

Reminiscences of Universalism in Western New-York

No. V

In 1830, being in a feeble state of health, and wishing to avail myself of the skill of an eminent physician of Rochester, N.Y., I took board in his family. His wife was a Presbyterian. He was not a member of any denomination, but his sympathies were with that sect. Whenever a preacher called he was politely introduced. A desire was manifested by him to find what were my religious views. On ascertaining their character, a reproof for thus believing was the consequence. I soon found the lady of the house did not seem unwilling to hear very severe remarks against Universalism; but it seemed altogether a different matter to her to hear that sentiment vindicated. Indeed, she could not be induced to hear a word in favor of it. She seemed so enveloped in the creed of Calvin, as not to admit a ray of light from any other source. She was very kind to me in every other respect. After this discovery of my views, when people commenced to question me on the subject of my faith, I would merely say, "I am in belief a Universalist; I am willing to converse with you and give my reasons for thus believing, if it will not injure the feelings of Mrs. ____" (the doctor's wife). She would reply, "Perhaps it would be as well to drop the subject."

At one time the Dr. was speaking of the meetings which were being held in the court house. She inquired "what denomination held meetings there?"- "O," said he, "the Universalists and Unitarians have got a couple of blackguards who try to preach there." "Doctor," she exclaimed, "I wonder that house does not sink; so much iniquity there!"

During my stay in Rochester, Mr. Finney, the revivalist, held a series of meetings, and raised a wonderful excitement. The Dr. said to me, "I intend to get Mr. Finney to come here and make an effort to purify your sentiments." I assured him that my sentiments were pure, however faulty I might be. "I know you do not believe the Universalist doctrine," he remarked. "What possible object do you imagine I can have for professing to believe it, if I do not? It certainly is very unpopular." "You should learn to think," said he. "Because I *do* think, is why I am a Universalist," I replied. "If I did not think, I could as soon be a Presbyterian as anything beside." Addressing his wife, the Dr. said, "It is her head that is wrong; her heart is right enough."

After a time Mr. Finney did call; not, however, to purify my sentiments, but as it appeared, to proselyte the Dr., whom his affectionate wife believed to be "out of the ark of safety." It was really quite distressing to witness the apparent misery that lady endured in view of the awful danger of endless woe, to which she no doubt sincerely believed her unconverted family were exposed. One evening, after her return from a prayer or conference meeting, she said, "Oh, how distressed I am!" I inquired if she were not well [as usual]. "Oh, yes," she replied, "but I am so distressed for my husband." I ventured to say, "My Dear Mrs. ____, why can you not trust him in the hands of your Heavenly Father? He will certainly do right by him." "Miss O __", she replied, "that is all the trust I have!" Addressing two ladies present, (a Methodist and a Presbyterian), she said, "I wish you would both pray for him." To myself she added, "and Miss O __, if you can pray."- But I could not petition my heavenly father to save one soul from endless misery, for the reason that I did not believe he had ever exposed one to such a fate.

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When Mr. Finney was introduced to me, he extended his hand, and taking mine, with a scrutinizing, lengthened gaze on my face, said, "Are you a Christian?" I soon after left the room. He remained several hours. When about to take leave, Mrs. _____ came to my room and requested that I would attend prayers; after which Mr. F., addressing me, said, "I would like to have some conversation with you respecting your sentiments, had I time." I said, "I am willing to converse with you on that subject." "Not now, I have not time," adding, "at any time in your life you have been under conviction, have you not?" I answered in the affirmative. "Well," he continued, "you will be under conviction again at the day of judgment." Addressing the Dr., he continued, "All these infidel Universalists have been under conviction, and given up of God." I said, "I do not think I have given up of God." "No, I suppose not. Yet I never knew one of these infidel Universalists who had not been under conviction and given up of God. It is the way with all of them." I considered his remarks unworthy of further reply. He called after that several times, always treated me very politely, yet never alluded to the subject of my sentiments.

Mr. Finney was a shrewd observer of human nature. Had he imagined that he had excited my fears by his unjust remarks, I suspect I should [would] have heard more from him on the subject. I several times attended his meetings. A favorite text of his was, "The wages of sin is death." He decided that "death" here meant endless, unmitigated agony. He represented the sinner as constantly crying, "Give me my wages!" After having depicted the agonies of the doomed in the most vivid colors, he would suddenly change his voice, and with a look that would send a chill to the heart, exclaim, "Take care, sinner; God will give you your wages!"

Very sensitive persons have been known to swoon in consequence of his [terrifying] preaching. An instance of the kind occurred in Rochester. This excellent discourse, as it was called, took so well that he was solicited to repeat it three times during his stay in Rochester at this time. People were so intent on hearing Mr. F., that the house would be crowded to overflowing. In the streets there would be a perfect rush towards the church where he was to preach.

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

Grand Marsh, Wis.

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