

A HISTORY
OF THE
CORRUPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

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ETC. ETC.

REPRINTED FROM RUTT'S EDITION, WITH NOTES.

TO WHICH ARE APPENDED
CONSIDERATIONS IN EVIDENCE THAT THE APOSTOLIC AND
PRIMITIVE CHURCH WAS UNITARIAN,

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New Appendix.

CONSIDERATIONS

IN EVIDENCE THAT

THE APOSTOLIC AND PRIMITIVE CHURCH WAS UNITARIAN.

[These Considerations are derived from the letters of Dr. Priestley, addressed to Bishop Horsley, the Bench of Bishops, and others, and from his work called "An History of the Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ." The above volumes are out of print and very scarce. The matter here presented is an abridgement, but, we may add, it is additional to what was promised to the subscribers to this Volume.]

THE UNITY OF GOD: THE FATHER THE ONLY TRUE GOD.

THE most express declarations concerning the unity of God, and the importance of the belief of it, are frequent in the Old Testament. The first commandment is, Exod. xx. 3: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." This is repeated in the most emphatical manner, Deut. vi. 4: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." . .

In the New Testament we find the same doctrine concerning God that we do in the Old. To the Scribe who enquired which was the first and greatest commandment, our Saviour answered, Mark xii. 29: "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.' And the Scribe said unto him, ver. 32: "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he."

Why is this ONE GOD in the New Testament always called the *Father*, and even the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*? And why are we nowhere told that this one God is the *Trinity*, consisting of the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*?

There are many, very many, passages of

Scripture which inculcate the doctrine of the divine unity in the clearest and strongest manner. Let one such passage be produced in favour of the Trinity. And why should we believe things so mysterious without the clearest and most express evidence? . . .

Had there been any distinctions of persons in the divine nature, such as the doctrine of the Trinity supposes, it is at least so like an infringement of the fundamental doctrine of the Jewish religion, that it certainly required to be explained, and the obvious inference from it to be guarded against.

I will venture to say, that for one text in which you can pretend to find anything harsh or difficult to me, I will engage to produce ten that shall create more difficulty to you. How strangely must you torture the plainest language, and in which there is not a shadow of figure, to interpret to your purpose, 1 Tim. ii. 3: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; 1 Cor. viii. 6: "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him;" or that expression of our Saviour himself, John xvii. 2: "That

they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Never upbraid us Unitarians with torturing the Scriptures, while you have these and a hundred other plain texts to bend to your Athanasian hypothesis, besides many *general arguments*, from reason and the Scriptures, of more real force than any particular texts, to answer.

You cannot say that this is a matter of no great consequence in Christianity. It affects the most fundamental principles of all religion, the first and the greatest of all the commandments, which says, "Thou shalt have no other God besides me;" and such is the nature of this great doctrine of the Unity of God, that there never was a departure from it which did not draw after it very alarming practical consequences. . . .

THE JEWS IN ALL AGES WERE BELIEVERS IN THE DIVINE UNITY.

THE Jews always interpreted their Scriptures as teaching that God is simply ONE.

"The Jews," says Eusebius, "were not taught the doctrine of the Trinity, on account of their infant state." *Basil* gives the same account.

"The doctrine of the Trinity," says the *Rabbi Isaac*, "as held by learned Christians, rests on the slightest evidence, and is contrary to the doctrine of the prophets, the law, and right reason, and even the writings of the New Testament. For the divine law gives its sanction to the Unity of God, and removes all plurality from him."

Some writers of yesterday have maintained that the Jews always believed in a Trinity, and that they expected that their *Messiah* would be the Second Person in that Trinity; but the Christian fathers, who say just the contrary, were as much interested as any men could be, in finding that doctrine among the Jews, and they were nearer the source of information.

Basnage, who studied the history and opinions of the Jews more carefully, perhaps, than any other modern writer, and who has written largely on this very subject, though a Trinitarian himself, has exploded all the pretences of *Cudworth* and others, to find the doctrine of the Trinity, either among the ancient or the modern Jews. "The Christians and the Jews," he says, "separate at the second step in religion. For after having adored together one God,

absolutely perfect, they find immediately after, the abyss of the Trinity, which entirely separates them.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

Jesus Christ, says, "The true worshippers shall worship the Father."

Our Saviour directs his disciples to pray to the same great Being, whom only we ought to serve.

Accordingly, the practice of praying to the Father only, was long universal in the Christian church, the short addresses to Christ, as those in the Litany, "Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us," being comparatively of late date.

Origen speaks of no Christian praying to any other than the God who is over all. "If we know," says he, "what prayer is, we must not pray to any created being, not to Christ himself, but only to God, the Father of all, to whom our Saviour himself prayed." "In this we are all agreed, and are not divided about the method of prayer; but should we not be divided, if some prayed to the Father, and some to the Son?"

When I was myself a Trinitarian, I remember praying conscientiously to all three persons without distinction, only beginning with the Father; and what I myself did in the serious simplicity of my heart, when young, would, I doubt not, have been done by all Christians from the beginning, if their minds had been impressed as mine was, with the firm persuasion that all the three persons were fully equal in power, wisdom, goodness, omnipresence, and all divine attributes. . .

In the Clementine liturgy, the oldest that is extant, contained in the *Apostolical Constitutions*, which were probably composed about the fourth century, there is no trace of any such thing as prayers to Christ. . . .

Idolatry, which began with the worship of *Jesus Christ*, soon proceeded to that of the Virgin Mary, and terminated in as many objects of worship as the heathens ever adored, and sufficiently similar to them.

With idolatry, which is paying divine worship to that which is not God, you cannot charge me, because the being that I worship is also the object of worship with you; and the far greater part of your public devotions are addressed to no other. But the charge will fall with all its weight upon you, if the Father only be God, and you worship two other persons besides him. . . .

You cannot but acknowledge that the proper object of prayer is God the Father, whom you call the first person in the Trinity. Indeed, you cannot find in the Scriptures any *precept* that will authorize us to address ourselves to any other person, nor any proper *example* of it. . . Our Saviour himself always prayed to his Father, and with as much humility and resignation as the most dependent being in the universe could possibly do ; always addressing him as his *father*, or the *author of his being* ; and he directs his disciples to pray to the same great being, *whom only*, he says, *we ought to serve*. . . .

To conclude, from the single case of Stephen, that all Christians are authorized to pray to Christ, is like concluding that all matter has a tendency to go upwards, because a needle will do so when a magnet is held over it. When you shall be in the same circumstances with Stephen, having your mind strongly impressed with a vision of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, you may then, perhaps, be authorized to address yourself to him as he did ; but the whole tenor of the Scriptures proves that, otherwise, you have no authority at all for any such practice.

THE TRINITY.

DIVINES are content to build so strange and inexplicable a doctrine as that of the Trinity upon mere inferences from casual expressions, and cannot pretend to one clear, express, and unequivocal lesson on the subject.

I wish you would reflect a little on the subject, and then inform us what there is in the doctrine of the Trinity, *in itself considered*, that can recommend it as a part of a system of religious truth. For there is neither any fact in *nature*, nor any one purpose of *morals*, which are the object and end of all religion, that requires it.

If the doctrine of the Trinity be true, it is, no doubt, in the highest degree important and interesting. Since, therefore, the evangelists give no certain and distinct account of it, and say nothing of its importance, it may be safely inferred that it was unknown to them.

Why was not the doctrine of the *Trinity* taught as explicitly, and in as definite a manner, in the New Testament at least, as the doctrine of the divine *Unity* is taught in both the Old and New Testaments, if it be

a truth? And why is the doctrine of the *Unity* always delivered in so unguarded a manner, and without any exception made in favour of the Trinity, to prevent any mistake with respect to it, as is always now done in our orthodox catechisms, creeds, and discourses on the subject?

The doctrine of Transubstantiation implies a *physical impossibility*, whereas that of the Trinity, as unfolded in the Athanasian Creed, implies a *mathematical* one ; and to this only we usually give the name of *contradiction*.

Now I ask, Wherein does the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity differ from a contradiction? It asserts, in effect, that nothing is wanting to either the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, to constitute each of them truly and properly God ; each being equal in eternity and all divine perfections ; and yet that these three are not *three Gods*, but only *one God*. They are, therefore, both *one* and *many* in the same respect, viz., in each being *perfect God*. This is certainly as much a contradiction as to say that Peter, James, and John, having each of them everything that is requisite to constitute a complete man, are yet, all together, not *three men*, but only *one man*. For the ideas annexed to the words *God* or *man* cannot make any difference in the nature of the two propositions.

Why, then, should you be so desirous of retaining such a doctrine as this of the Trinity, which you must acknowledge has an uncouth appearance, has always confounded the best reason of mankind, and drives us to the undesirable doctrine of *inexplicable mysteries*? Try, then, whether you cannot hit upon some method or other of reconciling a few particular texts, not only with common sense, but also with the general and the obvious tenor of the Scriptures themselves. In the meantime, this doctrine of the Trinity wears so disagreeable an aspect, that I think every reasonable man must say, with the excellent Archbishop Tillotson, with respect to the Athanasian Creed, "I wish we were well rid of it." This is not setting up reason against the Scriptures, but reconciling reason with the Scriptures, and the Scriptures with themselves.

I therefore think it of the greatest consequence to Christianity, that this doctrine of the Trinity, which I consider as one of its most radical corruptions, should be renounced in the most open and unequivocal manner by all those whose minds are so far

enlightened as to be convinced that it is a corruption and an innovation in the Christian doctrine, the reverse of what it was in its primitive purity; and that they should exert themselves to enlighten the minds of others.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED.

THIS creed of Athanasius is no act of any council. You neither know who composed it, when it made its first appearance, or how it came into the public offices of the church.

Bishop Taylor says, "If it were considered concerning Athanasius's Creed, how many people understand it not, how contrary to natural reason it seems, how little the Scripture says of those curiosities of explanation—it had not been amiss if the final judgment had been left to Jesus Christ." . . .

Many, no doubt, do subscribe to this creed in this light and careless manner; which shows the dreadful effect of the *habit of subscribing*. It leads to the utter perversion of the plainest meaning of words, and opens a door to every kind of insincerity. By your lordship's own confession, you yourself no more believe what you have subscribed with respect to this creed, than you do the Koran.

If your lordship defends these damnable clauses on the principle of *meaning nothing at all by them*, you vindicate the common cursing and swearing that we every day hear in our streets. If the phrase *perish everlastingly* does not mean *perish everlastingly*, your lordship should have informed us what it does mean. It is certainly no *blessing*, but a *curse* of some kind or other.

We think it our duty to *cry aloud*, and *not spare*, when we see such abominations in the public worship of Almighty God as are to be found in all the civil establishments of Christianity in the world; corruptions borrowed from heathen polytheism, and which in their nature and effects are very similar to it.

CHRIST PROPERLY AND ONLY A MAN.

CHRIST was a man, naturally possessed of no other powers than other men have, but a distinguished messenger of God, and the chief instrument in his hands for the good of men; this was the original faith of the Christian church, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles.

It must strike every person who gives the least attention to the phraseology of the New Testament, that the terms Christ and God, are perpetually used in contradistinction to each other, as much as God and man. . . .

Christ himself always prayed to this one God, as his God and Father. He always spoke of himself as receiving his doctrine and his power from him, and again and again disclaimed having any power of his own, John v. 19: "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself." Ch. xiv. 10: "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me." . . .

He calls his disciples his brethren, John xx. 17: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Can any person read this, and say that the Unitarians wrest the Scriptures, and are not guided by the plain sense of them?

God promised to Abraham, Gen. xii. 3., that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. This, if it relate to the Messiah at all, can give us no other idea than that one of his seed or posterity should be the means of conferring great blessings on mankind.

What else will be suggested by the description which Moses is supposed to give of the Messiah, Deut. xviii. 18: "I will raise them up a prophet, from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him"? . . .

Here is nothing like a second person in the Trinity, a person equal to the Father, but a mere prophet, delivering, in the name of God, whatever he is ordered so to do. . .

Had the apostle Paul considered Christ as being anything more than a man, with respect to his nature, he would never have urged, with the least propriety or effect, that "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." For it might have been unanswerably replied, This is not the case; for, indeed, by man comes death, but not by man, but by God, or by God the creator of man, under God, comes the resurrection of the dead.

The disciples certainly saw and conversed with him at first on the supposition of his being a man as much as themselves. Of this there can be no doubt. Their surprise, therefore, upon being informed that he was not a man, but really God, or even the

maker of the world under God, would be just as great as ours would now be on discovering that any of our acquaintance, or at least a very good man and a prophet, was in reality God, or the maker of the world. Let us consider, then, how we should feel, how we should behave towards such a person, and how we should speak of him afterwards. No one, I am confident, would ever call that being a *man*, after he was convinced that he was *God*.

I would further recommend it to your consideration, how the apostles could continue to call Christ a *man*, as they always do, both in the book of Acts and in their Epistles, after they had discovered him to be God. After this it must have been highly degrading, unnatural, and improper, notwithstanding his appearance in human form.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

Is not one self-existent, almighty, infinitely wise, and perfectly good being fully equal to the production of all things, and also to the support and government of the worlds which he has made? A second person in the god-head cannot be really wanted for this purpose, as far as we can conceive.

You speak of the *impiety* of the Unitarians. Before you repeat any expressions of this kind, I beg you would pause a little, and consider how such language might be retorted upon yourself. If it be impiety to reduce a God to the state of a man, is it not equally impious to raise any man to a state of equality with God,—that God who has declared that he will not give his glory to another, who has no equal, and who in this respect styles himself a jealous God?

As Christ expressly says, that he did not know the day of judgment, he certainly either was, or pretended to be, ignorant of something which, at least in his divine nature, he must have known. Here, then, is a question worthy of an *Apollon* to answer; and it may be amusing to observe what different solutions have been given of this difficulty.

There is also another consideration which I would recommend to you who maintain that Christ was either God, or the maker of the world under God. It is this. The manner in which our Lord speaks of himself, and of the power by which he worked miracles, is inconsistent, according to the common construction of language, with the

idea of his being possessed of any proper power of his own, more than other men had.

If Christ was the maker of the world, and if in the creation he exerted no power but what properly belonged to himself, and what was as much *his own* as the power of speaking or walking belongs to man—though depending ultimately upon that supreme power in which we all live, and move, and have our being—he could not with any propriety, and without knowing that he must be misunderstood, have said that of *himself* he could do nothing, that the words which he spake were not his own, and that the Father within him did the works.

It would also be a shocking abuse of language, and would warrant any kind of deception and imposition, if Christ could be supposed to say that his Father was *greater than he*, and at the same time secretly mean only *his human nature*, whereas his divine nature was at the same time fully equal to that of the Father. Upon the same principle a man might say that Christ never suffered, that he never died, or rose again from the dead, meaning his divine nature only, and not his human. Indeed, there is no use in language, nor any guard against deception, if such liberties as these are to be allowed.

SON OF GOD NOT GOD THE SON.

With respect to calling Jesus the Son of God, this phrase was, in the mouth of a Jew, synonymous to the *Messiah*.

If the mere appellation *Son of God* implies equality with God, Adam must have been a God, for he is called the Son of God, Luke iii. 38. Solomon also must have been God; and so must all Christians, for they are called *Sons of God*, 1 John iii. 2. John i. 12. Rom. viii. 14. Phil. ii. 15.

OPINIONS WHICH PREPARED THE WAY FOR THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

THE great obstacle to the reception of Christianity, especially with persons distinguished for their learning, or their rank in life, was the meanness of the person and condition of Christ, and especially the circumstance of his having been crucified as a common malefactor.

Not content with alleging that though their Master died the death of a malefactor he had not lived the life of one; that his death had answered the greatest purposes in the plan of Divine Providence the

more learned among them availed themselves of the philosophy of their age, and said that the Christ was a person of much higher rank than he appeared to be, even much higher than that of any other man, a great super-angelic-spirit sent down from heaven . . . for it was the opinion of many that angels in the shape of men had appeared, and were only temporary forms of flesh and blood.

If any new opinions be introduced into a society, they are more likely to have introduced them who held opinions similar to them before they joined that society. . . .

The divinity of Christ was first advanced and urged by those who had been heathen philosophers, and especially those who were admirers of the doctrine of Plato, who held the opinion of a second God. . . .

It happened that the philosophy which was most in vogue in that age was Platonism, the principles of which have been seen to be more conformable to those of revealed religion in general than those of any other system that was taught in the Grecian schools, as it contained the doctrines of the unity of God, the reality of providence, and the immortality of the soul. . . .

Platonism unhappily making a difference between the Supreme Being himself and his *mind* or *ideas*, and giving an obscure notion of its being by means of a divine efflux that all truth is perceived by the mind, as common objects are seen by the beams of the sun, they imagined that a ray of this wisdom, or the great second divine principle in their system, might illuminate Jesus Christ, and even had permanently attached itself to him. . . .

Some of those Greek philosophers having embraced Christianity, and being, as was natural, desirous of making converts to others, therefore wished to recommend it to them, by exhibiting it in such a light as they imagined would make it appear to the most advantage and ; in order to do this, they endeavoured to make it seem to be as little different from the philosophy to which they had been addicted as possible. . .

When Christians had found *two natures* in Christ, a *divine* as well as a *human* nature, they would easily answer this reproach of the heathens. "Who was it," says Arnobius, "that was seen hanging on the cross? The man whom he put on, and whom he carried with him. The death you speak of was that of the man he had assumed—that of the burthen, not of the bearer." This was an

answer that we do not find to have occurred to the apostles. . . .

There is a pretty easy gradation in the progress of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ ; as he was first thought to be a God in some qualified sense of the word, a distinguished emanation from the Supreme Mind ; and then the *logos*, or the *wisdom of God* personified ; and this *logos* was first thought to be only occasionally detached from the Deity, and then drawn into his essence again, before it was imagined that it had a permanent personality, distinct from that of the source from which it sprung. And it was not till the fourth century that this *logos*, or Christ, was thought to be properly equal to the Father. . . .

THE FATHER GREATER THAN THE SON.

[We here adduce only a tithe of the evidence found by Dr. Priestley in the writings of the Christian Fathers before the Council of Nice, 325, that they regarded the Son as subordinate to the Father.]

THE great object of the orthodox in the second century, was to make a God of Christ, but a far *inferior* God, and also a God *of* or *out of* God the Father, lest he should be thought to be *another God*, and independent of the Father. On the other hand, the great object of the orthodoxy of a later period, was to exalt the Son to a perfect equality with the Father. . . .

Bishop Bull acknowledges that *Justin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, and *Novatian* thought that the Father could not be confined to place, but the Son might. . . .

Justin Martyr, who insists so much on the pre-existence and divinity of Christ, speaking of the *logos*, says, "Than whom we know no prince more kingly, and more righteous, after the God who generated him." Speaking of the God in heaven and the God upon earth, who conversed with Abraham, he says, "The former is the Lord of that Lord who was upon earth as his Father and God, the cause of his existence, and of his being powerful, and Lord and God." . . .

Irenæus evidently supposed, that the time of the day of judgment was altogether unknown to the Son, and he advises us to acquiesce in our ignorance of many things, after his example. . . . No better reason can be given, but that we may learn of our Lord

himself, that the Father is above all ; for he said, "The Father is greater than I." . . .

Clement Alexandrinus calls the *logos* "the image of God, the legitimate son of his mind ; a light, the copy of the light, and man the image of the *logos*." He calls the Father the only true God. . . He speaks of Christ as subservient to his Father's will, and only called God by way of figure. . .

The early fathers, before the Council of *Nice*, say that the Son was generated *in time*, that there was a time when God was without a Son, and that this generation took place immediately before the creation, in order to the Son's being instrumental in it. . .

Tertullian expressly says, that "God was not always a father or a judge ; since he could not be a Father before he had a Son, nor a judge before there was sin ; and there was a time when both sin and the Son, which made God to be a judge and a father, were not." . . .

Tertullian considers "The monarchy of God as not infringed by being committed to the Son, especially as it is not infringed by being committed to innumerable angels, who are said to be subservient to the commands of God." "How," says he, "do I destroy the monarchy, who suppose the Son derived from the substance of the Father, and does nothing without the Father's will ; he being a servant to his Father ?" He says that Paul is speaking of the Father only, when he speaks of him whom no man has seen, or can see, and as the king eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only God. "According to the economy of the gospel, the Father chose that the Son should be on earth and himself in heaven ; wherefore, the Son himself, looking upwards, prayed to the Father, and teaches us to pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven." . . .

Origen says, that "God is the *αρχη* (the origin) to Christ, as Christ is the *αρχη* to those things which were made in the image of God." "Both the Father and the Son," he says, "are fountains : the Father, of divinity ; the Son, of *logos*." "The Father only is the good, and the Saviour, as he is the image of the invisible God, so he is the image of his goodness." "The *logos* did whatever the Father ordered." "The Saviour and the Holy Spirit," he says, "are more excelled by the Father, than he and the Holy Spirit excel other things." . . .

Novatian, whose orthodoxy, with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, was never questioned, says, "The Father only is the only

good God." "The rule of truth teaches us to believe, after the Father, in the Son of God, Christ Jesus, our Lord God, but the Son of God, of that God who is one and alone the maker of all things." "Though he was in the form of God, he did not attempt the robbery of being equal with God. For, though he knew he was God of God the Father, he never compared himself with God the Father ; remembering that he was of the Father, and that he had what the Father gave him." . . .

Arnobius says, that "the Omnipotent, and only God, sent Christ." And again, "Christ, a God, spake by the order of the principal God." . . .

"God," says *Lactantius*, "the framer and ordainer of all things, before he undertook the construction of this world, generated an incorruptible spirit, which he called his Son." . . .

"The Son patiently obeys the will of the Father, and does nothing but what the Father wills or orders." "He approved his fidelity to God ; for he taught that there is one God, and that he only ought to be worshipped ; nor did he ever say he was God. For he would not have preserved his allegiance, if, being sent to take away a multiplicity of gods, and to preach *one God*, he had brought in another, besides that one." . . .

The same language was held by *Eusebius*, who wrote about the time of the Council of *Nice*. "Christ," he says, "the only begotten Son of God, and the first-born of every creature, teaches us to call his Father the only true God, and commands us to worship him only." "There is one God, and the only-begotten comes out of him." "Christ being neither the supreme God, nor an angel, is of a middle nature between them ; and being neither the supreme God, nor a man, but the mediator, is in the middle between them, the only-begotten Son of God." . . .

THE REASON WHY THE APOSTLES DID NOT AT FIRST TEACH THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

THE Christian Fathers in general represent the apostles as obliged to use great caution not to offend their first converts with the doctrine of Christ's divinity, and as forbearing to urge that topic till they were first well established in the belief of his being the Messiah. . . .

After treating pretty largely of the conduct of the apostles with respect to their insisting on the doctrine of the *Resurrection* of Christ, rather than that of his *Divinity*, immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit, Athanasius says, "As to the Jews, who had daily heard, and been taught out of the law, *Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, and besides him there is no other*; having seen him (Jesus) nailed to a cross, yea, having killed and buried him themselves, and not having seen him risen again, if they had heard that this person was God, equal to the Father, would not they have rejected and spurned at it?" "On this account," he adds, "they (the apostles) brought them forwards gently, and by slow degrees, and used great art in condescending to their weakness."

Now if we look into the book of Acts, we shall clearly see that they had not got beyond the first lesson in the apostolic age; the great burden of the preaching of the apostles being to persuade the Jews that *Jesus was the Christ*. That he was likewise *God*, they evidently left to their successors; who, indeed, did it most effectually, though it required a long course of time to do it.

Theodoret observes, that in the genealogy of Christ given by Matthew, this writer did not add *according to the flesh*, "because the men of that time would not bear it." This writer also says, that the Apostle Paul, in mentioning the subjection of Christ to the Father, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "spoke of him more lowly than was necessary on account of their weakness."

Chrysostom says, that "if the Jews were so much offended at having a new law superadded to their former, how much more would they have been offended if Christ had taught his own divinity." He represents the apostle as beginning his epistle to the Hebrews with saying, "that it was *God* who spake by the prophets, and by his Son, and not that *Christ* himself had spoken by them, because their minds were weak, and they were not able to bear the doctrine concerning Christ." He even says that "when he there speaks of Christ as above the angels, he still spoke of his humanity. See," says he, "his great caution." He adds, at Athens Paul calls him (Jesus) simply a *man*, and nothing further, and for a good reason. For if, when they had heard Christ himself speaking of his equality to the Father, they would on that account have often stoned him, and called him a blasphemer; they would hardly,

therefore, have received this doctrine from fishermen, especially after speaking of him as crucified. And why do I speak of the Jews; when at that time, even the disciples of Christ himself were often disturbed, and scandalized at him, when they heard sublime doctrines; on which account he said, I have many things to say to you, but ye are not yet able to bear them.

I cannot help observing how extremely improbable is this account of the conduct of the apostles given by Athanasius, Chrysostom, and other orthodox fathers of the church, considering what we know of the character and the instructions of the apostles. They were plain men, and little qualified to act the cautious part ascribed to them. And their instructions certainly were to teach all that they knew, even what their master communicated to them in the greatest privacy. Whereas, they must have suffered numbers to die in the ignorance of the most important truth in the gospel, lest, by divulging it too soon, the conversion of others should have been prevented. The case evidently was, that these fathers did not know how to account for the great prevalence of the Unitarian doctrine among the Gentiles as well as the Jews in the early ages of Christianity, but upon such a hypothesis as this: [that the apostles did not at first teach the deity of Christ].

In how unworthy a manner, and how unsuitably to their real character and conduct, these fathers represent the apostles as acting. They were all plain men, far from being qualified or disposed to act so cunning a part as is here ascribed to them.

EARLY OPINIONS ABOUT THE HOLY GHOST.

It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding the doctrine concerning the person of Christ had been the great subject of controversy ever since the promulgation of Christianity, there is no mention made of any difference of opinion concerning the *Holy Spirit*, that attracted any notice, till after the commencement of the Arian controversy, and even till after the Council of Nice.

Justin Martyr, to whom we are indebted for the first rudiments of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, says but little concerning the Holy Spirit; and from that little it is not easy to conclude what

his real opinion was. But it is probable that he considered the Spirit as a created being, since he represents him as inferior to Christ.

Irenæus seems to have considered the Holy Spirit as a divine influence, and no proper person. "By the name of Christ," he says, "we are given to understand one who anoints, one who is anointed, and the unction with which he is anointed. It is the Father who anoints, but the Son is anointed in the Spirit."

Valentinus thought the Holy Spirit to be of the same rank with the angels.

Origen considered it as doubtful whether, since all things are made by Christ, the Holy Spirit was not made by him. And after discussing the question a little, he says, "We who maintain three hypostases, the Father, Son, and Spirit, and believe that the Father only is unbegotten, think it more agreeable to piety and truth, to maintain that the Holy Spirit is superior to all things that were made by Christ."

Tertullian seems to have thought that the Holy Spirit was derived from Christ, in the same manner as Christ was derived from God.

Novatian, who had as much orthodoxy with respect to the Trinity as any person of his age, certainly did not believe in the divinity of the Holy Spirit, whom he represents as inferior to the Son, whom also he makes greatly inferior to the Father. "Christ," says he, "is greater than the Paraclete; for he would not receive of Christ if he was not less than he."

Athenagoras considered the Holy Spirit as an efflux from the Deity, flowing out and drawn into him again at pleasure, as a beam from the sun.

Eusebius, who appears to have been as orthodox as other writers of his age with respect to the Son, (if his writings may be allowed to testify for him,) and who certainly was not bold in heresy, scrupled not to consider the Spirit as made by the Son. "The Holy Spirit," says he, "is neither God nor the Son, because he did not derive his birth from the Father, like the Son, but in one of the things that was made by the Son; because all things were made by him, and without him was nothing made."

Even *Hilary*, who wrote so largely concerning the divinity of the Son, seems not to have had the same persuasion concerning that of the Holy Spirit; but, in the little that he says on the subject, seems rather to have

considered the Spirit as a divine influence.

The reasoning of the fathers concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit lies in a much smaller compass than that concerning the divinity of the Son. One principal reason of this is, that so little mention is made of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, and still less that can possibly be construed into an evidence of his being a divine person. This is a circumstance that could not escape notice, and which required to be accounted for by the orthodox.

Among others, *Epiphanius* has advanced a reason which is curious enough. It goes upon the idea of the Holy Spirit being that person of the three which immediately dictated the Scriptures. He says, that "the Holy Spirit says little concerning himself, that he might not commend himself, the Scriptures being written to give us examples."

It was *Athanasius*, the great advocate for the divinity of Christ, and his consubstantiality with the Father, who also exerted himself strenuously and effectually in behalf of that of the Holy Spirit, whose divinity was denied by *Macedonius*. He informs us, that he was in the deserts of Egypt when he heard of that heresy, and that he wrote from thence to prevent the spread of it. He had so much influence in Egypt, that a Synod was immediately called there, which he attended, and where the Holy Spirit was for the first time decreed to be consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

Not long after this, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was more solemnly determined at a council held in Constantinople, and from that time it was deemed equally heretical to deny the divinity of the Spirit as that of the Son.

THE FIRST APOSTLES STRICTLY UNITARIAN.

WHEN the apostles first attached themselves to Jesus, it is evident they only considered him as being such a Messiah as the rest of the Jews expected, viz. a man, and a king. When Nathaniel was introduced to him it was evidently in that light, John i. 45. "Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

At the time that Herod heard Jesus, it was conjectured by some that he was Elias, by others that he was a prophet, and by some that he was John risen from the dead; but none of them imagined that he was either the most high God himself, or the maker of the world under God. It was not so much as supposed by any person that Jesus performed his mighty works by any proper power of *his own*.

If he was known to be a God at all before his death, it could only have been revealed to his disciples, perhaps the apostles, or only his chief confidants among them, Peter, James, and John, suppose on the mount of transfiguration, though nothing is said concerning it in the history of that transaction. Certainly what they saw in the garden of Gethsemane could not have led them to suspect any such thing. But if it had ever been known to Peter, can we suppose he could have denied him as he did?

If the doctrine of the deity of Christ had been actually preached by the apostles, and the Jewish converts in general, had adopted it, it could not but have been well known to the unbelieving Jews; and would they, who were at that time, and have been ever since, so exceedingly zealous with respect to the doctrine of the divine unity, not have taken the alarm, and have urged this objection to Christianity, as teaching the belief in more Gods than one, in the apostolic age?

As soon as ever the Jews had any pretence for it, we find them sufficiently quick and vehement in urging this their great objection to Christianity. To answer the charge of holding *two or three Gods*, is a very considerable article in the writings of several of the ancient Christian fathers. Why then do we find nothing of this kind in the age of the apostles? The only answer is, that there was no occasion for it, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ not having been started. Athanasius strongly expresses this objection, as made by both Jews and Gentiles, to the incarnation of the Son of God, though as a thing that was gloried in by Christians. "The Jews," says he, "reproach us for it; the Gentiles laugh at it; but we adore it. . .

Paul tells the elders of the church of Ephesus (Acts xx. 27) that "he had not failed to declare unto them the whole counsel of God." We may be confident, therefore, that, if he had any such doctrine (the deity of Christ) to divulge, he must have taught it in the three years that he spent in that city. But if we attend Paul thither, where we

have a very particular account of all the proceedings against him, we shall find no trace of anything of the kind. All their complaints against him fell far short of this.

Considering the known prejudices, and the inveteracy of the Jews, no reasonable man need desire any clearer proof than this, that neither Paul, nor any of the apostles, had ever taught the doctrine of the divinity of Christ.

If we consider the charge that was advanced against Peter and John at the first promulgation of the gospel, we shall find it amounts to nothing but their being disturbers of the people, by preaching in the name of Jesus. What was the accusation against Stephen, but his speaking blasphemous words against the temple and the law? . . .

The apostles, to the latest period of their writings, speak the same language; representing the Father as the only true God, and Christ as a man, the servant of God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him all the power of which he is possessed, as a reward of his obedience. Peter says, Acts ii. 22, 24, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, &c., whom God hath raised up." Paul also says, 1 Tim. ii. 5, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Heb. ii. 9, 10: "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels," *i.e.*, who was a man, "for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour," &c.

Speaking of those who believed Christ to be a mere man, *Facundus* says, "The apostles themselves were once imperfect in the faith, but never heretics. For while they believed too little concerning Christ, they received power to cast out unclean spirits, and to cure diseases, when our Lord sent them, and gave them a commission. If, therefore, the apostles, in the very time of their ignorance, were not heretics, how can any one call these so who died such?" . . .

The Apostles' Creed affords a strong argument for the antiquity and purity of the ancient Unitarian doctrine. This argument was urged by Photinus (A.D. 346, a Unitarian), who, according to *Rufinus*, pleaded that the "Apostles' Creed, literally understood, was in his favour." *Marcellus* (A.D. 330, a Unitarian) in his epistle, quotes the whole of the Apostles' Creed, and assents to it.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH UNITARIAN.

It is owned by *Eusebius* and others, that the ancient Unitarians themselves constantly asserted that their doctrine was the prevailing opinion of the Christian church till the time of Victor. The Trinitarians denied this.

That there were as proper Unitarians in the very age of the apostles as any who are so termed at this day (myself by no means excepted), and differing as much from what is now called the orthodox faith, I will venture to say was never questioned; and that these ancient Unitarians were not then expelled from Christian societies as heretics, is, I believe, as generally allowed.

Facundus says that "Martha and Mary would never have said to Christ if *thou hadst been there*, had they thought him to be God omnipresent." He adds, "neither would Philip have said to him *Show us the Father*, if he had entertained any such idea of him."

As one argument that the primitive church of Jerusalem was properly Unitarian, maintaining the simple humanity of Christ, I observe, that "Athanasius himself was so far from denying it, that he endeavoured to account for it by saying that all the Jews were so firmly persuaded that their Messiah was to be nothing more than a man like themselves, that the apostles were obliged to use great caution in divulging the doctrine of the proper divinity of Christ."

Theodoret, commenting on 1 Cor. viii. 6, "To us there is but one God the Father,—and one Lord Jesus Christ," says, "Here Paul calls the one, *God*, and the other, *Lord*, lest he should give those just freed from heathenism, and had learned the truth, a pretence for returning to their heathenism and idolatry. In his exposition of 1 Cor. xv. 28, in which the apostle says, that the Son was subject to the Father, says, "The divine apostle, fearing the evil that might arise from the Grecian mythology, added these things, speaking in low terms for their advantage." And the plain inference from this is, that the orthodox fathers must necessarily have supposed, that the Christian church in general was at first Unitarian, and that it continued to be so a considerable time.

"Hegesippus" (a Jewish Christian), *Eusebius* says, "wrote the history of the preaching of the apostles in five books. Conversing

with many bishops in his journey to Rome, he found the same doctrine with them all."

That *Hegesippus* (A.D. 170), though a Unitarian himself, should speak as he does of the state of opinions in the general churches which he visited, as then retaining *the true faith*, is, I think, very natural. The only heresy that disturbed the apostle *John*, and therefore other Jewish Christians in general, was that of the *Gnostics*. . . .

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE Gnostics.

[The Gnostics were a sect of Christians who, among other things, believed that Jesus Christ was a man, only in appearance, and it was against this sect John's writings were directed, not the Unitarians.]

IRENÆUS, speaking of the Cerinthians and Nicolaitans, says, that "John meant to refute them, and show that there is only one omnipotent God, who made all things by his word, visible and invisible, in the introduction to his gospel." "No heretics," he says, "hold that the word was made flesh." Again, he says, "John alludes to the Gnostics both in his gospel and in his epistle, and describes them by the name of Antichrist, and those who were not in communion with Christians.

Tertullian, indeed, maintained that, by those who denied that *Christ was come in the flesh*, John meant the Gnostics, and that by those who denied that *Jesus was the son of God*, he meant the Ebionites [Unitarians who did not believe in the miraculous conception]. He had no idea that the former expression only could include both. But as the Gnostics maintained that *Jesus and the Christ* were different persons, the latter having come from heaven, and being the son of God, whereas Jesus was the son of man only, the expression of *Jesus being the son of God* is as directly opposed to the doctrine of the Gnostics as that of *Christ coming in the flesh*.

It is remarkable, however, and really curious, that before the Unitarians were considered as heretics, we find a very different account of the reasons that induced John to write both his epistles and his gospel; *Ignatius* says it was solely with a view to the Gnostics, and so does *Irenæus*, again and again. This, therefore, was the more ancient opinion on the subject; and, I doubt not, the

true one. And it was not till long after this (Tertullian, I believe, is the first in whom it occurs) that it was imagined that the apostle had any view to the Unitarians in any of his writings. This is a circumstance that well deserves to be attended to.

Is it not extraordinary that, if this apostle conceived the indignation that you suppose him to have entertained against the Unitarians, he should give no intimation of it except in this one ambiguous expression? You own that he marks the Gnostics clearly enough, and expresses the strongest aversion to them. How came he then to spare the Unitarians, who have been so odious since? You must own that, in the course of his gospel, he inserts many expressions which, when literally interpreted, militate strongly against the doctrine of the divinity of Christ; as when, according to him, our Saviour says, "The Father is greater than I; I can do nothing of myself; I live by the Father; the Father within me he doth the works. The Father is the only true God," &c. If the apostle knew that there were in his time those who believed that Christ was a mere man, while he himself believed him to be God, is it not extraordinary that he should give them such an advantage from the language of our Saviour in his own gospel; and that he should have taken no care to qualify or explain it? Persons who are aware of a dangerous opinion, and wish to guard others against it, do not write as he does.

JEWISH CHRISTIANS; EBIONITES AND NAZARENES.

THE Nazarenes, as well as the Ebionites, the genuine descendants of the old Jewish Christians, and who cannot be proved to have departed from the faith of their ancestors, were all believers in the simple humanity of Christ; and certainly the presumption is, that they learned this doctrine from the apostles. For who else were their teachers?

It is plain there was a very great agreement between these two ancient sects; and though they went under different names, yet they seem only to have differed in this, that the Ebionites had made some addition to the old Nazarene system. For Origen expressly tells us, "They were called Ebionites, who from among the Jews own Jesus to be the Christ."

That the Ebionites comprised all the

Jewish Christians in the time of Origen, is evident from the passage, "When you consider what belief they, of the Jewish race, who believe in Jesus, entertain of their redeemer, some thinking that he took his being from Mary and Joseph, some indeed from Mary only and the divine Spirit, but still without any belief of his divinity you will understand."

The peculiar opinions of the *Ebionites* and the *Nazarenes* are represented by the most respectable authorities as the very same; only some have thought that the *Nazarenes* believed the miraculous conception, and the *Ebionites* not. But this has no authority whatever among the ancients.

Theodoret, who, living in *Syria*, had a great opportunity of being acquainted with the *Nazarenes*, describes them as follows:—"The *Nazarenes* are Jews who honour Christ as a righteous man.

Justin particularly mentions his having no objection to hold communion with those Jewish Christians who observed the law of Moses, provided they did not impose it upon others. Now, who could those be but Jewish Unitarians? for, agreeable to the evidence of all antiquity, all the Jewish Christians were such.

Tertullian is the first Christian writer who expressly calls the *Ebionites heretics*. *Irenæus*, in his large treatise concerning heresy, expresses great dislike of their doctrine, always representing them as believing that Jesus was the son of Joseph; but he never confounds them with the heretics.

UNITARIANS NOT AT FIRST RE- GARDED AS HERETICS.

HAVING proved that the great body of Christians in early times were Unitarians, it follows that they could not have been considered as *heretics*, or persons out of communion with the Catholic church.

Justin Martyr treats the ancient Unitarians in a way as evidently showing that in his time his own doctrine stood in need of an *apology*. There are two passages in this writer in which he speaks of *heretics* with great indignation, as "not Christians, but as persons whose tenets were absurd, impious, and blasphemous, with whom Christians held no communion;" but in both the passages he evidently had a view to the *Gnostics only*.

Hegesippus, the first Christian historian, enumerating the heresies of his time, men-

tions several of the Gnostic kind, but not that of Christ being a mere man. He, moreover, says, that in travelling to Rome, where he arrived in the time of *Anicetus*, he found all the churches that he visited held the faith which had been taught by Christ and the apostles, which, in his opinion, was probably that of Christ being, not God, but man only.

Ignatius also frequently mentions *heresy* and *heretics*, and, like John and Polycarp, with great indignation; but it is evident to every person who is at all acquainted with the history, learning, and language of those times, and of the subsequent ones, that he had no persons in his eye but the Gnostics only.

No man took more pains to inculcate the doctrine of the *logos* than Origen, and he thought meanly of those Christians who did not adopt it, considering them as of an inferior rank; but I believe he never classes them with *heretics*.

Clemens Alexandrinus makes frequent mention of heretics, and expresses as much abhorrence of them as Justin Martyr does; but it is evident that, in all the places in which he speaks of them, his idea of heresy was confined to Gnosticism. He considers it as an answer to *all heretics* to prove that "there is one God, the almighty Lord, who was preached by the law and the prophets, and also in the blessed gospel." He also speaks of heresy as "borrowed from a barbarous philosophy;" and says of heretics, that "though they say there is one God, and sing hymns to Christ, it was not according to truth; for that they introduced another God, and such a Christ as the prophets had not foretold." He never includes the Gentile Unitarians among heretics. . . .

But there is an evident reason why the Ebionites were pretty soon considered as heretics, and a reason which did not affect the Unitarians among the Gentiles. For the Jewish Christians, on account of their using a different language, held *separate assemblies* from those who used the Greek tongue; and besides, Jerome expressly says they were deemed heretics *ONLY on the account of their attachment to the institutions of Moses*. . .

THE UNITARIANS WERE THE GREAT BODY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH UP TO THE FOURTH CENTURY.

WHEN this investigation shall be completely finished, it will, probably, be matter

of surprise to many, that it was not sooner discovered that the Unitarians *must have been*, and certainly *were*, the great body of common Christians till after the Council of Nice.

The common or unlearned people in any country, who do not speculate much, retain longest any opinions with which their minds have been much impressed; and therefore we always look for the oldest opinions in any country, or any class of men, among the common people, and not among the learned.

There can be no doubt, therefore, but that the doctrine of the Trinity was a long time very unpopular with the common people among Christians; and this is a fact that cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, but on the supposition that the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ was that which had been handed down to them by tradition from the apostles.

Justin Martyr, A.D. 140, is generally supposed to have been the first platonising Christian, and it would appear his doctrine was not popular from the phrase, "neither do I agree with the majority of Christians, who may have objected to my opinion," which is nearly the most literal rendering of the passage, (though I would not be understood to lay much stress on that circumstance,) will naturally be construed to mean that the majority actually *did* make the objection, or that Justin suspected they *might* make it.

Nothing can well be more evident than that Tertullian represents the great body of unlearned Christians in his time as Unitarians, and even holding the doctrine of the Trinity in great abhorrence. "The simple, the ignorant, and unlearned, who are always the greater part of the body of Christians, since the rule of faith," meaning, probably, the Apostles' Creed, "transfers the worship of many gods to the one true God, not understanding that the unity of God is to be maintained but with the economy, dread this economy; imagining that this number and disposition of a Trinity is a division of the Unity. They, therefore, will have it that we are worshippers of two, and even of three Gods, but that they are the worshippers of one God only. We, they say, hold the monarchy. Even the Latins have learned to bawl out for the monarchy, and the Greeks themselves will not understand the economy." It is hardly possible in any words to describe the state of things

more clearly than *Tertullian* here does. It is the language of strong feeling and complaint, the clearest of all proofs that he did not misstate things on that side, as it would have been for the purpose of his argument to have represented the Unitarians as being inconsiderable on account of their numbers, as well as despicable on account of their want of learning.

It is evident to me that in the time of *Origen*, viz. the beginning of the third century, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was so far from being generally received, except by the bishops and the more learned of the clergy, that it was considered as a sublime doctrine, proper indeed for persons who had made advances in divine knowledge, but not adapted to the vulgar, who were content with the plain doctrine of Jesus Christ, he says, "the multitudes (i.e. the great mass or body) of believers are instructed in the shadow of the logos, and not in the true logos of God, which is in the open heaven. Wherefore the gospel must be taught both corporeally and spiritually; and, when it is necessary, we must preach the corporeal gospel, saying to the carnal that we know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. But when persons are found confirmed in the spirit, bringing forth fruits in it, and in love with heavenly wisdom, we must impart to them the *logos* returning from his bodily state, in that he was in the beginning with God."—*Origen*.

Origen well describes the different classes of Unitarians of his time in the following passage: "Hence may be solved the doubts which disturb many who allege a principle of piety, and a fear of making two Gods, and by this means fall into false and impious opinions; either denying that the identity of the Son differs from that of the Father, saying, that the Son is God only in name; or denying the divinity of the Son, while they allow his identity, and that he is a different person from the Father," &c. The first that he describes were the philosophical Unitarians, who allowed the divinity of the Son, but said it was the same with that of the Father; whereas the latter (probably the common people) denied the divinity of the Son altogether. It is evident from this passage, that the Unitarians, in the time of *Origen*, were numerous; for he calls them *many*, which he would not have done unnecessarily. The argument by which he solves their doubts has been mentioned before, viz. that the Father is God

with the article prefixed, and the Son *without* it.

Athanasius also acknowledged that the Unitarian doctrine was very prevalent among the lower class of people in his time. He calls them *ο πολλοι*, *the many*, and describes them as persons of low understanding. "It grieves," he says, "those who stand up for the holy faith that *the multitude*, and especially persons of low understanding, should be infected with those blasphemies. Things that are sublime and difficult are not to be apprehended, except by faith; and ignorant people must fall, if they cannot be persuaded to rest in faith, and avoid curious questions."

Gregory Nazienzen, who was contemporary with *Basil*, complains of the small number of the orthodox, saying, "They were the smallest of the tribes of Israel." He represents the common people as excusable for their errors, and safe, from not being disposed to scrutinize into things. . .

I think we may learn from *Facundus*, who wrote so late as the reign of Justinian, that in his time many of the common people were well known to consider Christ as a *mere man*, and yet were not disturbed on that account. As the passage in his writings from which I infer this is a pretty remarkable one, I shall cite it at full length. Speaking of the condemnation of Theodorus, in whose favour he is writing, he says, that "in condemning him they condemned all those who thought as he did, even though they afterwards changed their opinion.... What will they do with Martha, and then with Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, who were particularly attached to our Lord while he was upon earth? And yet both of them, first Martha and then Mary, are said to speak to him thus: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" who, though they thought that he was the Son of God who was to come into the world, yet would they not have said *if thou hadst been here*, if they had believed him to be God omnipresent. They therefore only thought as Theodorus is said to have done, and were excommunicated along with him; and how many of this kind do we know, by the writings of the apostles and evangelists, there were at that time, and how many even now are there still in the common herd of the faithful, who, by only partaking in the holy mysteries, and by a simple observance of the commandments, we see pleasing God; when even the apostles themselves, the first

teachers, only thought as those whom we see to be included in this condemnation of Theodorus."

Unitarians, however, were far from being all of the common people, and unlearned. There were several considerable writers among them. "*Beryllus* of Bostra," *Nicophorus* says, "left elegant writings behind him." *Marcellus* and *Photinus* distinguished themselves as writers, and *Gregory Nazianzen* says that the heretics boasted of the number of their books. Unhappily there are none of them now extant.

the Council of Nice. *Eusebius*, in his controversy with *Marcellus*, says, "If they are afraid of making two Gods."—"Some, for fear of introducing a second God, make the Father and the Son the same."—"But you are dreadfully afraid lest you should be obliged to acknowledge two hypostases of the Father and Son."

Alluding to the Unitarians, with whom, it is plain, *Origen* wished to stand on good terms, says, "We may by this means solve the doubts which terrify many men, who pretend to great piety, and who are afraid of making two Gods."

Photius very truly observes that, "to recite all the answers which the fathers have given to the question, why, when the Father, Son, and Spirit are each of them separately God, we should not say that there are three Gods? would make a book, instead of an epistle."

Cyril of Jerusalem complains of heretics, both Arians and Unitarians, as in the bosom of the church. "Now," says he, "there is an apostacy; for men have departed from the right faith, some confounding the Son with the Father," meaning the Sabellians, "others daring to say that Christ was created out of nothing," meaning the Arians. "Formerly heretics were open, but now the church is full of concealed heretics."

"We are torn in pieces," *Basil* says, "on the one side by the Anomeans, and on the other by Sabellius." "Is not the mystery of godliness everywhere laughed at; the bishops continuing without people and without clergy, having nothing but an empty name, able to do nothing for the advancement of the gospel of peace and salvation? Are there not discords concerning God, and blaspheming from the old impiety of vain Sabellius?" "You know," says he, "my dear brethren, that the doctrine of *Marcellus* overturns all our hopes, not acknowledging the Son in his proper personality."

"When I was lately praying before the people," says *Basil*, "and sometimes concluding with the doxology to the Father, with the Son, and Holy Spirit, and sometimes through the Son in the Holy Spirit, some who were present said, that I used phrases which were not only new, but contradictory." He says that "he was accused of novelty, and as an inventor of new phrases, and that they spared no kind of reproach, because he made the Son equal to

OPPOSITION TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST AND THE TRINITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

Tertullian testified that the greater part of the body of Christians complained that their teachers were worshippers of two, and even of three Gods.

Tertullian appears, however, not a little embarrassed with the question, how the Father can be called the one God, if the Son, though connected with him, can, in any proper sense, even where the Father is not mentioned, be called God; but he seems to satisfy himself with saying, that as the proper style of the Father before he had a Son was that of the one God, he could not lose it in consequence of having a Son, especially as that Son derives his divinity from his inseparable connection with the Father. "Without injuring the rights of the Son, the Father," he says, "may be called the only God."

With a view to the Unitarians, who were the majority of the common Christians in the time of *Tertullian*, as he particularly acknowledges, he is obliged to use a good deal of management, and though he contends for the propriety of calling the Son God, as a branch from God the Father, yet so great was the superiority of the Father to the Son, that he says he does not choose to call the Son God, when the Father had been mentioned immediately before.

Origen says, "It is probable that some will be offended with our saying, that the Father being called the only true God, there are other gods besides him partaking of his divinity." *Novatian* speaks of the Unitarians as "*scandalized* at the doctrine of the divinity of Christ." And the state of things was not different about the time of

the Father, and did not separate the Holy Spirit from the Son."

The authority of the church was also had recourse to, as an argument to enforce the reception of what could not be proved or explained. "Some tenets in the church," says *Basil*, "we receive as preserved in writing, but some are of apostolic tradition, handed down as *mysteries*, both of which have the same force with respect to piety, and no one will question them, who is at all acquainted with the laws of the church."

Austin pleaded for implicit faith by the authority of the prophet *Isaiah*. "It was, therefore," he says, "rationally said by the prophet (chap. vi.). Unless ye believe, ye will not understand; where he doubtless distinguishes these two things, and advises that we first believe that we may be able to understand what we believe; so it seems reasonable that faith should precede reason."

Nor were the Heathens less backward than the Christians to upbraid the orthodox fathers with their own *Polytheism*, while they pretended to reclaim them from theirs. The Heathens, according to *Chrysostom*, would say to them, "Who is this Father, who is this Son, or this Holy Spirit? Do not you make three Gods, while you accuse us of *Polytheism*!"

PRINCIPLES AND ARGUMENTS OF THE ANCIENT UNITARIANS.

THE great stronghold of Unitarians was the Scriptures, and the plain literal sense of them. "They bawl out," says *Basil*, "with their proofs from Scripture, and make no account of the unwritten traditions of the fathers." And *Photinus*, in his dispute with *Basil*, said that "he could prove his doctrine by a hundred passages of Scripture." The orthodox in general complained of the advantage which the Unitarians had in appealing to the literal sense of the Scripture. "If," says *Gregory Nyssen*, "a man rests in the bare letter, so far he Judaizes in opinion, and has not learned that a Christian is not the disciple of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

The two decisive texts in proof of the unity of God, and the proper humanity of Christ, in these epistles are the following: Eph. iv. 5, 6, "One Lord, one faith, one

baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all;" which was urged, as *Eusebius* informs us, by *Marcellus*; and 1 Tim. ii. 5, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," which was pleaded by the same. This was also alleged by *Photinus*.

Epiphanius says that *Theodorus* argued from Acts ii. 22, where Peter calls Christ "a man approved of God." And indeed it was acknowledged by the orthodox, that, in all the period to which the history of Luke extends, the apostles did not openly preach such offensive doctrines as those of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ.

We learn from *Epiphanius* that *Theodotus* urged Luke i. 35: "The spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee;" arguing that he did not enter into her, as the orthodox supposed. And John viii. 40, "Ye seek to kill me, a MAN who told you the truth." *Austin* says that the Sabellians urged John vii. 16, "My doctrine is not mine." *Basil's* enemies quoted against him John vi. 57, "I live by the Father."

When the Unitarians were urged with the Father and the Son being said to be one, they said that they were one by consent and harmony, and proved it from Christ's saying that his disciples might be one with them, as they two were one.

That the ancient Unitarians had much recourse to reasoning, and that they often disputed with great acuteness and subtlety, so as to puzzle their opponents, may be inferred from what is said of them by *Eusebius*, viz. that "they neglected the Scriptures, and reasoned in syllogisms." [They used both reason and Scripture.]

UNITARIANS HAD NO SEPARATE ASSEMBLIES.

[THE ANCIENT UNITARIANS were known by the names of Ebionites, Nazarenes, Paulians, Arians, Monarchists, &c. &c.]

THE Unitarians were originally nothing less than the whole body of Christians, and that the Trinitarians were the innovators; appearing at first modest and candid, as was natural while they were a small minority, but bold and imperious when they became the majority.

There was no creed used in the Christian church, besides that which was commonly called the *Apostle's*, before the Council of

Nice; and even after that there was no other generally used at baptism. This creed, as has been seen, contains no article that could exclude Unitarians; and there was nothing in the public services that was calculated to exclude them.

Accordingly, we find that all the Unitarians continued in communion with the Catholic church till the time of *Theodotus*, about the year 200, when it is possible that, upon his excommunication, some of his more zealous followers might form themselves into separate societies.

We have no certain account of any separate societies of Unitarians till the excommunication of *Paulus Samosatensis*, about the year 250, when, after him, they were called Paulians, or Paulianists. Others also, about the same time, or rather after that time, formed separate societies in Africa, on the excommunication of *Sabellius*, being, after him, called Sabellians.

"Sabellianism," which was precisely the same thing with Unitarianism in former times, Dr. Lardner says (*Credibility*, vol. iv. p. 606), "must have been very agreeable to the apprehensions of many people. Rusebius speaks of its increasing very much in Egypt, when Dionysius of Alexandria opposed it. According to Athanasius, the occasion of Dionysius writing upon that head was, that some of the bishops of Africa followed the doctrine of Sabellius, and they prevailed to such a degree, that the Son of God was scarce any longer preached in the churches. It is also remarkable that the first treatise that was ever written against the Unitarian doctrine was that of Tertullian against Praxeas, with whom he was particularly provoked, on account of the active part he had taken against Montanus, in getting him excommunicated and expelled from the church of Rome. This, says Le Sueur, was the cause of the bitterness with which Tertullian wrote against him. Now there were treatises against the Gnostics in a much earlier period. Why, then, were none written against the Unitarians, since pure Unitarianism was certainly as old as Gnosticism; and if it had been deemed a *heresy* at all, it would certainly have been thought to be of the most alarming nature, as it is considered at present?

REDEMPTION OF MANKIND.

WHATEVER may be meant by the *redemption of the world*, is not the Being who made it

equal to that also? If his creatures offend him, and by repentance and reformation become the proper objects of his forgiveness, is it not more natural to suppose that he has *within himself* a power of forgiving them, and of restoring them to his favour, without the strange expedient of another person, fully equal to himself, condescending to animate a human body, and dying for us? We never think of any similar expedient in order to forgive, with the greatest propriety and effect, offences committed by our children against ourselves.

Whatever you suppose to be the use of a *third person*, in the Trinity, is not the influence of the first person sufficient for that also? The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles was to enable them to work miracles. But when our Saviour was on earth, the Father within him, and acting by him, did the same thing. You also cannot deny that, exclusive of some particular texts, the general tenor of Scripture does not suppose such a Trinity as you contend for. Is it not the general tenor of the Old and New Testaments, that the supreme God himself, and not any other person acting under him, was the proper maker of the world; and that he himself, and not any other being, supports and governs it? Is not the same great Being, the God and Father of us all, and even the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, represented as forgiving the sins of his penitent offspring *freely*, and exhorting us to forgive as we ourselves hope to be forgiven? And are we to require any ransom, recompense, or atonement of a penitent brother?

If there be any religious truth of practical importance, next to that of a future state of rewards and punishments, it is that which leads us to consider all adorable and amiable attributes as centring in one undivided being, whom we can look up to as our maker, preserver, and benefactor, the author of all good; who has within himself mercy for the penitent, not requiring to be made placable by the sufferings of another, but by the repentance of the sinner only, and whose constant presence with us is sufficient for all the purposes of providential care respecting the mind or body; so that we have not to look to one divine person for one thing, and to another for something else.

This, you know, has been not only the tendency, but also the actual consequence of the belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, at least with the vulgar. With them mercy is

the exclusive attribute of the Son, and a constant invigorating influence the sole province of the Spirit ; and nothing but power, and that not of a benevolent and engaging nature, but something unknown and terrific only, is left to the Father.

THE CAUSE OF SCHISM.

WE Unitarians should never exclude you from joining in our devotions, because we should not use any language that you could not adopt ; but your Trinitarian forms absolutely exclude us. If there be any sin in *schism*, it lies wholly at your door ; because it is you who force us to separate ourselves, when, without any violation of your consciences, you might admit us to join with you.

What, then, is there unreasonable in our demands, when you might grant them in their utmost extent without the least injury to yourselves ? Thus the *unity of the church*, and the *extinction of all sects*, which is your own favourite object, depend entirely upon yourselves.

How glorious would it be to the heads of any Christian establishment to require nothing of the members of it besides the profession of our *common Christianity*, and to leave all particular opinions to every man's own conscience ! Every cause of unpleasing contention would then be removed, and one of the most popular objections to Christianity would be removed with it, viz. the want of harmony among Christians. We

should then meet as brethren, and the disciples of one common master ; and with respect to all our differences, having no object but *truth*, they would be discussed without animosity. No opinion having then anything in its favour besides its own proper evidence, all prejudice would much sooner give way ; and truth, which we all profess to aim at, would be much sooner attained, and become universal.

But the honour of producing so great and glorious a revolution is, I believe, too great for any powers, civil or ecclesiastical, that will be able to effect it. It is a scheme worthy of God only, and which in due time will be brought about by his good providence, contrary to the wishes of all the ruling powers of the world, or of those who direct their councils. In the meantime we Unitarians shall not fail to do everything in our power to exhibit these enlarged views of things ; confident that in this we are the instruments in the hands of providence ; that our principles, being frequently exposed to view, will in time recommend themselves to all who are truly liberal and unprejudiced ; and that all bigotry, like the darkness which it resembles, will at length give way before the light of truth.

With this glorious prospect before us, we willingly bear all the obloquy and every temporal inconvenience to which the open profession of our faith can expose us, and are infinitely happier in being opposed and frowned upon by the powers of the world, than you are in opposing us, with every advantage that the world can give you.