

Reminiscences of Universalism in Western New-York No. IV

In relating a few incidents which came within my own observation, I propose to give a slight sketch of what Universalists of those early times were obliged to encounter from opposers to our blessed religion. Similar instances were almost a matter of course.- If in the common occurrences of life, a Universalist was met by a preacher of an opposite sentiment, her religious views, if time allowed, must be tested. As soon as the fact was ascertained that she believed the great and good Author of the universe would, ultimately, bring the last wandering prodigal home, penitent and purified by that grace which works by love, she generally was subjected to severe denunciations by said preacher. To undertake to give a reason for thus believing was worse than useless. We were often told by opposers that we should not use our *human reason* on the subject of religion. And by the manner in which they would oppose our sentiments, it was often quite evident that if they were possessed of reason, it was seriously blinded by prejudice. Yet oppose Universalism they would, and frequently in a most unreasonable manner.

In 1826 I was spending an afternoon with some half dozen ladies in the village of Canandaigua, Ontario Co., N.Y. A Mr. E., pastor of the Presbyterian church in that place, on his parochial visits, called at the house where we were visiting. After having been duly presented to the company, he commenced to converse on the subject of religion, by saying, "Though we are strangers, we should be united in the cause of religion." This accorded with my views most decidedly. After waiting a suitable time, and as no one made any response to his remark, I ventured to say, "Certainly, I consider it the duty of *all* to join in the cause of religion."- Whether from my name, or from my placing too strong an emphasis on the word *all*, he suspected my sentiments, I know not. Yet he very soon commenced to talk in rather a severe and censorious manner. From some remark of his, I was led to say, "I am aware that I am a sinner, with all mankind." "No," said he, "you have no idea that you are a sinner." I ventured to say, "How can you know my thoughts, Mr. E?" "By your disputatious spirit," he replied. I said, "I am willing to trust myself in the hands of God. I think he will do me no injustice." "God's justice will send you to *hell*," he remarked. "I do not believe his justice requires it; I am willing to abide by it," I replied. He remarked, "You say what I dare not say. I dare not say my trust is in God. God's justice would send us all to hell. To his *mercy*, not his justice, I trust. I shall have no more to say to you," giving me a very severe and haughty look. I ventured to say, "If you had more to say to me, Mr. E., I do not imagine it would save me."- This was the substance of all I said to him. Yet, as I was afterwards credibly informed, he felt his dignity very much outraged, and said he was never so abused in his life.

Those of an opposite faith often seemingly considered it no abuse to talk in an abusive and severe manner to Universalists, but when one of that sect had courage to fearlessly repel their severe denunciation, they often considered themselves severely abused. In those days the dignity of the preacher must not be encroached upon so much as fearlessly to express our convictions of the truth, if they should happen to clash with their expressed opinions. Woe be to a young woman, especially, who should dare to express a thought which savored of Universalism in the presence of preachers of self-styled orthodoxy. It was too much, and was not at all to be expected by them that such a one should entertain such heretical views. She would be denounced.

Mrs. L. I. T. [Lasira I. Torrey]

Grand Marsh, Wis.

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