

**UNITARIANISM DEFINED. THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE OF
THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY
GHOST. A COURSE OF LECTURES**

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Unitarianism defined. The Scripture doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A course of lectures by Frederick A. Farley

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FREDERICK A. FARLEY

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A

COURSE OF LECTURES.

BY

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P R E F A C E .

THE following Lectures were delivered in the spring of 1859. They were not originally written out, but delivered orally after being carefully studied, as an advocate at the Bar speaks from his "brief." When, therefore, I was requested by my congregation—in a spirit which made my duty plain—to publish them, I found myself, should I comply, quite likely to disappoint any readers who heard them, by at least the loss they might feel of that more fresh and vivacious manner, which belongs to extemporaneous speech. Much as the old dame felt, who, when asked to sign a request to her Pastor for a copy of a sermon for the press: "La!" said she, "it's no use: you may print the *sarmon*, but you can't print the *tone*!" And in truth, "the tone" is of some importance, even if it be not the best in the world. The Lectures had to be written out from the *brief*; the excitement of a large and earnest audience was gone; the matter had been in a considerable degree dismissed from my mind; and it was very much like beginning to do over again in cold blood what had been done in a glow. I confess, therefore, to some reluctance at first to setting about the necessary preparation for the press. But circumstances conspired to urge me: circumstances which seemed at once to create and to indicate a fresh demand in the community, for a re-presentation of the grounds on which a faith, to me inestimably precious, rests. My own deep love and gratitude for the faith which has been baptized with the name of Unitarianism; my conviction of its being the original and essential faith of the New Testament and the primitive Church, and destined yet to recover its hold upon the affections and the allegiance of Christendom; my persuasion that it is altogether without warrant either to denounce or regard as infidel that vast majority of our population which is now unhappily dissociated from all the religious institutions of this nominally Christian land—since among the portion of it most indifferent or most opposed to the orthodox dispensation of the Gospel, many might be found ready to accept, could they only be brought to understand, our more rational and Scriptural views; my observation, notwithstanding

the wide-spread and deep-seated popular prejudice against Unitarianism, of the increasing influence of its principles of interpretation of the Scriptures, of its mode of regarding the Scriptures themselves, and of its essential and peculiar spirit, upon the general tone of religious thought and discussion ; have all urged and helped me on.

The *name*, Unitarianism, I care little for in itself, though I like it as sufficiently apt and distinctive, where and so long as a distinction must be made ; and while I see the *thing* which it denotes doing its work, and leavening the mass, however unacknowledged or unobserved even, by those whom it is doing perhaps the most to bless—yes, doing the work of orthodoxy, and by degrees winning its prestige—I am content. By *name*, I never expected to see it go with a rush ; but since I have been able to note the current of religious thought, and especially since the great controversy more than thirty years ago, in Europe, in Great Britain, and at home, tending to and largely resulting in more liberal views and a more liberal spirit in the very bosom of the orthodox churches ; to see how these pervade the best literature of the age—how they are enlarging the bounds within which men of different names and sects can co-operate for the truest Christianization of society and the world—how they are driving intolerance and bigotry back into the skulking-places of mere ignorance and superstition—I feel sure, that all that *we* have been most ready to contend for under that *name*, was never more active or mighty. The practical recognition of the great truths, not merely of One God, but of One God, the FATHER—of One all-sufficient Saviour, the Saviour of all, and not of an “elect” portion of the race only—of the Holy Spirit of our Father in heaven, the Comforter ever ready to come into the hearts of all who seek it—of the brotherhood of man, in which all the great interests of the race are seen to be inseparably one, and as such to be regarded and cared for by the Church of Christ more than any or all matters of creed or belief—these among the leading truths, which Unitarianism has always held dear and has always faithfully contended for, apart from all metaphysical subtleties and confusion of tongues, were never more emphasized than now in the Christian consciousness, whatever the loyalty, professed in any quarter, to symbols and confessions in effect fast growing obsolete.

The necessity of the case has compelled me to a more rigid adherence to purely dogmatic statement and discussion, than I could have wished. Believing, as I do, in Christianity as an Authoritative, Revealed Religion, and that it still suffers from corruptions induced by

false glosses and interpretations of its Records, I am unfeignedly anxious to commend it in its simplicity to the serious and devout inquirer. Not that I do not believe, on the one hand, that a Calvinist, or a Trinitarian of any stamp, and, on the other, that a Deist, a Naturalist, a Rationalist, may be as good as—perhaps better than—many who boast most loudly of their Christian faith; but that God, having seen fit to reveal his will through his Son, it is my bounden duty, as one to whom it has come, not only to see to it that I understand aright, accept, and obey that Revelation, just as it is; but as one of its Ministers, aid others to do the same.

If any think such Lectures are not needed, because orthodoxy has in many quarters, or in many respects been ameliorated, it remains true that even the most liberal orthodox bodies or churches still retain their old Symbols, Catechisms, and Confessions of Faith; and that by these in by far the overwhelming majority of cases, is a man's fitness to be or become a member of the Christian Church, tested. So long as such is the fact, so long must these discussions have place.

The words *orthodox* and *orthodoxy*, are of course used throughout the volume, as merely designating the popular faith, or the faith professed by the majority. I have also often introduced "concessions of Trinitarians"; not, surely, because Trinitarian expositions or criticisms are in themselves of more weight than those of our own household of faith, but because they are in the nature of attestations from the opposite side of the argument, in every given case, to the strength of our position. Is it sufficiently known, that the entire Unitarian argument may be sustained by the "concessions" of Trinitarian expositors and critics, in reference to every point of Scripture, and the History of the Church?*

It will at once be seen, that I plant myself upon the Bible, and especially the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I hold, that a just interpretation is needed to bring out the spirit from beneath the letter. I believe in progress; but in religious matters, progress within Christianity, not outside or beyond it. The Gospel is specially the religion of progress; has always been, and will always be in advance of the highest religious growth of man. To leave it, would be only religiously to retrograde. Progress? Yes. But remember

* Let my readers consult that remarkable volume of John Wilson, entitled, "Concessions of Trinitarians," published in England, in 1842; and his "Unitarian Principles confirmed by Trinitarian Testimonies," 2d vol. of the "Theological Library" of the American Unitarian Association, Boston, 1855.