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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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DIVINITY.

ON THE TRINITY.

"There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."—1. John, v. 7.

1. WHATSOEVER the generality of people may think, it is certain that opinion is not religion: No, not right opinion, assent to one, or to ten thousand truths. There is a wide difference between them: even right opinion is as distant from religion as the East is from the West. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all. And on the other hand, persons may be truly religious, who hold many wrong opinions. Can any one possibly doubt of this, while there are Romanists in the world? For who can deny, not only that many of them formerly have been truly religious, (as Thomas a Kempis, Gregory Lopez, and the Marquis de Henty,) but that many of them, even at this day, are real, inward Christians? And yet, what an heap of erroneous opinions do they hold, delivered by tradition from their fathers! Nay, who can doubt of it while there are Calvinists in the world? Assertors of absolute predestination? For who will dare to affirm that none of these are truly religious men? Not only many of them in the last century were burning and shining lights, but many of them are now real Christians, loving God and all mankind. And yet, what are all the absurd opinions of all the Romanists in the world, compared to that one, That the God of love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh, has, from all eternity, fixed an absolute, unchangeable, irresistible decree, that part of mankind shall be saved, do what they will, and the rest damned, do what they can!

2. Hence, we cannot but infer, that there are ten thousand mistakes, which may consist with real religion: with regard to which every candid, considerate man will think and let think. But there are some truths more important than others. It seems there are some which are of deep importance. I do not term them *fundamental* truths; because that is an ambiguous word: and hence there have been so many warm disputes, about the number of *fundamentals*. But surely there are some, which it nearly concerns us to know, as having a close connection with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank among these, that contained in the words above cited: "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One."

3. I do not mean, that it is of importance to believe this or that *explication* of these words. I know not that any well-judging man would attempt to explain them at all. One of the best tracts which that great man, Dean Swift, ever wrote, was his sermon upon the Trinity. Herein he shews, that all who have endeavoured to explain it at all, have utterly lost their way—have, above all other persons, hurt the cause which they intended to promote; having only, as Job says, "darkened counsel by words without knowledge." It was in an evil hour, that these explainers began their fruitless work. I insist upon no explication at all; no, not even on the best I ever saw; I mean that which is given us in the Creed commonly ascribed to Athanasius. I am far from saying, He who does not assent to this, "shall without doubt perish everlastingly." For the sake of that and another clause, I, for some time, scrupled subscribing to that creed; till I considered, 1, That these sentences only relate to wilful, not involuntary unbelievers: to those who,

having all the means of knowing the truth, nevertheless, obstinately reject it; 2, That they relate only to the *substance* of the doctrine there delivered; not the philosophical *illustrations* of it.

4. I dare not insist upon any one's using the word *Trinity*, or *Person*. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, "Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words *Trinity* and *Person*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible." These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text: "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One."

5. "As they lie in the text:"—But here arises a question, Is that text genuine? Was it originally written by the Apostle, or inserted in later ages? Many have doubted of this: and, in particular, that great light of the Christian church, lately removed to the church above, Bengelins, the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious, of all the modern commentators on the New Testament. For some time he stood in doubt of its authenticity, because it is wanting in many of the ancient copies. But his doubts were removed by three considerations. 1, That though it is wanting in many copies, yet it is found in more, and those, copies of the greatest authority; 2, That it is cited by a whole train of ancient writers, from the time of St. John to that of Constantine. This argument is conclusive: for they could not have cited it, had it not then been in the Sacred Canon. 3, That we can easily account for its being after that time wanting in many copies, when we remember that Constantine's successor was a zealous Arian, who used every mean to promote his bad cause, to spread Arianism throughout the empire: in particular, the erasing this text out of as many copies as fell into his hands. And he so far prevailed, that the age in which he lived is commonly styled, *Seculum Arianum*, the Arian Age—there being then only one eminent man, who opposed him at the peril of his life. So that it was a proverb, "*Athanasius contra mundum*:" Athanasius against the world.

6. But it is objected, "Whatever becomes of the text, we cannot believe what we cannot comprehend. When, therefore, you require us to believe mysteries, we pray you to have us excused."

Here is a two-fold mistake. 1, We do not require you to believe any mystery in this, whereas, you suppose the contrary. But, 2, You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.

To begin with the latter. You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend. For you believe there is a sun over your head. But, whether he stand still in the midst of his system, or not only revolves on his own axis, but "rejoiceth as a giant to run his course;" you cannot comprehend either one or the other. How he moves, or how he rests: by what power, what natural, mechanical power, is he upheld in the fluid ether? You cannot deny the fact; yet you cannot account for it, so as to satisfy any rational enquirer. You may, indeed, give us the hypothesis of Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, Copernicus, and twenty more. I have read them over and over: I am sick of them—I care not three straws for them all.

"Each new solution but once more affords
New charge of terms, and scaffolding of words:
In other girth my quation I receive,
And take my doubt the very same I give."

Still I insist, the fact you believe: you cannot deny. But the manner you cannot comprehend.

8. You believe there is such a thing as *light*, whether flowing from the sun, or any other luminous body. But you cannot comprehend either its nature, or the manner wherein it flows. How does it move from Jupiter to the earth in eight minutes—two hundred thousand miles in a moment? How do the rays of a candle brought into the room, instantly disperse into every corner? Again—Here are three candles, yet there is but one light. Explain this, and I will explain the Three-One God.

9. You believe there is such a thing as *atm.* It both covers you as a garment, and

"Wide it terfuss'd,
Embraces round this florid earth."

But can you comprehend how? Can you give me a satisfactory account of its nature, or the cause of its properties? Think only of one—its elasticity. Can you account for this? It may be owing to electric fire attached to each particle of it—it may not: and neither you nor I can tell. But if we will not breathe it till we can comprehend it, our life is very near its period.

10. You believe there is such a thing as *earth*. Here, you fix your foot upon it. You are supported by it. But do you comprehend what it is that supports the earth? "O, an elephant," says a Malabarian philosopher: "and a bull supports him." But what supports the bull? The Indian and the Briton are equally at a loss for an answer. We know it is God that "spreadeth the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." This is the fact. But how? Who can account for this? Perhaps angelic, but not human creatures.

I know what is plausibly said concerning the powers of projection and attraction. But spin as fine as we can, matter-of-fact sweeps away our cobweb hypothesis. Connect the force of projection and attraction how you can, they will never produce a circular motion. The moment the projected steel comes within the attraction of the magnet, it does not form a curve, but drops down.

11. You believe you have a *soul*. "Hold there," says one: "I believe no such thing. If you have an immaterial soul, so have the brutes too." I will not quarrel with any that think they have; nay, I wish he could prove it. And surely, I would rather allow *them* souls, than I would give up my own. In this I cordially concur in the sentiment of the honest heathen, *Si erro, libenter erro; et me redargui valde recusom.* If I err, I err willingly: and I vehemently refuse to be convinced of it. And, I trust, most of those who do not believe a Trinity, are of the same mind. Permit me then to go on. You believe you have a soul connected with this house of clay. But can you comprehend how? What are the ties that unite the heavenly flame with the earthly clod? You understand just nothing of the matter. So it is: but how, none can tell.

12. You surely believe you have a *body*, together with your soul, and that each is dependent on the other. Run only a thorn into your hand: immediately pain is felt in your soul. On the other side, is shame felt in your soul? Instantly a blush overspreads your cheek. Does the soul feel fear or violent anger? Presently the body trembles. These also are facts which you cannot deny: nor can you account for them.