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REMARKS

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THE REV. DR. WORCESTER'S

LETTER TO MR. CHANNING,

ON THE

“REVIEW OF AMERICAN UNITARIANISM”

IN A LATE PANOPLIST.

BY

WILLIAM E. CHANNING,

Minister of the Church of Christ in Federal Street.

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REMARKS, &c.

By the advice of friends, whose judgment I respect, I have resolved to offer to the publick some remarks on the letter of **Dr. Worcester**, in reply to mine addressed to **Mr. Thacher**. They will be few in number, and as free as possible from personalities. When I understood that my letter was to be answered by **Dr. Worcester**, I felt and expressed great satisfaction. I regarded **Dr. Worcester** as a man of candour, moderation, and liberal feelings. I had reason to suppose, that as a minister, he would understand the feelings of his brethren, whose uprightness had been so wantonly assailed in the **Paroquist Review**, and whose influence and usefulness that publication was designed to destroy. I trusted, that whilst he would openly express disapprobation of some of my opinions, he would still appear in the honourable character of a peacemaker among christians. But I have been disappointed. His letter, though milder in language, breathes too much of the spirit of the **Review**. I feel, however, no disposition to retaliate. His letter, I will hope, is not to be considered as an expression of his general temper; and although it is too obviously designed to drive both me

and my brethren from the church and the ministry, yet, in obedience to that Master, who has forbidden me to render evil for evil, I have no desire to rob Dr. Worcester of his character as a christian, or a christian teacher.

My letter to Mr. Thacher is considered by Dr. Worcester as bitter and severe ; but called, as I was, to repel the charge of immorality brought against men, whose virtue and piety I know and honour, and to whom I am bound by ties of friendship and christian affection, I felt it a solemn duty to express what I deemed a virtuous indignation. I laboured however to temper displeasure with christian moderation ; and, on finishing my letter, my fear was, not that I had expressed an improper warmth, but that I should be considered as wanting sensibility to the injuries done to some of the best men in this community. I know, however, the many weaknesses and imperfections of my nature. I may have erred, for the provocation was great ; and I sincerely repeat the declaration with which I closed my letter, that for every departure from the spirit of the gospel, I implore the divine forgiveness. On the present occasion I am called to defend myself, rather than my brethren, and I am therefore at liberty to suppress the feelings which were awakened by many parts of Dr. Worcester's letter.

There is one particular in which I am indebted to Dr. Worcester, and I hasten to express my obligation. He has pointed out an inaccuracy in the language which I have employed to express the

charges contained in the Review. I have said, that the Review “asserts that the ministers of this town and its vicinity, and the great body of liberal christians, are Unitarians, in Mr. Belsham’s sense of the word.” It is true, that this passage may be understood as charging the Review with asserting, that *all the ministers of Boston of all denominations* are Unitarians of Mr. Belsham’s school. I ought to have said, that the Review maintains—that the great body of liberal ministers in Boston and its vicinity, and of liberal christians, are Unitarians, in Mr. Belsham’s sense of the word. I was probably led into this inaccuracy, by the manner in which the phrase “Boston clergy” is used in the Review; a phrase as broad as the “ministers of Boston,” and which is employed by the Reviewer to designate the liberal ministers alone. I wrote too with a strong conviction, which is still in no degree impaired, that the Reviewer intended to fix on liberal ministers and christians, *considered as a class*, the sentiments of Mr. Belsham. I therefore made the statement with too little precision. I thank Dr. Worcester for detecting the inaccuracy, and if it has made a false impression on my readers, (which I think can very rarely have occurred,) I desire to express my sorrow for the wrong I have unintentionally done to the Reviewer.

This correction however affects very slightly the merits of the question. I still maintain, what I intended to maintain in my letter, that the Review was designed to represent the great body of liberal ministers in this town and vicinity, and the liberal party

in general, as Unitarians, in Mr. Belsham's sense of the word ; and that it charges these ministers and the leading members of the liberal party with artifice, hypocrisy, and base concealment. This statement of the charges contained in the Review, Dr. Worcester pronounces to be unauthorized and incorrect. There is a short way, and it is the only way, of settling this dispute. I beg every reader to examine the Review for himself, and to ask, from the impression made on his own mind, what is its obvious import and design. I offered but a few out of several passages which support the charges I have made. Let every man read for himself ; I ask no more. It is indeed possible, that by reading as a lawyer, who wishes to force every passage to say as little as possible, he may make the Review a very mild and harmless thing. I know too, that here and there some qualifying language may be found, under which the Reviewer, if he will stoop to it, may strive to take refuge. But the question is, not what a verbal critick, with a dictionary in his hand, may make out of the Review, but what are the impressions which readers at large receive from it, of the sentiments and character of the great body of liberal ministers and christians. This is the fair and established rule by which we are to judge of writings, and especially of those in which *moral character* is assailed. The question, and the only question, is, what will men of common sense and common feelings gather from this Review. On this point, I did not suppose that a doubt could exist. I never anticipated any

difference of construction. I thought it as impossible to err in regard to the obvious import and design of this publication, as to mistake midnight for noon. An attempt to prove that the Review was not written in English, would hardly have surprised me more, than the attempt which has been made to show that it does not convey the impressions I have stated. I very much suspect, from what Dr. Worcester has observed about our "temporizing" and "culpable disguise," that before he finished his letter, he understood the Review not very differently from myself. But enough has been said on this first head of Dr. Worcester's letter.

The next great object of Dr. Worcester's letter, if I understand him, is to convey to his readers the impression, that our mode of preaching is "concealed, indistinct, and unfaithful." This he attempts to prove, first from the statement which I made of the views of liberal christians in relation to the character of Jesus Christ. This statement, he says, is ambiguous and indistinct. That it is *general*, that it does not descend to particulars, I grant; but I deny that it is ambiguous, if considered, as it ought to be, in relation to the object for which it was made. Does not Dr. Worcester perfectly know, that it was simply designed to repel the charge of the Reviewer, that we are Unitarians in Mr. Belsham's sense of the word? Was it necessary, that in such a statement every question should be met and answered, which may possibly be started in relation to our sentiments? Have not I, in my turn, an equal right to reproach

Dr. Worcester with ambiguity and indistinctness? Has *he* any where told us, which of the many, very many explanations of the *Trinity* he and his brethren embrace, and are determined to impose on us as the term of christian communion? Has he told us the precise scheme of *atonement* which he adopts, or which of the many definitions of *faith* he has selected? How easily might this reply be extended? But I pass to the next consideration.

The next proof of our preaching in a “concealed, indistinct, and unfaithful manner,” is derived from the account which I have given of our general style of preaching. I did think that this account was too simple to be misunderstood. My statement was plainly this—that we labour to preach the truth, to preach whatever we clearly discover in the word of God; but that, in doing this, we generally avoid references to opinions which we do not receive, and never hold up those christians who differ from us to censure or contempt. According to this statement, we evidently preach the whole counsel of God, as far as we understand it. But Dr. Worcester, passing over this account, has selected a passage, in which I observe, that “we urge perpetually those great truths and precepts about which there is little contention, and which have an immediate bearing on the temper and life.” From this passage he infers, that we can urge none of the “primary and peculiar doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, because about all these there has been great contention.” To this I answer, first, that I have never understood, that there has been much contention about the “real *precepts*” of

the gospel, not even about those which have been most habitually disregarded. Christians, satisfied with dismissing these from their lives, have retained them in their systems. Even the bitterest persecutors in the church have never disputed the precepts of "loving their neighbour as themselves," and of "doing to others as they would have others do to them." On the contrary, they have insisted, that burning, beheading, defaming and denouncing those, whom they called hereticks, were perfectly consistent with christian love, and were even bright expressions of evangelical charity!—It may next be observed, that the common disputes about the "great *doctrines*" of the gospel have not related so much to their truth and importance as to some inferiour points connected with them. For example, there has been much debate about the benevolence of God, whether it forms his whole moral character, and his highest spring of action, or whether it be subordinate to wisdom or rectitude; but all parties have agreed that God is benevolent. In the same manner, many have disputed about the omnipresence of God, whether his substance be extended through infinite space, or whether he be present only by his knowledge and power to every portion of space. But all have agreed that God is omnipresent. In like manner christians have disputed about the precise way in which Christ's death has an influence on our forgiveness; but that it has a real and important influence on forgiveness, almost all unite in asserting. Once more, Christians have never been weary with disputing on the mode

and extent of spiritual influences ; but, with very few exceptions, all maintain that these influences are real and are promised to our prayers. Let no one then say, that we preach no primary or peculiar doctrines of Christianity because we insist perpetually on principles in which the different classes of Christians generally concur. Such principles, we sincerely believe, form the very substance and glory of the gospel. They shine with a clear and unsullied splendour. We are deeply impressed with their truth, their supreme importance, and their sufficiency to salvation ; and therefore we urge them with unwearied importunity, with zeal and affection. It is very possible that Dr. Worcester will go on to object, that, according to this very account, our preaching must be very general, vague, wanting in precision, and therefore unfaithful. The answer is short. If we are indeed general and vague in our representation of the truths of the Gospel, it is *because we are faithful*, because we dare not be precise above what is written, because we stop where the Scriptures seem to us to stop, and because we have a very deep and sorrowful persuasion, that our religion has been exceedingly defaced and corrupted by the bold attempts of theologians to give minute explanations of its general truths, and to cramp it with the fetters of systematick precision. We tell our hearers, that God sent his Son to die for us, exalted him to be our Prince and Saviour, and ordained him to be judge of the quick and dead, and never think it necessary or faithful to fill up the outline of Scripture, by adding,

that the *Son, who was sent*, was the *very God* who sent him, or by speculating on the infinite evil of sin, and on the necessity of an infinite atonement, in order to illustrate the fitness of such a mediator. Thus, then, we preach. Whether our preaching be nothing more than the inculcation of "natural religion," let our hearers determine.

Dr. Worcester, to render our mode of preaching odious, asks, if the "apostles avoided controversy," and never "attempted to refute error," &c. &c. We think the answer very obvious. In the first place, we wonder that any can confound the situation of ministers in a christian country, where the gospel has long been known and acknowledged, with the situation of the apostles, who preached a new religion which the multitude derided and opposed, and which their new and ignorant converts were continually corrupting with Jewish and heathen mixtures. We sincerely believe, that the great principles, for which the apostles contended, are now received with little dispute in Christian communities, and we conceive that the great business of a minister is to urge those truths in their primitive simplicity on the hearts and consciences of men, instead of making them subjects of controversy.

There is another important remark on this point. We do not pass sentence like apostles on many subjects of controversy among christians, for this very plain reason—that we are *not* apostles. We are, what we labour never to forget, uninspired and fallible men, and we are apt to distrust ourselves, when persons of intelligence and piety see cause to

differ from us in the interpretation of Scripture. We dare not preach like apostles on points which have perplexed and divided men of the profoundest thought and the purest lives ; and we know from the genius and leading principles of Christianity, that these points are not, and cannot be essential to salvation. We dare not imitate the bold and positive language, in which the darkest doctrines are sometimes urged as undoubted and essential ; and in which the sentence of excommunication is pronounced on serious inquirers after truth, by some who discover no superiority of intellect or virtue.

I now come to a part of Dr. Worcester's letter which, if I were to consult my feelings rather than my sense of duty, I should pass over in silence. I refer to his insinuation, that we have adopted a style of preaching opposed to that of the apostles, because we wish to avoid the sufferings which those holy men encountered, and wish to secure the favour of the world. Dr. Worcester's language is sufficiently soft and guarded, and by certain rules of criticism it may perhaps be proved to mean little or nothing. But I am accustomed to judge of writings, which affect moral character, by the impression which they make on the mass of readers ; and the impression produced by Dr. Worcester undoubtedly is, that we are guilty of base compliances, and of shunning to declare the whole counsel of God from regard to human applause. I have already intimated, that I am not disposed to notice the sarcasms, verbal criticisms, and half-humorous expressions of regard which are scattered

through Dr. Worcester's letter, and directed against *myself*. But reproaches cast on my friends and brethren, on men whose piety and virtues entitle them to respect, I shall always repel, let them come from what quarter they may. Dr. Worcester owes it to himself, to cast away these dishonourable weapons. It does not become *him* to strengthen the hands of those, who are assailing the honest reputation of his brethren—Besides, is it very clear, that we, above all other ministers in this country, are swayed and corrupted by human opinion? Is it not notorious, that we have espoused an unpopular cause? Is it not the boast of the Reviewer, that from Connecticut to Georgia all "orthodox christians" deny us communion? Is it not notorious, that beyond a narrow sphere our names are loaded with reproach? It is true, we receive marks of affection and respect at home, far, far beyond our consciousness of desert. But do aspiring men confine their views to their homes? And is it not a fact, that unwearied pains are employed to rob us even of this limited esteem, to alienate from us our friends and societies? If we indeed prefer applause to principle, why is it, that we do not accommodate our language to the system of our opponents, adopt a few popular phrases, call ourselves Trinitarians, on the ground of our believing in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and thus turn from us, (as we easily might without giving offence to our hearers) the torrent of reproach and denunciation.—It is a little remarkable, that gentlemen, who, as they boast, have all the colleges of the

country on their side with one solitary exception, who have at their command literary honours, seats in conventions, in general assemblies, and in the largest religious associations, should take credit to themselves for self-denial, and for preaching unpopular truth, and should lay at our door, as peculiarly ours, the sins of compliance with the prejudices and passions of mankind. I make this remark, not from any desire to cast back the charge of Dr. Worcester on himself or his friends, but simply with the view of shewing the inconsistency of the insinuations by which the reputation of my brethren is to be blasted.

I now come to what appears to me the third great object of Dr. Worcester, in his letter. I refer to his attempts to render our sentiments odious, and to justify those who, on account of our sentiments, would exclude us from the christian church. To render our sentiments odious, he again and again intimates, that Unitarians, *of course*, reject all the great and distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, particularly the doctrine of atonement by Christ's death. Is it possible that Dr. Worcester has not read so common a writer as Dr. Samuel Clarke, the most popular perhaps of all Unitarian writers, and in whose works the doctrine of atonement, as commonly held, is insisted on with great frequency and force? Has he not learned from so common a book as "Bible News," that many Unitarians sincerely believe, that the efficacy of Christ's death in obtaining forgiveness must be inexpressibly greater upon their system, than upon the system of the Trinitarians, which

makes the sufferings of Jesus nothing more than the sufferings of *a man*. There is one sentence of Dr. Worcester on this subject which amazed me. He says to me, “you will, doubtless, not hesitate to acknowledge, what I have certainly great sorrow in stating, that the doctrines of atonement by Christ’s death, and justification through faith in his blood, AS HELD BY ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN ALL AGES OF THE CHURCH, fall at once to the ground before you.” Astonishing assertion! If I were not assured that Dr. Worcester is a man of respectability, I should be tempted to say, Astonishing hardihood of assertion! What! does Dr. Worcester really believe, that I will acknowledge *without hesitation*, that I reject these or any other doctrines, as they were held by “orthodox christians,” *in the age of Christ and of his apostles*, or as held by “orthodox christians” *in any age of the church*? I sincerely believe that this strange assertion is not to be ascribed to bad intention, but to haste and inadvertence. I regret however that a sentence, so adapted to awaken popular passions, should have escaped from his pen. I am not disposed to protract this controversy by stating what I conceive to be the prevalent sentiments of liberal christians on the subject of Christ’s mediation. I will only say, that had Dr. Worcester known them better, he would have spoken on this, as on some other subjects, with much greater caution.—Before leaving this head, I would protest against Dr. Worcester’s habit of fastening on his opponents the consequences which

seem to him to follow from this system. This practice is unfair and injurious, and has betrayed Dr. Worcester into misrepresentation. Suppose that I, availing myself of this expeditious way of settling the opinions of others, should make a collection of the inferences which seem to me to flow from the doctrine that God is the author of sin, and suppose that I should publish this collection to the world as the creed of those christians, by whom this doctrine is received; would they not reproach me as a libeller? But I have no disposition to fasten this or any other bad name on Dr. Worcester.

Another method adopted by Dr. Worcester for rendering our sentiments odious, is this. It is urged, that our sentiments lead us into an entire indifference to christian truth; that we believe all error to be innocent; that we consider belief in the truth as no virtue; and that we thus set aside those passages of scripture in which the highest importance is attached to this belief. This objection is founded on our extending the name and privileges of christians to the lowest Unitarians, who hold some sentiments, from which, as I stated, we generally shrink with aversion. Now I deny that any indifference to truth, or any contempt of those passages which enjoin belief of the truth, is implied in this extension of our charity. I indeed very readily grant, that "belief of the truth," in the ordinary acceptance of that phrase, does not seem to us a virtue; and for this, among other reasons, that were it so, Satan might boast of higher virtue than any saint on earth.

Satan believes and trembles. The *faith* to which salvation is promised in scripture, seems to us to reside in the heart much more than in the understanding. The true believer is distinguished not by clearness and extent of views, but by a "love of light," a "love of the truth," originating in a sincere desire to "do the will of God." We wonder that Dr. Worcester did not discover this obvious principle in the very passages which he has quoted to condemn our liberality towards the erroneous. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "Because they received not the love of the truth, God shall send them strong delusion, that all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." This love of divine truth, this honest, unprejudiced, obedient mind, we highly venerate and always enjoin as essential to salvation. But we know that this love of truth is consistent with the reception of many errors. We know that the apostles, during the life of their master, possessed this temper in a sufficient degree to constitute them his followers, and yet they grossly misunderstood some of his plainest and most important declarations. We believe too that at the present day, many in every christian country are placed in circumstances, almost if not quite as unfavourable to a clear understanding of the gospel, as the apostles were under the ministry of Jesus. From considerations of this nature, from a knowledge of the amazing power of education

and other circumstances over the opinions of every mind, and from a fear that we, as well as others, may have been swayed and blinded by unsuspected infelicities attending our condition, we are very unwilling to decide on the degree of truth, which is required to the salvation of every individual, or to say that the errors of an apparently sincere professor of christianity are inconsistent with a pious character. In our judgment of professed christians, we are guided more by their temper and lives than by any peculiarities of opinion. We lay it down as a great and indisputable principle, clear as the sun at noonday, that the great end for which christian truth is revealed, is the sanctification of the soul, the formation of the christian character ; and wherever we see the marks of this character displayed in a professed disciple of Jesus, we hope, and rejoice to hope, that he has received all the truth which is necessary to his salvation. Acting on this rule, we cannot exclude from the church the lowest Unitarians who profess subjection to Jesus Christ. Of this class we have known or heard of individuals, who have breathed the genuine spirit of their master ; who have discovered a singular conscientiousness in all the walks of life ; whose charity has overflowed in good deeds ; whose wills have been resigned in affliction ; and who lived as seeking a better country, even a heavenly. Such men we have not dared to exclude from the christian church, on the ground of what seem to us great errors, any more than to exclude the disciples of Calvin ; whose errors we also

deeply lament, but whose errors are often concealed from us by the brightness of their christian virtues.

We are not conscious, that by this liberality we at all oppose those passages of scripture, in which great stress is laid upon belief of the truth ; for we are convinced, from laborious research into the scriptures, that the great truth, which is the object of christian belief, and which in the first age conferred the character of disciples on all who received it, is simply this, that Jesus is the Christ, or anointed by God to be the light and saviour of the world. Whenever this great truth appears to us to be sincerely acknowledged, whenever a man of apparent uprightness declares to us his reception of Jesus in this character, and his corresponding purpose to study and obey his religion, we feel ourselves bound to give him the hand of christian fellowship, and to leave it to the final judge to determine how far he is faithful in searching after the will of his Lord. This duty of searching, and of searching with humility and with a single and fearless regard to truth, we constantly inculcate; and we sincerely believe, that in this way we approve ourselves friends of truth much more sincerely, than if we should aim to terrify and prostrate the minds of our hearers, by threatening them with everlasting misery, unless they receive the peculiar views of the gospel, which we have seen fit to espouse.

There is a part of Dr. Worcester's letter, according to which our charity towards the lowest Unitarians not only proves our indifference to truth, but

makes us partakers in their sentiments and deeds. Because we bear "no decided testimony against them." and because we are called by the same general name of "liberal christians," Dr. Worcester thinks that we were properly confounded with them by the Reviewer. I wonder that Dr. Worcester did not perceive that this argument was a two-edged sword, and might do equal execution among friends and foes. It is well known that the old fashioned Calvinists in general regard the "new divinity" of the Hopkinsians with great horror; but it is also true that "a peculiar brotherhood is established" between these two classes of Christians in New-England. They both by mutual consent take shelter under the name of "orthodox." The Calvinists here have never, as a party, borne testimony against Hopkinsian peculiarities, have never "purged themselves from the guilt of them," but walk with Hopkinsians on as friendly terms as we do with the lowest Unitarians. According to Dr. Worcester, then, the guilt of these false and horrid peculiarities lies at their door. They esteem "error no crime," and "belief of the truth no virtue." The old fashioned Calvinists of New-York, however, have been more careful to "purge themselves from this guilt." The clergy of that city have almost without exception united in publick declarations, that Hopkinsianism, "is at war with the philosophy of the human mind, with *common sense*, and with the *word of the living God*. Such sentiments, in whatever connexion they may be taught, by whatever names they may be re-

commended, ought to be exposed and *reprobated* in the most decided manner." "They nothing doubt that christians, upon sober research, will find Hopkinsianism to be in *some very material points* 'ANOTHER GOSPEL' indeed." "By whatever name or title they, *i. e.* Hopkinsians, may be distinguished, they have departed, in many points, from the confessions of faith and the form of sound words adopted by the reformed churches, and *it is time they were known*, and A LINE OF DISTINCTION DRAWN." "It is a duty of all the Lord's people to contend earnestly for the faith. It is especially incumbent on those who are set for the defence of the gospel, to descry approaching danger, and should an angel from heaven preach another gospel to *denounce and resist* him." "These writers," *i. e.* Hopkinsian, "have gained a reputation far beyond what *nonsense and impiety* should acquire for a divine." "They are preparing the way for a more extensive diffusion of *infidel principles and even of atheism* in our country." See the recommendations prefixed to Ely's contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism by Dr. Smith, Dr. Romeyn, Dr. Mason, Dr. Livingston, &c. &c. It seems, then, that others, as well as Dr. Worcester, claim the privilege of sitting in judgment on their brethren. The measure he would mete to others, is ready to be measured to himself again, and it is very possible, that with all his orthodoxy he may soon suffer under the very same sentence, which he passes so rashly on one third of the clergy of this state. Such are the first fruits of a faith, which works by uncharitableness and not by love.

But Dr. Worcester has not merely aimed to make our sentiments odious. I would to God, that he had stopped here. He has openly taken part with those who insist, that on account of our sentiments we ought to be denied Christian fellowship, and to be driven from the church as unworthy the christian name. This is infinitely the most important part of Dr. Worcester's letter. All the rest is comparatively trifling. I exceedingly regret that Dr. Worcester has not brought this subject fully and fairly before the publick. He has mixed together topics, which ought not to be confounded, and has thus, I trust unintentionally, blinded his reader. His readers will imagine, that the separation to which Unitarians object on the part of Trinitarians is nothing more than the separation which Dr. Worcester says has been made by Unitarians themselves in England, a *separation in worship*, a separation produced by the adoption of prayers, hymns and doxologies accommodated to their peculiar sentiments. This view of the subject has given Dr. Worcester a field for his powers of humour and sarcasm. But this is not the true question. No. No. It is something more solemn than this. The question is this, Whether those persons, who cannot receive as a truth of revelation the doctrine that the one God is three distinct persons, shall be denied christian fellowship, or in other words, shall be denied the name and privileges of Christians. This was the proposition of the Reviewer, and with the sincerest sorrow I find that to this Dr. Worcester accedes.

To him I did look for a healing spirit, for an example of forbearance, and moderation. But he has solemnly and publicly given all his influence to the opinion, that we and all who agree with us on the subject of the Trinity are to be disowned by the church of Christ. The obvious import of the concluding part of his letter (and it is the obvious import, and not a strained and circuitous interpretation which I regard) may be thus expressed. "Every man who cannot admit as a doctrine of Scripture, the great doctrine of three persons in one God, which I and other orthodox Christians embrace, believes an opposite gospel, rejects the true gospel, despises the authority of Jesus Christ, is of course a man wholly wanting in true piety and without christian virtue; and may in perfect consistency with christian love be rejected as unworthy the name of a christian." I confess I do shudder at hearing from a frail and fallible creature this tremendous sentence passed on men of the profoundest understandings, of the purest lives, and of unwearied devotion to the study of God's word; and passed on these men, because they cannot receive a doctrine, which bears the strongest marks of inconsistency with that fundamental truth of all religion, the unity of God, and which for ages has perplexed and distressed the mind of almost every reflecting christian. Was Dr. Worcester sensible of the solemn responsibility which he took on himself, when he advanced the sentiments in the close of his letter? Is he confident that no Antitrinitarians are pious men? Is he sure that he has not been labour-

ing to drive from the christian fold the friends of Jesus and the heirs of salvation?

Before Dr. Worcester took so solemnly this ground, it became him to inquire most seriously into the doctrine of three persons being one God, to weigh well the arguments of those who oppose it, and to observe with candour their tempers and lives. Nothing but the deepest and most deliberate conviction that this doctrine of the trinity is indisputably true, that it is accompanied by evidence which renders the disbelief of it inexcusable, and that the scriptures insist upon it as an indispensable mark of a true believer, could have justified him in condemning as strangers to christian virtue men of established integrity, who profess with seriousness to revere the Saviour, and to make his instruction the rule of their faith and practice. I appeal to the conscience of Dr. Worcester, and I beseech him to ask himself with sincerity, whether he possesses this deep conviction, and whether it is the result of calm, patient and extensive research. If he shall answer in the affirmative, I then respectfully call upon him in the name of those on whom he has shut the door of the christian church, to "produce his reasons," to shew the ground of his confident persuasion that this doctrine is undoubtedly true, and that the Scriptures demand the acknowledgment of it as necessary to the character of a pious christian. I also beg him to state with all possible precision, what particular view of the trinity it is necessary for us to receive in order to salvation, and in what language our faith must be

expressed. I do not ask him to discuss these points in a letter to me or to any opponent. The controversy is not to be despatched in a few pages, nor ought it to be mingled with any personalities. Let it take another form, the form of general discussion. I promise Dr. Worcester that his arguments shall be seriously weighed, and I trust that those on whom he has past the sentence of exclusion will not be backward to defend what they deem the truth, or to vindicate their claim to the name of christians.

The principal argument which Dr. Worcester offers in favour of the proposed separation is, the greatness of the differences between Trinitarians and Unitarians. I sincerely regret that these differences are so studiously magnified, whilst the points of agreement between these classes of Christians are studiously overlooked. Dr. Watts and Dr. Doddridge have left us a better example. Trinitarians and Unitarians both believe in one God, one infinite and self-existent mind. According to the first, this God is three persons; according to the last, he is one person. Ought this difference, which relates to the obscurest of all subjects, to the essence and metaphysical nature of God, and which common christians cannot understand, to divide and alienate those who ascribe to this one God the same perfections, who praise him for the same blessings, who hope from his mercy the same forgiveness, who receive on his authority the same commands, and who labour to maintain the same spirit of devotion to his will and glory.—Ac-

According to Trinitarians, Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross, is a derived being, *personally* united with the self-existent God. According to the Unitarians, he is a derived being, *intimately* united with the self-existent God. Ought this difference, which transcends the conception of common christians, to divide and alienate those, who love the same excellent character in Jesus Christ; who desire to breathe his spirit and follow his steps; who confide in him, as perfectly adapted to the work which he was sent to accomplish; and who labour to derive just conceptions of his nature from his own instructions? The differences between Trinitarians and Unitarians are very often verbal. As soon as Trinitarians attempt to shew the consistency of their doctrine of three persons with the divine unity, their peculiarities begin to vanish, and in many of their writings little or nothing is left but one God acting in three characters, or sustaining three relations, and intimately united with his son Jesus Christ. Ought distinctions so subtle and perplexing, to separate those, who love the same divine character, and respect the same divine will.

Dr. Worcester, however, seems disposed to widen the breach between these classes of believers. He says, the Saviour “whom you acknowledge, is infinitely inferior to ours.” I answer—we believe that GOD saves us by his son Jesus Christ, in whom he dwells, and through whom he bestows pardon and eternal life. A higher Saviour we do not know, and cannot conceive. But Dr. Worcester does not stop here. He says, “The God whom you worship is

different from ours." To this I answer, as others have answered before, that I with my brethren worship "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, who hath glorified his son Jesus," whom Peter preached, Acts iii. We worship "the *God* and *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ," to whom Paul "bowed the knee." We worship that God, whom Jesus in his last moments worshipped, when he said, "*Father*, into thy hands I commend my spirit." We worship that God, to whom our Lord directed us, when he put into our lips these affecting words, "Our *Father*, who art in Heaven." We worship that God, of whom our master spoke in these memorable words, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the *true worshippers* shall worship *the Father* in spirit and in truth." Dr. Worcester speaks of a different God; but we can renounce ours for no other. This worship we are persuaded, is a spring of purity, joy and hope, and we trust that it will prove to us a source of unfailling consolation amidst the trials, reproaches and rude assaults of the world. But I must stop. The points of dispute between Unitarians and Trinitarians cannot be treated with any fairness within the narrow compass of a pamphlet, and I wish not to discuss them in connexion with the present controversy, which primarily relates to the moral character of the great body of liberal christians.

Dr. Worcester has laboured to shew, that *charity*, instead of forbidding, encourages and requires Trinitarians to exclude Unitarians from christian fellow-

ship, because charity commands us to promote truth, and truth is promoted by this system of exclusion. But let me ask, why is truth to be promoted? Not for its own sake, but for its influence on the heart, its influence in forming a christian temper. In what then does this temper consist? very much in candour, forbearance and kind affection. It follows, that any method of promoting truth which is unfriendly to these virtues is unchristian; it sacrifices the end to the means of religion. Now let me ask, whether the practice of rejecting as ungodly men those, who differ from us on subtle, perplexing, and almost (if not altogether) unintelligible doctrines, be not obviously and directly opposed to the exercise and diffusion of candour, forbearance, kind affection and peace. Has it not actually convulsed the church for ages with discord and war? The right of denouncing those who differ on such doctrines, if granted to one christian, must be granted to all; and do we need the spirit of prophecy to foretell the consequences, if the ignorant, passionate and enthusiastick, who form the majority of every community, shall undertake to carry this right into practice? The idea, that a religion which is designed for weak and fallible mortals of all classes and capacities, and which is designed to promote unity, peace, candour, and love, should yet make it our duty to reject as wholly destitute of goodness, every man, however uniform in conduct, who cannot see as we do on points where we ourselves see little or nothing, appears to me the grossest contradiction and absurdity. If this be

christianity, we may say any thing of our religion more truly, than that it is a religion of peace. A more effectual instrument of discord was never devised. Charity then does not command the Trinitarian to exclude his Unitarian brother. Charity commands us to use mildness and persuasion ; to open our eyes to the marks of virtue in those from whom we differ ; to beware of ascribing error to a corrupt heart, unless the proof be striking ; to think modestly of ourselves, and to drive from our minds the conceit of infallibility, that most dangerous error which ever crept into the church of Christ.

I have now finished my examination of the principal parts of Dr. Worcester's letter. There is one general remark to be applied to the whole. It does not appear, no, not in a single line, that Dr. Worcester ever brought home to himself the case of his injured brethren, ever imagined himself in their situation, and inquired how, under such circumstances, he would himself have felt and acted. Suppose for example, that in the *Christian Disciple* a review had appeared, solemnly charging on that class of ministers to which Dr. Worcester belongs, sentiments which they generally disapprove, and charging them with propagating these sentiments by artifice and base hypocrisy. Would no sensibility have been excited ? Would not Dr. Worcester have regarded the author of this Review with strong indignation ? Suppose then that Dr. Worcester, impelled not merely by a regard to his own usefulness, but by friendship, by christian affection, by a regard to

what he believed the interests of the church, had written such a letter as mine to Mr. Thacher; and suppose that I, after reading this letter, had come before the publick, and without one expression of sympathy towards Dr. Worcester and his brethren, had attempted to uphold the Reviewer, and had even declared, that the large body of christians condemned by that writer were virtually enemies to Christ, without piety and without hope. What would Dr. Worcester have felt? Might he not, in an unguarded moment, in the warmth of virtuous indignation, have called me a defamer? Would he not have said, that I was aiming a blow at what was dearer to him than life, at his christian character, and his usefulness as a christian minister? Now I ask, would this conduct have been a crime in me, and is it a virtue in Dr. Worcester? Let that gentleman bring the case home to himself, and he may view his letter with less complacency than he now does. He certainly will not wonder at the feeling which I have expressed, or think me instigated by the worst of passions in the remarks which I now offer to the publick.

I now bid farewell to this controversy, as I hope, for ever. This I do, not because I hope to escape reproach by silence, for I know that the full measure of reproach is prepared for me; not because I shrink in any degree from the cause which I have laboured to defend; but because I fear, that a controversy of this nature between christian ministers will produce impressions unfavourable to the cause of piety; be-

cause I believe, that it tends to awaken unfriendly feelings in the community, and that it ought therefore to cease as soon as the interests of truth will admit ; because I fear, from observations on my own heart, that it is not favourable to the best affections in those who are immediately engaged in it ; because I am persuaded, that it will never end, if I resolve to answer every new pamphlet and every fresh charge ; because a continuance of it will be inconsistent with the regular duties of my profession, and with more useful pursuits ; and lastly, because the most important topics in the controversy cannot be thoroughly and fairly discussed in the form of short publications abounding in personalities.—I am willing to relinquish the privilege of saying the last word, and shall of course be condemned by those, who consider the last word as a sign of victory. With respect to the direction, which the publick mind will take on this subject, it is not easy for a man of retired habits and of very limited connexions to determine. To God I cheerfully leave the event. Believing in his providence, assured that the gospel is his care, and looking forward to his promised kingdom, where the animosities, reproaches, divisions, and poor contentions of this world will never enter, I desire and hope to maintain in every condition an equal mind, and to attain some portion of that peace which, as men cannot give, so they cannot take away.

NOTE.

IN the preceding remarks I have wished to observe something like method, and to hold the attention of the reader to the great points of the controversy. For this reason, and I hope for a still better reason, I have passed over several of Dr. Worcester's courteous sarcasms, minute criticisms, and appeals to popular feeling. But there are some particulars, not undeserving attention, which were excluded by the order which I proposed, and which I have therefore reserved for a note.

I did not notice Dr. Worcester's criticisms on my interpretation of the Review, because I have not met a single individual, who has expressed one doubt as to the import and design of that publication. But there is one of Dr. Worcester's criticisms which ought not to be overlooked. I refer to the attempt which he has made to defend the Reviewer from the charge of a very criminal mutilation of Mr. Wells' letter. If the reader will turn to my letter to Mr. Thacher, page 12, he will see the mutilation stated at length. Dr. Worcester alleges, that the passage was varied by the Reviewer, merely that it might be inserted conveniently in a list of encomiums, passed by Mr. Wells on liberal gentlemen. To this defence I reply, first, that the mutilated part of the passage, as it stands in the Review, is not an encomium, and could not have been introduced as possessing that character. In the next place, it is very singular, that the passage could not have been properly "shaped," without excluding those words which most forcibly vindicate the

Boston ministers from the charge of concealment. But thirdly, it is still more remarkable, that the passage could not have been properly shaped without printing the last clause *in italicks*, a clause which, when thus printed, entirely changes the meaning of the sentence. How these italicks help to give the right shape to the quotation, is not obvious to a common reader, nor has Dr. Worcester thought proper to inform us.

Dr. Worcester asserts that I “claim all charity” for myself and my friends, and “deny it all” to our opponents, and thus “deny that they have true religion.” God forbid. If any part of my letter is marked by this exclusive spirit, I ask forgiveness of my injured fellow christians. I did think that I expressed a very opposite temper. I certainly felt it.

Dr. Worcester says that I have given a very distorted view of Calvinism. I should rejoice to think so. It is a painful thought, that such dishonourable views of our merciful Father in heaven, as I have ascribed to that system, should find admission into a single human mind. I represented Calvinism, however, precisely as I had been accustomed to understand it; and, what is more, since reading Dr. Worcester’s letter, I have consulted Miss Adams’ “View of Religions,” to correct my errors on the subject; but still I am met by the same heart-chilling doctrines; Calvinism still wears the same frowning aspect; still seems to me a dreadful corruption of true Christianity. That my letter contains any reflections on Calvinists, as Dr. Worcester intimates, cannot be true. I indeed think that, as a class, they have defects which may be traced to their system; and some of their number seem to love none of the principles of Geneva so well as those which lighted the flames for Servetus. But as a body I have always regarded them with respect, and it has been my happiness to witness among them very bright examples of christian virtue. If Dr. Worcester shall ask, how characters so excellent can have grown up under so corrupt a system, I will answer him, when he can explain how a Feron and a Pascal were formed in the most corrupt church in christendom.

Dr. Worcester says that I have unjustly represented Dr. Watts as a Unitarian. I hope that Dr. Worcester does not mean to avail himself of an ambiguous word. Does he mean to deny that Dr. Watts was an *Antitrinitarian*, that he rejected the doctrine of *three distinct persons in God*? Dr. Watts believed, that the Holy Spirit was not a divine person distinct from the Father, but the active power of God, to which personal properties were *figuratively* ascribed in Scripture. That at least I have always regarded as his opinion; and if so, *one* of the three persons has certainly disappeared from his system. Dr. Watts, indeed, believed that Jesus was properly a divine person, and he often speaks of him as God-man. But he believed that this divine person had a *beginning*, and was formed by the union of the Father with the human soul of Jesus; and still more, he believed that Jesus was divine, because the *Father* and not a *second divine person* dwelt in him; in other words, Jesus Christ, according to this system, is to be acknowledged as the supreme God, because he is the *Father* himself united with a human soul; all his divinity is derived from the indwelling Father. Have we here then a second divine person, *distinct* from the Father, yet equal with him in *eternity* and every other glory? This view of Dr. Watts' system is confirmed by his particular friend Dr. Doddridge who has given substantially the same account in his lectures; and by Dr. Samuel Palmer, the disciple and admirer of Dr. Watts. I have not one doubt, that Dr. Watts was a Unitarian, in the sense of believing that God is one person, in opposition to the Trinitarian doctrine of three persons, a doctrine which he calls a "strange and perplexing notion." Dr. Worcester says, that my assertions respecting Dr. Watts are bolder than Mr. Belsham *dared* to make. Mr. Belsham's assertions, which Dr. Worcester pronounces more cautious than mine, related to a very different point from that which I maintained. Mr. Belsham was anxious to prove, not that Dr. Watts was a Unitarian in the broad sense of that word, but a believer in the *simple humanity of Jesus Christ*. Did not Dr. Worcester know this fact? and was he ingenuous in ascribing to me greater boldness than to Mr. Belsham, when our objects were entirely different?

With respect to Dr. Barnard, I have satisfactory proof that he believed God to be one person, and was accordingly a Unitarian. From his language respecting the "essential divinity of Jesus Christ," I infer that he accorded in some degree with Dr. Watts or Sabellius. He did *not* believe the Son to be a divine person, distinct from the Father, and possessing equal divinity. His views on these subjects, like those of many good men, were not very precise. Had he been obliged to select a system, it would have been Dr. Samuel Clarke's. The same remarks may be applied to President Willard.

Dr. Worcester speaks of my "denunciation" of the Panoplist. I did not refer, as the connexion will shew, to the *general* discussions and statements of that work, of which I know very little; but to its representations of the views and character of liberal christians. On this point I have the same conviction as before, that the Panoplist is entitled to no credit.

Dr. Worcester has quoted for my benefit the following text of scripture, "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them." Dr. Worcester says, that this language may "sound harsh and unfashionable," and he "trusts" that I "will have the goodness not to impute to him the fault." Sarcastick compliments seem to me not to belong to so serious a subject. Trifling here is quite out of place. I ask Dr. Worcester's attention to this passage as rendered according to Dr. Campbell. "There shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in *destructive sects, or divisions*, denying or renouncing the Lord who bought them." Believing as I do, that the gospel is characterized by a benevolent and pacifick spirit, and that the Lord has bought us for this very end, that we should serve him in love, I cannot conceive of a surer mark of a false teacher of the gospel, than the introduction of *destructive divisions* into the church, and I am persuaded that one method of denying or renouncing the Lord is, to divide his followers, and to oppose the spirit of charity and peace. I shall not insult Dr. Worcester by asking him to "have the goodness not to impute to me the fault of this unpleasant and unfashionable"

comment, but I recommend it to his serious attention. I mean not, however, to intimate that any teachers of the present day are to be placed on a level with the false teachers condemned in this passage. These, as appears from the whole chapter,* were monsters of iniquity, covetous, lewd, adulterers, seditious, slanderous, given up to the basest lusts. They excited divisions for mercenary purposes, and built up a sect by encouraging lasciviousness and the grossest sensuality. Thank God, this race has passed away, and I could not without great guilt confound with them any class of ministers with whom I am acquainted. I believe that the fomenters of division among us are generally actuated by an injudicious zeal, by passions which they mistake for piety, and by prejudices which are reconcilable with a regard to God and duty, not by the motives which governed the profligate wretches referred to in the text.

It is one of my great offences with Dr. Worcester that I "put in my earnest plea" for the christian character of those, who believe in the "simple humanity of Jesus Christ." It is some consolation to me, that I have the excellent Dr. Doddridge as a partner in this guilt. The name of Dr. Lardner is I presume familiar to most of my readers. No man in modern times has rendered greater service to the cause of christianity. Dr. Lardner was a decided believer in the simple humanity of Jesus. Having published a volume of Practical Sermons, he sent them to Dr. Doddridge, who acknowledged the favour in a letter, from which the following extracts are made. "I esteem the valuable present you were so good as to send me, as a memorial of the learned, pious and generous author." "Be assured that though I am not able to express it as I would, I do actually feel a deep and constant sense of your goodness to me, and, which is much more, of your continual readiness to serve the publick with those distinguished abilities which God has been pleased to give you, and which have rendered your writings so great a blessing to the christian world. And I heartily pray that they may be yet more abundantly so, for promoting

* 2 Pet. ii.

“the cause of piety and virtue, of christian principles, and a christian temper. In the interpretation of particular texts and the manner of stating particular doctrines, good men and good friends may have different apprehensions; but you always propose your sentiments with such good humour, modesty, candour and frankness, as is very amiable and exemplary; and the grand desire of spreading righteousness, benevolence, prudence, the fear of God, and a heavenly temper and conversation, so plainly appears, particularly in this volume of sermons, that were I a much stricter Calvinist than I am, I should love and honour the author, though I did not personally know him.” Such was the language of Doddridge, a “disciple whom Jesus loved,” to the excellent Lardner. Blessed be God, who in every age raises up witnesses to the true spirit of christianity, and who opposes such examples as that of Doddridge to the narrow, exclusive and uncharitable spirit of the world.

I will conclude this note with earnestly desiring christians to obtain, if possible, some accurate ideas of the most important point in the present controversy. Let them learn the distinction between Trinitarianism and Unitarianism. Many use these words without meaning, and are very zealous about sounds. Some suppose that Trinitarianism consists in believing in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But we all believe in these; we all believe that the *Father* sent the *Son*, and gives to those that ask, the *Holy Spirit*. We are all Trinitarians, if this belief is Trinitarianism. But it is not. The Trinitarians believe that the One God is *three distinct persons*, called Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and he believes that each of these persons is equal to the other two in every perfection, that each is the only true God, and yet that the three are only one God. This is Trinitarianism. The Unitarian believes that there is but one person possessing supreme divinity, even the Father. This is the great distinction; let it be kept steadily in view.—Some christians have still more vague ideas on this subject. They suppose that Trinitarians think highly of Jesus Christ; whilst Unitarians form low ideas of him, hardly

ranking him above common men, and therefore they choose to be Trinitarians. This is a great error. Some Unitarians believe that the Father is so intimately united with Jesus Christ, that it is proper, on account of this union, to ascribe divine honour and titles to Jesus Christ. Some Unitarians deny that Jesus is a creature, and affirm that he is properly the Son of God, possessing a divine nature derived from the Father. Some Unitarians, who assert that Jesus is a creature, maintain that he is literally the first-born of the creation, the first production of God, the instrumental cause by whom God created all other beings, and the most exalted being in the universe, with the single exception of the infinite Father. I am persuaded, that under these classes of high Unitarians many christians ought to be ranked who call themselves orthodox and Trinitarians. In fact, as the word Trinity is sometimes used, we all believe it. It is time that this word was better defined. Christians ought not to be separated by a sound. A doctrine which we are called to believe, as we value our souls and our standing in the church, ought to be stated with a precision which cannot be misunderstood. By the Trinity, I have all along understood the doctrine, that *God is three persons*. If it do not mean this, it means nothing, and those christians who take shelter under this word, without adopting this sentiment, are acting, I fear, a dishonest and ungenerous part. They distinguish themselves by a name from christians with whom they substantially agree, and whom they are bound to honour and love as brethren. To those persons, who wish to understand better the nature of the Trinitarian controversy, I would recommend Dr. Price's five "Sermons on the Christian Doctrine," and Rev. Noah Worcester's three Tracts called the Trinitarian Review. This subject has of late been ably discussed in a "Reply to Wardlaw's Discourses," by Rev. James Yates of Glasgow, Scotland. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

