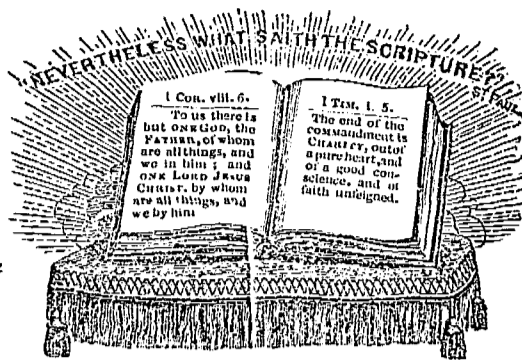


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THE DOCTRINE AND GENIUS OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY.

The following copious selection of extracts is taken from the *Unitarian Congregational Register* for 1848, just published. The compiler of that very useful Annual has printed them with the intention of presenting, by means of extracts from its various writers, some general views of the prevailing doctrines and spirit of Unitarian Christianity. We gladly reprint as many as we can make room for, because we consider them well adapted to aid the general design of this sheet. All the writers cited are known as Unitarians, with one exception; that is Rev. Dr. Bushnell, who is an eminent orthodox Divine of the more liberal and generous school. We need scarcely say that on the point for which he is quoted, his views are in harmony with those of the Unitarians:

"UNITARIANISM takes its name from its distinguishing trait, the strict personal unity of God, which Unitarians hold in opposition to the doctrine which teaches that God exists in three persons. This must be called the great leading doctrine, and, properly speaking, the only distinguishing feature of Unitarianism. On several other points they differ among themselves. Professing little reverence for human creeds, having no common standard but the Bible, and allowing, in the fullest extent, freedom of thought and the liberty of every Christian to interpret the records of Divine revelation for himself, they look for diversity of opinion as the necessary result. They claim to be thorough and consistent Protestants.

"Unitarians do not rely exclusively, or chiefly, on what they conceive to be the intrinsic credibility of the doctrine of the Trinity. They take the Bible in their hands, and setting down to read it as plain, unlettered Christians, and with prayer for Divine illumination, they find that the general tenor of its language either distinctly asserts, or necessarily implies, the supremacy of the Father, and teaches the inferior and derived nature of the Son. At the same time, they all entertain exalted views of Christ's character and offices. In a reverence for these they profess to yield to no class of Christians. 'We believe,' says one of the most eminent writers of the sect, 'in the Divinity of Christ's mission and office, that he spoke with Divine authority, and was a bright image of the Divine perfections. We believe that God dwelt in him, manifested himself through him, taught men by him, and communicated to him his spirit, without measure; so that, through seeing and knowing him, we see and know the invisible Father. In Christ's words we hear God speaking; in his miracles we behold God acting; in his character and life we see an unsullied image of God's purity and love. We believe then, in the Divinity of Christ, as this term is often and properly used.'

"By the Holy Spirit, Unitarians suppose is meant, not a person, but an influence; and hence it is spoken of as 'poured out,' 'given,' and we read of the 'anointing' with the Holy Spirit; phrases which, they contend, preclude the idea of a person.

"They reject the doctrine of native total depravity; but they assert that man is born weak, and in possession of appetites and propensities, by the abuse of which all become actual sinners; and they believe in the necessity of what is figuratively expressed by the 'new birth,' that is, the becoming spiritual and holy, being led by that spirit of truth and love which Jesus came to introduce into the souls of his followers. This change is significantly called the coming of the kingdom in the heart, without which, as they teach, the pardon of sin, were it possible, would confer no happiness, and the songs of paradise would fall with harsh dissonance on the ear.

"There is nothing peculiar in the sentiments which, as a body, they entertain of the Bible. They receive it as their standard, their rule of faith and life, interpreting it as

they think consistency and the principles of sound and approved criticism demand. In proof of their reverence for the Bible, they appeal to the circumstance that several of the ablest defenders of Christianity against the attacks of infidels have been Unitarians,—a fact which no one acquainted with the theological literature of modern ages will call in question.

"To the charge that they unduly exalt human reason, Unitarian Christians reply by saying that the Bible is addressed to us as reasonable beings; that God cannot contradict in one way what he records in another; that if the Bible be his gift, it cannot be at war with nature and reason; that we cannot do it greater dishonor than to admit that it will not stand the scrutiny of reason; that if our faculties are so distempered by the Fall that we can no longer repose any confidence in their veracity, then revelation cannot benefit us, for we have no reason left for judging of its evidences or import, and are reduced at once to a state of utter skepticism."—*Rev. Dr. Lamson.*

"I BELIEVE in the supreme importance of virtue. All faith is summed up in one article and reduced to one breath. God and the Bible, Christ and the Holy Spirit, tell us the fulness of all wisdom and truth in one compendious sentence,—THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUE. This one truth, time, along the spacious ailes of centuries, from the mouth of God, echoes. This truth, through endless ages, eternity will but repeat and sanction. The witness to it of this life, in our individual hearts, will be carried on in our hearts, through the immortality Christ has brought to light. I believe in virtue,—simple, genuine, sweet-tempered virtue. I believe in working, bearing, self-sacrificing virtue. I believe in household, social, political, business virtue. I believe in its superiority to all external modes and forms (which from it alone, reason or the Gospel being judge, receive any worth), however magnified these may be, like motes in a solar microscope. I believe virtue will enter the kingdom of God before all the Scribes and Pharisees of loud profession and pretended sanctity, and that the measures of its possession or lack will be the exact measures of the rewards and retributions of futurity."—*Rev. C. A. Bartol.*

"WHAT thinkest thou of sin and its consequences? In my view, nothing beside, comparatively, is an evil. Sin itself shocks me more, if possible, than what are called its retributive judgments,—so excellent is the nature of which it is the abuse, so noble the powers of which it is the prostitution, so great and good the Being whose will it sets at naught. What is it but the voluntary throwing away of an innocence which, once lost, can never be recovered; the intentional staining of a purity, than which nothing should be held dearer; the wanton violation of conscience, that holiest of all man's faculties; the willful defilement of the very image of God in the soul; the transgressing, on purpose and adversely to the most sacred obligations, of the righteous and beneficent law of the adorable Creator, the ever-blessed Father of all? But the consequences of sin, as they are termed,—what is to be thought of them? I believe there is a law of God by which guilt inevitably produces misery; a law of cause and effect in morals as well as in physics, which ever has been and ever will be in force; a law to which all human beings are alike subject, each in his own person, and by which every individual of our race has suffered, does suffer, or will suffer in proportion to his wickedness. It may be obscured by the pleasures of sin for a season; it may be forgotten in the delusions of selfishness; it may be disregarded in the eager pursuits of ambition; it may be spurned in the flush of successful fraud; but nothing can abrogate it. Its fulfilment may be delayed, yet not for ever; it will flash in the lightnings of remorse, in future years, if not sooner, on the soul of every guilty one, however he may slumber over it or set it at defiance now.—Nor is this law, in my view, confined to the present life; it belongs, also, in all essential respects, to that which is to come.—

Sin, on the other side of the grave, as well as on this, cannot fail to produce misery; and as every one's condition there will correspond, at any given period, with the character he possesses at that period, so whoever departs from earth a slave to vicious habits of thought, feeling, and conduct must, on entering the spiritual world, find himself subjected to suffering proportioned to his ill deserts. What, then, in the name of God, of conscience, and of happiness, is it wise for us to resolve upon and to do, unless it be, if innocent, to continue so; if virtuous, to persevere; if sinful, to repent and reform, at once and thoroughly?"—*Rev. Dr. Barrett.*

"To admit all the elements of truth into our system, at once to adore the infinity of God, and to give due importance to our own free moral nature, is no very easy work.—But it must be done. Man's free activity is as important to religion as God's infinity.—In the kingdom of heaven the moral power of the subject is as essential as the omnipotence of the sovereign. To rob man of his dignity is as truly to subvert religion, as to strip God of his perfection.

"An enlightened, disinterested human being, morally strong, and exerting a wide influence by the power of virtue, is the clearest reflection of the Divine splendor on earth, and we glorify God in proportion as we form ourselves and others after this model. The glory of the Maker lies in his work. We do not honor him by breaking down the human soul, by connecting it with him only by a tie of slavish dependence. It is his glory that he creates beings like himself, free beings, not slaves, and opens to their faith and devout strivings a futurity of progress and glory without end. It is not by darkening and dishonoring the creature that we honor the Creator. Those men glorify God most who look with keen eye and loving heart on his works, who catch in all some glimpses of beauty and power, who have a spiritual sense for good in its dimmest manifestations, and who can so interpret the world that it becomes a bright witness to the Divinity."—*Rev. Dr. Channing.*

"I CANNOT but look on human creeds with feelings approaching contempt. When I bring them into comparison with the New Testament, into what insignificance do they sink! What are they? Skeletons, freezing abstractions, metaphysical expressions of unintelligible dogmas. And these I am to regard as the expositions of the fresh, living, infinite truth which came from Jesus!—Creeds are to the Scriptures what rush-lights are to the sun. The creed-maker defines Jesus in half a dozen lines, perhaps in metaphysical terms, and calls me to assent to this account of my Saviour. I learn less of Christ by this process than I should learn of the sun by being told that this glorious luminary is a circle about a foot in diameter. There is but one way of knowing Christ. We must place ourselves near him, see him, hear him, follow him from his cross to the heavens, sympathize with him and obey him, and thus catch clear and bright glimpses of his Divine glory. Christian truth is infinite. Who can think of shutting it up in a few lines of an abstract creed? You might as well compress the boundless atmosphere, the fire, the all-pervading light, the free winds of the universe, into separate parcels, and weigh and label them, as break up Christianity into a few propositions. Christianity is freer, more illimitable, than the light or the winds. It is too mighty to be bound down by man's puny hands. It is a spirit, rather than a rigid doctrine,—the spirit of boundless love."—*Rev. Dr. Channing.*

"NIGHT comes down over a ship at sea, and a passenger lingers hour after hour alone on the deck. The waters plunge, and welter, and glide away beneath the keel. Above, the sails tower up in the darkness, almost to the sky, and their shadow falls as it were a burden on the deck below. In the clouded night no star is to be seen, and as the ship changes her course the passenger knows not which way is east or west, or north or south. What islands, what sunken rocks, may be on her course, or what that course is, or where they are, he knows not. All around, to him,

is mystery. He bows down in the submission of utter ignorance.

"But men of science have read the laws of the sky. And the next day this passenger beholds the captain looking at a clock and taking note of the place of the sun, and with the aid of a couple of books, composed of rules and mathematical tables, making calculations. And when he has completed them, he is able to point almost within a hand's breadth to the place at which, after unnumbered windings, he has arrived in the midst of the seas. Storms may have beat, and currents drifted, but he knows where they are, and the precise point where, a hundred leagues over the waters, lies his native shore. Here is Reason appreciating and making use of the revelations (if we may so call them) of science.

"Night again shuts down over the waste of waves, and the passenger beholds a single seaman stand at the wheel and watch, hour after hour, as it vibrates beneath a lamp, a little needle, which points ever, as if it were a living finger, to the steady pole.

"This man knows nothing of the rules of navigation, nothing of the courses of the sky. But reason and experience have given him Faith in the commanding officer of the ship,—faith in the laws that control her course,—faith in the unerring integrity of the little guide before him. And so without a single doubt he steers his ship on, according to a prescribed direction, through night and the waves. And that faith is not disappointed. With the morning sun he beholds far away the summits of the grey and misty highlands, rising like a cloud on the horizon; and as he nears them, the hills appear, and the lighthouse at the entrance of the harbour, and, sight of joy! the spires of the churches and the shining roofs, among which he strives to detect his own.

"Mystery—Reason—Faith;—Mystery is the lowest, Faith is the highest of the three. Reason has done but half its office till it has resulted in Faith. Reason looks before and after. It not only ponders the past, but becomes prophetic of the future."—*Rev. E. Peabody.*

"It is with Scripture as with nature. The everlasting heavens spread above the gaze of Herschel as they did over that of Abraham; yet the latter saw but a spangled dome,—the former a forest of innumerable worlds. To the mind of this profound observer, there was as much a *new creation* as if those heavens had been, for the first time, called up and spread before his sight. And thus it is with the Word of God. As its power and beauty develop themselves continually, it is as if heaven were creating it now, and leaf after leaf dropped directly from the skies. Nor is there any heresy like that which denies this progressive unfolding of Divine wisdom, shuts up the spirit of heaven in the verbal metaphysics and scholastic creeds of a half-barbarous period, treats the inspiration of God as a dry piece of antiquity, and cannot see that it communes afresh with the soul of every age, and sheds, from the living Fount of Truth, a guidance ever new."—*Rev. J. Martineau.*

"The doctrine of the Trinity, if it be true, is of the utmost interest and moment, and ought to mould and shape all our religious notions, and to be recognised in all our praises and prayers. We should, therefore, expect to see it set forth very clearly in a revelation purporting to come from God. But so far is this from being the case, that Trinitarians do not quote a single text as declarative of this prime article of their creed. They admit that it is nowhere distinctly stated in the Bible."—*Rev. A. P. Peabody.*

"St. Augustine once held the doctrine, that God was One Person,—a faith at that time the general belief; and in his mind it was by Platonic philosophy that this doctrine of the Scriptures was modified. Augustine says this in a thanksgiving to God, and then he proceeds with Plato's notion of the Divine nature,—a modified Trinity; for even St. Augustine was not orthodox. It is a common error to read the Scriptures with a heathen lamp, instead of exalting the Scriptures to be themselves the world's light.