

[Saratoga, Saratoga Co. NY]

## NARRATIVE

*Prejudice is strong, but the Love of God is stronger.*

It was in the dreary month of December, 1824, that the writer of the following narrative took an affectionate leave of the dear people of his charge, in the town of L\_, in the south western part of New Hampshire, where he had happily spent the first two years of his ministry, with the kindest and best of friends - bade adieu to the land of his birth, the fond parents of his childhood, a numerous circle of relatives and friends, and those that his heart held dearest on earth, upon the beautiful banks of the Connecticut - and in the bleak solitude of the season, crossed the *Virides Montes*, that stretch themselves from one extreme of Vermont to another, and arrived in the village of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where he had previously made a short visit, and engaged to make it a place of his residence and labors for a season.

One principal object in fixing my residence in this celebrated "watering place," was to be able to disseminate among the vast numbers of strangers that annually flocked here from all parts of the world, as unto the pool of Bethesda, more liberal and enlarged views of the character of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, than they had been accustomed to hear from the preachers that usually addressed them. Another object was to declare "the grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men," to the *inhabitants* of the village and vicinity, who apparently had hitherto "sat in darkness," and gross darkness had obscured their mental vision, at least in *spiritual* things. For though they were called Christian people, yet seldom had they heard the character of Jesus set forth in any other light than that which represents him as much of a Destroyer as a Saviour.

It is true they had a very pious and good man settled a while as their preacher, but a few of their penetrating inquisitors at length discovered that his views were more liberal and enlarged than those of his order generally, and he was forthwith *dismissed*, and a more bigoted one took his place. For they could bear with no one, unless he was "after the straightest sect a Pharisee," and "esteemed himself righteous and despised others." Of course prejudice was strong and deep-rooted in the minds of the inhabitants generally, and tradition was more the foundation of their faith than the sacred volume of God's revelation to man. In short, it was a complete hot bed of Calvinism, where the creed of the Geneva reformer was taught with all its rigour, and all its cruelty. I had, therefore, reason to expect the most violent and bitter opposition to the principles which I endeavored to inculcate, and the full measure of my expectations was realized. But, God be praised, my labors were not in vain, in the Lord. An incident occurred soon after my arrival in this village, which amply verifies the sentiment expressed at the head of this article.

I called one morning at the house of a Mr. H\_ [Huling], (who attended at the place of worship where I ministered,) for the purpose of transacting some business with him. I was introduced to his lady, who, although a fine looking and intelligent woman, at the annunciation of my name, scarcely gave me the common salutation of civility; but, with rather a morose countenance, sunk into a kind of sullen silence, indicating that she did not consider herself very highly honored by a call from such a person. This silence of hers I did not think proper at that time to interrupt, nor obtrude conversation upon her which I was well persuaded would be unwelcome. For I correctly judged that she was not overmuch pleased with the residence of a person of my principles in the village, much less with a visit to her house. Indeed, she had said she never wished to see me, and was determined never to hear me preach, nor allow her

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children to, if in her power to prevent it; though she supposed she could not prevent her husband from attending. She had been trained up in the dogmas of the day, considered herself *almost* a saint, and above all things hated that sect that was “everywhere spoken against.” I made but a short call at this time, and left her, probably with impressions similar to those with which I found her.

A few days later, I had occasion again to call for the purpose of seeing Mr. H\_. During my stay, there was something said that turned the conversation upon the subject of religion. But after her husband and myself had conversed a while on the subject, I found that Mrs. H\_ no longer wanted a tongue to express herself with, but was remarkably lavish of reproaches and invective against the doctrine of impartial grace and its advocates. “It is the most corrupt and licentious doctrine that was ever preached - it leads to all manner of crime and iniquity - there is no piety among those who believe it - and not a single passage in the Bible favors it in the least!” and much more to the same effect. - Madam, did you ever hear one of our denomination preach? “No, nor have I any desire to hear one.” Have you been familiar with their writings, and ascertained the doctrine to be so pernicious from their own publications? “No, I never read their books, nor would I if my house was filled with them.” Are you not hasty, madam, to condemn without hearing? “I know *enough* about it, to satisfy me it is a bad doctrine.” Why, madam - do you not wish it might prove true? do you not desire that all mankind may become sincerely penitent, exercise faith in Christ, come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved? nay, do you not ardently pray for the salvation of all men? “Why yes, to be sure,” said she, “I pray for the salvation of all, but I know they won’t all be saved.” And you would bring all to repentance and the enjoyment of salvation if you had it in your power? “Most certainly.” You admit that God has power to effect this, and all other things that he pleases? “Yes.” Well, madam, it is truly to be lamented, if your ideas are correct, that you were not in the place of God. For he *can* save all, but will not, and you *would* save all if you had the power. But do you really think, Mrs. H\_, that you are so much better than God, as this would make you? “No, better than God! by no means,” said she. She was struck with a view of the sad predicament into which her observations had led her. Well, Mrs. H\_, said I, can that be *goodness* in God, which punishes all to eternity any of the creatures he has made and has the power to save, without the possibility of doing them the least good? Or can it be consistent with goodness to punish endlessly, merely out of revenge? Would you, dear madam, be guilty of such cruelty? Have you an enemy on earth, however much he may have injured you - or lives there on the foot-stool of the earth the wretch, however vile he may be, that you could see thrown into a fire, the hottest that could be built with the best of fuel, and there groaning, writhing, and frying in the coals, and calling for help, for the space of one hour (if he could live so long), or even fifteen minutes, without reaching out the kindly hand of assistance and relief, and saying to him, “you have suffered enough; I am amply avenged on you for all the wrongs you ever did to me, for all the crimes you ever committed”? “Oh, no, no,” said she, “I could not see such torment inflicted on the worst being that ever existed in human form.”

Well, madam, is God, whose name and whose nature is LOVE, less merciful and less compassionate to forgive than yourself, and yet entitled to your supreme love and adoration, and to the dear name of Father and Friend? What would you think of an earthly father, whom you should see whipping and scourging his child as long as it could stand - then taking it and shutting it up in a dark and gloomy dungeon, till it had strength to endure another similar torturing - and thus continued to whip and torment it every day, till the blood would stream down its tender legs. You ask this father why he thus punishes and torments his child - he

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answers, "because my child has disobeyed me, and I am determined to be revenged on him; I don't design to benefit the child any, but I am determined in this way to convince him of my authority, and make him as miserable as lies in my power as long as he lives." What would you think of such a father? Would you not say he was a *monster*, and unworthy the name of a parent? "Most certainly," said she. Well, dear madam, will you then attribute to our Heavenly Father a disposition which would disgrace an earthly father, and prove him a monster indeed - or in fact, a disposition much worse than this, ... as eternity exceeds in duration the frail life of a mortal?

She paused and looked astonished. At length she spoke, "Ah, God's ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts." True, madam, and we have reason to rejoice that they are not; but they are as far *above* ours, in everything holy, benevolent, and merciful, as they heavens are above the earth. Where mercy is found to exist in man, it is but a drop; in God 'tis an ocean. We have had fathers of the flesh who corrected us for their pleasure, but God [corrects us] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

You, Mrs. H\_, I perceive, are a parent (she was then the mother of eight children), and doubtless feel the tenderest solicitude for the happiness of your children, both in this world and in that which is to come. And can you think so unworthily of your heavenly Father as to believe that he loves his children (and yours are his) less than you love yours? Or what object do you suppose he can have in inflicting endless punishment upon them, when he knows it can do them no good? Suppose, madam, you should be so fortunate as to reach the abodes of the blessed and glorified above, and there, surrounded with all the splendors and glories of the Paradise of God, should be permitted to look down into the dark regions of the damned, the horrid abodes of black despair, immortal woe, and never-ending torment - you should see there your little ones, that are now playing cheerfully around you - should hear their groans and shrieks ascending, see them writhing in immortal flames, rolling in the liquid lava of hell fire, dying a never-ending death, in vain calling on the tender name of mother, father, and all the powers above, below, around, for assistance - and you should know that their inexpressible miseries would continue ten times ten thousand ... years and ages, and that number multiplied by every sand on the seashore, and every drop of water in the ocean, by all the stars in the heaven, by every figure that would be required to wind the earth from pole to pole, and that number multiplied thrice ten thousand times unto itself - and that still, after they had wasted away all these inconceivable ages of misery and woe unalterable, they would be but just beginning to begin their sufferings which would never, never end! And at the same time you [w]ould know that it was naught but vindictive wrath and merciless cruelty that kept them there, that it could do them no good, could do the saints no good, could do God no good, nor any other being in the universe - tell me, dear madam, how much happiness could you enjoy with such a prospect before your eyes?

She answered not with words, for her heart was too full to allow her speak. She fondly pressed her babe to her bosom, and cast a tender look of the fondest maternal affection to the little cherub that stood by her side, and looking around on all her children, the big tear gathered in her eye, that told me with more certainty than words ever could have expressed, that this could never be.

[to be continued]

S.

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[Concluded from our last]

The sabbath after the conversation above described took place, as her family were about preparing to go to church, Mrs. H\_ observed that she felt something of a *curiosity* to hear Mr. S. preach, at least one sermon, though she did not think that she should [would] like him as a preacher, or believe his doctrine; yea, she knew as well as she wanted to know, that she should [would] not believe his doctrine, for it was not supported by the scriptures. After hearing one sermon, she felt an increasing desire to hear a second; but did not dare to go twice on the same day to hear a Universalist preach, lest she should be set down at once as a follower of that "pernicious sect." She accordingly waited with great impatience till the following Sabbath, when I again perceived she was in meeting. After hearing a second sermon, she was still more anxious to hear a third. For she felt the misery of her former faith, and realized that the firmer she believed it, the more wretched it made her. And she now ventured to incur the reproach of going twice in one day to hear me preach. I happened to take, as the topic of my discourse, the subject of Joseph and his brethren, as a type of Christ and the human family; and endeavored to show that as Joseph was a temporal savior of his brethren and all his father's household, so Jesus was the spiritual savior of all his father's children....

At the close of this discourse, to which Mrs. H\_ listened with the most profound and undivided attention and with tearful gratitude, she came to me, and taking me by the hand, exclaimed, (while tears, no longer the tears of sorrow and hopeless anxiety, but of overflowing joy, streamed copiously from her rejoicing eyes) "O, can tidings so good, love so great, and grace so rare, be true? ... Yes, surely it must be so, if the word of God be true; if God loves his children one half as well as I do mine, he can never inflict endless misery upon them - if Jesus is as merciful and impartial to his brethren as Joseph was to his, he will never suffer them to perish in a barren land, while the riches of his grace endure, or the treasures of his love are unexhausted. O, my soul wings her flight with joy, and in raptures of bliss ascends to my God."

From that happy day Mrs. H\_ dismissed all her gloomy forebodings and tormenting fears, and has ever since been one of the firmest and happiest believers in the doctrine of impartial grace. She views God as the universal and unchanging Father and friend of man, and Jesus as the affectionate brother, redeemer and saviour of all his Father's children. The love of God fills and satisfies her soul, and her charity and prayers embrace the whole world. She has often since mentioned to me the coldness of the reception she first gave me at her house, and the bitter and deep rooted prejudice that then filled and influenced her mind; and remarked that though *prejudice was strong, yet the love of God* when brought home to the soul, was *stronger*, and abundantly able to overcome it.

S. [Rev. Dolphus S. Skinner]

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