

Correspondence.

SIN AND SUFFERING IN THE UNIVERSE. Letters addressed to the Hon. Gerritt Smith, of Peterboro, New York.

BY ALBERT BARNES.

PREFATORY NOTE.

The following letters were written during the last winter, by the aid of a machine, in reply to one, in pamphlet form, addressed to me by the Hon. Gerritt Smith, of Peterboro, New York. Circumstances, now necessary to be referred to, have prevented their being published until the present time. The title of Mr. Smith's letter was, "A Letter from Gerritt Smith to Albert Barnes, 1868." It is not at all as a personal matter, with which the public could have no interest, or with any view to set myself right before the public, that these letters in reply to the one addressed to me by Mr. Smith are printed, but solely because the subject is of great importance to the world. It was for this reason, and this only, it may be presumed, that Mr. Smith had his letter to me printed, and that it was sent to me in that form only. For this reason, also, and no other, my reply to him is printed in the form which I think will be most useful. It is not improper, I trust, as it is not designed to be disrespectful, for me to say that it seemed to me that Mr. Smith's letter was not fitted to do as much harm, as a proper answer might do good. Hence these letters in reply to his.

In order that there might be no suspicion of unfairness in the reply, I have copied without change or omission, the parts of his letter referring to the points under consideration, and have thus in fact reproduced his entire argument, and almost the whole of his pamphlet.

ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA, June 20, 1868.

LETTER I.

HON. GERRITT SMITH:

MY DEAR SIR: When, nearly forty-eight years ago, I became a student of Hamilton College, your name was more frequently referred to than that of any one who had graduated at that Institution. You had preceded me by four or five years. You had received the highest honor in your class, and your high social position, your warm and generous nature, and your acknowledged talents and scholarship, led to a universal expectation of a high career of honor and usefulness.

It has so happened, I believe, that although we were born in the same vicinity; though we graduated at the same college; though we have both been with some prominence before the public; and though we have taken a warm interest in the great questions which have been before the nation, and which have so deeply and permanently affected our national affairs, we have never met, nor do I remember to have seen you but once. In common, however, with thousands of others, I have rejoiced in your wide and noble philanthropy; in your ardent love of liberty; in your friendship for the oppressed and the wronged; in your opposition to the worst law that was ever enacted in a land of freedom—the "Fugitive Slave" law; and in all that you have done for suffering humanity, and for the happiness of men.

Now, as we are approaching the termination of our long course, you have been pleased to address me in a printed pamphlet, on a subject which cannot be denied to be the most important that can occupy the attention of man at any period of life, and which is eminently appropriate to those who are approaching, as we are, the invisible world. It cannot be improper, especially as you have invited me to the task, to inquire whether the views which you have expressed in your letter to me, and which must be regarded as your mature opinions on the subject of religion, will be in the line of the benevolence of your long life, will tend to promote the happiness of the world when we shall have passed away.

It is not improper for me to say that we have both arrived at a period of life when, so far as we are personally concerned, an unpeppable importance must be attached to the utterance of our opinions. In earlier life, we could hope to be able to recall and repair what we might find on maturer reflection to be erroneous or injurious. We can entertain no such hope now. For good or for evil, what we utter goes forth to the world, and, escaping from our lips or our pen, it is beyond our reach forever. I do not say that this fact gives us any claim to the attention of our fellow-men, or that any special importance should be attached to our sentiments on that account; but no man approaching very near the eternal world can fail to desire that his last utterances should be in accordance with truth, and should be such as will promote the happiness of the world when he has gone to his grave. It is with this view, with the highest degree of respect for yourself personally, that I shall examine with freedom the letter which you have been pleased to address to me.

The passage on which your letter to me is founded, referring to the existing facts in this world in regard to sin and misery, and to the punishment of the wicked in the future world, is the following:

"I confess, for one, that I feel them, and feel them more sensibly and powerfully the more I look at them, and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts, and I make no advances toward understanding them. I do not know that I have a ray of light on this subject which I had not when the subject first flashed across my soul. I have read, to some extent, what wise and good men have written. I have looked at their theories and explanations. I have endeavored to weigh their arguments, for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither, and, in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray of light to disclose to me why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why men must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind; nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you. I trust other men, as they profess to do, understand this better than I do, and that they have not the an-

guish of spirit which I have. But I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers; upon death-beds and graveyards; upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family; my people, my fellow-citizens—when I look upon a whole race all involved in this sin and danger; when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it."

This was written, if I remember right, more than twenty years ago. I have no doubt that it is correctly quoted. It expressed my feelings then; it expresses my feelings now. Time has done nothing to modify my views, nor have I as yet seen any explanation which has removed the difficulties to which I then referred.

Whether the explanations which you have offered will contribute to their removal, will be the main object of my inquiry now. I should welcome more cheerful views if they could be presented. I should hail with joy any explanation which would be a relief from these difficulties. I should then find what the wise and the good of all ages have hitherto longed for and sought in vain.

To a correct appreciation of the value of the solution which you have offered, it will be necessary to consider the following points:

- I. The difficulties as they lay in my own mind;
II. The explanation which you have offered;
III. The system of religion on which your explanation is founded; and
IV. The question whether that system has greater advantages than my own, or is better fitted to confer happiness. If it is thus fitted to confer happiness, and to calm down the mind in reference to these difficulties, it would not be unreasonable in you to ask that I should abandon the system which I have so long held, and embrace yours.

Your first remark in reference to the passage on which your letter is founded is as follows:

"You are a gifted and a good man, a learned and a just one; and yet you are a very unhappy one. 'Anguish of spirit' is yours. Whence comes this? Confessedly from the violence which your theological creed does to your reason, and from your not daring to let your reason condemn your creed. Your reason sees not reason; but unreason, in that story of the hidden fruit, which lies at the very basis of your theology. Nevertheless, you accept the story and its representation of a purely arbitrary, and an utterly inexplicable dealing of God with man. It must be confessed that your creed corresponds with the story—the theological structure with its foundation."

Now, it is proper for me to ask, by whom is this "confessed"? It seems to be implied that I "confessed" or avowed this. Yet this is in no manner true. I neither confessed nor avowed this in the extract which you have made; nor have I done it anywhere else; nor do I now do it; nor do I now admit it to be true in any sense whatever. I had reference solely to facts, not to any theory in regard to those facts. My difficulty consisted not at all in reconciling these things to any system of philosophy or theology which I hold, but to the fact that we are under a divine administration—to the character of a holy, a just, an Almighty, and a benevolent Creator. The matter referred to lay in my mind in the following form:

- (1) The facts could not be called in question.
(2) These facts have no necessary connection with any theory of philosophy or religion.
(3) I had seen no sufficient or satisfactory explanation of those facts.

(1) The facts I supposed could not be called in question. I still suppose this to be true. The facts referred to are, that this is a world of sinners and sufferers—of death-beds and graveyards; that there is danger that large numbers will suffer forever; that the whole race is involved in this sin and danger; that the great majority of men are unconcerned in regard to this danger; that God only can save them, and yet that he does not interpose by his power to do it.

It certainly will not be denied by you that a part of these things at least is true—that part which relates to the existence of sin and suffering now on the earth; which have existed for thousands of years; and which have existed in all lands and under all forms of government, and in connection with all systems of philosophy and religion. You yourself do not refer to any lands, or to any period of history, in which there has been exemption from these things; nor could you do it. As I believe in God, it seems plain to me that this is somehow connected with his administration; as you believe in God, you must admit this also. My difficulty as to this fact was to understand why the Creator had suffered this to occur under his administration. The difficulty may be expressed in a word. If it might be supposed for a moment that you and I had been consulted as to what kind of a world a Being of infinite power and perfect benevolence would make, I think we should have said without hesitation, that he would not have made such a world as this, is in this respect. I only add here, that you will furnish any satisfactory explanation of this fact—of the reason why sin and misery have been allowed to come into the universe at all, and to exist for six thousand years, and how this is to be reconciled with the power, the justice, and the benevolence of God, I think it would not be difficult to advance with the same mode of reasoning which would explain this, and to show that it would not be inconsistent with the same power, justice, and goodness, that it should be allowed to exist, under the same administration in some form, forever.

The other part of my difficulty related to the fact that suffering and sin will exist in the future world.

The main difficulty here is not peculiarly mine, but it presses on you as really as it does on me. This is apparent, I think, from the following considerations: (a) On your theory man, as man, is liable to sin, and, as such, must be liable to it in the future world as well as in this. Indeed, in your apprehension, this constitutes the true—the real dignity of his nature, and if this exalted dignity of his nature is manifested in this world, it would be difficult to show any reason why it should not also be done in the world to come, and if at all in the world to come, at any period in the world to come—that is, forever. Thus you say, (p. 5.)

"It is true that man is so made that he can sin; but, instead of complaining of this, we should be thankful for it. Instead of lamenting it, we should rejoice in it. How low a being would man be, were he of necessity sinless! How far inferior to what he now is, were he so constituted that he could not sin

He would be a mere machine, and his going right would no more argue wisdom and goodness in him than does the right-going of a clock argue wisdom and goodness in it."

And again you say, (p. 6.)

"Blessed be God that he has made us capable of sinning; or, in other words, capable of transgressing the laws which He has written upon our being! I acknowledged the goodness of God in making us capable of sinning. I might have added, in making us capable of sinning so greatly. For to say that we have great powers and advantages for learning and obeying law; it being only in the abuse of such powers and advantages that great sinning is possible. His nature, through the violation of whose laws man has become a great sinner, is the very same sublime nature through the keeping of whose laws he would have been a saint."

From this I infer that it is the real exaltation of man that he can sin, and consequently that he does sin, for to act out his nature is his proper exaltation. And it is this which distinguishes him from the brute. You have shown no reason why this exaltation of his nature should not manifest itself in a future world as well as in this, and forever.

(b) It is, if I understand you, a part of your theory that God saves all in this world that he can; implying that there are some whom he cannot save; that is, who will be lost (p. 9.) If this is so in the present life, it may follow that such as are not saved in the present life will not be in the life to come, for it is fairly implied in your language, that the power of God in this respect is exhausted in the present life, or that, so to speak, God would have no better chance of success in the life to come, and if he cannot save such incorrigible sinners here, no hope can be entertained of doing it there. If you say, "God has made man too great to be saved by the direct and unaided power of God himself" here, is it not probable that, with expanded faculties in the future world, man will be found "too great" to be saved by that power there?

(c) According to your theory, (p. 14,) as I shall more fully quote hereafter, the universe is governed by unvarying and established laws, not permitting any direct intervention of the divine power. The fixedness of those laws, must extend over all worlds, and must embrace all time; and must therefore comprehend the regions beyond the grave as well as the affairs of this world. The principle implies, too, that this is eternal. It must, therefore, operate as a limitation of the divine power in the future world as well as in this.

(d) You expressly admit that there may be sin and suffering in the future world; that is, that men may be lost—a number made up according to the statement just referred to, of those whom God cannot save. Thus you say: "Far am I from holding that there is no suffering in the next life. If there is sin there, (and I believe there is,) suffering is also there; for suffering necessarily attends sinning."

What will be the extent of this sin and suffering in the future world, you do not indeed state, but if the evidence in the case is to be derived from the fewness of those who appear to be converted in this life, and to be prepared for heaven, the number cannot be small. So far, however, as the principle is involved, it can make no difference whether it is small or great. The essential point of difficulty is, that any should be lost in the future world.

(e) There is one other remark to be made here; one other point on which we cannot differ; for there is not any ground for a difference of opinion in regard to it. It is, that there is a very general fear or apprehension of future punishment among men, and that that punishment, unless something can be done to avert it, will be unending. This is somehow laid permanently in the human mind. I need not remind you that this universal fear—this "dread of something after death," as expressed by Hamlet, exists every where. It is found in the consciences of all men. It is laid at the foundation of all the heathen religions of the world. It enters into the Mohammedan system. It constitutes the foundation of the faith of more than nine-tenths of the Christian world. It may be doubted whether a single human mind exists that would be exempt from it on the commission of a great crime. Now this occurs under the government of God, and in the human mind as he has made it. The difficulty is to understand why he has so made man, if there is as you say, no "Hell,"—that he everywhere dreads that future under the belief that there is a "Hell." If there is, as I believe there is, such a world of woe, I can easily understand why man has been so made as to dread it, that is to put as if this were true. But what if there is no such world of woe; if there is nothing in fact to be dreaded when the sinner dies. Assuredly this must be known to God, and yet, knowing this, he has filled the world with fear and alarm—on your theory with false and needless alarm, and, therefore, deceptive alarm.

Are we, then, to believe that God governs the world with false alarms; with unreal fears; with unfounded apprehensions? Are we to believe that the divine administration is founded on a stuporous falsehood? Are we to believe that God controls men as weak and foolish parents do their children, by bugbears; by delusions; by frightful stories of bears and wolves; of ghosts and hobgoblins? I confess, for one, that I could not, and would not, honor such a God. And yet, so far as I can see, such must be the character of God unless there is real punishment to be feared in the future world. I think it is incumbent on you to explain this fact on the theory which you hold.—Such are some of the facts on which my difficulty was founded.

(2.) My next remark is that these facts have no necessary connection with my theory of religion; with my creed or any other creed; with my theology or any other theology.

You have been pleased to say, as already remarked, that these difficulties pertain to my theory of religion—to my system of theology. But if the facts are as I have now stated them, they have no particular and exclusive reference to any one theory of religion or theology. They pertain to one system as really as to another; to yours as much as to mine; to you as much as to me. The real difficulty is not in the Calvinistic system, or in the Arminian system; in the Trinitarian theology, or the Socinian theology; in the system of him who believes in the doctrine of future punishment, or the system of the Universalist; in the belief of the Christian, or the want of belief in the Infidel; in the Buddhist system of religion, or the system of the Brahmin; in the religion of

Confucius, or the religion of Zoroaster; in the Koran, the Zendavesta, the Shaster, the Bible, or the Book of Mormon; in the Mythology of the Greeks and the Romans, or in the system of the Hottentot or the Rejele Islander; in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Des Cartes, Malbranche, Leibnitz, Locke—of Kant, Hobbes, Hume, Cousin, or Comte. The difficulty is in the facts themselves; in reconciling these facts to the ideas of justice, goodness, and mercy with which we find our nature endowed. The real difficulty is to understand how an Almighty, a pure, a holy, and a benevolent God—the Creator of the world—should allow these things to come into his system; how they should be suffered to continue from age to age; how they should be permitted to spread delusion, woe, and sorrow over our world in all its history; how they should extend into the future world at all; how there should be either a certainty or a possibility that they should continue forever. I need not say to you that this has been eminently the great problem to be solved in all ages, and how the problem has entered into every system of theology and philosophy. For one, I felt the greatness of the difficulty, only as millions have done before me, and I gave utterance to my own feelings in the strong language which you have quoted, as human nature has done in all ages.

In my next letter, I shall consider the various explanations which have been made of these facts, with reference to the inquiry whether they are adapted to calm down the anxieties of a troubled mind. In the third letter, I shall examine the peculiar explanation which you have offered. I am, with great respect,

Truly yours, ALBERT BARNES.

A SUMMER DAY IN SWITZERLAND.

[From the note book of our European Correspondent.]

Interlachen lies in the centre of Switzerland, and as its name implies, between two lakes. These two lakes were once one long lake, 35 or 40 miles long; and from three to five wide, receiving numerous mountain torrents and discharging them through the western end by the river Aare, which empties into the Rhine. Parallel ranges of mountains running east and west hold in these lakes; but a large opening in the Southern range directly opposite Interlachen admits a roaring Alpine stream, and it is apparently from this stream that the alluvial deposit has been formed on which the town stands. It has formed a plain, level as a floor, four or five miles broad, from mountain to mountain and about as long as it is broad. Back of the town and close to the northern range of mountains, the river flows rapidly, discharging the waters of Lake Brienz, into Lake Thun. These two beautiful lakes on either hand, and the Bernese Alps with their snowy tops in front, make Interlachen the centre of many routes for wild and delightful excursions in every direction. The great feature of the place, however, is the immense mountain always covered with snow, the Jungfrau, which is seen through the opening in the range of hills opposite the town. It is visible from all parts of the town, and, as the sun shines upon it, looks like a mountain of solid silver, in grand and awful silence—a monument of the goodness of God; in providing for our happiness such sights of ravishing beauty.

The first evening after we arrived, a little shower was falling and misty clouds hid the mountain from our view, but while we were at tea, the mist disappeared and the sun came out with one of its glad summer evening smiles, when suddenly every one of the large company in the dining room left their seats and rushed for the windows. We guessed the cause, as we had been quite disappointed at not seeing the mountain on our arrival. So we went to the windows too, and there was such a sight as one sees only once in a lifetime.

The mountain was one of gold, not of silver. The setting sun was shining full upon it, covering it with such gorgeous light that no words can do justice to the scene, nor could any painter's art ever bring it upon canvas. The golden glitter faded into a luscious rosy tint, as the monarch of day bid farewell to the queen of Alpine beauty; then the rosetate tint faded into silvery white; but during the transition, the topmost peak of the mountain kept its golden hue long after the lower portions had changed and until the sun had quite set; and the evening shadows drew on.

The mountain appears to be about four or five miles off; but in the clear atmosphere of these high latitudes, distances are deceiving, and when we had ridden five miles towards it we had travelled about one fourth of the real distance. But we started out to describe one of the excursions we spoke of just now. There are a dozen to select from; which way shall we go? When we were at Geneva a week before, it was so cold and uncomfortable that we did not attempt the forty miles stage ride to Chamouni and Mount Blanc. So we had seen the glaciers only at a distance—and concluded that we would ride out towards Jungfrau and then turn to the Grindelwald Glacier. This was a trip for a whole day. Our party consisted of a New York merchant and his bride, a lady friend of theirs from Providence, with my wife and myself. We had been travelling together for a month, through Florence, Venice, and Milan, on the Italian lakes and over the Alps, and were well used to the full appreciation of fine scenery and the enjoyment of good cheer.

We filled an open barouché comfortably, I being pushed up alongside of the driver, to do the translating for the party. It was with some difficulty that we procured a good team with a French-speaking driver. One speaking English was out of the question. They were nearly all of the German-speaking Swiss, and we sent away several before we obtained one whom we could communicate with. We started southward across the plateau for the gorge some four or five miles distant, through which the glorious Jungfrau ever looked down upon us.

The road was dusty with every promise of a hot day. We soon overtook a gentleman and lady walking. They were evidently Americans.

You can tell American travellers wherever you meet them, all over Europe. Something in the dress, the features, the complexion, the manner, distinguishes them from English and all others. The gentleman had a knapsack strapped upon his back and the lady wore a large flat or sundown. Each carried their Alpine stock—a pole some six feet long with sharp iron point in the lower end and a knob, or chamois horn on the upper. All tourists in Switzerland carry them, using them in climbing over the crags and glaciers. It is the custom to have the name of each glacier or pass branded on them with a hot iron, while at the glacier or notable place. Men brand them for a few cents, having the irons always heated. Some of the poles carry the names of ten or a dozen notable places, visited by their pleasure-seeking, sight-seeing owners.

But the American gentleman and lady walking along the dusty road, who were they? As our carriage overtook them, they turned and smiled, recognizing our ladies who had made their acquaintance at the hotel the day before. They were a young Presbyterian clergyman and his wife from Western Pennsylvania, Erie I believe, out in pursuit of health, spending a year in Europe, and while they avoided the expensive carriage and pair, in their tour, they were certainly taking a sure method for enjoying Swiss sights and scenery and gaining health, by sending their baggage ahead of them by express, and travelling on foot from place to place by short stages, visiting glaciers, cascades and notable crags and passes.

We soon met the roaring Alpine torrent that came from the melting glaciers beyond among the mountains, and emptied itself through the gorge into the lakes behind us. We now pass a little collection of Swiss chalets, all built of wood with roof projecting so far as to shelter the little piazzas that encircle the house. On the rail of the upper piazza near the roof, hang stalks of flax drying in the sun. Some of the chalets have a very neat, tidy appearance, while others wear the opposite aspect. Occasionally a text of Scripture is painted in black letters, six inches long, across the front of the house near the top. The lower story is low, sometimes being used for a stable, but often for a storeroom. The piazza or veranda is reached by a short flight of steps, outside, and on this, the front door, or main entrance, opens. A second piazza encircles the house at the next floor. The chimney generally has a large shutter or trap door on it, worked by a string, which closes over the top to keep out the storm. The roofs sometimes are made of flat stones, which lay over each other in such a way as to shed the rain. These stone roofs are very heavy, often nearly a foot in thickness, and supported on beams.

Passing the village, we follow the stream and are soon among the mountains. A narrow valley worn by the torrent, with sometimes a perpendicular wall of rock three or four hundred feet high on one side, with a little meadow on the other, reaching to the foot of the mountain beyond. Peasants are mowing the grass in these little meadows. Here comes a woman in neat Swiss dress, peasant waist, large white muslin sleeves, and over them half sleeves, starched stiff and covering the front of the arms, a thick skirt of blue or gray, a white apron, and flat straw hat. She has raspberries for sale, rich and ripe. She knows that tourists will be passing this way and has quite a good many in little baskets, all arranged temptingly, and she takes in quite a good many half francs in the course of the morning.

We follow the winding stream for a few miles; now the adjacent cliffs shut out the mighty Jungfrau; again a turn in the road brings it into full view. Soon we come to a wide valley opening to our left and we bid good-bye to the Jungfrau. We follow a tributary to the torrent which joins it here, after a rapid noisy run of ten or twelve miles from the Grindelwald glacier at the head of the valley. But my letter is growing too long. All that we saw as we followed the stream to its very source, will appear in our next letter.

G. W. M.

MAN AND HIS SAVIOUR.

A very old German author discourses thus tenderly of Christ:—

"My soul is like a hungry and thirsty child, and I need his love and consolations for my refreshment. I am a wandering and lost sheep and I need him as a good and faithful Shepherd. My soul is like a frightened dove, pursued by a hawk; and I need his wounds for a refuge. I am a feeble vine, and I need his cross to lay hold of, and wind myself about it. I am a sinner, and I need his righteousness. I am naked and bare, and need his holiness and innocence for a covering. I am in trouble and alarm, I need his teaching; simple and I need the guidance of his Holy Spirit.

"In no situation, and at no time can I do without him. Do I pray? he must prompt and intercede for me. Am I arraigned by Satan at the divine tribunal? he must be my advocate. Am I in affliction? he must be my helper. Am I persecuted by the world? he must defend me. When I am forsaken, he must be my support; when dying, my relief; when mouldering in the grave, my resurrection.

"Well, then, I will rather part with all the world, and all that it contains, than with thee, my Saviour, and God be thanked, I know that thou art not willing to do without me. Thou art rich, and I am poor; thou hast righteousness, and I sin; thou hast oil and wine, and I wounds; thou hast cordials and refreshments, and I hunger and thirst.

"Use me, then, my Saviour, for whatever purpose, and in whatever way thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart, my empty vessel, fill it with thy grace. Here is my sinful and troubled soul; quicken and refresh it with thy love. Take my heart for thine abode; my mouth to spread the glory of thy name; my love and all my powers for the advancement of thy honor and the service of thy believing people, and never suffer the steadfastness and confidence of my faith to abate, that, so at all times, I may be enabled from the heart to say, 'Jesus needs me, and I him, so we suit each other.'"