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THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—UNITARIANISM.

THERE are many popular misconceptions concerning Unitarianism, one of which is the misconception that Unitarians are merely theists or deists or monotheists. But as Unitarians believe in the personality and fatherhood of God, they are not mere theists; and as they believe also in revealed religion, they are not mere deists. Nor are they monotheists in the sense in which Jews and Mohammedans are monotheists; for, unlike the Jews, they believe that the Messiah has come, and has, in the Person of Jesus Christ, not only provided an incomparable pattern for the conduct of mankind, but has also manifested forth many of the attributes of God. Not, indeed, in the sense of an Incarnation, but of an Epiphany, many Unitarians behold in Jesus Christ "God manifest in the flesh." It is this belief in Jesus Christ which differentiates the monotheism of Unitarians from that of the most benignant and progressive Jews. And their monotheism is sundered from that of Islam by the whole immeasurableness of its difference in the fundamental conception of God—the Allah of Mohammed being a God of inexorable sovereignty and irresistible will, a Deity above, away from, entirely outside His devotees; whereas the God of modern Unitarianism is a God of righteousness and holiness and love, an immanent God, inspiring and dwelling within the pure and lowly of heart. The Mohammedan crouches beneath the rod of an inflexible Despot; the Unitarian bows before the throne of an all-merciful Father.

And as Unitarians are distinct from all non-Christian monotheists, so also are they distinguishable, in some measure at least, from the Arians of the fourth and fifth centuries and the Socinians of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries of the Christian era. Though leaning doctrinally towards Arianism, and especially towards semi-Arianism and Sabellianism, they are partially separated from these heresies by a strong reluctance to dogmatize upon the origin, nature, and attributes of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Arius was not merely a denier, he was a dogmatist. He was a restless heresiarch and ambitious founder of a sect. But nothing is more characteristic of Unitarians, particularly of modern Unitarians, than their antagonism to dogma and their frequent unwillingness to regard even themselves as a Church or a sect. They consider religion a purely personal matter.

Arius would probably have accepted the decrees of the Nicene Council and gloried in them, if he could have added one little letter to the word *homoousion*. But modern Unitarians would accept no edicts of Councils, no articles of creeds, however favourable to themselves the edicts might be, or however anti-Trinitarian the articles. Their dogma is to hold no dogma, and their creed to fix no creed. The trust-deeds of all their places of worship are undogmatic. Ecclesiastically, Unitarians have no organization, being purely congregational; and doctrinally, they are wholly without any formulated system of theology. In respect to both organization and dogmatism they are therefore different from the Arians of the earlier centuries.

And they differ more widely still from the Socinians. Genuine Socinianism has never taken any real hold of Western Europe. Its chief abodes have been in Poland and Transylvania. In England there has been only one congregation of veritable Socinians, the congregation gathered by John Biddle in London during the time of the Commonwealth, and carried on, after Biddle's imprisonment and death, by his pupil Thomas Firmin. With the termination of Firmin's ministry, this solitary congregation of English Socinians disappeared.¹ The principal tenets by which Socinians may be distinguished from Unitarians are the cognoscibility of God, the nominal supremacy of the Scriptures, and the official Divinity of Christ. They have many other minor differences on such matters as baptism, the ascension of our Lord as a preparation for His public ministry, the operation of the Divine Spirit on the human mind, the exquisite torments and final extermination of the wicked, the acquisition of wealth by honest industry, the tenure of magisterial offices, and the like; yet in the supposed anthropic comprehensibility of the Deity, the ambassadorial Godhead of Jesus, and the artificial, though nominally supreme, authority

¹ Cf. Blunt's "Dictionary of Sects and Schools of Thought," p. 567.

of Scripture, we find the principal points of distinction between Socinianism and Unitarianism.

According to the Socinian doctrine, the nature and being of God fall fully within the scope of human reason. God is represented as vastly more perfect than man, yet in nothing beyond the reach of human reason and comprehension. The memorial tablet at Siena erected in honour of Fausto Paolo Sozzini (Faustus Socinus), the founder of Socinianism, characterizes him as "the vindicator of human reason against the supernatural." Socinianism is practically the deification of one single faculty of human nature—namely, reason. Nothing in the scheme of Socinianism is permitted to transcend the perception and sovereignty of reason, not even God Himself.

In like manner the authority of Scripture is subjugated beneath the sceptre of reason. Technically, the Socinians ascribe an immense authority to the Scriptures. They declare that all knowledge of Divine things must be derived from the Bible; but they also declare that "the Bible must be interpreted in conformity with the dictates of right reason; and by "right reason" they mean neither the individual spiritual mind nor the hallowed collective understanding of the Church, but simply natural intelligence and comprehension. Hence, as Mosheim states,¹ "the fundamental maxim of the whole Socinian theology is this: Nothing must be admitted as a Divine doctrine but what the human mind can fully comprehend; and whatever the Holy Scriptures teach concerning either the nature of God or the redemption of man" must be so interpreted as neither to transcend human reason nor afford scope for the supernatural. Socinus himself declares that he regards "the sacred Scriptures as his only guide"; yet, while yielding this nominal homage to the Bible, he practically destroyed its authority as a Divine revelation by making natural reason the sole and supreme interpreter of its oracles. Modern Unitarians do not technically ascribe the same paramount authority to the Bible as the Socinians, but it is certain that the great majority of them pay more real reverence to it. Those Unitarians are in a distinct and diminishing minority who wholly rationalize the Bible, and deny even to its most spiritual revelations any significance above the full grasp of natural reason.

It is not difficult to understand why the Socinians, and especially its early apostles, outwardly rendered such flattering homage to the Bible, while inwardly undermining its entire authority. Some of its early apostles were Italians, living within sight or sound of the miseries and profanities of

¹ "Ecclesiastical History," Book iv., sect. iii., pt. ii.

papal Rome at the period of its worst corruptions. Revolted by the iniquities of the Roman Curia, they were bent upon destroying it. In this enterprise they looked for aid to the Reformers, especially to Calvin and the Swiss doctors. With many of the Swiss reformers the paramount authority, even the verbal infallibility, of the Bible was a primary article of belief. It was necessary, therefore, for Socinus to adopt Swiss forms of speech in reference to the Bible, unless he was prepared to forfeit the aid of the Swiss doctors in his crusade against papal iniquities and papal pretensions. Hence his nominal homage to the Bible and his general adoption of orthodox theological terminology; while under cover of this terminology he was subtly assailing the most treasured tenets of the orthodox Protestant faith. He used the same words and names as the Swiss reformers, but in a wholly different and frequently hostile sense. Nothing is more characteristic of Socinianism than its disingenuous use of familiar theological terms in an unfamiliar sense. In this respect modern Unitarians shine forth in splendid contrast; for however far we may deem them to fall short in their perceptions of the verities of revelation, nothing is more alien from their universal temper than any inclination towards disingenuousness.

Socinian disingenuousness was displayed not only in nominal homage to the Bible, but also in the kind of Godhead ascribed to our Blessed Lord. Here again the Socinians, dreading a rupture with the Swiss reformers, used orthodox terms in an anti-orthodox sense. They ascribed Godhead to Jesus, but only representative or ambassadorial Godhead. Jesus indeed was God, yet not actually and really God, God only officially and by delegation. He was a man, yet not a mere man; He was God, and yet not verily and eternally God. He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Ghost—what this may be supposed to mean in the Socinian sense, seeing that Socinians believe the Holy Ghost to be neither God nor a person, I find it impossible to realize—yet though Divinely conceived Jesus was not Divine. Thus while seeming to adopt the evangelistic narrative, the Socinians practically explained it away. Their interpretation of the Ascension also was peculiar to themselves. They placed it before the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. According to them our Blessed Lord "before entering on His public labours was thought to have been elevated into the immediate presence of God Himself, in order that He might be there invested with authority; and as the high reward of the obedience which He showed in His capacity of Pattern-man, of Teacher, and of Legislator, He was finally admitted to a

share of the Divine sovereignty, and made in one sense equal with the Father. For this reason we may fairly be required to offer Christ a secondary kind of adoration, provided only that it never trenches on the worship which we pay to God Himself."¹

On this question of the adoration of Christ, great disputes, culminating in divisions, took place in the first days of Socinianism. Owing to these disputes, the followers of Socinus were separated into two sects, denominated "adorantes" and "non-adorantes." Socinus maintained both the adoration and invocation of Christ; Francis David, originally a disciple of Socinus, was the leader of the non-adorants and against all worship of Christ. He also opposed the offering of prayer to Him either directly or through His mediation to the Father. But neither adorants nor non-adorants ascribed a real Godhead to our Blessed Lord; although both alike ascribed to Him an official, *i.e.*, a nominal or titular Godhead. As in reference to the Bible, so also with regard to the Christ, they used ancient and accepted terms in a novel and unaccepted sense. Their phraseology was Protestant and Catholic, but their doctrine was individual and heretical. They sought the shelter of the Bible and the Creeds for teachings which the Creeds were specifically intended to suppress, and which none but themselves could discover in the Bible. All such subterfuges modern Unitarians honourably disdain. They ascribe neither an unreal Godhead to Christ, nor an unreal Sovereignty to the Bible, nor an unreal cognoscibility to the Supreme Deity. Whatever their errors, they are absolutely free from all stain of subterfuge.

It is, however, much more easy to discriminate modern Unitarians ecclesiastically from Arians and ethically from Socinians than to state with anything approaching to precision what their tenets actually are. As they reject all catechisms and creeds and formularies of faith, it is next to impossible to describe, and altogether impossible to define, them. Not a few Unitarians refuse to consider themselves as a religious body at all, and wholly repudiate the imputation of belonging to an organized sect, although others, in common conversation, not uncommonly speak of "the Unitarian Church." Each Unitarian congregation is strictly a vague concourse of individuals bound together against orthodoxy by an indeterminate number of negations, but bound together among themselves by—nothing.² In almost any modern Unitarian

¹ Cf. Hardwick's "History of the Reformation," p. 265.

² Their contention that they are bound together by liberalism in religion is inadequate, for liberalism is by no means a note exclusively proper to Unitarians.

congregation you could find some persons whose opinions are scarcely distinguishable from those of pure deists, and others who approximate in reality, though not confessedly, to the Catholic faith. They do not all use even the same baptismal formula: some baptize simply "in (or into) the name of the Lord Jesus;" others use (what they call) the formula of the Lord Jesus, and baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."¹ As elsewhere, so among Unitarians, there are high, low, and broad religionists—persons exceedingly diverse in religious taste, temper, and conviction. Unitarianism is thus a vague and wide term, ranging from simple Deism to approximate Trinitarianism. It has no formal creed, and is perhaps best described, in the language of Unitarians themselves, as a "general way of looking at the subject of religion."² Unitarianism is a temper, not a creed; a leaven, not a church; a subjective rather than an objective faith; more a system of negations than of positive beliefs; not a definite grasp of religious truth, but "a general way of looking at religion."

We have seen that modern Unitarians are neither Arians nor Socinians. The Socinians, indeed, styled themselves Unitarians; but very few modern Unitarians would be content to call themselves Socinians.³ Yet, despite their divergencies, modern Unitarians have not a few features in common with both Arians and Socinians. All alike disbelieve in the Catholic and Apostolic doctrine of the Unity of God. What Unitarians believe in is not the unity—for unity implies undivided plurality—but the single absolute oneness, the uni-personality, of God. The orthodox faith is that the Godhead is a Unity; Unitarians believe that God is a Unit. In reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, the differences of belief among Unitarians are immense, some regarding Him as mere man, others as their Lord, their Divine Master, their adorable Teacher and Saviour, in a unique and very special sense the Son of God, but yet not God the Son.⁴ "We look upon

¹ In the Prayer-Book compiled for the use of the Unitarian congregation in Little Portland Street, there are four alternative forms for baptism: (1) "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (2) "I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ." (3) "I dedicate thee to the kingdom of God, through His Son Jesus Christ." (4) "In the name of Jesus Christ, I dedicate thee to God, our Father in heaven."

² Cf. "Essex Hall Year Book," 1899.

³ Biddle's congregation were variously described as Biddellians or Socinians, or Unitarians, but I have often heard modern Unitarians repudiate the appellation of Socinians, and rightly so.

⁴ "Regarding the person of Christ," writes Dr. Beard ("Cycl. Rel. Den.," p. 302), "various opinions are held by Unitarians . . . ranging

Jesus Christ," they say, "as the greatest and holiest of Teachers, but not God."¹

Together with the Eternal Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ they reject, and necessarily reject, the redemption through His blood. For all Unitarians clearly perceive what some Trinitarians are slow in realizing—viz., the essential connection between the Incarnation of the Godhead and the redemption of our manhood. Moreover, in rejecting the Incarnation Unitarians feel themselves logically bound to reject the Atonement, and, in rejecting the Atonement, to reject also the need for the Atonement—a need deeply seated in, and not separable from, the inherent corruption of man's nature and its alienation from the righteousness and holiness of God. Having rejected the Incarnation, they cannot therefore but reject the inherent depravity of man, his being sold under sin,² the moral and spiritual bondage from which the Atonement was Divinely undertaken to set man free. They frequently, indeed, use the terms "salvation" and "Saviour," but for them these terms have none other than a human aspect. "Salvation" in their vocabulary means only "deliverance from sin, including everything that heals and helps man towards goodness and God." It does not include any sacrifice for sin, any making of Christ to be sin for us, the just for the unjust,³ any redeeming oblation to the justice of God. The whole effect of redemption, in the Unitarian view, is upon man, and upon each individual man, not by reason of his baptismal incorporation in the Redeemer, nor even by a justifying faith, but by reason of its efficacy as an object-lesson in the hatefulness of sin and the beauty of an ideal self-sacrifice. Whatever in the New Testament seems to inculcate the doctrine of the remission of sins through the shedding of blood, and that blood the blood of the Incarnate God, they reject as the old leaven of the Jewish doctrine of sacrifice lingering in the new wine-skins of the Gospel.

This liberty to reject whatever they suppose to savour of Judaism is grounded upon the postulate that the Bible, "whilst worthy of all reverence as the text-book of religion, is not itself the Word of God, but the record of God's gradual revelation of His truth and will—a human record, to be studied with perfect freedom, in order to distinguish the Divine from the purely human." Very much is made among

from the high Arianism of Milton to the simple Humanitarianism of Belsham; corresponding alike to the pre-existent Logos of John and the 'man approved of God' of Luke. There are other Unitarians who decline to speculate on the point."

¹ "Essex Hall Year Book," 1899.

² Rom. vii. 14.

³ 1 Pet. iii. 18.

Unitarians of this distinction between the Bible as a revelation and as only the record of a revelation. And it is upon the assumption of its being only a series of human records that they base their claim to study it with "perfect freedom"—*i.e.*, independently of primitive tradition and patristic interpretation.

It is not strange that this "perfect freedom," being nothing else than the liberty of individual interpretation, and individual interpretation varying with the knowledge or ignorance, the spiritual temper or the rationalizing tendency, of each several interpreter who is let loose into the library of the Bible to pick and choose, each according to his own idiosyncrasy, what in the Bible is human and what Divine—it is not strange, I say, that this "perfect freedom" should not be able to formulate itself into any definite doctrine or to crystallize into a creed. In theory every Unitarian decides his own belief *ab ovo* for himself, without assistance either from primitive creeds or the teaching Church.

Yet in actual practice Unitarians depend upon, and are influenced by, their environment just as much as other persons. Their creed, or, to use their own phrase, "their way of looking at religion," is for the most part the creed or the way of their upbringing. As the Trinitarian breathes the comprehensive air of the great Universal Church, so the Unitarian breathes the less expansive air of his nursery and his home—often a very beautiful and religious home, yet not grand as a church. The Trinitarian is nourished upon the Ecumenical creeds, the Unitarian upon family traditions. But as family traditions are numerous and variant, so the Unitarian "ways of looking at religion" are numerous and variant also. It is only in abstract theory that every Unitarian possesses "perfect freedom" to distinguish for himself what is Divine and what human in the Bible, and to formulate his own creed accordingly. Unitarians are but men, and therefore do not and cannot possess absolute individual freedom. They live and think and act under the influence of environment like other men. Their religious tenets, therefore, naturally form themselves into groups, and are more or less spiritual, more or less rationalistic, more or less political, according to environment. No one familiar with Unitarian circles can fail to observe that there are among them two distinct and opposing tendencies—one radical and sceptical, the other spiritual and conservative—and that family traditions and political companionships have a large share in determining to which of these groups each individual Unitarian belongs.

Yet even these distinct and opposing groups are more or

less bound together by their negations. None of them believe in the unity of the Triune Godhead, or the expiatory sacrifice of the Redeemer, or the fallen nature of man, or the inspired supremacy of Holy Scripture. None of them believe that Christ founded on earth a Catholic and Apostolic Church, or that He ordained a special order for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, or conferred an inherent grace on Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. None of them believe, with Arius, that the Christ was of like essence with the Father; nor, like Socinus, that heaven and hell are separate worlds. On the other hand, very few of them consider Christ either as a myth in the sense invented by Strauss, or as the kind of amiable Rabbi whom, according to the dramatic fictions of M. Renan, death has made Divine.

JOHN W. DIGGLE.

(*To be continued.*)



ART. II.—THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH.

No. XIX.

I HAVE not yet seen the new "Dictionary of the Bible." But if it be true, as has been stated, that in it Professor Ryle has placed the composition of Deuteronomy in the reign of Ahaz, the opponents of Wellhausen and his school have reason once more to congratulate themselves. Just as in the case of the New Testament, the followers of German critics of the Old Testament are being forced slowly backward in the date they are compelled to assign to its various books. Originally Deuteronomy was supposed by Wellhausen and his school to have been written shortly before its supposed discovery in the Temple. Professor Driver's theories in regard to the Pentateuch in general have already been described by Professor James Robertson,¹ as "a set of critical canons quite different from those of Wellhausen," and I have quite independently remarked on his recent description of Deuteronomy as a "compilation," not a composition, of the age—or somewhere about the age—in which it appeared, as a new departure. And now its composition, or, it may be, compilation, has been driven backward from the reign of Hezekiah to that of Ahaz. All this is an excellent omen of the prospects before those who would criticise the critics. It were, however, much to be wished that the "intelligent students" in our Universities

¹ "Early Religion of Israel," Preface, p. x (first edit.).