

REMARKS

THE TWO NATURES IN CHRIST.

"MY FATHER IS GREATER THAN I," said our Saviour. (John xiv. 28.) And again he says, "MY FATHER IS GREATER THAN ALL." (John x. 29.) To the same effect also is the language of the great Apostle of the Gentiles; "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and THE HEAD OF CHRIST IS GOD." (1 Cor. xi. 3.) Of a similar import is a large class of passages in the Bible. Their meaning is obvious,—it cannot be mistaken. They teach the subordination of the Son to the Father; they teach the subordination of Christ to God.

We are very well aware, however, by what means it is sought to evade the force of such plain and powerful testimony of our Saviour and his Apostles. We are very well aware how it is sought to make their words have no meaning in the controversy concerning Christ's supreme Deity. It is by a very ingenious device, but a most unwarrantable one. It is assumed that Christ had two natures; and by a dexterous employment of this assumption, the advocates of the triune theory of the Godhead seek to nullify every plain statement of the Scriptures regarding the supremacy of the Father and the subordination of the Son. But the assumption is entirely gratuitous, adopted solely with a view to meet the pressing exigency before us. It is a pure fallacy—a mere logical artifice; and yet, without it, the Trinitarian ground could not be maintained one moment. It is assumed that Christ had two natures,—one divine and the other human;—that he was perfect God and perfect man mysteriously combined. And then it is thought the force of the direct statements which teach his subordination is turned aside by asserting that such things were affirmed of, and by, our Lord, in reference to his human nature only. This is a mournful way of dealing with the obvious teachings of the Word of God. That it meets with so general a reception affords lamentable proof of the readiness of men to adopt any method of explanation which will enable them to cling to their favorite notions. Again we say, this distinction of two natures in Christ is a mere gratuitous assumption, adopted to meet the emergency of the case. Such a distinction is nowhere made in the Bible. Nowhere is it said 'this is spoken of, or by, Christ in reference to his human nature,' or 'this, in reference to his divine nature.' We look in vain for the statement of such a doctrine as that of the 'two natures' in the Scriptures. Nowhere is it said in the Sacred Records that 'our Saviour had two natures.' Such an expression is not to be found from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. Well hath it been styled "a mere human invention, to bolster up a human error."

In thus stating with such great plainness our opinion concerning the common doctrine of the two natures in Christ, we are not insensible to the fact, that to many minds some of our expressions may appear abrupt, unauthorized, and dogmatical. We confess we have not endeavoured to trim, or soften, or smooth our phrase in this matter. We believe the theory of the two natures to be fallacious, and we have said so very plainly. We have styled it a mere assumption, because it directly rests upon a mere assumption. It is high time that people should look to this—it is high time that the attention of the enquirer should be fairly directed to it—for on it really depends for support the doctrine of the Trinity. If this prop be unsound the whole structure of the triune theory of the Godhead must topple and fall.

And it is unsound. Let us look at the mode of proof by which it is sought to be established. Two Scripture phrases (or classes or phrases) are produced, in one of which it is said Christ's supreme Deity is taught, and in the other his subordinate nature. Both, it is urged, must be admitted in the sense attached to them, and from this it is urged that Christ had two natures. The theory thus constructed is then employed to defend the doctrine of Christ's supremacy against the overwhelming evidence of Scripture, teaching his subordination, which can be arrayed against it. Now we ask the careful reader to mark the fallacy. Is it not plain that in the first instance—in constructing the theory of the two natures—the real point in controversy (Christ's supreme Deity) is gratuitously assumed, or taken for granted, without

proof? And then the theory thus fallaciously constructed is employed to protect the very doctrine which was gratuitously assumed for the purpose of constructing it. Is not the fallacy obvious? Christ's supreme Deity must be satisfactorily proved before the doctrine of the two natures can be established. And this just brings us back to the primary question.

We say then, without any hesitation, that it is impossible to construct the theory of the two natures without resorting to the fallacy of 'begging the question,' or assuming that to be true which is the very point in dispute. Nothing short of a distinct Scriptural statement could warrant its adoption by the Scriptural Christian. And this, as we have already said, is nowhere to be found.

There is great danger to be apprehended from the admission of gratuitous assumptions into the interpretation of Scripture. With such a liberty, men might prove almost anything from the sacred volume, and find means to evade the force of any argument, however cogent and precise. Let us illustrate by an example. Christianity is universally held to be a religion of peace; our Saviour inculcated peaceful principles; his own life corresponded with his precepts—it was eminently peaceful: "Peace on earth" was the strain which ushered him into the world, and "peace" was the legacy he bequeathed to his disciples on his departure from it. But suppose a sect should arise, claiming to be his followers, who should assert that Christianity was a warfaring religion; that, in fact, it was a Christian duty to prosecute war, far and wide; and this not merely defensive war, but aggressive war,—a war which should lead them to invade unoffending and defenceless foreign nations, murder their people, destroy their property, and desolate their homes. Suppose we were to enter on an argument with such persons, in order to show them how utterly opposite their views of Christianity were to the whole teaching and spirit of the religion as represented in the New Testament, and, in doing so, we should cite passage after passage affording the clearest proof that Christ was a teacher of peace. Suppose all this done; and our warfaring Christians should reply, "All you have urged we fully admit; but it does not affect the question at issue. The passages you cite have reference merely to Christ in his character as a peacemaker, but do not bear against his character as a warfarer. Remember how he said, 'I came not to send peace but a sword;'—you do not seem to understand that he is to be viewed in two distinct lights;—you do not seem to apprehend that he was both a peacemaker and a warfarer." To this very strange reply we should naturally answer, "Your distinction of two characters in Christ is a pure assumption—it has no proper foundation; and we put it to you, as candid and conscientious people, will you avail yourselves of such an artifice to maintain your position, and to evade the prevalent teaching of the Scriptures against you?" We are then met by the rejoinder, that it is necessary to make the assumption of the two-fold character of our Lord, in order to interpret such a passage as that wherein he says he 'came to send a sword,' in harmony with the other teachings of the Scriptures concerning him.

Now the analogy is obvious between this case and that which is more particularly under review. In both cases, the general teaching of the Scriptures is plain, powerful, precise, and not to be misunderstood; but, in both cases, there are a few texts to be found which clash, apparently, with the general teaching. Rightly understood, they will be found to involve no contradiction. It is our business, then, to endeavour to understand them, and to discover how they may be interpreted in harmony with the current language and general tenor of Scripture. We are not at liberty to make gratuitous assumptions to suit our own purposes and to save some favorite doctrinal theory from being overthrown.—Common sense revolts at the assumption which would unite two characters in Christ so entirely incompatible as those of a perfect peacemaker and a bloody warfarer. And surely the assumption is not less unreasonable and impossible which would combine in one and the same person the attributes of the Supreme God and the qualities of a mortal man. It is to assume that the mind of that person is at once created and uncreated, finite and infinite, than which no greater contradiction can be supposed or asserted.

But even this assumption of two natures in our Lord cannot be made to cover all the circumstances of the case, and protect the theory of Christ's supreme Deity from the difficulties which press upon it from the plain statements of Scripture. Those statements not only negate the supremacy of the Son, but they affirm the supremacy of the Father. In thus making express affirmation of the supreme Deity of the Father only, they obviously exclude the supreme Deity of the Son in any and every sense. Let us advert

to what Christ says of the time of his coming in judgment:—"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." (Matth. xxiv. 36.) In the parallel passage in Mark, (xiii. 32,) it is thus written: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels who are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." In these passages it is evident that our Saviour disavows knowledge of the event referred to, in every sense, and assigns that knowledge to the Father exclusively. Here, then, is a difficulty which cannot be met even by the assumption of the two natures. By what ingenuity the force of these passages is to be evaded, and their plain statements set aside, we cannot even conjecture. We have seen the orthodox explanations of these texts; and they do not seem to us to have even the poor merit of plausibility.

Another objection we have to urge against this assumed theory of two natures, (and certainly not the least serious one,) is, that it imputes equivocation to our Saviour. If ever there had been any intimation given, either by himself or by any of the sacred writers, that our Lord had two natures, and that sometimes he spoke in the one and sometimes in the other, we should not feel justified in urging so very serious a charge against the theory under notice. But no such intimation ever was given. We feel bound, therefore, in vindication of the integrity and consistency of Christ, to bear solemn testimony against so dangerous and so groundless an assumption. What! shall it be said of him 'in whose mouth guile was never found,' that he explicitly disavowed knowledge of the time of an event, when, in reality, he was in full possession of that knowledge? Remember the answer he gave to the mother who came to him requesting for her sons certain places of dignity in his kingdom. His reply was, "I will sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matth. xx. 23.) Shall it be said, we ask again, of him who knew no deceit, that he positively disclaimed all power to confer a certain privilege, when, in reality, that power was fully his? Suppose any of us were to go to a Governor of this Province, and apply to him for a certain office; and suppose he were to say, plainly and without any explanation, that that office was not in his power to grant,—that the Sovereign of Britain kept its bestowal in his own hands. What would be our inference? Surely it would be, that the Governor had it not in his power to bestow the office. And if any one claiming to be that Governor's especial friend should afterwards seek to draw a line of distinction between his personal and his official capacity, and say that he really had the power, and that his denial of it was only to be understood in reference to one of his two capacities—in such a case, would not every right-minded man regard the denial in the light of a wretched equivocation? Now, shall we be bold enough to place our Saviour in a similar position, by saying that he really had the power to confer the dignity on Zebedee's sons, while he positively and unqualifiedly disclaimed it? We honor Christ too well to impute any such equivocation to him. We reverence him too highly to suppose that he would employ language so calculated to mislead those whom he immediately addressed, and so calculated to mislead every simple-minded reader of the Bible. Our opinion of the Saviour is this: that whenever he spoke he meant just what he said,—without the slightest approach to equivocation,—without any mental reservation whatsoever.

It is of great importance that we should look closely to this theory of the two natures in Christ. It makes our Lord a shifting image instead of a distinct reality. It throws a cloud of obscurity about him who was the brightness of the Father's glory. According to it, he is now one thing and then another, and thus we are prevented from gaining any clear and definite perceptions of his person or his character. Nothing has ever surprised us more than to mark with what unsuspecting confidence the Trinitarian controversialist glides from the one 'nature' of Christ to the other, just as he finds it convenient for his argument. It is but seldom he thinks it necessary to attempt any proof of the 'two natures.' Yet, without its aid, he could not even pretend to withstand the Scriptural arguments brought against the Trinitarian theory, so plain, so powerful, so precise, and so overwhelming in number. What can be more remarkable than to hear and read of men first admitting the subordination of the Son, and then proceeding to prove his Supreme Deity? This has about the same meaning as if they were first to admit a thing to be black, and then proceed to prove that it is white. It has about the same meaning as if they were first to admit a figure to be a circle, and then proceed to prove that it is a triangle.

QUESTIONS WORTH CONSIDERING.

ONE QUESTION IN ARITHMETIC.

According to the statements of Trinitarian creeds, The FATHER is a distinct Person, and truly and fully God; and therefore an Object of supreme worship,.....that is 1
The SON is also a distinct Person, and truly and fully God; and therefore an Object of supreme worship,.....that is 1
The HOLY SPIRIT is likewise a distinct Person, and truly and fully God; and therefore an Object of supreme worship,.....that is 1
Required.—The sum total of those who are truly and fully God; and therefore distinct Objects of supreme worship,.....

TWO QUESTIONS IN THEOLOGY.

According to the popular theology, sin committed against an Infinite Being requires an Infinite Sacrifice. Nothing short of this, it is said, could expiate the sins of the world. But no being is infinite except God. In the death of Christ, then, did God die?
If God did not die, what becomes of the common theory of vicarious atonement by an Infinite Sacrifice?

THREE QUESTIONS ON THE BIBLE.

We find it stated in the Bible that "God is One;" but where is it stated, that "God is Three"?
We find the phrase "God the Father" in the Bible; but where is there the phrase "God the Son," or "God the Holy Ghost"?
Where is it said in the Bible that Christ had "two natures"?

He that hath a mind to think, let him think on the foregoing questions.

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear the following declarations:—

"Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is One Lord."—(Deut. vi. 4.)

....."The Father" is the "only true God."—(John xvii. 1—3.)

Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."—(Matt. xvi. 16.)

Additional Query:—Can a Son be coeval with his own Father?

It is quite possible that the naked plainness of some of the above questions may be a cause of offence. But as no offence is intended, it may be well for all parties concerned to inquire candidly whether the statements are not true, and perfectly consistent with the systems of the prevalent theology. With respect to the tri-personality of the Deity, the question as stated above has entirely the meaning which appears on the face of it, or else we do not see how it has any real meaning at all. If the doctrine of the Trinity be only Sabellianism, the sooner the fact is known the better. Sabellianism has been aptly termed "Unitarianism in a mist." If Dr. Wallis's theory be correct, that "the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are no more three distinct intelligent Persons, than the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, are three Gods," then there is only a paper wall between Unitarianism and Trinitarianism. If this be so, let it be broken through at once. But if Dr. Sherlock's theory, that "the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are as really distinct Persons as Peter, James, and John, each of which is God: We must allow each Person (he says) to be a God;"—if this theory be the more popular and prevalent one, then it is obvious that the statement upon which the foregoing question is founded is perfectly correct.

In the 'Questions in Theology,' stated above, it is asked Did God die? This we know is a startling question, yet it is directly suggested by the common theory of vicarious atonement by an infinite sacrifice. That theory involves the suffering and death of the Almighty; or else we do not see that it has any proper meaning at all. It is of no avail to urge, in opposition to this conclusion, the mysterious combination of the "two natures," for if the element of infinity does not enter into that combination, and become the subject of suffering and death, it cannot be an infinite sacrifice. Without this, it can only be a finite sacrifice; and to admit this, would be to unsettle and unsay the whole system.

There are some, we know, who are not afraid to carry out the system to its unavoidable conclusion, and state that conclusion in all its naked plainness, painful and startling though it be. We do not now refer to such expressions as those of "a crucified God," &c., which may be found in the hymns of some Orthodox Churches, nor to the well-known passage of the Litany, where the Deity is invoked 'by his agony and bloody sweat,—by his cross and passion,—by his death and burial,' &c. We refer rather to the sober prose writer, who sits down deliberately, in this age of the world, and writes the (to us) fearful doctrine that God died! Not very long since, a theological work appeared in the United States, entitled, "The Sufferings of Christ, by a Layman." In this the doctrine is stated nakedly and plainly. "In the grand drama of the New Testament," says the writer, "whose author is God, and whose theme is Salvation, the Godhead and manhood of the Mediator act throughout in concert. They are one and indivisible; separated, or capable of separation, in nothing. They are born together; together they are wrapped in the straw of the manger. They suffer together; TOGETHER THEY DIE."

This doctrine was repudiated by some of the Orthodox prints, and it is well to perceive them startled by such a statement; yet we cannot see any thing in it but the legitimate result of their own system. Many there are, we know, who are disposed to throw a veil of words over the theory, to conceal its inconsistency, and take shelter under the common plea of mystery, to evade the force of the legitimate conclusion which flows from it. Wherever that conclusion is disowned, we should be sorry to press it; but at the same time, we maintain that to disown the conclusion, is virtually to abandon the theory.

Of the 'Questions on the Bible' we shall say nothing, further than to remind the reader, that Scripture doctrines can always be stated in Scripture language.