

[Thompson, John Samuel]

JOHN SAMUEL THOMPSON

This individual, who is somewhat known to many of our readers, has very recently published a *formal renunciation of Universalism!* a circumstance at which Universalists must heartily rejoice; and none will probably regret it, except those with whom he may hereafter be connected. This renunciation is published in his "Reformed Christian Guide" (noticed in our second No.) from which we find it copied into the "Gospel Luminary" for February 1831. We shall briefly notice this article, together with its author, 1st, Because we have been requested to do so by several of our patrons; 2d, Because the Gospel Luminary, by publishing, has given currency to it in many places where this paper circulates; and 3d, Because Mr. Thompson is an anomaly among the human species, and his writings equally so in the literary and religious world; and [he] having once been connected with Universalists, a notice of this kind will be read with some interest by our patrons.

Of him we may truly say, there are few creeds that he has not professed, none but what he has ridiculed. He has reviled all denominations, espoused the cause of many, and disgraced all with whom he has been connected. He professes to have abandoned Universalism because of its licentiousness, when the fact is, his own licentiousness prevented the Universalists from employing him longer.

In the article before us he says:—"The characteristic doctrine of the sect (Universalists) is the salvation of all men after death; but the creed of the denomination is much better defined by these five negatives: There is no Devil; There is no Hell; There will be no future judgment; There is no religious distinction among men in this world; and there will be no difference in their condition in the world to come!" If this were in reality the creed he held while he pretended to be a Universalist, we may cease to wonder that he should [would] treat with barbarity an amiable wife, wrong his creditors out of their dues, abuse his best friends, and disgrace the societies to which he preached.

He says he renounces Universalism, 1st, Because it "was unknown in the world till the middle of the 18th century!" Indeed! and how often has Mr. T. asserted in former publications that it was the pure doctrine of Christ and his apostles, and of all God's holy prophets since the world began? Again, he says, "in Mr. Ballou's elaborate book, entitled the "Ancient History of Universalism," he has been unable to furnish one living testimony for the existence or belief of the doctrine during the whole period embraced by his History!" Concerning this the public must judge; and it will judge, too, of the overwhelming mass of incontrovertible evidence adduced in favor of the antiquity of the doctrine.

"2d. Because Universalism is not taught in the Scriptures. For there is not a passage in the whole Bible that plainly teaches the doctrine." It is amusing to hear Mr. T. under this head, affirming that one of the main pillars of Universalism is "the relationship of the Deity to his creatures as father to children," and then with perfect sang froid, adding, "the contrary of this is the fact. God is never called the Father of infidel or

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unregenerate men by any of the sacred writers. Nor can any man show that a parental relationship subsists between God and degenerate sinners," &c. Alas! for the poor fatherless Mr. Thompson! But the falsity and wickedness of such an assertion must be manifest to all who have read the Bible. See Deut. xxvii: 5,6. Isa. i: 2, 3, 4 and xlix: 15. Malachi i: 6 and ii: 10. Num. xvi: 22. Acts xvii: 24-29. Eph. iv: 6. His criticisms under this head are unworthy of the least notice.

Here we will for the sake of variety publish a few sentences of this article, and afterwards follow it up with some selections from his former writings, in order that our readers may see him refuted by himself.

*"Universalism Renounced," 1831*

"3. Because Universalism is not only opposed to the general scope of the holy Scriptures, but also to the general belief of all enlightened nations.

"This new heresy outrages the plainest testimony of Revelation, and the general received faith of mankind, by denying the existence of a *personal* Devil, and a *local* Hell, and a future retribution, which are just as explicitly taught in the Scriptures as the existence of God or the reality of Heaven! The fact is, the sacred writers never attempt to prove the existence of these beings or places; they are every where taken for granted in the holy Scriptures, and there exhibited as the foundation on which the whole system of moral and religious truth is laid.

"He, therefore, who would expunge from the Bible and the Christian religion the received doctrine concerning Satan and Hell, may by parity of argument disprove the existence of God and Heaven. The being and providence of God, the personal existence and evil influence of the Devil, the immortal joys of the body in a place of endless felicity, and the indescribable torments and destruction of the wicked in Hell, are doctrines that have equal foundation in the Christian system; and will be acknowledged, in despite of all the efforts of infidelity, while the world stands, and the Bible retains the confidence of mankind. To every objection to these doctrines, it is sufficient to reply: They were popular in the days of Christ, never once reprov'd by him, but often made the foundation of his public instruction and impressive warnings; and therefore, we are authorised [sic] in believing that he gave them his divine sanction.

(Under his fourth reason for renouncing Universalism, Mr. T. says:)

"Universalism is utterly incapable of producing any moral and religious reformation."

(He then goes on to compare Universalism and Atheism with each other, representing them about on a par as to their moral tendency. And fifthly, says:)

"The moral tendency of Universalism is manifestly the subversion of religion and the degradation of human nature. Being engaged for some years after I joined the Universalist connexion in September, 1823, in preaching to people whom I had collected in new societies, I had no opportunity of seeing the tendency of the doctrine. But after I was called to preach stably for congregations of several years' standing, in that denomination, I then immediately discovered, with alarm, *death's doings* in all their frightful forms, &c.

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"6. Universalism is the most uncharitable and appalling doctrine for the poor, the oppressed, the diseased and the unfortunate, &c.

"7. Universalism is as unfriendly to civil government, as it is hostile to the existence and influence of Christianity, &c.

"8. Finally, I renounce and abjure the doctrine of Universalism on account of its *Absurdity, Infidelity, and Profanity*.—Universalism holds that the vilest miscreant can, when he pleases, dye his hands in his brother's blood, look up and attack the throne of Heaven by execrations and blasphemies, then turn the weapon on himself, and by an act of suicide compel the holy gates of heaven to open and admit him to rank as chief among the saints. The *Infidelity* is manifest by a total contempt of the Scripture testimony, &c. The *Profanity* cannot be concealed.—By making no distinction between persons who serve God and those who serve him not, it degrades the song of the *redeemed* to the same rank with the obscene mirth of the *libertine*. In a word, this *novel heresy* blights with the breath of *Upas*, the very trees, as well as the fruits of righteousness, in both the moral and religious world." &c. (Whatever else the above description represents, one thing is certain, it is not Universalism, nor anything that *resembles* it, as all who believe the doctrine well know.)

*From his "Systematic Theology," 1825*

"The belief in the existence of a Devil is equally injurious to virtue, simplicity, and Christian truth. It affords a palliative for crimes, and induces men to believe that wicked thoughts and evil actions have not been fomented in their own hearts, but spring from the suggestions of the wicked one. Men are hurried into enormities by this deceitful doctrine. A belief in the existence of the Devil, has driven many weak persons to despair, which most assuredly is the natural consequence of such a wild doctrine. The belief of his existence constitutes no fundamental article of Christian faith; no part of the New Testament states the necessity of believing such an unreasonable doctrine.—*Diablos* from *dia-ballo*, to *dart or strike through*, or to *calumniate*, signifies an *accuser*, a *calumniator*, an *imposter*, and is constantly used in the LXX as the translation of Satan, an *adversary*, and *Zar*, an *enemy*. The Jews in their state of degeneracy, adopted many of the heathen dogmas concerning demons. How deplorable is the state of the human mind degraded by superstition. An imaginary devil has obtained the greatest veneration in many countries of Asia and Africa, and even at this time, however incredible, his worship is very prevalent throughout all Christendom. Being the popular god of modern superstition, if any doubt his existence, all who wonder after the *beast*, hasten to cry out for whole hours, great is the Devil whom we adore. The existence and influence of the Devil are as necessary to the creeds of modern times, as the honors of Diana to the craftsmen of Ephesus. This doctrine of devilism was derived from the Persian theology. If the Devil exist, he must be the rival or servant of the Almighty. The first supposition is atheistic: for if there be a God, he is without a rival; nor would he suffer his designs to be frustrated, nor employ a servant to violate his laws or disturb the peace of his empire. But says the objector, 'if there be no devil, then here is no God, no hell, no need of preaching!' I would not have noticed

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such manifest *puerilities*, &c. O fie! Must God exist, and we preach for the Devil's sake? Shame on those men who sacrifice truth and insult good sense, to fan the fire of fanaticism. The term Satan indicates no more than that propensity to evil so frequently observable in human conduct. Tho' the term frequently occurs in Scripture, yet generally some human being is intended. O how different from the doctrines of devils are the views of God exhibited in the gospel of Jesus! There we read of one God and *Father of all*, who is above all, through all, and in us all—that it is his gracious intention to save and render eternally happy, *all* his intelligent offspring. There we behold no mighty Devil to blacken the moral horizon, or frustrate and baffle the designs of the Deity.

"I undertake to disprove the wicked doctrine of hell torments. The doctrine of hell torments is drawn from false premises. An everlasting Hell was built by Paganizing Christians, on the supposition that sin is infinite. The word Hell, in its modern signification is totally abjured by the spirit of prophecy and the testimony of Jesus, and consequently it is a violation and corruption of divine truth to place such a word in the Bible. My hearers will be surprised by the declaration, that not one of the original words which our translators have rendered *Hell*, conveys the idea of a place or state of punishment in another mode of existence. *Sheol*, which is translated *Hell* in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, signifies only the state of the dead indiscriminately. *Hades* from *a*, not, and *eideo*, to see, signifies unseen, invisible; the invisible receptacle or mansion of the dead, where are departed spirits are supposed to reside, without any distinction whatever. *Gehenna*, according to the testimony of the Scriptures, and the best historians, was the name of a valley south-east of Mount Zion, etc.

"We cannot refrain from viewing with a mixture of pity and ridicule, the foolish fantasies of the ancients and moderns on the local position of hell. Will any man be so wild or fanatical as to assert that the Jewish law contained any such threatening as eternal misery? And can it be admitted that the glorious gospel of the blessed God contains these dreadful denunciations unknown to the Mosaic dispensation? I have fully come to the conclusion, that were it not for ignorance, fanaticism, and the love of gain, there could not be found a single advocate of hell torments. (Query: Are either of these the cause of Mr. T.'s advocating them now?) Surely these advocates of endless misery must be unbelievers themselves, otherwise they would fear to add to the revelation of Heaven, lest God should add to them the plagues written in his book. An endless Hell is useless, even according to the opinions of its advocates. O Calvinists, what think ye of your God, who begets children, makes a fire for them and burns them to death! Nay, that is nothing; he immortalizes their existence to please himself with their contortions! O Arminian, what better is your God, who makes man, prepares the fire, clears the way, and sits calm and composed whilst he beholds his creatures going into the fire, and forever writhing in the liquid flames!! From the first proclamation of the gospel, all the blessings of it were pronounced to be free grace flowing from an impartial God, and therefore for the whole family of the great universal Parent.—On fable, on Pagan fable alone, have Orthodox divines built the antichristian dogma of hell

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torments. A being infinitely wise, good, and happy, cannot propose misery for its own sake.— There can be no suffering under the divine administration, which is not necessary for the perfection of intellectual felicity. If an attribute inflict endless pain on any being, that attribute cannot be good; it cannot belong to God. The design of God can be nothing less than the final and perfect happiness of all his intelligent creatures.”

We deem it entirely unnecessary to attempt a formal refutation of what Mr. T. says in his article entitled, *Universalism renounced*. His former writings placed under it are sufficient for this purpose; and both together will serve to show the dogmatical and uncharitable spirit that all his writings breathe—that whatever dogma the freak of fancy or passion may cause him to espouse, all who dissent from him are set down by him for infidels, knaves or fools. See, in addition to the above, a sentence in the exordium to his lectures on *Systematic Theology*, p. 5. “Arminianism is, therefore, nothing but Atheism dressed in the mock robes of senseless superstition; and Calvinism depicts the Deity such an unfeeling monster as to excite the love of Atheism in every benevolent heart.”

While Mr. T. was with the Universalists, he was esteemed by them as a rash, imprudent preacher and writer, calculated to do them much more harm than benefit. Though his writings might *contain* some good things, yet taken altogether, they were viewed as detrimental to the cause of truth. He held and advanced many opinions not approved by Universalists generally; and was as bigoted and uncharitable towards those that did not fully agree with him in all things, as he is *now* towards those who believe as he *then* did. The truth is, he will injure any cause that he espouses. It has taken years to wipe off the disgrace brought upon the cause of Universalism by his labors in this place, and to redeem the society from the moral death he occasioned them. Of this they were fully satisfied before he left Utica, insomuch that the trustees of the society closed the doors of their place of worship against him. The same was also done in Charleston, Mass., the last place in which he ever preached Universalism; and for the same reason as in this place. Being enraged at Universalists because they would not tolerate his worse than useless labors, and uphold him in his wickedness, Mr. T. forthwith renounced Universalism, and came out in flaming wrath against the whole denomination, denouncing them as the worst of all people, and their doctrine as the most demoralizing and licentious of all systems. If ever the poet’s declaration was verified in any one instance, we are pretty certain it is in the case of John Samuel Thompson, that “Hell was built on spite, and Heaven on pride.” He was determined to have a Hell in which to punish Universalists for their stupidity and ingratitude, in not discovering and properly appreciating his great merits and transcendent qualifications. His writings, however, against Universalism, will have little influence among people who *know the man*. It is sufficient for them that they *do* know him. We however wish him no harm. We are not his enemy because he is ours. We wish him well, and therefore desire that he may become a better man. We have said what we have said, in order to undeceive the public in relation to his high pretensions to a superior regard for the

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morals and welfare of society; and also to put *Christians* on their guard against being deceived by, or too hastily receiving into their fellowship, one who is calculated to injure instead of doing them any good.

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[Rev. Dolphus Skinner, proprietor of the *Evangelical Magazine & Gospel Advocate*]

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Transcribed on 29 Oct 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

Transcriber's note: By January of 1823, John Samuel Thompson, a convert from Methodism, had arrived in Philadelphia from England and had begun preaching Universalism. In January a year later he was settled in Rochester, NY and had begun publication of a monthly Universalist newspaper titled *Rochester Magazine and Theological Review*. On February 18 of the same year, he founded The First Universalist Society in Rochester. As it turned out, he went to Utica, NY after abandoning Rochester, founded a society there, and then abandoned it as well. Soon afterward he denounced Universalism, left the preaching profession and became a schoolteacher in Ohio.