

to bestow the best gifts on his children that it is a universal law, as universal and sure as the law of gravitation, that whenever we open our souls to him, seeking for his influence and help, and for what is true and what is right, something of that divine life will pass into our souls; that there is no accident in the gift of the Holy Spirit; that it does not come here to-day and there to-morrow; that it does not attend the path of some great revival; that it is not monopolized by prophets or saints or the professors of any particular religion; but that it is everywhere, just as the sun shines and the rain falls on the evil and on the good whenever they are ready to receive it.

So God's love, God's truth, the influence of his Holy Spirit, descends into the heart, whether of saint or sinner, good man or bad, orthodox or heretic, the moment he, looking up, opens his soul and says, "O Lord help me to know thee and be a better man!" Thus we can believe more and not less in the Holy Spirit by setting aside the old theology.

And we can believe, as it seems to me, more in the Bible and not less by not believing in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. We believe that those who wrote the Bible were inspired men, led and filled by the power of God; and we believe it because of the greatness of the book itself, because it has done so much and is doing so much. It must have God in it else it could not do the work it has done.

One of the chief proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is that it is able to withstand the ten thousand perversions that have been put upon it. There is hardly an error or villainy but has been defended out of the Bible. The Bible has been made in our time to defend slavery. The president of one of our New England colleges argued from the Bible, in a book which he took occasion to write in the middle of the great struggle between freedom and slavery,—this orthodox presi-

dent of one of the orthodox colleges of New England wrote a book in which he argued that slavery was a divine institution; and he almost went the length of saying what is logically to be implied, that we in New England were committing a sin against God because we did not hold slaves here.

The Bible has been used to defend almost every wrong that man has ever practised on man. Most terrible doctrines have been taught out of it and defended out of it. Because Noah is reported, after he came out of the ark, to have cursed Canaan, it was argued that this is a proof that the negroes—who were not descended from Canaan—ought to be made slaves. Because Noah, at the period when he was not entirely free from faults of his own, declared that whosoever sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed, an argument was drawn in support of capital punishment.

The Bible has been set against astronomy, science, and almost every discovery of man, and yet the Bible lives. That is a proof of its inspiration. It has so much good in it that it cannot be put down by its own friends; and there is nothing that has more occasion than the Bible to say "Save me from my friends."

But the Sermon on the Mount will never grow old; the Lord's Prayer rises to God every morning from the lips of infancy and is chanted every day in the liturgies of nations; and there is nothing in human thought or in human love which is not fed and strengthened and helped out of the Bible. And because we see that we believe in it.

But we do not believe that the Bible came down from heaven translated into the English, and printed, and having the proof corrected, and being bound up, and coming to us in that inspired form. We believe it was liable to mistakes all the way through; that the men who wrote the Bible were not

infallible, though they were inspired; that they saw some great truths and uttered them, and for the sake of those truths the Bible has lived and will live. But they were not free from mistakes.

Consequently the Bible is a human book, only the best human book there is; and the Bible being a human book we can read it freely as we read any other human book; and if we find something we cannot understand we may wait until we do understand it. If you find something that contradicts your moral sense do not believe it; set it aside. You need not say it is false, because perhaps you do not understand what it is and what it means. But never accept anything, if it is in the Bible, as true which you cannot see to be true, and never accept anything in the Bible to be good when it seems to be in contradiction to your moral sense; and so using the Bible it will help you a thousand times more than if you make it a master and your mind its slave.

The faith of Unitarians enables them to believe more in all these ways. I do not say we do believe more than others or that we have any more faith than others; but we have the power. We can also believe more fully in sin and the evil of sin than if we accepted the common doctrines about sin. The common doctrines about sin are theological doctrines and they have a theological and metaphysical sound. They do not seem to bear on human life or conduct. When we are told that sin came into the world by Adam; and that through Adam we have become sinners; and that the sin we committed is Adam's sin; and that somehow or other Adam's sin is imputed to us; and that we inherit from our federal head the guilt of sin; and that somehow or other we are totally depraved and yet are bound to do right and are very sinful if we do wrong; that we cannot do anything of ourselves that is

right because no one ever does or can, but nevertheless we are bound to do right,—when we are told these things what is the effect on the mind as regards sin?

The whole effect is to make a man think that sin is a sort of metaphysical thing with which he has not anything to do,—except perhaps in church. But when we consider that sin is that which separates us from the divine truth and divine love; that sin is falsehood and that sin is selfishness; and that because God is true and God is love, then whenever we are selfish and whenever we are false we are separating ourselves from that divine friend and plunging downward instead of going upward,—then we can understand the evil of sin.

Moreover I think, as Unitarians, we can believe more in punishment and not less than those who believe the theological doctrine. I do not believe in everlasting punishment because it seems to me to be dishonorable to God. The doctrine of everlasting punishment, as it is held to-day, is that man is sent into this world by his Maker in such a condition that he is capable of plunging himself into eternal ruin by what he can do in this world, so that he may reach a state in which he may be forever and forever a sufferer, without any power of reform or return.

Now, there is not a man, I will not say a good man, I will not say a saint; but there is not a decent man, with decent human feelings, who would be willing to be accused of such a thing as is thus ascribed to the Almighty. It is one of the saddest things in the world that theology can so pervert the common human sense and human heart that we can ascribe to the infinite blessedness and the infinite love that which we should consider disgraceful if performed by a human being.

And therefore I say that we can believe more in punish-

ment and not less when we see that punishment follows sin as its medicine, intended for its cure; and that though there may be hells in the future life, as well as heavens in the future life, hell below hell and heaven above heaven, yet the hells as well as the heavens in the future world, if there are hells and heavens there, are all the angels of God, all ministers of his love, all sent for our good, all sent to bring us back to him; and that there is no suffering inflicted upon any child in this or in any other world which is not intended to help or to save. Believing this, we can believe in punishments hereafter as in punishments here, because we can believe in them and still believe in the perfect goodness of our Heavenly Father,—knowing that he has made us free and that he respects our freedom and that he does not mean to make us good against our will here or anywhere else, but that he surrounds our evil with his infinite and perfect methods.

Since Jesus has taught us in this world that we are to overcome evil with good, therefore that we can overcome the evil with good, then the Lord who sent Jesus into this world must have as much power as he attributes to us here; and with his infinite good he must sooner or later overcome all evil. Feeling this, we can believe in punishment as a means of reform and we can believe more in the glory and beauty of the gospel and in Jesus as the representative of good in this world, standing as the medium through whom God's love and light flow to us.

We can believe more fully in it if we believe that he helps us with that divine power which is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through him in this world or in any other world. We do not believe that the sovereignty of God is such a limited sovereignty that after man's death God is not able to do anything more to help him, but is shut out

from his creature by the mere fact of his death, so that his love can no longer reach him.

We do not believe that the sovereignty of God is a sovereignty which rules over one part of the universe, leaving the devil and his fiends and the sinners to have their own way in another part of the universe.

We believe that the sovereignty of God is that which shall extend through all worlds and which shall redeem all worlds; a sovereignty whose power will never be balked by anything which men or Satan can do, and which shall in the end cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus, regarded as the representation of truth and of love, the manifestation of the divine beauty and glory, is the true Lord of the universe. So we can believe more in redeeming love, not less, since we believe it can extend to other worlds as well as to this.

Now I have shown you some of the reasons why I am a Unitarian. It is not because I wish to believe less in God, Christ, or religion, but because I wish to believe more; to have more faith in God, more faith in man, more faith in Christ, more faith in religion, more faith in the Bible, and more faith in the triumph of divine love. It seems to me that our views are more intelligible than those which have been so carefully arranged on the metaphysical anvils of the middle ages. Those were hammered out with a great deal of skill and a great deal of care, but they are mediæval doctrines and they do not belong to the nineteenth century; they are an anachronism here at the present time. God has given to us all common sense, and when he speaks to us he speaks to our common sense.

Christ rejoiced, not that his doctrines were mysterious, but that they were revelations; and he said "I thank thee, O

Father, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent,"—who probably in those days as in these were hemmed in and shut up by their metaphysical doctrines and theologies,—“that thou hast hidden these things from the pure and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.”

That seems to me to be proof, so far as it goes, that the doctrine which is the most intelligible is likely to be the most true. The Unitarian doctrine is also the most rational, because it does not demand of us to believe a contradiction. It is the one which opens a vaster future to mankind. It does not shut up Christ in any one belief or in any one church or any one party. Jesus said of himself when Pilate asked him whether he was king, “Thou hast said it; I am king, and this is my royalty. For this thing was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth; and every one who is of the truth hears my voice, becomes my servant, belongs to me and I to him.”

Every true man belongs to Christ,—for Christ is the manifestation of good,—whether he knows it or does not know it. He may call himself a deist, he may call himself an infidel, he may call himself a Mohammedan, he may call himself a Brahmin; but if he loves the truth and is following the truth, desiring to know it that he may do it; seeking to do good to his fellow men; seeking to love the infinite beauty more and more,—then he belongs to Jesus and he is a Christian without knowing it and will be so accepted on the last day. If that is not so then the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew does not contain the truth, because in that chapter Jesus himself tells us what shall be the judgment of the Gentiles.

On that day shall the Gentiles be called before him and then he shall say: “Come to my right; you belong to me.” And they shall say: “We did not know we had done any

good for you.” He will say: “When I was hungry you fed me; when I was thirsty you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me in; when I was naked you clothed me.” And they will say: “We were only doing it to our fellow men.” And he shall reply: “When you did it to them you did it to me.”

That is the royalty of Christ; that everything that is good and true in this world is tending toward him, and that he is to reign until all truth and all good under his guidance and lead shall have conquered all the powers of evil. Therefore we are Unitarians because this doctrine seems to us to open a better future to the human race than any other. It is good to live by and it is good to die by. It is certainly good to live by, because it shows us that this world is not the devil's world but God's world: that things here are good in their essence, tending toward good and toward God. If there is evil and sin around us here it is that we shall fight with it and struggle against it and overcome it by the power of divine love. It is a good world to live in, no matter whether we suffer or whether we are joyful.

Unitarianism makes this a good world to live in, for it teaches that an infinitely good Being has made it for us, and an infinitely good Being has placed us here; and he is our providence, our shield, and our support evermore. It is a good religion also to die by. It is a good religion to die by because it tells us it is a good thing to die: it is a good thing to die when death comes and not a bad thing. Death is not the king of terrors to us. Death is a friend. Since God has sent death to all his creatures, just as he has sent life to all his creatures, death must be just as good, when it comes, as life while it remains. We believe in that infinite love which is just the same in the other world that it is here. We believe that

the mercy of the Lord endureth forever and not merely for the seventy short years of human life. We believe that through all eternity, as through all time, we shall be surrounded by that divine grace and wrapt in the arms of that blessed tenderness; and that so we are safe everywhere while we trust in God and lean on him.

And, as we find no little polyp in tropical seas, brought into being under the providence of God, without having a place arranged beforehand for its home, and having its food prepared for it beforehand, and all the conditions of life cared for carefully before it comes, we may be sure that when we, who are better than they, as Jesus tells us, and nearer to God than they, pass on in his providence into the other world, there will be at least an equal care for us there and an equal arrangement made for our reception there and homes as good and suited to all the needs of our nature there as here. Christ said to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you."

So natural it was that they should believe it, that if it were not so he would have told them; but he hardly thought it worth while to tell them, since it was so. "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself." We see in these words the evidence that in the other life, as here in this, there will be homes prepared and made ready for us; that the friendships of this life shall not come to an end here.

Jesus could not live in heaven unless he had his human friends to be with him there. He could not drink the cup of joy alone in the heavenly world. "I will come again to receive you unto myself, that where I am you may be also." If even that holy life required for its full satisfaction and completeness that its earthly love should be carried over there

and that he should not be separated from his earthly friends in the heavenly world, we may be sure that the same divine law will apply to us and those whom we love.

And so we can feel safe and happy when the Lord calls us away, because we know it is the same infinite love which waits for us there which has surrounded us here; and that the same wonderful Providence which has arranged our human life will arrange our life in the heavenly beyond; and that the same sweet and tender affections which God has caused to spring up in our hearts below will be waiting for us also there.

These are the reasons, or some of them, my friends, for which I am ready still to call myself a Unitarian.