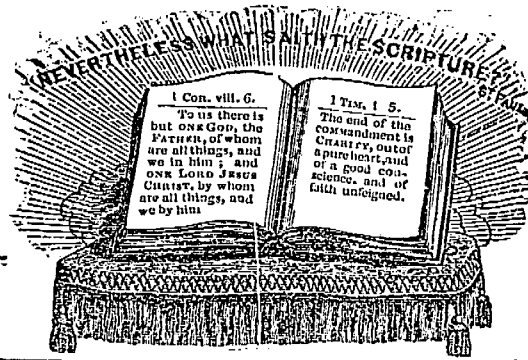


# THE BIBLE



# CHRISTIAN.

TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

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## The Bible Christian.

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### UNITARIANISM IN MONTREAL.

Unitarianism has for some time past occupied a much larger share of public attention in this city, than ever it did at any prior period. How it succeeded in obtaining such extensive notoriety we could not undertake positively to say. We should be sorry to take the merit of the matter wholly to ourselves. Were we to do so, we should be open to a charge of vanity and self-importance similar to that so justly alleged in the fable against the fly, which, whilst sitting on the centre of the carriage wheel in motion, took to itself the credit of all that was performed by the wheel.

We are willing to concede to our Orthodox friends the credit of bringing Unitarianism so prominently into notice. Yet to the Unitarians themselves, we suppose, must be given a share of the merit in the first instance. Had they not been in the city, or had they not taken means to give those who were anxious to hear, a knowledge of the Unitarian belief and the grounds of it, Unitarianism might still have remained in comparative obscurity in Montreal. Our worshipping Society is but of recent origin. It was not until within the past year that we had a church edifice in which to meet for worship. Availing himself of the accommodation it afforded, the Unitarian Minister commenced a course of lectures in January last, the object of which was to enter into a brief exposition of religion from its very foundation, and proceed regularly to the development of the teaching of the Scriptures on some of the more prominent points of faith. These lectures were well attended, and aroused many persons to inquire concerning religion who had hitherto paid but little attention to that subject.

Before the course of lectures in the Unitarian Church was concluded, it was found that many of the Orthodox pulpits in the city had taken occasion to argue against and denounce the alleged errors of Unitarianism. Of this we do not complain. If Unitarianism be erroneous, the sooner it is argued down the better. We hope, however, that a proper distinction will always be made between sound argument, and mere invective, or ardent appeals to the feelings. So much were our Orthodox neighbours aroused by their pulpits, that the Unitarians were met on every hand—in the market, in the street, and in the private circle—and informed how dangerous a system Unitarianism was, and how effectually it had been exposed and refuted in their church some Sunday or two before.

It was frequently found, however, that the persons who thus spoke of Unitarianism knew very little about it. Either their pulpits had given them imperfect and erroneous ideas on the matter, or they had misunderstood the information given. Under these circumstances, the Committee of the Montreal Unitarian Society thought it necessary to adopt some means to keep the public mind right on the subject, by imparting proper information concerning our views and the grounds of them. To this end, they compiled a tract, which, they printed on a

sheet the same size as this paper, and published, under the common title of a "Tract for the Times."

That our readers at a distance may have an idea of the amount of attention lately bestowed upon Unitarianism in this city, we may state, that during the past month no fewer than three pulpits have been delivering lectures by special announcement against our views, and that no fewer than three religious newspapers have been engaged in writing against them. Nor is this all: for we are assured by one of the religious journals that "in almost all the evangelical churches discourses have been delivered" to the same effect. Nor is the whole stated yet. Even strange clergymen visiting this city have been pressed into the same service; and some of the commercial journals, as if anxious to become polemics as well as politicians, have shewn themselves ready to pronounce judgment upon "Unitarian errors."

The facts above stated will account for the appearance of the unusually large quantity of controversial matter contained in our present sheet. The demand upon our own pen has been considerable, and we have endeavoured to answer it as well as we could amidst a variety of other necessary engagements. So long as the curiosity of the public concerning our views is stimulated by the Orthodox pulpit and the Orthodox press, we will consider it our duty to gratify it.

Seriously speaking, we think our Orthodox brethren have given us more importance than we deserve. The Unitarians are but an inconsiderable body in this city. Individually, we have watched the excitement without being much moved one way or the other. While we have had no fears whatever for the cause of Unitarianism, we have not allowed our hopes to be very sanguine for its immediate success to any remarkable extent. It would be contrary to all experience, however, if the result of such an agitation, did it not prove favourable to the Unitarian cause. And it is only proper to state, that so far it has proved favourable to our cause in Montreal. A marked augmentation has already taken place in our worshipping Society. Many who came to our church out of mere curiosity, from having heard our views denounced, remained to be convinced of their truth. Some there are amongst us who freely acknowledge that having "come to scold, they remained to pray."

\* The following editorial paragraph appeared in the *Montreal Herald* of April 25th:—

"We are requested to intimate that the Rev. Nathaniel Willis, D.D. of Renfield street Church, Glasgow, will preach to-morrow (Sunday), in the Free Church, Cote Street, as follows:—Abernoon (Military Service), half-past 1 p. m.; Evening, 7 p. m."

"We understand that Dr. Willis has also agreed to give a discourse on the Divinity of Christ, in opposition to Unitarian errors, in St. Gabriel Street Church, on Wednesday evening, at 7 o'clock. From the well known character of Dr. Willis as an able Theologian, and from his former experience as a Theological Professor in Scotland, it is confidently anticipated that the Doctor will do ample justice to this deeply important subject."

Now if our contemporary, the *Herald*, had simply said DOCTRINES instead of ERRORS, there would be nothing objectionable in the above paragraph. When there are three religious journals in Montreal on the orthodox side, and two of them good-sized weekly papers, and nothing on the heterodox side but our own very small and unpretending sheet making its appearance monthly, there is surely no occasion for the secular press to turn polemical. The religious prints have evidently the will, and no doubt they think they have the power, to put down Unitarianism.—Under all the circumstances, we hope our neighbours of the daily broad-sheet will see the propriety of abstaining from interference. They are powerful, we know; and we hope they will be generous.

### BRIEF STATEMENT OF REASONS For Declining to receive THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

The belief in a tri-personal Deity is a fundamental point in the popular theology. As faith in a God, or great First Cause, must lie at the bottom of all religion, so a faith in the threefold nature of the Supreme Being may be regarded as the basis of what is conventionally termed Orthodox Christianity. According to that system, each of the three alleged "persons" of the Godhead has an appropriate and peculiar function to fulfil in relation to man.

Now this distribution of the Supreme Being into three "persons," "hypostases," "substences," or "somewhats," (as they have been variously designated by Trinitarian theologians,) is declined by a large and constantly increasing class of Christian believers. These maintain that the one God who is acknowledged by all Christians, is personally one—one in the proper and absolute sense of that term—undivided and indivisible. Thus, while the bulk of the Christian world believe in God's threefold nature, or the *Trinity in Unity*, this class of believers hold to the doctrine of God's uncompounded nature, or *simple Unity*. Designated with reference to their ideas of the Godhead, the former should, in strictness of language, be called *Trinitarian-Unitarians*, or, as believers in a Triune God, *Tri-Unitarians*; while the latter should be named simply, *Unitarians*. But, for the sake of convenience, it has been adopted as a custom to style the former *Trinitarians* simply, their belief in God's unity in the sense they put upon it, being all the while understood. It is likewise usual to style the latter *Unitarians* simply, always meaning by that term those who maintain the strict unity of the Supreme Being.

Both classes are Christian believers, though in different senses. Both classes maintain that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour of men, the Lord and Lawgiver of the Christian Church, the Mediator between God and man. But on each of these terms they respectively put different constructions.—The Trinitarian conceives that the term "Son of God" is to be understood as conveying the idea of a strict identity of essence or nature with God, so that Christ is on a perfect equality with the Supreme Being, or in fact the Supreme Being himself. He considers that the term "Son of God" has an equivalent or synonyme in "God the Son." The Unitarian, on the other hand, conceives that the term "Son of God" denotes a being distinct from that God whose Son he is, proceeding from him, and therefore posterior to him in point of time, and subordinate to him in point of rank.—The Trinitarian conceives that Christ was the Saviour of men by virtue of his Supreme Deity, in consequence of which he was enabled to offer an infinite sacrifice on the cross, to expiate the sins of mankind. The Unitarian, on the other hand, conceives that Christ was the Saviour of men by virtue of his office as a Teacher of divine truth, by the sinless and perfect example he set before us, by the profoundly interesting spectacle of his death upon the cross, endured on account of our sins, and by which the heart should be moved to reverence, repentance, obedience and love. Unitarians generally consider that Jesus is the Saviour of men by establishing a system of motives, means, and influences, to act upon the human mind and heart, to turn man from sin, and thus save him from the consequences of sin, to bring him into the way of holiness here, and thus, through the great mercy of God, secure him a heaven of happiness hereafter.—The Trinitarian conceives that Christ is Lord and Lawgiver of the Christian Church by virtue of his own inherent and underived authority. The Unitarian, on the other hand, conceives that Christ is Lord and Lawgiver of the Christian Church in consequence of the power and commandment he received from his Father. He conceives that 'God made Jesus both Lord and Christ.'—The Trinitarian conceives that Christ is Mediator between God

and men; but that his office and individuality as such are to be regarded as distinct from his alleged Supreme Deity. Hence he speaks of his mediatorial character and capacity as something different and distinguishable from that superior nature which he assigns to him. The Unitarian, on the other hand, recognizes no such distinction of two natures in Christ. As he believes God to be one uncompounded Being, so likewise he believes Christ to be one uncompounded Being. He regards Christ as the Mediator between God and men, because God raised him up as a Divine Messenger, and qualified him by extraordinary gifts to perform an important work for humanity. According to the Unitarian view, God and man were at variance. God had compassion for the world, and wished man to become reconciled to him. Christ was the medium through which God put himself in communication with man. Through him, as the Mediator, came all the spiritual blessings to the human race; and through him again, as the Mediator, are all offerings of praise and prayer to ascend from man to God.—Both parties, then, receive Christ as he is offered to them in the Gospel, but they put different constructions on the terms found there in connection with him. By thus receiving Christ in sincerity, and to the best of their knowledge, as he is revealed to them, they become his professed disciples. In addition, then, to the names already given to them on account of their belief in a God, and their particular views of the Godhead, we attach the name *Christian* to them. The Trinitarian becomes a *Trinitarian Christian*; the Unitarian, a *Unitarian Christian*. As to which party is right in its interpretation of the Scripture, that is just the point in controversy.

Ever since the period of its first authoritative promulgation by the Council of Constantinople, in A.D. 381, the doctrine of the Trinity has had a powerful and extensive hold upon the mind of Christendom. The awfully rigorous measures of the Emperor Theodosius effectually checked the discussion of the question, and paved the way for the complete triumph of the Trinitarian doctrine.\* The strong arm of imperial power severely exercised had given it a firm hold and secured its prevalence in the Church before the night of the Middle Ages set in upon the world. When this dark period came, the human mind was hushed in slumber, or engaged in speculations which were calculated to augment, rather than diminish, the errors which had already become incorporated with the simple doctrines of the Gospel. In the sixteenth century an open and successful revolt was made against the corruptions and abuses of the Church. It was not to be expected, however, that the reformers of that period could discover and set aside the accumulated errors of fifteen centuries. Their work was the first step towards a glorious consummation, and a giant stride it was. But they did not rise completely above the evil influence of their times. Those who narrowly escaped the faggot for denying the doctrine of Transubstantiation, could look without compunction on a brother reformer in the flames because he denied the doctrine of the Trinity. The fate of Servetus, and the part Calvin took in the affair, are well known matters of history. No doctrine was ever more favoured and aided by the strong iron arm of temporal power, than that of the Trinity. It is but little more than thirty years since the penal laws against those

\* Here is a sample of the style in which Theodosius addressed the Arians, A.D. 383, two years after the Council of Constantinople:—"I will not permit throughout my dominions any other religion than that which obliges us to worship the Son of God in unity of essence with the Father and Holy Ghost in the adorable Trinity—ne hold the empire of Him; and the power which I have to command you, he likewise will give me strength, as he hath given me will, to make myself obeyed in a point so absolutely necessary to your salvation and to the peace of my subjects.—Waddington's *History of the Church*, p. 99.

"Theodosius considered every heretic [that is, every one who differed from himself] as a rebel against heaven and earth. . . . In the space of fifteen years, he promulgated at least fifteen severe edicts. . . . more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; and to deprive them of every hope of escape, he sternly enacted, that if any laws or decrees should be alleged in their favour, the judges should consider them as the illegal productions either of fraud or forgery."—*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. v. p. 31.