

and always putting questions as if he wished for information. And yet for many years he greatly promoted the Samosatanean heresy, and led many to adopt it."*

Such was the origin of Socinianism, and such, to a large extent, has been the kind of men by whom it has been advocated, although many of them have been fortunate enough to find themselves in circumstances that rendered it unnecessary to have recourse to the policy and management which its founder adopted, as to the mode of bringing out his opinions.

Sec. II.—Socinian Views as to Scripture.

The Socinians differ from the great body of Christians in regard to the subject of the *inspiration* of the sacred Scriptures. This was to be expected; for, as they had made up their minds not to regulate their views of doctrinal matters by the natural and obvious meaning of the statements contained in Scripture, it was quite probable that they would try to depreciate the value and authority of the Bible, so far as this was not plainly inconsistent with professing a belief, in any sense, in the truth of Christianity. The position, accordingly, which they maintain upon this point is, that the Bible contains, indeed, a revelation from God, but that it is not itself that revelation, or that it is not, in any proper sense, the word of God, though the word of God is found in it. They virtually discard the Old Testament altogether, as having now no value or importance but what is merely historical. And, indeed, they commonly teach, that the promise of eternal life was not revealed, and was wholly unknown, under the Old Testament dispensation; but was conveyed to man, for the first time, by Christ Himself, when He appeared on earth: men, under the patriarchal and Mosaic economies, having been, according to this view, very much in the same situation as the mass of mankind in general,—that is, being called upon to work out their own eternal happiness by their own good deeds, though having only a very imperfect knowledge of God, and of the worship and duty which He required, and having only a general confidence in His goodness and mercy, without any certainty or assurance as to their final destiny. Jesus Christ, according to Socinians, was a mere man, who was

* Zanchii opera, tom. i., Genev. 1619.

appointed by God to convey His will more fully to men; and the *sole* object of His mission was to communicate to men more correct and complete information concerning God and duty,—and especially to convey to them the assurance of a future state of blessedness, to be enjoyed by all who should do what they could in worshipping and serving God, according to the information He had communicated to them.

They profess, then, to receive as true, upon this ground, all that Christ Himself taught. They admit that the teaching of Christ is, in the main, and as to its substance, correctly enough set forth in the New Testament; and they do not allege that it can be learned from any other source. But then, as to the *books* which compose the New Testament, they maintain that they were the unaided compositions of the men whose names they bear; and deny that they, the authors, had any special supernatural assistance or superintendence from God in the production of them. They look on the evangelists simply as honest and faithful historians, who had good opportunities of knowing the subjects about which they wrote, and who intended to relate everything accurately, as far as their opportunities and memories served them; but who, having nothing but their own powers and faculties to guide them, may be supposed, like other historians, to have fallen sometimes into inadvertencies and errors. And as to the apostles of our Lord, whose writings form part of the canon of the New Testament, or the substance of whose teaching is there recorded, they commonly deny to them any infallible supernatural guidance, and admit that they were well acquainted with the views of their Master, and intended faithfully to report them, and to follow them in their own preaching. But they think that the apostles probably sometimes misunderstood or misapprehended them; and that they are not to be implicitly followed in the reasonings or illustrations they employed to enforce their teaching,—an observation, of course, specially directed against the Apostle Paul.

With these views of the apostles and evangelists, and of the books of the New Testament, they think themselves warranted in using much greater liberty with its words and language, in the way of labouring to force them into an accordance with their system of theology, than can be regarded as at all warrantable by those who believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,—that holy men wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of

God. Socinians are also fond of dwelling upon all those topics which seem fitted to shake in men's minds a due sense of the reverence with which the sacred Scriptures ought, as being the word of God, to be regarded,—such as the obscurity attaching to some of their statements, and the difficulty of ascertaining their true meaning; the various readings, and the difficulty in some cases of ascertaining the true text; the apparent inconsistencies, and the difficulty occasionally of reconciling them. In discussing these and similar topics, they follow the example of the Papists,—treat them commonly in the same light or semi-infidel spirit; and their general object is the same,—namely, to insinuate the unfitness of the Bible, as it stands, to be a full and accurate directory of faith and practice, so as to leave it men's only business to ascertain the true and exact meaning of its statements, that they may implicitly submit to them. These topics they are fond of dwelling upon, and of setting forth with prominence, and even exaggeration. And the application they make of them is,—*first*, and more specifically, to disprove the inspiration of the books of Scripture; and, *secondly*, and more generally, to warrant and encourage the use of considerable liberty in dealing with their statements, and to cherish a feeling of uncertainty as to the accuracy of the results that may be deduced from an examination of them. They thus make it sufficiently manifest, just as the Papists do, that they are rather disposed to shrink from a trial of their doctrines, by a direct and impartial examination of the exact sense and import of the whole statements of Scripture, as they stand. They are fond, indeed, of declaiming upon the supremacy of the Scriptures, as the only rule of faith, in opposition to all human authorities, councils, creeds, confessions, etc., etc.; and though this general principle is unquestionably true and sound, yet it will commonly be found that there are, in Socinian and rationalistic declamations upon the subject, quite as plain indications of a feeling of soreness, that the creeds and confessions of human authority,—that is, of almost all who have ever professed to draw their faith from the Bible,—have been decidedly opposed to *their* theological views, as of reverence for the Scriptures. And there is ground for suspecting that the main reason of *their preference* for the Bible alone, is because they think they can show that the Scriptures are capable of being so dealt with as to countenance, or, at least, not to oppose, their system; while creeds and confessions commonly are not. Still Socinians

have generally admitted, at least theoretically and in words, down till their recent adoption in our own day, both in America and in Britain, of the entire anti-supernaturalism of German neologians, that the true sense of Scripture, when correctly and clearly ascertained, was to be practically and substantially the rule or standard of men's faith; and have, in consequence, usually undertaken to show, that their system of theology was countenanced by Scripture, or, at least, was not opposed to it, but might be held by men who professed to receive the Bible as the rule of faith.

The leading peculiarity of their system of scriptural interpretation is just the principle, that nothing which is contrary to reason can be contained in a revelation from God; and that, therefore, if any statements of Scripture seem to impute to Jesus, or His apostles, the teaching of doctrines which are contrary to reason, they must, if possible, be explained in such a way as to avoid this difficulty, and be made to appear to teach nothing but what is accordant with reason. I will not enter again into the consideration of the general principle, or of the way and manner in which it ought to be applied, in so far as it has a foundation in truth; but will rather advert now to the way in which the Socinians actually deal with Scripture, in order to exclude from it anything irrational; though this is a topic which I fear can scarcely be made useful or interesting, without producing more in the way of examples than our space permits. It is very plain that, if it be admitted in general that our faith is to be determined by ascertaining the meaning of Scripture statements, then the first and most obvious step to be adopted is just to employ, with the utmost impartiality and diligence, all the means which are naturally fitted, as means, to effect this end. If it be true, as it is, that the special blessing of God, and the guidance and direction of His Spirit, are necessary to attain this end, let us abound in prayer that we may receive it. If the use of all the ordinary critical and philological means and appliances which are applicable to the interpretation of such a collection of documents as the Bible contains, is necessary to this end,—as it is,—then let all these be diligently and faithfully employed; and let the result be deliberately and impartially ascertained, in the exercise of sound reason and common sense. This should evidently be the way in which the work should be entered on; and then, in so far as the principle about alleged contrariety to reason is true and sound, and admits of being fairly applied, let

it be applied fully and frankly to the actual result of the critical and philological investigation, whatever may be the legitimate consequences of the application. But the Socinians commonly reverse this natural and legitimate process. They first lay down the principle, that certain doctrines,—such as the Trinity, the hypostatical union, the atonement, the eternity of punishment,—are irrational, or inconsistent with what natural reason teaches about God; and then, under the influence of this conviction, already existing, they proceed to examine Scripture for the purpose, not of simply ascertaining what it teaches, but of showing that *these* doctrines are *not* taught there, or, at least, that this cannot be proved.

Now, this condition of things, and the state of mind which it implies or produces, are manifestly unfavourable to a fair and impartial use of the means naturally fitted to enable men to ascertain correctly what Scripture teaches. Impartiality, in these circumstances, is not to be expected,—it would betray an ignorance of the known principles of human nature to look for it. Those who believe in these doctrines profess to have found them in Scripture, fairly interpreted, in the use of the ordinary appropriate means,—to base them upon no other foundation,—to know nothing about them but what is stated there,—and to be willing to renounce them, whenever it can be proved that they are not taught in the Bible; while the Socinians are placed, by this principle of theirs, in this position,—as some of the bolder and more straightforward among them have not scrupled to avow,—that they would not believe these doctrines, even if it could be proved to their satisfaction that they were plainly taught by the apostles. Still they usually profess to undertake to show that they are not taught in Scripture, or, at least, that no sufficient evidence of a critical and philological kind has been produced to prove that they are taught there. The violent perversion of all the legitimate and recognised principles and rules of philology and criticism, to which they have been obliged to have recourse in following out this bold undertaking, can be illustrated only by examples taken from the discussions of particular doctrines, and the interpretation of particular texts; but we may advert briefly to one or two of the more general features of their ordinary mode of procedure in this matter.

In regard to the text of the New Testament, they are accustomed to catch eagerly at, and to try to set forth with something

like plausibility, the most meagre and superficial critical evidence against the genuineness or integrity of particular passages,—as has been fully proved with respect to the attempts they have made to exclude, as spurious, the first two chapters both of Matthew and of Luke, because of their containing an account of the miraculous conception of Christ; and they sometimes even venture upon mere conjectural emendations of the text, which have not a shadow of critical authority to support them,—as, for instance, in their criticism upon Rom. ix. 5,—a practice condemned by all impartial critics.

In the interpretation of Scripture, one of the general presumptions which they are fond of using is this,—that the texts adduced in support of some doctrine which they reject, are brought only from one or two of the books of the New Testament,—that the alleged proofs of it are not by any means so clear, so frequent, or so widely diffused as might have been expected, if the doctrine in question had been intended to be taught,—or that no apparent proofs of it occur in passages where they might have been looked for, if the doctrine were true. In dealing with such considerations, which Socinians frequently insist upon, the defenders of orthodox doctrine usually maintain,—first, that most of the doctrines which Socinians reject are clearly and frequently taught in Scripture, and that statements affording satisfactory evidence of their truth, more formal or more incidental, are found to *pervade* the word of God; and, secondly, that even if it were not so, yet a presumption based upon such considerations is unwarranted and unreasonable: for that we have no right, because no sure ground to proceed upon in attempting, to prescribe or determine beforehand, in what particular way, with what measure of clearness or frequency, or in what places of Scripture, a doctrine should be stated or indicated; but are bound to receive it, provided only God, in His word, has given us *sufficient* grounds for believing it to have been revealed by Him. If the doctrine can be shown to be really taught in Scripture, this should be sufficient to command our assent, even though it should not be so fully and so frequently stated or indicated there as we might perhaps have expected beforehand, on the supposition of its being true; *especially* as it is manifest that the word of God, in its whole character and complexion, has been deliberately constructed on purpose to call forth and require men's diligence and attention in the study of its

meaning, and in the comparison of its statements; and to test also men's fairness, candour, and impartiality, as indicated by their being satisfied or not with reasonable and sufficient, though it may be *not* overwhelming, evidence of the doctrines there revealed.

Another general consideration, often insisted on by Socinians, in order to help out the very meagre evidence they can produce that particular passages in Scripture do not teach the orthodox doctrine, is this,—that all that they need to prove is, that the passage in question does not *necessarily* sanction the orthodox doctrine, but may *possibly* be understood in a different sense; and then they contend that they have done *this* at least. They often admit that, upon critical and philological grounds, a particular passage *may* be taken in the orthodox sense; but they contend that they have disproved the allegation that it *must* be taken in that sense, and that this is sufficient. Now, here again, orthodox divines maintain,—first, that in regard to many of the passages, the meaning of which is controverted between them and the Socinians, it can be shown, not only that they *may*, but that they *must*, bear the orthodox sense, and that no other sense is consistent with a fair application to them of the ordinary rules of philology, grammar, and criticism; and, secondly, that the Socinian demand that this must be proved in all cases, or indeed in any case, is unreasonable and overstrained. We may concede to the Socinians, that, in the controversy with them, the *onus probandi* lies properly upon us, and that we must produce sufficient and satisfactory evidence of the truth of our doctrines from Scripture, before we can reasonably expect them to be received. But we cannot admit that any such amount of antecedent improbability attaches to the doctrines we hold, as to impose upon us any obligation to do more than show that the Scripture, explained according to the ordinary legitimate principles and rules applicable to the matter, teaches, and was intended to teach, them,—that a man, examining fairly and impartially as to what the Scripture sets forth upon these points, would naturally and as a matter of course, without straining or bias to either side, come to the conclusion that our doctrines are taught there,—and that these are the doctrines which the Scriptures were evidently intended, as they are fitted, to inculcate. We wish simply to know what the actual language of Scripture, when subjected to the ordinary legitimate processes of criticism, really gives out,—what it seems to

have been really intended to convey. The resolution with which the Socinians set out, of labouring to establish a bare possibility that the words *may* not have the sense we ascribe to them,—that they may *by possibility* have a different meaning,—has no reasonable foundation to rest upon; and it produces a state of mind manifestly opposed to anything like a candid and impartial investigation of what it is that the Scripture truly means. Under the influence of this resolution, men will generally find no difficulty in getting up some plausible grounds for asserting, that almost any conceivable statement does not *necessarily* mean what appears plainly to be its real and intended meaning, and that it might by possibility mean something else; while they lose sight of, and wholly miss, the only question that legitimately ought to have been entertained,—namely, What is the true and real meaning which the words bear, and were intended to bear?

It is in entire accordance with these unreasonable and overstrained principles of interpretation, that Mr Belsham,—who held the most prominent place among the Socinians of this country at the conclusion of last century, and the beginning of this,—lays it down as one of his general exegetical rules,* that “impartial and sincere inquirers after truth must be particularly upon their guard against what is called the natural signification of words and phrases,”—a statement manifestly implying a consciousness that Socinianism requires to put a forced and unnatural construction upon scriptural expressions, such as would not readily commend itself to the common sense of upright men, unless they were prepared for it by something like a plausible generality, in the form of an antecedent rule. It is, however, just the *natural* signification of words and phrases that we are bound, by the obligations of candour and integrity, to seek: meaning thereby, that we are called upon to investigate, in the fair use of all legitimate means and appliances suitable to the case, what the words were really designed to express; and having ascertained this, either to receive it as resting upon the authority of God, or, should there seem to be adequate grounds for it, on account of the real and unquestionable contrariety to reason of the doctrine thus brought out, to

* Belsham's "Calm Inquiry," Introduct., pp. 4, 5; quoted and animadverted on in Abp. Magee's Supplement to the Remarks on the Unitarian Version of the New Testament—Works, vol. ii., p. 108.

reject the document containing it as resting upon no authority whatever.*

Sec. III.—Socinian System of Theology.

Having explained the origin and causes of Socinianism, and the principles and leading features of the plan on which its supporters proceed in the interpretation of Scripture, we have now to give some exposition of the system of theology which, by the application of these principles, the Socinians have deduced from Scripture; or, to speak more correctly, which they consider themselves warranted in holding, *notwithstanding* their professed belief in the divine origin of the Christian revelation. We have been accustomed to speak of Socinianism as just implying a rejection or denial of all the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of the Christian system, as revealed in the sacred Scriptures; and this is, so far as it goes, a correct, though but a negative and defective, description of it. Socinianism, however, is not a mere negation; it implies a system of *positive* opinions upon all the important topics of theology, in regard to the divine character and moral government,—the moral character, capacities, and obligations of mankind,—the person and the work of Jesus Christ,—the whole method of salvation,—and the ultimate destinies of men. It is common, indeed, to speak of the *meagre* or *scanty* creed of the Socinians; and in one sense the description is unquestionably correct, for it includes scarcely any of those doctrines which have been usually received by the great body of professing Christians as taught in Scripture. And when thus compared with the system of doctrine that has commonly been held in the Christian church, it may be regarded as being, to a large extent, of a negative character, and very scanty in its dimensions. At the same time, it should be observed, that while, in one point of view, the Socinian creed may be regarded as very meagre and scanty, inasmuch as it contains scarcely any of those doctrines which Christians in general have found in the word of God, yet it really contains a system of opinions, and *positive* opinions, upon all those topics to which these doctrines relate. The ideas most commonly associated with the name of Socinianism are just the denial or

* Dr J. P. Smith's Scripture Testimony, Book I., especially last chapter, in reply to Belsham.

rejection of the doctrines of the Trinity, of the proper divinity of Christ and of His vicarious atonement, and of the personality of the Spirit. And without adverting at present to other features of the Socinian system, it ought to be observed, that while they deny or reject the doctrines that have been commonly held by the Christian church upon these points, they have *their own* doctrines regarding them, which are not *mere negations*, but may be, and are, embodied in positive propositions. They not only deny the doctrine of the Trinity, but they positively assert that the Godhead is one in person as well as in essence. They not only deny the proper divinity of Jesus Christ, but they positively assert that He was a mere man,—that is, a man and nothing else, or more than a man. They not only deny the vicarious atonement of Christ, which most other professing Christians reckon the foundation of their hopes for eternity, but they assert that men, by their own repentance and good works, procure the forgiveness of their sins and the enjoyment of God's favour; and thus, while denying that, in any proper sense, Christ is their Saviour, they teach that men save themselves,—that is, in so far as they need salvation. While they deny that the Spirit is a person who possesses the divine nature, they teach that the Holy Ghost in Scripture describes or expresses merely a quality or attribute of God. They have their own *positive* doctrines upon all these points,—doctrines which their creed embraces, and which their writings inculcate. On all these topics their creed is really as wide and comprehensive as that of any other section of professing Christians, though it differs greatly from what has been generally received in the Christian church, and presents all these important subjects in a very different aspect.

Socinians, as Dr Owen observes,* are fond of taking the place, and sustaining the part, of respondents merely in controversy; and it is no doubt true, that if they could succeed in showing that our doctrines receive no countenance from Scripture, we would not only be called upon to renounce these doctrines, but, in doing so, would, at the same time, as a matter of course, embrace views substantially Socinian. Still, it is right and useful that, during the controversy, we should have distinct and definite conceptions of what are the alternatives,—of what are their doctrines upon all points as well as our own, and of what are the posi-

* Dr Owen, Pref. to *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*.

tive opinions which we must be prepared to embrace and maintain if we think we see ground to abandon the orthodox system of doctrine and to adopt the Socinian. We are not to imagine, then, that what is commonly called the scanty creed of Socinianism is a mere negation; and we are to regard it as virtually embodying positive doctrines upon those points on which we ourselves hold opinions,—though opinions very different from theirs.

There is another observation of a general kind which I think it important that we should remember,—namely, that Socinianism really includes a *scheme of doctrines* upon all the leading subjects of theology,—upon all the main topics usually discussed in theological systems. The common impression is, that Socinianism merely describes certain views upon the subjects of the Trinity and the atonement; and these topics, indeed, have always and necessarily had much prominence in the controversies that have been carried on with the Socinians or Unitarians. But right or wrong views upon these points must, from the nature of the case, materially affect men's opinions upon all other important topics in theology; and, in point of fact, Socinianism, even in the writings of its founders, was a fully developed system of doctrine upon everything material that enters, or has been supposed to enter, into the scheme of revelation. Socinianism has its own Theology in the strictest and most limited sense of that word,—that is, its peculiar views about God, His attributes and moral government, as well as its negation of a personal distinction in the Godhead. It has its own Anthropology,—that is, its own peculiar views in regard to the moral character and capacities of mankind as we find them in this world, though here it has just adopted the old Pelagian system. It has its own Christology, or its peculiar views as to who or what Christ was,—though here it has followed very much what were called the Samosatanean and Photinian heresies of early times; names, indeed, by which *it* was often designated by the writers of the seventeenth century. It has its own Soteriology,—that is, its peculiar views of the plan of salvation,—of the way and manner in which men individually are saved, or actually attain to final happiness,—as comprehending the topics usually discussed under the heads of the atonement or satisfaction of Christ, justification, regeneration, and the work of the Holy Spirit; on the latter topic, indeed, adopting substantially the views of the Pelagians; but with respect to the first of them,—namely, the

atonement,—they have discoveries and demerits which may be said to be almost wholly their own. They have their own Eschatology, as it is called,—that is, their peculiar views in regard to those topics which are usually discussed in theological systems under the general head “*De novissimis*,” or the last things,—and especially the resurrection and the final punishment, or the fate and destiny, of the wicked. And besides all this, they have views in a great measure peculiar to themselves, and in full harmony with the general character and tendency of their theological system, on the subjects of the Church, and especially of the Sacraments. We have a sounder view of what Socinianism is, and can form a juster apprehension of the estimate that ought to be made of it, when we regard it as a complete and well-digested system, extending over the whole field of theology, and professing to present a full account of all the leading topics which it most concerns men to know, of everything bearing upon their relation to God and their eternal welfare; a system, indeed, taking up and embodying some of the worst and most pernicious of the heresies which had previously distracted and injured the church, but likewise adding some important heretical contributions of its own, and presenting them, in combination, in a form much more fully developed, much better digested and compacted, and much more skilfully defended, than ever they had been before. It may tend to bring out this somewhat more fully, if we give a brief statement of what the views *are* which have been commonly held by Socinians on these different subjects, mainly for the purpose of illustrating the unity and harmony of their theological system, and showing that the controversy with the Socinians is not a mere dispute about some particular doctrines, however important these may be, but really involves a contest for *everything* that is peculiar and important in the Christian system.

It is true of all systems of theology,—taking that word in its wide and common sense, as implying a knowledge of all matters bearing upon our relation to God and our eternal destinies,—that they are materially influenced, in their general character and complexion, by the views which they embody about the divine attributes, character, and government,—that is, about theology in the restricted meaning of the word, or the doctrine concerning God. Hence we find that, in many systems of theology, there are introduced, under the head “*De Deo*,” and in the exposition of the

divine attributes, discussions more or less complete, of many topics that are afterwards taken up and illustrated more fully under their own proper heads,—such as providence, predestination, and grace. Socinians have sought, like other theologians, to lay the foundation of their system of doctrine in certain peculiar views in regard to the divine attributes. Orthodox divines have commonly charged them with denying, or explaining away, certain attributes which reason and Scripture seem to unite in ascribing to God, with the view of diminishing the perfection of the divine glory and character, and thereby removing arguments in favour of orthodox doctrines, and bringing in presumptions in favour of their own. I cannot enter into details, but may briefly advert to two of the principal topics that are usually brought into the discussion of this subject.

Socinianism,—and, indeed, this may be said of most other systems of false religion,—represents God as a Being whose moral character is composed exclusively of goodness and mercy; of a mere desire to promote the happiness of His creatures, and a perfect readiness at once to forgive and to bless all who have transgressed against Him. They thus virtually exclude from the divine character that immaculate holiness which is represented in Scripture as leading God to hate sin, and that inflexible justice which we are taught to regard as constraining Him to inflict on sinners the punishment which He has threatened, and which they have merited. The form in which this topic is commonly discussed in more immediate connection with Socinianism, is this,—whether vindicative, or punitive justice,—that is, justice which constrains or obliges to give to sinners the punishment they have deserved,—be an actual quality of God—an attribute of the divine nature? The discussion of this question occupies a prominent place in many works on the atonement; the Socinians denying that there is any such quality in God,—anything in His nature or character which throws any obstacle or impediment in the way of His at once pardoning transgressors, without any satisfaction to His justice; while orthodox divines have generally contended for the existence of such a quality or attribute in God, and for its rendering *necessary* a vicarious atonement, or satisfaction, in order that sinners might be forgiven.

The other topic under this general head to which we propose to advert, is that of the divine omniscience. Orthodox divines

have always contended that scriptural views of this attribute, and of its application, afforded powerful arguments in favour of that entire dependence of men upon God's will and purposes which may be said to be a characteristic of the Calvinistic scheme of theology; and, accordingly, the discussion of it, and of the inferences that may be legitimately deduced from it, has entered largely into the Arminian controversy. The Socinians agree in the main with the Arminians upon this subject,—that is, so far as concerns a denial of Calvinistic doctrines; but being somewhat bolder and more unscrupulous than the Arminians, they have adopted a somewhat different mode of arriving at the same conclusion. The Arminians generally admit that God certainly foresees all future contingent events, such as the future actions of men exercising, without constraint, their natural powers of volition; but *how* this can be reconciled with their doctrine, that He has not foreordained these events, they do not pretend to explain. They leave this unexplained, as the great difficulty admittedly attaching to their system, or rather, as the *precise* place where they are disposed to put the difficulty which attaches to all systems that embrace at once the foreknowledge of God and the responsibility of man. The Socinians, however, being less easily staggered by the conclusive Scripture evidence of God's foreseeing the future free actions of men, especially that arising from the undoubted fact that He has so often predicted what they would be, boldly deny that He foresees these actions, or knows anything about them, until they come to pass; except, it may be, in some special cases, in which, contrary to His usual practice, he has foreordained the event, and foresees it *because* He has foreordained it. That they may seem, indeed, not to derogate from God's omniscience, they admit indeed that God knows all things that are knowable; but then they contend that future contingent events, such as the future actions of responsible agents, are *not* knowable,—do not come within the scope of what may be known, even by an infinite Being; and, upon this ground, they allege that it is no derogation from the omniscience of God, that He does not, and cannot, know what is not knowable. They think that in this way, by denying the divine foreknowledge of future contingencies, they most effectually overturn the Calvinistic doctrine of God's foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass; while they, at the same time, concede to the Calvinists, in opposition to the Arminian view, that God's certain

foreknowledge of the actions of men lays an immovable foundation for the position that He has foreordained them.

It may be worth while to mention upon this point—for the fact is both very curious and very important—that, in what is probably the earliest summary ever given of the whole Socinian system of doctrine, after it was fully developed, in a little work, understood to have been written with the view of explaining and defending it, by Ostorodus and Voidovius, when, in 1598, they were sent from Poland on a mission into the Low Countries, in order to propagate their doctrines there, it is expressly assigned as a reason why they denied God's foreknowledge of the future actions of men, that there was no other way of escaping from the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination.* We shall afterwards have an opportunity of showing that there is more truth and consistency in the Socinian, than in the Arminian, view upon this particular point, while they agree in the general conclusion, in opposition to Calvinists; but, in the meantime, the two instances we have given will show how wide and extensive are the Socinian heresies; and how thoroughly accordant it is with the general character and tendency of their system to indulge in presumptuous speculations about the incomprehensible God—to obscure the glory of His adorable perfections—and to bring Him nearer to the level of the creatures whom He has formed. As the Trinity must afterwards be more fully discussed, I say nothing more about it at present, except this—that here, too, Socinians manifest the same qualities and tendencies, by presuming to claim such a thorough knowledge of what the divine unity is, and of what it consists in, as to be warranted in maintaining, as a first and certain principle, that it is necessarily inconsistent with a personal distinction, or a plurality of persons, and generally by insisting on applying to the divine nature notions and conceptions derived wholly from what takes place and is exhibited among men.

I have said that the Socinian doctrine about the moral character and capacities of mankind is just a revival of the old Pelagian

* *Vide* Mosheim, Cent. xvi., chap. iv., sec. xiv. Cloppenburgii Compendium Socinianismi confutatum, c. vi., quoted also by Witsius, De Œcon. Fœd., lib. iii., c. iv., sec. xii. As to the authorship of this Compend, see

Sandii Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum, p. 91; Buddæi Isagoge, tom. i., p. 380, ed. 1730; Wallace's Antitrinitarian Biography, vol. ii., pp. 400 and 405.

heresy. Of course it amounts in substance to a denial of the fall and of all original depravity, and to an assertion that men are now, as to all moral qualities, tendencies, and capacities, in the same condition as when the race was created. The image of God in which man was formed consisted, according to them, merely in dominion over the creatures, and not in any moral perfection or excellence of nature. Adam had no original righteousness, or positive holy tendency of moral nature, any more than we have; and, of course, did not lose any quality of that sort by the sin into which he fell. He committed an act of sin, and thereby incurred the divine displeasure; but he retained the same moral nature and tendencies with which he was created, and transmitted these unimpaired to his posterity. He was created naturally mortal, and would have died whether he had sinned or not. Men are now, in moral nature and tendencies, just as pure and holy as Adam was when he came from the hand of his Creator,—without any proper holiness of nature, indeed, or positive tendency and inclination, in virtue of their moral constitution, to love and obey God, for that Adam never had; but also without any proneness or tendency to sin, although we are placed in somewhat more unfavourable circumstances than he was, in consequence of the many *examples* of sin which we see and hear of,—a position which somewhat *increases the chances* of our actually falling into sin. Still men may avoid sin altogether, and some do so, and obtain eternal blessedness as the reward of their perfect obedience. And in regard to those who do commit actual sin, and are guilty of transgression, this at least is plain in general,—that since men are weak or frail, though not sinful or depraved, creatures, and since God is nothing but a kind and merciful Father, and has no punitive justice as a constituent element of His character, there can be no difficulty in their obtaining His forgiveness, and being restored to His favour, and thus escaping all the consequences of their transgressions.

As it is true that men's whole theological system is usually connected intimately with the views or impressions they may have been led to form of God's character and government, so it is equally true that their whole views upon theological subjects are greatly affected by the opinions they may have been led to form of the fall of Adam, and its bearing upon his posterity. Sound and scriptural views upon this important subject are indispensably necessary to anything like a correct system of theo-

logy; and errors in regard to it spread darkness and confusion over the whole field of theological investigation. Nothing has been more fully brought out by the history of theological discussions than the truth of this position; and the case of Socinianism most strikingly confirms it. If man has not fallen and ruined himself, he has no need of a Saviour, or of any extraordinary interposition of God, in order to his salvation. Sin can be no very heinous matter when committed by such frail creatures as men are; and, when viewed in connection with the character of so gracious and benevolent a being as God is, cannot be supposed to occasion any very great difficulty, or to require any very extraordinary provision, in order to its being forgiven and removed. And, accordingly, the whole Socinian system is based upon these general notions and impressions. He whom most other persons that take the name of Christians regard as their Saviour, and whom they believe to be represented in Scripture as God over all,—a possessor of the divine nature,—and to be held up there as the sole author of their salvation, an object of unbounded confidence and reverence, affection and worship,—and whom *all* admit to have been sent into the world that He might do everything that was needful, *whatever that might be*, to secure the salvation of men,—is regarded by the Socinians as a mere man, who had no higher nature than the human, who had no existence till He was born in Bethlehem, who did nothing, *and who had nothing to do*, for the fulfilment of His mission, but to communicate fuller and more certain information about the divine character and government, the path of duty, and future blessedness, and to set before them an example of obedience to God's law and will. What they say of Christ is true, so far as it goes. He was a man, and He did what they ascribe to Him. But it is not the whole truth, and He did much more for our salvation. Were the Socinian view of man's natural condition correct, a mere man, who came to communicate information and to exhibit an example, might have sufficed for all that was needed. No satisfaction required to be made to divine justice, no righteousness to be wrought out, no change needed to be effected upon men's moral nature. And, of course, there was no need of a divine Saviour to expiate and intercede, or of a divine Spirit to renew and sanctify. All this is superfluous, and, therefore, it is wholly discarded. The condition of man did not require

it, and indeed did not admit of it; and therefore God did not provide it. Men needed only to be assured of God's readiness to pardon all their sins, without satisfaction to His justice, and to get clearer and more certain information than they could very readily procure themselves as to the course they ought to pursue, in order to share more abundantly in God's favour. This was not indeed altogether indispensable, but highly desirable. And God might have communicated it to men in many ways; but He has chosen to convey it by One who, though described in Scripture as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person, was yet nothing more than a mere partaker of flesh and blood like ourselves. The sins of men are forgiven merely *because* God's nature leads Him to forgive, and does not lead Him to punish, sin. They need no change upon their moral constitution; accordingly, no provision has been made for changing it. They need merely to be instructed how they can best improve what they have, and most successfully exercise their own natural powers. And this, accordingly, was the *sole* end of Christ's mission, and of the revelation which He gave.

Christ is undoubtedly spoken of in Scripture as a Prophet, a Priest, and a King; and it has been generally supposed that these different offices, ascribed to Him, express, or indicate, the three chief departments of the work which He was to execute, in order to promote the spiritual welfare of men. The old Socinians reduced them to two,—virtually rejecting the priestly office altogether, or conjoining and confounding it with the kingly one; while modern Socinians have still further simplified the work, by abolishing the kingly office of Christ, and resolving all into the prophetic. In the Racovian Catechism,—which fills, in the complete edition of 1680, very nearly two hundred pages,—four pages are devoted to the kingly office, six are assigned to the priestly or sacerdotal office; and these six are chiefly devoted to the object of proving that Christ was *not* a priest, and did not execute priestly functions *upon earth*, although it is admitted that He did so, in some vague and indefinite sense, after He ascended to heaven. The exposition of the prophetic office occupies nearly one hundred pages, or one-half of the whole work. And as this was really and substantially, upon Socinian principles, the only office Christ executed, they endeavour to make the most of it. A considerable space is occupied, in the Racovian Catechism,—and on

this account, also, in many of the older works written against the Socinians,—in the discussion of this question,—Whether Christ, in the execution of His prophetic office, revealed to, and imposed upon, men a new code of moral duty,—imposed upon them new and stricter moral precepts which were not previously binding, in virtue of anything which they would learn from the exercise of their own faculties, or from any revelation which God might have formerly given. The Socinians, of course, maintained the affirmative upon this question, in opposition to orthodox divines. And the reason is manifest,—namely, that since Christ had nothing else to do, in the fulfilment of His mission upon earth, but just to reveal, or make known, matters of doctrine and duty, the more of *this* work He did, the more plausible will seem the Socinian account of His mission, viewed in connection with the exalted representations that seem to be given us of it in Scripture, even though that account omits everything about satisfying divine justice, and thereby reconciling us to God. But then it did not suit the tendency and genius of the Socinian system to ascribe to Him much work in the way of revealing to men new truths or doctrines. According to their views of things, very little doctrine is needed, except what men can easily and readily acquire; for though, as I have explained, they have their own positive opinions upon most theological points, there are very few doctrines which they reckon fundamental. Certain notions about the divine character, and some certainty about a future state of happiness for good men, constitute all, in the way of doctrine, that is necessary or very important. And hence, the old Socinians laid the main stress, in expounding the prophetic office of Christ, and unfolding the object of His mission, upon His making important additions to the precepts of the moral law, and imposing upon men moral obligations which were not previously binding. They were accustomed to draw out, in detail, the instances of the additions He made to the moral law, and the reasons on account of which they held that the particular cases alleged *were* instances of the general position they maintained upon this point; and the discussion of all this occupies one-fourth part of the *Racovian Catechism*. The general position, of course, can be proved only, if at all, by an induction of particulars; and these they ranked under two heads: first, the additions Christ made to precepts which had formerly been given in the Old Testament,

but which, in many instances, they allege, He rendered more strict and extensive; and, secondly, in the precepts He introduced which were wholly new. Under the first head they go over the ten commandments, and endeavour to show that, in regard to every one of them, the New Testament imposes some additional obligation which was not binding, and might have been disregarded or violated without sin, under the law as given by Moses from Mount Sinai,—making use for this purpose chiefly of some of the statements contained in our Saviour's sermon upon the Mount. And so, in like manner, under the second head, they select a number of New Testament precepts, and endeavour to show that they impose duties which were not binding under the Old Testament economy.

These views are utterly rejected by orthodox divines, who, in the discussion of this subject, have fully shown that Socinians need to employ as much straining and perverting of Scripture, in order to make out that Christ added new precepts to the moral law, as is required to show that He was *not* made under the law, being made a curse for us, that He might redeem those who were under the law. In this way, however, Socinians make out a full and complete rule of moral duty, communicated to men by Christ; and as men have, in the exercise of their own natural capacities, full power to obey it, in all the length and breadth of its requirements, without needing renovation and sanctification from the Spirit, there is no difficulty in their securing their own eternal happiness.

The old Socinians inculcated,—and, so far as outward conduct is concerned, usually acted upon,—a high standard of morality, putting commonly the strictest interpretation upon the moral precepts of the New Testament. Their general system, upon the grounds already explained, naturally led to the adoption of these views, and zeal for the system naturally induced them to attempt to follow them out in practice; just as other false views in religion have often led men to submit to the severest hardships and mortifications. But experience abundantly proves, that, constituted as human nature is, no attempt to carry out a high standard of morality will ever succeed, *for any great length of time, or among any considerable number of men*, which is not based upon the scriptural system of doctrine; upon right views of the moral nature of man, and of the provision made, under the Christian scheme, by the work of Christ and the operation of the Spirit, for reno-

vating and sanctifying it. And, accordingly, modern Socinians have wholly abandoned the strict and austere morality of the founders of their system. They commonly exhibit the character and the conduct of mere irreligious and ungodly men of the world; and while they still profess to open up heaven to men as the reward of their own good deeds, wrought in their own unaided strength,—that is, without any aid except the ordinary assistance of God in providence, as He upholds and sustains all things,—they seem to have discovered, by some means with which the old Socinians were unacquainted, that a very scanty supply of good works, and especially very little of anything done from a regard to God, to the promotion of His glory and honour, is amply sufficient to accomplish the important end, and to secure men's everlasting happiness.*

Under this same general head of the prophetic office of Christ, the Racovian Catechism has a chapter† on the subject of His death,—the place which that great event occupies in the Christian scheme, and the purposes it was intended to serve. As it was a fundamental principle of the old Socinians, that Christ did not execute the office of a priest *upon earth*,—though they admitted that He did so, in some vague and indefinite sense, after His ascension to heaven,—His suffering of death, of course, did not belong to the execution of the priestly, but of the prophetic, office; in other words, its sole object and design were confined within the general range of serving to declare and confirm to men the will of God,—that is, the revelation of an immortality beyond death, of which no certainty had been given to men before Christ's death, not even to the most highly favoured servants of God under the ancient economy. Accordingly, the exposition of the death of Christ in the Racovian Catechism is mainly devoted to the object,—first, of proving that it was not, as Christians have commonly believed, a satisfaction to divine justice for men's sins, though it is admitted that Christ might, in some vague and indefinite sense, be described as a sort of piacular victim,—and, secondly, of showing how it served to declare and confirm the revelation which God thought proper then to make to men of immortality

* See Fuller's "Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared as to their Moral Tendency."
 † Racov. Cat., c. viii. Ed. 1680.

and a future life of blessedness for the righteous,—the special importance which seems to be assigned to it in Scripture, in its bearing upon the eternal welfare of men, being ascribed to, and explained by, not any peculiar or specific bearing it had upon the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and the enjoyment of His favour; but simply this,—that it was a necessary preliminary to Christ's resurrection, by which chiefly He made known and established the doctrine of immortality, and thereby presented to men such views and motive as might induce them, in the exercise of their own natural powers, to lead such a life as that they would secure *for themselves* the forgiveness of any sins which they might have committed, and the enjoyment of eternal life. This, and this alone, according to the Socinians, is the place which the death of Christ holds in the Christian scheme; and this indirect and circuitous process is the only way in which it bears upon or affects men's relation to God and their everlasting destinies. Some modern Socinians have seriously proposed, that the established phraseology of Christ being the Saviour of sinners should be wholly abandoned, as being fitted only to delude and deceive men, by conveying to them the idea that Christ had done, for the promotion of their spiritual welfare, far more than He ever did, and far more than their natural condition required or admitted of.

With respect to eschatology, or the head "*De novissimis*,"—the last things,—the general spirit and tendency of Socinians are also manifested in some important deviations from the doctrines which have been generally received among Christians as being plainly taught in Scripture. They have always denied the scriptural doctrine of the resurrection,—that is, of the resurrection of the same body,—as a thing absurd and impossible; thus faithfully following their true progenitors, the infidel Sadducees, and erring, like them, because, as our Saviour said, they know not the Scriptures nor the power of God. They admitted, indeed, that there will be what they call a resurrection, at least of the righteous; for many of the old Socinians maintained that the wicked who had died before the end of the world would not be raised again, but would continue for ever in a state of insensibility or annihilation,—though this doctrine is repudiated in the later editions of the Racovian Catechism; *—but then it was not a resurrection of the *same* body, but

* Racov. Cat., sec. viii., pp. 179, 180.

the formation and the union to the soul—which they generally held to have been, during the intervening period, in a state of insensibility—of a different body. Eternal punishment, of course, was inconsistent with all their notions of the divine character and government, of the nature and demerit of sin, and the design and end of punishment. But they have been a good deal divided among themselves between the two theories of the entire destruction or final annihilation of the wicked, and the ultimate restoration of all men to the enjoyment of eternal blessedness after a period, more or less protracted, of penal suffering. The older Socinians generally adopted the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked, though they sought somewhat to conceal this, by confining themselves very much to the use of the scriptural language, of their being subjected to eternal death;* while modern Socinians, with very few exceptions, advocate the doctrine of universal restoration, or the final and eternal happiness of all intelligent creatures, and hold this to be necessarily involved in, and certainly deducible from, right views of the Divine perfections.

I need not dwell upon the views of Socinians, in regard to the nature of the Christian church, and the object and efficacy of the sacraments. As the sole object of the appearance of Christ upon earth, and of the whole Christian scheme, was merely to communicate to men instruction or information, and not to procure for them, and bestow upon them, the forgiveness of their sins,—the enjoyment of God's favour,—and the renovation of their natures,—of course the objects of the church and the sacraments, viewed as means or instruments, must be wholly restricted within the same narrow range. The church is not, in any proper sense, a divine institution; and does not consist of men called by the almighty grace of God out of the world, and formed by Him into a peculiar society, the constitution of which He has established, and which He specially governs and superintends. It is a mere voluntary association of men, who are naturally drawn together, because they happen to have adopted somewhat similar views upon religious subjects, and

* Wakefield held the doctrine of annihilation; while Priestley, after hesitating long between the doctrines of annihilation and universal restitution, finally adopted the latter.

Estlin's Discourses on the Universal Restitution, pp. 69-72.

Dr Lant Carpenter's Examination of Magee's Charges against Unitarians and Unitarianism, 1820, c. iii., pp. 40-44.

who seek to promote one another's welfare, in the way that may seem best to their own wisdom; while the sacraments are intended to *teach* men, and to impress divine truth upon their minds, and are *in no way whatever* connected with any act on God's part in the communication of spiritual blessings.

I have thus given a brief sketch of the Socinian system of theology, and I would now make one or two reflections obviously suggested by the survey of it. It is manifestly, as I formerly explained, a full scheme or system, extending over all the leading topics of theology. It is plainly characterized throughout by perfect unity and harmony, by the consistency of all its parts with each other, and by the pervading influence of certain leading features and objects. It might, we think, be shown that the Socinian system of theology is the only consistent rival to the Calvinistic one; and that when men abandon the great features of the scriptural system of Calvinism, they have no firm and steady resting-place on which they can take their stand, until they sink down to Socinianism. It is very evident that the Socinian system presents a striking contrast, not only to the views of doctrine which have been generally professed and maintained by Christian churches, but to what seems *prima facie* to be plainly and palpably taught in Scripture. It must present itself to the minds of men, who have become at all familiar with scriptural statements, in the light of an opposition scheme, fitted and intended to counteract and neutralize all that Christianity seems calculated to teach and to effect; and a thorough investigation of the grounds of the attempts which Socinians have made to show that their system of theology is consistent with Scripture and sanctioned by it, will only confirm this impression. Socinianism has been openly and avowedly maintained only by an inconsiderable number of professing Christians,—many of those who held the leading principles of the Socinian scheme of theology having thought it more honest and straightforward to deny at once the truth of Christianity, than to pretend to receive it, and then to spend their time, and waste their ingenuity, in labouring to show that the scheme of scriptural doctrine was, in almost every important particular, the very reverse of what the first promulgators of the system plainly understood and intended it to be. The churches of Christ, in general, have held themselves fully warranted in denying to Socinians the name and character of Christians; and the ground of this denial