

**LETTERS ON THE TRINITY
AND ON THE DIVINITY OF
CHRIST: ADDRESSED TO THE
REV. WILLIAM E. CHANNING**

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Letters on the Trinity and on the Divinity of Christ: Addressed to the Rev. William E. Channing
by Moses Stuart

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MOSES STUART

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LETTERS ON THE TRINITY,
 AND ON
THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST;

ADDRESSED TO
 THE REV. WILLIAM E. CHANNING,
 IN ANSWER TO HIS SERMON
 "ON THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY."

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 ANDOVER.

WITH A PREFACE,
 BY THE
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P R E F A C E.

THE Apostle Paul, in one of the Epistles to his friend and fellow-labourer Timothy, after mentioning the fulfilment of the Divine purpose, in the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, refers to his own appointment as a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. In discharging the duties of this sacred office, he experienced many sufferings, and at the very moment of writing his Epistle was in imprisonment at Rome, and in the expectation of a speedy and violent death, in consequence of his determined and uncompromising declaration of revealed truth. "Nevertheless," he adds, "I am not ashamed;"—meaning that he entertained not the feelings of a man who, having hastily adopted certain religious opinions, and brought upon himself ridicule, sufferings, and death, saw at that awful period how vain and foolish had been his former views, and imprudent his conduct—who stood condemned by himself, and abashed in the presence of his fellow-creatures—who regretted his past course, and had a fearful looking for of judgment and eternity. No: whilst in prison, and in the prospect of death, he indulged very different thoughts. "I am not ashamed, for I know," he continues, "in whom I have believed. I am thoroughly convinced of the certainty of the truths which I have myself received, and been declaring to others. I know the authority, the power, the sufficiency of the Saviour. I look with all the confidence of an enlightened and unsubdued conviction, and with all the satisfaction of conscious honesty, upon the testimony which I formerly bore to Christ, and in the prospect of the death which I am soon to undergo, and in the view of the eternity on which I am soon to enter, I rely with perfect confidence on the security of that

foundation, assured that the promise of forgiveness and eternal life, through the mediation of the Son of God, will be fulfilled in me, and in all those who have been partakers of the same grace."

The word of God, and reason, and experience, are all in opposition to the thought, not unfrequently entertained, of a very great change having taken place in the disposition of men towards Christian truth, and towards those who faithfully proclaim it, in comparison with that manifested in the time of the Apostles. The enmity of the carnal mind—that is, of every mind unrenewed by divine grace—remains the same. It may not be carried to the same extent in the outward exhibition of it, nor embodied in the same forms. Still, now, as formerly, it is true that there is a powerful spirit of opposition to the Gospel amongst men—amongst professing Christians—even amongst the inhabitants of England, of Scotland, and of this City. The result also must be the same. As the Apostles were suspected, insulted, persecuted,—the same, with the limitations before described, must be the portion of every man who sets before his fellow-creatures, as he did, the fearful depth of their natural depravity—the number and aggravation of their actual sins—the condemnation to which, on account of them, they are exposed—and who, after an explanation of the divine purpose in a Redeemer, calls upon them all, whether young or old, whether rich or poor, whether reputable or disreputable, in the estimation of the world, "to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold upon the hope set before them in the Gospel." Suspicion, of whatever nature, will certainly be entertained—reproach, of whatever kind, will certainly be thrown upon that man, and in exact proportion to his fearlessness and determination. Even amongst those who profess to entertain the same sentiments, who may be members of that Church of which he is constituted a minister, this spirit will be indulged, and in one form or other will be manifested.

But there is one class of men to whom he will be particularly obnoxious,—Socinian preachers and their followers. The doctrines proclaimed by the faithful ministers of the gospel, especially those which relate to the person and work of the blessed Saviour, are described by these men as having very little autho-

rity of any kind, but especially from reason, to support them ; and the ministers themselves are represented as mere machines, impelled by self-interest, and exhibiting to their simple and deluded congregations, not rational, vivifying, and salutary truths, such as *they* present, but the artificial arrangements of creeds and catechisms. That this is the nature of the religious truths proclaimed to the inhabitants of this city, by its ministers, we have been frequently and in various ways reminded, in the course of last winter ; and the same statements may be again put forth, by those persons who delight so much to dwell on the doctrines of *universal benevolence and charity*.

Now, in such circumstances, the writer of these lines, one of the persons thus assailed, feels strongly disposed to adopt the course and the language of the Apostle, who, as we have seen, when exposed to suspicion and contumely, attacked not others, nor even directly defended himself, but fell back on the entrenchments of faith and hope. So I feel great disinclination to argue truths of a nature so important and all-concerning, in the way and with the spirit of a combatant. Regarding me, as the Apostle did, as a sinful and a dying, and yet immortal creature, I would rather enter on such a question with the feelings of one most deeply interested in the result, and seek to fortify myself against the ungenerous assaults of the enemy, by more narrowly examining my own heart, and planting myself more securely on Christ, the rock of ages. Especially, when such suspicions are entertained by many, and are avowed by not a few, when we hear it alleged that the sentiments of the man are concealed under the garb of the clergyman, I desire to throw it off, and to treat the subject, not with a professional, but personal feeling,—even as one who declares his own convictions, and is anxious to show to others the ground of them,—and all this with the seriousness and solemnity produced by the feeling that he, as well as they, will soon be summoned into an eternal world, and that the most important inquiry for them both now is,—“What must we do to be saved?” It is in such a spirit that, in the midst of surrounding indifference, and of avowed or secret enmity to the grand doctrines of the everlasting Gospel, I would say with the Apostle,—“Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I

know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

"I know in whom I have believed," says the Apostle, and, like him, I would be justified in maintaining this feeling of confidence and satisfaction on the authority of the Word of God. But the occasional suggestions of one's own mind, and still more the prevailing and practical infidelity of others, render it necessary for me, in order to repose with undisturbed quietness on the power of the Saviour, to go farther, and be satisfied of the unsoundness of all other positions, and of the Scriptures being the only authority in the business of religion: and it will not require much time or effort to be brought to this conclusion. On the subject of religion, it will be very easy to see that the knowledge to which unaided reason is capable of conducting us is a very unsafe guide. It will appear that, even with regard to such simple truths as the existence and attributes of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, it has not led to a consistent or general belief;—that, on the contrary, the most discordant views on both these most important questions have been entertained; whilst, throughout a vast number of the human race, no very intelligible notions with respect to either of these have been found to exist. The power of reason, indeed, even allowing it to have experienced no diminution from any cause, is very limited in these inquiries. It could discover those truths only to which, under the direction of conscience, we may be led in our investigations into the material world, or in the combination and prosecution of the views with which all of us are in some degree naturally impressed. But what our state is before God, how we came into it, for what purpose we are preserved in it, what is afterwards to befall us,—these are questions which, whatever men may pretend to, reason is utterly incapable of solving; and if so, even when its range is most extended, and its flight most free, what must be the result when, as at present, all its powers are darkened and weakened by sin, "when we are alienated from the love of God, through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts?" In short, it is true of religion, above all things, that "he who trusteth his own heart is a fool." He is relying, in the most important of all concerns, on a guide

both ignorant and deceitful, and which, whatever may be the claims advanced for it by its votaries, has done nothing for mankind throughout 6,000 years, but left them nearly at the end of it, as at the beginning, in darkness, degradation, and despair. Survey the religious state of ancient nations when reason was the only guide. Contemplate the condition of Heathen countries at the present time. Observe even our own land, illuminated as it is by the Sun of Righteousness, and mark the religious and moral state of those men in it, who follow reason, as it is called, to the neglect of the Divine record. It is true of them all, that, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

I have been thus taught to distrust reason as my guide to religious truth, and have been led to dwell with unyielding confidence on the sacred Scriptures, as the only depository of the will of God, and the duty and destiny of man. Their claims to this character are numerous and overwhelming. The voice of God therein is evident to the attentive hearer. The system of religious truth which it conveys, so worthy of the infinitely pure, holy, just, and merciful Being, whose attributes and purposes it discloses, and so marvellously adapted to the character and circumstances of man—the uninterrupted continuance of this scheme throughout many, many centuries—the progressive advance of it, until completed in the appearance and propitiation of the Son of God—the perfect uniformity of the truth itself, although under various dispensations—the extraordinary fulfilment of prophecy—the person, the character, the discourses, the prophecies, the miracles of the Saviour, his resurrection and ascension—the triumph of the Cross among Jews and Gentiles—the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion until this day of its inhabitants: on these, as on a very few of the almost innumerable and varied evidences of the Scriptures, as a revelation from God to men, my mind rests with a firm conviction. I consider it not sufficient, however, to have a vague, indefinite impression of the Bible, as given by inspiration of God,—since such an acknowledgment is often made by those who, on examining it with a view to the establishment of their religious principles, pay very little respect to its authority. To no body of men is this remark more justly applicable than those to whom, as Socinians, we have referred.

They receive, they say, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the inspired record of Divine revelation ; but, if they acted consistently with their confession, they would not hesitate to " cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." That such should be their spirit, in the examination of the sacred volume, is not more in accordance with its own requisitions than those of reason itself, which declares that, if men are permitted to receive or to reject whatever the Divine record contains, according as it may be agreeable, or opposed to their own views of what is rational, the revelation might have been withheld altogether ; for there is not any one of its statements, however certain or essential, which may not be set aside by such capricious mandates ;—even the whole light of the Gospel may be extinguished, by being subjected to such a mode of interpretation. Indeed, so far as these unhappy men are concerned, they are already left in nearly total darkness as to the most important truths in which, as sinful, accountable, and immortal beings, we can be interested. My obvious duty, I repeat, is, upon conviction of the reality of a revelation from God, to seek, with a submissive and a prayerful mind, the knowledge of its truths, assured that whatever may be my opposition to any of them, they are all consonant to the Divine wisdom, goodness, and justice, and " profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness."

Eternity ! What an awful scene does this word set before us—thousands, and thousands, and thousands of years, ceaselessly revolving, and never, even by one point, bringing our existence nearer to a close. With what solemn, earnest, prayerful, and upright minds, should we engage in any inquiry in which our welfare throughout that eternity is involved. And yet, unspeakably solicitous as we should be in such an investigation, we may here pause, and survey the ground we have passed over, assured that hitherto all is safe. We have renounced reason as our instructor in the knowledge of religious truth. We have done it the highest honour, when we sought, as it commands us, after a more authoritative and a surer guide,—and when, after the discovery of it in the Christian revelation, we commence an impar-