

of him than he did of himself," made him cheerful and happy under all the vicissitudes of life. Even the cruel persecutions to which he was subjected, could not shake his faith in the dignity and worth of human nature; and though his affection and friendship for the few friends who stood by him unshaken in the hours of trial, were ardent and sincere, his sympathies and his labours were for all mankind. The works of Priestley are the possession of the world,—they are part of the inheritance of each of us; but the glory of his life of simple holiness and upright integrity, may be claimed, in a peculiar sense, by Unitarians,—a sect which, small and despised as it has been, has ever been rich in disciples whose deeds have ennobled, whose intellects have enriched, and whose virtues have blessed mankind; and among the first of these claiming our admiration, gratitude, and reverence, stands the name of PRIESTLEY.

I proceed to give a brief sketch of the life of this eminent man, abridged from authentic sources; and shall conclude with a few remarks on his writings and on some of the more prominent and interesting traits of his character.

Dr. Priestley was born on the 13th of March, 1733, at Fieldhead, near Leeds, in Yorkshire. His father was engaged in the cloth manufacture, and was a Dissenter of the Calvinistic persuasion. Joseph was in his youth adopted by an aunt, a pious and excellent woman, by whom he was sent to several schools in the neighbourhood, and finally to the Dissenting Academy at Daventry, being designed for the ministry. "I was brought up," he says in his account of himself, "with sentiments of piety, but without bigotry; and having, from my earliest years, given much attention to the subject of religion, I was as much confirmed as I well could be in the principles of Calvinism,—all the books that came in my way having that tendency. Having read many books of experiences, and, in consequence, believing that a new birth, produced by the immediate agency of the Spirit of God, was necessary to salvation, and not being able to satisfy myself that I had experienced any thing of the kind, I felt occasionally such distress of mind as it is not in my power to describe, and which I still look back upon with horror. I imagine," he continues, "that even these conflicts of mind were not without their use, as they led me to think habitually of God and a future state. And though my feelings were then, no doubt, too full of terror, what remained of them was a deep reverence for divine things, and in time a pleasing satisfaction which can never be effaced, and, I hope, was strengthened as I advanced in life, and acquired more rational notions of religion. The remembrance, however, of what I sometimes felt in that state of ignorance and darkness, gives me a peculiar sense of the value of rational principles of religion."

At Daventry he spent three years, during which his acute and vigorous mind was expanding in free inquiry and diversified pursuits. Of the Academy in this place, founded by the celebrated Dr. Doddridge, he says: "In my time, the Academy was in a state peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuits of truth, as the students were about equally divided upon every question of much importance, in consequence of which all the topics of theological orthodoxy and heresy were the subject of continual discussion. Our tutors also were of different opinions: Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question; and Mr. Clark, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty. The general plan of our studies, which may be seen in Dr. Doddridge's published lectures, was exceedingly favourable to free enquiry, as we were referred to authors on both sides of every question, and were even required to give an account of them. In this situation, I saw reason to embrace what is generally called the heterodox side of almost every question." On quitting the Academy, he accepted a situation to officiate as minister to a small Presbyterian congregation at Needham, in Suffolk, the salary promised him being £40 per annum, but the most that he received from them was £30, whilst the expense of his board exceeded £20. Notwithstanding this, everything for a while appeared promising, and he was happy in the success of his schemes for promoting the interests of religion in the place; but having commenced a course of lectures on the theory of religion, which he had composed whilst at the Academy, he found that when he came to treat of the *Unity of God* merely as an article of faith, several of his audience were attentive to nothing else but the soundness of his faith in the doctrine of the Trinity. As he made no secret of his real opinions, it was soon found that he was an Arian. From the time of this discovery, his hearers fell off apace, especially as the old minister to whom he succeeded took a decided part against him; and notwithstanding the principal families continued with him, his salary fell

far short of £30 per annum. "I was barely able," he says, "with the greatest economy, to keep out of debt (though this I always made a point of doing at all events); and had it not been for Dr. Benson and Dr. Kippis, I do not believe that I could have subsisted. I shall always remember their kindness to me at a time when I stood so much in need of it." At Needham, Dr. Priestley felt the effects of a humble situation, and the want of popular talents (owing principally to an impediment in his speech). "Even my next neighbour," he says, "whose sentiments were as free as my own, and known to be so, declined making exchanges with me, because the more genteel part of his hearers always absented themselves when they heard I was to preach for him. But visiting that country some years afterwards, when I had raised myself to some degree of notice in the world, and being invited to preach in that very pulpit, the same people crowded to hear me, and they professed to admire one of the same discourses they had formerly despised."

After a residence of three years at Needham, Dr. Priestley accepted the charge of a congregation at Nantwich, in Cheshire, to which he joined a school. In the business of education he was indefatigable; and here his reputation as a man of varied knowledge and active enquiry began to extend itself. In 1761, after a residence of three years at Nantwich, he was invited by the trustees of the Dissenting Academy at Warrington to occupy the post of tutor in the languages. In this situation he continued six years, and in the second year he married a daughter of Mr. Wilkinson, an ironmaster, near Wrexham, in Wales. This proved a very suitable and happy connexion, his wife being, to use his own words descriptive of her, "a woman of an excellent understanding, much improved by reading, of great fortitude and strength of mind, and of a temper in the highest degree affectionate and generous,—feeling strongly for others, and little for herself." At Warrington, Dr. Priestley obtained the title of Doctor of Laws from the University of Edinburgh; and the situation he held, afforded him the advantages of cultivating an extensive acquaintance with books and with men of literary eminence. Here he published his *History of Electricity*, a work undertaken at the recommendation of Dr. Franklin, Dr. Watson, and Dr. Price (to all of whom he had been introduced, whilst on a visit, a short time before, in London). This was the first fruits of that inventive and sagacious spirit by which he afterwards rendered himself so celebrated in the walk of natural philosophy. It was several times reprinted, was translated into foreign languages, and procured for him admission into the Royal Society. This work was undertaken without the least idea of doing any thing more than writing a distinct and methodical account of all that had been done by others. Having, however, a pretty good machine, he was led to endeavour to ascertain several facts which were disputed; and this led him, by degrees, into a large field of original experiments.

After being for six years at Warrington, most laboriously employed for nothing more than a bare subsistence, he accepted an invitation to take charge of the congregation of Mill-Hill Chapel, Leeds. The liberality of the persons composing it, and his own predilection for the Christian ministry, rendered this a very agreeable situation to him; and here he resumed with his characteristic ardour, his theological studies. Besides the *Theological Repository*—a periodical publication—his works on various questions connected with religion were numerous, and evidenced the zeal with which he was inspired. But his labours were not confined to the closet: he was exceedingly assiduous in his pastoral duties; and the instruction of the young in the principles of religion, afforded him peculiar pleasure. It was at Leeds that his attention was first excited, in consequence of his vicinity to a public brewery, to the properties of fixed air, which he found ready made in the process of fermentation, and his experiments led him so far as to contrive a simple apparatus for impregnating water with it, and he was enabled to make other interesting discoveries connected with the doctrine of air. At this time, he says, he had very little knowledge of chemistry; and to this circumstance he attributes in some measure the originality of the experiments which produced these subsequent discoveries that rendered him so celebrated, since otherwise he might probably have followed some beaten track. He subsequently published the "History of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light, and Colours," which, being a work of much labour and expense, he published by subscription. While at Leeds, a proposal was made to him to accompany Capt. Cook in his second voyage to the South Seas; and as the terms were very advantageous, he consented to it,—the

heads of his congregation agreeing to keep an assistant to supply his place during his absence; but he was subsequently informed that he was objected to by some clergymen on the Board of Longitude, on account of his religious principles.

About this time, whilst on a visit to Archdeacon Blackburne, at Richmond, commenced his intimacy with the Rev. Theophilus Lindsay, the Rector of Catterick,— "an intimacy," says Dr. Priestley, "which has been the source of more real satisfaction to me than any other circumstances in my whole life. Mr. Lindsay," he adds, "soon discovered to me that he was uneasy in his situation. At first I was not forward to encourage him in it, but rather advised him to make what alteration he thought proper in the offices of the Church, and leave it to his superiors to dismiss him if they chose. But his better judgment, and greater fortitude, led him to give up all connection with the Established Church, of his own accord. This took place about the time of my leaving Leeds; and it was not until long after this, that I was apprized of all the difficulties he had to struggle with, before he could accomplish his purpose. But the opposition made to it by his nearest friends, and those who might have been expected to approve of the step that he took, and to have endeavoured to make it easy to him, was one of the greatest. Notwithstanding this, he left Catterick, where he had lived in alluence, idolized by his parish, and went to London without any certain prospect, where he lived in two rooms on a ground floor; until, by the assistance of his friends, he was able to pay for the use of the upper apartments, which the state of his health rendered necessary. In this humble situation have I passed some of the most pleasing hours of my life, when, in consequence of living with Lord Shelburne, I spent my winters in London. On this occasion it was that my intimacy with Mr. Lindsay was much improved; and an entire concurrence in everything that we thought to be for the interest of Christianity, gave fresh warmth to our friendship. To his society I owe much of my zeal for the doctrine of the divine Unity, for which he made so great sacrifices, and in the defence of which he so much distinguished himself as to occasion a new era in the history of religion in this country. As we became more intimate, confiding in his better taste and judgment, and also in that of Mrs. Lindsay, a woman of the same spirit and views, and in all respects a help-meet for him, I never chose to publish any thing of moment relating to theology without consulting him; and hardly ever ventured to insert anything that they disapproved, being sensible that my disposition led to precipitancy, to which their coolness was a seasonable check."

[TO BE CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]

(From the New York Christian Inquirer.)  
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK.

The Association held its annual meeting at the Library of the Church of the Divine Unity, on Monday evening, 11th January, the President, Z. Cook, Esq., in the chair.

Rev. Mr. Robins, of Boston, opened the meeting with prayer, and the Annual Report of the Association was then read by the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Richard Warren, Esq.

Rev. Mr. Bellows said that, though disabled by a severe cold, he could not allow the report to pass in silence, lest the very walls should cry out. He praised its directness, its business-like tone, its unvarnished truthfulness; and proceeded to disclaim for the clergy any merit in what had been already accomplished by the Association. He rejoiced that the work had been done by laymen; laymen had laid the foundations; laymen were building the walls of the Institution. As to what had been done, it might seem small, in comparison with what is accomplished where numerical force is greater; but it is, nevertheless, of great importance. It requires but a spark of living fire, to set off a great train. Unitarianism is making progress, indirectly as well as directly. It is advancing not only by the express teachings of the pulpit, but by the continual droppings of the popular literature. There is a great deal of latent Unitarianism; our business is to develop it. Public sentiment is waiting to run in the channel which we and we only can prepare for it. Means, though small, if used with the right spirit, will accomplish great results. Much has already been done. Men's minds are shaking off the trammels which they have learned to feel so degrading. They will think for themselves, and they are ready to accept a simple faith as soon as it is offered. It is our duty to labour heart and soul that it may be offered to all.

Mr. Cook expressed himself, in behalf of the Directors, much pleased with the recep-

tion of the report, and stated that the paper had been prepared solely by the gentleman who presented it, without a suggestion on the part of the Directors.

Mr. Allen then remarked upon the fact that there were generally supposed to be but two Unitarian societies in this city; but that there were in reality ten which were truly Unitarian, as denying the fundamental tenets of the Calvinistic theology, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. Of these, two are of the Christian denomination, four Universalists, two Hicksite Friends, and two of our own. In the State there are 500 societies who hold to the strict Unity of God; in the United States 3,000. All these we ought to hail as brethren. They hold the peculiar distinctive faith, on account of which men cast out our names as evil; and we should give them the right hand of fellowship, which is elsewhere denied to them and to us. He was glad that our brotherhood with these sects was alluded to in the Report.

Mr. Warren now offered a resolution, which he said was offered twenty years ago at Boston, but would be equally appropriate now; and he would read it, hoping some gentleman present would make it the ground of some remarks. The resolution was as follows:—

*Resolved*, That the opportunities daily presenting themselves for the spread of Unitarian truth, call for an increase of teachers, and a more strenuous effort on the part of its friends.

The Rev. Mr. Robins, of Boston, came to sympathize with New York, but he believed he should go away sympathizing with Boston. He came as a stranger might; to look on, not intending to say a word; but he felt impelled to rise, to give his testimony of approbation to what had been done, and to manifest his sympathy in this effort to spread the knowledge of "the faith once delivered to the saints." Though a stranger, he felt himself among brethren and friends. He concluded his remarks by exhorting the workmen who had begun so admirably to keep the ploughshare bright in the field of God, trusting Him to prepare the soil for the seed, and bring it to a glorious harvest.

Mr. Cook, at the close of the proceedings, announced that the Association had obtained from the Legislature an act of incorporation, which was read and accepted; and after a few business resolutions, the meeting adjourned.

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- 3.—Unitarianism the Faith of our Lord Jesus Ch.
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- 6.—Unitarianism the Faith of the Primitive Ch.
- 7.—Unitarianism a Rational Faith.
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