

THE UNITARIAN CHRONICLE,

AND

COMPANION TO THE MONTHLY REPOSITORY.

PUBLISHED BY C. FOX, 67, PATERNOSTER ROW.

No. V.]

JUNE, 1832.

[Price 3d.]

PROCEEDINGS AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE IRISH UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN SOCIETY.*

THE Second Anniversary of the Irish Unitarian Christian Society was held, in Dublin, on Sunday and Monday, April 29th and 30th. On the afternoon and evening of the former day, the Rev. George Harris, of Glasgow, preached in the meeting-houses of Eustace-street and Strand-street. His hearers will long remember his beautiful and impressive exhibition of Unitarian Christianity in its relation to the social and individual improvement of man. On Monday, April 30th, the Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in Strand-street meeting-house. The attendance was more numerous than at the last annual meeting, and the interest awakened not less deep. At one o'clock the chair was taken by Joseph Hone, Esq. The Report of the Committee having been read, was adopted. We can only give the following extracts:—

‘In reporting to the Society the proceedings of a second year, your Committee would congratulate its members, that it has struggled with good success through the difficulties which beset the early period of its organization.

‘Contracted as the resources at the disposal of your Committee have been, they have still confined their operations to the distribution of books; deeming it better to render the Society truly efficient in this department,

* These proceedings are so important and interesting, that it is hoped our subscribers will not object to a Supplementary Number, in which the conclusion of them will be

than to attempt plans which, though highly desirable in themselves, might entail a hazardous expenditure, with slow returns of good. The book-stock of the Society has been materially enlarged during the past year; and the circulation of publications has been more than doubled. The number of copies distributed since the last annual meeting is 1060. When the probability is remembered that, without the agency of the Society, no appreciable number of these would have found their way into the country, its influence in creating, as well as supplying, a demand for religious information, will not be pronounced insignificant.

‘Your Committee, aware that they represented a body of Christians who loved truth for the sake of its righteousness, have thought it within their province to place in the Catalogue of the present year many publications which, though in harmony with Unitarian views, are by no means doctrinal in their character. They would especially call your attention to the supplement, comprising books peculiarly adapted to the young; and would express their hope that it may aid parents in imparting to their children, in no unattractive form, the devotional influences of a scriptural faith.

‘The provincial connexions of the Society remain the same as at the end

found, together with as much other intelligence as our limits, so enlarged, will allow, and notices of various anniversaries to be held this month.—ED.

of the last year. Your Committee have unmingled satisfaction in pointing to the continued activity and prosperity of the Cork District Society. Its weekly meetings for theological conversation have given rise to a similar practice in Dublin; and the fearlessness with which its members, in private and in public, avow and vindicate their convictions, the vigilance with which they protect the rights of conscience, and the liberality with which they uphold institutions designed to promote social improvement, show that they desire to exhibit the natural union of doctrinal truth with practical righteousness. A liberal subscription from the Society at Bandon proves its anxiety to be copiously furnished with the means of religious information.

‘The Rev. Fletcher Blakely, the able and indefatigable secretary of the Moneyrea Society, says, in a letter recently received:—“Unitarianism is spreading rapidly in the north of Ireland; and nothing is wanted but plainer preaching and the dissemination of small Unitarian publications, to give it a firmer hold. Many of the humbler people in this district understand it well: several infant congregations are springing up.”

‘And in a letter written from the North of Ireland, by your late treasurer, the Rev. Joseph M’Alister, whose resignation of his office will be matter of regret to all who know his zeal, the following remarks occur:—“Entering fully into the opinions of the Committee, that the resources of the Society might be greatly increased, and its usefulness much extended, by the establishment of branch societies in remote parts of Ireland, I had taken an opportunity of visiting many of the towns of the north, with the view of forming agencies for the promotion of our Christian objects. Several branch societies were in process of organization in connexion with the Central Society in Dublin, as noticed in your annual Report, when some members of the Unitarian body in the north

saw the expediency of establishing a local Tract Society in Belfast, in order to communicate more directly with the Remonstrant Churches of Ulster. This Society has offered its friendly aid in carrying forward the plans and extending the principles which were contemplated by you as a Tract Society. But the great field of *missionary labour*, which it was an object of the Central Society gradually to open up, is yet, I may say, with one or two exceptions, untouched. The preaching of Unitarian Christianity at Ballymoney has been crowned with much success. Indeed, there is scarcely a place in connexion with the Old Synod, where missionary exertion might not be carried on with equally favourable results. The members of the Remonstrant Synod have had much to do in their late struggle. They have effected more than could have been anticipated. But the *spirit of the Northern restoration will subside, unless it be followed up by an efficient and well-directed Missionary establishment*. The religious aggressions of the Calvinists here are beyond all description insinuating and enslaving. They can only be met by a steady and public maintenance of rational Christianity. Missionary exertion will never be properly conducted in this country until the Unitarians of the north, of Dublin, and of the south, unite their funds, and heartily co-operate in the good cause.”

‘The fact is, that until one missionary tour shall have been made throughout the country, it will be impossible to learn with precision the state and prospects of pure religion in its different districts, or to avail ourselves of the openings for useful exertion which they may afford.

‘During the past year your Committee has continued the correspondence with America, which was commenced by Rev. Henry Ware’s visit to Ireland.

‘Your Committee have great satisfaction in recording the continued interest in your objects expressed in

the last year's correspondence by our Unitarian brethren in England.' 'In proof of the high position which the Unitarians of England hold in respect of intellectual cultivation and Christian benevolence, an appeal may be made to the Monthly Repository; a publication as worthy of the social and religious character of the denomination which it represents, as it is of the eloquence and philanthropy of its gifted editor, the Rev. W. J. Fox. It is impossible that such admirable heralds of truth as the Monthly Repository for England, and the Christian Pioneer for Scotland, can fail to prepare the way for a rapid diminution of prejudice, and the wide diffusion of a better faith.'

The Rev. Joseph Hutton proposed, and the Rev. James Armstrong seconded, the following resolution, which, with all which followed it, was passed unanimously:—

1. 'That the thanks of this Meeting be given to the Rev. George Harris, for his eloquent and impressive sermons, delivered yesterday on behalf of this Society.'

The Rev. George Harris moved the following resolution:—

2. 'That the members of this Society, contrasting the present state of Unitarian Christianity with its aspect in the days of the persecuted Emlyn, find reason for much gratitude to the Father of Lights; but comparing its still depressed condition with its holy and benignant character, we feel ourselves impelled by solemn obligation to renewed efforts in the dissemination of a faith, tending to bring glory to God, love to Christ, and peace to man.'

He said, 'When I look around me, I feel impelled to thank God and take courage. I regard this assembly as an indication of the progress of the times,—of a growing spirit of inquiry and of benevolence, as a pledge and prelude of brighter days; as a testimony to the true character of the religion of the Saviour, which tells of privilege to the many, emancipates from the thralldom of superstition, and

ushers humanity into the presence of God. The dispensations of God have been not only dispensations of abstract wisdom, faithfulness, and mercy, but have been beautifully adapted to the several stages of human progress to perfection. In the infancy of humanity, the mode of God's government was analogous to the exercise of parental authority,—a special guardianship constantly exerted, a literal obedience constantly exacted. He was as the Patriarch of patriarchs, the almighty God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As man advanced to the youth of intellect, temptations multiplied; tyranny came to crush, and found in superstition a ready ally. It seemed good to Heaven to secure one sacred enclosure, to set apart one select nation, as the depository of wisdom; and, prone as uncultivated man is to ceremony and show, he who seeth the heart decreed that the spirit of holy truth should be enshrined in ritual observances. As man advanced farther, the vision of nobler progress, the buddings of more productive reason, the reign of a higher benevolence, were shadowed forth by the prophets. At length the manhood of man arrived, and the Messenger of Grace appeared. Broken down was the wall of partition, and the temple-gates thrown open; and the banner was borne before the conqueror, inscribed with the announcement of "Peace on earth, and good-will to men;" peace, not merely to one tribe, but to all generations; good-will, not merely to Scribes and Pharisees, not to any privileged few, but to man as man, as part of that great family of which the Saviour is the elder brother, and God the impartial parent. To us, the ceremonies of Judaism are not adapted: at the time of their appointment they were essential. Man as a race resembles man as an individual; that which would be his sustenance at one time, would be his death at another. It is a proof of God's wisdom, that while his revelations have been various, they have been in unbroken harmony: and

their diversity and their harmony are both illustrative of the progress of man towards perfection. It is in this view of the progressiveness of its tendency, that I especially advocate Unitarian Christianity. Its principles are my best treasures; not merely because they are reason's dictates, but because, being identified with the gospel, they possess its spirit of enlarging benevolence. When Christianity sprung forth fresh from the Author and Finisher of our faith, then was the period of its moral power; its spirit of philanthropy evinced in its banding in holy brotherhood the Jew, the Samaritan, the Gentile; its spirit of devotion testified in the sufferings of confessors and the blood of martyrdom. When it became corrupted, when it was contaminated by unholy alliance with courts and thrones, when its pure simplicity of worship was forgotten, then tyranny and licentiousness ran riot; then pure Christianity was exiled to the mountains; and when from these fastnesses it issued once more, the sounds of renovated liberty were uttered first by the believers in God's unrivalled majesty and unqualified benevolence. And as Unitarianism has connected itself with the periods of the gospel's greatest moral power, so has it been received by the greatest minds of our race as the truth of God. Those who have read aright the annals of their race know this. Who was he that unravelled the mysteries of the human soul, and laid his finger of discovery upon the subtleties of thought; and, enamoured of the truth, was the friend of inquiry, and held forth to the wandering intellect the lamp of knowledge? John Locke, the Christian Unitarian, whose name is dear wherever philosophy and liberty are held sacred. And who was he, before whose gaze the veil which had enwrapped creation's glories, withdrew; who wandered in thought through regions of the universe, where he grew familiar with the blaze of suns, and crossed the planetary tracks? Newton, the Christian Uni-

tarian, who, though standing among men as the interpreter of the Creator, deemed his faith dearer and sublimer than his philosophy. And who was he who communed with the heavenly muse on "Sion's height," and by "Siloa's brook, that flowed fast by the oracle of God;" and thence "invoked her aid to his adventurous song;" he who raised the soul to heaven by his lofty verse, and vindicated its liberty on earth by his immortal prose? John Milton, the Christian Unitarian, whose patriotism, inspiration, and theology, dwelt in beautiful harmony within his soul. You know that I might lengthen out this list: names like these, enshrined in the veneration of mankind, prove that knowledge is the herald of Unitarianism; and, vice versâ, where Unitarianism dwells, knowledge and liberty will not be far. The call which we make to our fellow-men is, "Think; think freely; if you think with us, well; but at all events, think. Know yourselves, know your religion, know your Saviour, know your God; know your rights, and maintain them, and then will you dignify your nature." That is not freedom of inquiry which admits of any boundary but those of the human intellect: that is not free inquiry which Athanasius or Calvin menaces with fire eternal. I look on him as a vassal who is terrified by man's frown, or seduced by his smile, from taking the Bible in his hand, and extracting from its sacred page an uninfluenced and individual faith. I glory in the name of Protestant; a name associated with the noblest struggles for spiritual liberty. But if there be abroad in the land a spirit striving to deter the inquirer from his pursuit; if it warn the people against reading the books of those who are contemptuously pronounced unsound in the faith; if it call into exercise family influence, and enlist family affection in behalf of intolerance; if it convert social intercourse into a sectarian squabble; and if I am asked to call this Protestantism, I will be no party.

to the unhallowed misnomer. The rack and the fire are not there indeed; but is there not a prostration of mind at variance with genuine Protestantism? It matters little whether the Bible be put into the hands of the people, or be shut up, if the people are, after all, to judge of it by proxy.

‘If I am to bow down to authority, give me not the charter of my liberties to mock me. There is no medium between “the Bible and the whole Bible,” and a degrading vassalage to authority: and Unitarianism, withholding that Bible from none, and prescribing no creed to fetter its interpretation, secures the possession of that liberty and knowledge which are the destined inheritance of every creature of the living God. Unitarianism, by the views it unfolds of God as a kind parent, and of man as his beloved child, make the promotion of knowledge and happiness the duty of all its believers. And in the performance of this duty they will imitate that Being whose highest glory it is, that He is the fountain of universal good. They will unmask all those false and specious forms of good which tyranny has dressed up for the delusion of the nations. There is that scourge of humanity, that path to renown, stained with blood and haunted by images of crime and death, that Moloch, war. When religion was pure and fresh, the arms of the warrior were laid at the foot of the cross; but when potentates took Christianity under their royal patronage, then the banner was raised again. And the restoration of pure religion, the prevalence of Unitarianism, would be the prevalence of universal peace. Men would learn the difference between the false glory, the mushroom greatness, which, in the service of selfishness, desolates the earth, and that true greatness, whose interpretation is usefulness; that pure glory, whose essence is a love of duty toiling for the general good;—the glory, not of the soldier, but of the philanthropist;—the glory of principle, of probity, of truth, of justice,

of benevolence;—the glory, not of governing men as machines, but of instructing them to educate and govern themselves. There is that insult to humanity, slavery; and be it black or white, our sympathy is with the wronged and outraged; and would men but regard God as their Father, these things could exist no longer. But while God is thought of as a tyrant, and earth as an accursed prison-house, and man as an outcast, slavery has a plea of sympathy with faith. The soul is branded to men’s hands already: to enthrall the body is but an insignificant improvement on God’s own system. A West Indian colony realizes the picture which Calvinism gives of God’s creation. It is to the energies of pure religion that we look for the abolition of slavery. Too long has the black looked around him, and asked, “Am I not a friend and a brother?” too long has he looked to heaven and cried, “Hast thou but one blessing, my Father?” Friends of freedom! reflect that the rights for which you contend are the rights of mankind; and that he who would enchain man, raises his arm against heaven. I call on all who hear me, not to cease from their exertions, till the last slave-ship shall have visited Africa;—till the Ethiopian from Egypt to the Cape shall stretch forth his hands to the true God.

‘The criminal code of our country is constructed on merciless principles, at variance with the proper objects of punishment. It would seem to regard the gallows as the best preventive of crime, and the hangman as the teacher of social morality. And as long as men continue to believe that God burns his creatures in hell-fire for ever, with no other object than the infliction of agony, they may well conclude that revenge may be the object of law, rather than reformation. In cases of heretical faith bigots have long thought that to kill was as short a method as to convert, and somewhat easier too; in cases of guilty conduct, the law thinks so still. The inhuman prin-

ciple is not a whit more reasonable in the one case than in the other: it is at variance with the decisions of sound philosophy, and with the merciful spirit of Christianity. And Unitarianism, in the views which it takes of the Divine character, of man as a moral being, and of earth as a preparation for heaven, secures the advancement of a more humane and remedial system towards the wretched victims of guilt. The greatest happiness of the greatest number is our object. While the inhabitants of these islands are crying out against a monopoly of trade and a monopoly of power, how strange is it that the monopoly of heaven should be regarded as a bright and saving article of faith—a monopoly which shrouds the earth in gloom, and makes heaven a conventicle!—how opposed is it to that religion, which flings wide open the everlasting doors, and inscribes on the portals, that “God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him.” It is because I perceive the sympathy between existing systems of faith, and existing practices of injustice, that I believe those systems to be not only erroneous and unscriptural, but alien to the spirit of humanity, and hostile to the prevalence of genuine liberty. Glad am I to know, that numbers who entertain the common theology, feel and act inconsistently with their faith; that the human heart gains a victory over the creeds that are interwoven with the memory, and receive the assent of the judgment. Would we bring glory to God and blessings to our fellow-men? It must be by the open profession of those principles which we believe to be gospel truths, that we can hope to accomplish these dearest objects of our hearts. God has declared that he will have all men to be saved, and the Saviour has assured us that the truth shall make his disciples free,—free from sin, prejudice and imperfection. The triumph of truth and justice, then, is

secure. Let us only do our parts, and then leave the issue in the hands of Omnipotent Love. To stimulate you to this duty is the object of the Society which calls us together.—May its accomplishment form the happiness of your lives, and through eternal ages prove the glory, the honour of your immortality!

Mr. William Porter seconded the resolution: he said, ‘It cannot be denied that the Remonstrants have done much in behalf of the sacred cause which we are met to forward. They have subjected themselves to many inconveniences rather than surrender one jot or one tittle of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made his people free. But perhaps we have accustomed ourselves to speak of them and of their services in a strain of eulogy in some degree exaggerated. Comparing ourselves by ourselves, they certainly tower above the common class of Unitarians of the present day. But we have had men whose sacrifices for the sake of truth were infinitely greater; men who, against principalities and powers, against penal statutes and public odium, against arbitrary judges and subservient juries, against fine and imprisonment, maintained alike the right of private judgment and the opinions to which its exercise had led them, and who flung property to the winds, and snapped asunder every cord that tied them to the earth, and who would not have accounted their lives dear unto them in comparison with the manly and fearless assertion of what they in their consciences believed to be the truth once delivered to the saints. I allude to the persecuted Emlyn, whose memory was this morning honoured by our reverend guest, and others of his sterling stamp, the goodly fellowship of our confessors: the noble army of our martyrs. We must not, Sir, congratulate the Remonstrants of the north as if their warfare was accomplished. We must not hail those who buckle on their armour as those who put it off. They

have nobly freed themselves from hinderances hard to be shaken from them; they have placed themselves unencumbered at the starting post, from whence, I trust, they will press onward toward the mark; but we should not lead them to suppose that the goal has yet been reached. In no part of Ireland have Unitarians done their duty. Many reasons might be assigned for the prevailing apathy, but I shall confine myself to one which strikes me as very influential. Exertions are not made to disseminate Unitarianism in Ireland, because it is considered that all exertions of the kind are hopeless. Difficulties do, no doubt, beset the path. Mr. Harris has this evening communicated some instances illustrative of the furious spirit of opposition which his ministry has encountered in Scotland, but Unitarians in this country must overcome obstacles yet more considerable. "It is evidently impossible," exostulates the timid man, "to stem the tide which now sets in against you. Look round upon the religious world, and what encouraging signs do you discern? The high church party in the Establishment, though not extremely zealous about doctrine, shrinks appalled from every shadow of innovation, and it commands the acquiescence of all those who are more anxious that the church to which they attach themselves should be in close connexion with the most wealthy empire on the globe, than with a certain other kingdom, which is not of this world. The Evangelical party—a large and still increasing body—feels towards your opinions a fanatical hostility, and exerts itself against them with unwearied perseverance. Do you hope to pierce the panoply of prejudice in which the orthodox dissenter has fortified his mind, warm as he is in the north, with the heat of a recent controversy, and in the south, roused to run the career of popularity with the Calvinistic portion of the church? The enlightened amongst our Roman Catholic countrymen are for the most part careless about Chris-

tianity, and the remainder beyond the reach of argument from devotion to their church. Persons have no doubt been heard from the platform of the Rotunda, who desired a Christian assembly to preach the Gospel to every creature, not with any expectation that the glad tidings would be embraced, but in order that God's justice might be glorified in the damnation of those who, by his own decree, were inevitably to reject them*. But Unitarians have not so learned Christ. They are not pious enough to volunteer for the eternal destruction of their fellow men. They have no motive for exertion, save a prospect of success. And does a small sect,—one everywhere spoken against,—conceive that they have any hope of overcoming such obstacles as have been now enumerated?" Unquestionably these considerations are not destitute of weight, and nothing is gained by affecting to think them frivolous. But what reformation ever took place which did not triumph over obstacles greater far than these? A thousand avenues are open through which we might throw both Unitarian publications and Unitarian preaching into the public mind. We profess to hold the powers of human nature in respect; we protest against Calvinism, because, in our opinion, it calumniates them; and yet we practically avow our conviction that plain, rational, scriptural demonstrations, submitted with kindness to the consideration of the public, will produce no good effect whatever. I ask, in the name of common consistency, should these things be? Sir, the course is open before us, and it is only timidity that sees a lion in the path. But if we are content to be Unitarians of a certain class, that is to say, persons who go to meeting once a week because it is seemly to go somewhere; who have a few favourite phrases constantly in their mouths, about allowing every man to go his own way to heaven,—who delight to dwell upon the evils of

* Rev. Nicholas Armstrong.

controversy when prevailing error is about to be assailed—who are ready to make the most charitable allowances for a popular system of divinity, but are signally severe in their judgment upon any which appears to be at all more unpopular than their own; who coldly sanction a form of worship for the dissemination of which they scruple to afford one penny of their money, or one hour of their time; if we are content to be Unitarians of this description, I have no great expectation of success. To what purpose should you urge such an individual to promote the objects which we have in view? Gallio careth for none of these things. But if the Unitarians of Ireland could be roused from their indifference; if a miracle could be wrought, and the dry bones live, much honest prejudice might be overcome, and much dishonest clamour effectually put down, by a firm unflinching avowal of our opinions. In considering the course which we ought to pursue in the advocacy of our sentiments, I have often thought that the respective conduct of two celebrated men in the sister island, both of whom embraced Unitarianism, and desired to propagate what they had embraced, might furnish an instructive lesson. In one of the most enlightened periods of English history, when opinions upon many important subjects had been weighed in the balance, and many of them found wanting; when, in politics, the glorious revolution had preserved a nation's liberties; when Newton and Locke—those Unitarian worthies on whom Mr. Harris passed this morning such a splendid panegyric—had brought under subjection the worlds of matter and of mind; it was to be expected that theology, though always hanging back, should nevertheless participate in the general advance. Accordingly, a man of the most profound and varied talents, a most accomplished scholar—in natural philosophy selected to translate the *Principia* into the language of the learned,—in metaphysics the worthy

antagonist of Leibnitz, a distinguished favourite with royalty, and the most popular preacher of his day, became a believer in the simple Unity of the Great First Cause, whose being and attributes he had previously demonstrated in a noble work which still maintains its pristine reputation: I allude of course to Dr. Samuel Clarke. Now, with respect to religious institutions, the doctor was a bit-by-bit reformer. The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity is written with an evident disposition to outrage as few prejudices as possible. It sought to win the Church to Unitarianism, by affecting to find Unitarianism in the standards of the Church: and this course seemed for a time to prosper. If the Convocation murmured, Clarke strove to soothe the Convocation; and he gathered so many personal influences about himself and his opinions, that the latter were thought to have spread far and wide. But what finally became of this attempt to smuggle truth unawares into the Establishment; this attempt to put the new wine into the old bottles—the new doctrine in the old creeds? What became of the Thatched House petition, and the 250 ministers who signed it—the pamphlets of Archdeacon Blackburne, and the speeches of Sir George Saville? With the exception of Lindsey, Jebb and Wakefield, who manfully seceded, what became of all the rest? Of the many who were healed, how was it that these alone appeared to give thanks? Unitarianism, Sir, at that period, sprung up quickly; but, because it had no root, it withered.

‘ In an after day another champion, less cautious in his tactics, issued from the ranks of the orthodox dissenters. As long as the highest moral worth, united to an ardent longing after truth, shall command respect, the name of Priestley must be held in reverence. This great man adopted a course of proceeding, the reverse of that pursued by Dr. Clarke. He cried aloud, and spared not. With him there was no attempt to conciliate

persons or principles which he felt it his duty to denounce; and at first the results appeared to be disastrous. He was blamed by timid friends for his imprudence; he was assailed by open enemies for his presumption; he was exposed to the attacks of adverse parties; to the high church intolerance of Horsley, and the sceptic sneer of Gibbon: a half religious, half political mob destroyed at Birmingham his scientific property; a social persecution followed him to London with unremitted virulence, and he was at length driven from a country of which he was an ornament, to seek for shelter in a foreign land. But what was the ultimate effect of all this? We may read it in the flourishing state of Unitarianism in England; and in the cheering progress which it has made in America, to which the storms of persecution carried the seeds of truth. Channing has done much, but he entered in some degree into the labours of Priestley, in the new world, where Unitarian principles promise to be as permanent as the phenomena of her external nature; and those who seek to overthrow them might as well attempt to shoulder the Andes from their base, or turn again the Mississippi to its source. I trust that the friends of truth in this country will be animated by the same decided spirit. Depend upon it, temporizing will serve us nothing. Instead of conciliating opposition, it invariably increases dogmatism. If, whilst our opponents are bold, confident, and sweeping in their statements, we begin to doubt, and hesitate and draw distinctions, and advocate the truth as if we were apologizing for error, the truth will win no conquests. Are your opinions false? Speak out: they will be the more easily refuted. Are your opinions true? Speak out: they will be the sooner recognized. May our ministers universally be convinced that it is their duty to attach their flocks by the enduring bond of principle, and that all ties of a nature merely personal, are at best but flaxen cords! May they

universally perceive that a community of feeling, and, on some important points, a community of faith, are the only cement which can bind a church permanently together; and that when we endeavour to substitute any other preparation, we do but daub the wall with untempered mortar. In my opinion, we should canvass the errors which surround us with charity and freedom. We cannot do justice to our own views without contrasting them with those of others. The part of Moses naturally precedes the part of Joshua. You must first lead out the people from the house of bondage, and then introduce them to the promised land.

‘I cannot sit down without adverting for an instant to a circumstance connected with the interests of the Society whose anniversary we celebrate. My reverend friend, Mr. Martineau, sits amongst us as its secretary for the last time. I would willingly prophesy smooth things if I could; but I cannot contemplate without anxiety the departure of the individual who has been, since its establishment, the very breath of its nostrils. I will not enter upon any extraneous topics. But when I call to mind the qualities which distinguish the man, the minister, and the secretary, I may be allowed to participate in a wish which is felt by many in this city, that he had been allowed to remain amongst us. God knows we need him.’

The Rev. Dr. Drummond moved the following resolution:—

‘3. That the Unitarian faith is embodied in the “Bible and the whole Bible;” that consequently it intimately connects itself with the great principle of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures; that in the dissemination of the sacred writings its professors have rejoiced to find an object of religious benevolence, in which they could cordially unite with all other denominations of the Protestant world; and that, while we regret the recent attempt to exclude them by a doctrinal test from the continuance of this union, we ob-

serve with satisfaction the spirit in which it has been rejected by the Committee of the Hibernian Bible Society.'

He observed, that 'when the Bible Society was first formed, all Christian-minded people, especially those of the Protestant denomination, hailed it with emotions of delight. They said that the Word of God would now have free course, unimpeded by sectarian prejudice, and that a mode had at last been discovered of uniting with harmony the discordant elements of which the Protestant world is composed. As all Protestants agree that the Bible contains the sum and substance of their religion, it was naturally supposed that the profession of belief in its sacred contents should form a sufficiently strong bond of union among those whom conflicting opinions on doctrinal subjects had kept too long separated. The only principle on which it is probable that Christians should ever be induced to agree is this, viz. "that the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible," is the source of true religion and sufficient to make men wise unto salvation, without being connected with the peculiar doctrines of any particular church. The Bible Society was founded on this principle, and had for its specific objects the distribution of the Bible without note or comment. The scheme was happily devised and successfully carried into execution. It received liberal support from the intelligence, the wealth, and the influence of almost the whole Protestant community. For a time the world began to assume a new aspect, a more Christian aspect than it had exhibited since its earliest and most flourishing times. Primitive Christianity seemed to have again visited the earth; and some were almost prompted to exclaim, "Behold these Bible men, how they love one another!" A spot of neutral territory had been discovered, where the belligerent powers of church militant might congregate in peace—a green oasis in the wide desert of

polemics, where shepherds from different regions might give to each other the right hand of fellowship, and whither they might lead their flocks as to pastures of tender grass and fountains of living water.

'The scheme wrought well, for it was framed and conducted on principles truly Christian: it fulfilled, it surpassed the most sanguine hopes of its founders;—the press, the great instrument of man's liberties and rights, was set actively to work; the Bible was translated into more languages than had been written; it was multiplied like the leaves of the forest; the good seed of the word was scattered abroad to the four winds of Heaven, and though some of it may have fallen on a stony soil,—though some of it may have been choked by weeds or devoured by ill-omened birds, and some trodden down and crushed under the iron hoof of bigotry and superstition, it cannot be doubted that much of it fell on a good and fertile soil,—that it has brought forth fruit to perfection,—that it has produced, and is now producing, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred-fold. Protestants of all denominations were invited to unite their efforts in the holy cause, and numbers of them all, or almost all, were admitted to take a part in the proceedings of the society. For a time the distinctions of what are called orthodoxy and heterodoxy were laid aside, and all seemed willing to be actuated only by principles of Christian philanthropy;—the dark cloud of sectarianism and bigotry began to be expelled from the religious atmosphere, and the genius of Christianity came forth beautiful and brilliant as a star in the firmament that has "bathed its glittering forehead in the ocean and new-tricked its beams," and was seen for a time, by the rapt eye of faith and hope, radiating a cheerful light and shedding a benignant influence on the heads and hearts of men. But this happy state was not ordained to last; the glorious vision passed away,—it melted into the

air. The spirit ANTICHRIST was disturbed, and as he is said to have insinuated himself into the Garden of Eden to blight that felicity which he could not participate, so he determined to creep into the Bible Society to create confusion and to scatter among the sons of peace the fiery seeds of discord and rebellion against the Most High. Under the mask of superior sanctity, and in the guise of one who pretended that he had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, and had his eyes opened to distinguish between good and evil, he entered their councils, and began to whisper that their sanctified body was tainted with the poison of heresy, the leprous and soul-destroying heresy,—that they ought to undergo a purgation,—that the heretics should be expelled,—and, to guard against their re-admission, a test of orthodoxy should be administered to every member of the holy conclave. *The evil one* having thus infused the venom of his serpent tongue into the bosom of his elect, left it to work and ferment, and it wrought and fermented according to his wishes. At last, some whom he had made his confidants and the organs of his counsels, had the assurance, in defiance of all shame, to give utterance to his wicked suggestions, and propose that a belief in the Trinity should be adopted as the test of membership by the Bible Society!

‘This proposition was in direct violation of the principle on which the Bible Society was founded. It was annexing to the Bible a *note* of portentous sound,—a comment of most anti-biblical, most anti-christian tendency,—an audacious attempt to overthrow a system whose peculiar beauty and utility lay in the broad principle on which it was based.—That such a proposition should have been a subject of discussion in the Bible Society, nay, that it was not met at once by an universal burst of indignation and scorn, is a matter of reproach. After a stormy meeting, which a Rev. gentleman, who was present, compared to a

bear-garden, the motion was lost, and the Bible Society was rescued from ruin and everlasting opprobrium.

‘Foiled in their endeavours to overthrow the beautiful creation of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the adversaries resolved to form a society of their own, which they baptized with the water of contention, the bitter water of Marah and Meribah, the Trinitarian Bible Society. They had now got a bantling of their own to nurse, and might indulge many a glowing anticipation of its future beauty and its future strength, when it was to come forth like Samson to smite down the Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass; or rather, like a man of Gath, to defy the armies of the Living God. But, lo! while they are yet gazing and gaping with parental delight on their baby-giant, they behold with amazement and horror that it is speckled like a viper, dotted all over from top to toe with the plague-spots of the Irving heresy! and, to add to their horror and mortification, they heard their first-born denounced, sneered at, and ridiculed even by some of the sanctified fraternity as a *lusus naturæ*, a monstrous miscreation. Having formed a new society, and adopted a purifying test of admission, it was to be presumed that it would be hailed, by the elect at least, as a beautifully orthodox and perfectly immaculate corporation; and, above all, that their chosen committee, the *sanctum sanctorum*, would be impervious to the *mal-aria* of heterodoxy. How completely they were mistaken, the orthodox journal, named “The Record,” testifies.’

The Rev. Speaker here read several extracts from the ‘Record’ newspaper confirming his statements of the total failure of the Trinitarian Bible Society, one of which is the following:—

‘Although there were sixty-four individuals who signed the requisition for the special meeting of the Trinitarian Bible Society, only forty-

eight voted. Several of the requisitionists are known to have wholly misunderstood the intention of the originators of this measure, and some have expressed their wish that this should be made known. Among these is the Rev. J. Saunders. Another requisitionist, John Boswell, Esq., has sent us a corrected copy of his speech, and concludes as follows:—

“Allow me, Mr. Editor, to add that I have seceded from the British and Foreign Bible Society, because heresy is eligible to a share in the management of the affairs of that Society. I have seceded from the Trinitarian Bible Society, because heresy and fanaticism have a share in the management of its affairs.” Holy, conscientious man! with what a sweet pugilistic grace he may project his arms and exclaim, “Stand aside! I am holier than thou!” or, raising them aloft with dilated stature, and swelling chest, and trumpet tongue, cry aloud, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are!” The same anti-christian spirit which wrought in England extended its baleful influence to our own island, and attempts, though of a less public nature, similar in wickedness and folly to those made in London, were made to subvert the Hibernian Bible Society. The good sense and Christian feeling of this Society, united to a regard for principle and consistency, baffled those attempts, and, it is to be hoped, will continue to baffle them should they be ever repeated. Trinitarians are fond of boasting, to their shame, that no Socinians—meaning Unitarians, for they are fond of nick-names—are ever admitted to their councils, or to any share in the management of their affairs. This is assuredly not fair. They who are members of a society, who are acknowledged to be such by the receipt of their subscriptions, who have always evinced an honest desire to act faithful to the principles on which the Society was constituted,—who, in the purity of their morals and the rectitude of their conduct, would

not shrink from a comparison with the best of the exclusionists,—ought to have their representatives in the committee and on the platform. Whence so much anxiety to exclude them? Have they in any mode rendered themselves unworthy of the holy brotherhood? Have they ever betrayed the great principle of the Bible Society, and made use of an influence, derived from their connexion with that Society, to circulate tracts and comments in support of their peculiar doctrines? Have they distributed the Bible, without note or comment, with the right hand, while with the left they were scattering their creeds, articles, and confessions of faith? Had they one face for the privy council and another for public exhibition? Have they at any time claimed precedence of men, their superiors in virtue and learning, or used an undue influence to keep an orthodox brother in the back-ground, and to plunge him in the deepest shade, lest, being discovered, he might become an object of that popular regard which the orthodox are so anxious to monopolize? Unitarians know well how they have been treated by Bible Societies, and assuredly they cannot boast that it has been according to the golden rule of Christianity; but they scorned to complain;—if good were done, they remained satisfied; they were little ambitious of distinction among the orators of the Rotunda. They rejoiced to see that the Bible was distributed, conscious that the Bible is their most powerful and efficient advocate. The projectors of the Trinitarian Bible Society have given Unitarians the most decisive triumph; they have virtually sealed their testimony to the truth of Unitarian Christianity. Whence their anxiety to form a Trinitarian Society and make a profession of belief in the Trinity the condition of membership? Where, but from a consciousness that the Bible is a Unitarian book? Whence but from a secret and well-founded conviction that the Bible, without note

or comment, will make all honest and unprejudiced readers Unitarians? They have betrayed their want of confidence in the Bible to teach the doctrine of "Three in one." They would stamp Trinitarian on its back as a talisman against the omnipotence of truth. They dare not send it forth on the strength of its own merits. They are afraid to trust it alone;—it will propagate the soul-destroying heresy,—it will unteach all that has been taught by Athanasius and Calvin. That it has already produced some of these effects we may rest persuaded; and how should it not? The Bible is Unitarian throughout; anti-trinitarian in the beginning, anti-trinitarian in the middle, anti-trinitarian in the end. It knows as little of the doctrine as of the terms Trinity and Trinitarian, and that is nothing; but it teaches that God is one person, an intelligent Being, the Creator and the Father of all. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent." In all that was written by Moses and the prophets, and taught by Christ and his Apostles, we can discover nothing of a Trinity, nothing of a Platonic, an Aristotelian, a Pythagorean, a Brahminical, a Runic, a Sabellian, or a Swedenborgian Trinity, nor any of the three-score and ten Trinities which have claimed in turn the belief and imposed on the credulity of mankind. Christianity repudiates the very name of Trinity as a heathen abomination,—an insult to reason, a blasphemy against the most sublime truths of Revelation; the Bible, I repeat, is essentially an Unitarian book; if allowed to do its own work, and to go forth in its own simple majesty without the deforming and distorting drapery in which priestcraft and bigotry would enfold it, it will Unitarianize the world. It has wrought, and it is working marvellous conversions. Unitarians have no misgivings of mind as to the result. They are willing to cast their bread upon the waters, assured that, after many days,

they shall find it;—they are willing that the good seed of the word should be scattered, though by orthodox hands, for the Lord of the harvest will cause every seed, according to an invariable law of his Providence, to produce after its kind; and therefore the crop must be Unitarian. It is from ignorance of the Bible, or from coming to its perusal with minds preoccupied by anti-biblical notions, from blind attachment to antiquated creeds and nursery catechisms, from blind veneration for state religion, and its forms established by human laws, that men are Trinitarians. Let them dare to emancipate their minds from the inglorious vassalage,—let them assume courage to read the sacred volume with their own eyes, to judge by their own understandings, and the religious world will at last become truly Christian, and worship the Father "in spirit and in truth."

The resolution was seconded by Dr. Strattan.

The Rev. George Armstrong, a lately beneficed clergyman of the established church, proposed the following resolution:—

4. 'That as all true religion must ally itself with the advancement of the general mind, it is the character of Unitarian Christianity to rejoice in the free extension of intellectual light and moral culture through society; that the sectarianism which afflicts this land may be gradually soothed by uniting in the school-room those who are divided in the church; and that, with these convictions, we hail with satisfaction the project for national education which has recently been devised, and believe that, in thus attempting to re-unite those social elements which intolerance has severed, the government of the country is wielding its secular power in true co-operation with the peaceful spirit of the Gospel.'

In recommending the resolution, he said:—

'From the earliest period at which I can charge my recollection with

having thought upon the subject, I can truly say, Mr. Chairman, that the scheme of education for the people of this country, which has at length been put forward under the patronage of the government, was precisely that which had always presented itself to my judgment, (however faintly it might have grown upon my hopes,) as one which was most adapted to our wants,—and most consistent with policy, justice, and true religion.

‘Sir, I am disposed to regard it as but little evincing a capacity for the conduct of affairs, in any great project, and more particularly in so critical and delicate an enterprise as that of instructing on a national scale the population of this island, to undervalue the difficulties, or miscalculate the obstructions, which may oppose themselves to our efforts.

‘It might no doubt be vastly desirable that no such embarrassments should exist: but in the condition of human nature, and especially of this country, such a spirit of docility or concession is not to be expected. The temper of a nation is not to be changed by a wish; the prejudices of a people will not disappear at our bidding. The disasters of seven centuries may instruct us that a new method must be tried. Above all other countries on the globe, it most behoves him who would legislate for Ireland, and especially him who would enlighten the mind of the country, to remember that the age of miracle is no more—that the age of violence is passed away—and that it is time we essay what the age of intelligence may now accomplish.

‘Sir, an opportunity of bringing such experiment into action has now been offered to us. The government of Ireland, often mistaken, sometimes unjust, rarely enlightened, has at length put an instrument of good into our hands, by which a revolution more signal than any which her annals have yet recorded, may be effected in this country. It gives a power which she has not yet been practised to resist.

It gives us the promise of her confidence. It opens an avenue to her affections. It carries us into the hearts of her people—a noble region!—where her conquerors have never yet trodden—but where friends may gather an abundant harvest, if they have only the skill to prepare, and the patience to await it. In a word: this measure for the national education of Ireland supplies us with a great moral lever by which we may raise the community to an elevation hardly yet contemplated, if, in despite of the ignorance or the madness of blunders, we will only apply our force in the right place, and erect our fulcrum in its true position.

‘But not only is it policy thus to act—but it is that without which, truly speaking, there can be no such thing as policy at all; and without which, I believe it is in the irreversible order of things that no great or permanent good ever was, or ever can be, effected. Sir, it is justice! It is obedience to the fundamental law of God’s immutable will. It is ‘doing to others that which we would desire of others to do unto us.’ ‘In the spirit, then, of this great maxim, I would concede at once the right of every man living, (saving the equal right of others,) to hold fast possession of his prejudices, until he chooses spontaneously to resign them. I would not, if I could, pluck up an error with an over-strenuous hand. I would spare my ignorant neighbour the torture of too sudden an extrication from its embrace: and preferring to loosen the soil about it, would sever the tap-root remotely below, that the process of decay might be gradual, and the restoration of the encumbered stem to life and air be less abruptly felt.

‘But after all, it may be said, why all this finesse? why all this reserve? Do these obstructions to our purpose indeed exist? and are there any such formidable prejudices, such obstinate jealousies, to cross our path, and embarrass or defy our progress? I apprehend there are. I apprehend the

peasants of Ireland are neither such ardent pupils, nor so soon to be weaned from their ancient sentiments, as our Protestant zealots would have us to believe: and if time would permit, I might demonstrate, from some pregnant narrations of their own speakers, and even the most successful of their own documents, that we are sufficiently admonished to abandon a scheme at once so equivocal in its morality, so uncertain in its progress, and so precarious in its end.

‘Well, then, the work has yet to be begun. But arduous though it be, let us not be dismayed. Much there is to accomplish, but much also to encourage and elate. For ourselves, we estimate beyond all price the privilege we would fain extend to our brethren. We regard with amazement beyond the power of words to utter—almost beyond the power of thought to imagine,—the pretension of mortal man to do irreverence to the image of his Maker, and put chains upon the intellect, which only can be great in proportion as it is free, and only can vindicate its heavenly lineage in proportion as it has power to analyse the works, and to search into the mind of the Divinity!

‘But if we cannot transport to the same elevation of knowledge or of feeling with ourselves, the multitude who are wandering below—at least it is something that they are willing to begin the ascent. It is something at least that they do not repudiate the alphabet. — Give them then, by all means, this alphabet! It is a wonderful, almost a mysterious implement. In the compass of four-and-twenty little symbols, all human knowledge is comprised: and while we deposit this intellectual seed, we know not with what forms of beauty or exuberance of growth it may shelter and adorn the national mind in no very distant times.

‘We say then, *est quôdam prodire tenus*;—if they will not defer to our protestant sentiments of liberty, at least it is something, I repeat, that

they reverence the alphabet. If they cannot be brought within hearing of the same pulpits, at least it is something that they will meet us on the floor of the same school. If they cannot approach to the same views, or enjoy, with the same conviction, the great and ennobling truths which we discern in the sacred page,—it is something, surely, that they acknowledge, on the same authority, and embrace with a like assurance with you, that “true religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this,” &c. It is something surely that they hold with you, that “the grace of God hath appeared to all men, teaching them,” &c.—And finally, it is something surely that they no less believe, that “the hour is coming, and now is, in the which,” &c.!

‘Having, then, these momentous convictions to rest upon, may we not *wait* for all that is to follow? If, ulterior to these, or intermingled with these, any new or exceptionable matter be thought to be important, can it be so important as to justify the suspension, or the partial application, of our labours, until the Catholic mind of Ireland has been coerced or coaxed to regulate its credence according to our Protestant conceptions? Or rather, where, out of Ireland, where, out of that land of bigotry and blunders, would it not be deemed the duty of benefactors to their country and their kind to consign such questions to the future capability of the national mind to deal with them, confiding in the efficacy of the principles already admitted, and forward to improve the opportunities possessed, without disquietude, and without disunion?’

Mr. Armstrong here adverted to several objections to the plan; and thus continued:

‘How persuasive, for example, to four-fifths of the people of Ireland, the following invitation to coalesce with the writer in the heavenly work of appeasing sectarian jealousy, and promoting the benevolent designs of a society in whose behalf such a cham-

pion was ready to present himself!—"What opinion, let me ask, stands foremost in the rank of Popish falsehoods connected with the word of the eternal God? What opinion appears stamped upon THE BRAZEN FOREHEAD OF THE HARLOT who sets HER SHAMELESS FRONT against the majesty of heaven's eternal King, when she DARES TO WAG HER IMPIOUS TONGUE against the revelation of his love and mercy?"* And thus much for Popery! Let us now see whether it has fared any better with the antipodes of that creed: "Well then," exclaims another of the peaceful brotherhood, emulous of the sounds of love which had floated from the shores of our Emerald Isle,—“well then, what is likely to come from this Papist-Protestant Board? I suppose that the Protestant part is purely protestant. I do not suppose there is anything of Socinianism mixed up with it. Oh, to trust a Socinian to mutilate the Bible!—AS WELL MIGHT YOU TRUST A VAMPIRE to leave the life's blood in its victim!"†

‘Now, sir, whether these indications betray more of the nature of the lamb or the lion—more of the placid or the furious—I leave it for those who are curious in the history of animal habits to determine. But, sir, startling as these specimens may have proved, our menagerie comprises a still more extravagant combination of opposite qualities, which our own island, fabled as it is to have long since ejected all monstrous things from her soil, has still the unenvied peculiarity of having produced. Hitherto we have had to do with the lion and the lamb, the leopard and the kid—but imagination exhausts itself in the attempt to conceive the union of either of these gentle natures with the untameable soul of the hyena! And yet, sir, I am credibly informed that one of the most earnest advocates of the system which is to kindle in the infant heart “the

kindly sympathies of our nature,” by dint of its combined religious instruction,—thought himself warranted to kindle, in his maturer hearers, this same “kindly sympathy,” by some such incentive as the following:—“when the devil was hammering infidelity on the anvil of hell, Arianism was one of the most hot and pernicious sparks that issued from the forge!!!”

‘There, sir, there's an apostle of PEACE for you! There's a missionary to preach against the mischief of instilling animosities in the peasant mind of Ireland! Take him, Kildare Place Society, take him, my Lord of Roden, to your alliance—and prove to astonished Britain on what materials you rely, and to what prodigies you resort, in support of your wise, and national, and Christian schemes!

‘Sir, I can only rapidly glance at what remains. These missionaries of peace—these half-lambs and whole hyenas—these champions of Protestantism, half-tolerants and whole persecutors—half-scripturalists and whole *Creedists*, talk loudly of Christian liberty, talk fondly of the sole sufficiency of Scripture, and can never enough commiserate the ignorance which submits to priestly intrusion.

‘Strange, Sir, that these purists have altogether forgotten, that of those among them who profess an adherence to the Established Church, not one can presume, at the peril of schism, to define what heresy is!—It is reserved for the Parliament of England to do so. This Blackstone will tell them. And of those who do not belong to the Church of Parliament—pardon me—of England I mean, the bulk are alike subservient to the Assembly of Westminster—to the men whom Selden frightened with the Hebrew Bible—to “shallow Edwards, and Scotch what d’ye call”—! Sir, I hold at this instant in my hand DOCUMENTARY evidence that this is the fact; and that it is a ruled case that in order to constitute heresy, *it is not enough* to prove the

* Letter of the Rev. Robert M'Ghee to the Rev. Dr. Sadleir.

† Rev. Mr. Melville's Speech at Exeter Hall.