

**MEMOIR OF THE CONTROVERSY  
RESPECTING THE THREE HEAVENLY  
WITNESSES, I JOHN V. 7.:  
INCLUDING CRITICAL NOTICES OF THE  
PRINCIPAL WRITERS ON BOTH SIDES OF  
THE DISCUSSION**

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Memoir of the controversy respecting the three heavenly witnesses, I John v. 7.: including critical notices of the principal writers on both sides of the discussion by Ezra Abbot

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**EZRA ABBOT**

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## EDITORIAL NOTE.

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THE "Memoir of the Controversy respecting the Three Heavenly Witnesses" which is here reprinted consists of a series of articles which originally appeared in the Congregational Magazine for 1829, under the signature of "Criticus," and were published at London in a separate volume in 1830. The author, the Rev. William Orme, was born at Falkirk in Scotland, in 1787, and became minister of a Congregational church at Perth, in 1807. He afterwards removed to London, and became minister of a congregation at Camberwell, and Foreign Secretary to the London Missionary Society. Mr. Orme was the author of several esteemed works, as the "Memoirs of John Owen, D. D.," London, 1820; "Bibliotheca Biblica, a Select List of Books on Sacred Literature, with Notices Biographical, Critical, and Bibliographical," Edinburgh, 1824; and especially the "Life and Times of Richard Baxter, with a Critical Examination of his Writings," published at London in 1830, the year of his death. In his account of the controversy respecting 1 John v. 7, being a Trinitarian, he will not be suspected of undervaluing the arguments for its genuineness through theological prejudice; and Horne justly praises "the candid spirit and diligent

research which pervade every page of his able and well-written Memoir."

The republication of the present work is due to Frederic Huidekoper, of Meadville, Pennsylvania, at whose instance I undertook its editorship. Though the controversy itself is a memorable one, and its history will always possess an interest both to the theological student and the student of human nature, it may seem to have been hardly worth while to call attention to the matter at the present day. It may be said that the question is obsolete; that the spuriousness of the disputed passage has long been conceded by all intelligent and fair-minded scholars. This is true; but a little investigation will show that great ignorance still exists on the subject among the less informed in the Christian community. The passage is still quoted as a part of genuine Scripture in volumes published by our Sunday School Societies, Tract Societies, and other religious bodies; many of the popular commentaries either give a false impression in regard to it, or pass over it in silence; and it has been used as the text for not a few sermons on the Trinity, which have been published even in the present century. Many Trinitarians, who are aware that the passage has been disputed, have a vague notion that it was at an early period fraudulently left out of some manuscripts by the Arians, and that it is now rejected by Unitarians on account of their hostility to the doctrine involved; on the other hand, some Unitarians imagine it to have been a deliberate forgery, devised for the purpose of giving support to the doctrine of the Trinity. These

errors do not tend to promote Christian charity. Those who still quote the passage through ignorance should be enlightened; those who know the facts in the case, and conceal them, should be put to shame. The republication of this Memoir may perhaps contribute something to both these ends. It will also show that the interpolation did not originate in fraud, though "pious fraud" has done something to give it currency.

In the present edition of this work the extracts made by Mr. Orme from various writers have been carefully verified, as far as possible, by comparison with the originals, and many mistakes have thus been corrected; to the more important quotations in foreign languages a translation has been subjoined, for the benefit of the unlearned reader; and a few notes have been added, together with an Appendix, continuing the history of the controversy, and exhibiting the judgment of the best scholars at the present day in regard to the subject. The original text has been reprinted without omission or change, except the correction of typographical errors: the editorial additions are enclosed in brackets.

E. A.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., *December 20, 1865.*





## P R E F A C E .

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THE sentence which has been placed on the title, from the *Horæ Biblicæ* of the venerable Charles Butler, is by no means intended to apply to the following pages. The author is too sensible of their imperfections to lay claim to the merit of presenting a full and complete history of the controversy of which they treat. He has neither possessed the leisure, nor the means, to enable him to accomplish so desirable a work. If, however, his efforts should induce some more favored individual; such a person as Crito Cantabrigiensis, whose acuteness and learning, calmness of temper, and powers of argument, show that he possesses every requisite qualification for such an undertaking, he will feel himself amply rewarded, though the work of the pioneer should be forgotten in the splendid triumph of the successful general.

The greater part of this Memoir of the Controversy was originally drawn up by the author as a kind of recreation from more severe labors, during hours both "few and far between," which he occasionally thus employed. What gratified himself, he imagined might afford some gratification to others. He, therefore, extended his notes, and printed them

during the preceding year, in the successive numbers of a monthly publication. He has understood they created some interest in the subject; and that to a few their appearance in a separate form would be acceptable.

In that form they are now presented to the public, with some corrections and very considerable additions. Criticism he neither courts nor deprecates. He who has freely expressed his opinion of others, may expect that others will use the same freedom with him. And if this is done with candor, and with due regard to the interests of truth, though it should differ from his own, he will not complain, or be offended.

LONDON, *February*, 1830.

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