

The Bible Christian.

MONTREAL, MAY, 1848.

THE "UNITARIAN BIBLE."

Of all the misrepresentations which have been originated, and kept in motion, concerning Unitarians and Unitarianism, none is more gratuitous or absurd than that which charges Unitarians with fabricating and using another Bible to suit their purposes. This is a calumny, however, which is very potent in deterring the more ignorant and unenquiring part of mankind from any investigation of Unitarian Christianity. The reverence which all Christians entertain for the sacred scriptures makes them shrink with peculiar horror from any connivance at their corruption, or participation in it. And when they hear it asserted by those whom they are accustomed to believe, that the Unitarians do not hesitate to alter and interpolate the scriptures to suit their own theological views they naturally regard them with peculiar distrust, and consider them guilty of great presumption, and unpardonable wickedness.

This story of another Bible is one which not infrequently reaches us. We have been asked if it is really the case that the Unitarians use other scriptures than those which are relied on by Christians generally. Of course such a question is put by those only who are quite unacquainted with the Unitarian system. Any one possessing the slightest knowledge of this, would no more make such an enquiry than he would ask whether Unitarians breathed the same atmospheric air as other people. Every person connected with the Unitarians, and having any intercourse with them, knows that in their public instructions, and private reading and meditation, they use the common authorised version of the scriptures.

The fiction of a "Unitarian Bible" had its origin from the fact of the existence of a certain book, called an "Improved version of the New Testament." This book was published in London by a society there, called the "Society for promoting Christian knowledge," which was composed of Unitarians. It was published to meet a want then felt, and still felt, for a more correct copy of the sacred writings than that which is in general use.—Every intelligent reader of the sacred volume, with any pretensions to Biblical knowledge, is aware that there are inaccuracies in the common text and translation. Indeed many of these are plainly indicated in the popular commentaries on the Bible. Who will now venture to say that the text of the "three heavenly witnesses" in I John, v. 7, is not a forgery? Every one whose opinion is worth anything, will admit that the scriptures would be purer if that passage were omitted. A proper reverence for the sacred writings should make us wish to see them freed from all mistranslations and forgeries. Various efforts have been directed by learned men towards this end.—Many of them have devoted long and laborious lives to it. When the present received text was edited, and the authorised version made, the science of Biblical criticism was in a much less advanced state than it is now. A multitude of ancient manuscripts of the scriptures, and important facts connected with them, have been brought to light since that time, which enable us to rectify mistakes in transcription and the like, and arrive at a closer resemblance of the original documents of the sacred writers. It was in the legitimate pursuit of such criticism that the book just referred to was produced. Although issued under the auspices of certain Unitarians, it is to be observed that Archbishop Newcome's Revision is taken as the basis, from which, however, frequent departures are made. It does not make pretension to be a perfect work: it only aims to be what its title indicates—"an improved version."

But amongst Unitarians no authority whatever is given to this book. Taking the Unitarians of Great Britain, Ireland, and America together, they will venture to say that not one in fifty of them ever saw it. We have attended religious services in many places connect-

ed with the Unitarian denomination in all those countries, and we can say that we do not remember ever having seen a copy of it in any of their places of worship. It is rarely alluded to even in their theological schools, and then, as far as we know, in terms of disapproval. And it is known to those who have paid any proper attention to its history, that perhaps the most severe and searching criticism it ever received was from the pen of a Unitarian Reviewer, in a Unitarian periodical.

Such being the circumstances of this case, how comes it, it may be enquired, that such a misrepresentation is perpetuated? To this question we can offer no very satisfactory reply. Our only explanation should be that it was repeated from time to time with the view of strengthening and increasing the popular odium against the Unitarians. And this answer is not very satisfactory, inasmuch as it places some of those who esteem themselves more orthodox and pious than we, in a questionable position. Not long since a clergyman of this city made public reference to the "Unitarian Bible" as a most dangerous and deadly production. We are in possession of other circumstances, likewise, connected with this matter, but we have no desire to make any farther allusion to them. We simply say to that clergyman, and to all others, that the propagation of such fictions from the pulpit can scarcely augment the dignity of that sacred place, or permanently increase their own respectability and usefulness.

THE UNIVERSITY QUESTION.

This vexed question still remains tangled and unsettled. The hankering after tests still clings to some who would desire to have it free—just free enough to give themselves abundant liberty, and a little to spare. It is really amazing to perceive how slow some people are in perceiving that the only safe and solid ground to occupy is that of principle. Our own opinion on this question has already been given more than once. We should have no theological tests in a great national seat of learning. They are fraught with evil, and evil only. Really conscientious men alone are excluded by them; and these, if competent to the office to which they aspire, are the persons whom, above all others, it is desirable to have. Men of loose conceptions of duty will not permit tests to stand in their way to any office which is lucrative, or otherwise desirable. Tests afford direct encouragement to insincerity, and in their use and operation bring religion into disrepute.

The Rev. Dr. Burns, of Toronto, a leading clergyman of the "Free Church of Scotland" in this country, has lately addressed a series of letters to His Excellency Lord Elgin on the University Question. By the proposed measure of the late Ministers, the "Free Church" was one of the proscribed bodies; and Dr. B. has a natural repugnance to have the mark of exclusion placed on himself and his party. He is in favour of an open University; but he would attach a spring and snap-bolt to the door which would slam it close, and keep it so, at the approach of a Unitarian. The Doctor can only go a certain length in religious liberty. He is not long from the "old country," and the "flesh pots" still smell sweet and savory in his nostrils. Can he not read the signs of the times? Can he not understand the spirit of the age? Can he not perceive the prevailing free genius of this great continent of North America? But there are more correct and liberal views abroad among Trinitarians than those enunciated by Dr. Burns, as the following paragraph will testify. This extract is taken from the Montreal Register, a paper conducted by clergymen of the Baptist denomination:—

"But our present business is to notice what Dr. Burns proposes as the means of imparting a religious and Christian character to the University. In the Banner of April 7, he propounds two things for this end, viz., that all the Professors should declare their belief in the inspiration of the Bible, and in the doctrine

of the Trinity, (which is the test at present imposed,) and that the President open the business of every day in some public manner, by asking the blessing of God. These may appear very reasonable demands to parties not fully enlightened as to religious liberty and equality, and we are ready to admit that the enforcement of them would be no practical grievance to the great bulk of the people.—Nearly all religious bodies, and the Baptists among them, could easily put up with such demands. Yet for our part we must deprecate the plan, as it will needlessly and injuriously affect the consciences of others, though not our own. On principle we earnestly protest against any religious test in a public seat of secular learning. Only let this thing be sanctioned in the University, and we may soon find zealots and bigots calling out for imposing the same test (and for the same reasons) on all the masters in the Government schools, and all lecturers in Mechanics' Institutes, &c., which receive aid from Provincial funds. Dr. B. and his friends should reflect, that if a test to exclude an anti-Trinitarian gentleman from the Professor's chair be good and fair in Toronto, so the attempt to remove Sir D. Brewster from his post in St. Andrew's University, for his Free Church heresy, was equally fair and honourable. If we Trinitarians were to combine and shut out our doctrinal opponents, with what semblance of consistency could we object to the High Church party's scheme (as in the original charter) of excluding all but believers in the Thirty-nine Articles? Shall we sanction the very principle which has been the fruitful source of our own grievances and wrongs? No! no; away with religious tests as a delusion and a snare. 'What we want is liberty—absolute liberty—just and true liberty—equal and impartial liberty.'"

NO UNDERGROUND ROAD TO HEAVEN.

The religion of Christ is a visible religion.—His church a visible church; its members visible members. This visibility is an important feature of Christian piety; while its seat is in the heart, the vital and moving power there, there must be a profession, a manifestation.—This grows not out of any authority or command, but from the very nature of the principle. It is here, and you cannot hide it; it goes forth, and will go forth. It is light, and you cannot make it dark: you may, indeed, light your candle and put it under a bushel; but if you put it on a candlestick, it will give light to all who are in the house. Such is its nature—the rays will flow from the centre, and it is folly to expect anything else. It follows, that if a person is a Christian, the world will find it out; if he have true faith in his heart, this faith will cause him to do something by which he will be exposed and known. There is, then, no such thing as having Christ's religion to ourselves—no going masked to heaven—no night passage there—no tunneled, underground road to that place. We are aware that there are those who love to talk about religion as something altogether between their own souls and God. They tell us that they do not put it on their foreheads, nor write it on their garments. And we ask, who does approve of ostentation in such matters? But we say, if it be so, always and everywhere a hidden thing, it is a dead thing. If you keep it thus a secret, it is because you are ashamed of it—ashamed to have it known. We infer this both from the nature of the principle, and from the teaching of the great Author. He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess. Here is the test: if you have it, you will show it; if you have it not, you have it not. If there is nothing seen, there is nothing inside.—Bib. Repos. for April.

THE BOOK OF BOOKS.

The poor might enjoy the most important advantages of the rich had they the moral and religious cultivation consistent with their lot. Books find their way into every house, however mean; and especially that book which contains more nutriment for intellect, imagination and heart, than all others; I mean of course the Bible. And I am confident that among the poor are those who find in that book more enjoyment, more awakening truth, more lofty and beautiful imagery, more culture to the whole soul, than thousands of the educated find in their general studies, and vastly more than millions among the rich find in that superficial, transitory literature which consumes all their reading hours.—Dr. Channing.

THE BIBLE.—We are so accustomed to the sight of a Bible that it ceases to be a miracle to us. It is printed just like other books, and so we forget that it is not just like other books. But there is nothing in the world like it or comparable to it. The sun in the firmament is nothing to it, if it be really (what it assumes to be) an actual, direct communication from God to man. Take up your Bible with this idea, and look at it and wonder at it. It is a treasure of unspeakable value to you, for

it contains a special message of love and tender mercy from God to your soul. Do you wish to converse with God? Open it and read. And at the same time look to him who speaks to you in it, and ask him to give you an understanding heart, that you may not read in vain, but that the word may be in you, as good seed in good ground, bringing forth fruit unto eternal life. Only take care not to separate God from the Bible. Read in the secret of God's presence, and receive it from his lips, and feed upon it, and it will be to you as it was to Jeremiah, the joy and rejoicing of your heart. The best advice which any one friend can give to another is to advise him to consult God; and the best turn that any book can do its reader is to refer him to the Bible.—T. Erskine.

THEMES FOR THE PULPIT.—In the department of Christian morality, I think many of those who are distinguished as evangelical preachers, greatly and culpably deficient.—They rarely, if ever, take some one topic of moral duty, as honesty, veracity, impartiality, Christian temper, forgiveness of injuries, temperance (in any of its branches,) the improvement of time—and investigate specifically its principles, rules, discriminations, adaptations. There is none of the casuistry found in many of the divines. Such discussions would have cost far more labor of thought than dwelling and expatiating on the general evangelical doctrines; but would have been eminently useful; and it is very necessary, in order to set the people's judgment and consciences to rights. It is partly in consequence of this neglect (very general, I believe,) that many religious kind of people have unfixed and ill-fated apprehensions of moral discriminations. Hall told Anderson that in former years, he had often insisted on subjects of this order.—Foster.

ON EDUCATION.—I think we may assert, that in a hundred men, there are more than ninety who are what they are, good or bad, useful or pernicious to society, from the instruction they have received. It is on education that depends the great difference observable among them. The least and most imperceptible impressions received in our infancy, have consequences very important, and of a long duration. It with these first impressions, as with a river, whose waters we can easily turn, by different canals, in quite opposite courses, so that from the insensible direction the stream receives at its source, it takes different directions, and at last arrives at places far distant from each other; and with the same facility we may, I think, turn the minds of children to what direction we please.—Locke.

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