

LETTERS CONCERNING CHRIST.

[The following letters are taken from Mrs. Dana's series on the Trinity and kindred topics. Mrs. D. as many of our readers are aware, is a lady of some celebrity as an author in the United States. She is the daughter of a highly respected Trinitarian Clergyman, who trained her carefully in his own belief. In later years, however, a serious study of the Sacred Scriptures led her to doubt, and finally to reject the leading peculiarities of Calvinism in which she had been educated. With a degree of independence which does her great honor, she made her new views known, and avowed herself a Unitarian. In consequence of this step, she received a great many warnings and remonstrances from her former friends, to all of which she replied with excellent temper and discrimination, as will be seen, we think, from the specimens here presented.]

UNITARIANS DO NOT DENY CHRIST.

MY DEAR SIR,—You profess to have taken your pen in hand out of personal regard and concern for me; in this assertion I certainly believe you sincere, and therefore I thank you for your kind intentions. But your letter has been, on many accounts, very unsatisfactory and unpleasant. You take the broad ground that Trinitarians are the only believers in Christ's divinity and atonement. Now the truth or falsehood of this assertion depends entirely upon the ideas which are attached to the terms divinity and atonement. You use them in one sense, Unitarians in another; and their sense is as correct to them as yours is to you. And you go on to say—"Some, it is clear were foretold as to be distinguished by this trait—denial of the Lord; and denial of Him as having bought them. Can you think of a party to whom such a phrase is equally applicable as that of the Unitarians, if their leading tenets be false? It is not technically nor commonly used to express what anybody does believe, so much as what they do not believe. It, by the usage of all religious society, (?) means those who reject evangelical doctrine." Here then is something of a *prima facie* reason to suspect that you may be going wrong in joining them.

If, my dear Sir, Unitarians believe as much as the Bible reveals, they believe enough. This they profess to do. All additions to the doctrines taught in the word of God, are errors which ought to be abandoned; and Unitarians cannot find the doctrine of the Trinity in the

Bible, nor the doctrine of legal substitution, nor the other doctrines peculiar to Calvinism. So far as their system, in comparison with yours, is a system of negations, they rejoice in the fact; because they believe that your faith is encumbered with doctrines of human invention, not sanctioned by the word of God. Bear in mind here, that their system is one of negations only when compared with your creed, and not when compared with the Bible. They have as much right to assert that their system is the scriptural one as you have; and, as no human being is infallible, the question still remains a question, which each individual must decide for himself, according to his opportunity and ability to examine and understand the infallible word of God.

But Unitarians by no means admit that they do not believe in Christ's divinity and atonement. It is true that their belief on these points is different from yours, but it is just as real and valuable. They believe in the divinity of the Son of God, because God gave to his Anointed his Spirit without measure.\* They believe in his atonement, because it is declared that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Nor do they deny the Lord as having bought them, any more than they deny that God redeemed the Israelites out of the hand of Pharaoh by providing the means for their escape. They believe that they are "bought with a price"—even the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot. They believe that the sinner is "reconciled to God by the death of his Son." And they believe with St. Paul, that if, when they were enemies, they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, they shall be saved by his life. I will give an illustration of my meaning. Suppose a civil community to be in a state of rebellion against their lawful sovereign. It would be just in that King to visit them with summary vengeance; but he is a compassionate King, and is not willing that any should perish. After trying various means to reconcile them to his government, last of all he sends his Son; saying, "They will reverence my Son." The Son willingly undertakes this mission of mercy. It is the aim and object of his life to persuade the rebellious subjects of his kind and gracious Father to be reconciled to him, and submit themselves to his just and reasonable authority. Many and various are the proofs he gives them of his Father's long suffering and tender love; and in his own person he gives them a wonderful example of filial veneration and obedience. Such an example of filial devotion, of patience under suffering, and of unwearied compassion, the world has never seen. The same untiring love which fills the bosom of the King, his Father, dwells in his own. To these rebellious subjects he represents his Father as their Father, long suffering, slow to anger, ready, upon certain reasonable conditions, to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Some are touched by this exhibition of his own and his Father's love, and willingly resign themselves to his authority, and follow his guidance; for he comes with "all power" to fulfill the objects of his mission. But the great majority reject his authority, and will not even credit the genuineness of his credentials. The more he presses his claims upon them, the more violent becomes their opposition. Finally, their madness and fury rise to its height, and they put to death, in the most shameful and painful manner, the only and well beloved Son of their

\* On this point one of them, the Rev. A. B. Muzzey, thus writes: "The popular theology tells us that Jesus Christ is 'both God and man,' that he has, accordingly, 'two distinct natures.' In one aspect, this representation is correct. It is true that two natures, a human and a divine, met in our Saviour. But it is not true, that they constituted one being. Christ, the man, was not united with a Christ, who is God, but with God, a separate, independent being, one who, unlike himself, is eternal, omniscient, and almighty. He was in God, and God was in him. The apostle Paul incites the Christian to become a partaker of the divine nature. Christ, in this sense, did partake of the divine nature. God was manifested in him; he was gifted with his spirit without measure; it is his connection with God that makes him our Saviour; destroy that, and we have no Saviour left. So is it that two natures met in Christ." The following remarks are from an article from the pen of Dr. Channing, entitled, "Objections to Unitarian Christianity considered." He says: "It is objected to us that we deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. Now what does this objection mean? What are we to understand by the divinity of Christ? In the sense in which many Christians, and perhaps a majority, interpret it, we do not deny it, but believe it as firmly as themselves. We believe firmly 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, and communicated to him his Spirit without measure. We believe that Jesus Christ was the most glorious display, expression, and representative of God to mankind, so that in seeing and knowing him, we see and know the invisible Father; so that when Christ came, God visited the world, and dwelt with men more conspicuously than at any former period. 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."

"The meaning of this charge," says Dr. Gannett, namely, that Unitarianism is a negative system, "may be that our faith embraces few positive or affirmative propositions. This is doubtless the sense in which we should take the remark, that 'it is a system of negations.' It has been said, with an attempt at smartness, that it 'consists in not believing.' The ground of this assertion is the fact, that the Unitarian Christian does not receive certain doctrines of the Calvinistic or Orthodox theology. With equal reason therefore might the Calvinistic faith be said to consist in not believing, because the disciple of this school rejects the peculiar dogmas of other still larger divisions of the Christian Church. . . . A cursory survey of what we do believe, may show how far the assertion is correct, that our faith is of a negative character in respect to its doctrines.

"We do then believe in the existence of a God; a Being of infinite perfection—a pure Spirit—the Author, Sovereign, and Father of the Universe—the spring of peace and joy. We believe in a moral government of the universe; by which all intelligent creatures are made subject to wise and immutable laws. We believe in a righteous providence; within which all things are included. We believe in the moral nature of man; in his freedom of choice, his capacity of improvement, and his liability to err. We believe in the divine mission of Jesus Christ; in his miracles, his perfect character, his authoritative teaching, his voluntary death, and his triumphant resurrection. We believe in the necessity of obedience to the will of God, and of repentance for sin; and in the inseparable connexion between goodness and happiness on the one hand, and wickedness and misery on the other. We believe in the immortality and accountability of man; in spiritual judgment and future retribution. We believe in the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures in respect both to faith and to practice. We believe in the forgiveness of sins, in the efficacy of prayer, and in the importance of a deep and permanent change in them who lead vicious or careless lives. To sum all in one line, we believe in God, in Christ, in duty here, and in recompense hereafter.

"Now if this exposition of our belief does not contain enough which is affirmative or positive in its character, it would be useless to collect any further evidence to the same effect. We are neither atheists nor infidels. We disbelieve a great deal that has been believed; and we thank God that we have escaped the contagion of many errors which have prevailed in the world. But we also believe a great deal; nothing which is unintelligible or contradictory to sound reason, but much which reason alone would not have taught us. What we do believe, we find in the Bible. What we find in the Bible, as a revelation from God, we believe."—*Christian Unitarianism not a negative system.* Tract No. 94, 1st series. pp. 4, 5, 6.

merciful King—him who came only to do them good, and reconcile them to his Father's kind and reasonable rule. This bitter cup he drinks; this dreadful death he meekly endures for the enemies of his Father and himself, crying in his agony, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

At this wonderful consummation men stand amazed. One exclaims, "truly this was a righteous man;" and all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things that are done, smite their breasts, and return. Those who would not listen to him in life, now become reconciled by his death. And, being reconciled, they will naturally remember his wonderful example, his precepts, his commands, and thus be saved by his life. In after ages the story of his death will be read with wonder and gratitude, and will still be efficacious for the reconciliation and salvation of mankind.

Those who had been appointed by the Son to spread the glad tidings of pardon, and to carry on the Father's benevolent design—the work of reconciliation—would now naturally preach the cross; would know nothing among men, but the Son and Him crucified. This would be, emphatically, their theme. In this would they glory. For this, in imitation of their Master, would they rejoice to suffer and to die. By believing in the cross, as held up to view by its ministers, all could still be rescued who are willing to be saved on the terms proposed by their sovereign.

Other foundation can no man lay. This is to save us. The death of Christ reconciles us to God, and his life teaches us how to live. Therefore we, Unitarians as well as Trinitarians, belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has bought us with his blood. Eternal life is the gift of the Father, through him. Oh, what a price he paid for us! Herein is love! Now hath the Father given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as he hath given him. If Christ, under God, hath given to us eternal life, to Christ, under God, we belong. We are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Christ says to his Father, "all mine are thine, and thine are mine." Now, my dear Sir, is it correct to say that Unitarians reject the atonement, only because they do not admit your view of it? If they believe that the death of Christ is efficacious in procuring their salvation, in this sense they believe that it was thereby purchased. They believe that his death was necessary to produce such a change in us, that our heavenly Father could pardon our sins according to his promise. Without the death of Christ we should not be so likely to be wrought upon to repent and reform, and without repentance and reformation we could not be pardoned. Thus is our redemption purchased by the blood of Christ, who, in a sense, and by a figure, bore our sins: in his own body on the tree; just as, in a sense, and by a figure, he took the infirmities, and bore the sicknesses of those whose maladies he removed while he sojournd among men.

THE SCRIPTURES HONOR CHRIST.

MY DEAR SIR,—You ask me to "consider deeply whether the whole strain of the New Testament, and of a great mass of passages in the Old, do not seem constructed on the principle of honoring Christ as much as possible. One," you say, "calls him 'Rabbi'; one, the Son of God, the King; another, 'one who knew all things'; another, his Lord and his God. There seems," you continue, "to have been no fear of overcharging the epithets of honor, or the ascriptions of power bestowed. Now the charge of Unitarianism is, plainly, that we think too much of Christ, and honor him too highly. But to honor him very highly is the spirit of all the New Testament."

I freely grant that epithets of honor and ascriptions of power, are, throughout the Bible, lavished upon our blessed Master; but that is no reason why we should confound him with the Supreme God, who is constantly spoken of as a distinct Being from the Messiah. How can the Son be the Father? We are nowhere told that they are two distinct persons in one being. It is true that Christ says, "I and my Father are one;" but he also, in prayer to his Father, explains his meaning by these remarkable words; "and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one." And how could this be? Let our Lord reply; "that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be"—not one in each other, but—"one in us."

Further, Unitarians do not charge their orthodox brethren with giving too much honor to Christ; they charge them with mistaking altogether the declarations of the Bible concerning him. The Christ in whom Unitarians believe; who is a distinct being from the Supreme God; the Son, and not the Father; you do not sufficiently honor; therefore the charge made against you, by Unitarians, is just the reverse of the one you have put into their lips. What you call the human-nature of Christ you certainly do not honor as the Unitarian honors his Master. When Christ declares, without qualification, that there was a certain day and hour of which he knew nothing, we, who are Unitarians, believe him. You, on the contrary, make him prevaricate, and, in one nature, deny what he certainly must have known in the other;

and yet these two natures you declare to have been in constant and intimate union. You continually make him contradict himself. This is, in my view, sadly to dishonor him.

It is very natural that the Scriptures should seem to labor to honor Christ. It was to reveal the way of salvation by Christ that they were written. Patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, apostles, all hold up the Messiah to the view of a suffering, sinful world. In the glowing language of the east, they reveal the promised Saviour of mankind. Now, all that the Scriptures say of Christ Unitarians joyfully receive. They are not afraid of honoring their Master, but they are afraid of assigning to him that place which belongs to God alone.

You go on to say, "had I heard of some great unnatural attack of my friend's upon her venerable parents, personally, it could not have surprised me more. She virtually attacks our common Lord and Redeemer, as I must testify, by this retrocession from her allegiance to Him; lessens infinitely his claims on her; lowers his title to her confidence—his right to command—her motives to love him. He did not leave His divine throne for her, she has discovered; did not take upon himself her nature; did not condescend to be a man. She has no duty to Him as 'Lord of all'; discards and repudiates all zeal for Him as once relinquishing and now wielding all power in heaven and on earth. Is this my once pious friend? The whole character, tone, and depth of her piety, how changed, if these tidings be true!"

My dear Sir, why should you seek to make my heart sad, when the Lord has not made it so? I thank God that such assertions cannot deprive me of that peace of conscience, which I feel at this moment; but such allusions to my venerable parents as the one you have made above, do make me sad indeed. God knows how it has wrung my heart to give them pain; but He also knows that I could not conscientiously act otherwise than I have done.

And what right have you to say that I have given up my allegiance to our common Lord? You require, before you will allow to me the title of Christian, far more than Christ or his apostles—the establishers of this religion—ever required. Now what right has any one to do this? In the New Testament I constantly find that men were commanded to believe: that the Messiah was the Son of God; but in the present day a very different faith is required of us. Instead of saying, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," men are required to say, "I believe that thou art the living God himself." The former is the Unitarian faith, the latter the Trinitarian; which of them is the more scriptural belief, it appears to me is very plain.

You cannot produce one passage of Scripture in which the primitive teachers of Christianity required a belief in Jesus as the Supreme Being. They called upon men to believe and confess that Jesus was the Christ; that is, the Anointed; he who was to come; who was typified and promised throughout the Old Testament, as the great Mediator between God and man. He was to be received as the glorious Saviour of the world—annointed and sent of God for this purpose, and therefore clothed with the authority of God himself. A knowledge of his original nature was never made a requisite before men could receive the salvation he came to bring. It was enough that they recognized his divine authority, and joyfully submitted to it. And what right have modern divines to require more than their Master ever did?

Should a father send a messenger to a child in a distant country, would it be absolutely necessary for that child to discover the original standing and respectability of the messenger before he would receive and honor his father's message? Would not his chief inquiry be, does he really come from my father, with full power and authority to deliver and enforce his will? This point once satisfactorily ascertained, would not the message have equal weight whether the chosen messenger were originally rich or poor, honored or unknown?

I do not mean to say that the original dignity and importance of the messenger would be a matter of no consequence. Far from it. But I do mean to assert that his original character would not affect the abstract question of his authority, and of the child's duty implicitly to obey what he is convinced is his father's message.\* Now Christ comes to us as the messenger of God. Through Him God was manifested in the flesh. He came to usher in the Christian dispensation. Well, if I acknowledge his authority—let it proceed from what source it may—let it be original, or derived from the Father, as he expressly teaches us it is—the effect upon me is just the same; and you have no right to take it for granted that I am no Christian, and that the whole character, tone, and depth of my piety are changed; when I acknowledge Christ as my spiritual Head and Lord just as fully and heartily as ever I did. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand."

\* The Trinitarian Bishop Watson says, "His (Christ's) authority as a teacher, is the same, whether you suppose him to have been the Eternal God, or a being inferior to Him, but commissioned by Him."