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THE  
BROTHERS' CONTROVERSY ;

BEING

A GENUINE CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN A

CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

*A. C. C. C.*  
AND A *Longley*

LAYMAN OF UNITARIAN OPINIONS :

*not mine - yet to*  
CHIEFLY ON THE QUESTIONS

HOW FAR BELIEF IS AN ACT OF THE WILL ;  
ON THE USE OF REASON IN THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE ;  
AND HOW FAR IT IS THE DUTY OF UNLEARNED CHRISTIANS TO  
EXAMINE OR IMPLICITLY ABIDE BY THE RELIGION,  
OF THEIR EDUCATION.

“ Let each be regarded by each as a fellow pilgrim to the land of eternity, as much concerned as his brother to understand what God has been pleased to reveal of himself, and of the final destiny of his rational offspring.”—*Madge's Two Di'courses—Prefatory Address.*

LONDON :  
B. FELLOWES, LUDGATE STREET.

1836.

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LONDON:—R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD-STREET-HILL.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

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IT will be apparent to any reader into whose hands the following correspondence may fall, that no one Letter it contains was written with any view to publication; but it does not follow that its publication may not be useful. The Editor is of opinion that it may be highly so, principally from the example it affords of the manner in which controversy may be carried on when the parties are actuated solely by earnest anxiety for truth, not influenced by the pride of triumph. They seem to have left off nearly where they began—each satisfied with his own arguments, and each wondering at, and lamenting the immobility of the other; yet, as the Editor can say, from personal

observation, and from the declaration of the parties themselves, drawn nearer in affection in the later period of their lives.

The Letters have been in the Editor's possession many years, and he had permission to lend them (that is, a copy without names) to a few chosen friends, some of whom have entreated that they might see them in print; a request with which he could not comply, nor could he even permit a copy to be taken, without appearing to give uneasiness to the friends of one of the writers, who had much objection against his being at any time quoted as a theological controversialist.

Under circumstances which have since occurred, (the MSS. being still in his hands,) he finds himself at liberty to use them according to his discretion, without violating the confidence originally implied. He gives the following reasons for the step he now takes:—

One of the friends above alluded to, many years ago, writes,—“Your MSS. are intensely interesting; I have not fully perused them, which is partly accounted for by the limitation of my leisure, and partly by the nature of the subject, which admits not a cursory view. What I have read, however, sufficiently proves that christian theology may be debated with christian



charity; and while it highly confirms my estimation of the parties, it transports me with an earnest desire of enjoying the more intimate acquaintance of the frank and zealous layman, and his highly learned, pious, and eloquent brother."

From the same, shortly afterwards:—

"There is much in the correspondence which I should like to discuss with you when opportunity offers, but, at present, I have not sufficient command of my thoughts to enter on a subject so important; but although the parties intimate a cessation of the correspondence, I trust it will be renewed, for it certainly cannot be called concluded; and if such prove to be the case, I shall esteem a sight of it a particular favour."

This was written nearly ten years ago. The renewal never did take place, and it is now impossible; but it is not too late for others to take it up, and that the Editor would be very desirous to witness.\*

\* If some influential religious periodical would open its pages to discussion on both sides, the example of these correspondents may be followed on the same principle of amicable and affectionate controversy. *Controversy* is all *warfare* now; why should there not be continued treaties for *peace*? Many a scowl and censure passes from one to another merely from misapprehension and want of explanation. Friends would find

Another friend says :—

“ I wish you would print it. The perusal of these letters, when known to be genuine, may be gratifying to any class of serious persons, whether of the Church of England, or Dissenters from it; and may help them in that self-examination which Mr. Erskine, in his Essay on Faith, so justly inculcates; viz. ‘ whether their ideas are not derived almost entirely from creeds and church articles, or human compositions of some kind,’ the evil consequence of the want of which inquiry, he says, ‘ are most grievous.’ ”

Another friend says :—

“ I and my wife are very much interested in the ‘ letters :’ you must permit me to say, that, as an Unitarian, I should advise against the publication; for I think the clergyman will make the converts.” The Editor answers, “ that is nothing to me. I want to make orthodox and sectarians think and discuss.”

Lastly, a friend, an author, whom the Editor has not permission to name, lately consulted, says, “ I should be glad to hear of its publication: not because I am of opinion that it will go far in making converts on either side; but

brethren and fellow-christians amongst those whom they have thought infidels; be freed from painful doubts by *conversing* on’y with those whom they *have* feared.

because it may tend to promote a spirit of inquiry, and certainly presents an admirable specimen of the temper in which such discussions ought to be conducted. . . . I admire the controversy, because both parties appear to be influenced by an earnest and serious desire of maintaining what they think is important truth . . . I might, of course, animadvert on many parts of the correspondence on either side," &c. &c. &c.

These parts the Editor does not give; leaving comments entirely to the reader.

In compliance, then, with the wishes thus expressed, with his own desire and hope of promoting such a spirit of non-polemic, family, friendly controversy, the Editor now sends them to the press; giving the whole of the letters faithfully, without comment, without altering a word or syllable, vouching only for their genuineness; the internal evidence of which he considers will, of itself, suffice to satisfy most readers.

One caution he desires much to enforce, and particularly to his female readers: "Do not throw it down, frightened at a few Greek words." See the mention of that subject in Letter XI. and lay the Greek by.\*

\* There are only five or six Greek phrases brought into view at all, and the difference of construction put on them needs

not interrupt the argumentative expostulation on either side :—  
*ὁ ὢν*, Rom. ix. 5, is by one party construed, “who is,” and by the  
 other, “the being who is:” *ἐπὶ πάντων*, “over all,” or “above  
 all,” or “over all things:” *δι’ οὗ*, Heb. i. 2, is by some con-  
 strued, “*through* whom,” or “*by* whom;” by some, “*for*  
 whom:” *ἀρπαγμὸς*, by some, “robbery,” by others, “a prey,” or  
 “a prize:” *ἴσα*, “like,” or “as,” or “equal with:” *ἐπτωχέυσε*,  
 “became poor,” or “led a life of poverty:” *Αἰῶνες*, by some,  
 “worlds,” by others, “ages or dispensations:” *ἐγένετο*, “was  
 or were *made*, or *done*,” or “happened,” or “came to pass.”

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THIS Work, which was at first printed only to distribute amongst friends, being now published, the Editor deems it not less than justice to one of the Correspondents, (with both of whom, as he has intimated in his Preface, he was upon the footing of the most perfect intimacy,) to observe, that one of them (to wit, he whose letters are subscribed C——) had no opportunity of keeping copies of his own letters, and, therefore, never had the correspondence, as a whole, before his eyes; while D——, unengaged,

in any public or personal duty, certainly did keep copies, and had leisure to study his part. If, then, either unnecessary repetition, or even some apparent inconsistency, should, in any degree, seem chargeable upon C—, the Editor, professing to give genuine Letters, considers it his duty thus to present each on its just and true footing.

## ERRATA.

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- 31, for Estlen, *read* Estlin.  
 32, last line, for his, *read* this.  
 55, for Mozsey, *read* Moysey.  
 81, lines 11 and 12, *insert* parenthesis marks before 'to which,' and after 'punished.'  
 85, line 11, for has, *read* have.  
 98, line 7 from bottom, *dele* quotation marks before 'totidem,' and *insert* before 'hæretici;' also place 'totidem verbis' in parentheses.  
 99, lines 1 and 3, for εἰ μὴ *read* εἰ μή.  
 103, line 17, for ἐποίησεν *read* ἐποίησε.  
 142, lines 18 and 19, for purchased with blood, *read* with his own blood.  
 146, line 5 from bottom, for now-a-days, *read* now-o'-days, which is the original MS. (*nunc dierum*, Lat.)  
 163, line 2, for made wood, *read* made of wood.  
 164, line 9 from bottom, for friend, *read* friends.  
 175, line 12, *place* quotation mark after 'heaven;' line 13, *before* 'a sincere,' and *comma after* 'that.'  
 193, *ref.* to Phil. ii. 6, *add* 2 Cor. viii. 9, 10.  
 195, line 7, for orbs, *read* orbis.  
 219, line 10 from bottom, for observation, *read* observations.



# LETTERS.



## LETTER I.

FROM C—— TO S——.

February 6, 1823.

MY DEAR S——,

THE two little treatises (viz. Erskine on Faith, &c.) which accompany this letter, appear to me to bear the stamp of divine truth most strongly impressed upon them; and as they treat of subjects of the very last importance both to you and to me, I earnestly beseech you to give them a candid and attentive perusal.

The state of your religious belief has long been a subject of the most harassing anxiety to me, because, although I presumed not to fix the cause which at first influenced that belief,

yet I could not blind my eyes to the conclusion that it might have originated in something which involved moral guilt in the sight of God ; and the bare idea of this filled me with apprehension on your behalf. In reviewing the chastisements which it has pleased God from time to time to impose upon me, this I have ever considered as the heaviest sorrow that has visited me ; and whenever I have, in thought, anticipated the bed of death, your image has so been associated with it, that I have felt as if, in the last solemn hour, the last worldly care that should weigh upon me, the last worldly prayer that I should utter, would be for your return to the faith which you had abandoned.

These perpetually recurring thoughts naturally suggested the attempt to lead you back again ; but any invitation to retrace your steps through the endless mazes of critical controversy, I was convinced must be useless ; there must be some simpler method ; and I had myself begun to pursue a train of reasoning which I have lately found so forcibly developed in the works I now offer to your attention, that I resolved no longer to delay intreating your consideration in behalf of these momentous subjects.

When you are assured that the happiness of one of your fellow-creatures is deeply concerned

n the decision you shall make upon them, the common feelings of humanity would prompt you to examine thoroughly the arguments he proposes for your consideration ; but when the appeal is made by an affectionate brother to an affectionate sister, it surely cannot remain unheeded.

One caution, however, you must excuse me for addressing to you ; and most solemnly do I conjure you to attend to it : If you enter upon these subjects in your own strength, I utterly despair of your ever discovering or abiding in that great truth which is the very corner-stone of Christianity. I am too well aware how much it is the custom, among many of your persuasion, to ridicule the idea that human reason alone is incompetent to secure us from error on these points. I must, therefore, bespeak your attention for a few minutes, while I explain to you my sentiments upon this subject.

If I were prepared to admit that the truths revealed in the gospel are abstract and purely intellectual propositions, I should agree that unaided human intellect might comprehend them in their fullest meaning, though I should still hold that man to be presumptuous, to be wanting in humble dependence upon God, and untaught by the system of moral discipline, whose

evidences obtrude themselves on his notice on all sides, who did not, in entering on the investigation of them, implore the Divine assistance to aid him in this, as in all his other undertakings. Widely different, however, is the case with gospel truth. As it is, somehow or other, to be a mighty instrument in our salvation, it must be of such a nature as to exert a moral influence over us ; and our blessed Lord intimated as much when he spoke of the truth as sanctifying us. (John xvii. 19.) This truth, therefore, comes in contact with our moral character, and its acceptance, or rejection, is influenced by moral causes.

Now it is a fundamental maxim, not only in christian, but in heathen ethics also, that the wilfulness of the heart blinds the understanding ; and that, in practical matters, whatever we wish to believe, we soon do believe. In sitting down, therefore, to investigate that object of belief, whatever it may be, which is declared to be essential to salvation, it is plain that not only the head, but the heart also, must be aright ; so that if, when we first set forth upon the inquiry after the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, we have indulged in feelings and reflections calculated to awaken a spirit contrary to the spirit of any doctrine there to be met with, the influence thereby produced upon our deci-

sions will more than counterbalance the effects of the most acute penetration.

If any one has that unhesitating confidence in the singleness and simplicity of his heart, and in the uncompromising strength of his judgment, that he holds it impossible for his practical conclusion in moral truths to be any other than the right one, it must be confessed that that person will feel but little inclination to summon to his aid the counteracting influence of Divine grace upon his heart and understanding; but it must, at the same time, be admitted, that though aided by the light of revelation, he practically denies one of the first principles in morals which natural religion long since taught the philosophers of Greece and Rome; he practically refuses to acknowledge the truth that (Wisdom ix. 15, 17) “the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth on many things;” or, with Solomon, he would have exclaimed, “Thy counsel, O God, who hath known, except thou give him wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?”

Such, surely, my dear S——, must be the feelings of the rational, the humble, the pious Christian. Suppose him conscious of possessing an understanding of unrivalled vigour, yet with

him is intellectual confidence so blended with, and subdued by a sense of moral infirmity, that he acknowledges (Wisdom viii. 21,) he cannot obtain wisdom, except God give it him; he confesses that it is a point of wisdom to know whose gift it is; he prays to the Lord for it with his whole heart, and he knows that he shall receive it, for God is faithful who has promised.

The demonstration I have here attempted really seems so self-evident, that I am almost ashamed of seeming to think you require proof of it; but, unhappily, I perceive that the leading persons of your persuasion openly profess principles opposed to those which I have been endeavouring to enforce; and though I can hardly bring myself to imagine that you go with them such lengths, yet, as I cannot blind myself to the conclusion that you are in an error which may prove fatal, and as I see a moral cause directly tending to produce that effect, operating among many who think with you, I cannot rest satisfied that you are not, in some degree, influenced by it.

Did you then, my dearest S——, when you first entered upon the investigation of these questions, indulge no lurking wish in your heart that the belief you now entertain might be impressed on your mind? If this was the case, if your judgment was unaided by the Divine influence,

it entered the field at unequal odds, and was, of necessity, vanquished; the wish, then, necessarily led to its completion: and if, in perusing the arguments I now offer to your consideration, you shall still wish to continue in the same persuasion, you almost infallibly will do so, however erroneous that persuasion may be. This, you will perhaps say, is a hard doctrine; but it is a doctrine founded upon the first principles of man's moral constitution, and confirmed in every page of God's revealed word.

Is conviction, then, never to be complete? and are we never to feel satisfied that we have apprehended the truth? In answer to this, I must for my own part state, that though the doctrines for which I am so anxious to gain your belief, though these doctrines, I say, are the delight and consolation of my existence; though I feel that were I to surrender the hopes which they suggest I should surrender all that to me makes life most valuable; though I am persuaded that they have the highest influence in cultivating the best and noblest affections of our heart, and in bringing it gradually into conformity with the principles of our heavenly Father;—in short, though I do believe that I apprehend the truth, however faintly and imperfectly; yet if it be God's will, and truth after all be not on my side, I am

content to abandon all ; and therefore do I still pray continually and most cordially, that God will remove all those obstacles which close the avenues of the heart against the entrance of his blessed word, and that he will guide me, through his mercies in Christ Jesus, into all truth. The principles which influence me in this view of the subject, and in these feelings, are the following.

If the truth that produces conviction is to sanctify us, it must come in contact with all that is unsanctified, and subdue it. Our difference, then, in the formation of our moral conviction, will be exactly in proportion to the conviction we have of our own distance from moral perfection ; and self-confidence in the formation of our moral conviction must argue a sense of self-righteousness, which man is no where taught to indulge ; which militates most especially against that humble frame of mind so indispensable to the christian character, and which will never bring down God's blessing upon its labours in discovery of truth. (In aid of these observations, pray read 1 Cor. i. 16, to the end, and Luke x. 21.)

I will now conclude, and commit the issue of this appeal to Him who is the great disposer of all events: if He be with us, who shall be against us? and if He be not with us, vain



indeed is the help of man. We, indeed, may plant and water, but it is God that giveth the increase; the sower may liberally dispense the seed, but if there be noxious weeds that obstruct its growth, it will soon be choked; and even with all due cultivation and preparation of the husbandman, his labour will be fruitless, unless cherished by the genial influence of the sun, and visited by the precious dew of heaven.

O may you and your husband, (for to him also are these observations, in all affection, addressed,) may you both meditate upon these things to your soul's health; and may the Divine blessing be with you! Think not still to say within yourselves, like Naaman, that the rivers of Damascus are better than all the waters of Israel, or the leprosy of sin will still cleave to you; but having once, like him, rejected the proffered remedy, may you like him, too, repent of your hasty refusal; and, purified by the blood of the Lamb, which cleanseth from all sin, may you be enabled by God's grace to meet Him without confusion as your judge, whom you shall then have acknowledged as your Redeemer also.

Believe me ever,

My dearest S——,

Your unalterably attached Brother,

C.

## LETTER II.

FROM D—— TO C——.

February, 1823.

MY DEAR C——,

YOUR sister is about to thank you for the book you have sent, and for your affectionate letter which accompanies it. I desire to add my thanks for both; but I have bid her consider, read, and write, from her own feelings, uninfluenced by me: and though we generally read together, and write all our letters in concert, yet I shall not make any observations to her upon this subject till she has read the book, and given you her own unbiassed sentiments of it.

The affectionate expression of your feelings, and the motives that prompt your letter, excite a correspondent feeling in us; yet it could not be that such expostulation could be read without also exciting many a painful feeling. There is, however, one paragraph which I so cordially

subscribe to, and which finds its echo in my breast, that I shall subjoin a copy of it, in order that we may each of us be in possession of an explicit expression of sentiment, to which, if we shall differ in subsequent reasoning, we may recur ; and, to use a seaman's expression, "take our reckoning afresh from that point," viz.—

"Is conviction, then, never to be complete? and are we never to feel satisfied that we have apprehended the truth? In answer to this, I must for my own part state, that though the doctrines for which I am so anxious to gain your belief, though these doctrines, I say, are the delight and consolation of my existence; though I feel that were I to surrender the hopes which they suggest I should surrender all that to me makes life most valuable; though I am persuaded that they have the highest influence in cultivating the best and noblest affections of our heart, and in bringing it gradually into conformity with the principles of our heavenly Father;—in short, though I do believe that I apprehend the truth, however faintly and imperfectly; yet if it be God's will, and truth after all be not on my side, I am content to abandon all; and therefore do I still pray continually and most cordially, that God will remove all those obstacles which close the avenues of the heart against the entrance of

his blessed word, and that he will guide me, through his mercies in Christ Jesus, into all truth."

To this I subscribe with all my heart; it is very much the expression of sentiment I am accustomed to find in Unitarian writings, and of which I often lament to perceive so little in the writings of the professed Orthodox, whose language generally is, "Never listen to any thing but that which you are sure does not militate against your first faith, imbibed in baptism," &c. &c.

You must now let me quote another sentence from your letter. "Did you, when you first entered upon the investigation of these questions, indulge the lurking wish in your heart, that the belief you now entertain might be impressed on your mind?"

Now not only am I able to assure you that no such wish was prevalent, but I must also request you to consider, and to explain to me, what kind of motive you can imagine to have raised that wish in the mind of one, all whose prejudices of education and early affection lay on the other side. I am at a loss to conceive what motive (other than a love of truth) can induce any one to embrace the rigid doctrines of Unitarianism, and to profess so unpopular a

belief, or to join such a calumniated sect: all worldly motives are against it. But still more in the present case, how can such an one as you are now addressing have wished that a belief might be impressed on her mind, not accordant with the creed and catechism of infancy, cherished till womanhood, in concert and communion with those she held most dear?

Perhaps you will say, that she must now wish to think with the one to whom she had united herself for life in the bonds of affection; and that this union would be paramount, and the former continued in subservience to it. But put it to yourself. Suppose yourself to be united by conjugal ties to one whose creed differed from yours. What should you most wish? to bring over that one to your belief, or to be convinced of its error? In point of fact, I can say, —and my much-loved partner will always bear witness to the truth of my words,—that I never used influence, nor even persuasion. Asked my own opinion, I explained it: but we should have agreed to differ without an interruption of affection, if serious reflection on the grounds of our several tenets had not brought us to think exactly alike. I think I scarcely ever (if ever) went further with her than to recommend to her to consider what ideas she did really annex to

the words she used; and what was the foundation on which her opinions rested; and she found (to use the words of the book you recommend) that they were “derived entirely from creeds and Church articles, or human compositions of some kind.” Arguments I never did use; but only referred to the plain language of Scripture, and recommended to her to reflect on, and analyse, and explain to herself the meaning of the terms used by herself; and try whether that was taken from the words of Christ and his apostles, or from human authority; and whether it was consonant even with itself; and whether she was not, by long-continued habit, using (even in devotion) phrases to which she had never annexed any meaning at all.

But I am writing more than I intended. I set out with asking you whence you could suppose that such a wish as that you allude to could arise? I will add one more question, viz.—From what Unitarian writings you take your estimate of them as to those sentiments which you “think you have observed amongst the leaders of the sect?” And do not be offended at my surmise, that you may have formed your opinion of them not from their writings, but from those of their opponents, which is exactly the same thing as if one should read in Roman Catholic books their

account of the damnable heresies of Protestants, and from those writings judge of the Christianity of Protestants.

S—— knows nothing of this letter, further than that I write to assure you that yours is taken in good part, and that I add some questions and remarks, so that what you hear from her will be from the feelings of her own heart; and in this way will she read the book, not led in any degree by comments of mine.

I shall always be happy to hear from you. Freedom of expression I use and court: “*Hanc veniam petimus, dabimusque vicissim.*” Be assured that your letters will always be received by me and your sister in that spirit of affection in which we doubt not they are written.

D.

## LETTER III.

FROM C—— TO D——.

Friday, February 20, 1823.

DEAR D——,

THIS is literally the first moment I have been able to put pen to paper in answer to your letter received on Sunday morning; a circumstance I regret, because I have felt most anxious to answer the questions you therein put to me. The term "*motive*" I remember particularly avoiding, and substituted the word "*cause*" for it, as it never could for a moment enter into my head that *interested*, or, as they are commonly called, *worldly* motives, could have influenced S—— in the change of her belief; besides, I have a peculiar dislike to imputing motives, thinking it a very unchristian practice: but when I saw an effect, of which I believed there might be a criminal cause, I could not rest satisfied without explaining my views, and requesting your opinion upon the soundness of those views.



The cause or causes which might have led to the effect of her present belief I shall hereafter advert to; in the mean time I will answer your second question, as to the source from which I have derived my estimate of the sentiments which I think I have observed among the leading persons of your persuasion. I answer solely from Mr. Belsham's Reply to the Bishop of London's Charge; in which charge you are no doubt aware the following expressions occurred: "Prostration of the understanding and will are indispensably necessary in the Christian religion;" and Mr. B.'s remark upon it is, "Prostration of the understanding!" God forbid: if the Christian religion itself were to require this debasement of the intellect, this prostration of the understanding in those who approach it, I for one would reject it with disdain.\* Of course the only way I have of arriving at Mr. B.'s meaning (unless indeed I hunt through his works for some more explicit declaration, which I really have not time to do) is by making up my mind as to what he professes to reject. Now, to me, the obvious interpretation of the Bishop's word is, that all *à priori* argument, all preconception, all human pride, prejudice, and passion, must be made to submit to the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. Con-

\* Belsham's Letter, p. 75.

scientifically I believe that to be the Bishop's meaning; and therefore I had no alternative left but to imagine that Mr. B. meant to deny that part which relates to the understanding, and to maintain that *à priori* argument and preconception were not to give way to Scripture; and certainly I have been somewhat confirmed in my supposition, by having had occasion to remark (quite incidentally, and while in search of the passage I have above quoted,) the mode Mr. B. takes of interpreting and translating scripture by new rules of grammar, and criticism applied to passages which made against his hypothesis. This subject I will hereafter draw your attention to; at present merely stating the impression they left upon my mind in confirmation of the opinion I had before formed. If, said I, a critic, who had never heard of the controversy in question, were to consider the merits of the text which Mr. B. adopts, the principles of criticism which he follows, as well as the canons of grammar and criticism, by which he supports his interpretation, would he not reasonably distrust the text as well as the critic who had compiled it; would he not directly suspect that there was some object at variance with the plain meaning of the text, which the editor wished to support; and could he be considered uncharitable in concluding

that from this prepossession he was resolved to make Scripture bow to his reason, instead of his reason to Scripture?

Before I proceed further, let me assure you that, as far as I know my own heart, truth and your good are the sole objects I have in view in thus addressing you. In my opinion, there is no event in the life of man, however trifling, which does not form a part of that great scheme of moral discipline to which we are all subject. The correspondence which I have entered into with you and S——, the very letter which I now write, I consider as instrumental to my own probation. God is on my heart while I write; and any sentiment or expression dictated by passion or wilful prejudice; any thing, in short, which shall not be the result of pure conviction, that may escape me, will, I hold, make me criminal in his sight. I entreat you, therefore, to believe that such are my present feelings, and so to interpret my words as if dictated by this spirit.

As to the criminal cause which I conceived *might* have influenced S——'s belief, I will now proceed to explain myself. You yourself must, of course, acknowledge, from Mark xvi. 16, that he who believes not the gospel is condemned. The main argument, then, between us resolves itself into this simple question, *What is the*

*gospel?* Upon that subject I shall say nothing at present, because the immediate question is, not what is truth—but what is the frame of mind which will enable us to arrive at truth, and why God should have pronounced the belief in truth to be essential to salvation? Now it is acknowledged that the quality of an action depends solely upon the principle which influenced it; selfishness and vanity may prompt nominal Christians to perform acts of the greatest munificence, which may benefit society largely; but the love of God is the only motive proposed to the Christian, which can make his works in any way acceptable to God. We will then, with your leave, put belief upon the footing of actions; as far, at least, as each derives its quality solely from the principle of which it is, as it were, the effect and representative. Under this view we shall both agree that this condemnation can have no reference to those persons who have had no opportunity of believing, but merely to those who, having had the gospel (whatever that name may comprise) presented to them, shall, through any principle of the heart which is in opposition to the Divine will, reject it. This is the doctrine of the Church of which I am a minister; and that is what is meant by the damnatory clause in the Athanasian Creed; for the Commissioners appointed to

review our Liturgy, in 1689, express themselves thus:—"The articles of which (the Athanasian Creed) ought to be received, and believed as agreeing with the Holy Scriptures; and the condemning clauses are to be understood as relating only to those who obstinately deny the substance of the christian faith."

My interpretation of the term "obstinacy" is as above;—the holding any principle of the heart in opposition to the will of God, and suffering it to obstruct the entrance of faith; and, by the articles of the Athanasian Creed, are meant merely two propositions: 1. The Trinity in Unity; 2. The Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the explanatory part, the damnable clauses have nothing to say. If, therefore, I am satisfied that these two doctrines are essential to the Gospel, of course I have no alternative left but to pronounce that the "obstinate denial" of these doctrines must be condemned by God; and then you must allow that there is nothing more bigoted and uncharitable in this view of the subject, than in your own assertions, which, of course, you must be prepared to make, that he who disbelieves that Gospel, in your sense of the word, cannot be saved.

To come to the point—it is the frame of mind with which we sit down to weigh the evidence,

as to what is or is not the Gospel, which will influence our decision as to what it is, and will make our belief, if, after all, it should be the wrong one, criminal in the sight of God. If we allow *à priori* argument and preconception to have too much weight when balanced against the authority of Scripture; if we permit our heart, which is naturally proud and deceitful, to rise in insurrection against the humiliating doctrine of the atonement; if we rely too much on the strength of our own understanding in the search of gospel truth, when we are clearly told in Scripture that we are to look for Divine illumination as our guide in that search, (an influence not superseding, but assisting, the full exertion of every intellectual faculty we have;) the combination of these causes, which are, in my opinion, enmity to God, would be sufficient obstacles to the discovery of Divine truth.

These are the three points in which, in my opinion, we are all likely to offend; and it is upon these that I will dwell in another letter, if you are not already tired of this correspondence. I will then substantiate what I said upon Mr. Belsham's method of translation and criticism.

Believe me,

Your very affectionate Friend and Brother,  
C.

## LETTER IV.

FROM S—— TO C——.

April 14, 1823.

I HAVE read Mr. Erskine's book with the utmost seriousness and attention; but I must honestly confess, (though I shrink from the idea of the pain my avowal may give you,) that so far from its having produced any change in my views respecting the doctrines of the Gospel, it has only tended to confirm those I had been led to form by previous inquiry; and you must believe me, my dear C——, when I declare that these have not been taken up lightly and precipitately, but that, from the time I entered upon this most important pursuit, it has been my earnest prayer to God that I might be led to discern the truth; and that, having made up my own mind, I might have courage to avow the opinions I had adopted, in spite of the unsparing abuse so universally

heaped upon Unitarians. Such being the case, (or, if you doubt the truth of my assertion, I could give you proof of it in numerous extracts from the works of orthodox opponents of Unitarianism,) I would put it seriously to you, my dear C——, to say what motive, other than the firmest conviction of the truth of those opinions, could have induced me to become one of a “sect every where spoken against.” You will probably reply, that my husband’s influence had weight. But I do most solemnly assure you that he never, either by word or deed, attempted to influence me one way or the other; it was my own desire to make myself acquainted with the arguments on both sides. I read all the books I could procure, and the result was a most decided conviction that the opinions of Unitarians are sanctioned by the preaching of our Saviour himself and his Apostles, but that the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement are not taught by them.

I now come to that part of your letter in which you speak of the state of mind necessary for entering upon the inquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus; and here I must freely acknowledge I do not understand what it is you mean to express. Of what nature you conceived the truths revealed in the Gospel to be, I cannot



at all comprehend; since, though you believe they are intended to exert a moral influence over us, you still think that unaided human intellect cannot comprehend them. Now, holding as I do, that the main design of the gospel revelation was to proclaim the hitherto unrevealed doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, to be awarded strictly according to the use or abuse of the talents committed to us in this life, I can see that such a doctrine, attested by the miraculous powers of our Saviour and his Apostles, and still further, by that greatest of all miracles, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which his disciples always appeal to as a pledge and pattern of the future resurrection of all mankind; I can see that such a doctrine as this would address itself most forcibly to the minds of men, would infallibly exert a most powerful moral influence over them; and we do accordingly see, in reading the account of the preaching of the Apostles, as given in the Acts, that these plain truths were the means of converting thousands at once to the belief and reception of the Gospel, in spite of the blindness and prejudice so notorious among the Jews.

I am also at a loss to understand how it is that you suppose a person has it in his power “to summon to his aid the influence of Divine

grace upon his heart and understanding." It appears to me that the miraculous influence of the Holy Spirit ceased with the miraculous powers that were bestowed by the Apostles on the first converts to Christianity, and that we have no warrant from Scripture for expecting that they would be continued beyond that time. But though I should be sorry to see any enter upon so serious and important an investigation as that we are speaking of, without first preparing his mind for it by earnest prayer to the Supreme Disposer of all human events, that he might be enabled to discern the truth, and to divest himself of prejudice in the pursuit of it; I cannot but think that if you once admit that a man may be sensible of special Divine influence upon his mind, you sanction at once all the wild and enthusiastic pretences of the fanatics of all ages.

In conclusion, I must add, that I am not conscious of having indulged in any feeling of self-confidence, or self-righteousness, in forming my conviction of what I believed to be the truth. I certainly entered upon the investigation with no predisposition in favour of Unitarian opinions, but the contrary; and God only knows what I have suffered in the profession of them, from the consciousness that they were so misapprehended by very many of those I most love

and esteem upon earth ; but I humbly submit to this, as to every other painful dispensation, earnestly praying that I may make the best use of it in weaning my affections from earthly things, and fixing them on that state of blessedness which is promised to those who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

I cannot close this long letter without assuring you once more, my dearest C——, that I am deeply sensible of the affectionate feeling which dictated your letter to me, and shall ever consider it as a most convincing proof of strong attachment on your part ; I am grieved at the thought of the pain I fear my reply may give you, but I could not disguise the truth. It will always give me pleasure to hear from you, if you feel disposed to continue the subject by letter ; but as I have never shrunk from considering the arguments of the opponents of Unitarianism, I feel that there is less probability of my being induced to alter my opinions, than there might be with one who had looked at only one side of the question ; still, if you should write, I will promise to weigh and consider all you say, and most seriously and honestly to avow the result.

Your affectionate Sister,

S.

## LETTER V.

FROM D—— TO C——.

May 18, 1823.

DEAR C——,

YOUR letter has lain a long time unreplied to, unless a short conversation we had when we accidentally met has stood as an answer to some parts of it. S——, however, to whom your first was addressed, has written to you in the interim; and the expectation of this, rather delayed my taking up the subject, as you know my wish was, that her answer should be entirely unbiassed by conversation with me; and it has been so. Necessary avocations and occasional society, and the reading of some new books, has since put by, for a time, my attention to the immediate subject of our correspondence: and in fact it requires some preparation and winding up on my part, knowing how much a good cause may suffer in being advocated by one

who, though not unused to listen to and judge of the arguments of others, is quite unused to collect and arrange his own for the purpose of disputation or defence. An unbiassed and diligently attentive juror may be well satisfied with the verdict he has given, and yet be very unequal to the task of vindicating it by re-arguing the cause with those who object to his verdict. However, if our correspondence continues, I will not in my future letters fill my sheet with apologies. We are disputants mutually and equally disposed to enter into each other's meaning, and not to take advantage of inaccuracies of expression. I now take up your letter.

Of two questions I had put to you, you notice first that relating to the source from which you had derived your estimate of the sentiments of the leading Unitarians. You answer, "Solely from Mr. Belsham's Reply to the Bishop of London's Charge." I am very glad you have read that book; both because I think it excellent in itself, and also because I think you could not fail to observe in reading it, how very unfairly and unjustly the Bishop had calumniated the Unitarians, in likening them to Deists: and as to the Quarterly Review, I think no one can read Belsham's book, and the review of it, and not see that truth was not the object of the writer of

the article. I know not, nor even surmise who the writer was ; but I should be very much hurt if any one so wrote on our side. I am not pleased at the phraseology of the individual sentence you quote from Mr. Belsham's answer, nor do I ever approve of asseverations of that kind ; and I acknowledge that I sometimes find phrases in Mr. Belsham's controversial writings, for which the best apology I can make is, that they are less objectionable and less frequent than in the writings of his opponents. How sad is it to read from the pen of such a man as Mr. Venn, "If such be the meaning, I would burn my Bible!" &c. But (to drop criticism as to mere expression) the objection of Mr. Belsham to the Bishop's doctrine, that "prostration of the understanding is indispensably necessary for proficiency in the christian religion," I perfectly concur in ; and the inference I should draw from it is very different indeed from yours, in the estimate you thence form of Mr. Belsham's general sentiments. You interpret the Bishop's words to mean that "all *à priori* argument, all human pride, prejudice, and passion, must be made to submit to the truth as revealed in Scripture." Now these sentiments are ever most strongly maintained by Mr. Belsham, in his writings, preaching, and conversation, as well as

in those of Lindsey, Priestley, Carpenter, Yates, Southwood Smith, Estlen, Simpson, &c. Indeed, I not only never met with, but scarcely ever knew how to conceive of one who would set up his reason and understanding against Revelation. Not only would it be presumption, but absolute incapability of exercising the power of reasoning.

The Deist may deny that there has been any revelation from the Supreme Being, or the Atheist may deny that there is any intelligent First Cause; but he who believes in an omnipotent and omniscient Creator, knows, that what he has revealed is truth itself. Now if the Bishop means by "prostration of the understanding," the submission of human fallible *à priori* conception, to a revelation from Omniscience, he must suppose himself writing to persons insane; but if he means that we are to reject the use of our reason in our construction of the words in which revelation is given to us, it is absurd; for to what power can language be addressed, but to the understanding? This may do very well in the Church of Rome—there it is perfectly consistent; "prostrate your understanding to that construction which the infallible Church puts upon Scripture." With them private judgment is even criminal: but the Protestant

Church says the Gospel is addressed to every individual; and I say that he who does not use his most serious and powerful understanding in endeavouring rightly to comprehend it, hides his best talent, instead of improving it. If the Bishop meant that which you attribute to him, we can only lament that he has said something very different. But surely your interpretation is not at any rate what you call it, ‘obvious;’ still less can you have been without any alternative but to imagine that Mr. Belsham meant to maintain that “preconception is not to give way to Scripture;” for such is very different indeed from refusal to assent to the proposition that “prostration of the understanding is necessary for proficiency in the christian religion, (a sentiment which I think derogatory and degrading to the christian religion;) and still further may I be surprised at such construction of yours, when in the very book which you so censure on that supposition, you read, “It is the first principle of Unitarians, that all which God reveals is to be believed;—that all which God requires is to be done. Their second axiom is, that too much attention cannot be applied, too much pains cannot be taken, to distinguish the doctrines of heaven from the traditions of men.” Is his “being resolved to make Scripture bow to



his reason, instead of his reason to Scripture?"

What are the "principles of criticism" you suppose Mr. Belsham to follow, or the "canons of grammar and criticism by which he supports his interpretations," and which you think would "lead the reader to distrust the text as well as the critic," I do not know; when they are specified, I shall very readily attend to your objections; at present I can only say, take your opinion of Unitarians from their own writings, not from the representations of others concerning them, in which they are expressly accused of "believing what they choose to believe, and rejecting all they do not choose to believe;" they are so accused because they reject the words substituted for the words of Scripture. We are not afraid of the inquiry, who are they that "add to, or take from this book?" We demand to be so tried, and our trial is refused us: our judges require our peers to shut their ears to our defence, and so to condemn us. By whom are these accusations made? Who requires other Christians to shut their ears against our defence? (I wrote the word other Christians quite un-awares,—they refuse us the appellation; they will not allow that the sincerest and most ardent desire to understand and embrace all that Jesus

Christ taught, is to be a disciple of Christ.) But by whom are these accusations made against us? Rather ask, by whom are they not made? I can scarcely open a book in which the subject is directly, or even remotely introduced, written by prelate, priest, or layman, male or female, in which they are not dragged in. To speak only of contemporaries—take Archbishop Magee, Dr. Nares, Bishop Burgess, Bishop Horsley, Dr. Chalmers, Mr. Cunningham, Hannah More, Mrs. Trimmer, Mrs. Cornwallis, Miss Hawkins, and her brother, not to mention the anonymous writers in the *British Critic*, *Quarterly Review*, and a swarm of editors and correspondents in the orthodox, as well as evangelical periodical publications. Not so Archbishop Tillotson. He in christian candour said of the Unitarians (even while he said their cause was bad, and truth not on their side) that they were “a pattern of the fair way of disputing, and of debating matters of religion; arguing matters with that temper and gravity, and with that freedom from passion and transport, which becomes a serious and weighty argument.” Bishop Burnet said “they were men of probity, justice, and charity, and seemed much in earnest in pressing the obligation to very high degrees of virtue.” Dr. Nares expressly says, they are not Christians; and Mr. Hawkins says, they follow

“ a very convenient fashion of belief, as it annihilates much of the culpability of sin ;” and very similar to this are the innuendoes of those who write or preach concerning them : but in fact, I do not know one instance in which those who (from accident, or curiosity, or the true spirit of the search after truth) have been induced really to inquire what Unitarianism is, and what are the views of Unitarians, have not been astonished to find them so different from what they are represented to be, and so utterly undeserving of the calumnies heaped upon them. Indeed we owe the increase of our numbers to the virulent attacks upon us, and the cautions against listening to us, which are brought so forward in the charges of the Bishops, and the visitation sermons, &c. of modern times.

You introduce the subject of the Athanasian Creed, otherwise I should not have mentioned it ; but being called on, I cannot but say that I regard it with horror. When I saw Nares’s Sermons on the three creeds advertised, knowing how many pious clergymen had wished with Tillotson, that the Church was well rid of it (the Athanasian Creed,) I thought “ if a clergyman vindicates the continuance of the use of it, upon the principle that it is difficult to make reforms ;-- that the Liturgy has excellencies which atone for

its defects, and the one is endangered by an attempt to remove the other ;—that the power to make alterations is a dangerous one to raise, and so forth ;—let such an one console himself as he can, under the obligation to comply with forms ; but to set forward to vindicate the form itself in the abstract, and the use of it at times of devotion, does raise my astonishment. I bought and read his book, and found the thing defended to come out worse for the defence ; and so it ever will from every attempt at its vindication. Your father was with me, and I prevailed on him to read Nares's Sermon. He perfectly agreed with me. " Why will they meddle with it ? " he said ; " he *has* made it worse." And what can be said to excuse the presumption of declaring that he shall not be saved who does not hold the faith and doctrine of fallible men, at best inferred, not copied, from Revelation ? The learned and the unlearned, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, from the mitred prelate to the meanest peasant, meet together for the purpose of instruction and devotion ; and the mixed congregation, old women and charity children, look towards a consecrated altar, and hear a priest solemnly read,—“ Whosoever will be saved, above all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith ; and the Catholic faith is

this ;” then follow clauses (which we say are as thoroughly contradictory as language can make them, not mystical, but specifically detailed, and of which not one word is to be found in any part of Scripture ; but waiving this, then follow clauses, I say,) to which is annexed the declaration — “this is the Catholic faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly,” and all the people shall say Amen ; and when they have so said for ten, twenty, or fifty years, one in a thousand learns that it may be explained ; and though all is read in one breath, and Amen follows, yet the latter part of that which is included in the Amen, is not connected with the former part ; or the clauses are not damnatory, but defensory ; or the damnatory clauses have nothing to do with the explanatory clauses ; or that the words, “This is the Catholic faith, which, except a man believe,” &c., means only that “those who obstinately deny the substance of the Christian faith cannot be saved,” — and this from those who are perpetually accusing others of “explaining away :” and though not one of the points is capable of being expressed in Scripture language, the understanding is to be prostrated to their inferences ! (By the bye, some of the Orthodox deny that the clauses are explanatory ;

and, indeed, it does seem absurd to insist upon explaining in detail, that which the same clauses declare to be incomprehensible.) But is this christian instruction, and christian worship? I often adduce Nares as an instance of the mischief of the practice of scholastic disputation. I am fully satisfied that it brings the practiser into a habit of sacrificing reason to eloquence, sense to sound; till the orator really deceives himself, and is satisfied with his rounded periods, without ever knowing, or asking himself, what meaning he himself annexes to his own phraseology. Very frequently might a complete refutation be produced of Nares's triumphant arguments, (and he is very apt to be triumphant when he has nothing else for it,) by simply saying to the reader, "think—think—read the sentence again—does it prove what he maintains? or does it prove the contrary? or does it prove any thing? Is it not an effusion of habitual and practised eloquence, containing no meaning at all?"

But I am getting farther than I intended. I could have wished to postpone entirely the consideration of the points in which the Church and the Dissenters differ, till we had more fully canvassed our original subject, "the question of the duty of inquiry and openness to conviction,"

had it not been that in your discussion you make a kind of appeal to me, taking for granted (as necessarily to be admitted by me) that, against which I must protest *totis viribus*. You say, "there is nothing more uncharitable in this view of the subject than in your own assertion, which, of course, you must be prepared to make, that he who disbelieves the Gospel in your sense of the word cannot be saved." God forbid that I should make such an assertion, or entertain such a sentiment! I must then condemn many of those whom not only I love as friends and near connexions, but to whom I look up as my superiors in all christian attainments, save only that, from the prejudices of their education, they have always neglected to examine themselves, to find whether their belief or doctrine was not "derived entirely from Creeds and Church Articles, or human compositions of some kind." I must look back to the hours when I was parting with my dear mother, in her submissive expectation of the immediate approach of death; and because her explanation of the doctrine of atonement differed from mine, and, in my opinion, was not consonant to the Gospel, shall the dreadful thought come over my mind, that "she shall not be saved?" No! Without any doubt in my mind,

I say that her opinions were founded on the erring construction of men, instilled into her early mind from the nursery, and not on the doctrine of Jesus Christ or his Apostles; yet, with all full confidence, I believe, and trust without doubt, or fear, that she is gone to receive the reward of those who patiently persevere in well doing. My father was one of the most upright men that ever lived, and uniformly devout and pious. I am not at all anxious to know whether his creed and mine would exactly agree, if he had left documents by which I could ascertain it; but most heartily do I wish that I had through life imitated his serious and earnest obedience to the will of his God. I remember old Gilpin in intimacy with my father, and frequent amicable discussion between them, of the questions of dissent from the Church, and the doctrine of the Trinity;—the one *ex animo* assenting to it, the other freely treating it as a strangely contradictory, unscriptural, and unmeaning hypothesis;—did they condemn each other? No! they often talked of the happiness of meeting where clouds and doubts will be removed. I look to the biography of two men whom I barely remember, Price and Priestley; intimate friends through life, writing, preaching, praying together; one an Arian, the other an



Unitarian, in the strictest sense, arguing continually with each other on that very point; did they condemn each other? or shall I, judging between them, say of either, "he shall not be saved?" No; I trace the progress of each in obedience and ardent desire to spread the benefits of the Gospel amongst their fellow men, and locking to the temper which each manifested at the close of life, and the submissive confidence in the faithful mercies of their Creator, with regard to each can I say, "May my last end be like his!"

I have made my letter sadly long, but if I had not noticed what you take for granted, I must have appeared to admit it; and the supposition awakened me so, that I could not but dilate in answering it. I regret that we should have been so led away from our first point. I shall pay a thorough attention to any remark upon what I have written, and shall enter just as far as you please on the consideration of any point that you propose: but I very much wish either to stick entirely to our preliminary point, "the propriety and duty of every individual to examine the doctrines he has imbibed," until we are either agreed, or have determined wherein our difference consists, or else to divide our subject into two series as it were, so as not

to mix our questions in the desultory manner we have done.

But I now find I must conclude, and postpone what was intended for the principal subject of this letter. Perhaps I may write again without waiting for your reply to this; if I do, I promise you a short letter confined to that subject merely.

I shall always be happy to hear from you, but do not mean to bind you to enter into discussion to the interruption of the pleasure I hope you will meet with in your intended tour.

Your affectionate Brother,

D.

## LETTER VI.

FROM C—— TO D——.

Cheltenham, Jan. 19, 1824.

DEAR D——,

As S——'s unseasonable illness has most unfortunately prevented our meeting this Christmas, I cannot return to ——, where my incessant round of occupation would prevent me from devoting any time to our correspondence, without replying to some points in your letter, received just before I went abroad.

As to my view of the Bishop of London's meaning, when he asserted that "prostration of the understanding is necessary for proficiency in the christian religion," it still remains unaltered, in spite of the passage you quote from Mr. Belsham's Answer to the Bishop, in which he declares that "it is the first principle with Unitarians, that all which God reveals is to be believed."

It is impossible that any passage of Scripture can have greater credit for genuineness, than such an one as all manuscripts and versions agree in inserting, without the slightest alteration or difference one from the other. The fifth verse of the ninth chapter of Romans, therefore, is the revealed word of God; or we have no security for any passage of Scripture, and the whole volume must be given up upon the same principle that I abandon the passage in question. Now Mr. Belsham, in his late translation of St. Paul's Epistles, acknowledging that no manuscript version, or ecclesiastical authority whatever, warrants him in so doing, arbitrarily alters the Greek text, (which, as it stands, is a familiar Greek idiom, and makes perfectly good sense,) merely because it happens to be entirely subversive of his hypothesis. Now, therefore, Mr. Belsham cannot complain that his adversaries should charge him, at least, with refusing to believe what God reveals; for if we can be sure that God revealed a single sentence in the Bible, we can be sure that he revealed the verse in question. It matters little, whether or no it be granted that the four concluding words in the sentence are elliptical, that the word *ἐν* is to be understood, and the clause to be translated, "God be blessed for evermore;" for still *ὁ ὧν*

*ἐπὶ πάντων* is predicated of Christ; and what he is “who is over all,” if he be not God, it remains for the Unitarian to satisfy himself. That he cannot satisfy himself without altering it, is clear, by Mr. Belsham’s bold and unwarrantable dealing with the text of Scripture. Such a frame of mind as that which prompted Mr. Belsham to this step, is the temper which the Bishop of London, in my opinion, is writing against, when he makes use of the expression which has been so much objected to, never dreaming, I should think, that any body would suppose he meant to interfere with the right of private judgment, or lay down the maxim that the construction which the Church put upon Scripture was infallible, when the very Articles of that Church lay down the contrary doctrine.

Thus I have given you one of the instances of Mr. B.’s false criticism, as it appears to me, which at once shews me the temper of mind with which he comes to the study of Scripture, as well as the unsoundness of the principles upon which he proceeds in his translation. Had I met with such a specimen of criticism in the edition of any Greek classic, I should, of course, reject it; and, upon the same grounds, I reject it here, and must call upon you to do the same.

Another instance to the same point, (and I

assure you I met with them both in turning over the leaves of Mr. Belsham's version in a very cursory manner); another instance of Mr. B.'s unsound criticism is to be found in the second verse of the first chapter of the Hebrews, where I was very much surprised to find "δι' οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας ἐποίησεν," rendered, "with a view to whom also he made the dispensations;" an interpretation which Mr. B. supports from a passage of Thucydides, book vi. § 7; from the authority of Grotius and Beza, in their remarks on Rom. vi. 4; and from the use of διὰ at 1 Cor. xiv. 19. This translation of διὰ at once struck me as contrary to the doctrine I had been accustomed to believe, with respect to its force where governing a genitive case—having always myself held, and taught my pupils in like manner, that διὰ with the genitive signified *the instrumental cause*, and διὰ with the accusative *the first cause*. The latter, in Attic Greek, sometimes signifies the instrumental cause, as well as the final cause, I am aware; but I had held, that the preposition with the genitive could never signify the final cause. I lost no time in investigating the question; prepared, by God's help, to give up all those important passages from *our* translation of which the instrumentality of Christ in creating the

world derives considerable support. I first examined the authorities quoted in Mr. Belsham's note. That from Thucydides was not to be found according to the reference; and the few words of the text which are quoted, wherever they are to be found, may, as far as I can see without the context, just as well be translated as signifying the instrumental as the final cause. The authority of Grotius and Beza upon Rom. vi. 4, Mr. Belsham neutralizes, as far as he himself is concerned; because he translates Rom. vi. 4 in a different way from them, giving its instrumental force. Now if he himself translates  $\delta\iota\alpha$  there as the instrumental cause, he has no right to appeal to it as a passage in which it may be translated as signifying the final cause. The passage from the Corinthians I was convinced, from reading carefully the thirty-three first verses of the chapter, could not bear the interpretation of Mr. Belsham.  $\Delta\iota\alpha\ \nu\acute{o}\sigma\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\nu$  cannot signify "with a view to my being understood." I have not been able to discover that  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\nu}\varsigma$  ever signifies "*meaning*;" and our translation, "with my understanding," harmonizes very well with the context. I next applied to Lexicons and critical works. All that I referred to confirmed me in my former opinion; in Budæus alone

a passage was quoted from the writings of Gregory Nazianzene, which appeared to countenance M. B., but no reference was given; and *one passage* of *such a writer* against the word, is, after all, no authority to justify such a deviation from established rule. An author, too, is the best interpreter of himself; and when, at Col. i. 16, I find the expressions  $\delta\iota' \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$  and  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$  standing together, I conclude  $\delta\iota' \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$  cannot mean "with a view to whom," or  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ , which signifies precisely the same, would never have been placed immediately after it.

Still the most satisfactory confirmation of all remained. I was in company with Mr. Elmsley, (who is, I believe, without much doubt, the greatest living Grecian,) at the Bodleian Library at the time I was examining the passage. Without hinting to him my object in asking the question, I begged him to give me his opinion as to the force of  $\delta\iota\alpha$  with the genitive—"Can it, or can it not, signify the object, or final cause?" His answer was remarkable. "I am afraid it cannot; *I wish it could*; for there is a passage in Aristophanes which I should alter directly upon that principle, *if I dared do so*." My conviction, then, upon the subject was complete; and I was also forced to admit the conclusion, "that Mr. Belsham



dare take that license with the word of God, which Mr. Elmsley would not venture upon a line of Aristophanes."

Now if you will point out to me any mistranslation in King James's Version, I will most diligently examine it; and if I shall find that authority is really against our interpretation, you may rely upon my immediately adopting the right rendering; and, with this profession, I think I have a right to demand that, unless you can shew cause to the contrary, you should adopt the translation of *διὰ* as the instrumental cause in John i. 3; Heb. i. 2; and Col. i. 16; and if so, confess that Christ was instrumental in the creation of the world, and, therefore, that he pre-existed at least.

These are instances of Mr. Belsham's notions of grammar and criticism, discovered quite incidentally, which are sufficient to make me distrust both the critic and the text of the translation which he has put forth. Surely the way in which he has dealt with the Scriptures is not giving them fair play; give them the same chance you would to an uninspired work, and the conclusions we draw seem inevitable; take the two perverted passages I have happened to hit upon, and Christ's pre-existence must result from the one, and his divinity from the other.

There is a misunderstanding which I perceive has arisen from these passages in my last letter to you, which I am anxious to clear up. You seem to imagine that I had therein stated, that your conviction must be, that none who differed from you on religious subjects could be saved. What I meant to assert was this—If you believe what Christ declares (Mark xvi. 16), that “he who believeth not shall be damned,” you must, I suppose, have made up your mind what that object of belief is, which, if not believed in, will entail condemnation on the unbeliever. Whoever, therefore, is in such a case as to disbelieve that which you conceive to be referred to by Christ in this expression, you must surely conclude to be under the condemnation therein pronounced, or it seems to me that the words are left entirely without meaning. I cannot imagine how any body, who allows that passage to be genuine, can fail to agree that there is some object or other of belief which is essential to salvation, and that he who disbelieves that essential is under condemnation. As to the instances you quote of persons who differed from each other on religious subjects, and yet lived in harmony and charity, they are perfectly consistent with my notions. Even if each considered the other to be an unbeliever in the essential point, what-

ever it may be, there is no reason why there should be a breach of charity between them: but, very probably, neither of the parties you mention conceived the other to be erring in the essential. All I mean to contend for is, that if Christ's words have any meaning at all, unbelief is a sin which will be condemned and punished; and every body who attaches any meaning to these words, must have made up his mind as to what that essential object of belief is. If you choose to shut belief entirely out of the condition of salvation, that alters the case; but as long as Scripture has authority, I see not how we are to evade the conclusion, that belief, according to opportunity, is one of the essentials to salvation.

As to the duty of free inquiry, it is impossible for any one to advocate it more entirely than I do, only let Scripture authority be paramount. But if any one tampers with Scripture, as I think Mr. Belsham has done, then, be he friend or foe, I will join in reprobating such conduct. Let all who can carry the investigation through, enter upon it; but how are those who have not made the Greek language their study to decide upon these questions of criticism? Yet, since it has pleased God to reveal his will to us in that language, all who are not well versed in it must depend upon the interpretation of others.

The last resort in the argument with an Unitarian must be made to the proper mode of interpreting particular passages; and if you are not prepared to depend upon your own interpretation, you must lean upon human authority. I will now request you attentively to compare John iii. 16 with Rom. v. 7, 8. Is there not represented in both passages a great personal sacrifice on the part of the Deity? Was there any such sacrifice in allowing Christ, if merely the son of Joseph and Mary, to die upon the cross? Was there any such sacrifice, if God forgives the sin of man, merely in compliance with his attribute of mercy? Under your hypothesis, as Erskine truly observes, are not the expressions of God's love towards man quite hyperbolic? In Rom. v. 7, 8, God and Christ together stand in the relation to sinful man, that He who sacrificed his life to ensure the life of the good man does to him. But where is the resemblance between God and the self-devoting individual under your hypothesis? If you will show me any contradiction between the interpretation put upon the passage, and any other passage in Scripture, or the general tenour of Scripture, then I will hesitate to admit my own conclusion. But if it is on *à priori* argument that your objection is grounded, that I cannot

admit against the plain declaration of Scripture,—and it is, as you must have seen from my last letter, in the allowing preconception to outweigh the authority of Scripture, that the sinfulness of unbelief, in my opinion, really consists. There is no act of our lives which is so important in respect of our moral probation as the formation of our religious belief; and certainly while thus engaged, we have the constant temptation before us of being wise above what is written. The heart is very deceitful, and it is only by a deep sense of that deceitfulness that we are led to examine with anxiety the process by which we arrive at conviction; endeavouring with the most watchful jealousy to detect any undue bias which may prevent the inspired word from having its due influence.

Much, indeed, was I grieved to find, in turning over some volumes to find the passage I quoted to you from Mr. Belsham's Letter in my last, that Mr. B. has so different a notion of the value which a minister of the Church of England sets on truth, when he represents that we all must, of necessity, be its enemies. Is this, I thought, the spirit that thinketh no evil? If it be not, then I should not expect that the mind which harbours that spirit could arrive at gospel truth; because our blessed Lord says, "He

who will do the will of my Father which is in heaven, shall know of my doctrine, whether it be from heaven." Does Mr. B. really think that there is no minister of our Church who practically believes that he shall be a loser if he "gains the whole world, but loses his own soul;" who knows and feels that this world passeth away with the lusts thereof; but that he who doth the will of God abideth for ever? If he does, I am prepared to expect his opinions to be erroneous upon matters connected with divine truth. But where I meet with such a work as that I have recommended to you, breathing, as it does in every page of it, a spirit the most truly christian, I conceive such a mind as the writer's to be well adapted for the reception of truth; and in full reliance on Christ's promise, I am prepared to expect that he has arrived at truth. Finding then that such a mind admits the doctrines which I believe, is to me an internal evidence of their truth.

Well, too, does Erskine observe that we are not required to understand or believe how the Trinity in Unity exists. Nor would that mysterious doctrine, probably, ever have been revealed to us, had not a belief in it been calculated to produce a most beneficial influence upon our practice. It would be unreasonable to expect that

this doctrine should have been fully revealed till the day of Pentecost. It certainly was not till then that the Apostles thoroughly understood the nature of the christian dispensation; then the hidden meaning of those difficult discourses contained in St. John's Gospel was explained to them through the medium of the promised Comforter, who was "to teach them all things." At the same moment, therefore, that they were taught the meaning of those discourses which had before been so unintelligible to them; when they understood the true interpretation of John Baptist's opening declaration, that Christ was "the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world," and that he should "baptize with the Holy Ghost;" then was it that a belief in the accompanying doctrine of the Trinity became necessary; then they comprehended the full meaning of our Saviour's last charge to them, that they should baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In the histories, therefore, written by those Evangelists who confine themselves exclusively to a recital of some leading discourses of our Lord, and to an account of some of his principal miracles, I should expect to find fewer traces of these higher doctrines. In Mr. Belsham's own words, (p. 57 of his Reply to Dr. Mozsey) I would ask,

“when our Lord was so very cautious in discovering himself to be the Messiah, would he, at the same time, make no hesitation in declaring himself to be ‘the very eternal God?’ What would have been the effect upon the Apostles (says he again, p. 13,) the instant the amazing truth was communicated to them? their faculties would be absorbed in terror and astonishment; no more free conversation, no more asking of questions, no more attempts to impose upon him, or to rebuke him; the greatest awe and distance would instantaneously take place, and all the endearing and familiar relations of master, instructor, companion, and friend, would at once have been broken off.”

The little impression which our Saviour’s miracles made upon the Apostles, and the wavering and unsettled conviction of their minds as to his being the Messiah after all, (Luke xxiv. 11, 25,) is evident from many passages. Such a frame of mind as this would be incapable of receiving and comprehending doctrines more abstruse, when even the testimony of their senses produced so little effect upon them. I should therefore be prepared to expect that the grand disclosure of Christ’s divine nature would not be formally made to them till that period should arrive when they should be “able to bear all



things ;" which period, from John xvi. 12, 13, we learn to be the epoch of the descent of the Holy Ghost. I need not, I am sure, when addressing you, multiply quotations to prove that the truth, whatever it was, was not communicated completely at once ; the conversation with Nicodemus, (John iii. 12,) as well as that with the disciples, (John vi. 61, 62,) when coupled with John xvi. 12, all tend to prove this. It is, therefore, no argument to me against the truth of the doctrine of Christ's divine nature, that he does not teach it to the Apostles, before his crucifixion, so openly as might be expected. Nor should I expect to find in the histories of the three Evangelists who merely give an historical narrative of our Saviour's ministry, without any comment of their own, such direct statements of the doctrine as I do in the Gospel of that Apostle who prefaces his account with remarks of his own. These remarks teem with observations on the leading doctrines of the Gospel, which the Spirit of God had taught him since the resurrection, partly by explaining the full bearing of those discourses and allusions, many of which had been a dead letter to the disciples before ; partly by hearing those things revealed to them which were not said unto them before, because they could not bear them ; but

which the Spirit of Truth, when he came, should speak unto them. (John xxi. 12, 13.)

January 28.

Going up to London gives me an opportunity of sending this. I am extremely glad to hear S—— has suffered so little from her journey. Give her my kindest love, and accept the same from your very

Affectionate friend and brother,

C.

## LETTER VII.

D—— TO C——.

February, 1824.

MY DEAR C——,

I THANK you for your long letter brought me by ——, but cannot say that I find in it any defence of your censure of dissenters in general, of Unitarians in particular, nor of the individual you have singled out as their representative. We acknowledge no man, or set of men, as our representatives, or head, or leader. We have among us preachers and writers whom we highly value, and with whom, generally, we agree in opinion and doctrine; and amongst these Mr. Belsham is eminent: but while I do not feel myself bound to defend every point of criticism or translation put forth by him, or any writer, I yet entirely differ from you in your censure of his translation and

criticism, in the two passages you refer to, and still more in your reproof of the temper of mind with which he comes to the study of the Scripture, and your charge that he “refuses to believe what God reveals.” I do not feel any force in your reasoning from Mark xvi. In the inference you draw from Rom. v. 8, 9, I differ very strongly indeed; and most of all in your sentiments on the duty of inquiry, and the necessity or allowableness of “leaning upon human authority;” and as this last leads us back to the most important point, that from which we set out, I shall desire to abide there till we quite understand each other as to the right and duty of examining the foundations of our belief. However, that I may not appear to shrink from the discussion of the other points of your letter, I will take them in order for the present, and conclude with that important point upon which the whole of your affectionate exhortation with S—— must be grounded.

You say your view of the Bishop of London’s meaning in the passage that has been quoted between us remains unaltered, in spite of the passage I produce from Mr. Belsham. Be it so: I think differently; but I did not commence an attack upon the Bishop; I defend Mr. Belsham against your censure of his answer,

according to the meaning he put upon the Bishop's proposition.

You say, (Letter III. Feb. 1823,) that you "derive your estimate of the sentiments of the leading persons amongst the Unitarians solely from Mr. Belsham's Reply to the Bishop's Charge;" and add, that from that reply you had no alternative but to imagine that he meant to maintain, that *à priori* argument and preconception were not to give way to revelation. I think I answered that fully in shewing that the supposition, instead of being your only alternative, was in itself impossible, and, in point of fact, quite opposite to the whole drift and principle of the very book from which the sentence is quoted; and I point out a distinction (in itself surely obvious enough) between, on the one side, opposing our reason to revelation, and, on the other side, using our reason in discovering what are the words of revelation, and the construction of those words. Now, supposing that you had discovered an instance of an error in his construction or translation, (which you profess to have done in Rom. ix. 5,) that would not be opposing his reason to what he believes to be the word of God, but only erring in that judgment; and even if he erred in consequence of preconception and bias, that would be, not an

abandonment of his professed principle, but an unperceived instance of departure from it—an instance of inconsistency with himself, to which all men (writers of voluminous works particularly) must sometimes be subject. What writer amongst the Church-of-England divines could stand such a test? But you have not hit upon such a blot as you suppose; nor is it even just to charge him with “refusing to believe what God reveals,” nor with altering the text, because it happens to be subversive of his hypothesis. You do not quote his words, and I am absent from my books; I therefore will not venture to say from memory whether I agree with him in the reasons he gives for his proposed emendation. But you acknowledge that he gives it hypothetically, not hiding from view the text as found in the MSS. that exist; a charge which may be brought against the text and version called orthodox. In the publication called the “Improved Version,” it stands—“God, who is over all, be blessed for evermore,” a doxology that has been, (and I believe, to this day is,) habitual with the Jews; and of frequent introduction as a parenthesis in their solemn writings and exhortations; and therefore, in my mind, a very probable reading, and one which the construction of the Greek text, as it stands, will fully bear; and if it is the

right reading, “ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων” is not “pre-dicated of Christ.” I believe, too, you will find that the primitive Christians, writing on that very passage, denied that it was. But suppose the reading a mistaken one, the Unitarian does not shrink under your phrase—“Let the Unitarian satisfy himself what He is who is ‘over all.’” Πάντων is a plural adjective, and no substantive is expressed; so that a substantive must be supplied by implication. Must we necessarily supply the blank with such a substantive as will ascribe to him omnipotence, which he was so far from claiming himself, that many of his solemn assertions were in direct contradiction to it? *e. g.* Matt. xxviii. 18, “ALL POWER is given unto me in HEAVEN AND IN EARTH!” At any rate, it must be our reason and understanding, on which only we can rely for filling up the blank at all. A great leader, founder of a new and holy system—the christian dispensation, may surely be styled the head over all that dispensation. Have you not a canon declaring the king of England the head of the Church, and therefore “over all things” in that Church?

Suppose, again, that this construction is wrong. Suppose I cannot mend it. Well! then you have produced a passage from an Epistle written by Paul to a church, or society, of converts of his,

which sentence I cannot understand. Is that to be wondered at? Must I adopt that mode of supplying the ellipsis which appears to contradict numberless passages of Scripture, and even the whole tenour of that revelation which teaches me that God alone is over all his works; that there is none other; that Jesus Christ was sent by him? And then of Him who prayed to his Father, and said, "I can do nothing of myself," shall I be compelled to find a word to supply the blank, which word shall imply that he is the One that is "over all" the works of his creation? and shall I be compelled to receive this implication as revelation from God himself? No. If I find two passages in the book that appear to contradict each other, I know that in one of them either the text has been corrupted, or is mistranslated, or at least is misunderstood. Some misapprehension must be the cause of apparent contradiction, for revelation cannot contradict itself. I will therefore endeavour so to construe the passage as to reconcile it with that of which the meaning is indisputable; and if I cannot do that, I will be content to say I do not understand it. I will listen to any interpretation that seems reasonable and probable; but I will not adopt, upon any authority, that which appears to me inconsistent with the indisputable



doctrines of revelation. This principle no Protestant can condemn, without abandoning the principles on which he protests against the infallibility of the Church of Rome. Your expressions, that because a certain sentence in a letter written by an Apostle to a society of his converts has universal credit for “its genuineness,” “therefore it is the revealed word of God, or we have no security for any passage of Scripture;” and afterwards, “if we can be sure that God revealed a single sentence in the Bible, we can be sure that he revealed the verse in question;” would put dangerous weapons in the hands of Deists, of which they are ready enough to avail themselves. But you must have written the page without much reflection on the danger of that style of argument, and therefore I will say no more upon it at present.

You next take hold of Mr. Belsham’s translation of Heb. i. 2. (By-the-bye, there is no proof that Paul was,—and there are many reasons for thinking that he could not be,—the author of that epistle. You know that in the primitive ages of Christianity it was not admitted as the undisputed writing of an Apostle: and that Eusebius and Origen have both declared that the writer was unknown. But I shall not debate your point upon that ground.) In

the first place, then, the rendering you object to of “δι’ οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας,” &c. does not originate with Mr. Belsham, but was debated long before his time. In the second place, whether the preposition will, or will not, bear the rendering he adopts, he has yielded to no inducement from an idea that the other construing favours the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. How came you to pass over the next word? Will you or Elmsley say that αἰῶνας signifies “the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all things that are therein?” Ask him. I think he will say that it is a license he would not dare to take with Aristophanes.

You cannot make out any thing from this text that favours the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. But suppose you could. Do you not know that many Unitarians hold that doctrine; and what is there in it inconsistent with the belief that he was the creature of God, and not God himself? I form no limit to the power of God, nor judge of the means or instruments whereby his great will is executed. Pre-existence in another state is no step towards eternal existence. You say, “acknowledge that he pre-existed, at least;” but this *least* is nothing. Is there any gradation between a created being and a self-existent being? Were I to grant

that Christ was literally the Creator of the earth, and all things thereon, that would be no step towards the stupendous doctrine that he is God himself. If Moses stretched forth his hand and the rivers became blood, as this was an exercise of a power delegated by the Almighty, might not the power to form the globe and the creatures be delegated by the same Almighty, in like manner, to a created being? I do not believe that it was, because I do not read that it was: I read, "I alone made," &c. "God the Lord, he that created the heavens and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, he that giveth breath unto the people," (Is. xlii. 5:) will ἐποίησε τοὺς αἰῶνας answer to these words?

You say, that during Christ's abode on earth he did not declare himself to be the eternal God, and that this doctrine was not revealed till the day of Pentecost. Read, then, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and all the preaching of the Apostles from the time when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and sure I am you cannot shew me where they preach this doctrine. When under the immediate influence of inspiration, the whole of their divine commission now fully opened to them, filled with the Holy Spirit, and working miracles in proof of it, they say, "A man from God manifested

among you by works," &c. " which God did by him,"—" whom God hath raised up"—" exalted to the right hand of God,"—" having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,"—" God made that Jesus both Lord and Christ." " The God of Abraham hath glorified his servant Jesus."—" Moses said, The Lord your God will raise up unto you from your brethren a prophet like unto me."—" The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye killed"—" him God exalted"—" and we are his witnesses." And Stephen, full of God's grace and power, and probably with even the vision of Jesus Christ in his exalted state before his eyes, refers to the prophecy of Moses as now fulfilled: " A prophet the Lord God will raise up," &c. " like unto me, to him shall ye hearken," (not to him shall ye pray.) And afterwards, Paul: " God hath fulfilled the promise," to us, their children, " in that he hath raised up Jesus;" " This Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Christ." And in Athens: " The God who made the world, and all things therein, hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world, by that Man whom he hath appointed; of which (appointment) he hath given proofs in that he hath raised him from the dead." So in Corinth: " Paul was employed with them, testifying to

the Jews that Jesus was the Christ;" and they opposed themselves to what?—to the assertion, not that he was God, but that he was the Messiah. So in Ephesus, "proving by the Scripture that Jesus was the Christ:" this continued for years. Afterwards to the Elders, (chap xx. ver. 18, *et seq.*) "I have not kept back any thing that was profitable to you;" announcing to Jews and Gentiles "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ:" "I have kept nothing back, but have shewn you all the counsel of God." And afterwards, at his trial,— "So worship I the God of our fathers;" and he declares, "Concerning (not the God-head of Christ, but concerning) the resurrection of the dead I am judged by you;" and before Agrippa, "That Christ should suffer, and that he being the first who rose from the dead should announce light," &c.

Here I have not "altered the text"—not commented—not inferred—but have given the plain words of the preaching of the Apostles, from the time they were fully instructed and commissioned, inspired, and professing their inspiration, as well as repeating the living instruction of their Master, uninterruptedly to the end of the history, and in language that he who runs may read; and after all this, can I believe that concerning

this Jesus,—whom the Apostles so preached year after year, to Jews and Gentiles, professing their inspiration, and express commission to teach, saying that they had taught all the Gospel,—it was afterwards for the first time revealed, in a letter written by one of them to a church he had established in a heathen country, (and in this letter, not by direct declaration of the writer, but incidentally, by way of allusion in a parenthesis,) that he was the very and eternal God? That the Almighty, who had promised he would send the Messiah, had come himself? That the ineffable *I Am* was born, nursed, educated, was taught; that it was God that hungered, was tempted! wept, died? and the church to whom it was so for the first time revealed, were they not in consternation at that doctrine, (at which one of your divines says, “reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded?”) It is utterly inconsistent with the principles or feelings of human nature, from the creation to the present time, that it should be so received by them. Such a construction of the epistle of their apostolic teacher never once entered into their minds. The doctrine never came from the mouth of Christ, nor from the lips or pen of an Apostle.

But I am going farther than I intended—I do not wish to persuade you to be a Unitarian. I

act on the defensive, and only vindicate the right and duty of distinguishing the doctrines of heaven from those of men, (according to Mr. Belsham's expression,) or of trying ourselves, "whether our ideas are not derived from creeds and articles, or human compositions of some kind," (according to Mr. Erskine's expression,) and applying all the reason and understanding "that God has given us with that aim."

Now let me say a word on the "frame of mind which prompted Mr. Belsham to this step," and the "temper of mind with which he comes to the study of the Scriptures." You have hit upon an instance which, together with that of Lindsey, (almost a martyr,) and of several others of our leading men, must stand as a thorough refutation of your "fundamental maxim, that in practical matters, whatever we wish to believe we do believe."

Mr. Belsham was in a situation very congenial to his feelings, and very consonant with his view of the comforts of life, that of divinity tutor in a dissenting college, educating young men for the ministry. You will not deny that pious, learned, and eminent men, have proceeded from that foundation; (Doddridge and Watts, I believe, *inter al.* :) Mr. B. was deeply concerned to find that some of his pupils were falling off in orthodoxy,

(as it was called there, as in the several churches in the world,) and that they were led from the truth, deceived by the writings of Priestley, &c.

With the hope of bringing them back to the doctrines they had first learnt, he sat down to select from the Bible the passages he thought most convincing. Could a more proper "temper of mind" have prompted him to the search? At length, the love of truth alone compelled him to confess to himself that he had before believed that to be judgment which was prejudice, or founded on a biassed reading of Scripture; and his conscience obliged him to desist from teaching that which, on a patient and painful investigation, he found to be opposed to the doctrine of the Gospel; and therefore to resign an honourable post, and submit to the pain of parting from friends and friendships.

Conviction is irresistible; and nothing less than irresistible conviction is deserving of the name of belief. We cannot believe because we wish to believe. Your friend Erskine both denies it and declares it. I never met with a more confused argumentation than that which runs through the whole of his book. But the knowledge of facts as exemplified in all the converts from orthodoxy (as it is termed) to Unitarianism, (and of such a large proportion of Unitarians



consists,) would be sufficient, if argument could fail, to disprove it undeniably. What temper of mind, what wishes, prompted Lindsey to resign a valuable living, and high prospects in the Church, and to part from and offend expostulating and beloved friends, scarcely knowing where to lay his head? It is said of him, that his friend Mason, (author of *Self-Knowledge*,) finding him immovable by any consideration respecting himself, asked him whether he had a right to subject Mrs. Lindsey to such hardships—that this consideration, though pouring into his cup a tenfold portion of bitterness, could not shake him. He was observed afterwards, with an altered look, and depressed countenance; but reasoning with himself, he said, “How is this? can one indispensable duty be really incompatible with another?” and he recovered his serenity. Believe me, C——, the change from “Orthodoxy,” or conformity to the doctrines held by those with whom we have associated in life, is painful to professors or private individuals. It is consonant to no wishes but that of finding the truth, and is to be produced only by irresistible conviction, to which I maintain it is our duty at all times, and during the whole course of our lives, to expose ourselves; and it is the best, (I may say the

only, confirmation of our belief, to find that it will bear this constant exposure.

I must give you one more instance of the "principles of the leading persons of our persuasion." I copy a paragraph from Estlin's preface to his Book of Prayers. In his apology, he says of himself, (the writer,) "In connecting himself with Dissenters, he was influenced by no sectarian spirit; for the first wish of his heart, till he was nearly twenty years of age, was to officiate in the Established Church, and to procure for himself that share of its emoluments and honours which was to be obtained by a fair competition, by professional industry, and by consistency of character. It has often been a painful consideration with him, and it has led to a most unpleasant general inference, that his close attention to the subject, and his fixed determination never to sacrifice principle to inclination, should have operated as the cause of his exclusion." Such are the principles you condemn in our writers. Look at Priestley! He was educated a Calvinist. What advantage did he expect from promulgating his change of opinion?—persecution? He did not expect that, to be sure. But the fearless love of truth, for its own sake, and the irresistible conviction that followed a

patient investigation of the evidence, which a diligent and unbiassed searching of the Scriptures brought before him, exposed him to it; and his sufferings have stood as a warning to others not to wish, at least, to think as he thought. Lardner! What temper of mind influenced his writings? What temper of mind influenced the pious and amiable Watts, or the universally esteemed Whitby, when, towards the close of life, soon to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, they both embraced Unitarianism? I am very far from denying that your sect abounds with examples, living and dead, of piety, and of every thing amiable in their religious temper of mind: but I am as far from shrinking from the comparison of them with ours. We are speaking of leading men. I should think you would not in this comparison select Archbishop Magee, Bishops Horsley, Burgess, or Howley; nor Dr. Nares, nor Moysey; I mean as to “temper of mind,”—for I do not suspect any of them, (with the exception perhaps of Horsley,) of insincerity, nor with a want of religious feeling. And as to argument, look at Serle’s “*Horæ Solitariæ*”—what a determination to support a system through thick and thin is apparent in that work; what an uninterrupted string of palpable *non sequiturs* does he triumph in! What a wonderful prejudice in

favour of hypothesis carries him on in a torrent as it were of sophisms! (I use the word in its least obnoxious sense, for I fully believe him sincere.) On the other side, take Carpenter, in his Reply to Magee; the calm and gentle, yet forcible rebuke of the unfeeling heedlessness of his accusations and misrepresentations. See his close and unanswerable arguments and evidences. Take Turner's Letter in answer to the same, on the sacrifices and Mosaic ritual. Compare Yates with Wardlaw. See the temper of mind in Southwood Smith's Essay on the Divine Government: the ardent but moderated zeal and affection with which he discusses the important subject, the logical minuteness of his arguments, the fairness and candour with which he weighs those of his opponents, the closeness with which he adduces his proofs from Scripture, and the fine strain of benevolence with which he concludes. I know of no book more animating, more stimulating in the duties of life, more justly terrifying to the conscience of evil doers, more consoling to those who suffer under the dispensations of a wise and kind Providence;—as superior to Erskine's, as sound logic is to the effusions of imagination. Neither am I afraid to mention the appeal of Rammohun Roy, a learned Brahmin, a convert to Christianity—a

book which it will be almost a shame to any member of any Christian Church not to read; and which for learning and sound sense I should not hesitate to compare with the work of almost any member of any European university.

As I have before said, I do not wish to make you a Unitarian: on the contrary, I should be much concerned at it, (I think I can vindicate the sentiment, though it has an appearance of inconsistency,) but I do wish to convince you that they do not deserve the calumnies heaped upon them;—that they are unfeignedly anxious to preserve (that which they are accused of perverting) the integrity of the records of revelation, and of making every thing bow to that.

If I have not the happiness to find you, upon calm reflection, disposed to join Tillotson and other eminent men of your Church, ashamed of the Athanasian Creed, and wishing to keep it as much as possible out of sight, at least do ours the justice to understand, that while we shudder at it, we do not inconsistently “assert that he who does not believe the Gospel, in our sense of the word, cannot be saved.”

I must refer you to my former letter on that point: I assure you, I read all yours more than once or twice. Can you really think you have at all answered that protest of mine, by the remark,

that the persons there alluded to might “live in harmony and charity, consistently with the notions you had expressed?” The question is not concerning harmony and charity, but the believing each other to be condemned to eternal perdition. You put me now to express our sentiments strongly. The Unitarians not only do not think that any humble and sincere inquirers after gospel truths and gospel evidences shall be so condemned, but they think that for any uninspired men to assert it, and to make themselves judges of what is truth, and condemn others for differing in that judgment, is a wicked and impious presumption : and charging this presumption on the inventor of that creed, they entertain no spirit at all analogous with it.

You still say that we must surely conclude that they are under the condemnation who disbelieve what we conceive to be referred to by Christ in the expression alluded to, Mark xvi. 16. I thank God, I never joined a sect that arrogates to itself such a tremendous reliance upon its conceptions of the meaning of a record. Sincere doubt is no crime ; blind assent, a very great one.

A few pages back, I barely noticed a style of asseveration against which, (now that I find it a third time in your letter,) I must take the liberty to caution you. Such phrases as, “if Christ’s

words have any meaning at all"—“as long as Scripture has authority,” &c.

In order to shew you the danger of them, I will now personate a caviller against your belief, and reading just the remainder of the very sentence you quote, in such character (of caviller.) I will say, “You, and all your fraternity are yourselves destitute of saving faith, or any belief at all. Can you swallow poison unhurt? can you lay hands on the sick and heal them? No! Then either you do not believe, and shall be condemned, or the words of Christ your God have no meaning at all. Do you all, smitten on the right cheek, turn your left? No. Then you ‘refuse to believe what God reveals,’ or to obey what God commands. Either you eat the very body of Christ, or his words have no meaning at all.” Thus you see, that by the use of such expressions you deprive yourself of all rational answer to the objections of unbelievers. Let me, in the purest good-will, and for your own sake, whatever cause you espouse, recommend to you to observe and check that style of arguing. The habit of using it has a certain, though imperceptible tendency to increase. When your argument is sound, its force is not augmented by asseveration; and if you are in error, its force recoils upon you.

I consider you to be exceedingly mistaken in the sentiment you found upon the verse in question, (Mark xvi. 16,) as to both the word "believe," and the word "saved," and the opposite. To "believe" evidently means to "receive the Gospel." Amongst the Jews, to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Amongst the Gentiles, to believe that he was a man sent from God, to teach the doctrine of eternal life; and that he had given proof of his divine mission, by the miracles which he did, and of his doctrine, in that he himself rose from the dead.

Could Jesus Christ, by the word "believe," mean, "form a correct hypothesis." This is what you require. "Consubstantial"—"Very God of very God"—"begotten, not made," "proceeding from" two other persons, with whom he was "co-existent and co-eternal." Jesus Christ says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom he hath sent." What did the believers believe of him (John vii.)? "This is that Prophet"—"this is the Christ." Philip said to the eunuch, "If thou believest, thou mayest be baptized;" and he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And what was the belief taught by the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts? Of this I have said enough before. Then as to the word "saved;" may it not justly be



said of the nations, who are rescued from the worship of dumb idols to the worship of the true God, or from ignorance and barbarism, from sin and voluptuousness, to the knowledge of eternal life, and the conditions of it; they are saved from ignorance and all its evils? Your friend Erskine thus construes it in one place, (see page 30 of his Second Book.) "Salvation," he says, "here signifies healing or deliverance, not from the condemnation, but from the influence of sin;" and the opposite word, "condemned," to which, by-the-by, you *add* the words "and punished," appear to signify, "shall remain under the condemnation of darkness, ignorance, and its evils." "Shall" (it is scarcely necessary to observe to you) is a word peculiarly English; and though the peculiarity gives us generally an advantage over other languages, in the expressiveness of the two modes of forming our future tense, yet in translation it is disadvantageous; because it determines the intention of the sentence, which, in the original, is left so far doubtful. "Shall be condemned," then, is not necessarily the denouncing of a sentence of condemnation, but the whole seems to signify—"if they receive you, receive them; if they reject you, (not otherwise,) reject them. Cast not your pearls before swine,

but leave them as you find them, condemned to ignorance and idolatry."

Now that I have written this, shewing you that I have no need to shelter myself against the application of the passage you quote, and concerning which you say, "If the words of Christ have any meaning at all," I request you to look at Griesbach's note upon the last twelve verses of that chapter; and to remember that Griesbach was an orthodox divine.

There are several dubious indications of more modern writing in those verses; but it is not necessary to my argument to cast a doubt upon them.

I am frightened at the sight of this twentieth page, and the more so, because I find I have not got half through your letter. Yet I have constantly checked myself, and endeavoured to compress what I have to say. But it would have the appearance of inattention to the feelings which have prompted you to enter on the subject, if I were to leave unnoticed any material part of your arguments; and to withhold my own, would be to abandon the principles of that conviction which binds me. At present, I can only send this off as a fragment.

## LETTER VIII.

FROM D—— TO C——.

April, 1824.

MY DEAR C——,

I SENT you a terribly long half letter from ——, broken off abruptly, because I found it necessary to postpone the continuation of the detail of answer to your last, in order to settle first the principles on which we proceed, and to understand each other as to what we mutually acknowledge to mean by free inquiry.

The question between us is, whether Christians, of any or every sect (that of the Church of Rome, the Church of England—of Scotland—Lutheran, Calvinist, Dissenters of any denomination, Quakers, Arian, Unitarian, &c.), or, I may add, Jews, Mahommedans, or Hindoos, pursue or transgress the sacred line of duty, in undertaking, for the first time, at any period of life, a free examination of the doctrine they were taught to profess, at an age when it was confessedly

impossible they could be competent either to believe or disbelieve any system offered to them by the authority of parents and teachers—a belief which they have ever since professed in union and concert with beloved instructors, as well as with fellow-disciples, and which, under their influence and example, they have learnt to hold sacred.

The Jew speaks with reverence of the religion of his ancestors, of the God of his fathers, of the law of Moses, of the promise of the Messiah; the Christian tells him he reverences, in like manner, the same God, the same law, the same prophets, and the same promises: but he tells him the promise is fulfilled, the law of Moses is superseded by that of the Messiah that was to come; that the Messiah is come, and that Jesus Christ was the Messiah; and he offers him proof of it, which proof cannot be addressed but to his reason. Ought the Jew to listen to him? or would a willing listening to the proofs of the Christian “involve moral guilt in the sight of God?”

The Mahomedan believes also in the one God, the God of the Jews—in Jesus Christ, as his prophet; but the revelation of Jesus Christ is superseded by his greater successor, Mahomet. What is the foundation of his belief? Why, that he was born a Mussulman; he has been taught

from his infancy to hold the doctrine sacred, and he would as soon listen to Satan himself as to a Christian who would offer proofs that Jesus Christ was the last that should come, and that his kingdom shall endure for ever. The bolder amongst them will abhor the christian dog: the more timid one will shrink from him with fear and trembling. We pity their ignorance, but we justify their aversion to listen to what we call divine truths, only by referring it to the darkness in which the prejudices of their education has involved them.

Now we will look to the christian world. An infant is born in a Roman Catholic country, of Catholic parents. He is baptized with holy water—he is made, in extreme youth, to repeat certain sounds, and to perform certain acts, of the meaning of which he knows nothing; but they are all necessary for the safety of his soul. He grows up; he is never to question even the reason of these acts, or the real meaning of the words. Holy Church determines them. The true faith is in its mysteries. The mysteries are sacred. He may read the Bible in such parts of it, and in such words as Holy Church prescribes, but must not *question* whether they are the words of revelation, nor examine, or pry into their doctrine in any other sense than as construed by his

priest. If he doubts, he is damned. If he listens to one who would show him that he is under any error, (though he who would show it him may be ready to seal his own conviction with death and torture,) he becomes an heretic, and shall suffer the punishments of heretics. He hears with horror the Protestant, who tells him that the Virgin Mary, and the Saint under whose special protection he is, and who has heard and answered his prayers in all times of his distress, are not to be worshipped.

Do you not say, that these are the means whereby the errors of Popery are continued amongst multitudes (a large majority) of Christians, from generation to generation, now down to the nineteenth century, after the promulgation of gospel truth? Are these errors perpetuated in any other way than by forbidding the disciples of Popery to listen to reason? Would not reasoning from Scripture, and expounding Scripture, by comparing it with itself instead of the dogmas of men, by degrees bring out the truth of the Gospel, and dispel those errors from the face of the earth, if priestcraft and prejudice did not forbid that their dogmas should be so examined? Do you not, as a Protestant, condemn that principle of exclusive doctrine? Do you not call the infallibility pretended to, gross

presumption in the sight of God? Do you not excuse the wilfulness wherewith the Catholic so educated shuts his eyes to what you offer him as gospel truth, solely by the pity you have for the darkness that has thus been cast over his understanding? Is he not, in so shutting his eyes, obeying the solemn teaching he has received from all whom in this world he looks on with love and reverence?

Now in Great Britain, a child born of parents professed members of the Church established by law, is baptized also in infancy;—words are said for him—persons undertake that he shall be taught *the* Belief. When he can speak, but before he can understand, he is taught to say that his sponsors promised for him so and so. Then he is taught to repeat a creed, in which he says, “ I believe in *the* Catholic Church: *the* communion of saints,—*the* forgiveness of sins,” &c. What it means he has no means of inquiring, nor perhaps, in the course of his life, ever does inquire; still at an age when it is quite impossible he should demur to any declaration that his instructors put into his mouth, he releases his sponsors from their promise (which, probably, they have never thought of, nor had any power to execute if they did), and he takes the responsibility upon himself. Now he believes that “ the Father is

God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God—without confounding the persons,” and so on,—and that all who do not acknowledge this, “without doubt, perish everlastingly.” Further, believing that he and all his fellow-creatures are subject to condemnation to eternal torment for sin committed thousands of years before he was in being, and his only hope of pardon for such sins is in his faith or belief that God himself became man, and suffered in his stead an equivalent to that eternal torment. Hitherto, his belief rests upon a foundation exactly equal to that of the Mahommedan, the Jew, or the Roman Catholic Christian,—the mere accident of birth.

Ought it to rest there? If so, no longer blame the Church of Rome for forbidding its sect to listen to heretical insinuations; still less, lead them into temptation, by an attempt to convert them. Send no missionaries amongst the Hindoos or Mahommedans; denounce the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the Society for Converting the Jews, &c. &c. for they are tempting men to “abandon the faith in which they were brought up.”

If not, (that is, if it is really their duty to try whether their religious belief does not “depend entirely upon human compositions of some kind,”) )



then tell me how is that self-examination to be conducted?

“Read the Bible,” you will say. We also say so: but the Bible does not contain these doctrines. We find no such words! “No,” you say, “not in words, but the doctrine may be inferred.” But must we listen to the inferences, reasonings, and comments, of one side only?—of those who first taught that belief, of which now, for the first time, we are able to examine the foundation? Then the foundation of our belief is again reduced to the level of the belief of the Mahomedan, or the Roman Catholic.

Protestant Christians are, as jurymen, required each to return his own verdict on his own conscience, according to evidence. Can a jurymen have any pretence to say he returns even a conscientious verdict, after hearing the evidence on one side only; explanation and comments on the Acts of Parliament, by advocates on one side? But, perhaps, I can put the whole in a shorter compass, by confining my question to one instance, by way of illustration. You have given to S—— (and to your other sisters,) a book, of which you say, that in it is forcibly illustrated a train of reasoning which you seem to conclude ought to influence her religious belief.” She read it with serious attention. Unitarians never

refuse to listen to argument, or to expose their belief to examination. You must admit that there is in this some *primâ facie* evidence (not only of sincerity, but) of the soundness of their doctrine: and you have since given to them a book of extracts from Serle's "Horæ Solitariae," &c. by way of confirming them in that faith in which they were brought up. Now suppose a book to be written by a serious Christian in answer to Erskine, reasoning with him, and professing to show him his abundant errors; or in answer to Serle, referring with him verse by verse, to Scripture, drawing opposite inferences, and justifying those inferences by comparing Scripture with itself throughout,—what would be the duty of those sisters, desirous in all earnest humility to know the truth?

There are four predicaments, one of which they must choose:—either they must refuse to read both the one and the other;

Or they must read the books you gave, and not the answers;

Or they must read the answers, and not the books;

Or they must read both books and answers.

The Evangelical sect would say, "Read neither—read the Bible, and pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten you." But this answer

involves the supposition that that sect only pray as they ought,—(a presumption too prevalent amongst some, who flatter themselves that they are very humble ;) or else, that the Holy Spirit gives different answers to them, and to those who differ from them, which would be somewhat impious and absurd. You, however, could not agree with them in their recommendation, for that would be inconsistent with the design of giving the books.

Then plainly say, ought they to read the answers if such were before them? Would it be the reading, or the refusal to read, that would go most nearly to “involve moral guilt in the sight of God?”

If you say they ought in such a case to shut their eyes to the unorthodox argument, then show me in what respect the foundation of their faith stands higher than that of the Hindoo, the Mahomedan, the Roman Catholic, or any other—(I don't say their faith, for that would be begging the question, but the foundation of their faith;) I say, that those whom they pity for their blindness have exactly equal right to be confident in their faith. It rests upon the same foundation,—the mere accident of birth.

Can the Protestant rest in comfort and confidence on the account he shall one day give of

the talents (or talent) entrusted to him, who has never once used it in the inquiry whether the mystery (on which his only hope of salvation rests !) was taught by Jesus Christ, or only by the framers of creeds, and modelled into catechisms to be learnt by rote in infancy?

The self-examination necessary requires no knowledge of Greek. Sad, indeed, were our case if our salvation depended on Greek criticism.

Your Affectionate Brother,

D.

Pray give me the etymology and signification of the following Hebrew names—

Elihu.	Elijah.
Elishaphat.	Adonijah.
Elishama.	Badjah.
Eliah.	Tobiah.

## LETTER IX.

FROM C—— TO D——.

September, 1824

MY DEAR D——,

MY tardiness in replying to your last letter may reasonably have excited your surprise; but it is only during my vacation that I have a moment to attend to any thing but my parish, my pupils, and the correspondence they entail upon me. During the short interval I had at Easter, I was so very unwell as to be unable to give my mind to any thing that required exertion; and, once entered upon the long vacation, I thought I might as well be the bearer of my own dispatches when I should pay my promised visit to you at your country house.

In answering your last sheets, I shall, for clearness' sake, follow, as nearly as may be, the order of subjects which you have adopted; finishing with that important one upon which

you are naturally anxious we should mutually come to an understanding.

I regret very much that I have no copy of my last to you ; as from some expressions in yours, I think some misconception must have arisen from it. You speak of my having “censured Dissenters in general ;” of which I am really at this moment quite unconscious. You also seem to imply that I have imputed blame to S——, absolutely,—for having abandoned the faith in which she was brought up ; whereas, I thought I had endeavoured to guard against any such construction of words, by stating that my apprehensions on her account arose, not from any guilt I conceived might attach to her entering upon the inquiry into the grounds of her faith, but from the frame of mind in which that inquiry might have been conducted.

I now proceed to the substance of your letter. As to my censure of Mr. Belsham’s Answer to the Bishop of London’s Charge, I can have no object in pressing it beyond the bounds of fair argument. It was founded principally upon my interpretation of the Bishop’s expressions ; and it seems that had I read farther into Mr. B.’s Reply, I should have discovered that he understood these words in a different sense, and, therefore, denied a different proposition from

that which I imagined he had controverted. I cannot, however, alter my opinion as to the imputation I cast on Mr. B. for the way in which he has handled those passages of Scripture which I remarked upon in my last. That he has gratuitously “altered the text at Romans ix. 5, is undeniable, and that he has done so in support of an hypothesis is equally undeniable; for it would be idle to maintain that he would have done so had the passage in question been totally irrelevant to the point at issue. I can only say, that when I treat Scripture in the way that he has done, I shall not complain of any injustice if I am subjected to the same charge that I have cast on him; nor shall I think it unfair, should any one accuse me of “refusing to believe what God reveals,” when, to avoid the necessity of assenting to that which every extant MS. and version agrees in representing as the word of inspiration, I substitute words of my own invention.

Before I quit the passage above alluded to, I shall wish to correct a mistake into which you seem to have fallen. Who the primitive writers are of whom you say that they deny that  $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu \Theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  was predicated of Christ, I know not; but I think the following testimonies from Irenæus and Tertullian are of some autho-

rity in showing your notion to be erroneous. Irenæus (cap. xvi. Against Heresies), quoting St. Paul's words, says, "Et iterum ad Romanos scribens de Israel dicit, 'Quorum patres, et ex quibus Christus secundum carnem, qui est *Deus super omnes* benedictus in secula.'" This quotation proves—1st, That the reading of our text was the understanding at that time acknowledged in the Church; for had there been any suspicion of its authority, he never would have made use of it against heretics, without some apology and justification of himself for so doing. 2dly, It proves that our interpretation was the received interpretation at that time acknowledged in the Church. Again, Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, chap. xiii., towards the end, quoting St. Paul, says, "Ex quibus Christus; qui est 'inquit' *Deus super omnia* benedictus in omne ævum. When you can bring me such authority as this to prove that the primitive Church denied  $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu \Theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  to be predicated of Christ, I shall be less inclined to trust to the fidelity of our interpretation of these words.

These questions, I think you will allow, afford some ground for supposing that  $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu$  was meant by the Apostle to signify "over all things," absolutely; and as to the quotation



you make from our canons, it seems to me quite irrelevant. In the context of Romans ix. 5, there is nothing which leads to limit the sphere of Christ's supremacy, as there is to limit that of the king in the canon where the Church is spoken of. The phrase ἐπὶ πάντων here predicated of Christ, is also predicated of the Father in Eph. iv. 6; in both cases equally without any thing to limit the sense to any particular sphere of preeminence, and, apparently, with the same general signification. However, this part of the passage is of comparatively little moment, when we see what was the opinion of the early Church as to the whole clause. When, in defence of your explanation, you say that "revelation cannot contradict itself," you seem to me to use an argument most favourable to our view of the question; for it is by our interpretation of these disputed passages alone that the apparent contradiction is got rid of. He who maintains that Scripture declares Christ to be mere man and not God, immediately makes the Bible contradict itself; for the Bible says that "Christ was over all, God blessed for evermore." But he who maintains that Christ was both God and man, is immediately relieved from the dilemma, and reconciles Scripture with Scripture. The very principle, therefore, which

induces you to reject our interpretation, urges me to adopt it.

As the passage I have quoted from Irenæus is unanswerable as to his opinion about St. Paul's meaning, I was curious to see how Priestley disposed of it in his *History of Early Opinions*. In the chapter in which he discusses Irenæus's notions of heresy he does not allude to it; and I find his main argument to prove that the Ebionites were not considered by him as heretics, is, that he nowhere discovers that he calls *them* heretics, whilst the chief arguments of that Father are directed against the Gnostics. Every body knows that by far the most prevalent heresy in the early Church was that of the Gnostics, who denied Christ's humanity; one would reasonably expect, therefore, that the major part of his treatise should be directed against that party. But to argue that Irenæus did not consider the Ebionites as heretics, because he cannot find that he says "*totidem verbis, hæretici sunt Ebionitæ,*" seems of little avail; if, in his book against heretics, he quotes the passage from the Romans against those who denied the divinity of Christ, and maintained the doctrines of the Ebionites. Take, too, this passage from Irenæus against heretics, lib. iv. 59: Ἀνακρινεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς Ἠβίονες — πῶς

*ἐύνανται σωθῆναι εἰμὴ ὁ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ τὴν Σωτήριαν  
 αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐργουσαμένος; ἢ πῶς ἄνθρωπος  
 χόρησει εἰς Θεόν, εἰμὴ ὁ Θεὸς ἐχώρηθη εἰς  
 ἄνθρωπον;* How any man, after perusing this  
 passage, can doubt whether Irenæus thought  
 the Ebionites heretics, I know not. Priestley  
 alludes to the passage, omits the latter clause  
 from *ἢ πῶς ἄνθρωπος* in his translation, and,  
 as it appears to me, gives a sense to the former  
 part quite foreign to the meaning of his author,  
 as collected from the subsequent clause. Irenæus  
 says that God will condemn the Ebionites; and  
 in proof of his assertion, asks, “How can they  
 be saved, unless he was God who worked out  
 their salvation for them on earth; or how shall  
 man go to God, unless God has come to man?”  
 Priestley slurs over the passage in this way:  
 “He says, indeed, (speaking of Irenæus) God  
 will judge them.” “How can they be saved if  
 it be not God that worketh out their salvation  
 on earth?” Will you give me your opinion as  
 to the sentiments of Irenæus on the subject of  
 the heresy of the Ebionites, and Priestley’s can-  
 dour in his dealing with this passage?

From the high character you gave of the  
 precepts of Rammohun Roy, I was induced to  
 look at them; and there again was almost imme-  
 diately struck with a most preposterous piece

of criticism. It is there maintained that the words οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα τῷ Θεῷ, are rightly rendered thus: "He did not think of the robbery of being equal with God;" and in a note it is said, "we find the verb ἠγέομαι implying 'to esteem' as well as 'to think,' with a simple accusative; e. g. ὡς τινες βραδυτῆτα ἠγοῦνται, 'as some men count slackness,' properly speaking, 'think of slackness.'" Now these remarks betray, in two instances, great ignorance of the Greek language; ἠγέομαι will, of course, signify "to esteem" as well as "to think," for they are synonymous, both answering to the word *arbitror*; but that does not prove that it will signify "to think about," (an expression almost idiomatic in our language) a sense which ἠγέομαι never had. Suppose I wished to express in Greek, "I never thought of writing this letter;" and were to say οὐχ ἠγησάμεν τὸ γράφειν ταύτην τὴν ἐπίστολην, I should commit an error which I should be ashamed to discover in a pupil of my own. Again, it is a well known rule in Greek, that when two substantives occur together with a verb intervening, that which has the article attached to it is to stand as the subject, and the other as the predicate. Now the sense of "to consider," which is the only one ἠγέομαι can here

bear, shows at once that the verb εἶναι must be understood between τὸ ἴσα εἶναι τῷ Θεῷ (which stands for a substantive), and ἀρπαγμόν. Then comes the question which is to be predicated of the other, and the rule above mentioned obliges ἀρπαγμόν to be predicated of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα τῷ Θεῷ. The passage, then, cannot be constrained in the sense given it by Rammohun Roy; nor can it be otherwise rendered, than “He did not think that the being equal to God was robbery.” What, then, can be understood from this, but that Jesus did consider himself equal with God?

I know that you are not answerable for the errors committed by writers on your side; but you may perhaps have been influenced in your belief by some such misrepresentations (I call them not wilful) as I have here exposed. Looking into Unitarian writings has certainly explained one thing to me which was before incomprehensible: I never could conceive how persons with the Bible and the Fathers open before them, could arrive at the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity was unscriptural. But while such misrepresentations as I have noticed pass current for truth, the difficulty is, in some degree, solved. As to those who may have been induced by such statements to deny

this doctrine, as well as that of the atonement, God will assuredly judge them according to that which they have, and not according to that which they have not. The blame will attach to those guides who have undertaken the task of instruction without the competent means; and I trust no expression of mine could ever be construed into an assertion that “our salvation depended on Greek criticism.”

Before I proceed to the remainder of your letter, I will merely state, that it is at present my conscientious belief, that were I to allow myself the use of those principles of interpretation, &c. which I have remarked and specified to you in some of the writers of your sect, I could make out a most plausible case to prove that the New Testament no where preaches the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead.

I am well aware that the rendering of Heb. i. 2, did not originate with Mr. Belsham; but as he has adopted it, he is responsible for it. I am surprised at your assertion, that “he has yielded to no inducement (in rendering the preposition *διὰ* in the way he does), from an idea that the other construction favours the doctrine of Christ’s preexistence.” The habit of assigning motives is certainly most scrupulously to be avoided; but it cannot be

denied that he has given an unwarrantable meaning to the preposition; and it is to me most evident that the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence must follow immediately, if we grant that he was instrumental in the creation of the universe. But then you intimate that it is an unwarrantable license which Elmsley would not take with Aristophanes, to translate *αἰῶνας*, the worlds. At Heb. xi. 3, St. Paul again uses the word in such a way that it can signify nothing else than "the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things therein;" the word *αἰῶνας* there must mean the visible universe, because, in the conclusion of the verse, it is paraphrased by "the things that are seen," *i. e.* the visible creation of God; so that I think your question set at rest as to whether *ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας* can answer to "created the heavens and spread forth the earth."

When I said that Heb. i. 2 proved Christ's preexistence at least, of course I never meant to imply that the proof of his preexistence was any step towards the proof of his divinity, as you observe "there is no gradation between a created and a self-existent being."

Yet I cannot but differ from you, when you say if you were to grant that Christ was literally the Creator of the earth and all things therein,

that would be no step-towards the stupendous doctrine that he is God himself.

God says, "I alone created," &c.; and Scripture informs us that by him (Christ) were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible." (Col. i. 16.) Either, therefore, Christ did not create the world, or he is God. Until you can show me a passage in which God says, "I alone turned the rivers into blood," I do not see that your argument from the miracles wrought by Moses' hands will be valid; but it being granted that Moses was the instrument of God's vengeance, it seems reasonable to suppose that God would not express himself so as to declare—"I alone turned the rivers into blood;" nor, in fact, do I find that he has any where so expressed himself.

The objection you have made against the doctrine of Christ's divine nature, from its not being more dwelt upon in the Acts of the Apostles, has often presented itself to me; and various are the answers which have occurred to me. Among others, one which I met with a few days since, in one of Lord Bolingbroke's Essays, seemed reasonable. He thinks it natural (and I like to quote his opinion as he is a sort of neutral,) that St. Paul, when addressing the



Gentiles, should have reserved the doctrine of the Trinity for their future instruction, lest he should seem, in any degree, to countenance their favourite polytheism. When they were established in their belief of Christ's divine legation, he would then proceed to unfold this mystery to them; and this notion as to St. Paul's mode of proceeding seems to me strongly countenanced by the very passage you quote from Acts xx. 18, 19. He then tells his Ephesian converts "that he had kept nothing back, but had shown them all the counsel of God;" and immediately after, bids them "take heed to feed the church of God which he had purchased with his blood." So that whether St. Paul had or had not revealed to the Ephesians the mystery of Christ's divinity when he first addressed them, it is evident that before this his last visit to them, they were acquainted with it, or he never could have used such an expression as that above quoted, without the least comment. By the Unitarian canon of criticism, the passage, *διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος*, will be explained away.

But supposing no satisfactory solution could be given of the objection, I should feel that the general mass of evidence in favour of this doctrine was so great as to make me lose sight of

any apparent deficiency in any particular part of the New Testament. It is not for me to impugn the wisdom of God in not having given me more clear and pregnant evidence of that which I feel confident he has revealed, provided he has given me enough to found my belief upon. If I were once to admit the principle, that nothing should be believed upon evidence, however strong, whilst any proof which might have been adduced has been omitted, I should find much difficulty in answering the objection of the infidel when he denies the truth of the resurrection, because Christ appeared only to certain witnesses chosen beforehand.

At the conclusion of your quotations from the Acts, you say, "Here I have not altered the text nor translation, nor inferred," &c. Granted that you have not altered the text or translation, and I heartily assent to every quotation you have adduced; but surely you mean to infer something. You could not merely mean to prove that Christ was man, because that you know I acknowledge; you must have meant me to infer that he was not God. Passages multiplied without end, proving that Christ was man, prove nothing against the Trinitarian: one single passage stating that he was God, overthrows the Unitarians. Every Scripture proof by which the Unitarian main-

tains that Christ was not God, must be one drawn from inference or implication; for it is nowhere written in Scripture "Christ was not God;" whereas, it is directly asserted in Scripture that "Christ is over all, God blessed for evermore." I abstain from quoting other passages till this is disposed of. It is acknowledged that our text is the only one authorised by any MS. or Version; and I have shown by quotations from Irenæus and Tertullian, that the primitive Christians understood it in the sense we attach to it. I can conceive no more positive or complete demonstration upon the question than this; and I may now fairly ask whether does the Unitarian, when he asserts that Christ is not God, or the Trinitarian, when he maintains that Christ is God, most rest his proof upon inference and implication?

I cannot of course doubt that you quote my words exactly, when you say, I call it "a fundamental maxim, that in practical matters whatever we wish to believe we do believe;"—and upon this supposition, I shall beg leave to explain that sentiment, by stating that all I meant to assert was, that our wishes have a great influence over our judgment.—"*Tardè quæ credita lædunt, credimus,*" says Horace. Πλέον μέρος νέμοντες τῷ μὴ βουλέσθαι ἀλίθεις εἶναι, says Thucydides of the Athenians, who refused to

believe the evidence of the Mitylenian revolt, because they wished it false. This is all I wish to lay down, and certainly never thought of asserting that we were compelled to yield our assent to what we wished to be true ; nor did I, when I spoke of “ the principles of the leading persons of your persuasion, allude to the motives which had originally influenced them in adopting Unitarian sentiments, but to those principles of scriptural interpretation, &c. which I had observed among some of them. The principles, therefore, which you have set forth as having actuated Belsham, Lindsey, Estlin, and Priestley, I never thought of impugning or condemning ; but nothing that you have stated as to Mr. B.’s motives for embracing Unitarianism have in the least degree altered my opinion as to his unwarrantable treatment of Scripture.

Nothing that I have advanced upon the subject of the Athanasian Creed is, as I conceive, in the least degree inconsistent with my joining in the sentiment of Tillotson, and wishing it removed from our Church service. If I were called upon to give my vote upon the subject, it would be for its omission ; but this would not at all imply that I felt less uneasiness as to the future salvation of those who deny the Lord that bought them ; nor do I see how the entertaining

such fears necessarily leads to any breach of charity;—at least I hope I have not displayed such in the expostulation I addressed to S——. I should still believe that God had offered salvation upon certain conditions; and that those who refuse to comply with those conditions must submit to the punishment denounced against them in Scripture.

This leads me to notice your interpretation of Mark xvi. 16, which appears to me inadmissible; and I will proceed to explain the grounds upon which I think so. The question between us is, what was meant by the words “believe” and “be saved.” I shall begin by showing my reasons for conceiving that nothing but “eternal salvation from the effects of God’s wrath” can be meant by the word saved; and if you shall admit that my reasoning upon that head is conclusive, and approve of the method I have adopted in supporting my interpretation, I will then proceed to explain my grounds for understanding the word “believe” in the sense I attach to it. Should we not agree as to the meaning of the expression “be saved,” it will be useless for me to proceed farther.

Now I am fully aware that the words “salvation,” and “be saved,” sometimes, though rarely, have the meaning you attach to them—

of "being saved from ignorance and all its evils;" but because it may rarely be so rendered, it is no proof that it is to be so here. Upon carefully examining every passage in which it occurs, I find several in which it may mean either present freedom from the dominion of sin, or future escape from the punishment due to it; *e. g.* Mark x. 26; John v. 34; Acts ii. 47; Rom. x. 1; 1 Cor. x. 33; Tit. iii. 5: these, of course, prove nothing either way. In 1 Cor. i. 18; xv. 2; Eph. ii. 5, 8; it seems most reasonable to understand it in your sense, *i. e.* of present freedom from the power of sin. On referring to Luke vii. 50; viii. 12; xiii. 23; John iii. 13; Acts iv. 12; xv. 1; xvi. 30; Rom. viii. 24; 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. ii. 15; 1 Pet. iv. 18; Acts xv. 11; Rom. v. 9, 10; I find it to be absolutely necessary in most of the passages, and highly reasonable in others, to interpret them as referring to eternal life. This comparison of text in which they occur, affords a *primâ facie* evidence in my favour; and when I refer to St. John's Gospel, iii. 36, and find it written—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life," I perceive this passage to be so complete a gloss of Mark xvi. 16, that I at once am

convinced that loss of eternal life is therein pronounced to be the consequence of unbelief. I cannot allow myself to be guided by what the word *σωθήσεται* may mean in other parts of Scripture, but by what it evidently does mean upon a comparison with its parallel passage. I shall be happy, however, to listen to any reasons which may induce me to adopt your interpretation; and when you have given me your opinion as to the grounds of my own, I will proceed to compare Scripture with Scripture, and show you my reasons for assigning the meaning I have given to the word "belief."

Before I quit this part of the subject, I wish to make a few observations in elucidation of the principle upon which I have apologized for the Athanasian Creed.

You must, if you believe the Gospel, acknowledge that repentance is therein laid down to be one condition upon which we may escape the wrath to come; and I read that faith is just as much a condition as repentance of our escaping it; for I read, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Now when you, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, have made up your mind as to what gospel repentance means, could

you feel any hesitation in subscribing to the doctrine, that he who has not repentance in the sense you find to be its proper one in Scripture, will suffer under the wrath to come? When I, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, have made up my mind as to what gospel faith means, I can have no objection to say, in accordance with the words of our Saviour, "He that believeth and is baptized will be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned;" attaching to the words "belief" and "be saved" such meaning as I find warranted by Scripture. Will you, therefore, answer me whether you think any reasonable Christian could have any objection to explain what repentance means, and then to say that he who has not such a frame of mind as he has described will not be saved? If you think he could have no objection, neither ought he to find fault with those who explain what they find to be the Scripture meaning of faith, and then pronounce that he who has not the frame of mind expressed by that word shall not be saved.

For your remarks upon my expressions, "if Christ's words have any meaning at all," "as long as Scripture has any authority," I am much obliged, as I doubt not they were well meant; but I can see nothing prejudicial to the cause of



Christianity in the use of them. Whenever I have made up my mind as to the right text, and shall then have translated it according to its grammatical and obvious sense,—unless I can find any thing in any other part of Scripture which contradicts the assertion in that passage, (there is no contradiction between the assertions Christ is God, and Christ is man; it is not the same substance of which it is declared that it is God and man;)—I hold myself bound to believe it implicitly as the word of God, or I consider myself guilty of dishonouring God, and refusing to believe what he reveals. So that my answer to you, in the person of the caviller, would be simple. I do not believe that I can swallow poison unhurt; nor do I thereby disbelieve what Christ says. I find no other passage of Scripture which asserts any thing of the same kind; and I see that for many ages no Christian has been able to do so. Either, therefore, Christ must here have spoken of his immediate followers, and those who should live during the prevalence of the miraculous powers conferred on the early Christians, or he has spoken falsely: of course I choose the former alternative. Again: “I do not believe that I eat the body of Christ;” for if Christ had meant to use the terms body and blood literally, he would have contradicted

himself, for he elsewhere calls the consecrated element “the fruit of the vine;” and it would be a contradiction to say that the same substance is, at the same time, bread and flesh. With this understanding I can conceive no evil resulting from the phrases you have objected to.

I now come to the second part of your letter, which seems to be dictated by a misconception of my first to S——. I entirely disclaim the idea of attaching any moral imputation to any one who chooses to examine into the foundation of the faith he was taught to profess. My anxiety on S——’s account, my expostulation with her, was not grounded upon her having renounced a certain belief merely because it was the belief in which she was bred up, but because it was a belief which, as far as I could understand Scripture, was the only one which, connected with repentance, was offered to the lost race of mankind, as the condition of their re-admission into the favour and presence of God. I am sorry, therefore, that you should have given yourself the trouble of stating the case of the Mahommedans and Roman Catholics so much at large. There are, however, certain questions interspersed throughout those remarks, which I will distinctly answer.

You ask, ought the Jew to listen to the Chris-

tian's proofs? Undoubtedly, provided he thinks (for it is a matter entirely between God and his own conscience)—provided, I say, he thinks the objections brought against his creed are at all reasonable, and feels that he has the means of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion upon the question, but not otherwise.

As to the Catholic, you ask me whether the system adopted by the Church of Rome is not the means whereby the errors of Popery are continued? Certainly they are; but I see nothing analogous to this in the method adopted by the Church of England for disseminating and upholding its doctrines, or in the principles which I individually advocate. We prohibit no one from reading heretical works. We say, reason from Scripture, and expound Scripture by comparing it with itself, instead of with the dogmas of men; and this is the appeal I wish every where to be made.

I will now follow you through your description of the grounds of belief of a member of the Church of England. You first make out a fair representation of the mode in which a child's education is conducted under our Establishment; and then state that when he has arrived at years of maturity, his faith rests upon a foundation no better than that of the Roman Catholic Christian.

This may be the case, though it by no means follows that it necessarily must be so. This member of the Church of England has had unrestrained access to the Scriptures, translated for him into his native tongue, which access has been denied to the Roman Catholic; he has been allowed to “reason from Scripture, and expound Scripture, by comparing it with itself instead of with the dogmas of men;” so that he has had the very means which you so justly recommend, of satisfying himself as to the reasonableness of his faith; and he is accountable to God if he has not used them. But then, you will probably reply that many of them have only had opportunities of studying the Scriptures through a translation which you call incorrect; and that they should read the Unitarians’ Improved Version. As to the correctness of either, ninety-nine out of every hundred are incompetent judges, and must therefore take the matter upon trust after all; so that were they to take the Improved Version, and form their belief from that, they would be grounding their belief upon human authority just as much as if they read our version.

Suppose, then, that one of these individuals is influenced by the opinion of persons, whose judgment he relies upon, to believe that our

version is, in all essential points, correct; and shall have diligently searched the Scriptures to see how far the doctrines he has early imbibed, are warranted by the word of God; and shall, after this search, find that he has no reasonable ground for doubting the creed he has learnt from his infancy; I can see no obligation whatsoever which binds him to set about reading the Unitarian controversy. Life is not long enough to allow of his studying every question which divided the Church; and if he has no reasonable grounds for doubting in his belief as to the points in question between his church and the Unitarian, why should he enter upon that controversy rather than upon the Romish one; upon that concerning infant baptism, regeneration, or any of the others which have agitated the Christian Church? Do you recommend every body to read Hume on Miracles, and Paine's Age of Reason, and tell them, if they have not done so, that their faith rests upon no better foundation than that of Turk, Jew, or Roman Catholic? and yet it seems to me just as reasonable to maintain this as to declare that the faith of him who has not read the Unitarian controversy rests on similar foundations.

You ask me whether it would not be the duty of my sisters to read any answer to Erskine's

book which might be put into their hands. I must here make a distinction between those who have and those who have not entered upon controversy already. If you ask me whether those who have not yet entered upon the controversy are blamable if they do not read any answer which may be offered to them, I answer, not a bit more than they would be blamed for not making it a point to read Hume on Miracles, and Tom Paine's Age of Reason, supposing I had given them a copy of Paley's Evidences.

But perhaps you will reply, that, by reading Erskine's book, they have already entered upon the controversy. I can only say that I did not put it into their hands as a controversial work, but as a book which I thought calculated to awaken piety on that principle which I read to be a great motive for love to God, namely, his having first so loved us as to give his Son to redeem the world; and in proof of my assertion that I did not view it as a controversial work, I can appeal to my first letter to S—, and the opposition I made between Erskine's book and works of controversy. It is certainly much less a book of controversy than Paley's Evidences.

As to M—, the question whether she chooses to read such answer, must be decided between God and her own conscience. Neither

you nor I can say, unconditionally, whether she ought or ought not to read them. If the perusal she has already made of Unitarian arguments has been attended with advantage, she would do wrong to refuse receiving additional support in the establishment of her religious faith upon these new grounds. But if she had reason to repent the day on which she entered upon the study of this controversy,—if she has ever regretted that she neglected her father's recommendation, when he advised his daughters to study their Bible, and learn the doctrines and precepts of Christianity from it, without attending to controversy,—if her conviction is returning, or perhaps I should say, returned to its former state,—if her mind is (as I trust in God it is) regaining its former tranquillity,—I then say that she would do wrong in exposing herself again to a trial which has wrought no good effect, and been the author of much pain and misery to her.

My general answer, therefore, to your four predicaments is this:—

If my sisters, having had access all their lives to the Scriptures, and having diligently studied them, with a view to the examination of the grounds of their belief, have found that they have no reasonable ground for hesitating in it,

they are not called upon to enter into any study of controversy, and, least of all, into the study of the Unitarian, in which the appeal must ultimately lie to the interpretation of certain passages from a language of which they are ignorant.

You ask me, in conclusion, for the etymology of Elijah, &c. They are, of course, compounded of אֱלֹהִים God, and יְהוָה Jehovah. Your object in putting the question is obvious; but what you gain by it I really do not see. If, after Elijah had been carried up into heaven, I had found that he was there an object of worship to every creature in heaven and earth, and had found him in other parts of Scripture declared to be God, not only by name, but by nature also, then I should pronounce him to be very God.

Will you give me any other explanation of Rom. v. 8, 9, than that which I set forth in my last?

Believe me,

Ever your affectionate brother,

C.



## LETTER X.

FROM D—— TO C——.

February, 1825.

DEAR C——,

I HAVE suffered your letter of September last to lie a long time unanswered, for which delay I cannot plead want of time, but want of courage; not from fear of difficulty, for no task can be easier than to point out the errors (as they appear to me to be) in your reasoning, and the inapplicability of your replies to my former answers: but it is painful to perceive that our points of difference multiply as we proceed, instead of drawing to a close. S—— has felt it so; and while (unprompted by me, but reading your letters before I made any remark upon them) she freely declared how every discussion fortified her in her faith as to what the doctrines of revelation really are, and how different from those usually taken upon trust as Orthodox,

she has found herself fearful (anxious at least) upon the effects of a prolonged controversy between parties to whom she is so affectionately attached, and has more than once pressed me to withdraw from it.

Unwilling to resist any request of hers, in which the repose of her affectionate heart is in the slightest degree implicated, I could not but find my reluctance to sit down to the task, much increased. I have not, however, any of the fear which her tremulous mind seems to entertain; for I am quite confident that while I differ from your doctrines, and wonder at your arguments, that difference has no tendency to abate my personal regard, my brotherly affection, or my estimation of the goodness of your heart.

But if what I consider a duty you call a crime, and I consider that to be a crime which your sect denominates an essential duty, while I bless the memory of those martyrs to whom we owe that the consolations of Christianity have been brought down to us, I feel it shameful to suffer a mere reluctance (though a painful one), to induce me to shrink from the avowal or defence of the belief to which I annex so much importance; or to leave the erroneous objections made to it, and the imputations so mistakenly cast upon it, unanswered.

I argue, however, under great disadvantage fighting as it were with my right hand bound down; for I act on the defensive merely, not wishing (or, as I have before said, wishing not) to convert you to Unitarianism, but only to assert the right and the duty of the disciples of every church to examine carefully and impartially whether the doctrines in which they have been brought up are the doctrines of the Bible, or of fallible men; and this cannot be if they listen to the arguments of its advocates only, and refuse to listen to a fair examination of them. Perhaps I am now called on to reconcile this sentiment I maintain towards you, with the sentiment I maintain, that to separate the doctrines of Christ, from the corruptions of that doctrine, is of the highest importance; and maintaining also, as I do, that Trinitarianism is a corruption dangerously subversive of the important truths he revealed to men.

Satisfied that no exertion of time or talent could be more beneficial to mankind than that of which the purport is to restore genuine Christianity freed from the corruptions which unhappily pass under the name of Orthodoxy, it is only by the perception of the hopelessness of the attempt, and consciousness of my own inability to further what far greater talents are unable to effect

(I mean the calling almost any one's attention to the question), that I can excuse to myself the absence of that exertion. But how is this consistent with the wish not to effect the ultimate purpose in any individual instance?

By way of explanation I will put a supposed case. Imagine a certain district, in which dwell a number of rude and ignorant persons of the Roman Catholic persuasion. Suppose a priest of pious disposition, sincere in all the errors of his sect, governing the minds of his flock, and, together with the absurdities and superstitious belief of that church, teaching them at the same time much of the valuable truths of Christianity, the rewards and punishments of the life to come; and by his zeal, and piety, and good example, leading them on in a religious life,—however much you might wish to free that religion from its corruptions, and introduce pure Christianity among the people, I think yet you would not wish that the priest should be the one convinced of the errors of his sect so as that his conscience should oblige him to abandon those whom he could not convert, and leave them without any religious instruction, or leave his vacant place to be filled by one of more superstition, or perhaps more carelessness. If he were to attack your faith, and call on you, or on those whom you had

convinced, to justify or abandon it, you would defend yourself and them; but with a wish to stop short, without bringing him over from his place of usefulness.

This is very nearly an illustration of my difficulty; and a vindication by analogy, of any apparent inconsistency in my professed wishes. You must then have observed (or on re-perusal of our correspondence you will observe) that I have written entirely in defence; answering only your propositions; except that as to the right and duty of free and perpetual examination of the foundation of all articles of our belief,—that I call for, and stand forward to maintain, as an unceasing duty of every individual; but most particularly of those who ever pronounce creeds. I vindicate those who have exercised and who continue in this duty, and maintain that it is impossible that any one can “have reason to repent the having entered upon it,” or that they “will do wrong in continuing to expose their doctrines to trial;” surely you must, in consistency, be angry at Erskine’s requiring of them to examine within themselves whether “their belief is not derived from creeds and church articles, or human compositions of some kind,” if you say they do wrong in exposing their doctrines to trial!

I have heard lately of a melancholy (indeed,

it strikes me as a tremendous) instance of what I call presumptuous obstinacy in this respect. A young lady (of course I shall never name her), a descendant of an old family of Dissenters, an Unitarian not only by education, but in principle, was about to be married to a member of the Church of England,—a religious man, I do not doubt. The difference in their religious opinions was a subject of uneasiness to them; and the gentleman made it a point that the lady should read the works of some of the divines of the Church, who had combated the Unitarian doctrine. So far well. I do not know whether the requisition was reciprocal, but there cannot be a doubt that it ought to have been so. It was understood that she was to spend a certain time in studious review of the arguments laid before her. This is also well; but if she was to confine herself during that time to the statements of one side, and not to compare or study the replies that had been, or might be made, such is not the probable road to truth: but I am not yet come to my objection.—After spending the time, she was to decide; and never afterwards to reopen the controversy, or listen to the arguments of her former religious friends. The die is cast.

What would you have thought and felt, if, when you sent to S—— your first letter of

appeal, with the accompanying little volume, she had returned the letter and the book, saying that she had made up her mind, and had promised to me and to herself, that she would never more listen to such reasoning as might shake the faith she had adopted? And where lies the difference between the cases? God forbid that I should live with such a load on my conscience, as to have shut up the door of honest inquiry, or shut out well-intended instruction, or forbid reiterated reflection upon the tenets embraced by Christians as essential articles of saving faith.

I will now go back to the omissions in my former letters, and take your questions in the order of your last letter, with its references. You say (in page 2) you have no object in pressing your censure of Mr. Belsham beyond the limits of fair argument, &c.; “and it seems,” (you say) “that if you had read farther into his reply, you should have discovered that he denied a different proposition from that which you imagined he had controverted.” We do not read your books so. In my first or second letter, I expressed a pleasure in finding (as I supposed I had) that you had read that excellent reply of Mr. Belsham’s; and now I have the mortification to find that you have either met

with an insulated quotation from it in the writing of some opponent, or you have dipped into some page, and laid it down, satisfied with what you thought at the first blush an objectionable sentence.

Quitting that book, how can you harp so upon his text, Rom. ix. 5, "gratuitously altered the text," "substituting words of his own invention" to avoid the necessity of assenting to what all extant MSS., &c. agree in representing as the words of inspiration, and thus refusing to believe what God reveals?" when you know that he nowhere hides what are the words of the extant MSS.; that he merely informs his readers that such and such commentators have supposed that one single letter may have been transposed in old copies, and that he leans to that as the more probable case: but so far from insisting or laying a stress upon it, the Improved Version, as you know (and in which version, as you also know, he had much, if not the principal share,) translates the passage without the conjectural transposition. "It would be idle to maintain," you say, "that he would have given the supposed alteration, &c. had the passage in question been irrelevant to the point at issue." What can be the meaning of "the point at issue" in the translation of a book? But so far from admitting the idleness



of the supposition, I have no doubt that he would have given it, if it had been adduced by commentators in opposition to his declared exposition of the Apostle's meaning; and I feel fully assured that in his construction of *δι' αὐτοῦ*, if he were publishing another edition, and Elmsley's answer, "that he did not dare so to construe the preposition." when he wished it in his edition of Aristophanes, were communicated to him, he would give Elmsley's answer in Elmsley's words, and perhaps adopt his translation: but certainly record it. It is characteristic of all Unitarian writers with whose works I am acquainted, to produce all arguments for or against them. Their decision may be different from yours, but they never hide the argument.

You go back to *ἐπὶ πάντων*, Rom. ix. 5. It is to me inconceivable that the Apostle could possibly, in the winding up of a sentence in an epistle, intend to reveal the astonishing doctrine that Christ was God; that he who said to him, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," should ever have added, "I am the God of the universe, who took upon myself the form of a created being;" and that the Apostle, having preached Christ crucified and risen, should, after years of such preaching, bring out this revelation in so cursory and elliptical a manner; and that

any stress in support of such a supposition can be laid upon the phrase "over all" or "above all," which might be in so many ways justified by the character and office of him to whom you suppose it to be applied. He was superior to Moses and the prophets; it was he of whom they spake; he superseded the Mosaic dispensation; he brought life and immortality to light; he was the founder of the new dispensation, which embraces all mankind; his kingdom shall endure for ever. I by no means admit that it was applied to Christ; but if you insist upon that, still does not this character fully justify the title "above all?"

Your quotations from Irenæus and Tertullian prove that the now received construction existed in their time, and was received by them; in other words, that they were Trinitarians, and that is all.

Looking back to my letter of February, 1824, I think I have said enough on that subject, and rest in the opinion I advanced there. I turn, however, to your reference to Ephes. iv. 6; but, because God is there said to be (as in all times, places, and occasions, he must be said to be) "above all things," must the words have the same meaning if applied to one sent by him? God is called a Father in the same passage.

May no man, then, thenceforth be called a father? The Apostle is speaking to the Romans of the Jewish and Christian dispensations. The Israelities—the adoption—the admission of the Gentiles by Christ, who is “above all” (that is, if I admit your construction,) and then the doxology, “God *be* blessed for evermore,” may very aptly follow. (By the bye, in the text you refer to, ἐπὶ is translated “above” in the authorized version; and if there is any difference in the English expression, it may with equal propriety be adopted in Rom. ix.) Upon the whole, I do not agree with Mr. Belsham, nor Whitby, Taylor, and the others whom he quotes, in adopting the supposition of the transposed letter; but, taking the original as it stands, I have little doubt of the construction, “God who is over all things (or God, the Being above all), *be* blessed for evermore.”

You would not let a pupil translate ὁ ὧν, “who is,” without, at least, remarking that it is not literal: you would tell him that ὧν signifies “being;” and may be (like the English word,) taken as a participle, or a substantive; that “*he who* is,” is nearer to ὁ ὧν than “*who* is;” and that, as there is no verb in the sentence, one not expressed must be understood; and I do think that an impartial critic, having no system in view, but

philology only, would say that such translation is a more literal translation of the Greek as it stands, than “*who is* God over all things, blessed,” &c.; and the Apostle Paul, as a Phariſee, was very likely to use a Jewish doxology at the cloſe of his ſentence.

You then expreſſly deſire my opinion of Priſtley’s candour in dealing with a paſſage in Irenæus, commenting on the text in queſtion.

I am not a little ſurpriſed at your charge againſt Priſtley. No charge ever fell more harmleſſly from the one accuſed. Priſtley, after ſhowing that Unitarians abounded in that age, contending (and ſucceſſfully I think) that they then formed a large majority of the Chriſtians, conſidered, that, oppoſed as the opinions were of Trinitarians and Unitarians, ſtill they joined in worſhip together, and did not call each other heretics. He ſays, that at firſt he had conſidered Irenæus to include Unitarians in his claſs of heretics; but, on further attention, he thought he did not; but that the Gnoſtics were excluſively meant in thoſe pages he had before ſo conſtrued: and then he gives his reaſons, which, if you had read two pages farther, you would have found. I think he reaſons well; perhaps you would differ. But what ſhould prompt Priſtley to diſguiſe or conceal any

thing? He knew that Irenæus was a Trinitarian; and your passage proves nothing more. Why should he bring forward a sentence which has nothing to do with the point in question?—But how is this? I read in Priestley the whole Greek sentence, including the very words you accuse him of omitting. He might have omitted them as not to his purpose; but he has not omitted them. It is true, your words are, “he has omitted them in his translation;” but this is no charge at all. He was not writing three-penny tracts for the ignorant; in which case, leaving the passage in Greek only, might be virtually hiding it. Nine-tenths of his readers would be Greek scholars. For the convenience of mere English readers, he translates that part of the sentence on which he founds any argument; but he could not hide the remainder when the Greek is in his book. Priestley has been often accused of hastiness in drawing conclusions; of daring boldness perhaps in his expressions; of being led, and leading others into error by intemperate zeal: these things have been said of him by his opponents; but at the charge of caution, and disguise, and concealment, all who know any thing of the life or writings of Priestley, must smile. He spent his life in active and disinterested exertions for

the benefit of his fellow-creatures ; in an attempt to restore Christianity to that which Jesus Christ taught. He was persecuted in a manner that goes down in history as a disgrace to Great Britain. He is gone to receive his reward. The obloquies cast on him are not removed, but the truth opens out by degrees ; his writings speak for themselves ; and though slowly, will make their way, to the advantage of the present age, and of posterity.

But our present question is concerning the sentence of Irenæus, "How can man go to God unless God has come to man?" I am sure I have no objection to be called a heretic by the writer of that sentence. What ! is not God always present with us ? about our bed, and about our path ? can there be required (or, indeed, can there be) local presence distinct from omnipresence, or added to it ? "Draw nigh to God;" "Come before him;" "Unto thee shall all flesh come;" "Blessed is he whom thou causest to approach unto thee:" and shall one answer, "How can man go to God unless God has come to him?" meaning, thereby, a local coming in a visible and tangible form ?

I am astonished at your sentiment, that, "admitting, of course, that Scripture cannot contradict itself, the Trinitarian gets rid of the

apparent contradiction, by maintaining that Christ is both God and man ;” but, as this is introduced again in a latter part of your letter, I postpone my reply.

You were induced, you say, to look into Rammohun Roy ; and then you lay down the book because you dislike one of his renderings of a Greek word. But when we were discussing the temper and spirit with which a man should come to the study of the Scriptures, it was in that light that I brought forward his “Appeal.” As far as I am a judge, I think him mistaken in his construction of the verb ἠγάθημαι ; but I am not sure that the difference does not arise from his misapprehension of the English language, into which he translates. At any rate you cannot subscribe to the translation in the common version, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” The Greek will not bear it out, nor is the sense intelligible. Is there meaning in the words “God thought it not robbery to be equal with God?” Ἀρπαγμὸς is not “robbery ;” neither is ἴσα “equal.” Jesus was tempted in a vision, when his miraculous powers were made known to him, to use them for his own glory and worldly power, as a prince over all the kingdoms of the world, and for his own personal safety against his enemies. “Command that these

stones be made bread;" "The angels shall bear thee up," &c. ; and he perceived in this temptation, that he had power to be as ("not equal to") a God. But this prize, or prey, or bait, he did not grasp; οὐχ ἠγήσατο ἀρπαγμὸν, "he did not consider it a prize to be grasped;" but (rich as he was in power to procure all that is desirable in the world,) he ἐπτώχευσε, (not became poor, but lived poor and exposed to suffering) for our sake. You may not agree with me in this construction, but cannot support the other; and you cannot deny that this is tenable, if not convincing.

I am, however, very sorry to have been led into Greek criticism, because my main object is, to maintain that those who do not know a word of the language, are bound, and have full opportunity offered them, of learning all that is essential to salvation, without reliance on human authority.

"Looking into Unitarian writings," you say, (and certainly you seem to have merely looked into them,) "explains to you, for the first time, how persons, with the Bible and the Fathers open before them, could arrive at the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity was unscriptural." I am very sure that if they had the Bible before them, and no creed preceding their perusal of it,



they would never find it there, even in the received text and version. I am very sure it never proceeded from Jesus Christ or his Apostles. You excuse, however, those that are ignorant and misled by their teachers, but condemn "those guides who have undertaken the task of instruction without the competent means." What are the qualifications they want? A man who spends a long life in study must either be a fool by nature, or he must be a learned man; and what are the qualifications, or "competent means," adapted to the task of religious instruction, other than good sense, learning, and piety? Lardner,—the learned, pious, and indefatigable Lardner,—(as even the Quarterly Reviewers, the declaredly bitter enemies of Unitarianism, call him); Farmer, who, like Griesbach, spent years and years in the faithful and diligent collation of existing MSS. and copies of the sacred writings; Priestley, Price, Lindsey, Simpson (I name only those who are gone); any, and every one of them, spent more years than many of their critics could have spent weeks in the diligent study of the Scriptures; and will you for a moment join with those who would cry them down as ignorant, or without the competent means? To whom may we look up, if not to men who, purposely avoiding or forsaking every road to worldly emolument or

honour, dedicated their whole lives to devotion and study ?

Now I come to a sentence which it grieves me to read,—“ Were I to allow myself the use of those principles of interpretation, &c. which I have specified to you in some of the writers of your sect, I could make out a most plausible case to prove that the New Testament nowhere preaches the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead ! ” This is an hyperbole beyond my comprehension.

We believe (rather we know) that God is truth ; that he is omnipotent, omniscient, every where present, infinitely wise and benevolent ; we know, therefore, that what he reveals must be true ; that his promises and threatenings are wise and just ; and his will must be carried into execution, and therefore his commands must be obeyed.

Our “ principles of reasoning ” lead to this undoubted conclusion. They lead us also to believe that he has revealed his will by Jesus Christ, whom he fully instructed and commissioned to teach us all that is necessary to prepare us for eternal happiness, if obeyed ; that Jesus Christ gave full and undoubted proofs of that commission : and our “ principles of interpretation ” shew us that his great doctrine was, that

man shall be raised from the dead to eternal life, to judgment, to a state of retribution. Now, if from "these principles of interpretation" you can prove that there is no resurrection, there is an end of all religion, at least of revealed religion, and we may throw every thing at once into the hands of the Paines and the Carliles, &c., (or at least) of Hume and Gibbon, and that class of writers. Of these writers, undoubtedly, in my opinion, the Unitarians have been the best answerers. O, I think you must wish you had not written that paragraph! and so I will leave it.

Again, you bring me back to Heb. i. 2, and poor Belsham is accused of warping the Scriptures to favour a preconceived opinion, when you know that his preconceived opinion was the direct contrary, and that it was to oppose the doctrine of Priestley that he sat down to collect texts of Scripture. He found them to fail him, and he painfully gave up his preconceived opinion.

I think you rather blink the question, "whether you or Elmsley can find any authority for translating *αιῶνες* 'worlds?' and I am justified in supposing that you cannot."

Your reference to Heb. xi. 3 confutes you; for the writer himself explains it otherwise in

express terms, — “whether they be thrones, principalities, powers,” &c. The words would be without meaning,—“the heavens, the earth, the sea, &c., whether they be thrones,” &c. Can principalities and powers be visible in the sense in which the sun and stars are visible? or can they be created, in the sense in which man and beast are created? The question is, as you say, “set at rest,” but on the side opposite to where you would place it. *Αἰῶνες* cannot be construed “worlds.”

Then you go to Col. i. 16; but would you let a pupil construe *ἐγένετο* “were created?” This verb *γινώμαι*, with its inflections, is said to occur upwards of seven hundred times in the New Testament, and never bears the sense of “to create.” It is one of the commonest words in the language, and is never so used. I think, if you met with it in an Unitarian book, you would lay it down, and read no further.

After all, I am ready to leave the Trinitarian to contest the point with the Arians, who believe that Jesus Christ pre-existed, and, by power derived from God, created the habitable worlds; but who yet do not believe that he was uncreated himself, nor does it at all follow.

But if you insist upon the belief that Jesus Christ was the Creator of the world, why do you

not say, "I believe in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, maker of," &c.? But you say, "I believe in God, maker of," &c. "*and*—(with this conjunction bringing in another being) — "*and* in Jesus Christ his Son," &c. "*We* also believe in God the Father, maker of," &c., "*and* in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord." The framer of this creed surely did not believe that Christ was the Creator.

You would next repel my "objection against the doctrine of Christ's divine nature," supposing my objection to be "its not being more dwelt upon in the Acts of the Apostles." I did not say "not more dwelt upon," but "nowhere mentioned or alluded to, in all their preaching, for years after they had received the Holy Spirit." A much better reason for this may be given than that of Bolingbroke. The true reason is, that they had never learned the doctrine, and therefore never could, and assuredly never did, teach it.

But see now what a surrender you have made: first, you declare in your letter, January, 1824, that the grand disclosure as to Christ's divine nature was not formally made to the Apostles until the epoch of the descent of the Holy Ghost; and that there are no direct statements of

the doctrine previously thereto. I shew you, that after that epoch, the doctrine is unnoticed by them as far as appears in the history and detail of their preaching in the book of the Acts. Then you shift it further still, and say, "it was not to be expected till the Gentiles were established in their belief of Christ's divine legation;" and then your belief of St. Paul's having so preached is countenanced by his telling his Ephesian converts that he had shewn them all the counsel of God: so that, after all, it is only a countenanced or probable surmise that you bring forward in proof of the revelation. I did not press you into this surrender; the whole originates with yourself.

Your belief is further countenanced by the expression of St. Paul, (Acts xx. 28,) "Feed the church of God, which he has purchased with blood." This would be only an allusion, not a revelation, and an expression too obscure for such an astounding doctrine, if there were such a text; but there is not. It is "the church of the Lord," *Κύριον*. You make no use of your Griesbach, though you must know the value of the book, and the fidelity of the author.

Having produced no evidence at all of such a revelation, you say, "you must not impugn the wisdom of God in not having given more clear

and frequent evidence." We never call for any evidence on the part of the Almighty, but look only for what he has declared: but do you mean evidence of the revelation, or evidence of the truth of it? full evidence that it is revealed must be essential to belief.

Afterwards you say, "it is nowhere written in Scripture that Christ was not God," and, therefore, that such a doctrine must rest on inference or implication; but this is exactly preposterous; *i. e.* putting the things out of their places, or inverting the order of just arrangement. Should such a thing ever be expected? Do we expect that it should be said that Adam was not God? or Elijah, Moses, Isaiah, or any prophet or apostle? It was not blasphemy to say "that they were Gods to whom the word of God came; and it is said of Moses even rather more strongly than of Jesus Christ. Either, then, you believe that Moses was God, or you refuse to believe what God reveals." If you vindicate the use of such expressions in argument, I do not see with what justice you can repel them when applied to your own reasoning. But, though we could not expect it, (and it seems utterly strange that such a sentiment should occur as an objection,) it does happen that we *are* told it; for Christ is expressly foretold,

(and the prophecy is afterwards brought in evidence,) as a man like unto Moses. These things must require a good deal of explaining away on the part of the Trinitarian, though this is a crime in Unitarians. To your categorical question, then, "Does the Unitarian, when he asserts that Christ is not God, or the Trinitarian, when he maintains that Christ *is* God, most rest his proof upon inference and implication?" I answer as plainly, "The Trinitarian entirely, the Unitarian not at all." We have nothing to do with inference.—We need not infer that a man is not God; and we are repeatedly told by Christ himself, that his power was derived, and that he could do nothing of himself. He prayed to God for all he desired, and was thankful that his prayers were heard, and for his support in affliction, and for the promise and the prize that was set before him. To say that this was in his human nature, as distinct from his divine nature, is not only begging the question, or making an assertion to favour a pre-conceived hypothesis, but it is an equivocation which a Christian ought not to submit to. Jesus Christ never spoke of his "human and divine nature," nor did any of his Apostles. This is not Scripture, nor can it be expressed in the language of Scripture; the words are utterly without meaning.



You advert again to the influence of our wishes upon our belief, and you deduct somewhat from the strength of your former "fundamental maxim." But in your first letter (to S——,) you added, "if in pursuing, &c. you shall still wish to continue in the same persuasion, you almost infallibly will do so." Now can you possibly not be aware that the same thing may be said to you, and if just in the one case, is so in the other? Do you not "wish to continue in the persuasion" you have entered into? Now she has shown you most clearly that her wishes were the same as yours must be; and that, painful as the change was, she did not "continue in the persuasion" her wishes laid hold of: and she has shewn that she will never close her mind against the arguments of those who would bring her back to it. Nor will I. Neither of us, so long as God grants us a continuance of those faculties which alone render us responsible beings: and you know that I left her to read both your letter and your book entirely by herself. But the mode of orthodox teaching is, to caution the disciple to close the avenues of his understanding to the arguments of those whose desire (at least) is, to receive all the doctrine Christ taught. The disciple is cautioned to remain in a safe ignorance of those arguments;

as if knowledge and security could arise from ignorance!

I do maintain that an unceasing willingness to expose our doctrines to trial, is the only test of our conviction of their truth; and that they who have taken their belief for granted from education only, and have never so examined themselves, cannot, in a proper sense, be said to believe, and have not a shadow of right to say, that their belief stands upon a ground superior to that of the Jew who abides by the religion of his ancestors, and refuses to look at the proofs that Jesus rose from the dead, and that in his person was fulfilled the promise of the Messiah: or than that of the Roman Catholic, who dares not look at any thing that casts a doubt upon the authority and the mysteries of Holy Church.

Having I think gone through all those parts of your letters that *so* call upon me, I trust I have now done with Greek criticism. I do not mean to preclude your reply, to which, undoubtedly, I shall attend, though I am desirous not to continue it on my part; and I do maintain that a knowledge of it is *now-a-days* by no means necessary to the satisfaction of the mind in inquiry after gospel truth;—that the unlearned reader has no excuse for reliance on the doctrine of men, (as you contend,) and that all that is

essential to saving faith is plainly revealed, and that to say otherwise is charging God with injustice;—that there is no need nor ground for that trepidation which seizes the Christian when startled with doubts as to the doctrines they have been taught to consider so sacred;—that the *more sacred* they think them, the *more incumbent* it is to scrutinize them;—that the true tendency of this scrutiny is to console and calm the mind; and that where it has not that effect, the failure is entirely attributable to early and unjust prejudice. Indeed, that trepidation itself is *a proof* that the faith does not rest on a true foundation; that though it may be right, it may be wrong, and that we deceive ourselves in relying upon it.

*We* doubt not that mankind are all going where it will be asked, not “What hast thou believed,” but, “What hast thou done?” This we are sure a Christian will be able to learn from his Bible, and therefore creeds and controversies are not so necessary to us; but if you will insist that salvation depends upon belief, you ought to teach, *that controversy should be the business of our lives*. Assuredly creeds and controversies must go together, else we merely cast lots for our salvation, and let it depend upon the mere accident of birth.

These are the points I wish to confine myself

to, and I shall resume the task, and continue my reply to your letters, but for the present must close.

I have left for you a copy of a printed sermon by Lant Carpenter, which I request you to read, as it gives a summary of Unitarian belief, and I think a pleasing specimen of the "temper of mind" of Unitarian preachers. If I had met with it sooner, my letter would have been shorter.

Farewell for the present. I do not find that "controversy" has any tendency to diminish kind regards.

Your affectionate Brother.

D.

## LETTER XI.

FROM D. TO C——.

April, 1825.

MY DEAR C——,

IF you imagine that I make any boast, or have any self-complacency concerning my knowledge of Greek, I desire to put an end at once to that supposition, by confessing (which I do with some shame, and much regret,) that for five and twenty years after arriving at manhood, I am not sure that I ever read a continuous page in any Greek book; and that having in my later and more leisure years taken up again my old school-books, I have been surprised and mortified to find how much I had lost. If you think that a smattering of the language has had any tendency to render S—— confident in her construction of the Bible, you are still more mistaken. She has read the Greek Testament

with me, and it is a pleasure to us to be able to read together ; and the prospect of that pleasure was, I believe, her only reason for desiring to meddle with Greek at all.

This preface brings me to your sentiment (letter of January 1824, p. 10,) “ Since it has pleased God to reveal his will to us in that language (viz. Greek,) all who are not well versed in it must depend upon the interpretation of others ;” and “ if you are not prepared to depend upon your own interpretation, you must lean upon human authority.” This I deny. But I consider that you in professing it have almost granted me the whole of my argument ; which was, to prove that it is on human authority only, and not upon revelation, that the members of the Church do, (for you in plain terms say “ they must) rely.”

In what a dreadful state do you place them ! How can any fail to fall into misery and despair ? “ He that believeth not shall be damned :” to believe signifies to believe in a certain hypothesis, — this hypothesis depends on the construction of Greek words. Learned men differ one from another in that construction and hypothesis — “ the unlearned must rely on human authority ” — they cannot know which authority to prefer, but choose they must, and abiding by

that choice, they must admit of no doubt ; they must so believe, or perish everlastingly !

Happily, however, there is no point whatever wherein our salvation depends upon the right or wrong interpretation of Greek words. I now desire in this discussion to put myself entirely on a footing with those who do not know one word of that language, and am yet satisfied that I shall find all that is necessary to salvation without embracing a creed founded on human authority ; and at the same time as you say that I “ shall probably reply that they have studied the Scriptures through an incorrect translation, and that they should read the Unitarians’ Improved Version,” I must assure you I shall make no such reply ; nor shall I call on them to ground their belief upon any thing but thorough conviction (I admit no meaning to the word “ belief ” but “ conviction, ”) the result of the honest exercise of the talents which God has measured to them, and the use of the means he has afforded to every one in his or her peculiar station. But till they attain that conviction, or even if unable to attain it, how dreadful is it, how insincere and false before God, to profess it !

As for the Unitarian Version, (as you call it,) it is a publication of the other day only—the first edition was published in 1808 ; and though I

value it highly, I did not read it in order to be convinced that Unitarianism is the doctrine which Christ and his Apostles taught. But why should they not read it? If any thing in Scripture is hard to be understood, why should they refuse any help, or to know what interpretation other Christians use? "They cannot rely on their own interpretation;" but can they less rely upon it after hearing the opinions of others? You add, "it would be grounding their belief upon human authority as much as the other:" I admit it would, if they were called upon by us to read it, and prohibited from reading any other; thus reduced to the dreadful alternative of choosing between two authorities with no reason for preferring either, except that they have happened first to fall in with it.

But to return to our ignorance of Greek. Do you suppose that it is from reading a translation of the New Testament which varies from the authorized version, that we embrace Unitarianism? You know very little about us. It is not the Unitarian, but the Trinitarian, that rests his doctrine on a few disputed or difficult passages: if we take up these passages critically it is in self-defence. We do not set forward to adduce the correction even of corrupt or mistranslated texts, or disputable interpretations, as



the grounds of our belief. You I am sure will not deny that the received text was taken from certain copies, not the most authentic; nor that Griesbach, having access to copies more ancient and of better authority, has given to the world a copy, which (though not absolutely perfect) is undoubtedly nearer to the genuine apostolic writing. No learned men, orthodox or otherwise, differ on this point. One of the highest dignitaries in your Church published a translation of this improved copy. Was he to blame in this? His whole edition (about the time of his death, I believe) was sunk at sea, and so damaged that a very few copies remained legible. Was it not desirable that such a translation should exist? Why did not the Church take it up, and reprint the lost translation? If they had, the Unitarians would not have published any. You will not deny that there are in the received text some few (very few) palpable interpolations. Does reverence for the Scriptures induce the Church to publish millions of copies without even a note of caution to the reader that the Apostle did not write them? This is a strange way of shewing a veneration for Scripture! The Unitarians, finding that the Church would not take it up, have republished Archbishop Newcome's translation, inserting nothing which he

or Griesbach had omitted; omitting nothing which they have inserted.

In a few instances (very few of moment) they have varied from his translation; and when they have so varied, they have still given his translation in a note, and their reasons for differing from him.

But without going out of the common authorized copy and version, any unprejudiced person commencing his study would be astonished to find, if he will expressly search for and register them, how few passages there are that even seem to countenance the mystery of the Trinity—of passages in which it is revealed he will find not one. These few texts are for ever brought forward in support of the inferred doctrine, while the whole tenor of Scripture establishes the contrary—*i. e.* the absolute Unity of One Spirit, undivided, indivisible, whether into Beings, Minds, Intelligences, or Persons. One or two palpable forgeries, (the text of the three witnesses, 1 John v. 8; “God manifest in the flesh,” 1 Tim. iii. 16; and “the church of God, which,” &c. Acts xx. 28;) have been much relied on, and are still often quoted. These the Archbishop’s translation of Griesbach’s copy points out manifestly to all impartial readers; but these corrections are not what we single out as the foundation of Unitarianism.

You say, "it has pleased God to reveal his will in the Greek language." I cannot adopt the phrase, for God needs not the intervention of language to communicate to the objects of his inspiration the instructions he vouchsafes. They have used the language in their communication to their fellow-men, and it is true, that if that language were lost, *we* should be without revelation. But, although that translation is the work of men, it is not upon human authority we rely : for the coincidence of language (both in sacred and profane writings) is to the unlearned a proof in the nature of things that the words did signify what we suppose them to have signified.

I have never crossed the Atlantic, and cannot know, but by reading voyages and histories, or by oral communications, that any land exists there ; voyagers and historians have often lied or erred ; yet I am as much convinced of the existence of a continent there, as I am of that of the field now before my eyes. Do I then rely upon the testimony of men, who may be deceivers ? No : it is not in the nature of things,—it is absolutely impossible that such concurrence should take place in the relation of falsehoods. The history of the death and resurrection of Christ was written in a language as unknown to me as are opposite shores of the ocean I have never

traversed ; yet the concurrence of translators is as convincing to me as if the account were in my native language, and I do not rely upon human authority. Where all agree, the reader knows as much as the translators—they have given him their knowledge ; where they do not agree, he knows as much as one of the parties, for one must be wrong. In these cases, all ought to doubt ; and he is as fit to try the cause between them, by comparing their testimony, as either of them can be ;—oftentimes more so, as being less biassed.

But, you say, “let all who can carry the investigation through, enter upon it.” What is meant by “carrying it through?” Do you mean “attaining conviction?” can they not be convinced? then how can they believe without all doubt? “Incompetent to decide a question that the most learned disagree on”—yet you call on them to decide.

We say, act, obey, pray for assistance, and if sincere, be assured that all necessary knowledge may and must be attainable. *He* gave me my understanding in measure and limit, exactly according to *his* will. Will he be angry that I cannot go beyond the limit he purposely assigned? He gave me my eye and my ear, will he be angry that my eye cannot penetrate further

into space than his gift enables me? This indeed is making him a hard master, "reaping where he has not sown." He will be angry that I do not use his gift as far as it will penetrate, but let me not repine because his gift was not greater—two or five talents: nor call it humility to declare that he has given me only one, and that I dare not use it. It is presumption, not humility; ingratitude, not submission; indolence, not obedience; wilful blindness—"prostration of the understanding," not to revelation, but to prejudice.

But what is the "investigation" they are called on to enter upon? To decide questions of Greek criticism? no such thing. We call on them to think when they read the Bible. Does the gospel teach us that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling? or, does it teach us that "the first thing is, to be convinced that we can do nothing towards our own salvation?" that we must rely solely on the merits of Jesus Christ? In what part of the English Bible do we read that?

I do verily believe, that from having read the words so often in sermons and human compositions, a very large portion of well-meaning Christians do really think that they have in their English Bible read of a "scheme or plan of redemption"—of "the incarnation of God"—of his

“taking upon him our nature;” of “two natures in Christ,” “his human nature—his divine nature;” of “vicarious sacrifice”—“satisfaction to the justice of God”—of his “bearing the Divine wrath”—of his “submitting to punishment for the sins of mankind”—of his “all-atoning, expiatory death,” &c. They think they have read that “the Jewish sacrifices were types of the great sacrifice,” &c. &c. They do not indeed think they have met with the word “Trinity,” but, probably, many think they have read of “God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost:” they actually carry these things in their minds as Scripture language, and when they hear of the Unitarians adopting so much of Scripture as suits their views, and “rejecting all the rest,” (for this is the constant cry,) they imagine that the Unitarians strike them out; it never occurs to them that they are Trinitarian glosses.

I do not want to talk about Greek; read the common English translation, and shew me the passages. And who is not competent to consider the question? What source of information is open to one Christian more than to another? What renders one Christian less able than another, or less responsible?

In support of those doctrines which I main-

tain to be genuine Christianity, I do not need to call readers to any Unitarian book, but only call on them to think when they read Trinitarian books:—but they are called on by their Church to take every thing for granted; not to criticise—not to reason or object; and if any one would point out the fallacies, not to dare to look at the objection.

Thus the passage is pointed out to them, “I and my Father are one, and the glory I had with thee before the world was,” &c.; and these are called decisive: but the explanatory passage, John xvii. 20, and following verses,—“As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me,”—they forget; and if an Unitarian would call their attention to these words of the same great teacher, Christ, they must shut their ears against his plausible arguments, “lest they should shake their faith!” And even you say they will “have cause to repent,” if they thus use their weak reason in considering Scripture in this way, or enter on the inquiry, “whether they have not been in the habit of considering what has been pointed out by their human instructors, and forgetting the

rest." "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Can the Greek scholar understand these words better than the unlearned Christian? It is quite a mistake to suppose that the appeal must ultimately be to the interpretation of languages of which they are ignorant."

Where, in Scripture, is the justice of God set in opposition to his mercy? "God's conflicting attributes," as Dr. Chalmers, from his own fancy and presumption, (and as I almost think, blasphemously,) calls them? Where is it said that justice required a sacrifice, an infinite sacrifice? and who are the Christians that ought not to put these questions to themselves, or that are less able to answer (if free to consider) them?

Take from Bishop Porteus's (generally excellent) lectures, "His justice, his wisdom, his authority, as the moral Governor of the Universe, all these must have been shaken to their very foundation had he pardoned mankind without some satisfaction made to him for their disobedience."

Is not this human reasoning? and why am not I, an unlearned Christian, to use my reason in reply? and what knowledge of Greek is necessary to enable me to answer that it is neither reason, nor Scripture; but the presumption of a



man who would legislate for the Almighty? and what Christian ought not to “enter on the investigation,” rather than take it for granted? From the same—“It appears from the nature of the things themselves, from the clearest deductions of reason, from the ordinary course of human affairs in the present world, &c. &c. and above all, from the positive declarations of God himself both in the Old and New Testament!!! that besides the contrition of the sinner himself, something must be done, or suffered by some other being, on his account,” &c.

I read, that “whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy.” I read that “there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth;” and when the prodigal son returned, the fatted calf was killed for joy, not put to agony as an expiation of the youth’s offence, nor was any substituted punishment proposed in our Saviour’s parable. Can it be wondered at that those who are prejudiced from infancy in favour of such an hypothesis, and debarred from, or cautioned against, reading a review of orthodox works, should in their memories and apprehensions confound those wild declamations with Scripture, being told that they are “the positive declarations of God?” Ought they not to look and see? I am sure they will never find them there, in

Hebrew, Greek, or English: nor can they "have cause to repent," if, in searching the Scriptures to see whether these things be so, they find they are not; and if they should find them to be so, then you must of course say, they will have cause to rejoice.

Observe, I have been quoting from one of the most popular and deservedly esteemed dignitaries of your Church; and I do not desire to argue in favour of Unitarianism in any other way than to read the books of the orthodox, and fairly examine their own arguments. It is really melancholy to see the effect of early prejudice on subjects so important, when we find such a man as Porteus really fancying that in this he was using Scripture language.

Take an extract from Dr. Munter's account of the conversion of Struensee, a book now very popular, and handed about, and recommended as an impressive lesson. That there is much in it that is good, I acknowledge; but let us not shut our eyes to its fallacies.

After a detail of his conversion to a belief of a future state, and of the Christian revelation generally, he says, "He was now ready to acknowledge the other mysteries to be divine;" but Dr. Munter has omitted to mention one single argument that induced him to acknowledge them.

Now if in a chain of an hundred links one link be made wood, to what purpose is it to shew me that the other ninety-nine are of good iron? Yet this one link is wanting in all the Trinitarian books of argument I have ever met with; and I have read many, and never turned from any. “You see from this,” says Dr. Munter, (after shewing, truly enough, that the miracles became necessary to serve him for credentials,) “that a religion, whose Author performed miracles, must, according to its intention, contain mysteries.” Now what reasoning is this? He goes on—“Reason tells us the Unity of God; Revelation adds, that three Persons are in one Deity,”—and these assertions are put into the hands of simple-minded Christians, as revelation! Again; he actually refers to Heb. i. 3, as if quoting it, as declaring that Christ has the same essence as the Father has, and is therefore perfectly equal with him. From the same;—“Christ commanded me to believe that he was very God and very man; and that, in the divine nature, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one. I thought myself obliged to believe these mysteries upon the word of Christ.”

What would be said of an Unitarian who should so introduce his doctrines, and call them Scripture language? You might brand that as

“unwarrantable treatment of Scripture,” and I do not see why any serious, simple-minded Christian is not as competent as Dr. Munter, or his editor Dr. Rennell, to judge of it; and I am sure it is the duty of every reader to think, and to take every help he can meet with, to enable him to understand whether it is Scripture or human invention that is laid before him as such. “No other means to obtain pardon, but through the merits of Christ,” he says. This is not to be found in the New Testament in Greek or English.

When a Chinese man was killed by an accidental explosion of a loaded gun, from an European ship, the Chinese demanded an European to be delivered up to be put to death as an expiation. Any one would do; it was not as a deterring punishment of a guilty person, but blood for blood—“satisfaction.” A Canadian was killed in a quarrel by an Englishman, who escaped. The friend of the deceased lay in wait, and seized an innocent English sergeant. They put him to death, and were “satisfied.” The Chinese and the Canadians considered this to be justice: we consider it as a ferocious injustice, excusable only by their savage ignorance. An Italian lately offered himself to the magistrates in London to be executed in lieu of a condemned criminal, for whose pardon petitions

had been presented by his wife and son, and some other persons. We consider the man to be either a hypocrite or a madman, but we know it would have been a mockery of justice if the law could have admitted the self-devoted victim in lieu of the actual criminal ; and yet, man proposes, not only as a fact, but as a necessary requisite for the pardon of repentant sinners, that one who knew no sin should suffer as a criminal, to appease the Divine wrath, and that a claim which it is savage in man to make, in God is just. Justice requires that we should be punished everlastingly for sins committed before we were in being, and mercy sacrifices to justice, who accepts the agony of an innocent substitute. This scheme being no where to be traced in Scripture, they *reason* with us, and shew that it must be so of necessity, and yet tell us that we are not to “ set up our reason ” in canvassing it. They illustrate their theory in part, by telling us that in this world the children of the wicked are punished for the offences of their parents. No ; they are punished by them, not for them.

Would a judge, with any pretence to common justice or common sense, say to a poor wretch brought before him, “ Your father and grandfather were thieves, and therefore you must be punished ? ” Would not his justice and his humanity

operate the other way? Would he not say, “This poor wretch is to be pitied, he knows no better; he comes of a stock from whom he could not learn honesty or any good feeling?” If he has actually committed crime, the safety of society may require that a deterring punishment should be inflicted upon him; but the sentence would be reluctantly passed, and mitigated beyond that which the guilty child of a virtuous parent would have to expect.

Yet are we to be told from our infancy, that on this belief depends our only hope of salvation from eternal misery; and searching the Scriptures to see whether these things are so, or whether the faith is not derived from creeds and catechisms, or from merely imaginary feelings, consequent upon early prejudices, is “controversy”—an inquiry not to be entered upon except by the learned?

As to feelings: the Roman Catholic *feels* as much the protection of the Virgin Mary, who hears her prayers, and intercedes for her, and who has consoled her in all her trying hours in this life. She confesses to her priest; and having received absolution, feels “maintenant pure comme une ange.” Any thing whatever that is taught to an infant, and impressed on his mind with a caution that it is sacred, and not to be

questioned, will return, and be felt through life, by Mahometan or by Christian, Papist or Protestant. All their feelings are upon a par ; and they have much to answer for who have excited them, and forbidden the control of reason, and the unbiassed comparison of them with the words of revelation.

Has the Christian, at his dying hour, to look back (like Struensee,) on a life spent in actual crime? then, if he can be sure of his repentance, the mercy of the all-seeing God is promised him. Who dares to say it cannot be granted on the conditions the Almighty has promised, and that God, according to some fancied scheme, must sacrifice to justice? Or say, that the dying man is not sure of his own sincere repentance;—who dares to tell him that he must rely on some other conditions than those expressly declared? He *ought* to fear and tremble. It is his last and only chance for repentance. Or can the dying Christian look back on a well-spent life? Who dares to take from such an one the comfort of a good conscience, and tell him (in any other than Scripture words), that he may not rely on the promise of a just God, who created him for his happiness, and appointed the conditions, and gave him his talents in measure and limit, according to his will, and will judge him in that measure and scale?

Or does the dying Christian feel a fear and consciousness that he has not done all the good he might, and ought to have done? Is that deficiency to be put upon the footing of a wicked life? is all crime, in every degree, to be confounded, and without distinction? then there is an end of all difference between good and evil conduct in this life of trial.

But if the Christian have been so deficient, where is it told him that the merits of another Being will be accepted as a substitute? or the suffering stand in lieu of his? Let us have our answer *in Scripture words*. It is quite contradictory to all ideas that God has enabled our reason to form either of justice or mercy :—but, (oh monstrous!) that this substituted victim to God's justice, is God himself!!! Answer us not to the question, “What thinkest thou?” but, “How readest thou?” The mercy of an all-seeing God is sufficient for all his creatures to rely on, if they will obey him according to the best of their power, if obedience is the desire of their lives. He wants no schemes or plans, nor need we inquire his means.

Can it make any one unhappy, or “be the author of much pain and misery,” to be reminded that those who in simplicity of heart and mind, like children, desire to obey, are such of whom the



kingdom of heaven is composed?—that of the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of God?

The great commandment, I read, is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;” and “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Is not this the state of mind which we are to strive to attain? Are we to be told we can do nothing of ourselves? Is any one called on beyond the talents given him? “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them.” “Love your enemies, do good, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.” “He is kind to the unthankful, and the evil.” “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful.” Whose words are these? Who adds to them, that the wrath of God is poured on the babe for sins committed ages before he was born? and that “the justice, wisdom, and authority of God must be shaken to its foundation,” if he were to pardon this unoffending child without some satisfaction? Bishop Porteus. Who adds that we must believe that Christ “being God, took our nature upon him, and that it is through his merits only that we can obtain salvation?” Mr. Bowdler, father and son, Dr. Munter,—the Church of England, and the orthodox writers; but they do not so *read*. They slip these

things in, as if they were in Scripture ; and their readers really believe that it is in the Bible they have read them.

But you have said, your sister “has neglected her father’s recommendation to his daughters to study their Bible, and learn the doctrines and principles of Christianity from it, without attending to controversy.” This is what we require, and what the Church forbids. Do you not first give the creeds, and then require them to spend their lives in hearing the orthodox comments, to the exclusion of all others? It is the comments on the comments that you interdict. If I may be allowed to quote an expression, which, though ludicrous, is exactly applicable, “your neutrality is all on one side.” Are not all sermons, all doctrinal books, comments on the Bible? But mark the inconsistency into which the prejudice of an orthodox education has led you upon this very point. About the time of your father’s death, you gave your sisters a Bible, in which the notes and comments exceed the text in bulk, at least five times. The Unitarian edition of Archbishop Newcome’s New Testament has notes certainly not amounting to a twentieth part of the text; so, by way of following their father’s recommendation, and reading the Bible without comment, they are to read only that one in which the

comments exceed those of the other at least one hundred times. 'These comments are to be their daily study, by way of avoiding controversy !

Now the very first words of the book so given, are—*text*, " In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;" *note*, " In the beginning of time, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, made of nothing the whole great and goodly frame," &c. Another note in the same page instructs them, that because the word translated " God " is in the Hebrew plural, therefore " it is reasonable to suppose that the inspired writer designed to intimate the Trinity of persons in the Godhead." To have these strange surmises of men always before their eyes, is to study the Bible without note or comment ! and to be advised to think whether they are part of revelation, is " to be called into controversy—to enter upon an inquiry which they will not be able to ' carry through.' "

I do not understand Hebrew, but when I am thus told that the word Elohim is a plural, has not the learned Hebraist given me his knowledge, and placed me (on that point) perfectly on a par with him ? Then I shall ask him whether he finds the same plural word in any other part of the Bible: and if so, whether it must denote plurality of persons in such other part. (I think

indeed he should have told us unasked.) We unlearned readers too shall ask, why it is not in our Bibles translated "Gods," and we shall also ask, whether, when the Jews for ages read this plural noun in their own language, it ever suggested to them "a plurality of persons in the Godhead;" and if not, how in our age, when the knowledge of the language is comparatively so very imperfect, this nicety is to suggest to us a notion so flagrantly opposite to that absolute unity which distinguished their religion from those of the nations from whom they were separated by the counsel of God.

And what Christian of common education and good sense, is unable to judge of these points, as well as Dr. Mant, or the other learned editor, or the bishops, or writers, whose notes these are?

I have thus taken from the first page of the book, given for the purpose of avoiding controversy, these two samples out of the many, very many instances, wherein the orthodox writers, in their books, "force interpretations to favour their preconceived opinions."

You grant me every thing when you say, the Jew ought to listen to "Christian proofs," provided he thinks the objections are reasonable, and feels that he has the means of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion, but not otherwise. So

that he must think the objections reasonable, before he is at liberty to know what they are ; and so must the orthodox-educated Christian ; and if they do not feel the means of arriving at satisfactory conclusion, they must rest their salvation on the chance that has first befallen them. “ Satisfactory conclusion,” I suppose, means “ conviction.” How can any one be said to believe that is not convinced ? Why am I not as capable of prosecuting the inquiry to conviction as you are ? (I put out of question any complimentary estimate of our several intellects, and speak of the means in our power.) Why not your sisters as well as either of us ? Why not any of us as much as an archbishop of Dublin, or bishop of St. David’s, Peterborough, or London ? We have the same map on which to trace the road ; and, in fact, if you will fairly consider, let me ask which of your sisters has not had manifold more time and leisure to study that map, than you have had in the last seven years, or have at this day, or in immediate prospect ?

I read in the Quarterly Review, (I am only surprised that the quotation should be from Baxter,) “ that Church is happy, in which all are, in Christ’s school, divided into the distinct ranks of teachers and hearers.” We know in which rank the reviewer would place himself, but in

the Church of Christ we are all fellow-disciples ; and in the Gospel, I read, “ call no man Master.” Then, you say, “ they must enter into every question that has agitated the Church for ages.” —No, no, no, into none of them. If they were all forgotten,—if the decrees of councils, and the existence of councils, and the Homoousian and Homoiousian doctrines decided by a casting voice, and all the votes, as to what shall be believed as essential to salvation, and all the jargon of controversialists, were forgotten,—it would be greatly to the advantage of genuine Christianity. It is not we, but you, that suppose the necessity for the study. For if the settling of the points be necessary at all, how and why less necessary for one Christian than another?

We say, they form no part of Christ’s instructions ; and let the differing schoolmen anathematize one another,—we pity both parties, and stand aloof. But when you say, “ above all things it is necessary to believe,”—then every Christian is bound to see and judge whether that is Scripture or not ; and every one has, equally with the most learned, the means of judging ; and where the means and power of any one cease, at that limit ceases his responsibility. If any one says, “ I believe,” and does not understand, and is not convinced of it, he is insincere before the

God to whom he prays. If he humbly confesses his difficulty, he cannot be punished by a just God for want of power. BELIEF IS NOT THE ACT OF THE WILL, and I do maintain, that in whatever degree our wishes influence our belief, *in that degree, to the full, we are insincere in the sight of God*; and I do maintain with Dr. Price, that “he who faithfully wishes to know the truth, and who does his best to discover and to practise it, must be approved by the Deity, and cannot possibly mistake fundamentally. In all his inquiries he is under the superintendence of Heaven,—and that a sincere disposition to receive whatever information God is pleased to give us, may be considered in all cases equivalent to a right belief.” If Price is wrong in this, then must we indeed cast lots, and take our chance; though our chance, (it is not my word, but that of Judge Blackstone, Dr. Nares, and other orthodox writers,) must be better when we follow those who say, “Take nothing from us on trust, but search, and judge for yourselves, whether these things be so; give fair attention to all fair serious instruction, whether from us or our opponents;” than in following those who say, “Take this and abide by it, and dare not to listen to that which may make you doubt whether our exposition of Scripture is right: the Church maintains

it, and that is enough for you unlearned Christians."

We are called "schismatics," but we ought to be called "the excluded." If schism be a sin, it is indisputably from the Church it arises. *We* desire with one accord to offer our common supplications to God; and with one voice to say, "O God, have mercy upon us." And is not this an address that must be fully satisfactory to every believer in God? But the Church insists on adding, "O God the Son, have mercy on us—O God the Holy Ghost, have mercy," &c.—and then, "O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity," (who invented this word?) "three persons in one God, have mercy upon us." Why these additions?—for the purpose (and for the purpose only) of excluding us.

If God consists of three persons, if such is the essence of God, the scriptural address fully includes all that essence. Jesus Christ taught us to address the Father: his Father and our Father, his God and our God. "Schism" is "division"—is it not? Who divides the Church of Christ? Who shews best his reverence for the words and doctrine of Jesus Christ? He who obeys them strictly and literally, or he who paraphrases them according to his own preconceptions?

"After this manner pray ye," was his instruc-



tion ; and the Church, in order to exclude us from joint worship, alters even the address—the name and title of the Being to whom their prayer is offered ; and even forbids its disciples to compare these addresses with the instructions of the Great Revealer of the will of God, lest they should “ have cause to repent of having entered upon such a comparison, or unless they can depend on their knowledge of the language ” in which he spoke.

In that solemn time when Jesus gave the bread to his disciples, he said, “ Do this in remembrance of me ; ” and if a priest says, previously to administering it, “ above all things it is necessary to believe, ” surely he ought to give the words of Christ himself, not human paraphrase, and one that cannot be expressed in scripture language. We have at least a right to require this, and then all the disciples of Christ might join in the communion ; and we have all equally the power, and therefore it must be our duty, to compare the words of the priest with those of the Bible. What is the investigation we call on all Christians to enter into ? Why, to think when they read the Bible, and to think what it is they themselves mean when they pray. Do they address one Being or three ? We call on them for nothing but to think, and not indolently take

for granted, or imagine they can really divest themselves of responsibility in the eyes of the Creator, by leaving it to others — to their Church.

I will now give a quotation from Mr. Bowdler's Sermons. After descanting on the "gospel doctrine of justification," he says, "Here is no easy remission or forgetfulness of sin—the law is enforced in all its rigour—the penalty is imposed—the punishment is inflicted—and if mercy rejoices, it is not in a triumph over justice," &c. —and "the justice of God has been satisfied—more fully satisfied by the perfect righteousness and atoning sacrifice of his Son, than if in its vengeance it had swept from the earth the whole of a guilty race." What horrible ideas does this good man's wild imagination suggest to him, when he has laid by his Bible! He goes on— "Greater than all the rest is that mighty work of salvation, &c. by which he poured on one devoted head the vials of the wrath, which should else have blotted out the fair face of the creation." (Surely this devoted head was another being, not himself!—a Being too, who knew no sin, is the subject of this wrath!) "Marvellous was the redemption planned in the Divine mind, when seeing there was none to help, and wondering (to use the strong language of the prophet) that

there was no intercessor, he himself consented to become the victim," (*i. e.* of his own wrath!) "and to travail in the greatness of his strength for the deliverance of those he loved."

How can you, my dear C——, in your conscience, and in times of sober consideration, say that such things as these being at all times before the eyes and minds of humble Christians, in sermons, books, letters, and memoirs, if any serious persons call their attention to them, and bid them think whether they are consonant with revelation, reason, or common sense, they ought to close their eyes to the inquiry? and can you in your conscience say that those who so read these things, take their creed from the Bible? I look into no Unitarian books to furnish me with answers to any of your positions; and I care not much what orthodox books I open to find these glaring assumptions. Some of the wildest will be from Simeon, Chalmers, Jowett, Bowdler, jun. Serle; but these perhaps you will say are not orthodox. They will say so of you; but let us take the acknowledged orthodox Archbishop Magee, Bishop Horsley, (Porteus I have quoted just before;) they all quit their Bibles, paraphrase till they lose sight of the original, and incorporate their dogmas into it. What is it the Unitarian requires? Why, to call Christians from the dogmas

and reveries of men to the doctrine of Christ, Jesus Christ speaks of those who have done good, and those who have done evil; and separates them accordingly. The Bible every where contrasts the righteous and the wicked, “to receive rewards for deeds done in the flesh, whether they be good, or whether they be evil;” and God has promised “mercy to all who love him, and keep his commandments.” Who is it that has instilled into the minds of meek and humble Christians, that they can do nothing that is pleasing to their Creator—that they have no sure foundation whereon to rest their hope of acceptance, but that of the merits of Christ, and that God himself has suffered for them?—nothing to plead before him in opposition to their own unworthiness? What are the words in which Scripture teaches this? and who contributes most to the peace and the joyful serenity of mind of such humble Christians,—he who recommends to them to rest in the doctrine taught them in their infancy, and not enter into the inquiry whether it is the doctrine of God or of men, or he who reminds them, that in the Bible, and all through it, they will find that the vengeance of God is denounced against crime — his wrath against wilful disobedience; that his doctrine is, “Cease to do evil, learn to do well;” and “His mercy is

towards all who love him, and keep his commandments ;” “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” “Children, father,”—are the terms of the relationship expressed by Christ. We say, let the Christian, who desires to obey, comfort himself by reading the great and glorious book, in every part of which he will find those assurances and consolations. Are we in this recommendation the “authors of pain and misery !” No ! Let those who think God has given them only one talent, seek their happiness in rightly using that one, without fearing that God will require more at their hands. He has promised this in intelligible words ; and of the promise, let no man or Church deprive us.

I have left some of your questions unanswered ; but it is only lest I should tire you by the length of my letters. My part of the subject was, the right and duty of inquiry, and the impossibility of exercising that, by confining ourselves to arguments on one side. I could not compress more than I have done ; but I am not intending to offer more, and am desirous that you should have the last word, so you need not fear my dragging you into tedious correspondence : only to such interrogatories as you put to me I shall not hesitate to reply.

With thanks for the good-will and kind intention in which this correspondence began on your part, and with much esteem and heartfelt regard,

I remain,

Your affectionate Brother,

D.

## LETTER XII.

FROM C—— TO D——.

July, 1826.

MY DEAR D——,

YOUR two long letters of last year ought not to have remained so long unanswered; but your own absence from England, and my very close occupation during that year, induced me to postpone the matter till your return; and the first leisure hours I have had since that time, have been after my own excursion to the continent, now that I am quietly settled in my own study.

The profession you make of undiminished regard, in spite of our conflicting opinions, I trust I can sincerely subscribe to myself; and as the feeling which prompted me, in the first instance, to enter upon this correspondence, was one of affectionate interest in the welfare of those who were dear to me, I doubt not that that

feeling will continue unimpaired to the end. Whatever the issue may be, it will still be my constant prayer that your faith may at length be built on the foundation which the Gospel seems to me to point out as the only ground of pardon and peace with God. Even if any thing had occurred in the course of our discussion which might have produced irritation, there is much in your last letter to disarm resentment; and as it seems to be your wish that this letter should close our correspondence, it will certainly be my object that nothing shall occur in the course of it, which may in any degree interrupt the affection which, I trust, will ever continue to subsist between us.

The subject that first demands my attention, in reply to your letter, is “the right and duty of the disciples of every Church to examine carefully and impartially the doctrines in which they have been brought up.” But before I state to you explicitly and finally my sentiments on that head, I must disclaim, both on my own part and on the part of the Church to which I belong, the charge you repeatedly bring against us, of “forbidding inquiry.” Speaking of the members of the Church of England, you say, “They are called upon by the Church to take every thing for granted—not to criticise—not to reason or object; or if one would point out the obvious



fallacies, not to dare to look at the objections." Again, in illustrating the sort of inquiry you would recommend, you bring forward various passages in explanation of the nature of the glory of Christ, and his unity with the Father; and make me say that persons "will have cause to repent if they use their weak reason in considering Scripture in this way." Speaking of the devotional feelings by which many persons are influenced, you say, "that Church has much to answer for who has so excited them, and forbidden the control of reason, and unbiassed comparison of them with the words of Scripture;" and towards the close of your last letter, you ask, "Do you not first give the creeds, and require them to spend their lives in hearing orthodox comments, to the exclusion of all others?" and after having made various quotations from Bowdler, Chalmers, &c. you say, "Can you, in your conscience, and in times of sober consideration, say, that if any serious persons would call their attention to them, and bid them think whether they are consonant with reason, revelation, or common sense, they ought to close their minds to the inquiry?"

Now as a general answer to all these charges and questions, I assert that neither the Church of England nor I have ever required persons to

take their creeds for granted, or forbidden the unbiassed comparison of them with the words of Scripture. "Search the Scriptures" was the command of our Master Christ; and if we discouraged obedience to that precept, we should indeed deserve the obloquy you attempt to cast upon us. I never met with or heard of any passage in any writer of our Church, which could authorize such a charge; and if any expressions in my own letters have been so misunderstood as to appear to countenance it, I shall be most anxious at once to do away with the erroneous impression. It was by maturely weighing the word of God, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, by expounding one passage through the help of all others in the sacred volume which related to the same point, and by thus reconciling the apparent contradictions which may be found in it, that the errors of the Church of Rome were detected; it is to such practices that we owe the very foundation of our own Church, and the religious freedom we enjoy; and such do we still recommend to all who profess the same faith as ourselves. The eighth article of our Church says, "The three Creeds ought thoroughly to be received and believed,"—and why? because the Church says so? No; but because "they may be proved by most certain warrants

of holy Scripture." The word of God is the test by which we pronounce they are to be tried; and in thus pronouncing, we do in fact invite all who are in communion with us to make use of every faculty with which God has blessed them in satisfying themselves of the consistency of such creeds with the language and tenor of Scripture. But when once they are convinced, from such a diligent comparison as I have above described, that such is the work of God, we then tell them that "reason, revelation, and common sense" combine, requiring that they should submit to it with implicit obedience. The very highest use of reason we conceive to be, to bow to the word of Him who gave it; and to listen with the child-like docility of Samuel, when he said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

You seem to have conceived that the inquiry which I discourage is that which I now declare I most earnestly invite all to enter upon; and I do most solemnly and conscientiously assure you that all the expressions which have led you into this error, were prompted by the fallacies, as they appear to me, in translation and exposition, which I have noticed in Unitarian writers. Some of those fallacies the reader's own common sense will enable him to answer; but when he is told the translation he has been in the habit of using

is a wrong one; that passages which he has been accustomed to refer to, as the warrants for his belief, do not in the original convey the meaning he has been wont to attach to them; he is unable to answer the objection to the received translation, though its absurdity may be palpable to those who are more conversant with the original, and he is left in a distressing state of uncertainty. The inquiry then which I declared a person might repent of entering upon was the field of controversy and criticism: I agree with you in believing that they never can repent of a diligent and unbiassed comparison of their creed and form of prayer with the word of God. I have of course myself gone through such a comparison, and that with fervent prayer that the Holy Ghost would enlighten my understanding, and enable me to judge without partiality and without hypocrisy. I arose from the study with increased conviction and consolation, and have therefore no reason to doubt that any who shall apply themselves to the same investigation will reap the same fruits from it.—(See Appendix, Note A. *sub. fin.*)

The Bible is happily now in every body's hands; and in this most inquiring age, religious inquiry keeps pace with others. There are probably at this moment more individuals searching

the Scriptures than were ever to be found in this country ; and if truth lies with you, it will doubtless soon prevail in this age of universal investigation. It is the fashion of the day to take nothing for granted ; and I do most seriously hope that this general bearing of men's minds may induce all who have not done so, so to search the Scriptures as to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in them.

As to the case you refer to, the demand made by the gentleman was undoubtedly to be condemned ; it can never be right indiscriminately to close the door against all inquiry. Each person must judge for himself, when the occasion offers, whether the peculiar line of investigation proposed is calculated to lead to any profitable result ; whether it will not rather " minister questions than godly edifying, which is in faith ;" and if they are conscientiously convinced that their faith is likely to receive no improvement from it, then let them decline it, but not otherwise.

I will now proceed to your answers to my citations of Scripture. In reference to Rom. ix. 5, you say you do not admit that the term " above all " applies to Christ ; and even if it did, still you think that as Christ was the founder of a new dispensation which superseded the Mosaic, and

as his kingdom was to endure for ever, this character would justify the title "above all." As to its not applying to Christ, it appears to me that common sense and common grammar both pronounce it to be referable to him alone; and here is the stumbling-block which presents itself *in limine* to any one who thinks of the Unitarian doctrines and Unitarian interpretations of Scripture. Scripture speaks in terms so plain that he who runs may read; it was written for mankind at large, an enormous proportion of whom are plain uninformed men, little capable of understanding language in any other manner than the known and customary one. If the obvious meaning of words be not the true one, then the Scriptures were written for the enlightened and educated portion of mankind alone, and common sense has little chance of ever arriving at the truth. The man of plain common sense, for whose use I understand the word of God was meant, could never for a moment doubt who the term, "over all," applied to; he would see that there was nothing in the context of the passage limiting the expression to a particular dispensation, but that it was an unqualified expression of supremacy; and his first and obvious impression would be confirmed, when he found that Being, for whom this supremacy was claimed,

was instantly afterwards termed the "Blessed God;" and should any one suggest to him the objections which you have brought forward, he would say Scripture is meant for plain men, and if such shifts and subtleties are necessary for understanding it, such as we are had better shut it up, for it cannot be meant for us. If I am to renounce my belief in Christ's absolute supremacy, I may as well also deny the absolute supremacy of God, although it is declared as plainly as words can express it, Eph. iv. 6.

These observations contain the substance of one great reason why I am not a Unitarian; because, as far as I have seen, if I adopted your belief, I must, in instances without number, interpret Scripture according to what, by a very remote possibility, and by a very forced construction, it might mean, abandoning the plain and obvious sense; in others, I must adopt readings for which there is no authority whatever, or submit to shifts and constructions, equally revolting to grammar and common sense; and because it is my firm conviction, that if you were to set a man of plain but sound understanding, who never heard of controversy, down to the study of the Bible, and bid him, from the prophecies of the Old Testament relating to Christ, and the character given of him in the New, make out

what order of being he was, he could rise with no other belief than that he was God and man; bid him also find out the terms on which God had covenanted to save Christians, and he could only answer, faith in the redemption which Christ had wrought, by dying for sinners; and repentance, bringing forth a life which should answer to that faith. As to your question, whether I would let a pupil, translating a profane author, construe *ὁ ὢν*, "who is," without at least remarking that it is not literal, I assure you, that I believe those who are under me to be so familiar with that idiom, that I should not have thought it worth stopping them to make the observation. By the bye, you seem to fancy that our translation runs, "who is God over all things, blessed," &c.; the words occur in this order, in exact conformity with the arrangement in the original, "who is over all, God blessed for evermore."

In the course of your discussion of this passage you admit that Irenæus and Tertullian were Trinitarians. If you have attended to the evidence which the other Ante-nicene fathers gave to the prevalent opinions of their time upon the subject of the Trinity, I am at a loss to conceive how you can imagine the Church for the three first centuries had any other belief than that of the divinity of Christ. Your interpretation of



the passage from Irenæus, "How can man go to God, unless God has come to man?" is another instance of that forced and figurative meaning which the Unitarian is so often compelled to give to passages in preference to the obvious sense, and that which the context would seem to require.

Your criticism upon Phil. ii. 6, &c. surprises me still more. You say, "Rich as he (Christ) was in power to procure all that is desirable in the world, he (ἐπτωχέυσε) lived poor, and exposed to suffering for our sakes;" and add, "You may not agree with me in this construction; but you cannot deny that this is tenable, if not convincing." It appears to me to be not only not convincing, but untenable. Common sense would immediately object that you have represented an opposition between a poor and a rich man, as dwelt upon in the passage; whereas, upon reference to the whole context, there is not the slightest appearance of any such thing. The statement refers to one who was "made in the likeness of men," and was "formed in fashion as a man," not as a poor man. The contrast evidently lies between man, and some other being than man; what the character of that being was we learn from its being stated that he was in the form of God, and οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ. You say ἀρπαγμὸς is not

robbery. Æschines, one of the purest writers of Attic Greek uses it in this sense. You say *ἴσα* is not equal. Granted : it literally means “ things equal,” used here as the neuter plural instead of the adverb. *Τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ* literally means “ to be equally with God,” an expression not English : the least possible violation of the literal construction, so as to reconcile the phrase to the English idiom, is to render it “ to be equal with God.” Then you ask, “ Is there meaning in the words, ‘ God thought it not robbery to be equal with God ? ’ ” This is equivalent I suppose to asking what meaning there is in the words, “ Three persons in one God.” If the doctrine of the Church on that subject be true, God the Son is equal to God the Father ; and that is the meaning I attach to the words.

Speaking of those who believe in that doctrine, you say, “ I am very sure, that if they had the Bible before them, and no creed preceding their perusal of it, they would never find it there, even in the received text and version. It is difficult to find persons in these times who have never heard of creeds before they read the Bible ; but it appears to me, that the most satisfactory way of ascertaining the truth of your remark, will be to observe what doctrines those persons found in the Bible, who certainly could

have their minds prejudiced by no creed, save that which they received from the mouth of the Apostles, or which they learned from the inspired writings;—such was the only teaching that Barnabas had, and yet he says,—“*Ad hoc Dominus sustinuit pati pro animâ nostrâ cum sit orbs terrarum Dominus; cui dixit die ante constitutionem sæculi. Faciamus, &c.*”—(*Eph.* c. v.) Again he says,—“For if he had not come in the flesh, how could we men have been saved when we looked at him? For when men look at the sun, the work of his hands, which will cease to exist, they have not the power to face his rays,” (c. v.) Compare with this Gen. i. 16, “And God made two great lights.”

Let us next see what Clement of Rome believed while as yet unschooled by creeds and articles. In his first Epistle he says,—“Ye have all been humble-minded and arrogant in nothing, subjected rather than subjecting, giving rather than receiving; being satisfied with the supplies sent from God, and paying careful attention to his words, ye have fixed them deeply in your minds, and his sufferings were before your eyes.” Again he says,—“But it is faith in Christ which confirmeth all things; for he himself thus calleth us by the Holy Ghost, ‘Come, ye children,’ &c.” quoting Ps. xxxiv. 11—19. (*Ep. I. c. xxxii.*) Trying

Ignatius by the same test, we find him opening his Epistle to the Ephesians with these words,— “Ignatius to the church at Ephesus, which was preordained before the worlds, according to the will of the Father, and of Jesus Christ our God.” Again, “There is one Physician, fleshly, spiritual, made and not made, God born in the flesh, true life and death, both of Mary and God, first capable of suffering, and then incapable.” These words expressly assert the two natures of Christ. (*Ep. ad Eph. c. vii.*) But you say such an equivocation is unworthy a Christian; I will only reply, that no one need be ashamed of such an imputation when he finds he has to share it with those who were the approved companions and acknowledged disciples of the Apostles themselves; and as to the object I had in view in quoting these passages, since I find that Barnabas, Clement, and Ignatius, without creed preceding, arrived at the same conclusion that I have, namely, that Christ was God, and also the Creator of the world, I am little inclined to distrust that “Orthodox education” to which you seem to attribute the inferences I draw from the study of the Scriptures.

What now becomes of Priestley’s bold and groundless assertion, that “we find nothing like divinity ascribed to Jesus Christ before Justin

Martyr?" (*Hist. Corr.* Vol. I. p. 32); or that "Justin Martyr is the first writer who mentions the miraculous conception?" (*Hist. Early Op.* Vol. IV. p. 107.)

You accuse me of blinking the question about the translation of the word *αἰῶνας*, Heb. i. 2. The mode I took of settling its meaning in that passage, namely, by referring to St. Paul's use of it in other parts of his writings, appears to me to be far more satisfactory than bringing forward instances of its use in other authors. The passage I adduced was Heb. xi. 3, which you say confutes me,—“for the writer himself explains it otherwise in express terms,”—“whether they be thrones, principalities, powers,” &c. —referring, I conclude, to Col. i. 16; but the reference seems to me in no degree to weaken my argument from Heb. xi. 3, to shew that *αἰῶνες* there must mean “the visible creation:” τὰ βλεπόμενα is undoubtedly put in opposition with *αἰῶνες*, and interprets it. Your question, “Can principalities and powers be visible in the same sense in which the sun and stars are visible?” only shews that it was for want of looking a little more closely into the passage in the Colossians that you did not discover that the “principalities and powers” there spoken of are an enumeration of the invisible things, of

which, as well as of the visible things, whether in heaven or earth, Christ is there declared the Creator. Your objection, therefore, being irrelevant, I still believe the question to be set at rest as to the true meaning of the word *αἰῶνες* in Heb. i. 2, and that it does there mean “worlds.”

You again refer me to Col. i. 16, and ask if I would let a pupil construe *ἐγένετο*, “were created.” The word used by St. Paul is not *ἐγένετο*, but *ἐκτίσθε*, a term agreed, I believe, on all hands, to be expressive of “Creator.” I suppose, however, you were thinking of John i. 3, at the time, and boldly assert that the word *γίνομαι* and its inflexions never bear the sense of “created” in the New Testament. I fear you have relied upon the authority of the Improved Version for this assertion;—let us see how it is borne out by fact. Referring to James iii. 9, we find this expression, *τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν Θεοῦ γεγονότας*. No one, I think, can doubt that St. James meant this for a version of the expression in Gen. i. 27,—“God *created* man in his own image;” in the image of God *created* cannot be doubted.

The inference you draw from the beginning of the Apostles’ Creed, as to the belief of the framers of that creed with respect to the Creator

of the world, seems to be by no means conclusive. The belief of the Apostles, that Christ was the Creator of the world, is stated in their own writings as clearly as language can express it; and that we understand the passages declaratory of that fact in the right way, the testimony of the apostolic fathers above cited give us a convincing proof. Such unanswerable evidence as to the opinions of the early Christians upon this point cannot be overthrown by your appeal to the opening of the Apostles' Creed, which is consistent with the belief I entertain, insomuch as the passage from Heb. i. 2 declares that God made the world, by his Son. He, therefore, who says that "God the Father was Maker of heaven and earth" may also believe and confess, in conformity with the repeated declarations of Scripture, and especially of the passage above referred to, that by Christ "all things were made," and that by him "the Father made the worlds." There can be no doubt that the framers of the Nicene Creed held Christ to be the Creator, and yet they hold the same language as to the Father being Maker of heaven and earth; so that your argument from the language of the Apostles' Creed, as to the belief of those who framed it, is inconclusive.

As to the "great surrender" which you seem

to think I have made with reference to the period at which the disclosure of Christ's divine nature was formally made to the Apostles, I think you have been too hasty in drawing your inference from my last letter. I declared, in my letter of January, 1824, that I conceived the disclosure not to have taken place till the descent of the Holy Ghost; and because in my last I stated that it was not to be expected that the Apostles should enter at once in their preaching into the higher mysteries and doctrines, till their converts were established in their belief of Christ's divine legation, you immediately conclude that I have "shifted the period further still," *i. e.* the period of disclosure to the Apostles—a conclusion evidently not deducible from my words; and the "surrender" I have made is nothing.

In the course of your remarks upon that head, you take upon yourself to make one of those bold and unwarrantable assertions for which the Unitarian school of the present day seem so unhappily distinguished. You venture, without reserve, to pronounce that there is no such text as "the Church of God," (Acts xx. 28,) and reprove me for making no use of my Griesbach,—"I fear you have made no use of the last edition of your Griesbach,"—(London, 1818), and reprint of the smaller edition of 1805, in



which it appears that a remarkable change had taken place in the mind of the great critic as to this reading, founded, probably, upon his subsequent knowledge that the Vatican MS. agreed with the received text on this head. You have trusted again, probably, to the Improved Version, when it tells you that "the received text rests upon no MS. of note or value;" whereas it happens that the oldest MS. of the original Greek, viz. the Vatican, and the oldest MS. of the oldest version, viz. the Syriac, support the received reading. Equally unfounded is the assertion of the Unitarians, that the expression, "the blood of God," is not quoted by the earliest ecclesiastical writers. Ignatius says,—“Being imitators of God, having animated yourselves by the *blood of God*, ye have performed perfectly the congenial work.”—(*Ep. ad Eph. in initio.*) Clement of Alexandria speaks of the power of God the Father, and the *blood of God the Son.* Tertullian says,—“I well know we are not our own, but bought with a price—and what sort of price?—*the blood of God.*”—*Ad Uxorem, II.*

Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria might be added; but enough has been adduced to show how groundless the assertion is. I fear, however, you have been misled by it, and such-like declarations; for had you been aware of the real state

of the case, I cannot imagine you would have permitted yourself to call Acts xx. 28 “a palpable forgery.”—(P. 154.)

Imagining that, by this round assertion, you really have destroyed all the evidence as to the doctrine of Christ’s divinity drawn from this text, you say, “I have produced no evidence at all of the revelation,” as if in adducing that text I had been recapitulating the proofs in general, and not merely brought it forward with reference to the Acts of the Apostles, and with the view of shewing at what period St. Paul certainly was acquainted with the doctrine of the deity of the Son.

But after all, it is comparatively of little importance to ascertain the period at which the Apostles were fully convinced upon this point, provided I am satisfied that they, writing under the influence of inspiration, have revealed it to me. “Evidence that it is revealed,” you say, “must be essential to belief.” Of course it must; and what more convincing evidence can I wish for, than the fact that the Apostles, speaking by the Holy Ghost, proclaim Christ to be “God,” “Creator of the world,”—and an object of worship? If I wished to lay before you all the grounds deducible from the New Testament upon which I rest my conviction that the Apostles were sooner or later inspired to announce those

facts to the world, I certainly should not have stopped short with that one expression in the Acts; nor should I have been contented with "a few disputed passages," which you seem to think the only support the Trinitarian has for his belief in the divinity of Christ.

That the passages are disputed, seems to make but little in favour of the inference you would draw from the use of the expression; for if they were not disputed, the controversy would be at an end. As to their being few, that I deny; for they are many score which, directly or by natural inference, express the doctrine, even omitting the two which you call palpable forgeries: *e. g.* Christ called God: John i. 1; Rom. ix. 5; Matt. i. 23, &c.; Isaiah vii. 14; 2 Pet. i. 1; Heb. i. 8, 9; Rev. xxi. 5, 7, compared with Rev. i. 11, iii. 21; Tit. ii. 13; 1 John v. 20; John i. 23, compared with Isa. xl. 3; and Malachi iii. 1. Eternity ascribed to him: Rev. i. 10, ii. 8, compared with Isa. xxi. 17. Omnipresence: Matt. xviii. 20, xxviii. 20. Immutability: Heb. xiii. 8; Ps. cii. 27, compared with Heb. i. 10. Creator: John i. 3; Col. i. 16; Heb. i. 10, 12. Worship: Heb. i. 6; Phil. ii. 9—11; Acts vii. 59, 60; 1 Thess. iii. 11, 12; 2 Thess. iii. 5; 2 Cor. xii. 8; Eph. vi. 23; Acts ix. 14; 1 Cor. i. 1, &c. &c. Again,

I find St. Paul placing that sort of general and unqualified trust in the Lord Jesus, which scripture and common sense tell us is due to God alone. "I trust in the Lord to send Timotheus shortly unto you," (Phil. ii. 19.) Imagine Daniel saying, "I trust in Moses to send Azariah shortly unto you." Presently afterwards, (ver. 24,) St. Paul adds, "I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly." Who can he be but God, who controls by his especial providence the movements of men? David tells us that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;" and I cannot doubt but that St. Paul looked on him, in whom he thus trusted, as very God. (I have omitted the passages from the Old Testament, as well as many from the New, in proof of the deity of Christ, because these are, I imagine, entirely sufficient.)

With such unequivocal testimony before me, if I am to believe that Christ was not God, I should certainly say (in answer to your question upon that head) that I must find it somewhere expressly declared that he is not God. You ask, "Do we expect it should be said that Adam was not God?" Certainly not, I answer; because nothing is elsewhere said of Adam, which could lead persons into any mistake as to his nature. And although Jchovah says to Moses, "I have

made thee a god unto Pharaoh," yet as it has been evident ever since these words were written that they are used metaphorically, inasmuch as no individual to this day ever thence inferred that Moses really was God, I should expect no counter-declaration to be made as a caution against such a belief. But when accumulated declarations are made both in the Old and New Testament of the divine nature of Christ; and when most of the divine attributes are assigned to him in terms so distinct, that even those who conversed with the Apostles themselves were (according to you) misled by them, and ninety-nine hundredths of the christian world have from that time to this been equally deceived by them; then indeed I should imagine that he who foresaw the evident conclusions that would be drawn from the expressions, would have guarded against consequences by some assertion that Christ was "only man," and was "not God."

In answer to my assertion, that as the word of God has been revealed to us in a foreign language, our belief as to what is or is not declared therein must in part rest on human authority, you object that I thereby "reduce the inquirer to a state of misery and despair; he cannot know which authority to prefer, yet he must choose, he must believe, or perish everlastingly." I reply,

in your own words, that all are bound to "the honest exercise of the talents which God has measured out to them," and to use "the means he has afforded them in their peculiar station." It is a question which rests between God and their own consciences, what those means and talents are, and whether they have exercised and used them as they ought. In case they have, I do not believe that any error into which they may be led will be fatal to them; but that those who were the authors of it will be responsible in the sight of God.

The question between us and the Unitarians rests upon an appeal to the words of Scripture; and supposing two persons unacquainted with the ancient languages were to be arguing upon the point in dispute, how it is possible that either party should proceed without appealing to the opinions of the learned as to the meaning of certain passages, or without referring to some authority for believing that such and such words are or are not the revealed word of God, I am at a loss to imagine; and if they do make this reference, they do so far forth acknowledge that their belief rests on human authority.

For instance, the member of the Church of England maintains that Christ was the Creator of the world, and quotes the beginning of St.

John's Gospel ; the Unitarian says, No, the word which your version translates "created" occurs so many hundred times in the New Testament, and never elsewhere signifies "created." Here he relies on the authority of the Improved Version in support of his peculiar creed ; and so in an infinite number of other cases it must be ; so that the mass of the members of your profession must really believe, in a considerable degree, upon human authority, unless indeed they proceed according to that course, which I fear is too common with them, viz. to reason first, and then try whether the word of God agrees with the result of their own lucubrations ; at least, if this be not the case, and if they do pledge themselves to abide by the word of God, whatever it may declare to them, it seems to me absurd to maintain that the Unitarian's belief has nothing to do with the corrections of corrupt or misconstrued texts.

As I never attacked the authors of the Improved Version for having undertaken to give a new translation to the world, it is needless for me to reply to your defence of them ; the only fault I have to find with them is for having misled people by such notes as that to John i. 3, and Acts xx. 28, to which I have before referred. But when you attack the Church of England for

not adding a note of caution to certain passages which you refer to, intimating that the Apostle did not write them, I would answer, that I should be exceedingly sorry to find our Church following the example of the Unitarians in denouncing passages at once as positively spurious, because there are doubts as to their authenticity. The Unitarian may think himself justified in pronouncing Acts xx. 28 a palpable forgery; but whether expressions somewhat more measured might not have been more appropriate, I leave you to judge from the observations I have elsewhere made upon the subject. If you ask me whether it would not be better for every one to know the state of the argument for and against such passages, I allow most willingly that it would; but when once the door is opened to note and comment, where is it to end? Besides, the advantages of giving the Bible without note or comment are so very great, that they will counterbalance any evil that might be derived from the omission of any remark as to the doubts that some persons entertain as to the genuine reading; and while the learned are still at variance, it would be premature for the Church to come to any conclusion, and stamp a given reading with the seal of their authority. The evidence as to Acts xx. 28 has materially varied



within the last thirty years, by the examination of the Vatican MS. ; so that desirable as it would be in the abstract that each person should, at each given period, be aware of the grounds on which each reading rests, yet practically it is beset with many difficulties, and we must be content to put up with that which I believe is the least evil of the two, viz. publishing one Bible, without any note whatever.

And as I am upon the subject of our Church, I will notice another grave charge which you bring against it. You say that the Church, "in order to divide and exclude us from joint worship, alter even the address, the name, and title of the Being to whom their prayer is offered ;" and therefore maintain that the offence of schism rests with the Church. Now this appears to me to be simply begging the question as to whether the primitive Christians did, or did not, worship Christ ; it is assuming that St. Stephen and St. Paul did not pray to Christ as a divine person ; that "calling upon the name of the Lord," does not mean offering prayer to Jesus, &c. &c.; that Pliny's authority goes for nothing, when he tells us that the early Christians used to "sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as a God." But if, as I am entirely convinced, the worship of Christ has, from the Apostles' time

downwards, ever formed an essential part of christian worship, then it must follow that those who refused to join in such adoration were the true schismatics. Supposing at this moment the Church were to say to the body of Unitarians, We will expunge from our Liturgy the objectionable titles in the opening of the Litany and elsewhere, but we will not abandon that which we are fully persuaded to be apostolic, namely, the worship of Jesus, think you an union could be effected? Certainly not with those who hold him to be a mere man. How unfair it is then to maintain that schism rests with the Church, and to reproach it for not depriving its members of that consolation in difficulties and trials which it perceives St. Paul received in so abundant a manner from addressing his petitions to the Saviour. You will, perhaps, maintain that Christ's own words, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing," (John xvi. 23,) should overbalance any argument drawn from the example of St. Paul; the answer to which is, that ἐρωτήσετε there signifies, "ask questions," and not offer petitions to, "αἰτέω" being in that chapter used to signify the latter; and that our Lord himself authorizes us to pray to him, when he says, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it," (John xiv. 14.) A large portion of your last

letter is occupied with quotations from Trinitarian writers, (some of our Church, others, Chalmers at least, not,) whose language you object to, and I think not without reason in some instances. For example, when speaking of the atonement, I never would go the length of saying, that it was impossible the Deity should have saved mankind in any other way than by accepting a vicarious sacrifice; I should content myself with proving from Scripture that that was the method he had thought fit to adopt, and should therefore conclude that it was the most proper one. Such expressions as "God's conflicting attributes" had better be avoided, perhaps; but if the doctrine of the atonement be scriptural, I think it will be difficult for any one to conceive of it without some such idea occurring to him. Nor, as I think, can any one who holds your belief, and acknowledges that a Being both just and merciful will sit in judgment upon mankind, avoid imagining that there must be a sort of equipoise between his justice and his mercy, which might metaphorically be called "a conflict," without any great violation of propriety.

As to the persons who you believe to imagine that they have met with the words "incarnation of God," "vicarious sacrifice," &c. &c. in the Bible;

if there be such, it is certainly not for me to defend them. However, enumerating several expressions of a similar character, you challenge me to produce the passages from the common English translation, which, as I conclude you to mean, will justify the use of them; for I presume you do not expect that I should produce texts in which those very words occur; or that you will go the length of saying, that no one should in a sermon use the term "vicarious sacrifice," because those two words do not occur consecutively in the Bible, even though he should be able to prove that the idea is founded upon scripture truth.

Let me, then, take your catalogue of expressions, and see whether they are, or are not borne out by Scripture. "Incarnation of God," John i. 1, 14. "His taking upon him our nature:" Phil. ii. 7. "Of two natures in Jesus Christ—his human nature, and his divine nature." For his divine nature, see the various passages I have quoted in a former part of my letter; for his human nature, Heb. ii. 17. "Vicarious sacrifice:" Isa. liii. 5; 1 Pet. iii. 18; John i. 29; 1 Pet. ii. 24; 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. iii. 25; 1 John ii. 2; Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14; Heb. x. 10—12. "Satisfaction to the justice of God:" all the passages in which Christ is spoken of as having

reconciled " God to man, and to have been a propitiation " for their sins. For if God became reconciled to mankind through Christ, his anger must have been previously kindled ; and if kindled, justly so, of course ; so that if Christ's death was the means of appeasing that wrath, which if unappeased would have led the Deity to exert his justice in punishing sin, Christ's death was a satisfaction to the justice of God. The other expressions you quote are so implied in those of " vicarious sacrifice," and " satisfaction to the justice of God," that I think they need not be separately justified.

You elsewhere ask me, " In what part of the English Bible do we read ' that the first thing is, to be convinced that we can do nothing towards our own salvation ;' that we must rely solely on the merits of Jesus Christ ?" As to the former expression, it will be necessary to come to a right understanding as to what is meant to be conveyed by it. If it mean, that I could of myself have done nothing by which I could have gained a title to heaven ; and that if I should at length attain to it, it be of God's infinite mercy, and not of my own merits ; I will undertake to support that interpretation of it by Luke xvii. 10 ; Tit. iii. 4, 5 ; Eph. ii. 8, 9. If, on the other hand, it mean that I am not to work just as diligently

as if I could save myself without any exercise of mercy on the part of God, as that is not the doctrine of the Church of which I am a member, and as it is decidedly unscriptural, I shall leave those to defend it who maintain it.

As to relying solely on the merits of Jesus Christ, that is a necessary consequence of the doctrine of the atonement. If we were to substitute "mercy of God," for "merits of Jesus Christ," you I suppose would acknowledge that to be consistent with revelation; and I who maintain that the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ is the efficient cause of God's mercy being extended to mankind, of course say, that those who hope for pardon must rely solely on what "Christ has done for them,"—an expression tantamount to "the merits of Christ;" and when you say, "I read that whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy," and would thence infer, that by confessing and forsaking sin alone we are pardoned, independently of any thing Christ has done for us, it is just as unreasonable in you thus to take a part for the whole, as it would be for me to say, that because I read, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son," we may therefore obtain pardon without either confessing or forsaking sin.

You next find fault with Struensee for not

requiring an argument in favour of the mysteries of our religion, after being satisfied of the truth of revelation. Why should he? He was convinced that the Bible was the word of God—he found those mysteries distinctly revealed in it; and with the humility of a Christian, he hesitated not to acknowledge the truth. Had he, after being satisfied, required proofs from human reason to assure him of the truth of what was therein contained, he must virtually have held such language as this, “I will not believe what I am convinced God hath spoken, until I see good reason to satisfy me that he ought so to have spoken.”

Upon the principle which you appear to maintain in thus condemning Struensee, it really would seem to me that you must also condemn Abraham for having such implicit faith as to obey the Almighty message which bid him slay his son, without requiring to be convinced of the reasonableness of a command so contrary to the best feelings of his own nature, and to all that he knew of the divine attributes. The Unitarian frequently complains of the imputation so unjustly cast upon him, of making Scripture bow to reason. Indeed, my dear D——, I do not see how you at any rate can complain of such a charge after your strictures upon Struensee; if at least I compre-

hend your meaning when you blame Dr. Munter for omitting to mention one single argument, which induced Struensee to acknowledge the mysteries after he believed the Bible to be the word of God.

“ Thus saith the Lord ” was argument enough for him ; and the whole tenor of the account shews that Struensee felt there was no alternative between rejecting the Bible, or acknowledging the mysteries.

As bearing upon the point, I was a good deal struck with a conversation I had with a young man in the course of my travels this summer. He was I found of Unitarian connexions, and had been educated as such ; he told me, however, that he had been induced to abandon that communion partly from perceiving how much, (I am using his own words,) the Unitarians converted Reason into a sort of god ; and how ill suited their independent notions with respect to divine assistance, and the natural strength of man, were to beings of such frailties and infirmities as ourselves.

The declamation in which you indulge to prove the impropriety of God’s accepting the death of his Son as a propitiation for the sins of the world, illustrated by the anecdote of the Italian refugee, and the Chinese demand, is only to be answered by the fact that he did accept it. See



Rom. iii. 25; 1 John ii. 2; Rom. v. 10, 11; 1 John iv. 10. And as to arguing in the way you do, as to what may or may not be fitting for the Almighty to do in his economy of the universe, it seems to me as presumptuous as for the fly on St. Paul's to criticise the beauty and proportion of the whole building, having not the slightest idea of the relation which the parts bear to each other.

And this, after all, is the hinge upon which the whole question between you and me really turns—here is the gulf which separates us, and, after all the sheets we have written, we are just where we were when we began; because, when you read that “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,” you refuse your assent to the declaration until your reason is satisfied that God ought to have been reconciled by such means, until you have tried every link in the chain of the argument, and found them all sound. I look for no chain of argument, and seek not to be wise above what is written, convinced of the weakness of human reason, and its inability to fathom the deep counsels of God.

That we are both conscientiously convinced that the principle we have adopted is the right one, I trust the Searcher of all hearts will here-

after testify; as long, however, as I believe that God has pronounced an essential union between belief and salvation (salvation meaning generally, as I shewed in a former letter, pardon from sin and acceptance with God), so long shall I continue to pray that He will have mercy on all those who have erred and are deceived. And now, with the most affectionate wishes and prayers in behalf of S—— and yourself, I will conclude in the words of the pious Baxter,—“While we wrangle here in the dark, we are dying, and passing to that world which will decide all our controversies; and the safest passage thither is by peaceable holiness.”—*History of his own Times.*

Ever your truly affectionate Brother,  
C.

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## A P P E N D I X.

*Note A. see p. 188.*

July, 1826.

I FIND I have omitted here to remark upon some observations which occur towards the close of your second letter, on the subject of the copy of Ment's Bible, which I gave my mother and

sisters. Just so far as that can be fairly considered as inviting them to enter upon controversy, so far I at any rate cannot refuse any invitation to them on your part to read the answers to the controversial arguments therein contained. It will be for them to judge how far their belief has been influenced by what you call the Trinitarian glosses—how far they are conscientiously called upon to study the replies to them.

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FROM D—— TO C——.

November, 1826.

[In answer to a private letter, not included in the foregoing extract.]

—— In answer to the postscript to yours of the 10th instant. Of course I do not wish to press you to send me the observation you say you have written, without the preparation you think requisite, nor to hurry you at a time when your duties leave you no leisure for this correspondence. I shall now receive them (as I have some former ones) when absent from my own books and memorandums,—not of much importance, however, then or now; but as you say you are waiting to read the “Testimonies of the Antenicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ,” it is

but fair to let you anticipate my want of interest in the result of your labour. You may prove that they all believed it ; and I am ready to presuppose their belief, and save you the trouble of proving it. We know, from the highest authority, that corruption of doctrine and false opinions as to the person of Christ arose even in the time of the Apostles ; and if those subsided, others might become prevalent in their stead. If, indeed, you look into that book for *argument*, I shall, no doubt, find *that* more interesting ; but I admit no human *authority* without reasoning. As to reasoning against divine authority, it is madness ; but not to *reason* upon the *construction* of it is not to receive it.

I read the Scriptures without comment,—I enter upon the consideration of them with all the powers of my reason and understanding. I read them also *with* the comments and explanation of other persons, and particularly of those who differ from me. Now, whether I read them with or without comment, I am satisfied that the Apostles not only did not believe in, but never surmised or thought of the Godhead of Jesus Christ (except in reprobating the doctrines of the Gnostics): and, therefore, concerning the surmises of the Fathers I am very indifferent.

D.

Dec. 23.

Your letter of the 20th of November has saved me some trouble in pursuing my inquiries into the belief of the Ante-Nicene fathers upon the Godhead of Jesus Christ; and I assure you that my first impression upon finding that you rejected all conclusions drawn from their writings, as to the prevailing belief of the Church in their days, was, "what a desperate cause must that be which is compelled to such a resource as this." The Unitarian certainly is placed between the horns of a fearful dilemma; he must either deny that the apostolic fathers, those who were acknowledged by them as their disciples and companions, are credible witnesses as to the fact of what was the belief of the Apostles and the early Christians, as to the Godhead of Jesus Christ; or unable to maintain such an opinion as this, he must attempt the hopeless task of shewing that these said fathers did not hold the doctrine in question: either alternative seems to me so absurd, that I am at a loss to say which is the most so. As to the one you have adopted, you give this as a reason for it: "We know, from the highest authority, that corruptions of doctrine, and false opinions as to the person of Jesus Christ, arose even in the time of the Apostles; and if these subsided, others might have become

prevalent in their stead ;” that is to say, because the Apostles tell us there were certain persons in their own times who perverted the truth, we are therefore to confound all the early converts together, to maintain that none of them are worthy of credit, and put those persons who were their approved companions and disciples upon a level with those whom they denounce as persons who had erred from the truth. Let us suppose the case of a disputed will:—the testator hints at some persons who would be ready to put an improper construction upon it ; therefore, when it comes before the jury, the intimate friends and companions of the testator, those who heard him declare the sense in which he wished the several clauses to be understood, are not to be examined—their evidence is to be set aside—and why ? because it is known that there were some persons who perverted the truth respecting them. If this be the course that common sense would pursue, I am much mistaken ; nor need you, I think, be surprised that you cannot get persons to listen to the Unitarian arguments, if, *in limine*, you call upon them for such a surrender of the principles which guide them in the common course of life.

You also say that you are satisfied the Apostles not only did not believe in, but never surmised

or thought of the Godhead of Jesus Christ, excepting in reprobating the doctrine of the Gnostics. I will only remark upon this, that if St. John wrote the first chapter of his Gospel with that view, he adopted the most extraordinary method of refuting them; for if St. John really believed in the simple humanity of Jesus Christ, and yet wrote that chapter to confute the Gnostics, he has completely betrayed his own cause, and played into his adversaries' hands, since that introduction was one of the great bases on which they support the truth of their tenets. That St. John, with the very object of overthrowing these tenets, should have been so simple and imbecile as to write in such a manner as to countenance their errors, is really too incredible to be conceived.

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Until the following statement can be satisfactorily answered, I think I am not going too far in using the expression:—

“ If the Apostles preached, and the early  
 “ Christians believed, as the Unitarians tell us,  
 “ that Jesus Christ was a mere man, the notion  
 “ of his divinity could not have been introduced  
 “ and finally established in the Church without

“ long controversy and continued opposition.  
“ Historians would not have been silent as to  
“ the progress of so great a change—such a  
“ total revolution in the religious belief of  
“ Christians. Volumes must have been written  
“ in support of either doctrine. The writers of  
“ one age would be found to differ from those  
“ who preceded them ; and since we have works  
“ remaining of all the three first centuries, we  
“ should find traces of all those successive  
“ changes which must have existed between the  
“ creed of the apostolic times and the Council of  
“ Nice.”—*Burton's Testimonies of the Ante-  
Nicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ.*  
Introduction, p. vi.

THE END.









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