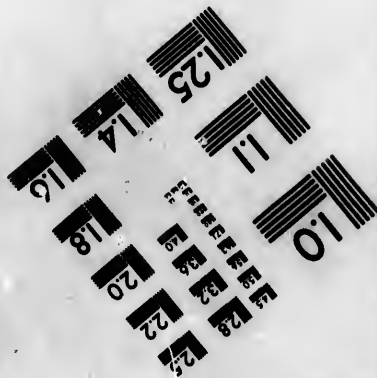
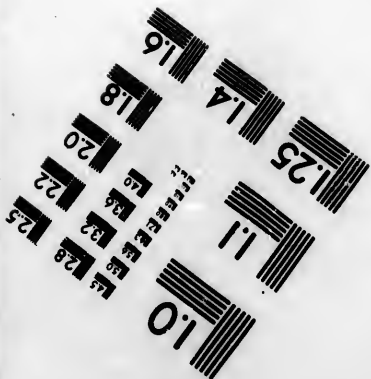
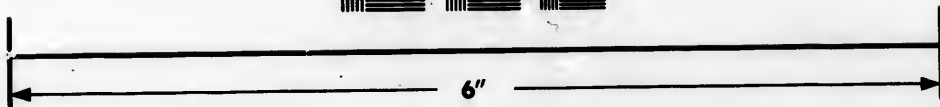
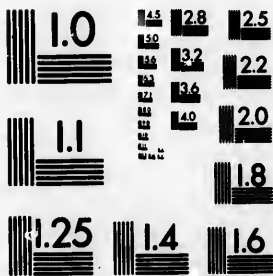


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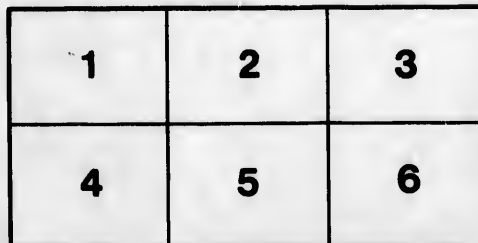
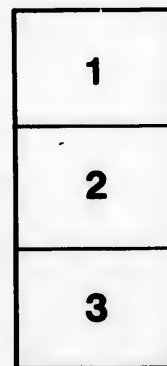
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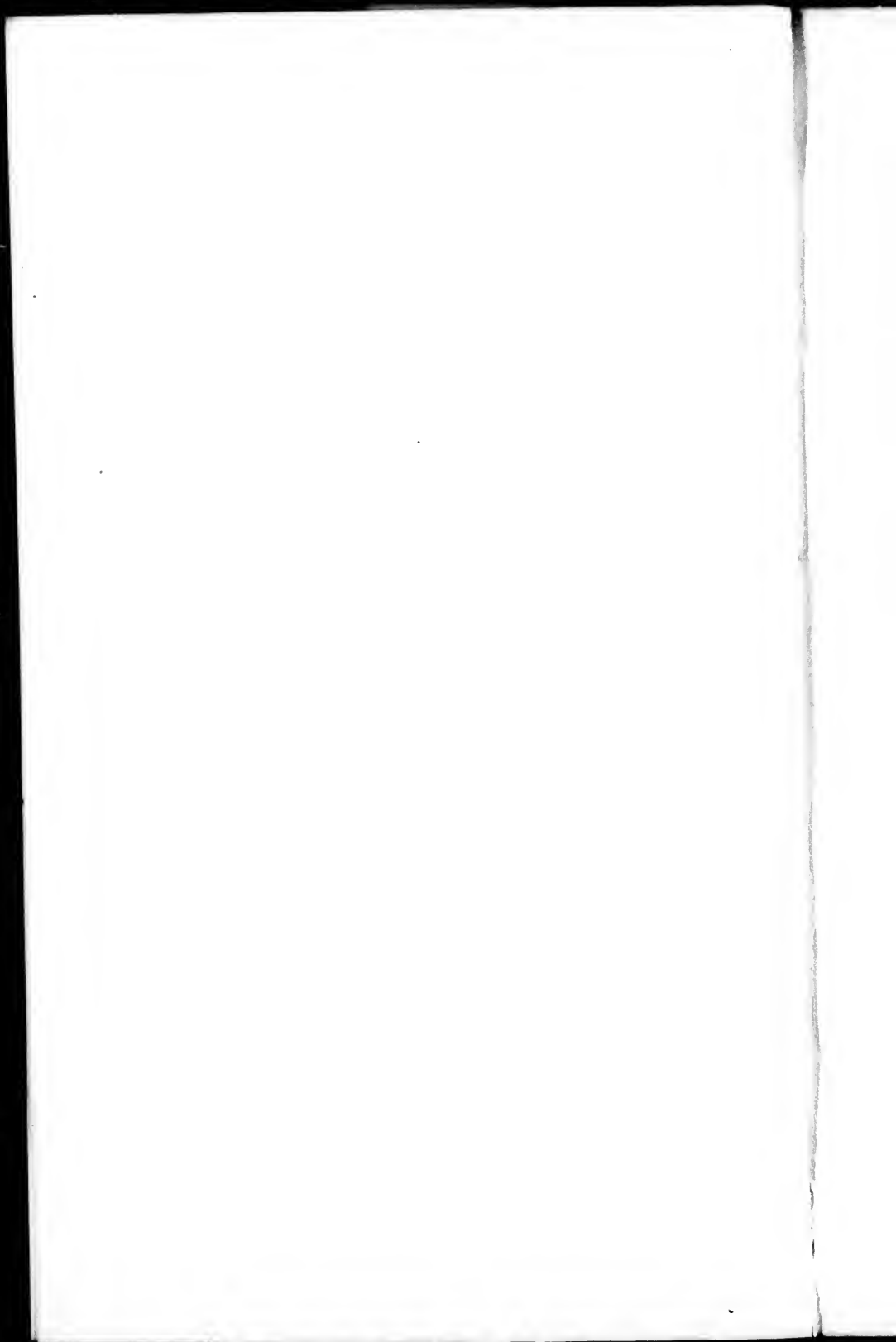
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The Faith of the Unitarian Christian Explained,  
Justified, and Distinguished.

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

THE DEDICATION

OF

THE UNITARIAN CHURCH,

Montreal,

ON SUNDAY, MAY 11, 1845.

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By EZRA S. GANNETT,  
MINISTER OF THE FEDERAL STREET CHURCH, BOSTON.

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Published by request.

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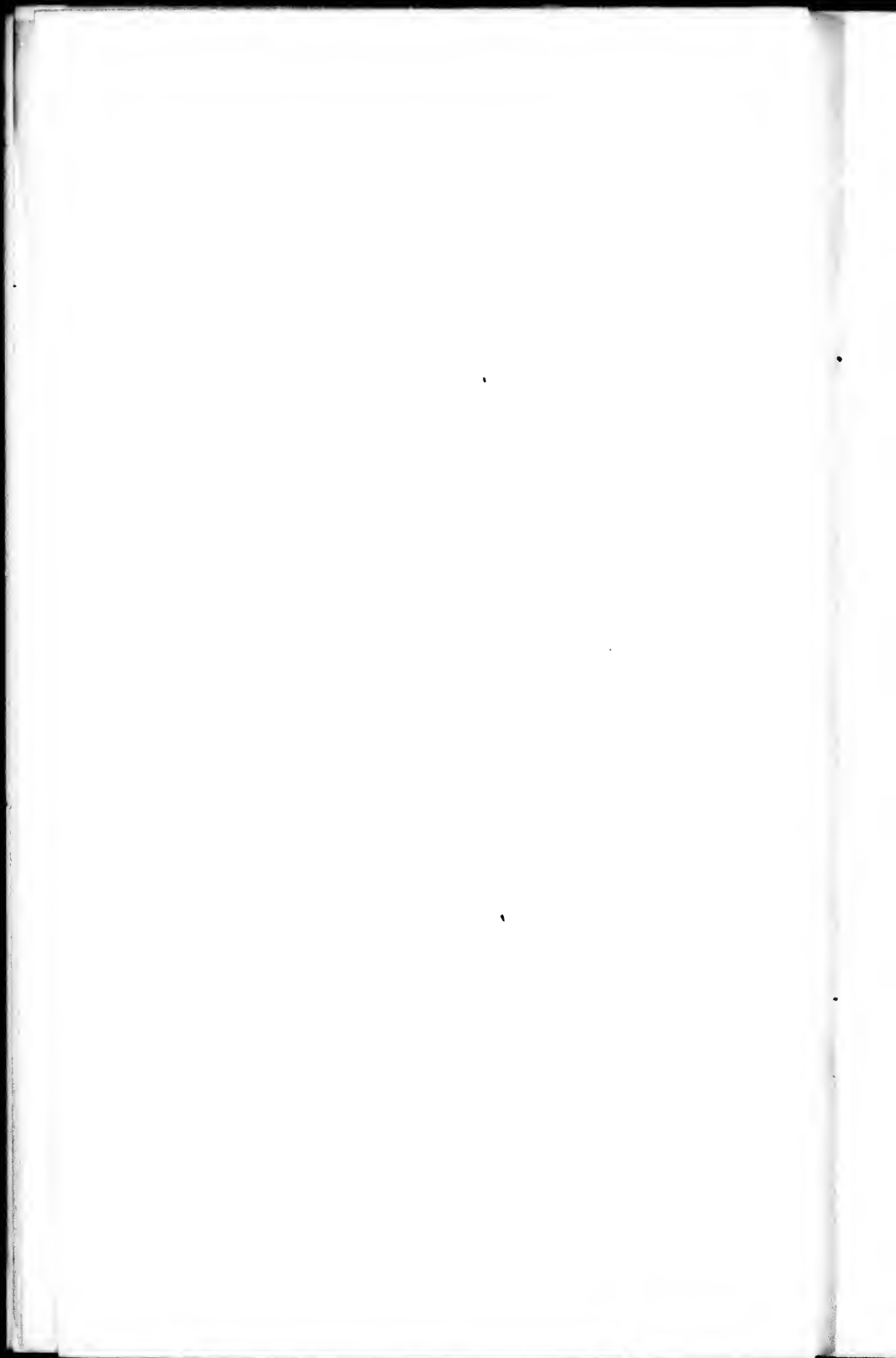


Unitarian Church, Montreal.



Tablet in front of Church.





## DISCOURSE.

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2 CORINTHIANS IV. 13.

WE HAVING THE SAME SPIRIT OF FAITH, ACCORDING AS IT IS WRITTEN, I BELIEVED AND THEREFORE HAVE I SPOKEN, WE ALSO BELIEVE AND THEREFORE SPEAK.

WE have assembled to dedicate a building to the uses of Christian worship. It is not an unusual occurrence in this city. Yet it can never take place without interesting many hearts, and claiming some attention from a community who wish that good morals and Scriptural piety should prevail among them. Some measure of sympathy even, it might be thought on the naked statement of the purpose for which we have met, would be felt by such as should learn that another edifice would now be added to the number of those which are designed to extend and deepen the influence of religion, in a metropolis abounding with the temptations of secular engagement and worldly pleasure. But there is this peculiarity in our present dedication, that most of the citizens of this place probably look with unkind or

doubtful regards upon the services which we celebrate. Many good people would account it a duty rather to discourage than to assist the enterprise of which this structure reminds them, and of the successful prosecution of which it affords an indication, if not an assurance. Crowds of ignorant though honest, and yet other crowds of ignorant and dishonest persons, and still others whose prejudice or opposition cannot seek a shelter behind their ignorance, as they look upon these walls, will find no pleasure in the sight. They who have built this house have studied no concealment. They have placed upon its front the word "Unitarian," though it be offensive to many eyes, and by some observers be deemed a contradiction of the title of "Christian" with which it has been united in the same inscription.

The circumstances under which we have entered these doors seem therefore to determine the course of remark which is most suitable to the occasion. The dedication of the first avowedly Unitarian church in British America almost requires of us that we explain and justify ourselves in such a step. When there are so many other houses of public worship in which the members of this society might have found opportunities of religious service, and so many other names under which they might have arranged themselves in the division of the Christian forces, why have they thought it necessary to erect a sanctuary bearing the distinctive name of Unitarian? What is the import of this name? What are the reasons for adopting it? And what are the differences which it indicates between the worshippers here and those who gather

around other altars? These are questions that naturally arise; and in answering them I believe that I shall more directly meet the wants of the present hour, than if I should discourse of the propriety or the character of Christian worship in general.

According to my ability then would I speak on these points—the truths, the justifications, and the differences of Unitarian Christianity;—by invitation from this society, but not with any authority except such as belongs to honest private conviction, and a somewhat large acquaintance with the opinions entertained by other Unitarian believers here and elsewhere. They have no accepted creed which I may quote, no formularies of faith nor symbolical books which they recognize as containing the only accredited exposition of their views, and no ecclesiastical body from which such an exposition might emanate. The right and duty of personal inquiry, which are the elementary principles of their religious state, preclude any attempt to utter other than private persuasions or the impressions which a wide and careful observation may have given. Such observation will lead any one to a knowledge of certain great doctrines which are held in common by Unitarians in America and in Europe, and will show that they accord in respect to the grounds of their belief, and in their dissent from many popular representations of the Gospel.

What are the truths of Unitarian Christianity? What do Unitarians believe? This is the first question, and it is one which thousands might ask under a profound ignorance even of the nature of the reply that would be given. So little pains have been taken

to learn what we really hold as truth, and so great misapprehension prevails, that the simplest statement of our faith may not be out of place. We believe, then, in God, as the Supreme, Perfect, and Infinite Being, Lord of heaven and earth, Author of all life, Source of every blessing, Searcher of hearts, and Judge of men. We believe in his universal, constant, and righteous providence, through which alone the frame-work of the creation and the processes of animate or inanimate existence are sustained. We believe in his moral government, which he exercises over all beings endowed with intellectual or moral capacities, and which, as it is rightfully exercised, so is inflexibly administered. We believe in his paternal character, in which he has been pleased to reveal himself to our admiration and love; a character which never shows him to us as weakly indulgent or capriciously tender, but as always consistent with his own perfections while full of parental regard towards men. We believe in the requisitions of duty which he has promulgated, by which are laid upon us the obligations of outward and inward righteousness, and it is made incumbent on us to cultivate purity, devotion, disinterestedness, and the harmonious expansion of our nature, that the result may be an excellence which shall redound to the glory of God. We believe in his mercy, which enables him, without impairing the integrity of his government or subverting the original conditions of his favor, to forgive the penitent sinner and admit the renewed soul to an inheritance of eternal life. We believe in his revelations, which he has made by those of old times who spake as they

were moved by the holy spirit — Moses and the Divinely inspired teachers of the Jewish people, and in a later age by Jesus Christ, the Son of his love and the Messenger of his grace. We believe that God is one in every sense in which the term can be applied to him — one in nature, in person, in character, in revelation; and therefore we are Unitarians. We believe that Jesus was the Christ — the Anointed and Sent of God, whose truth he proclaimed, whose authority he represented, whose love he unfolded; and therefore we are Christians. We believe that Jesus Christ came on a special mission to our world — to instruct the ignorant, to save the sinful, and to give assurance of immortality to those who were subject to death; that such a Teacher and Redeemer was needed; that he spake as never man spake, lived as never man lived, and died as never man died. We read the history of his life with mingled admiration and gratitude. We are moved by his cross to exercises of faith, penitence and hope. We rejoice in his resurrection, and celebrate him as Head of his Church, the authoritative Expounder of the Divine will, the faultless Pattern of the Christian character, the Manifestation and Pledge of the true life. We believe that man is a free and responsible being, capable of rising to successive heights of virtue, or of falling into deeper and deeper degradation; that sin is his ruin, and faith in spiritual and eternal realities the means of his salvation; that if he sin, it is through choice or negligence, but that in working out his own salvation he needs the Divine assistance. We believe that man in his individual person is from early child-

hood, through the force of appetite, the disadvantage of ignorance, and the strength of temptation, liable to moral corruption; that social life is in many of its forms artificial, and in many of its influences injurious; and that both the individual and society must be regenerated by the action of Christian truth. We believe that all life, private and public, all human powers and relations, all thought, feeling, and activity, should be brought under the control of religious principle and be pervaded by Christian sentiment. We believe that piety is the only sure foundation of morality, and morality the needed evidence of piety. We believe that 'perfection from weakness through progress' is the law of life for man; and that this law can be kept only where an humble heart is joined with a resolute mind and an earnest faith. We believe that men should love and serve one another, while all love the Heavenly Father, and follow the Lord Jesus to a common glory. We believe in human immortality, and a righteous retribution after death; when they who have lived in obedience or have reconciled themselves to God through sincere repentance shall enter upon a nobler fruition of life, while they who have been disobedient and impenitent shall realize the consequences of their folly in shame and suffering. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing the authentic records of God's wonderful and gracious ways, seen in the history of his ancient people, and in the miraculous works and Divine teachings of Jesus and his Apostles; and to these Scriptures we appeal as the decisive authority upon questions of faith or duty, interpreting them in

the devout exercise of that reason, through which alone we are capable of receiving a communication from Heaven. We believe in the Christian Church, as a consequence of the labors and sufferings by which Christ has gathered unto himself, out of many nations and communions, "a peculiar people," embracing his Gospel and cherishing his spirit.—the Church on earth, with its ministry, its ordinances and its responsibilities, the anticipation and promise of the Church in heaven.

Such are the prominent truths of Unitarian Christianity, I conceive, as held by those who adopt this name as the designation of their faith, and who, however they may disagree on questions of inferior moment, would probably concur in this exhibition of the articles of their belief.

And now what need is there that we should enter upon a vindication or defence of such a faith? Does it not carry its own justification in the elements of which it is composed? Does it not sound right? Does it not look right? Has it not the aspect and savor of truth? Does not reason approve, and Scripture sanction it? *We* can answer these questions in but one way. We are satisfied that ours is a correct faith, of which we need not be ashamed, but in which we may glory before men, and by which we may hope to obtain eternal salvation. Yet to many ears and eyes it wears a suspicious character. It is not the popular, the prevalent, the "Orthodox" faith. Strictly *orthodox*, as we contend, emphatically Evangelical, these titles are deemed inapplicable to it by most of the Christian denominations



by which we are surrounded. They account it as at best grievously defective, if not radically unsound. We are driven therefore to the necessity of proving that we hold the essential and sufficient truths of religion. And I must now proceed to give such a reply as the time will permit to the second question we proposed to answer — what are the grounds on which we rely for the justification of our belief.

First, I remark, it finds justification in our nature ; as both the capacities and wants of this nature pronounce in its favor. Let me however anticipate here an objection, with which we are familiar, — that the acceptableness of our views of religion to a depraved nature is a proof of their falsehood. It is not of the tastes of a depraved mind or the tendencies of a corrupt heart that we speak, but of inherent, indestructible characteristics of the nature which God has given us, and of necessities which arise out of the constitution imposed by our Creator. The human being and the Christian religion came from the same Source. They must be suited to one another, for Christianity was intended by its infinitely wise Author to meet the exigencies of humanity. Unless, therefore, we recognise a correspondence between our religion and our nature, we conclude against God, imputing to him a defective performance of his gracious designs. Is not this to “charge him foolishly” and ungratefully ?

Of the capacities which consciousness reveals to us let us select two, — one of which marks us as rational, and the other as religious beings ; for no one will deny that we are *capable* of religious, as of intellectual exer-

cises. Take then the rational faculty; and let it examine the truths which we have just repeated. Is there one which it would not approve? Not one, we confidently affirm. There is nothing here, at which reason need be or would be offended, nothing at which it must "stand aghast," or from which it must turn away in contempt. If this seem but small praise to bestow on a religious system, let it be remembered that as much cannot be said for all the theology in the Christian world. As we look over the history of opinion in the Church, we esteem it no slight recommendation of the views which we entertain, that they harmonize with the conclusions to which reason is brought by a study of the works and ways of God, and the constitution and situation of man. But farther, not only is each article of our belief when separately considered such as reason may accept without injury to its prerogative of distinguishing between what is worthy and what unworthy of reception, but there is no contradiction or inconsistency between these articles. Each finds support in every other, and each gives support to all the rest; yet not through an artificial arrangement, but from the harmony that always prevails among the different portions of truth; which, like the disjointed members of a perfect figure, when brought together are seen to belong to each other. Now we cannot but value our faith for this sentence of approbation which reason is compelled to pass upon it, for we do not believe that revelation was intended to put such an affront on that faculty which was the greatest previous gift of the Creator to man, as would be implied in disregarding its decisions.

If now we turn to the religious element in human nature, we find that it demands just such opportunity of exercise, such encouragement, guidance and help, as are presented to it in the exhibition we have made of the Divine character and of the relations of the Supreme Being to his children on earth. Where shall piety find an Object to whom it may rise, even from the dust, in grateful confidence, if not in the Father whom it is our privilege to portray in terms which we think authorised by his chosen Messenger? Again, the moral is intimately associated with the religious part of our constitution; whence shall this draw instruction so suitable and adequate, at once so tender and so stringent, as from the exposition we give of duty? How can the conscience be quickened to a faithful performance of its work more directly, than by the language we use respecting the obligation of personal righteousness? Or what motives can be addressed to the will more persuasive, than those which are embraced within our representations of the dependence of honor and happiness, both here and hereafter, upon character?

So does the Gospel as interpreted by Unitarian believers justify itself to the *capacities* of our being. But there are also deep wants in this nature of ours — wants which religion alone can relieve. It is needed for the protection of our frailty, for the satisfaction of our best desires, for the comfort of our sorrows; and in respect to the demands which each class of these wants makes upon a true religion, Unitarian Christianity fulfils the conditions required of it. How it assuages the grief of the mourner by its revelations of

Divine love, of spiritual discipline, and future blessedness, or how it offers to our purest desires the satisfactions which God and heaven alone can give, needs no illustration. I will only speak of the necessities which follow upon the exposure of such a nature as this which we inherit to the incidents and influences of an earthly life. The consequence, as we see, is sin; not because we are naturally wicked, but naturally weak. We need to be kept from falling by means of truths which shall stand around our souls like heavenly guards; and when notwithstanding their presence we have fallen, we need friendly voices that shall save us from despair and restore us to our former position. Others may regard this as the last claim which we should presume to urge in favor of our interpretation of Christianity, but we do not hesitate to assert in its behalf, that it is preeminently suited to meet the wants of man as a frail and sinful being; alike as it reveals to him the origin, and the remedy of his state. It tells him that he is a sinner because he *chooses* to be one, it sets before him the guilt of such voluntary estrangement from God, and it opens to him the conditions of a mercy large enough for the greatest of sinners. Behold here that union of reproof and pity which must be most effectual for the end which it contemplates.

The time does not allow me to expand this argument as I could desire. Its importance entitles it to consideration; for as in the material creation the wonderful adaptations which we discover bespeak a Divine Author, so the admirable fitness of the religion of the New Testament to the beings for whom it was

given is a proof of its superhuman origin, which has been justly insisted on by Christian writers, but the full force of which can be felt only where the true features of the revelation are discerned. Whether on the one hand we look at man as a being, the intellectual, social and spiritual elements of whose constitution require culture, or on the other hand as a being whose appetites and infirmities call for means of restraint, or again as a being whose history includes that terrible fact of sin which gives a new aspect to all his relations and creates a before unknown class of wants, the most urgent which he can feel, we perceive in the truths and influences of our faith just that supply of direction, assistance, and redeeming grace which is needed. His intellect finds the loftiest exercise alike for its discursive and its meditative powers; his social affections are led forth to the happiest results by the constraint of that law of love to which they are subjected; his spiritual faculties obtain the freedom and elevation which they crave; his animal propensities are placed under the discipline of an habitual self-denial; his infirmities receive aid or admonition as they may require; and for the evils which sin has brought upon him provision is made, equal, and more than equal to all the necessities of which it has become the fruitful source.

But I must leave any farther illustration of this point, to notice a second ground of confidence in our theological statements. They are founded upon Scripture. We take our faith from the Bible. Unitarian Christianity is the Christianity of the New Testament. We find it there on every page, and we find there

nothing which suggests to us a different exposition of the Divine will. It is common indeed to deny us this occasion of rejoicing, and to charge upon us irreverent or violent treatment of Scripture. We repel the charge as wholly false. It is upon the testimony of the sacred volume that we plant ourselves, as on a sure foundation. The Bible is in our favor from beginning to end. An English writer whose works are just now in great repute on this side of the Atlantic has remarked, in a sentence whose rhetorical point is a poor compensation for its audacious falsehood, that "to be a worthy member of the Unitarian or rather Socinian community, a man must be prepared to reject nine-tenths of the Old Testament and the whole of the New!" "Nine-tenths of the Old Testament!" On what page of the Hebrew Scriptures is there a line that asserts any other doctrine than the absolute unity of the Divine Nature? Where from Moses to Malachi—where from the history of the creation to the last words of Jewish prophecy—is there an intimation that God exists in three persons, or that Christ was an Infinite Being? The Jews discovered no such doctrine during the centuries in which they were the sole possessors of these sacred books. And if the principles of sound interpretation, which are observed in regard to every other book in the world by any person laying claim to intelligence or honesty, be followed in the perusal of the Bible, not a passage can be brought thence which militates with our faith. "The whole of the New Testament" must be "rejected!" When, if there be a collection of Unitarian writings on earth, it is what has there been

given us by Evangelists and Apostles. I wish not to use cautious or equivocal language on this subject, for we have a right to speak in the most positive terms. The whole, (I make no exception of a tenth or a twentieth part,) the whole of both the Old and New Testament must be misconstrued to yield any other than a Unitarian interpretation.

Does any one demand proof of this declaration, so bold, I am aware, as it may be esteemed by others, but so obviously true as it appears to us? The proof could be furnished in detail only by examining every text in the Bible. To such a trial of the correctness of the assertion we shall always rejoice to see it subjected, but this is not the time for such an investigation. I can only remark, that we place a two-fold reliance on the support which Scripture gives to our views; first, as its general tenor is clearly and strongly in their favor; and then, as particular passages — numberless in amount — confirm the impressions which we derive from the prevalent complexion of thought and style of expression. Let an unbiassed reader take up the Bible for the first time and peruse it carefully, without commentary or friend near him to suggest what it *ought* to mean, and the conviction would grow stronger upon him as he proceeded from writer to writer, that they knew nothing about Trinitarianism, or many other doctrines which we have discarded from our theology. Let him then fall upon such passages as these, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord;” “This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;” “To us there is but one God, the Father,

and one Lord, Jesus Christ," — and these are specimens of innumerable similar declarations, — and what judgment could he form but that the Bible recognizes the distinction on which we insist between Him who alone is God and him who is the Mediator between God and man. We stand by the Bible, and the Bible stands by us. We love and honor the Bible, without which we should live in darkness, and die as the Heathens die. Precious volume! whose meaning the wisest cannot exhaust, yet the simplest may comprehend; book of books; treasure of treasures; source and summary of all good influences! Never may the hour come when we shall cease to cling to the Bible; for then shall we give up the main justification of our faith, and be thrown upon a fathomless sea of doubt.

We adduce the testimony of our nature, as in its various elements — whether we consider its power or its weakness — it proclaims the validity of our interpretation of religious truth; and we cite the whole instruction of Scripture, whether contemplated in its general character or examined in detail, as concurring in the same result. To add only one other ground of confidence in the opinions which we hold, they prove their title to the estimation we bestow on them by the effects which they have produced. It may not become us to cite our own experience on this point, — to speak of the restraint they lay upon our passions, the stability they impart to our principles, or the peace with which they fill our hearts. We cannot press the argument in this form, for we feel how unworthily we have used the grace of



God which he has shown in bringing us to the knowledge of himself through his dear Son. But we may refer to those who have lived and died in this precious faith. We have seen — the world has seen — what Unitarian Christianity can do for man; how it can inspire him with a Divine energy, and clothe him in a heavenly grace, and prepare him for a glorious futurity. There have been examples of great excellence under almost every phase of belief which has been known in the Christian Church; for they have all included enough of truth to become “a savour of life unto life” to them who have believed. But never have nobler or purer examples of the Christian character been witnessed, than have arisen beneath the influences of that “form of sound words” which distinguishes — painful rather than pleasant it is, to say, still *distinguishes* — us. From the days of the Apostles to our own time, through the successive periods of Christian history, there have never been wanting those who have been confessors of this faith, worthy to be numbered among God’s elect. Amidst abundance and in poverty, under the sunshine of prosperity and beneath the darkest night of adversity, have lived those who have illustrated this faith, and shown its power, whether to protect or to support the soul. Men of a true spiritual nobility and women of a heavenly charm have traced all that was good in them and all that was beautiful to their confidence in the truths of Unitarian Christianity. They who have departed in peace, or have triumphed over every obstacle and every disaster, have drawn from this armory the weapons with which they have achieved the last,

as all their previous victories. It is a sad mistake, to suppose that only persons of a refined or speculative turn of mind can discover in this system of faith what is congenial to their tastes or needful for their wants. I call it a system, let me observe, for though we give it no systematic arrangement under which it may be imposed on human consciences, yet such an arrangement it must obtain in the mind of every thoughtful disciple. But not to men of thoughtful or retired habits alone is it adapted. The humblest and plainest of England's population whom Richard Wright on his missionary tours visited in their rural homes, and the lowest among the inhabitants of a busy metropolis in the United States whom the ministry-at-large has searched out and gathered into the fold of Christ, can attest the efficacy of these doctrines. Nor is it, on the other hand, less unjust to represent this faith as one which can recommend itself only to persons of little intellectual force or spiritual discernment. This latter objection, you will perceive, is overthrown by the former, but both are contradicted by facts. When such men as Socinus and Servetus, Newton and Locke, Priestley and Wakefield and Buckminster and Channing have cherished these tenets of an unpopular theology, it is idle to call it a religion only for gross or indolent minds.

The charge, common as it is, and certainly of grave import, which stigmatises this as a superficial, negative, or cold belief, is utterly false. The most spiritual people I have ever known were formed under its influence, and in no Communion have the fruits of love to God and love to man been more

largely exhibited than in ours ; — we say it not in vain boasting, but in justice to the cause of truth. It is a calumny, though it be on many lips, to affirm that this is not a religion by which men may be prepared to die, or in which they can meet death with Christian hope. Thousands and thousands have gone down to the grave in the full conviction of this faith, and when sensible that the springs of life were wearing out, have calmly waited as those who “knew in whom they had believed.” Lives adorned with the beauty of holiness have been closed in the serenity of a religious trust, and characters which had withstood the assaults of temptation have been found more than able to cope with the surprise and terror of death, for to them death, under whatever circumstances it may have approached, has brought neither terror nor surprise. If any one ask for evidence of the sufficiency of our views of religion for all the exigencies of man as a sinner or an immortal being, amidst the vicissitudes of an earthly condition or the anticipations of a righteous judgment, we may point him to the examples of the living and the dead, whom to name would in the one case be superfluous, and in the other might be indelicate ; and we leave to his own mind our vindication from the groundless charges under which we labor.

In the capacities and wants of human nature, in the general tone and express declarations of Scripture, and in the effects produced on character and life, we discover reasons for accepting Unitarian Christianity rather than any of the forms of religious belief which prevail around us. Are they not substantial reasons

for a departure from popular persuasions? Do they not justify us in maintaining separate institutions of worship? We cannot concur with other portions of the Church in adopting opinions which they regard as essential to the vitality of the Christian faith. Is it not better then, that we have our own religious services, in which because we "believe," we "speak" in a manner which must be unsatisfactory to them, than that we should be in continual danger of giving or taking offence from the want of sympathy between us and our fellow-worshippers? While we affirm that the essential principles of religion, the great and vital truths of the Gospel, are held in common by us and various other Christian sects, we neither mean nor wish to conceal the differences which separate us from them. We pronounce these differences important, and we believe that the cause of both truth and charity will be promoted by a calm recognition of them. In what remains of this discourse I shall endeavor to present those differences between ourselves and others, which most clearly mark our position in the community.

In the first place, then, as Unitarian Christians we differ from unbelievers of every class and name — in our doctrine concerning Christ. They deny his supernatural mission, if not his moral excellence. We believe in both the one and the other, — in the perfection of his character and the Divine authority of his teaching. To us he is the representative of God, speaking in his name and reflecting his glory. We hold it to be our privilege to sit at the feet of this heavenly Master; accounting it a higher office to

listen reverently to him, than to occupy the proudest chair of philosophy or the most despotic throne on earth. Unitarian Christianity has no affinity with unbelief. They belong to opposite poles of experience. Infidelity, whatever form it may take, from the coarseness of the scoffer to the sophistry of the skeptic, meets with no favor at our hands. We treat it justly, as we would treat everybody and everything, be it man or devil, error or vice; but we can bestow on it only our pity, our condemnation, or our counsel. We gratefully accept the records of the Saviour's life, and follow him in holy admiration from Bethlehem to Calvary, exclaiming as we hearken to his words — "this is one who speaks as having authority;" as we behold his wonderful works, — "who could do these miracles, except God were with him;" and as we gaze upon his last suffering, — "truly this was the Son of God." We will not be seduced from our faith by the ingenious theories or mystical discourse of some who affect to honor Jesus while they throw suspicion over his whole history. We cannot divorce the history from the Divine influence which it conveys. Spiritual Christianity needs historical Christianity as its basis. To separate the former from the latter, is as if we withdrew from the towers and spires of a lofty cathedral the support of the foundation which enables them to soar upwards in their graceful beauty. Of coarser material may that foundation be made and be partly buried in the earth, but its solid strength upholds the walls out of which those lighter creations of art spring towards the skies. So must the loftiest aspirations of faith spring from convictions

that rest on the firm basis of the Gospel history. We repel the charge of promoting or countenancing infidelity. We warn those whose hearts are set in this direction of the peril they run; we entreat those who have sought this as a refuge from superstition to leave it for the stronghold of a Scriptural faith; and shall we, because we cannot join in heaping opprobrious terms upon the unbeliever or in pursuing him with maledictions, be accused of secret agreement with him? Our language is, "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" but the name of Jesus Christ; can the most unscrupulous ingenuity pervert this language into a symbol of unbelief?

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from Trinitarians of every Communion—in our doctrine concerning God. We adopt no such expressions as "Triune God," "blessed and holy Trinity," "three persons in one God." We find no such expressions in the Bible. There, as I have said, we read only of the Divine unity. We do not meet with a line or a word which represents Christ as sharing supreme deity with the Father. We do not read of a double nature in him, which enabled him to equivocate without a sacrifice of truth;—a moral, and literal impossibility, is it not? We say with all confidence that the doctrine of the Trinity is either unintelligible or self-contradictory, and that in either case it cannot be a subject of revelation. We do not hesitate to pronounce it injurious in its effects upon devotion, and pernicious in its connexion with morality. We trace its history back to the admixture of an impure philosophy with

the primitive faith of the Church. And when we are reminded that it is now included in the faith of nearly all Christendom, we answer, first, that if the truth of opinions be determined by majorities, Christianity must cower before Paganism, and Protestantism humble itself before the majesty of Rome; and secondly, that the variety of explanations which have been given by the advocates of this tenet is a sufficient proof that the majority of the Christian Church are not agreed in any interpretation, and since we cannot find it in the Bible, we may at least defer a belief in it till they who esteem it so important have decided what it is which they wish us to believe.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from all of the Presbyterian or Congregational name who adopt Calvinistic standards of faith — in our doctrine concerning man. We look upon him as fallen from his state of primeval innocence. Observation and consciousness tell us that he is corrupt. But not by nature. We cannot shut our eyes on human depravity, but we can believe neither in natural nor in total depravity. If man comes into life with a nature wholly inclined to evil, where is his guilt in obeying the necessity under which he is placed of doing evil? As soon should I think of charging guilt on the mountains whose bleak sides are by the ordinance of the Creator smitten with the desolation of an almost perpetual winter, because they do not exhibit the verdure of early spring. If man can only choose and commit sin, where is his freedom, or where his responsibility? What folly to speak to him of duty! What injustice to pass upon him a sentence of condemnation! I care not for nice

distinctions between natural and moral inability. Inability is inability, and what a man cannot do, it is worse than idle to require him to do. If the dogma of *natural* depravity be opposed to common sense, the idea of *total* depravity is irreconcilable with facts. There is not a being on earth wholly depraved — without any good in him. Nero, demon as he was, had some humanity left. Vitellius, beast as he was, could not drown his whole nature in sensuality. Neither the cannibalism of New Zealand nor the horrors of the French revolution reveal to us unmitigated atrocity.. In the worst men there are secret qualities that need only the right sort of collision with circumstances to bring them out to our admiration, as from the hard and black flint sparks of light may be struck by proper means. Man is a sinner — call him so, be he clothed with purple or beg in rags; and sin is spiritual suicide, by slower or quicker methods — so describe it, whether before Herod in his palace, or the Pharisee in the temple, or the most abandoned profligate in the foulest den of iniquity. Call them all to repent, alike by the mercies and the terrors of the Lord. “Cry aloud, spare not,” and prove yourself faithful as a minister of God to guilty mortals. But say not that man is only vile. Commit not that sacrilege, for it is God’s work which you abuse. See in that wreck of humanity, as in a noble ship which the waves have swept till it looks only like a worthless hulk, much which is sound, enough even to authorise the hope that it may be restored to its former bearing. The sinner is a man, and in that title if he have not the pledge of his redemption, he has what for a free and



accountable being is better, the proof of its possibility.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from the self-styled Orthodox of this and other lands—in our doctrine concerning the atonement. We believe in an atonement, and in *the* atonement; in an atonement needed by every sinner, by which he shall be reconciled to God, and in the atonement of which Christ is the instrument, by bringing the sinner to God, that he may be forgiven and justified. Nay, more; we believe that the atonement was the great object of Christ's mission, even as he said, "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," and that in this purpose we find the solution of the mystery which overhangs his cross. But we cannot—and we thank God that we do not—believe in a vicarious atonement which would subvert our notions of justice, and teach us to look upon the Heavenly Father as an Infinite Despot. We *must* use strong language on this point. We reject with abhorrence a doctrine which despoils the Divine character of its glory, and takes from the Divine law its most urgent sanctions. We can call that a gracious Providence which hides instruction beneath chastisement, but we cannot call that a revelation of grace which shows us the Sovereign of the universe refusing forgiveness to contrite offenders except on conditions which they are utterly unable to fulfil, yet which are held to be fulfilled by a technical evasion that would be sanctioned by no court of justice in the civilized world. Our doctrine of the atonement is a doctrine of parental love; the popular doctrine of the atonement, if it were not con-

nected with the Divine Name, we should describe as a doctrine of cunning tyranny. Such, I am constrained to say, painful as is the association, is the light under which it seems to me to present the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I know that this dogma is set forth as the sinner's only ground of hope. Strange affirmation! And yet stranger blindness, that cannot see the invitation of a free mercy illuminating every page of the New Testament. Mercy, oh how much needed by man, how freely exercised by God! Let not the condition of man be mistaken by the sinner, let not the character of God be misrepresented by the theologian.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from members of the Roman Catholic Communion — in our doctrine respecting authority in matters of religion. The principle towards which all the ideas of the Roman Catholic gravitate, is the Church. It is to this that he adheres with most tenacity, for in giving up this he thinks he gives up everything. As he reduces this principle to practice, he makes the Church the infallible interpreter of Scripture and expounder of truth. The Church is the ultimate authority, whom it is fatal sin to disobey or distrust. Heresy therefore (which is only dissent from the Church) becomes impiety, and may be punished as spiritual treason. Now we believe in the Church; but it is the Church of the saints who are compacted into one body “by that which every joint supplieth,” and not the hierarchy who are only members in the body. We believe in no infallibility residing on earth, because we say, — making a statement in moral arithmetic which any

child can understand, — that no aggregation of fallible judgments can make an infallible guide. We protest against this claim of the Romish Church. It is her cardinal vice. We might bear with her other errors; but this assumption of the attributes of the Most High, with all the terrible consequences which it involves, we may not regard even with patience. It invades the sanctuary of man's freedom, and scales the throne of God's sovereignty. It has but one word to express the conditions of eternal life; and that is, *submit* — submit to the Church in its interpretation of truth and its declaration of duty. This, with God's grace, we will never do. We will submit, not to the Church, but to him who is the Head of the Church, and the only spiritual Head whom its members should acknowledge. Christ has called us to liberty, not to bondage. He has taught us what to believe, and on us lies the responsibility of construing his instructions in their right sense. We can let no man nor body of men frame a creed for us. It is not the *right* of private judgment alone, which we defend. It is the *duty* of private judgment, which we dare not neglect. We must think and read for ourselves. If we mistake the meaning of the written word, on our souls will lie the peril. It is a fearful responsibility which is committed to us. We know this — we hope we feel it. If we suffer ourselves to be warped by passion or prejudice, by self-will or self-interest, we shall stand condemned. But if we use no means of ascertaining "the mind of the spirit," except as we passively yield to others' dictation, we shall incur still heavier guilt. We are the Lord's freemen, and how

can we be called loyal to him so long as we enter into voluntary servitude to any other master ?

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from the adherents of the Episcopal Church — in our doctrine concerning the ministry. We are far from denying the need of a separate order of men who shall give themselves to study and preaching, that they may be able to convince the gainsayer and instruct and exhort the believers. We perceive that such a class as the clergy are demanded by the situation of the Church in the midst of the world, as well as by its internal wants, and we doubt not that the ministry was intended by Christ to be perpetual. But we look with no respect on the claims which are advanced in behalf of the clergy of a particular church over other ministers. We find it difficult to express our amazement at the effrontery of a church, which, itself a fragment of the universal Church and a secession from a larger fragment, presumes to consider the ministers of other portions as intruders into the sacred office. It would be ridiculous, if it were not insolent. We do not call in question the claims of the English Church to the admiration of its members, for if they find in its liturgy or discipline what enkindles their admiration, we would not let our preference for a simpler worship lead us to forget the original diversity of mental wants ; but to admit her argument, drawn from Scripture, in favor of the three orders, or her argument, not drawn from Scripture nor from any other source except fancy, in favor of the Apostolical succession, is what we cannot do without surrendering our common sense.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from the Baptist denomination — in our doctrine concerning ordinances. The ordinances we value. They are beautiful symbols and efficacious means. We prize them, and use them. But we would be slow rather than eager to exaggerate their importance. And we cannot easily understand the delusion which causes intelligent and excellent people to raise the mere form of a form, a method of a means, into a condition of church fellowship. We should as soon think of making an exact agreement in pronunciation indispensable to the interchange of kind offices on a journey. It is not sufficient to say, that compliance with the letter of the Master's direction is of the first importance ; because, to pass over the question whether the words of Scripture must bear the construction which is put upon them by the members of this denomination, it shows a grievous misapprehension of the genius of our religion and the mind of its Founder, to care *more* for the letter than for the spirit of his teaching. It might be difficult to determine which makes the greater mistake in his use of Scripture, the literalist or the allegorizer.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from the Methodist Connexion — in our doctrine concerning religious excitement. We do not decry all excitement. On the contrary, we preach that men should be interested in religion as in everything else of moment, and that they should be more interested in this than in anything else, because this is supremely important. We like earnestness and fervor in religion, if they be held under the restraint of principle and propriety. Perhaps we have not as much of these qualities as it is

desirable we should have. Our aversion to one extreme may have driven us towards the other. But we cannot admit that religion consists in excitement, nor that its best beginning is made in a tempest of feeling. We do not believe that God takes the soul by storm. A change of heart is not the work of an hour, as you may change the course of a stream by digging across a belt of ground which has turned its waters from a straight channel. Rather as the torrent which has been dashing down the hills and exhibiting the wildest disorder in its descent, gradually subsides into the stream which flows quietly in a broader and deeper current through the fields, so the impetuous and disorderly passions are gradually subdued into a tranquil and useful character. We doubt the value of those occasions of which so much use is made, to convert the sinner by the force of sympathy. Regeneration, as we understand it, is a secret work, and often of slow growth, though its results be great and manifest. We dislike mechanical methods, as we distrust stereotyped evidences of religion.

As Unitarian Christians, we differ from the Universalist body — in our doctrine concerning retribution. They agree with us in regard to the supremacy and sole deity of the Father ; and many, doubtless, believe that the effects of transgression will extend beyond this life. But a still larger number, probably, hold that sin entails no consequences after death, while all who adopt this name find the peculiar glory of the Gospel in the promise of a final restoration of all men to virtue and happiness. Now, while there are different shades of opinion among us as to the future state of

the wicked, no one, I presume, would adduce the ultimate salvation of the whole human race as the great revelation of Christianity, and all of us would reject any statement of belief which excluded the idea of future retribution. To us the doctrine which limits the consequences of a sinful life to our present existence, appears equally unphilosophical and unscriptural. It overlooks the constitution of our nature, and tortures the language of the Bible into senses which only the greatest violence could ever make it bear. Its influence we should deplore, as its prevalence we must deprecate. We reason with the sinner of "a judgment to come," and entreat him as he would avoid shame and suffering in the world to which he is going, to turn from his evil ways and cleanse his heart; for the character he shall bear into that world must decide the condition on which he shall there enter. Death will not change the character. If we have chosen to live without God here, we cannot dwell in the joy of his presence hereafter. Fearful beyond all other description is the view which we take of the lot of the impenitent, for we say that material images do but faintly represent spiritual loss and anguish; and as certain as is another state of existence do we make the experience of its retributive scenes, for this experience follows from the laws of our being, and is announced by the warnings and exhortations of Scripture.

But enough of this unpleasant, though necessary description of the differences between us and our fellow Christians. It would be a far more agreeable task, for which I have not time, to portray the features

of common resemblance. They were indicated in the earlier part of this discourse, when speaking of those truths which we embrace, but which so far from desiring to confine to ourselves, we rejoice to believe are held by us in common with multitudes, if not with all those who take the same motto with us, — ‘Christ and his cause.’ And in this reception, by the most divided portions of the Church, of the truths on which we lean, do we find an argument to increase our confidence in them as the only essential truths of Christianity, — so plain that they cannot be mistaken, so important that few, or none have been able to deny them a place in their theology. There is however one example of agreement between us and other Christians, which I am anxious to notice, as presenting yet one other difference which we would press on the consideration of those from whom it distinguishes us. In this instance they from whom we differ are not Christians except in name. Perhaps we are no more. Then God forgive us! for we ought to be immeasurably more. And this is what I wish to say; — that as Unitarian Christians, we differ from the irreligious of every class, whether they be the openly immoral or such as immerse themselves in the cares of the world, the profane or the thoughtless — in our doctrine concerning righteousness. For we hold that this is the one thing needful, and that whatever else a man risks or loses, he must not let go the integrity of his soul; which he can keep only by strenuous obedience to every law of the outward and inward life. A man is not true to himself, nor faithful to Christ, nor thankful to God, who does not purify himself from sin, and



consecrate both body and soul to the execution of the Divine will.

We preach a doctrine of righteousness which covers all human relations and penetrates to the inmost recesses of our being. It is not a superficial propriety, nor a conventional rectitude which we demand, but thorough, genuine goodness. A man must be filled with this goodness, just as the tree is pervaded from its root and its heart to its outmost twig with the vital fluid. The life which is in us, the everlasting life, must penetrate and vivify our whole nature. Till this is our experience, we do but partially *realize ourselves*. We are not whole men in our own consciousness. The only true and complete man is he who bears the closest possible resemblance to Christ. They who live for earthly vanities, or they who pursue their worldly labor as if this were all they need think of, so far from having reached their being's end and aim, have not begun to comprehend it, and the great benefit of Christ's mission is still unknown to them. When we speak of righteousness, we do not mean that which is partial, but that which is comprehensive. How can a man be right who does not place himself in just relations to God, with whom his relations are more important than those he sustains towards all other beings? Righteousness then, as we understand it, includes piety not less than morality, and the character not less than the behavior. So was it understood by our Lord, when he said, "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." They "shall be filled;" but those who do not desire this, their great good, with an

impatience like that of the starving man for food, *they* shall be empty — empty of good — empty of that which alone has permanent value — empty of the real life. This is our doctrine concerning the present ; and with this doctrine upon our hearts we are almost ready to say, let others discourse of the future, for here we have a theme so grand and vast that it exceeds all our powers to treat it worthily. With this doctrine let Unitarian Christianity go into the world and entreat and adjure men to turn from the idols which their own hearts have set up in the secret places of their worship, to Him whom those hearts should confess and adore and love. Let it go into the world with this doctrine, and let the commentary be furnished by us in the growing holiness of our lives, and our faith will leap from crag to crag of society, and dart down into its lowly coverts, and bathe its whole expanse with a divine influence, even as the morning light glances and spreads and rests over the whole landscape.

We have, within such limits as the time permits and prescribes, considered the questions which we proposed to answer, — having endeavored to exhibit the truths of Unitarian Christianity, the grounds of our preference of this over other systems of faith, and the differences which distinguish its disciples from other considerable portions of the community. The result must be, to convince every candid hearer that we have a positive faith—a faith full enough, plain enough, authoritative enough for all the purposes for which a religious faith can be needed. We “believe, and therefore speak.” Our profession of Unitarian

Christianity is the fruit of an intelligent and cordial reception of its truths. We believe that these truths constitute "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God," and therefore we give utterance to the convictions with which our minds are laden. Believing, we ought to speak. Silence under such convictions would be ingratitude towards God and unfaithfulness towards man. It would be a violation of solemn trusts and neglect of sacred interests. It is our duty to diffuse the opinions which we think just to God and beneficial to man. By the speech of the lips and the eloquence of the character should we proclaim them before men. And all the more zealous should we be, if we have embraced unpopular opinions. What are our convictions worth, if they will not breathe into us something at least of the martyr spirit? What is our attachment to them worth, if it will not sustain us in confronting the prejudice of the multitude? He is the true believer, who is not ashamed nor afraid to let it be known that he has espoused the cause which he has in fact taken to his heart. I would not commend a busy proselytism, but frank and manly and Christian adherence to our faith amidst opposition or obloquy is the course which a wise policy unites with self-respect in urging us to adopt. Skepticism we disown, bigotry we abhor, and affectation we despise; but for truth and freedom and holiness we will speak, in word and deed.

The society who have erected this building have then done well, in the work which they have now brought to a completion more successful even than their hopes. It is a day of rejoicing with them, and

with no more acceptable sacrifice can they for the first time approach this altar than the joy and gratitude which they feel. The edifice which they have raised stands, in its chaste beauty, a monument of their exertions to secure for themselves and afford to others the opportunities of a Scriptural worship ; as they have indicated in the reference to the sacred volume which they have placed over its entrance. And now what remains but that we dedicate this house to the purposes contemplated by its builders? To religion and its uses we dedicate it — to the worship and glory of the one living and true God. To Christianity and its influences we dedicate it — to the exposition and enforcement of that Gospel which is the rule of life and the charter of salvation. To the well-being of man we dedicate it — in his preparation for the duties of this life and the enjoyment of the life to come. To truth and love and peace we dedicate it, and invite them to dwell within its walls as the guardians of its sanctity. To holy prayer we dedicate it ; to religious instruction we dedicate it ; to sacred song we dedicate it. Here may devotion breathe its sublimest hopes, and wisdom utter its choicest counsels, and music pour forth its sweetest strains. Here may our friend long be permitted to refresh his spirit in the labors of the sanctuary. Long may this memorial of Christian zeal stand, to gather many into the sympathies of fraternal union. As in tranquil dignity it looks down upon the crowded ways of life at its feet, may it seem to speak of a higher and calmer existence. Here may an influence begin, that shall be extended through the city, the neighborhood, the province, in which, in

respect to the peculiar character which we have seen to belong to this house, it now stands alone ; an influence that shall become deeper as well as wider with every year of its exercise. We enjoy the smile of Heaven upon our work of to-day in the bland sunshine which has softened every unfriendly element of the season. Let us interpret it as the promise, in our spiritual husbandry, of a fruitful summer and an abundant harvest. May souls here grow into a ripeness for a better world. As the Father shall here be worshipped and the Son be honored, may the spirit of grace from the Father and the Son descend in unseen influences, that shall not, like the visible flames on the first Christian Pentecost, cease to rest upon the brethren at their departure from the place of their assembling. And when in the course of time this structure shall give place, as we trust it may, to one of ampler dimensions, may its history be invested with associations that shall cause its remembrance to abide with those who shall have then entered the " temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Father Almighty ! hear thou our desires, and grant them fulfilment. To thee, in the name of thy dear Son, we consecrate these walls, these seats, this altar. Thine be the glory of their fresh beauty, and thine the richer glory of their decay !

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