

ART. III.—UNITARIANISM.

1. *Scripture Proofs and Scriptural Illustrations of Unitarianism.* By JOHN WILSON. Third edition, revised and enlarged. London: 1846.
2. *The Concessions of Trinitarians, from the works of the most eminent Biblical critics and commentators, from the era of the Reformation till the present time.* By JOHN WILSON. London and Manchester: 1856.

FAIR and kindly discussion, throwing light and warmth about the subject of dispute, has, from the days of Æsop down to the present, had far greater success in removing any cloak of prejudice, within which human intellect is enwrapped, than all the windy denunciations of a fierce, but puerile dogmatism. Nowhere has such dogmatism so fully displayed itself as in discussions of religious opinions; nowhere has it laid such abundant claim to the lasting deprecations of mankind. Furious in its conscious* imbecility, it has ever sought to sustain itself by appealing to other arms than those of logic and common sense. Through it the doctrines of the Prince of Peace have been baptized in blood, and his own melancholy prediction has been fulfilled that, in the ignorance of bigotry and prejudice, men will think they do God service in the slaughter of his true disciples.

In view of these facts, so indicative of "what is in man," it behooves one entering upon religious controversy, to do so in earnest aspiration for the truth, and in charitable recognition of honest differences in human opinion. In the

* *Conscious*, we mean, of its inability to defend its tenets in fair discussion, but not of any inherent weakness in their foundations; for well has Neander said: "When a man entrenches himself in some particular dogmatic interest, and makes that his central position, he can easily explain (*viz. for himself*) everything in conformity with his own views, and *finds everywhere a reflection of himself.*" *Hist. Christ. Relig. and Church*; Vol. I., Sect. 4; Forrey Jr., p. 581.

discussion before us especially, this recognition should, on our part, be prominent, for we find frequent passages in Scripture, founded upon by some as establishing the Trinitarian doctrine, believed by others, not less convinced of its truth, to furnish no evidence in its favor. The argument from such "Concessions," however, has little other application. It can avail nothing against the doctrine itself, nor against the evidences for it in the passages of Revelation upon which it is founded, save so far as the authority of any one, who doubts the favorable interpretation, may extend as a reliable commentator. Even this use of Trinitarian "Concessions" is fully rebutted by the proof they afford of the multifarious testimony to a doctrine, which left without important support in many individual cases, can yet find other evidences sufficient to assure its adoption. Instead, therefore, of an exhibition of its inherent weakness, we must regard them as a confirmation of its fundamental strength.

The first volume cited above, however, contains a direct argument *for* Unitarianism and *against* the doctrine of the Trinity. The proof of this doctrine, we should notice, is *accumulative*. It is to be gleaned from an examination of the whole field of Scripture. In our own belief there are a few passages, which alone indisputably indicate and assert this doctrine; but all are impeached, and hence arises the necessity of accumulated proof. Justice cannot be done the Trinitarian cause unless there is had a proper appreciation of the nature of such proof—of the aid mutually rendered by one evidence to every other and by these to it. For what Bacon says of the sciences, is eminently true, also, of religious doctrine, that "its harmony, that is, when each part supports the other, is and ought to be the true and brief way of confutation and suppression of all the smaller sorts of objections; but on the other hand, if you draw out every axiom, like the sticks of a fagot, one by one, you may easily quarrel with them, and bend and break them at your pleasure."* And we may add the words of Cardinal Wiseman,

* *D. Augm. Scient.* l. vii.

uttered in the same connection: "the successive and partial attention which we are obliged to give to separate evidences or proofs, doth greatly weaken their collective force."* Our opponents, of course, may justly advance similar claims to whatever advantage may result from a like consideration of the evidences adduced to sustain their positions. Nevertheless, greater disadvantage must accrue, popularly, on this ground to the Trinitarian view, since the doctrine of the Trinity is of such character, as we shall presently more fully display, as to preclude that clearness of revelation which seems demanded by reason, and which is, therefore, at *every step* and with apparent effectiveness, insisted on by Unitarians. Thus is produced a singular effect of isolation on the various proofs which are brought forward from Scripture.

If there exists such a union of persons in the Godhead, as the doctrine of the Trinity sets forth, it is plain, we think, that the apprehension of their mutual relations and the nature of their union would lie beyond the reach of human understanding. Is it strange, then, that this doctrine is delivered to us by no explicit attempt at a revelation which we should not be able to comprehend? It pervades the whole Bible in such manner as to convey to us sufficient knowledge for essential purposes—but not sufficient to confound our reason, which would seem to be the inevitable consequence upon any effort fully to satisfy it. There are things in the universe which the reason of man cannot grapple with successfully. So, as Bishop Butler has so admirably shown, it is beforehand to be expected that there should be insoluble mysteries in religion.† "Although this mystery is incomprehensible to mortals," well says Benedict Pictet, "it must not be rejected by us: for it is not strange that finite beings such as we are, should not perfectly comprehend the nature of an infinite Being."‡

The Unitarian doctrine originated, doubtless, in that am-

* *Lectures on Connection between Science and Revealed Religion.* Vol. 1, lect. 1.

† See especially *Analogy of Religion*, Part II, ch. iv.

‡ *Christian Theology*: Reyroux Tr., ch. ix, sub. fin.