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THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—UNITARIANISM.

PART II.

HISTORICALLY regarded, modern Unitarianism is not distantly related to certain lines of thought developed by the left wing of the Humanists at the epoch of the Reformation. The revival of classic studies, the culture of classic tastes, the reassertion of the authority of reason against the despotism of the Roman Curia, the emancipation of the individual from the bondage of ecclesiastical feudalism, and the reactionary rebellion of the soul thus emancipated from religious serfdom against all religious traditions and all religious authority of every kind—these and similar causes led the extreme Humanists of the sixteenth century to a position almost identical with that occupied by modern Unitarians. As Luther and Calvin revolted against the despotism of the Roman Curia, so these Humanists rebelled against the doctrines of Luther and Calvin; especially such doctrines as appeared to them either contrary to reason or ethically incomplete. There can be no doubt that Calvin's unhistorical view of the Bible, and Luther's exaggerated utterances concerning the valuelessness of works—utterances not intentionally though practically tantamount to Antinomianism—gave a strong impetus in the sixteenth century to speculations which subsequently developed into modern Unitarianism. The eminence ascribed to the writings of Servetus, particularly to his two treatises, *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Dialogorum de Trinitate Libri Duo*, are evidence of this impetus. Servetus was put to death by the authority of Calvin; but it was the cruel forensic theology of Calvin which made it possible in later years for the writings of Servetus to win a strong though undeserved influence. To-day many of the opinions and

sentiments promulgated by Servetus prevail in Geneva, once a city almost abjectly subservient to the dominion of Calvin. Very true are the words of the great Dr. Döllinger. "It was the rude and mechanical conception of the Atonement," he writes, "and the opposing of the Divine Persons . . . like parties in a law-suit, which by a natural reaction made Unitarians of the Puritan theologians and preachers."¹ In the many conversations I have had with Unitarians of various classes, I have found no stumbling-block so great to their minds, nothing so repugnant to their sense of justice or their yearning for a sweet reasonableness in religion, as the Genevan doctrine of the Atonement; and no key so readily opens the door for their return to the Church as the realization that the Church is not responsible for, and has never incorporated into her creeds, the ruthless Institutes of Calvin.

Following upon the Genevan doctrines, which in the age of the Commonwealth obtained a powerful and gloomy ascendancy in England, came the eighteenth century—the century of the sovereignty of unassisted and unspiritualized reason over religion. It was towards the close of this century of Latitudinarianism that modern Unitarianism established its foothold in England. Its first Apostles were Lardner and Priestley and Lindsey, the last of whom founded the first modern Unitarian congregation in England in the year A.D. 1773,² although from the beginning of the sixteenth century there had been many individual advocates and some martyrs of Unitarianism. "Under Edward VI. Joan Bocher, and a Dutchman named Van Parris, were burnt for their heresies concerning the Trinity; and two other heretics were burned on a similar charge, under James I. The life of Biddle was a continual martyrdom. His works were burned by the hangman, he was banished for a time to the Scilly Islands, fined and repeatedly imprisoned, and at last died in prison in 1662."³ To repugn the received doctrine of the Trinity had been constituted at the beginning of the Stuart dynasty a capital offence.

But, as is usual, the persecution defeated the aims of the persecutors. Under its influence what at first had been mainly an intellectual speculation deepened into a conscientious principle. Suffering threw the halo of martyrdom around the sufferers, and some of the most powerful and most earnest minds of the age were attracted to a cause which

¹ "Church and Churches," p. 239, quoted in Curteis's "Bampton Lectures," p. 297.

² "Encycl. Brit.," vol. xiii., p. 671.

³ Lecky's "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. i., p. 312.

hallowed freedom of religious speculation by beautiful and un murmuring patience under suffering. A species of Unitarianism may be detected in the "Paradise Lost." It tinged the theology of Newton. It captured Whiston, one of the most learned theologians of his time, and professor of mathematics at Cambridge; while Lardner, who ultimately became one of its apostles, is still reckoned among the most powerful and persuasive apologists for Christianity.¹

Thus, notwithstanding the publication in 1685 of such powerful defences of the orthodox faith as Bishop Bull's "Defensio Fidei Nicenæ," one of the most solid contributions ever made to Christian theology, Unitarianism continued to spread, began to gather itself into assemblies for worship; and so towards the close of the eighteenth century, in 1773, the first distinctly English congregation of Unitarians was formed. In 1792 Fox made an attempt to extend to Unitarians the Toleration Act of William III. which, in 1689, had secured freedom of public worship to all Protestant Trinitarians; but, owing to the opposition of Burke and Pitt, and the dread of Free Thought caused by the revolutionary movements in France, the efforts of Fox were defeated by 142 votes to 63. Meanwhile, in 1791, the Unitarian Book Society for the distribution of Unitarian literature was founded; and in 1806 the Unitarian Fund Society for promoting Unitarian mission work. Owing partly to the labours of these societies, partly also to the cessation of the panic caused by the French Revolution, and to the discovery that the great body of the Unitarians were not political anarchists, as well as to the steady growth of charity in the religious world, in the years 1812 and 1813 the Unitarians obtained in England a legal toleration for their opinions and worship; and at the present day they labour under no disabilities of any kind, civil, social, or religious.

The removal of these disabilities has greatly weakened both their political influence and their religious fervour. The days when they suffered persecution were the days of their power, and the days when disciples were largely added to them. Early in the nineteenth century, when Unitarianism was a form of religion condemned by the State, nearly the whole body of the old English Presbyterian congregations became Unitarian; and in 1844 the right of Unitarians to these old Presbyterian Chapels was legally secured to them by the Dissenters' Chapels Act. But since that date there has been no conspicuous accession to their numbers. Never, indeed, among the Latin races or in the realms of the Greek Church has

¹ Cf. Lecky, *ut supra*.

Unitarianism gained any real foothold. Transylvania, England, and America are the only countries in which Unitarian congregations have ever existed in any numbers and for any length of time; and in England to-day there are only 279 Unitarian congregations, with about 70,000 adherents, including in the list (a) all duly organized Unitarian, Free Christian, and other non-subscribing congregations and missions, (b) pioneer movements holding regular meetings for worship, (c) chapels and other places of worship closed at present, but not finally given up; in Ireland 39 congregations, "nearly all Presbyterian in constitution," in Wales 32, in Scotland 8. During the last forty years only 81 new congregations have been founded in England, 10 in Wales, 1 in Ireland, and 3 in Scotland. In Africa there is no definitely Unitarian congregation, in all Australia only 3, in Canada 4, and in New Zealand none. The largest sphere of modern Unitarianism is the United States of America, where there are about 450 Unitarian societies, with about 600,000 adherents, and about 500 ministers.¹ Yet a prominent Unitarian minister of Boston, which is the stronghold of Unitarianism in the United States, told me nearly twenty years ago: "The future of religion in America does not lie with the Unitarians"; and an able and very friendly writer has observed: "Not a few representatives of modern Unitarianism disclaim the name Unitarian as tending to perpetuate divisions which no longer exist; and but for their conscientious disapproval of theological formularies would probably join the larger liberal churches, whether established or dissenting, as indeed many do."²

What, then, we may ask, has been the strength of modern Unitarianism, which has enabled it, though in a restricted sphere, so deeply to endure; and what its weakness, which is now leading towards what appears to many observers an inevitable decay? Its strength has lain, first, in its devotion to the intellectual faculty in man, its cultivation of the reasoning powers, its love of letters, its culture of Hellenic tastes and arts, its hatred of ignorance and Philistinism and boorishness. Every Unitarian is an enthusiast, often a fanatic, in the cause of education. The educational laws of the last thirty years are a monument of their industry and determination. No religious body has established so many colleges and seminaries in connection with itself, and in relation to the fewness of its numbers, as have the Unitarians in Great

¹ These statistics are mainly taken from the "Essex Hall Year Book," 1899, the authentic Unitarian calendar.

² "Encycl. Brit.," vol. xxiii., p. 726.

Britain and America. The history of Manchester College affords an illustrious example of their devotion and zeal in the face of continuous difficulty and comparative failure. Manchester College was founded at Manchester in 1786, removed to York in 1803, restored to Manchester in 1840, transferred to London in 1853, removed to Oxford in 1889, adorned with new buildings in 1893; and yet to-day, notwithstanding the glory conferred on it by the learning and moral grandeur of Dr. Martineau, the lavish expenditure of money, and the splendid devotion of its supporters, does not count twenty students upon its roll. It is no wonder that such learned zeal and passionate love, a zeal which no difficulties can arrest and a love which no failures can chill, should have conferred upon its possessors a large and well-merited influence. Nor is their educational fervour confined to their own seminaries. The establishment of Victoria University, with its three affiliated colleges at Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds, is largely due to the generosity and enthusiasm of Unitarians. Moreover, the Unitarian press, both in England and America—whether in the form of books or magazines or newspapers—is eminent for its learning, its liberality, its enlightenment. The homes of Unitarians, whether among the rich or poor, are generally homes of singular refinement, good taste, and active interest in every intellectual movement of the day. Every modern Unitarian is a defender and apostle of intellectual freedom; and in this enthusiasm for rational inquiry, and liberty of thought, and the culture of the mind, lies the first source of Unitarian strength.

The second source lies in devotion to ethical principles. The allegiance which modern Unitarians withhold from creeds, they pay ungrudgingly to conscience. They hate theological dogmas, but they love righteous dealing. Their generosity and charitable benevolence to the sick and the poor are proverbial. The origination of our present system of hospital nursing and district nursing is mainly due to the fervid genius for charity of the venerable head of the great Unitarian family of the Rathbones of Liverpool. It is this devotion to the humanitarian principles of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus—the visiting the sick, the clothing of the naked, the reformation of prisons, the improvement of poor laws, the moralization of money, the enthusiasm for righteousness, the generosity displayed towards noble causes, the worship of ideals of duty and peace and love—which is the second source of the strength of modern Unitarianism.

And yet this very strength is also the secret spring of their weakness. In their enthusiasm for reason, and the development of man's intellectual nature, they do not allow for the

limitations of reason, and they altogether forget that reason is not conterminous with the whole province of man's inner life. They forget that the things above reason are not necessarily against reason, that the super-rational is not always irrational, and that to transcend reason is not equivalent to contradicting it. They forget that critical and familiar speculations regarding God are not the noblest, but rather sometimes are the most perilous, exercises of the human soul; and that all speculations regarding God, however humble and reverent, when not rooted in spiritual experience are necessarily unfruitful.

This extravagant exaltation of reason nearly proved fatal to Unitarianism very early in its career. The soul-refrigerating theology of Priestley—a combination of Locke's philosophy with the crudest rationalistic supernaturalism—threatened Unitarianism with death by the process of spiritual freezing in the infancy of its life. By his cold analytical criticisms Priestley had perverted religion into mere logic-chopping, and souls conscious of a Divine hunger soon began to find that they could not be satisfied with the feats of mere logic-chopping, however dexterous and brilliant. They yearned for real spiritual food, not for clever displays of intellectual gymnastics. And in their unsatisfied hunger, in their revolt against the icy rationalism of teachers like Priestley, many Unitarians lost all interest in their Unitarianism, or they swung by reaction to mysticism, or Irvingism, or Romanism, or else they interested themselves in electro-biology and mesmerism and a variety of mysterious psychological phenomena. Dr. Priestley and similar teachers having robbed Unitarianism of spirituality, not a few Unitarians became, by a natural rebound, credulous towards spiritualism.

It was at this crisis in the fate of modern Unitarianism that in America uprose Channing and Theodore Parker, and in England, Tayler and Thom and Martineau. These strong, sweet souls felt profoundly the need of some more heavenly nourishment than could be found in the hard and cold syllogisms of Priestley and Biddle and Socinus. "Socinians," writes Dr. Martineau, "seem to me to contrast unfavourably with their opponents, and to exhibit a type of thought and character far less worthy (on the whole) of the true genius of Christianity. I am conscious that my deepest obligations as a learner, in almost every department, are to others than writers of my own creed. . . . In devotional literature and religious thought I find nothing of ours that does not pale before Augustine, Tauler, Pascal. And in the poetry of the Church, it is the Latin or the German hymns, or the lines of

Charles Wesley, that fasten on my memory, and make all else seem poor and cold."¹

The influence of these new prophets and champions, particularly of the Revs. Dr. Channing, Dr. Thom, and Dr. Martineau, upon modern Unitarianism has been immense. The majestic solemnity and passionate, yet sublimely controlled, fervour of Dr. Channing's writings have mightily leavened Unitarian thought. The mystic beauty and deep devotion of Dr. Thom's sermons, the sweet tenderness of his whole personality, his love of the most spiritual hymns, have also wrought great results. The publication of the life and letters of the Rev. J. J. Tayler formed a kind of epoch in many Unitarian lives. Then, too, the writings of Emerson and Carlyle, notably the transcendentalism of the former, have had a powerful influence in shaping and elevating the present character of Unitarianism. Above all stands, as on a solitary summit, the grand and venerable figure of Dr. Martineau—the most learned, most philosophical, yet at the same time the most spiritual, of Unitarians. Under his leadership, Unitarianism has in recent years been deeply modified. It is no longer the cold, hard, analytical system of Priestley. Dr. Martineau's mild and benignant sway has developed among Unitarians less of ruthless logic, but more of holy love. "I am on the heterodox side in everything," was the hard, vain boast of Priestley. Very different is the sweet, simple attitude of the spiritually-minded Dr. Martineau. Those who have read Priestley's "Institutes," and Martineau's "Endeavours after a Christian Life," will readily perceive the vastness of the change which has passed over representative Unitarianism during the course of the nineteenth century. If the twentieth century should be fated to witness among Unitarians as great an advance beyond Dr. Martineau's position as Dr. Martineau has achieved beyond the position of his predecessors, if also during the same period the Church continues in her present pursuit of sound learning and spiritual enlightenment, Unitarianism, except perhaps in the breasts of isolated individuals, will probably in the next hundred years have ceased to exist.

Meanwhile the chief desideratum of Unitarianism is a greater Godwardness. Unitarianism is specifically a manward, not a Godward religion. This is its radical defect. It inclines too much towards making man the measure of God, too much towards bringing God down, like the Socinians, to the compass of man's reasoning capacity. Its difficulty with the Unity in Trinity is simply this: it cannot understand so

¹ Curteis's "Bampton Lectures," p. 299.

transcendent a truth. Because the ineffable and Triune God will not fit into any syllogism or system of arithmetic, Unitarianism hesitates to believe in His Trinity. Unitarianism is not yet content to rest in revelation, and bow before mystery, and adore the Unsearchable. It begins with an exaggerated estimate of everything appertaining to man—man's importance, man's innate moral capacity, man's intellectual comprehension—and it ends with a wholly irrational rationalism concerning God—His eternal Triune self-existence, His inconceivable immensity, His absolute sovereignty, His unapproachable holiness. This excessive manwardness not only vitiates the doctrine, it also chills the worship, of Unitarianism. Unitarian worship is sorely lacking in adoration. Its eye is always upon man; it does not lose itself in God. It does not burn and glow with the Presence of the Invisible. Prayer is considered chiefly valuable, not as effectual with God, but in its influence upon man. The Bible is not the heavenly lamp and guide of human reason; reason is the critic and judge of the Bible. The Sacraments are not regarded so much in the light of God's grace as of man's self-dedication. So in everything else, God is too little adored, man is too highly esteemed in Unitarianism.

In nothing is this manwardness of Unitarianism more evident than in its morality. When Unitarians speak of the ethical principle, they too frequently mean merely "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," or some similar principle to be wholly judged by its good effects upon humanity. Unitarians too seldom speak of ethics towards God. Nothing could be more beautiful than their strenuous endeavours to keep the "Second Commandment of the Law," if only they did not so often forget that the Second Commandment is not the First. But they too seldom realize that the worship and love of God should come before work and love for their fellow-men, and that the best charity towards his neighbour can only spring from man's devotion to the Maker and Saviour of mankind. The morality of Unitarianism is thus too often anthropocentric, and not theocentric.

And yet it is a very serious and solemn question whether any charity towards man can be truly moral which is either a rival of, or a substitute for, duty towards God. We all feel, for instance, that no generosity towards the outside world can atone for niggardliness at home. We all feel that no system of ethics can possibly be regarded as satisfactory which does not place filial duty before other duties, whether social or civil. Yet if the claims of earthly parenthood, which on any system of religion cannot be considered as anything more than instrumental and secondary parenthood, are confessedly so

strong, it is obvious that, on any system of morals, the claims of primary and actual parenthood are immeasurably stronger still. If, therefore, man be only secondarily the child of man, but primarily the child of God, then ethically man's first thought, first duty, first love, is due to God. By degrees this larger conception of morals as beginning with duty towards God is slowly leavening modern Unitarianism. It manifests itself in a profounder reverence, a richer and warmer worship, a less analytical and more synthetic treatment of the Bible, and a more sympathetic attitude towards spiritual religion.

In the past, Unitarianism has done glorious service to the Church in claiming for reason an honoured place in religion; it remains for the Church in the future to show Unitarianism that the sweetest of all forms of reasonableness is an intelligent reverence for Revelation. Unitarianism has also done grand service to the Church in emphasizing and bringing into prominence the humanitarian aspects and duties of Christianity; the great importance of righteousness in religion, of the claims of personal liberty as a moderating influence upon central authority, of the rights of conscience to be heard in the discussion of creeds, of the necessity of morals to the life of faith. It now remains for the Church to extend among Unitarians the primary claims of Godwardness in religion, to show that true Christian morals begin with duties to God, that the best way to serve man is first to serve God, that holiness is the highest form of righteousness, that he worketh best who prayeth best, that they who most love God also most love man, that where the Spirit of God is, there, and there only, is perfect liberty, and that all true dogmas, even the dogma of the Blessed Trinity, when vitally incorporated into human consciousness, are not mere functionless opinions, but the most effectual of all instruments for exalting and redeeming and hallowing humanity.

JOHN W. DIGGLE.



ART. II.—MY "CHRONICLES OF MISERY."

SOME OLD RATE-BOOKS.

RATE-BOOKS are not generally considered interesting reading—in fact, we view them with disdain or ill-concealed dislike. The rate-collector is not a person whose acquaintance we wish to cultivate, at any rate in an official sense. We look upon rates as a necessary evil incident to our manners and customs, but not at all as affording us any