

who ventured to deny it, were erased from the statute book of Great Britain.

It is no wonder, then, that it should be so extensively held and professed in the world at present. Nor should it be thought strange that those who set it aside are now greatly in the minority. The power and the fashion of the world, the interests and the prejudices of the multitude, have all been in its favour. In a community or country where the denial of this doctrine is a new thing, those who venture on such a course will be regarded with distrust. And this is natural enough. To all around, then, they appear as innovators on things most sacred. In this light all religious reformers have been viewed at first. If the community be of an intelligent and inquiring character, it will be ready to ask, and willing to hear, what reasons Unitarians have for departing from so prominent a point in the popular faith. Such a disposition is proper and praiseworthy. Presuming that there are many persons in this community of that stamp, we propose to offer a few reasons in justification of Unitarians for adopting the course they have taken.

There are several reasons which compel us to decline the triune theory of the Godhead, and adhere to the belief in the simple unity of the Deity. In our opinion, the argument from common sense is against the doctrine of the Trinity; the argument from sound reason is against it; the argument from plain Scripture is against it; the argument from ecclesiastical history is against it; and even from those who believe it, as well as from those who deny it, we derive argument against it. Let us briefly illustrate what we have now laid down.

1. *The argument from common sense is against it.* The following extract from the Athanasian creed may be taken as a statement of the doctrine: "The Father is Almighty; the Son, Almighty; and the Holy Ghost, Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son, Lord; and the Holy Ghost, Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord." Now we say that common sense gives a verdict against every sentence of that statement. Here are three persons, each of whom is plainly affirmed to be God, and yet in the same breath we are told they are not three Gods, but one God. Common sense at once pronounces that if the former part be true, the latter cannot; and if the latter be true, the former cannot.

Or take the statement and explanation of the Westminster Confession: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son." Here again common sense gives a verdict against the assertion that a Son can be eternal as his own Father, or that the third person of the Trinity can be precisely coeval with those other persons from whom he is said to have proceeded.

2. *The argument from sound reason is against it.* Some may think it unnecessary to make this a matter of distinct statement; inasmuch as sound reason, it is said, always confirms the dictates of common sense. But under this head, we only intend to shew somewhat more minutely that the verdict of common sense is correct. The assertion that there are three persons, each of whom is Supreme God, and yet that there is only one Supreme God, at once confounds numbers and contradicts first principles, and therefore it cannot be true. If the term "person" have any intelligible meaning, it implies, at least, a distinct individual existence. Now to affirm that there are two or three such distinct individual existences, each and every one of whom is omnipotent, &c., is to assert a moral impossibility. And with respect to the co-eternity of the Son with the Father, this part of the theory is likewise at variance with reason and truth. Father and Son are correlative terms, necessarily involving the ideas of priority and posteriority in point of time. "The phrase *Eternal Son*," says Dr. Adam Clarke (himself a Trinitarian), "is a positive self-contradiction. *Eternity* is that which has had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. *Son* supposes time, generation, and father; and time also antecedent to such generation." An argument of the same nature lies against the "eternal procession" of the Holy Ghost, or third person of the Trinity.

We know it is said, however, that the whole is a mystery; and that a doctrine is not to be rejected merely because it is incomprehensible. In the latter opinion we fully agree. Many things are incomprehensible to us which are unquestionably

true. The union of the soul with the body is an incomprehensible matter to us, yet we should never think of denying it. The fact of such a union is unquestionable. To explain it is above our reason, but there is nothing in the statement of it to contradict our reason. But it is very different, as we have seen, in the statement of the Trinity. There is a line of distinction to be drawn between that which is above reason and that which is contrary to it. If we lose sight of this line, there can be no end to the absurdities which may be presented in the name of religion. Under the much-abused plea of mystery the Roman Catholic finds what he conceives a sufficient shelter for the doctrine of Transubstantiation. It should always be observed that the Unitarians do not reject the doctrine of the Trinity because it is incomprehensible, but because it is defective in rational and Scriptural proof.

3. *The argument from plain Scripture is against it.* Every reader of the Bible knows that the general tenor of that Sacred Book is in harmony with the declaration of Moses when he said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." We read in the Bible that there is one God. We read likewise that "God is one." But it is nowhere stated that "God is three." And until such a statement is produced we do not see (and we say it with all respect) how Trinitarianism can be said to stand upon the same distinct and definite Scriptural ground as Unitarianism. Roman Catholic controversialists insist that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be proved from the Scriptures alone.* To the same effect speak the Tractarians of the Anglican Church.† These parties hold the Trinity, but they maintain that the authoritative tradition, or teaching of the Church is necessary, as well as the Scriptures, to establish it. The Unitarians likewise maintain that it is not sustained by the Bible, and, as they discard the authority of tradition, they discard the doctrine of the Trinity likewise. Thus it appears that although the doctrine of a Tri-personal God is the faith of the great multitude of Christian believers, yet it is at the same time maintained by the large majority that that doctrine cannot be legitimately drawn from the Scriptures alone. This consideration should surely have some weight with the careful enquirer.

The Trinitarian controversialist does not pretend to say that the doctrine in question is expressly revealed in the Bible. The most that is claimed for it, is, that it is a doctrine fairly deducible therefrom by a process of inferential reasoning.‡ But wherever human reason is employed, the element of fallibility is introduced, and its deductions should not be arrayed against the utterance of the infallible Word, when that utterance is plainly, distinctly, and incontrovertibly spoken. The Bible teaches that there is "one God." All who admit the teaching of the Bible acknowledge this truth. This is the unity of the Deity which is held by Unitarians and Trinitarians alike. But the Unitarians maintain that the "one God" acknowledged by both parties, is simply One—they hold his *simple unity*; and for this opinion, they quote a Scripture declaration—"God is one."§ The Trinitarians, on the other hand, are not satisfied with this doctrine of the simple unity—they hold a compound unity, called a *trinity in unity*. Now to make their ground as strong as that of the Unitarians they should be able to quote a Scripture declaration that "God is three." But they cannot do this. Their

* In a discussion held at Castlebar, Ireland, in January, 1837, between the Rev. Mr. Hughes, a Roman Catholic Priest, and the Rev. Mr. Stoney, Protestant Rector, the former gentleman thus expressed himself:—"I believe the doctrine of the Trinity on the authority of the Church; and though he (Mr. Stoney) rejects Church authority, he would be glad to base his creed upon a splice of it. My belief in the Trinity is based on the authority of the Church;—no other authority is sufficient."

† The following extract from the writings of the Oxford Doctors is worthy of attention in this connection:—"What shall we say when we consider that a case of doctrine, necessary doctrine, the very highest and most sacred,—may be produced where the argument lies as little on the surface of Scripture,—where the proof, though most conclusive, is as indirect and circuitous as that for Episcopacy, viz. the doctrine of the Trinity? Where is this solemn and comfortable mystery formally stated in Scripture, as we find it in the Creeds? Why is it not? Let a man consider whether all the objections which he urges against the scriptural argument for Episcopacy may not be turned against his own belief in the Trinity. It is a happy thing for themselves that men are inconsistent; yet it is miserable to advocate and establish a principle which, not in his own case indeed, but in the case of others who learn it, leads to Socinianism (meaning Unitarianism). A person who denies the apostolical succession of the ministry, because it is not clearly taught in the Scripture, ought, I conceive, if consistent, to deny the Godhead of the Holy Ghost, which is nowhere literally stated in Scripture. . . . If the Lord's Supper is never distinctly called a sacrifice, or Christian ministers are never called priests, still, let me ask, is the Holy Ghost ever expressly called God in Scripture? Nowhere. We infer it from what is said: we compare parallel passages."—*Tracts for the Times*, vol. 1, No. 45, vol. 5, No. 85, pp. 4, 11.

‡ A Trinitarian writer, the Rev. J. Carlile, in his work called *Jesus Christ the Great God our Saviour*, thus states the matter:—"The doctrine of the Trinity is rather a doctrine of inference and of indirect intimation, deduced from what is revealed respecting the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and intimated in the notices of a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, in the form of baptism and in some of the apostolic benedictions, than a doctrine directly and explicitly declared. We have now come to the limit of explicit revelation, and are entering upon the region of reasoning and inference."

peculiar doctrine of the Godhead stands, not on an express *Scripture testimony*, but on a process of *inferential reasoning*.

Even though their process of inferential reasoning could not be at once shown to be false, we should be obliged to reject its result when we discover its discrepancy with so plain a declaration of God's Word. But it can be shown to be false. This is not the place, however, to enter on a discussion of such a nature. Our aim in these remarks is only to submit a few reasons in justification of Unitarians for departing from the popular doctrine of a triune Deity. The Trinitarians are very apt to speak of the Unitarians as relying too much on human reason. Such a charge whenever made, is improper, and unjust, and might be forcibly retorted. The doctrine of the Unitarian rests directly on Scripture, and can be stated in the very *language of Scripture*. The doctrine of the Trinitarian cannot be so stated. It is constructed by an exercise of human reason, and can only be stated in the *language of human creeds*. Their conduct in this respect seems to us very inconsistent and extraordinary. To borrow the words of a late distinguished convert from the Trinitarian to the Unitarian faith, "they first construct the doctrine upon inference and human reason, and then prostrate reason to receive it."

The only text in the Bible where the three terms, Father, Word (or Son), and Holy Spirit, are mentioned together and called one, is 1st John, v. 7: "For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." But what man who values his character as a Biblical scholar would say that this text is genuine Scripture? That it is an interpolation is now admitted by eminent critics of every denomination. Yet it was clung to as a proof for the Trinity, by many parties, long after the critical evidence had spoken decisively against its genuineness.* And even yet it is offered as the first proof-text for that doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Scriptures plainly teach God's simple unity. The Deity is always spoken of as one. He is never styled three. Our Saviour repeats the declaration of Moses already referred to, as the first of all the commandments. "Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord."† "In that day," saith the Prophet, "there shall be one Lord, and his name One."‡ Elsewhere in the Prophecies he is styled "the Mighty One,"§ "the High and Lofly One,"|| &c. And the Apostle Paul not only says that there is one God, but he writes expressly that "God is One."¶ The general tenor of Scripture is in harmony with the texts cited. From all which it appears not only that there is "one God," but that that one God is One—one simply and indivisibly. The Unitarian and the Trinitarian alike believe that there is "one God." But while the latter affirms that in "the unity of the Godhead there be three persons,"** the former maintains that in the unity of the Godhead there is only one person—he affirms that "God is one."†† Following up his affirmation respecting the three persons in the Deity, the Trinitarian asserts that "the Father is God, the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God."‡‡ While the Unitarian on the other hand following up his affirmation respecting the one person only in the Deity asserts that the "Father" is the "only true God."§§ Thus distinct and different do their statements stand concerning the doctrine of the Godhead. The Unitarian can state his faith in the very language of the sacred Scripture. But the Trinitarian is compelled to resort to the language of human creeds and confessions.

4. *The argument from Ecclesiastical history is against it.* It is worthy of remark that the Jewish people never held the doctrine of a threefold God. We know that during a long course of centuries their nation was the depository of the records of divine revelation. Inspired prophets and teachers were raised up amongst them, time after time, but none of these ever taught the doctrine of the Trinity. Nor did our Saviour and his apostles ever teach such a doctrine. If we had one enunciation from them that "there are three persons in the one God" the question would be set at rest. In the first ages of the church there was no such distribution of persons in the Deity, known to Christians. For three centuries after the death of our Lord, the Apostles' Creed was the only publicly recognized symbol of

* "We have some wranglers in theology," says the eminent Bishop Lenth, "sworn to follow their master, who are prepared to defend any thing, however absurd, should there be occasion. But I believe there is no one among us in the least degree conversant with sacred criticism, and having the use of his understanding, who would be willing to contend for the genuineness of the verse, 1 John v. 7."

† Mark xii. 29. ‡ Zech. xiv. 9. § Isa. i. 24. || Isa. lvii. 15. ¶ Westminster Confession, chap. iii. § 3. †† St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, chap. iii. v. 20. ‡‡ Athanasian Creed. §§ Christ's Prayer,—John xvii. 1, 2.

faith. Now the Apostles' Creed is essentially Unitarian in doctrine, and the fact that it was the only creed known during those first ages of the church, clearly shows us that the Christians of those times were believers in the simple unity of God.

Since neither the Jewish people nor the first Christians knew the doctrine of the Trinity, whence then, it may be asked, did it come? We reply, that it can be traced to its origin in the refined speculations of the Gentile philosophy. Plato the celebrated Athenian sage who flourished about 360 years before Christ, taught the doctrine of one great first Cause. And, according to the interpretation put upon his writings by his disciples, he likewise taught that in the divine nature there were three 'principles' or 'hypostases' which he termed *To Agathon*, the Supreme Good; *Logos* or *Nous*, the mind or reason of God proceeding from the former principle, and *Psyche*, or soul. According to the Platonic philosophy these three, taken together, constituted the one Divinity.

Such was the fashionable philosophy at Alexandria when the simple doctrines of the Gospel found their way to that great city. Here Christianity came in contact with it and was corrupted by it. The divine religion which our Saviour taught, was too simple for men who had always been accustomed to refined and abstruse speculations. As christianity found its way among the learned they engrafted upon it some of their favorite philosophic notions. The three-fold division of the Deity was a prominent doctrine of the reigning philosophy, and this notion was introduced into the Christian system by the philosophising Christians, as they have been called. It was resisted by the great body of believers as a strange and novel doctrine. To the learned, however, it was acceptable, and they willingly promoted it. The following extract from Tertullian, one of the early Christian writers, will shed a flood of light upon the matter. "The simple," says he, "(not to call them ignorant and unlearned,) who are always the greater part of believers, since the rule of faith itself transfers them from the many Gods of the heathen to the one true God, not understanding that the one God is indeed to be believed, but with his own economy [that is his distribution into three persons] are startled at the economy. They presume that the number and arrangement of a Trinity is a division of the Unity. They, therefore, hold out that two or even three Gods are worshipped by us; assuming that they are the worshippers of the one God." From this we may learn how adverse the great body of plain unlettered Christians were to the reception of the new doctrine.

Alexandria the famous seat of the Platonic philosophy was the birth-place of the Christian Trinity. Here it was that the famous controversy broke out concerning the Godhead, in the early part of the fourth century. This is known in history as the "Arian controversy," which for so long a time shook the church and the world. The Arians and the Athanasians (the Unitarians and the Trinitarians of the time), each experienced alternate successes and defeats. Now Arius was degraded and banished by one Council of the church; then Athanasius by another. Sometimes we find an Arian Emperor on the throne, and sometimes an Athanasian. The controversy was carried on with great vigor until the awful severities of Theodosius the Great put down the Arians, and secured the triumph to the Athanasians. Never was a persecution more ruthlessly persisted in than that of Theodosius. "As he persevered inflexibly," says Waddington, "his severities were attended by general and lasting success, and the doctrine of Arius, if not perfectly extirpated, withered from that moment rapidly and irrecoverably." From the page of history, then, we learn that it was by brute force, the Unitarianism of the early times was crushed.

The three creeds found in the book of Common Prayer—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian,—furnish an excellent illustration of the progress of the Trinitarian doctrine in the world. The *Apostles' Creed* runs thus:—"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, &c."—Now this creed we say is an *Unitarian creed*, and as we have already intimated was the only one publicly recognized by the church for the first three centuries.

Next we have the *Nicene Creed*, composed for the most part at the council of Nice, A.D. 325, which was assembled by order of the emperor Constantine, to settle the Arian controversy. Here we have the first authoritative promulgation of the Deity of the Son. In this creed Christ is styled "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, &c."—But even in it, as it came from the Nicene Council, we have no statement of the separate Deity of the Holy Ghost, or third person of the Trinity. This was not added until upwards of half a century afterwards. The statement

* Adv. Praez. Sect. 3, p. 502. † History of the Church, p. 99.