

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM.

By Rev. John Mather Austin
Written in about 1855.

The gospel itself clearly proclaims the doctrine of the final salvation of all mankind, as I have shown by a large class of the most plain and emphatic passages to be found in the Bible. That this sentiment had always prevailed among the people of God, from the earliest ages of the world, we are assured by St. Peter. He declares that:—"The times of the RESTITUTION of ALL THINGS, God hath spoken by the mouth of ALL his HOLY PROPHETS since the world began !!!"—(Acts iii. 21.) And the same doctrine of Universal Salvation has been believed and advocated in the Christian Church by the most eminent and learned men in different ages, from the time of the Apostles to our own day. Down to the year A. D. 190, there are but few traces of the writings of the Christian Fathers, now extant; yet, in these, we find a distinct recognition of the salvation of all men. About the year 120, there were two large sects in the church, called "Basilidians" and "Carpocratians." They were believers in the final salvation of all mankind. This was only ninety years after Christ's death, and but twenty years after the decease of St. John.

These sects must have been in existence, and known to that Apostle. About A. D. 150, we find this doctrine declared in what are termed the "Sibyline Oracles," written by certain Christians to convince the heathen of the truth of Christianity. The pretense that they were "Oracles," was of course false and in putting forth such a claim, their authors greatly erred. Nevertheless, these "Oracles" serve to show us what *doctrines*, prevailed in the church at that early day. No one doubts they gave a correct exposition of the sentiments which were then received by Christians as "Orthodox." And as they, clearly teach the salvation of the world, it is proof positive, that this was a prevailing doctrine among the followers of Christ. In the year 190, the doctrine of Universal Salvation was plainly preached by Clemens of Alexandria, President of the Catechetical, or Theological School, at Alexandria, Egypt, and one of the most eminent of the early Fathers. After him it was proclaimed by his pupil, ORIGEN, the most renowned scholar and theologian between the days of the Apostles and the Reformation. No doubt Origen was visionary on some points. But while many of his opinions were condemned, yet, for three hundred years after his death his Universalism was not censured or complained of by the most bitter of his opponents. In this fact we have evidence that most of the members of the Christian Church, during that long period, sympathized with him in his doctrine of the world's salvation. It was also maintained by Ambrosius, Titus of Bostra, Gregory Nissen, Gregory Nazianzen, Dydimus of Alexandria, and many other of the most eminent Fathers. Some of these prominent Universalists were sent out by the orthodox party of the church to preach against the *heresies* which then prevailed,—thus showing that *Universalism* was the *orthodoxy* of the early Christian Church.

But as the dark ages came on, and art, literature, science, and knowledge, disappeared from the world, amid the grossest ignorance, the doctrine of God's impartial grace, the most glorious light of the Gospel, became obscured. Gradually its flame burned more and more dim, as the dark clouds of heathen error and ignorance rolled in, until its enemies gained the ascendancy, and finally condemned and voted it down, in the Fifth General Council, convened at Constantinople, in A. D. 553. When we consider the age when this condemnation was enacted—the ignorance,

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM.

superstition and corruption which then prevailed in the Christian Church—it will be seen that it was rather a *compliment* to Universalism than a *censure*. The doctrine was too enlarged, too enlightened, too liberal, to be tolerated in an age of barbarism and darkness. Dr. Jortin says of the Ecclesiastical Councils of those ages—"Some of these Councils were not assemblies of pious and learned divines, but *cabals*, the majority of which were quarrelsome, *fanatical*, DOMINEERING, DISHONEST prelates who wanted to *compel* men to approve of their opinions, of which themselves had no clear conception, and to *anathematize* and *oppress* those who would not implicitly *submit* to their determination!!" — (*Dr. Jortins Works*, vol. 7, charge 2.) The condemnation of Universalism by *such* a council can have no weight in an enlightened and unprejudiced mind. It was an appropriate work for *such* ecclesiastics to condemn and anathematize a doctrine so grand and heavenly, as that which teaches the final repentance and happiness of all mankind!!

This sentiment, however, did not wholly disappear, even after the condemnation of the Fifth General Council. We can occasionally see traces of it, and now and then find an advocate throughout the entire extent of the dark ages. As late as the year 730, the various councils continued to condemn Universalism—thus plainly showing that it still continued to exist. In 744, it was advocated by Clement, a Catholic priest. In 850, it was maintained by John Scotus Erigena, a native of Ireland, and one of the most learned and celebrated men of his age. When Alfred the Great, of England, founded the College at Oxford, he desired to place John Scotus Erigena at its head, notwithstanding his Universalism, but he refused to accept the appointment. In 1190, Universal Salvation was maintained in France by Raynold, Abbott of the Monastery of St. Martin. Also by Amalric, an eminent professor of logic and theology in Paris, in 1210. In 1222, we find this doctrine among the *Hestorians*, one of the most ancient sects, whose existence has extended from the earliest ages down to the present day, and one of whose Bishops recently visited this country. At that date, Saloman, Bishop of Bassorah, clearly proclaimed the salvation of all men. In confirmation of that doctrine, he quotes the opinions of Theodorus of Mopsuestia, and Diodorus of Tarsus, both eminent Christian Fathers of an early age. He also asserts that other Nestorian writers taught the same sentiment. Many other eminent defenders of this faith might be mentioned down to the days of the Reformation.

After that great event had broken the chains of spiritual despotism, and given the people liberty of conscience, the doctrine of Universal Salvation speedily revived, and found numerous and able advocates. The Anabaptists generally embraced it. And it has been supported by many of the most able and learned men, in different countries, down to our own day. In England, the final salvation of all men was believed and defended by Dr. Hey, Rev. Jeremy White, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Dr. Henry More, Archbishop Tillotson, Dr. Thomas Burnet, Sir Isaac Newton, Bishop Newton, Dr. Samuel Clarke, Dr. George Cheney, Chevalier Ramsay, Daniel De Foe, the celebrated author, Dr. Doddridge, Dr. Edward Young, author of *Night Thoughts*, and a large number of others, whose names cannot here be enumerated. There is good evidence also to prove that Dr. Isaac Watts, author of *Watts Psalms* and hymns, was a believer in Universal Redemption. That doctrine has also had many eminent defenders since the Reformation, in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, France, and other countries, whose names stand high in literature and theology. It is well known that Oberlin—the sainted Oberlin—whose praise is in

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM.

the mouths of all Christians, and whose name has been adopted by an Evangelical Theological Institute in Ohio, was a believer in the final salvation of the whole world!

Nor were those comprised in this long array, whether in ancient or modern days, merely *Armenians*, as Elder Holmes will assert,—that is, believers simply that Christ *died* for all, but that multitudes will fall into endless misery and woe, notwithstanding Jesus shed his blood for them. The eminent men whose names I have enumerated, were Armenians so far as to believe that the Redeemer died for the world; but they were also *Universalist*, in believing that *all* for whom Christ died will ultimately be saved. In corroboration of this fact, did my limits admit, I could give you extracts from the writings of most of them, in which they advocate the final salvation of all men, in an emphatic manner.

At the present day, the doctrine of Universal Salvation prevails generally throughout Germany—a country where Professor Dwight declares theology is a *century in advance* of America. It is not confined to the class usually denominated *Rationalist*, although they generally adopt it, but it prevails extensively among the *Evangelical* or *orthodox* sects in Germany. Professor Dwight of Yale College, son of President Dwight, a man of great integrity, and with religious tenets strictly orthodox, who, a few years since, traveled extensively in Germany, declares in his book entitled "Dwight's Travels in the North of Germany," that "the doctrine of the ETERNITY of Future Punishment, is almost *universally* REJECTED!" He says, moreover, "I have seen but *one person* in Germany who believed it, and but one other who was *wavering* on this subject !"

Professor Sears, of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Newton, Mass., made the tour of Germany not many years ago and tarried in the country some months. In his published letters, giving an account of his travels, he declared that Professor THOLUCK, who stands at time head of the Evangelical sects in Germany, and whose fame extends throughout our own country, was a believer in the salvation of all men. The language of Professor Sears, announcing this fact, was as follows: "This distinguished and excellent man, [Tholuck,] in *common* with the GREAT MAJORITY of the EVANGELICAL Divines in Germany * * * * believes that ALL MEN, and fallen spirits, will *finally be saved*." This declaration has been stoutly denied by many of the Orthodox in the United States, and is still denied. But Professor Sears, after his re turn, reiterated in the strongest terms the assertion that Tholuck was a believer in the salvation of all men. He declared that this was not a matter of "heresy" with him; but he *knew* it to be a fact. He had conversed personally with Tholuck on the subject, and had heard him repeatedly declare his belief in that doctrine, without evasion or reservation. Professor Sears had a private discussion with Tholuck, at his residence, on Universal Salvation. The latter advocating the salvation of all, and the former objecting to it. Professor Sears frequently attended the lectures Tholuck delivered to his theological students. "In one of these lectures," says Professor S., "he took up, at great length, the subject of Universal Salvation in the American sense of the term, and declared his *belief* in the doctrine in the most *unequivocal* manner!!" Moreover, Professor Sears gives the testimony of Hengstenberg, Oucken, and Professor Balentine, all eminent theologians in Germany, and well acquainted with Tholuck, who unite in declaring that he was a believer in the salvation of all the world.

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM.

It will be recollected Professor Sears declared that not only Tholuek, but the "*great majority of the Evangelical Divines in Germany,*" were believers in the salvation of all men. To the same effect is the testimony of Professor Stuart, of Andover Theological Seminary, the great orthodox institution of New England. In an article from his pen, on Universalism, published in the Biblical Repository, in 1840, he says—"This doctrine, [the final salvation of all men] has become so *wide-spread* in Germany, that it PREVADES even the ranks of those who are regarded as serious and *evangelical* men, in respect to most or all of what is called *orthodox* doctrine, saving the point before us!" What effect has their Universalism on the hearts and lives of the German Christians? Does it injure them? Listen to the testimony of Professor Dwight. He says—"I have never seen any Christians who seemed to me to have a deeper sense of the *odiousness* of sin in the sight of God, or whose hearts beat with more ardent gratitude toward our Saviour, for the great redemption he has made for fallen man. * * * We must look in vain for *brighter examples* of piety than they exhibit. * * * In their *charity* and *love*, the Protestant inhabitants of both countries would do well to *imitate* them."—(*Dwights Travels*, p. 423.)

In regard to England, I have already stated that many of its most eminent divines, Doctors of Divinity and Bishops, for centuries past, were believers in the ultimate salvation of all men. We have the best evidence for believing that this sentiment prevails extensively among all sects—even the most orthodox in that country, at the present day. Rev. JONH FOSTER recently deceased, was one of the most eminent theologians of Great Britain. He stood at the head of the Baptist denomination throughout the world; and was confessedly the "pattern man," of their sect. A late writer in the New York Observer, [Presbyterian] says of Foster—"He was in some respects the *pride* of the English Dissenters; and as a writer, he has had, and will continue to have, a commanding influence, not indeed directly over the mass of the religious public, but over those minds that *influence* and *guide* the masses!!" JONH FOSTER was a UNIVERSALIST!! He was a clear, settled, decided believer in the salvation of all men! In his conversation and his writings he advocated that doctrine. The English editor of Fosters works says he must "be permitted, in justice to his memory, to remark that in Mr. Fosters mind, as is evident from his other writings this belief [in Universal Salvation] was associated with the holiest views of the Divine Being, and with a most elevated standard of moral excellence." Foster was not alone in his opinion on the subject. In a letter to a young friend, giving his reasons for dissenting from the doctrine of Endless Punishment, he says he knew a *number* of clergymen, of *great piety* and intelligence, some dead and some still living, who entertained similar views to his own; and who, though they did not like to say much on the subject in public, would freely express their opinions in relation to it *in private!*

The meeting of the famous Worlds Convention in London, to form an Evangelical Alliance, held a year or two since, affords good evidence of time prevalence of Universalist opinions in Great Britain and various parts of Europe. Previous to the meeting of the Convention, the British divines had united in a doctrinal basis, on which the alliance should be formed. And it is a remarkable fact, that in that basis they agreed to omit the doctrine of *Endless Punishment*. There is great significance in this omission. It is strong proof that the belief in that sentiment prevails but to a small degree in Great Britain. When, however, the American delegates appeared in the Convention, they stoutly insisted that endless woe should be adopted as one of the articles of basis, The British and European members *resisted* the effort to introduce this doctrine! We are

BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSALISM.

told that a "most striking, animated and luminous discussion" ensued, which continued *three days !!* The principal grounds taken against the introduction and adoption of Eternal Misery, by the British and European members of the Convention, according to a writer in the New York Observer, were as follows: "1. The belief of the doctrine was not *essential* to salvation." The evangelical Christians in Great Britain and Europe do not consider a *belief* in endless woe as "*essential* to salvation,"—that is, they insist men can be saved without believing it! Where is Elder Holmes oft-repeated declaration of the *danger* of believing in the worlds salvation?" 2. There are some good men in *doubt* about it! "Some *good men* in Europe are in doubt in regard to eternal wretchedness. And from what we have seen respecting Germany, it may be believed MOST good men doubt that sentiment." 3. Some [good men] entirely DISBELIEVE it!! This word "some" does not declare the *whole* truth. Multitudes of the best of men, and the most learned and sound theologians throughout Europe, entirely reject the doctrine of ceaseless agony. To satisfy the most unbelieving on this point, let them listen to the following paragraph from the New York Observer, [Presbyterian] in reference to the developments of Universalism at the Worlds Convention:—"The recent Convention in London, for the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, has had one incidental effect, which was not contemplated by those who were active in getting up that movement. It has *unveiled* the FACT before the world, and especially it has fixed the attention of the American churches upon the fact, that the so called evangelical religion of England, and of Europe, is infected to an *alarming* extent with a tendency to UNIVERSALISM !!"

In the United States, it is well known there have been many believers in Universal Salvation, aside from the Universalist denomination. Some of the most eminent men in the days of our Revolution adopted that sentiment. Among them may be enumerated *Gen. Green*, who appointed Rev. John Murray, the first preacher of Universalism in America, as Chaplain of the Rhode Island Brigade. Some of the orthodox clergymen remonstrated against this appointment. But *Gen. Washington confirmed* it, and in General Orders directed that Mr. Murray "be *respected* accordingly!" *Dr. Benjamin Rush*, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was a warm and open Universalist; as was also his friend, the eminent Dr. Redman, of Philadelphia. Of the celebrated Dr. Franklin, his daughter, Mrs. Black, writes as follows: "In his opinion, no system of faith in the Christian world was so well calculated to promote the *interests of society* as the doctrine which showed "a God reconciling a lapsed world to himself." Belonging to the orthodox clergy, of about the same period, were Dr. Charles Chauncey, of Boston, Dr. John Tyler, of Norwich, Conn., and Dr. Joseph Huntington, of Coventry, Conn., who were all believers and defenders of Universal Salvation.

That Universalism is spreading at the present day, to a greater or less degree, throughout the ranks of all the partialist sects of our country, both among clergymen and laymen, is evident from the language of Professor Stuart, of Andover Theological Seminary. Speaking of a class of orthodox Christians who believe in the final salvation of all men, he says—"Not a few persons in our community, [i. e. among the evangelical sects,] *secretly* belong to this class. Among them," continues the Professor, "are not a few professed preachers of the gospel!!!"—*Biblical Repository*.