

DEFENSE OF UNIVERSALISM

To the Editor of the New York Times:

Yesterday morning's issue of THE TIMES contained an article under the title "Devil Fist Universalist," the same being an abstract of a sermon preached Sunday morning by the Rev. R. B. Smith of this city against Universalism. Knowing you do not wish false judgments to go to the world through your journal, I beg space to inform the public and Mr. Smith that the article is inexcusable and gross misrepresentation.

Let me inquire first why Mr. Smith chose to preach this sermon at a time when he knew the representative ministers of the Universalist Church to be out of the city on their Summer vacations? Was he afraid to give these men a chance to defend themselves? The coarse epithet "liar," and the characterization of the devil as a Universalist, will, upon reflection, be sorely repented by their author. They would have done credit to a by-gone age, when it was customary to abuse and vituperate men whose beliefs their critics could not refute, but in these days, when the public knows the good work the Universalist faith does, and the beautiful spirituality it constructs, such harangues can harm none but their author.

Concerning the statement of Mr. Smith that Universalists do not believe that God punishes men [sic], let me quote the words of the Universalist Profession of Faith: "We believe in the certainty of just retribution or punishment for sin." The gentleman does not seem to have heard of that statement. There is no escape from the punishment any one has merited, but punishment, if endless, must proceed from anger, and not from love. Endless misery and torture are simply endless brutality, and no spiritual God and Father could engage in such a degrading occupation.

Is it ignorance or willful misrepresentation which inspires men like Mr. Smith to make false statements concerning Universalism? We advise that they study the Universalist statement of belief, and, instead of belaboring for spectacular purposes a man of straw, attack the genuine Universalist.

Furthermore, many of the best modern Bible scholars teach that the Bible, while it prescribes severe penalties for the wicked, does not contain the doctrine of endless misery. In the punishment which serves some good purpose the Universalist believes, because all the purposes and instruments of God are good. We have no purpose to soften the harsh parts of the Bible, except when we know them to be mistranslations. The translation of the Bible was revised in 1880 because Bible scholars knew the old version to be faulty; they took out the words "damnation" and "everlasting" and in most places the word "hell," because these words did not represent the truth as Jesus gave it to men. Will Mr. Smith say the revisers were wrong?

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