

THE BIBLE CHRISTIAN.

life of new obedience? With regard to Christ, the great questions have been,—what is his nature? is he the supreme God, or an exalted but subordinate agent of the Supreme God? Is he really the same with the Being who sent him, or a distinct and different being from him? What is his office? What the peculiar benefits of his mission? Was his office to communicate truth and exemplify it in his life, labours, and death: or is his death alone to be selected as the great central fact of Christianity? With regard to man, the great questions have been,—is he a free moral agent, or is he not? Is he by nature capable of doing good, or is he by nature totally corrupt? Is he subject to an uncontrollable decree as to his eternal destiny, or is that destiny made to depend on the character he forms?

It will be perceived that all those questions are of the last importance to themselves, and that on the replies made to them the greatest practical results depend. If God exist in one person only; then one person only is to be the object of our worship. If He exist in three persons, then three persons are to be the objects of our worship. If God sit on the throne of the universe demanding satisfaction for a violated law, *fear* must be the prevailing idea which occupies our mind as we contemplate him. If he be there clothed with the appearance of a tender parent, then we must regard him chiefly with feelings of *love*. If Christ be the Supreme God, then all our highest adoration should be directed to him. But if his dignity be that of the Son and Messenger of the Supreme God, this should not be, but we will be touched with love and reverence towards him, for all that he has done, and taught, and suffered for us in that character. If his office was to communicate truth and exemplify it to the world, then we should spare no exertion in imbibing his doctrine and imitating his example. But if the fact of his death be our sole reliance for salvation and escape from the consequences of sin, then his doctrine and example will appear to our minds in diminished importance. If man is not a free agent—if he is subject to a decree in regard to his destiny, uncontrollable and irreversible, then his powers must be cramped,—he must passively, perhaps hopelessly, resign himself to his fate. If he is by nature totally corrupt, and incapable of any good, then he need not attempt it, nor should we expect it from him. If on the other hand, he is a free moral agent, capable of good as well as evil, then he may attempt good, and we should expect it at his hands. Such is the nature of the practical consequences which depend on the opinions we form on the great questions at issue in the Christian world.

It is obvious that they are of the last importance. We are bound, therefore, to give the matter serious attention. Can we, consistently with our duty as rational and religious beings, overlook the fact, that great and striking diversities of opinion exist among men on the subjects just referred to? Shall we be justified in setting aside matters of such grave moment, as things which concern us not? Shall our minds remain quiescent and indolent while such subjects are presented to them—content with some dim and shadowy apprehension, instead of a clear, well defined idea? Is it right they should? We say most assuredly not. We say that duty requires us to look at those diversities of opinion, to ascertain as far as possible the grounds and reasons for them, and thus by our own exertion and investigation, obtain settled opinions for ourselves.

It is not our aim here to plead for any particular class of opinions. We are simply reminding our readers, of the necessity and importance of having definite and decided views on the one side or the other. But there are multitudes of every class and condition in life, who have no settled opinions. They appear perfectly satisfied to travel with a certain company in religious matters, because accident cast them there, or because they happen to be connected by some common sympathies or associations. How frequent is the case that a person born and brought up in a church or community of believers, is contented to remain there, without giving himself any trouble to ascertain what that church teaches to be believed. There are thousands in the

Church of England, who are strangers to the thirty-nine articles, and thousands in the Calvinistic Presbyterian Church, who know but little of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Hence the existence every where of so many people who could give no proper answer if they were asked to give a reason for the hope that is in them. Their minds have never for a moment been brought seriously to think on the question—what is worthy of belief and what is not? Religious truth has never been apprehended by them as a clear well defined set of ideas. Their connection with any community of Christians is the result of some other thing than sound rational conviction.

Several causes are constantly at work which operate against the formation of settled opinions in a large class of minds. We can merely mention them here. To dwell upon them would exhaust more time and space than we can spare at present. Religious indifference, and mental indolence, are sad obstacles to the progress of truth. There is too frequently, also, the dread of an unwelcome result which deters men from a thorough and impartial effort to obtain decided views. And then, again, there is the influence of early prejudice. No fabled enchanter that ever graced an eastern tale, could hold his subjects more securely spell-bound, than it can. It diffuses through the mind an undefined and undefinable fear of any thing that seems to clash with what it favours. It can find no reason for what it does, yet it causes the victim it besets to kick the beam against the weightiest and soundest arguments that can be offered in opposition to it. Multitudes of weak minds, many of them amiable too, are held in dim obscurity of belief by its grasp, even while the glorious sunlight of ascertained truth is shining clearly in their view.

We have introduced this important subject to our readers, not with the view of enlarging on it to any extent, still less did we propose to exhaust it, but rather to recommend it to their own serious and candid consideration. And whatever may be the settled opinions to which they arrive we must not fail to remind them, that they are to be held in candour, and with perfect charity towards all others.

NEW GERMAN-CATHOLIC CHURCH.

“A pamphlet has lately been put forth by Dr. Gunther of Jena, containing a collection of all the Articles or Creeds of the New German Catholic Church; which, placing in juxtaposition the different formulæ of belief adopted by the various communities which have followed the reform movement, enables us to gain a good insight into its nature and spirit. That they should differ very materially in the boldness of their tone, and in the latitude of their doctrines, is but to be expected, and is perhaps the best proof of the separation being the result of conviction rather than of party spirit. In some few, a lingering attachment is shown to the old tenets and institutions, such as Transubstantiation and the Mass; in the majority these are boldly and explicitly rejected; and it is a remarkable fact, that whilst the *negations* contained in all the creeds express the withdrawal of their allegiance from the Church of Rome, the *affirmations* do not, we believe, assert a single one of what may be called the prominent and Orthodox doctrines of the English Protestant Church beyond what are implied in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. (The latter being adopted by only three of the communities.) *In none of them stands any recognition of the Trinity, the Atonement, or Original Sin: whilst in all, the Scriptures are emphatically pronounced to be “the only true and safe source of Christian Faith.”*”

The foregoing paragraph is taken from the *London Inquirer*. We have marked part of the last sentence in italics because we think it mentions a fact worthy of being particularly noted. The German Reformers have nobly thrown aside the trammels of the old church authority and come to the Scriptures to read them with their own eyes. But they have not seen therein the doctrine of the Trinity, the common doctrine of Atonement, or that of Original Sin. The fact speaks volumes. A certain Calvinistic church has, we understand, furnished the German Reformers with translations of its authorised symbols of faith. To this there can be no possible objection. Let the seekers after truth gain all the light they can. But we venture to predict they will not fall in love with Calvinism. They have opened their eyes in a different age of the world from that in which the Calvinistic theology took its rise.

LIBERALITY.—CHRISTIAN UNION.

The subjoined paragraphs are from the pen of the editor of the *Baltimore Methodist Protestant*. In some prior articles, he had given expression to sentiments which were regarded as too liberal by some of his readers. He had ventured to say there were good and worthy Christians in various sects out of the pale of conventional ‘orthodoxy.’ The idea that any Catholics or Unitarians could be good Christians was not received well by some of his correspondents: and we know that such an idea is sufficient to alarm many worthy ‘orthodox’ people in more places than Baltimore. The discussion originated in the present movement for ‘Christian Union’ that is going on in this country and elsewhere.—The editor of the *Methodist Protestant* thought that it was proceeding on too narrow a basis. And so must every one think who consistently maintains the right of private judgment and the sufficiency of the Scriptures as a rule of faith. Talk of catholicity, indeed, in such a movement! It is sheer sectarianism,—this enlarging of the circle, inch by inch, until a precise and favored number get within it, to exchange congratulations and look satisfied, as if they represented the entire Christian world. The circle may indeed be enlarged, but it is a sectarian circle still: and those who press within it are as remote from the true principle of Christian catholicity as they were before they ventured beyond the pale of their respective sectarian organizations. It may do good, however, to a certain extent. It may bring together sects widely differing in opinion, cause them to know each other and appreciate each other's good qualities, and lead them into the practice of setting doctrinal differences in the background when more general interests are to be served. Wesleyanism and Calvinism are widely apart: Wesley has said of a favorite doctrine of Calvin, that it is worse than “all the absurd opinions of all the Romanists in the world.” Now it is well to see those sects coming together, and for the time sinking their wide differences. It affords ground to hope that the essential spirit of Christianity is working its way in the world; and the Liberal Christian always rejoices in the prospect of the time when it shall have triumphed over mere abstract dogmas, and effected a perfect “Christian union” between man and man, and a complete reconciliation between man and God. If mankind were thoroughly pervaded by the spirit of Christianity,—fully imbued with the all-comprehending charity of the Gospel,—there would be no exception taken to the following sentiments of the Methodist editor of Baltimore—they would be welcomed everywhere:—

“CHRISTIAN UNION AGAIN.—It seems that our remarks upon this subject are considered to have been too liberal. We give above two letters of disapprobation, which will show the other side of the question. Our readers have the privilege to think and act for themselves. We hold that it is our duty and privilege to be as orthodox as close, persevering, prayerful study can make us to be; but, also, to acknowledge the fruits of the Spirit, wherever they are visible; no matter how heterodox we may suppose the fruit-bearer to be. It must not be understood, that we have advocated, or that we teach or believe Unitarianism; for we have done, and intend to do no such thing; as we believe that system to come short of a proper exposition of the Bible. But, wherever a Unitarian *acts like a Christian*, it is the best evidence, to us, that he is one: and we gladly grasp his hand as that of a Christian brother. If, as J. W. does, it be questioned that a Unitarian can *act like a Christian*, we have only to say, that we have known, personally, two or three Unitarians, who were not excelled in Christian character, to judge by Galatians v. 22, 23, 24, and 1 John iii, 14, &c.; by any of the multitudinous ministers and laity around them; so far as we had opportunity to observe; and our opportunity was ample.

“So with Papists. One of the most precious Christians we ever knew, was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, in this city; and many a time have we knelt by her side at the venerable St. Peter's which has recently been torn down to afford a site to the Calvert Hall. So with the Quakers. Some charming members of Christ's Body have we fellowshiped among the peaceable, benovolent, excellent Quakers. Since we have been in the ministry even, we have attended service

in the Papal Church, and the Friends' Meeting House; and have ventured to occupy the pulpit of a beloved Unitarian brother. And yet, our own sentiments have remained unchanged, while our love for our variant brethren has increased.

“Our good brother J. W. will do well to remember that a man may hold doctrines that we detest, and yet be a good Christian. To our own mind, Calvinism is one of the most abhorrent systems, so far as it relates to Election, that has ever been presented to our consideration. It is infinitely erroneous; and in our humble opinion, of most fatal tendency. But yet, so many and so great and good Christians have held it, that we have never ventured to abuse it as some Arminians have done. Dr. Payson, who was one of the best and most useful men that ever lived, was so thorough a Calvinist that he could not, without violating his conscience, assist at the installation of an Arminian minister. We have heard Arminians say, frequently, that they would rather be Universalists than Calvinists; and yet probably, these very men would associate with Calvinists and reject the social overtures of Universalists.

“But there is no need of such detail. To sum up the whole matter, it is *our duty*, we think, to advocate orthodoxy and to oppose error: regulating the affairs of our own Church in our own way. But, we must allow freedom of thought, speech and action to other communities, who, holding the Bible to be the word of God, and Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world, construct their creeds, and endeavour to vindicate their own speculative Theology. As we cannot see the heart, we should leave that to God; and be content with believing that he who *acts like a Christian is one.*”

LECTURES ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

The course of Sunday Evening Lectures announced in our last, is now in progress of delivery, in the Unitarian Church of this city. At the time we write four have been given, which were listened to by numerous and attentive audiences. We reprint the list of subjects:—

The existence of a God: Christianity a revelation from God: The Christian Scriptures an authentic and perfect record of the Christian revelation; The Scriptures given to reasonable beings and designed to be interpreted on reasonable principles; What the Scriptures teach concerning God, his unity and paternal character: What the Scriptures teach concerning Christ, his person, and his office; What the Scriptures teach concerning man, his nature, his duty, and his destiny.

NOTE TO OUR FRIENDS IN CARLTON PLACE.

The *Universalist Watchman*, published in Montpelier, Vermont, speaks of a “letter written from Carlton Place, West Canada,” setting forth the want of a preacher of liberal Christianity for that place and the neighbouring district. Our cotemporary alludes, we presume, to the communication which appeared in our columns a short time since. Perhaps not, however, for he is quite silent concerning our agency in the matter. But we are anxious to let our friends in that quarter know, that the editor says, if they address a letter to him he thinks he can find a suitable preacher for them. We shall be gratified if we can in any way be instrumental in aiding them to get a minister suited to their position and wants.

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NOTICE.

The hours of Public Worship on Sundays, in the Unitarian Church, Montreal, are—ELEVEN in the forenoon, and SEVEN in the evening.—Free Sitings are provided for Strangers.