

Poetry.

DUTY.

BY W. J. LINTON.

Be thou no coward!
Life is a trust;
Thou art God's steward;
Dare to be just!
God's sun shines on all.

God is thy master;
Keep thy life whole;
Be thou no waster
Of body or soul!
God watcheth thy fall.

Care for God's children!
Faith ever thrive;
There is no wild'ring
Where there is love:
Love mastereth all.

"WHENCE CAME THE TARES?"

Whence crept the Trinity into the Christian fold? This question I shall now answer by giving as brief a sketch as possible of the history of the Trinity. But the first part of my history must be that of simple Unitarianism; for vestiges of no other form of doctrine can be traced back farther than the third century, nor can we find any evidence that the doctrine of three equal persons in the Godhead was maintained till late in the fourth century. I am prepared to state, without fear of contradiction, that the doctrine of the equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, cannot be found in any work of the first three centuries, and that there cannot be found, with reference to the divine nature, in any genuine Christian work of the first two centuries, any statement of doctrine, equivalent to, or approaching to, or consistent with, the modern doctrine of the Trinity. Is it said, that, because there was no controversy about this doctrine, it was passed over in silence? I reply, that, as the Christian fathers wrote chiefly about the divine nature, attributes, and will, if they had this idea, they could not have failed to use corresponding phraseology; for Trinitarian phraseology is now used by Trinitarians, not only in controversial writings, but in prayers and in practical sermons, and has been freely used during ages when the doctrine was received without opposition or dissent.

Yet farther, it is certain as any fact in history, that the Trinity was not in primitive times the doctrine of the whole church, even if we were to admit that it was held by a part of the church. No ecclesiastical historian denies or doubts that the Judaizing Christians of Palestine, who formed distinct sects early in the second century, were Unitarians. There were two sects of these Christians—the Ebionites and the Nazarenes. The Ebionites believed Jesus to have been a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary; they are confidently spoken of by the Orthodox fathers as heretics. The Nazarenes believed in the miraculous birth and superhuman dignity of Jesus, but regarded him as a created and finite being; and they seem to have been regarded as Orthodox in the earliest times, and are not spoken of as heretics till the fourth century. For these facts, it may be sufficient to refer you to the ecclesiastical history of Mosheim, himself a Trinitarian. Now could the Trinity have been believed by the great body of the church during the first three centuries, and these Nazarenes have been left without anathema and obloquy?

There is yet another remark of importance to be made with regard to the early Christian writings. They consisted not only of works for the edification of those within the church, but many of them were written for the defence and propagation of the new faith, and were addre sed to Jews and Pagans—to the opposers and persecutors of the church. In writings of this class, the most important doctrine of the whole Christian system could not have been passed over in silence. It must needs have been clearly stated and expounded, for the benefit of the uninitiated, and elaborately defended against doubts and objections. Let us see, then, what sort of language the early advocates of Christianity used in propagating and defending their religion.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter addressed a confused, skeptical, and mocking multitude, many of whom had come from afar, and were utter strangers to the new religion. Hear his simple statement, which made, we are told, three thousand converts. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and

by wicked hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up." Hear also in what terms Paul preached Jesus for the first time before the superstitious and idolatrous Athenians. "He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."† Hear also St. Paul's synopsis of his own preaching, in that bold, manly defence before Agrippa, in which you will all feel that it was infinitely beneath the apostle's character to have used concealment or equivocation. "I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."‡ "Saying none other things,"—could St. Paul honestly have made such a denial as this, if he had preached so novel and momentous a view of the divine nature as the Trinity unfolds, especially when it is considered that this must have been an entirely unknown doctrine to Agrippa?

The only other Christian apologist, whom I have time to quote, is Justin Martyr, who addressed a defence of Christianity to Antoninus Pius about the year 140, and about the same time wrote a defence of Christianity against Jewish objections, in the form of a dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Justin, I remark in passing, has always held an unquestioned rank amongst the Orthodox fathers. Speaking of Jesus (in the dialogue with Trypho), he says: "The Father is the author to him, both of his existence, and of his being powerful, and of his being Lord and divine." "He was subordinate to the Father and a minister to his will."

I will now offer you a few extracts from the fathers of the first three or four centuries, premising that I shall quote from no reputed heretic, but only from those whom the Trinitarians regard as representatives of the Orthodoxy of their times. I shall have no difficulty, I think, in showing you that these fathers were what we now call Unitarians.

Clement of Rome, a personal friend of St. Paul, (believed to be the Clement mentioned by St. Paul in the epistle to the Philippians,) styles Jesus "the sceptre of the Majesty of God." We find, towards the close of his epistle to the Corinthians, the following doxology,—could a Trinitarian have written it? "Now God, the Inspector of all things, the Father of all spirits, and the Lord of all flesh, who has chosen our Lord Jesus Christ, and us by him, his peculiar people, grant to every soul of man that calleth upon his glorious and holy name, faith, fear, peace, long-suffering, patience, temperance, holiness, and sobriety, who all well-pleasing in his sight, through our High Priest and Protector, Christ Jesus, by whom he glory, and majesty, and power, and honor unto him, now and forever."

Clement of Alexandria, who wrote near the beginning of the third century, says: "The Mediator performs the will of the Father. The Word is the Mediator, being common to both, the Seal of God and the Saviour of Men, God's Servant and our Instructor."

Origen, the most learned of the fathers, wrote about the year 225. He says: "The Father only is the God; and the Saviour, as he is the image of the invisible God, so is he the image of his goodness." "If we know what prayer is, we must not pray to any created being, not to Christ himself, but only to God, the Father of all, to whom our Saviour himself prayed." "We are not to pray to a brother, who has the same Father with ourselves, Jesus himself saying, that we must pray to the Father through the Son." If this is not Unitarianism, what is it?

Eusebius, the father of ecclesiastical history, who wrote about the year 320, says: "There is one God, and the only-begotten comes out of him." "Christ, being neither the Supreme God, nor an angel, is of a middle nature between them; and being neither the Supreme God, nor a man, but the Mediator, is in the middle between them, the only-begotten Son of God." "Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, and the first-born of every creature, teaches us to call his Father the true God, and commands us to worship him only."

I had marked for quotation many more extracts from the same and other fathers of the church; but I omit them for the sake of brevity. And now let me ask, could these fathers have been Trinitarians, in the modern sense of that word? Could a modern Trinitarian have written the passages which I have now quoted? Had I quoted them, without naming their authors, would you not have taken them for extracts from the writings of Unitarian divines? I trust that there is no need of my saying, that I have endeavoured to represent the opinions of

† Acts ii. 22-24. ‡ Acts xvii. 31. § Acts xvi. 22-23. ¶ Philippians iv. 3.

those times impartially. During the second and third centuries, from a source which I shall shortly indicate, there was a gradual introduction of Trinitarian phraseology into the church. But I no more believe that I myself am a Unitarian, than I do that the Christian fathers of the first three centuries, whose works have come down to us, were all of them virtually Unitarians. Though, from the time of Justin downward, there was a gradual departure from the simplicity of the gospel, and a tendency towards mystical views of the divine nature, and towards the recognition of a threefold distinction therein, yet I believe, that, down to the end of the second century at least, if not of the third, the doctrine of three equal persons in the Godhead would have been deemed as grossly heretical, as that of the undivided unity of God is anywhere regarded at the present time.

We have now reached the period of the Arian controversy, and the celebrated Council of Nice. The Arian controversy was on this wise. Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, in an assembly of his presbyters, maintained that the Son was of the same essence with the Father. This assertion was opposed by Arius, one of his presbyters, who maintained that the Son was totally and essentially distinct from the Father, being the first and noblest of his creatures. The dispute waxed warm, each side finding strong and determined champions, until at length Alexander summoned a numerous council, and deposed Arius and his adherents from their offices in the church. Upon this, the controversy spread like wildfire, inflamed the whole church, and finally led to the summoning of the Council of Nice, which met in the year 325, condemned by vote of the majority the doctrine of Arius, procured his banishment into Illyria, and established what is called the Nicene creed,—a creed not strictly Trinitarian, though strongly tending that way. This creed applies the title of God to our Saviour; but calls him God out of, or derived from God, and thus does not make him a self-existent and independent being, so that this last step towards the full development of the Trinity still remained to be taken. There was a large minority of the Council that dissented from this creed, though it was backed by the authority of the emperor Constantine, who took an active part in the session. Only five years afterwards, the emperor, having become an Arian, repealed the laws against Arius, and instituted a series of oppressive measures against the partisans of the Nicene creed. Ten years after the session of the Council of Nice, the Council of Tyre deposed Athanasius, Alexander's successor, and reinstated Arius and his adherents in their former offices and honors in the Alexandrian church. From this time, for a period of more than forty years, the Arian party generally had the supremacy; and the Nicene creed could not, therefore, have been called the creed of the church until near the close of the fourth century.

The Athanasian creed is the oldest monument extant of the doctrine of three literally equal persons in the Godhead. This was probably written by Hilary, who died in the latter part of the fourth century. It has been recognized in the Romish church as an authentic compend of faith, since the ninth or tenth century. It is retained in the English book of common prayer; and its exclusion from the service of the American Episcopal church was assented to with great reluctance by their transatlantic brethren. It is a very long and prolix document, and I cannot burden you with the whole of it; yet I am going to give you a pretty long extract from it, for two reasons, first, that you may see in its own canonical language what absurdities and contradictions the doctrine of the Trinity involves; and, secondly, that you may contrast it, as I read it, with the "simplicity that is in Christ."

"We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Spirit uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated; but one uncreate and one incomprehensible. So likewise, the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord: and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say, There be three Gods or three Lords. And in this Trinity none is fore or after other; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal." Of all which, and much more like it, the creed in its sequel charitably asserts, and the good people of the English church are compelled by the rubric to hear on no less than thirteen Sundays and festivals in the year: "Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." The only appropriate response to this would be in the words of the apostles, "Who then can be saved?"

We have now seen that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Bible, and that it formed no part of the Christian system as maintained by the primitive church. Whence then came it? I have no hesitation in referring it to the Platonic philosophy. Plato had written much about three divine principles, which he had styled the One or the Good, Mind or Word, and Soul or Spirit. His followers had talked and written mystically about these same three principles, until the number three had become with them a sacred number, and a divine Trinity had assumed a prominent place among the doctrines of the later Platonists, inso much that it may be traced in all their works. In process of time many eminent Platonists became Christians. Justin Martyr was a devoted disciple of Plato. Alexandria, which, as we have seen, was the birth-place of the Christian Trinity, was the head-quarters of Platonism; and the early Trinitarian fathers were all Platonists, and were therefore Trinitarians before they became Christians. These fathers having been much and long in the schools of philosophy, could not come to Jesus with the simplicity of little children. They were unwilling to be disciples of Christ alone. They quoted Plato and Jesus Christ in the same breath, believed in both with equally hesitating assurance, incorporated the Platonic Trinity into their religious creed, remodeled the Christian system in the Platonic mould, and then complimented the memory of Plato on his having anticipated the essential doctrines of the gospel. That this statement is not exaggerated will appear from the fact, that, in their extant writings, the early Trinitarian fathers always quote Plato and his followers, as freely as they do the New Testament, on the subject of the Trinity. St. Augustine expressly says, that he was in the dark with regard to the Trinity, until he found the true doctrine concerning the divine Word in a Latin translation of some of the Platonic writings, which the providence of God had thrown in his way. I might, had I time, adduce numerous quotations from the Christian fathers to the same effect.

I have now accomplished, as far as possible within the limits of a single lecture, the work proposed. I have shown you, as I think, that the Trinity is not a doctrine of the Bible, that it was not believed or taught by the early Christian fathers, and that it derived its technical phraseology, its ideas, and its ultimate form, from the Platonic philosophy.

One word in conclusion. If the view which I have now presented be just, ours is no new doctrine, but the faith first delivered to the saints. What we believe, was the creed of the church in those days, when there were tongues of fire and hearts all zeal, when the word was quick and powerful, when the disciples offered their all upon the altar of their faith, and multitudes of such as should be saved were daily added to the company of the believers. Why may not the same creed bear like fruits now, and among us? May it not, God helping, if we are faithful to our light? Let us not, if we think that we have the truth, idly boast of our superior discernment; for it only makes our negligence and sluggishness the more blameworthy. Were we blind, we should have less sin. But now that we say, We see, our sin remains. If we have the light, let us walk as children of the light. If we deem ourselves, in our own views of religious doctrine, more faithful than our fellow Christians to the sublime declaration of Moses, "The Lord our God is one Lord," let us be no less faithful to the commandment, which he annexes to that declaration,—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,"—A. P. Peabody.