. Infinite Wisdom knows the end from the beginning, and will not in the beginning create what will defeat the end. Infinite Power is able to control all things toward a desired end. Infinite Love, as expressed in the words " Our Father," will do the best for its children. What shall we say of the attribute of justice ? No attribute has been so belittled as this. We once heard that since man's sin was infinite, justice demanded infinite punishment; now it is changed to the statement, if men sin endlessly, justice demands they be punished endlessly. Both these statements are an abortion, a caricature of justice. No finite man can commit an infinite sin. If any man sin endlessly, justice cannot be satisfied, but only endlessly thwarted. Justice demands obedience to just law. It is never satisfied with less. As God is a just God, so nothing is ever settled until it is settled right. There are other attributes. "God is a consuming fire." His wrath and anger are spoken of. These attributes express the Divine hand raised against sin. If the Divine hand is raised against sin one must yield, and I don't believe it is the Divine hand. God is a consuming fire, not a fire burning forever in empty rage. He consumes man as the refiner's fire does the ore, burning the dross and bringing forth the good, as gold tried by fire.

2. I base my hope on the office and character of Jesus Christ. I see in his life no clumsy mechanical device of vicarious atonement. He did not shed blood to appease an angry Deity. The Deity does not want blood, He wants obedience. The life, and teachings, and death of Jesus are the supreme appeal to all mankind, "Be ye reconciled to God." God never needed to be reconciled to them, save in some such sense as any loving father might feel a barrier between himself and a prodigal son. Blood cannot remove it. Only the son coming back penitent can. The character and purpose of Jesus are most comprehensively stated in the parables of " The Lost Sheep," " The Lost Piece of Silver," " The Prodigal Son." The final declaration of his purpose he told when he declared, " I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." The completion of this purpose, man's rebellion may delay but cannot disappoint or annul.

3. I base my hope on the trend of Scripture. It is well known that a comparatively small portion of Scripture bears on this immortal life and the great end of our course. *Conduct* is three-fourths of life. This present life is the great pressing concern. A very large portion of the Old Testament dwells on righteousness and its earthly temporal rewards or sin with its temporal punishments. The New Testament is a great appeal to men to build character, seek eternal life, and "now is the accepted time." A solemn reserve is thrown over the future life; the great emphasis is on the present time. This is precisely as it should be. Not a few threats of judgment and promises of joy have been stupidly and persistently thrust over there which belong here.

Now and then, however, scattered through the Bible, its writers looked into the future, and spoke of the great consummation. There are enough such passages to give every believer warrant for his hope of immortal life.

Take, then, these passages which speak of the great end and consummation-on the point in question, of course, many others bear-and what is the trend of these Scriptures? Without an exception that I know of in these passages is a great song of joy, a great shout of triumph. I can cite but one:

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all " (I Cor. xv 24-28).

4. I base my hope on the Word of God speaking in the best heart and conscience of the race -the Word heard in the best poems and songs, the best prayers and hopes of humanity. The ages have been darkest when this hope was lowest. It cannot be successfully controverted that out of the six theological schools of the Early Church four taught the doctrines of Universalism, only one annihilation of the wicked, and one their endless punishment. To-day no preacher in his fiercest sermons approximates to such utterances as those of Jonathan Edwards. If he did he would not be tolerated a year. The Christian pulpit is silent on the doctrine of endless punishment, or else denies it, as Farrar, Beecher, Swing, and Thomas, and a great multitude of greatest minds have done.

I wish to contrast two utterances, and leave the reader to judge which is the noblest. One is this utterance of Mr. Talmage at Chautauqua. He said: -

Nearly all the heterodox people I know of believe all are coming out at the same destiny without regard to faith and character: Nero and Wesley, Guiteau and Garfield. I turn away from such a debauched heaven. Against that cauldron of beastliness I place the two destinies of the Bible forever and forever apart.

This is the surviving remnant of the idea once so vividly preached that the saints in heaven need the sight of hell to complete their joys. The other utterance I contrast to the above, is Hawthorne's in " Glimpses of English Poverty." He says of the wretched London poor: -

How difficult to believe that anything so precious as a germ of immortal growth can have been plunged into this cesspool of vice! Oh, what a mystery! Slowly, slowly, as after groping at the bottom of a deep, noisome pool, my hope struggles upward to the surface, bearing the half-drowned body of a child and bearing it aloft for its own life, and my own life, and all our lives. Unless these slime-clogged nostrils can be made capable of inhaling celestial air, I know not how the purest and most intellectual of us can reasonably expect ever to taste a breath of it. The whole question of eternity is staked there. If a single one of those helpless little ones be lost, the world is lost.

Which of these two sentiments is most like the Jesus of the people ?

No Christian prays for endless sin and punishment. If God permits it, it must be good and right. Why not pray for it? All Christians pray for the salvation of sinners, and yet Orthodox Christians profess to believe it will never be. The first essential of prayer is that it be in faith. The Universalist Church is the only one that believes in success.

Having sketched the bases of my hope that all will seek and find eternal life, it remains to notice a few statements brought against the validity of these proofs.

I. It is objected that we cannot judge what infinite wisdom, love, etc., will do. Very true! Eye cannot see, nor heart feel. How, then, do my orthodox friends get their information of God's intention to endlessly damn us ? While we do not presume to measure God's attributes, we dare not limit them with mete and bound. I at least suppose them to be infinitely better than the best, instead of infinitely worse than the worst, of man's ways.

2. It is objected that God permits awful pain, misery, and injustice here, which it seems infinite love could not do. He may permit these endlessly. I answer,

temporal evil admits of an explanation. It may co-exist with infinite love; but endless evil admits of no explanation. 'Tis a senseless, rayless, starless abyss.

3. " Many die and enter the immortal life who have never sought nor found eternal life, and death ends probation," says the objector. As the word "probation " is not in the Bible, nor the thing itself in its popular sense, the demand is made on us, " Show us a text which says man can repent after death."

Suppose a certain number of men should agree that no man has moral opportunity after 1890 I deny their belief. They say, "Show a text which says a man can repent after 1890." I reply, the burden of proof rests on you who have set up the external, mechanical, arbitrary and artificial date. The fact is that Scripture and reason declare that " now is the accepted time." Now is the time to live, to do, to be. No wise man defers it. It is as wise and as safe to defer it a day after death as it is a day after any other date. It is neither wise nor safe to defer it at all. There is nothing in the event of death that fixes character and ends a soul's moral possibilities more than there is in the date 1890 or any other arbitrary date. Those who set dates, such as death, after which moral beings cease to be moral beings, must show their proofs. Rev. G. F. Wright, in his book, " The Relation of Death to Probation," cites six texts which he thinks prove that death ends probation. I do not believe that under a true exegesis one of these texts supports such a doctrine; but even admitting it, shall six texts outweigh all the rest of Scripture and reason? *

Against the six texts I place the single psalm which twenty-six times declares " His mercy endureth forever." Any of the multitude of texts which call on men to repent and come to life

* To those who wish to read a full discussion of this doctrine, I recommend the above-named book, and as statement of the other side, "The Doctrine of Probation Examined," Dr. G. H. Emerson, Universalist Publishing House, Boston.

is a denial of probation. The call is not issued good for thirty days or until death, but good until used. The present life is not a probation, but a discipline. It is the initial step of a moral order whose progressive stages are to be endless. The principles of God's government are not suddenly changed at death or any other date. He is our "Our Father," and " the same yesterday, to-day and forever." The endless ages of immortal life are not given to sit on a flower-bed and sing and play harps, but for the endless development of immortal souls.

4. The form of objection changes. Formerly it was that God elected some to damnation and they could not help themselves. Now we are told He leaves all free to make their own choice. " God has made us so completely free we can go to heaven or hell just as we choose." " Sinners damn themselves." Millions choose evil; may they not always choose it? The reply is, that this is the sinner's will arrayed in battle against the Divine will. One must ultimately yield. I expect it will not be God. God will not coerce the sinner's will by force. He faces it as a consuming fire, and the day comes when the sinner sinks down beaten and cries out: " God, I yield." Terrible is God against sin, foolish the soul that contests against Him. Montaigne defined a lie as : " Courage toward God and weakness toward man." What sin is not this? The sinner is one who has courage to enter a contest of his will against God's will. My orthodox friends tremble for God. I do not. I exhort them to " have faith in God."

5. The objector says the sinner cannot repent. He cannot will to repent. He has sinned until it is a habit. Habit has fixed his character. By the momentum of character the endless future is dominated. He does not will eternal life and by-and-by he cannot will it. The force of habit is indeed strong, but this argument overloads it tremendously. To say threescore years and ten give a character momentum for eternity is about like saying a child's toy pistol gives a Krupp gun projectile momentum to go round the world a million times. If a man cannot will to obey he cannot sin. He is not a responsible actor. If death does this we are all alike unmanned. There can be neither heaven nor hell ; we are not men, but things. How often are fixed habits broken and men lifted out of ruts by some stronger motive, some mightier appeal! A woman studies the piano until her fingers play by habit, but the cry of her first babe so fills her soul that the lesser habit is forgotten under the stress of the diviner appeal. A man by habit profane has many a time been awed and silenced by the presence of dignified and purer souls. In the immortal world a thousand influences and motives may lift out of habits. Says Dr. Miner: "The father's hand may be tenderly laid upon the head of his wayward child as no hand had ever before been laid upon it; and the sight of the holiest, the most paternal, and the most loving of beings may touch that child's heart as it had never before been touched."

Against my hope is quoted the Bible word "hell." The Universalist is characterized as one who does not believe in hell. We believe the Bible doctrine of hell. Sin in a soul is fitly symbolized by the words Gehenna, Hades, Sheol, and Tartarus. Not one of these words primarily means a place of torment after death. The word " hell " in its old English sense of " to cover" was a passable translation of these original words, but in its present orthodox sense is not a translation of one of them, but an unwarranted substitution.

What are we to say when these substantives are described by the adjectives "everlasting," "forever and forever," etc.? What is the Bible use of these adjectives? They are applied to God and immortal life: here we know they mean endless from the nature of the subject. They are applied to the rainbow, Levitical rites, Jewish possession of Canaan, hills and stars; here we know from the nature of the subject they do not mean endless. These adjectives are therefore indefinite, and take their force from the nature of the subject to which they are applied. That eminent Bible scholar, Professor Taylor Lewis, said: "The preacher in contending with the Universalist would commit an error, and it may be suffer a failure in his argument, should he lay the whole stress of it on the etymological or historical significance of the words *aion* and *aionios*, and attempt to prove that of themselves they necessarily carry the meaning of endless duration." Lange's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, P. 48.

This is an honest concession from a great orthodox scholar of what my church has always contended for. On Sunday, Nov. 11, 1877, in Westminster Abbey, the great preacher, Canon Farrar, said very impressively: "I ask you where would be the popular teachings about hell if we calmly and deliberately erased from our English Bibles the three words damnation, 'hell,' and 'everlasting'? Yet I say unhesitatingly, I say, claiming the fullest right to speak with the authority of knowledge, I say with the calmest and most unflinching sense of responsibility, I say, standing here in the sight of God and my Saviour, and, it may be, of the angels and the spirits of the dead, that not one of these words ought to stand any longer in the English Bible."

Thus I sketch in merest outline my reasons for saying that none of the objections made are sufficient to undermine the bases on which I rest my hope that all will finally seek and find eternal life.

I recently met an old friend, Rev. C. A. Stoddard, editor of the *New York Observer*. I asked him if his journal had not, like the "orthodox" generally, become more liberal in its faith concerning the final destiny of man. He smilingly replied, "Friend Barnum, our orthodox families cheerfully meet and support you in your efforts to amuse and instruct our children, but we must draw the line there. We cannot endorse your theology." "Is it possible," I asked, "that the *Observer* still sticks to the old doctrine of endless suffering?" "The *Observer* don't budge an inch from its lifelong creed and doctrines," he replied. "Surely," said I, "you must lose numerous subscribers who at this day of the 'new orthodoxy' cannot believe that there are childless mothers in the Paradise of God?" The reverend gentleman responded, "The places of such subscribers are readily filled by those who, like myself, loathe the thought of

spending an eternity in the company of Judas." "But cannot Infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness conquer, purify, and win even the betrayer of our Saviour, who on the cross prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers?" The religious editor replied, with a good-natured smile, "Judas would require considerable fixing up before he would be fit to come in close contact with the holy angels and saints in heaven. - "True," I replied, "but will not you and I need some 'fixing up' for that state of perfect holiness without which no man can see God?" He admitted that such is the fact, but evidently he cannot as yet see a chance for Judas.

It may be added that the most eminent scholar of the Methodist Church, Dr. Adam Clarke, and others as well, have not been so hopeless as Mr. Stoddard even about the case of Judas, inexcusable and bad as it is. Dr. Clarke says:

"There is room for hope in his death. The chief priests who instigated Judas were worse men than himself, and if mercy was extended to those, the wretched penitent traitor did not die out of the reach of the yearning of its bowels. And I contend, further, that there is no positive evidence of the final damnation of Judas in the sacred text. I would not set up, knowingly, any plea against the claims of justice; and God forbid that a sinner should be found capable of pleading against the cries of mercy on behalf of a fellow culprit. Reader, learn from thy Lord this lesson: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'"^{*}

Dr. Adam Clarke had no regrets at the thought that he might have to spend an eternity in the heaven of Judas.

* See Dr. Clarke's Commentary, Acts i.