

Scripture,—those only which the word of God seems to require us to maintain and defend, without any intermixture of mere human speculations or attempts, however ingenious and plausible, at definitions, explanations, or theories, beyond what the Scripture clearly sanctions or demands. The defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity have often neglected or violated this rule, by indulging in unwarranted explanations and theories upon the subject, and have thereby afforded great advantages to its opponents, of which they have not been slow to avail themselves. And when, warned of their error by the difficulties in which they found themselves involved, and the advantages which their opponents, who have generally been careful to act simply as defenders or respondents, seemed in consequence to enjoy, they curtailed their speculations within narrower limits, and adhered more closely to the maintenance of scriptural positions, their opponents have represented this as the effect of conscious weakness or of controversial artifice. The truth, however, is, that this mode of procedure is the intrinsically right course, which ought never to have been departed from,—which they were bound to return to, from a sense of imperative duty, and not merely from a regard to safety or advantage, whenever, by any means, their deviation from it was brought home to them,—and which it is not the less incumbent upon us to adhere to, because the errors and excesses of former defenders of the truth, and the advantages furnished by these means to opponents, may have been, in some measure, the occasion of leading theologians to see more clearly, and to pursue more steadily, what was in itself, and on the ground of its own intrinsic excellence, the undoubted path of duty in the matter.

But though anti-Trinitarians are much fonder of dealing with the particular definitions, explanations, and theories of individual theologians upon this subject, than with those general and well-weighed statements which we have quoted both from the English Articles and our own Confession of Faith,—and which certainly contain the substance of all that Scripture teaches, and consequently of all that we should undertake to maintain and defend; yet it must be acknowledged that they commonly allege that the doctrine of the Trinity, even when most cautiously and carefully stated, involves a contradiction in itself, and is inconsistent with the doctrine of the divine unity; and to this we would now advert.

It will be understood, from the exposition of principles formerly

given, that we do not deny that such allegations are relevant, and that they must in some way or other be disposed of; and it will also be remembered, that sufficient grounds have been adduced for maintaining the two following positions upon this point: First, that when the Scripture is admitted in any fair sense to be the rule of faith, *the first* step should be simply to ascertain, in the faithful and honest use of all appropriate means, what it teaches, or was intended to teach, upon the subject,—that this investigation should be prosecuted fairly to its conclusion, without being disturbed by the introduction of collateral considerations derived from other sources, until a clear result is reached,—that an allegation of intrinsic contradiction or of contrariety to known truth, if adduced against the result as brought out in this way, should be kept in its proper place *as an objection*, and dealt with as such,—that, if established, it should be fairly and honestly applied, not to the effect of *reversing* the judgment, already adopted upon competent and appropriate grounds, as to what it is that Scripture teaches (for that is irrational and illogical), but to the effect of rejecting the divine authority of the Scriptures. Secondly, that in conducting the latter part of the process of investigation above described, we are entitled to argue upon the assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity has been really established by scriptural authority,—we are under no obligation to do more than simply to show that the allegation of contradiction, or of inconsistency, with other truths, has not been proved; and we should attempt nothing more than what is thus logically incumbent upon us. As we are not called upon to enter into an exposition of the scriptural evidence, we have no opportunity of applying the principles laid down under the former of these two heads, though it is very important that they should be remembered. It is chiefly by the positions laid down in the second head, that we must be guided in considering this allegation of our opponents.

We assume, then,—as we are entitled, upon the principles explained, to do, in discussing this point,—that it has been established, by satisfactory evidence, as a doctrine taught in Scripture, that true and proper divinity is possessed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that the divine nature and perfections are possessed by three; and that, while there is only one God, and while these three, therefore, *are* the one God, there is yet such a distinction among them, *as is, in some respects, analogous* to the

distinction subsisting between three persons among men,—such a distinction as lays a foundation for attributing to each of them some things which are not attributable to the others, and for applying to them the distinct personal pronouns, I, Thou, and He. This is the substance of what Scripture seems plainly to teach upon the subject; and we embody it in such statements as these, just because we cannot possibly represent or express it in any other way. Now, it is alleged that this doctrine,—which, in the meantime, we are entitled to assume, is taught in Scripture,—involves a contradiction in itself, and is inconsistent with the divine unity; and upon the principles which have been explained, we have merely to show that *this* allegation is not substantiated—is not proved.

The first part of the allegation,—namely, that the doctrine directly and in itself involves a contradiction,—is very easily disposed of, as it is manifestly destitute of any solid foundation. In order to constitute a contradiction, it is necessary that there be both an affirmation and a negation, not only concerning the same thing, but concerning the same thing *in the same respect*. To say that one God is three Gods, or that three persons are one person, is, of course, an express contradiction, or, as it is commonly called, a contradiction in terms. To affirm, directly or by plain implication, that God is one in the same respect in which He is three, would also amount to a plain contradiction, and, of course, could not be rationally believed. But to assert that God is in one respect *one*, and in another and different respect *three*,—that He is one in nature, essence, or substance,—and that He is three with respect to personality, or personal distinction (and this is all that the received doctrine of the Trinity requires or implies),—can never be shown to contain or involve a contradiction. It certainly does not contain a contradiction in terms; for we not only do not assert, but expressly deny, that God is one and three in the same respect, that He is one in the same respect in which He is three, *or* that He is three in the same respect in which He is one; and when the defenders of the doctrine adhere, as they ought to do, to a simple assertion of what they believe to be taught or indicated in Scripture, and of what is declared in our symbolical books, without indulging in unwarranted explanations and baseless theories, it is impossible to show that the doctrine involves, by necessary implication, any appearance of a contradiction.

Accordingly, the opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity are more disposed to dwell upon the other part of the allegation,—namely, that it is inconsistent with the known and admitted truth of the divine unity; and it is chiefly by pressing this position that they have succeeded in drawing the supporters of the doctrine into the field of explanations and theories, directed to the object of making, in some measure, intelligible how it is that unity and personal distinction,—unity in one respect and trinity in another,—are consistent with each other. The temptation to attempt this is, to ingenious men, somewhat strong; but the results of the attempts which have been made have always, in consequence of the limited amount of the information which God has been pleased to reveal to us upon the subject, and the imperfection of the human faculties and of human language, proved wholly unsuccessful in effecting anything really substantial and valuable; and have commonly been attended only with mischief, as serving to furnish plausible grounds to opponents to allege, *either* that, to adopt the language of the Athanasian creed, we confound the persons, *or* divide the substance,—that is, fall, or seem to fall, into the opposite extremes of Sabellianism or Tritheism.

Of course very different measures of wisdom and caution have been exhibited by different defenders of the Trinity in the exposition and application of these explanations and theories, illustrations and analogies, which they have brought to bear upon this subject. They have been propounded with some diversity of spirit, and they have been applied to different purposes. Sometimes they have been put forth boldly, dogmatically, and recklessly; and at other times with much more modesty, diffidence, and circumspection. Sometimes they have been urged as if they afforded positive proofs, or at least strong presumptions, of the *truth* of the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the combination of unity and distinction which it implies, and sometimes they have been adduced merely as affording proofs or presumptions of its possibility; while at other times, again, they have been brought forward, not as proofs or presumptions of anything, but merely as illustrations of what it was that was meant to be asserted. When applied to the last of these purposes, and used merely as illustrations of what is meant, there is no great harm done, provided they are restricted carefully to this purpose. When adduced for the first of these purposes,—namely, as presumptions or proofs of the truth of the doctrine,—

this, from the nature of the case, can lead only to baseless and presumptuous speculation.

But even when applied only to the second of these purposes,—namely, to afford proofs or presumptions of possibility,—they ought to be regarded as unnecessary, unsafe, and inexpedient. Strictly speaking, we are not bound to produce positive proof even of the *possibility* of such a combination of unity and distinction as the doctrine of the Trinity predicates of the divine nature, but merely to show negatively that the impossibility of it, alleged upon the other side, has not been established; and the whole history of the controversy shows the great practical importance of our restricting ourselves within the limits beyond which the rules of strict reasoning do not require us to advance. The only question which we will ever consent to discuss with our opponents upon this point,—apart, of course, from the investigation of the meaning of Scripture,—is this: *Has it been clearly proved* that the received doctrine of the Trinity, as set forth in our symbolical books, necessarily involves anything inconsistent with the unity of the Godhead? And there need be no hesitation in answering *this* question in the negative. No proof of the allegation has been produced resting upon a firm and solid basis,—no argument that can be shown to be logically connected with any principles of which we have clear and adequate ideas. It is the divine nature,—the nature of the infinite and incomprehensible God,—which the question respects; and on this ground there is the strongest presumption against the warrantableness of positive assertions on the part of men as to what is possible or impossible in the matter. The substance of the allegation of our opponents is, that it is impossible that there can be such a distinction in the divine nature as the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, because God is one; and they must establish this position by making out a clear and certain bond of connection between the admitted unity of God and the impossibility of the distinction asserted. The substance of what we maintain upon the point is this,—that every attempt to establish this logical bond of connection, involves the use of positions which cannot be proved; and which cannot be proved, just because they assume a larger amount of clear and certain knowledge, *both with respect to the unity and the distinction*, than men possess, or have the capacity and the means of attaining.

The unity of the Godhead or divine nature being universally

admitted, men are very apt to suppose that they understand it fully,—that they know more of what it means and implies than they do. But the unity of the Godhead is really as incomprehensible by men as any of His other attributes,—a position confirmed and illustrated by the fact, that it is doubtful whether the proper nature and ground of the divine unity can, in any strict and proper sense, be ascertained and established by natural reason. There has been a very general sense, among the greatest men who have discussed this subject, of the difficulty of establishing the strict and proper unity of the Godhead on mere rational grounds, apart from revelation. It has generally been regarded, indeed, as easy enough to establish that there is one Being (and not more) who is the actual Creator and Governor of the world; but it has commonly been felt to be somewhat difficult to deduce certainly, from anything cognisable by the natural faculties of man, a proposition asserting unity, in any definite sense, of the Godhead, or divine nature, intrinsically, and as such. And this fact is fitted to show us that it is not so easy to comprehend what the divine unity is, or implies, as it might at first sight appear to be. The Scriptures plainly declare the divine unity by informing us, not merely that the world was created, and has ever been governed, by one Being, but that the Godhead, or divine nature, is essentially one. But they give us no detailed or specific information as to the nature and grounds of this unity,—as to what it consists in; and of course they afford us no definite materials for determining what is, and what is not, consistent with it. And if it be true, as we are entitled at present to assume, that the same revelation which alone certainly makes known to us the strict and proper unity of the divine nature, does also reveal to us a certain distinction existing in that nature, the fair inference is,—that the unity and the distinction are quite consistent with each other, though we may not be able to make this consistency palpable either to ourselves or others.

It is scarcely alleged, though it is sometimes insinuated, by our opponents, that the admitted unity of the divine nature necessarily excludes *all* distinctions of every kind and degree. It is very manifest, in general, from the nature of the case,—the exalted and incomprehensible character of the subject, and the scanty amount of information which God has been pleased to communicate to us regarding it, or which, perhaps, we were capable of

receiving,—that we have no very adequate or certain materials for determining positively, in any case, that any particular alleged distinction is inconsistent with the divine unity; and, in these circumstances, *and under these conditions*, the position of our opponents is, *and must be*, that they undertake to prove, that the particular distinction implied in the doctrine of the Trinity is inconsistent with the unity of God. Now, if the scriptural doctrine were to be identified with the explanations and theories about it which have been sometimes propounded by its friends, it might be admitted that considerations have been adduced, in support of the alleged inconsistency, that were possessed not only of plausibility but of weight; but against the doctrine itself, as taught in Scripture and as set forth in our standards, nothing of real weight has been, or can be, adduced,—nothing but arguments *ab ignorantia* and *ad ignorantiam*. We profess to give no further explanation of the nature of the distinction, except this, that it is set before us in Scripture as a real, and not a merely nominal distinction,—a distinction of existences and objects, and not of mere names and manifestations,—and as analogous in *some respects*, though not in all, to the distinction subsisting between three persons among men; *and there is nothing in any one of these ideas* to which a definite argument, clearly inferring incompatibility with unity, can be shown to be logically attachable. It would be no difficult matter to show,—but it is not worth while,—that the attempts which have been made to establish such a connection, either, in the first place, proceed upon certain conceptions of the precise nature of the distinction of persons, which we disclaim, and are under no sort of obligation to admit; or, secondly, resolve into vague and general assertions on points which are beyond our cognisance and comprehension, and on which it seems equally unwarrantable and presumptuous to affirm or deny anything; or, thirdly and finally, are reducible to the extravagant position, more or less openly asserted and maintained, that the divine unity necessarily excludes all distinction, of every kind, and in every degree.

The steady application of these general considerations to the actual attempts which have been made by anti-Trinitarians to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity necessarily involves what is inconsistent with the divine unity, will easily enable us to see *that they have not proved* their position. And here we should rest,

relying for the positive proof of all that we believe and maintain, upon the authority of God in His word,—revealing Himself to us,—making known to us concerning Himself what we could not know in any measure from any other source, or by any other means, but an immediate supernatural revelation. The doctrine is above reason; it could not have been discovered by it, and cannot be fully comprehended by it, even after it has been revealed; but it cannot be proved to be contrary to reason, or to be inconsistent with any other truth which, from any source, we know regarding God. We can, of course, form no definite or adequate conception of this mysterious distinction attaching to the divine nature; but we have no reason to expect that we should,—we have every reason to expect that we should *not*, since we have no definite or adequate conceptions of many other things about God, even though these things are discoverable, in some measure, by the exercise of our natural faculties. We find great, or rather, insuperable, difficulties in attempting to explain, in words, the nature of this distinction in the Godhead; because, independently of the very inadequate conceptions which alone we *could* form of such a subject from the nature of the case, it has, of necessity, been made known to us, in so far as we do know it, through the imperfect medium of human language, and by means of representations which are necessarily derived from what takes place or is realized among men, and must therefore very imperfectly apply to the divine nature. In this, as well as in other matters connected with God, we must exclude from our conceptions everything that results from, or savours of, the peculiar qualities of man's finite and dependent nature, and admit nothing into our conceptions inconsistent with the known perfections and properties of God; while, at the same time, we must take care to exclude nothing which He has really made known to us concerning Himself, on the ground of our not being able fully to comprehend how it is, that *all* the truths which He has made known to us concerning Himself can be combined in Him. He has revealed to us that He is *one*, but He has also revealed to us that there are three who have true and proper divinity,—who have the divine nature and perfections. We, in consequence, maintain that, in the unity of the Godhead,—in the common possession of the one undivided and indivisible divine nature,—there are three persons; and without meaning to assert,—nay, while expressly

denying,—that the idea of distinct personality applies to the divine nature in the same sense as to the human, we use this mode of expression, because it is really the only way in which we can embody the idea, which scriptural statements convey to us, of the distinction existing in the Godhead,—namely, as being analogous *in some respects* to the distinction subsisting among three different persons among men,—an idea, however, to be always regulated and controlled by the principle, that the three to whom divinity is ascribed, though called persons, because we have no other expressions that would convey *any portion* of the idea which Scripture sets before us on the subject, are not three Gods,—as three persons among men are three men,—but *are* the one God.

It may perhaps be supposed, that though, upon principles formerly explained, Trinitarians are not obliged to give any full or exact definition of what they mean by persons, or by distinct personality, as predicated of the divine nature, when they merely lay down the general position, that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, yet that they are bound to attempt something more precise or specific in defining or describing personality, when they lay down the position that the Holy Ghost *is a person*, since the idea of personality is in this position more distinctly held up, as the precise point to be established. Now it is true, that the proof that the Holy Ghost is a person, is a fundamental point in the proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is scarcely disputed that the Holy Ghost is God, is divine; the main controversy turns upon the question of His personality, which is usually denied by anti-Trinitarians. But the personality of the Spirit can be proved satisfactorily by appropriate evidence, without our being under the necessity of giving any exact definition of what personality means, as applied to the divine nature. It is to be observed, that the discussion about the personality of the Spirit necessarily involves the maintenance of one or other of two alternatives, which really exhaust the subject. The Holy Spirit either is a mere attribute or power of God, *or* is a distinct person from the Father and the Son. Now, we can form a pretty definite conception of the general import of these two opposite or alternative propositions, without needing or being able to define precisely and positively wherein the idea of distinct personality, as applied to the divine nature, differs from the same idea as applied to the human nature,—so far, at least, as to be able intelligently to estimate the

bearing and the weight of the evidence adduced for, and against, them respectively. *Upon this state of the question*, without any exact or adequate idea of personality, we are able to adduce satisfactory evidence from Scripture, that the Holy Ghost is not a mere power or attribute of God, or to disprove one of the alternative positions. And this of itself is warrant enough for maintaining the truth of the other, which is the only alternative, especially as it holds generally of a large portion of our knowledge of God, that we approximate to an accurate statement of what we know of Him chiefly by negatives; while, at the same time, the scriptural evidence, which proves that the Spirit is not a mere power or attribute, manifestly brings Him before our minds, viewed in His relations to the Father and the Son, in an aspect analogous *in some respects* to the idea we entertain of the relation subsisting between distinct persons among men; and this warrants the application of the idea,—of course with the necessary modification,—and also of the phraseology of distinct personality.

Sec. VII.—Evidence for the Divinity of Christ.

I have endeavoured, in what has been said upon the subject of the Trinity, to guard against the tendency to indulge in unwarranted definitions, explanations, and theories upon this topic,—a tendency which too many of the defenders of the truth have exhibited,—by pointing out not only its inexpediency and danger, so far as mere controversial objects are concerned, but its unwarrantableness and impropriety, on higher grounds, as a matter of duty. I have attempted to mark out precisely the *extent* to which the supporters of the doctrine of the Trinity are called upon, in strict reasoning, to go, in the discussion of abstract points connected with this matter; and have, I think, rigidly confined my own observations upon it within the limits thus defined. But still I have some apprehension that, since I am not to enter into a detailed examination of the scriptural evidence in support of the doctrine, the prominence which has been given to abstract discussions regarding it, may convey an erroneous impression of the comparative importance of the different departments of inquiry that constitute a full investigation of the subject, and may lead some to overlook the paramount, the supreme importance of making themselves acquainted with the scriptural evidence of the

different positions, which may be said to constitute the doctrine, as it is generally received amongst us. On this account, I wish again to advert to the considerations, that this doctrine is one of pure revelation; that we know, and can know, nothing about the distinction in the divine nature which it asserts, except what is taught us in the sacred Scriptures; and that the *first* step that ought to be taken in a full investigation of the subject, should be to collect the scriptural statements which bear upon it,—to examine carefully their meaning and import,—and then to embody the substance of the different positions thus ascertained, as constituting the doctrine which we believe and maintain upon the subject. The doctrine which we believe and maintain should be reached or got at in this way; and the materials by which we defend it should be all derived from this source. We should hold nothing upon the subject which is not taught in Scripture; and we should be so familiar with the scriptural grounds of all that we profess to believe regarding it, as to be able to defend, from the word of God, the *whole* of what we believe, against all who may assail it. I have already made some general observations upon the Socinian method of interpreting Scripture, and given a warning against some of the general plausibilities by which they usually endeavour to defend their system against the force of scriptural arguments, and to obscure or diminish the strength of the support which Scripture gives to the scheme of doctrine that has been generally maintained in the Christian church; and on the subject of the Scripture evidence, I can now only make a few observations of a similar kind, bearing more immediately upon the doctrine of the Trinity, and directed, not to the object of stating, illustrating, and enforcing the evidence itself, but merely suggesting some considerations that may be useful in the study of it.

The great fundamental position which we assert and undertake to prove from Scripture is this,—that true and proper divinity is ascribed to, that the divine nature is possessed by, three,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the basis or foundation, or rather, it is the sum and substance, of the doctrine of the Trinity; and everything, of course, depends upon the establishment of this position. The deity of the Father is not a matter of controversy; it is universally admitted. The question, so far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, turns, as I have already explained, more

upon His personality than upon His divinity; for that the Spirit is God, in the highest sense, or is truly divine, is scarcely disputed. For these and other reasons, the main field of controversial discussion on this whole subject of the Trinity, has been the true and proper divinity of the Son,—that is, of Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners. Of course, all the *general* objections usually adduced against the doctrine of the Trinity, apply in all their force to the ascription of proper Godhead, or of the divine nature, to any person but the Father; so that, when the divinity of the Son is proved, all further controversy about the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, *so far as these general topics are concerned*, is practically at an end. When a *plurality* of divine persons has been established, all the leading general points on which anti-Trinitarians insist are virtually negatived, and excluded from the field. If it be proved that there is more than one person in the Godhead, there can be no *general* reason why there should not be a third; and it is on this account that the investigation of the proper scriptural evidence in regard to the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit has been usually somewhat less disturbed by extraneous and collateral considerations, by allegations of the impossibility of the doctrine contended for being true, and by violent efforts at perversion which these allegations were thought to justify, than the investigation into the scriptural evidence for the divinity of the Son.

But while the divinity of Jesus Christ has thus become, perhaps, the principal battle-field on this whole question, and while, therefore, the evidence bearing upon it ought to be examined with peculiar care, it is right to remark that Trinitarians profess to find evidence in Scripture bearing directly upon the doctrine of the Trinity in general,—that is, bearing generally upon a plurality, and, more particularly, upon a trinity of persons in the Godhead, independently of the specific evidence for the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is common in writers who enter fully into the discussion of this subject, to divide the scriptural evidence in support of the doctrine of the Trinity into two heads: first, that derived from passages which appear to intimate a plurality of persons in the Godhead, and from those which seem to speak of the three persons together, or in conjunction; and, secondly, that derived from passages which are alleged to assert or imply the divinity of Christ,

and the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit,—the second of these heads comprising much the larger amount of scriptural materials. The principal thing in the Bible which has been regarded by many as intimating a plurality of persons in the Godhead in general, without conveying to us any further or more definite information upon the subject, is the frequent use in the Old Testament of the plural appellation, as it is called, Elohim, or Aleim, the ordinary name of God, used in the plural form, and joined with nouns and verbs in the singular. Some Trinitarians have disclaimed any assistance from this branch of evidence, explaining the peculiarity by what they call the plural of majesty or excellence; while others, and among the rest Dr John Pye Smith,—who commonly leans to the extreme of caution, and is very careful to put no more weight upon a proof than it is clearly and certainly able to bear,—have, with apparently better reason, been of opinion that this singular construction has some real weight in the proof of the doctrine of the Trinity; or, as Dr Smith says, that “this peculiarity of idiom *originated* in a design to *intimate* a plurality in the nature of the One God; and that thus, in connection with other circumstances calculated to suggest the same conception, it was intended to excite and prepare the minds of men for the more full declaration of this unsearchable mystery, which should in proper time be granted.” *

The chief proofs which are usually adduced in support of three distinct persons, or in which the three persons of the Godhead appear to be spoken of together, or in conjunction, and yet are distinguished from each other, are the formula of baptism and the apostolic benediction, as they are commonly called (for most Trinitarians now admit that there is a decided preponderance of critical evidence against the genuineness of 1 John v. 7, usually spoken of as the three heavenly witnesses). And here, too, there has been some difference of opinion among Trinitarians as to the weight of the evidence furnished by the passages referred to,—some thinking that these passages by themselves do not furnish what can be properly called a proof, a distinct and independent proof, of the doctrine, but only a presumption; and that, after it has been proved by a clearer and more conclusive evidence that

* Scripture Testimony, vol. i., pp. 483, 484; Hopkins' Primitive Creed Examined and Explained, pp. 321-337.

the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is possessed of divinity and personality, these passages may be regarded as corroborating the conclusion, and confirming the general mass of evidence; while others are of opinion,—and, I think, upon sufficient grounds,—that the language employed upon these occasions,—the manner and circumstances in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are there conjoined,—are plainly fitted, and should *therefore* be held as having been *intended*, to convey to us the idea that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons; and that they are possessed of equal power and dignity, or, in other words, that they equally possess the same divine nature.

Still, the difference of opinion that has been exhibited by Trinitarians as to the validity and sufficiency of these proofs of the doctrine of the Trinity in general, has concurred with other causes formerly mentioned, in bringing about the result that the controversy has usually turned mainly upon the passages of Scripture classed under the second head, as those which are regarded as establishing the true and proper divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and especially of Jesus Christ. All the supporters of the doctrine of the Trinity of course profess, and undertake to prove from Scripture, that Jesus Christ is truly and properly divine,—that He is God, not in any secondary or subordinate, but in the proper and highest, sense; and is thus, equally with the Father, a possessor of the one divine nature or substance; and they have agreed harmoniously, in the main, in selecting, classifying, and applying the varied and abundant scriptural evidence by which this great truth is established. They have been in the habit of classifying the evidence under *four* heads, and there is probably no better mode of classifying it.

First, The proof from Scripture that divine names and titles are applied to Christ; and under this head the points to be established are these two: first, that names and titles are ascribed to Christ which are exclusively appropriated to the one true God; and, secondly, that names and titles are applied to Christ which, though not exclusively appropriated to the one true God, and sometimes applied to creatures in a secondary and subordinate sense, are yet applied to Christ in *such* circumstances, in *such* a manner, and with such accompanying adjuncts, as to furnish evidence that the Scriptures were fitted, and, *of course*, intended,

to impress upon us the conviction that they apply to Christ in a sense in which they do not, and cannot, apply to any creature,—in the same sense in which they are applied to the Father.

Secondly, The proof that divine qualities and attributes, such as omnipotence and omniscience, are ascribed to Christ; attributes which manifestly cannot belong to any finite or created being, and must be exclusively appropriated to the divine nature,—to the one true God.

Thirdly, The proof that acts, or works, are ascribed to Christ, which are not competent to any finite or created being; and which require or imply the possession and exercise of divine perfections and prerogatives,—such as the creation and government of the world, and the determining the everlasting destinies of men.

Fourthly, The proof that Christ is entitled to divine worship and homage, to the adoration and the confidence, the submission and the obedience, which creatures ought to give to their Creator, and to none else, and which are claimed in Scripture as due exclusively to the one true God.

Any one of these departments of proof, when really established by a careful investigation of the precise meaning and import of particular statements, would be sufficient to settle the question of the true and proper divinity of Christ; but when each and all of these positions can be established, as has been often proved, by various and abundant scriptural evidence,—formal and incidental, palpable and recondite,—by many passages of all different degrees of clearness and explicitness,—by many proofs, corroborated by innumerable presumptions, there is presented a mass of evidence, which, it is not to be wondered at, has satisfied the great body of those who, in any age, have investigated the subject, and have assumed the name of Jesus,—that He whom they call their Lord and Master is indeed God over all, blessed for evermore.

Of course, the establishment of each of these four leading positions concerning Christ, depends wholly upon the particular scriptural evidence adduced in support of it,—upon the result of a careful examination of the precise meaning and import of particular statements contained in Scripture,—upon the proof that can be adduced that there are statements contained in Scripture which, when investigated in the fair and honest application of *all* the principles and rules of sound interpretation, bring out, as the general result, that if the Scriptures were fitted and designed to

be our rule of faith, it was then wished, intended, and expected, that we should believe all this concerning Jesus Christ.

All the various scriptural statements which have been adduced in support of these positions concerning Christ, have been made the subjects of controversial discussion. It has been contended by Socinians, that there is nothing in Scripture which, rightly interpreted, furnishes sufficient or satisfactory evidence that Jesus Christ had any existence until He was born in Bethlehem,—that He had any other nature than the human,—that He was anything more than a mere man; and it has been contended by Arians, that while Christ existed in a higher nature than the human before the creation of the world, He still belonged to the class of creatures,—that He is called God only in a secondary or subordinate sense,—and is not possessed of true and proper divinity,—is not a possessor of the one divine nature; and both these parties have exerted themselves to clear away the scriptural evidence adduced in support of Christ's proper divinity. The Arians, indeed, join with the Trinitarians in proving, against the Socinians, that there are scriptural statements which clearly and certainly prove that Jesus Christ existed before the creation of the world, and was possessed of a nature higher and more exalted than the human. And, in giving a detailed and digested exposition of the Scripture evidence concerning Christ, it is perhaps best and most expedient to begin with establishing those positions which Arians concur with us in holding in opposition to the Socinians, by proving Christ's pre-existence and superhuman dignity; and then, abandoning the Arians, to proceed to the proof that He had a nature not only superhuman, but truly and properly divine, by adducing and expounding the evidence of the four leading positions regarding Him formerly stated. But, of course, the proof of His true and proper divinity shuts out at once not only Socinianism, but all the various gradations of Arianism, as it necessarily implies that He was, as our Confession of Faith says, "of one substance, power, and eternity with the Father." And the general features of the method of disposing of the Scripture evidence for the divinity of Christ, to which alone we can here advert, are substantially the same, in the case of all the different classes of anti-Trinitarians.

I need not add anything to the general observations formerly made, about the Socinian practice, usually followed also by the

Arians, of mixing up the general objections to the doctrine upon abstract grounds, with the investigation of the proper meaning of scriptural statements,—of insisting that the doctrine, if true, would have been more frequently mentioned, and more clearly asserted,—and of demanding that we shall prove, in regard to the scriptural passages we adduce, not only that they may, but that they *must*, bear the meaning we assign to them, and cannot possibly admit of any other. All these different features of the method they employ, which they lay down beforehand as general principles, are directed to one single object,—namely, to diminish a little the amount of torture which it may be necessary to apply to particular scriptural statements, with the view of showing that they do not furnish any satisfactory evidence for Christ's divinity. It is evident that, if these general principles were conceded to them in all the latitude of construction which they commonly put upon them, a smaller amount of perverting power would be necessary to make out a plausible case in support of the positions they maintain. They are pretty distinctly conscious that it is necessary for them to subject scriptural statements to a considerable amount of pressure, in order to distort and pervert them to such an extent, as that they shall appear to give no very certain sound in support of Christ's divinity; and as they are aware that this is rather apt to disgust honest men, they are naturally solicitous to do with as little of it as they can. It was evidently with this view that they devised those principles of interpretation to which we have referred; for if these be well founded, a smaller amount of distortion and perversion will be necessary for accomplishing their object. It is enough to remember, upon the other side, that *all* that we are called upon to do in order to establish the doctrine of Christ's divinity, is just to show that Scripture, fairly and honestly explained, according to the recognised principles and rules of sound interpretation, does *teach*, and was *intended* to teach, it.

The opponents of Christ's divinity, after having attempted by these general considerations to make provision for effecting their object with the minimum of perversion, proceed to the work of showing, minutely and in detail, that the scriptural statements we adduce do not teach, or at least do not necessarily teach, the doctrine of Christ's divinity. They are not unfrequently somewhat skilled in the technicalities and minutiae of biblical criticism; and some of them have manifested very considerable ingenuity in

applying all these to the object they have in view, which may be said to be, in general, to involve the meaning of scriptural statements in obscurity,—to show that no certain meaning can be brought out of them,—and, more particularly, that it is not by any means clear or certain that they bear the meaning which Trinitarians assign to them. I cannot enter into any detail of the various methods they have employed for this purpose. I may merely mention a specimen.

One very common course they adopt is, to break down a statement into its separate words, phrases, and clauses, and then to try to get up some evidence that the particular words, phrases, or clauses, or some of them, have been employed in some other passages of Scripture in a somewhat different sense from that in which Trinitarians understand them in the passage under consideration; and then they usually reckon this,—aided, of course, by an insinuation of the impossibility or incredibility of the doctrine of their opponents,—as sufficient ground for maintaining that there is nothing in the passage to support it; while, in such cases, Trinitarians have undertaken to prove, and have proved, either that the words, phrases, or clauses are never used in Scripture in the sense which Socinians and Arians would ascribe to them; or that, even though this sense might be, in certain circumstances, admissible, yet that it is precluded, *in the passage under consideration*, by a fair application to it of the acknowledged rules of grammar, philology, and exegesis; and that these rules, fairly applied to the whole passage, viewed in connection with the context, establish that the Trinitarian interpretation brings out its true meaning and import. The great leading impression which the Socinian mode of dealing with the Scripture evidence for the divinity of Christ, is fitted to produce in the minds of those who may be somewhat influenced by it, and may thus have become disposed to regard it with favour, is this,—that most of the passages which they may have been accustomed to regard as evidences of Christ's divinity, have been so dealt with singly and separately as to be neutralized or withdrawn, to be thrown into the background, or taken out of the way; so that, while there is much in Scripture, as Socinians admit, which would no doubt concur and harmonize with the Trinitarian view, *if that view were once established*, yet that there are few, if any, passages which seem to afford a clear and positive proof of it, and that thus the foundation is taken

away, and the whole superstructure of course must fall to the ground. This is the impression which is sometimes apt to be produced when we read a plausible Socinian commentary upon the scriptural statements adduced in support of Christ's divinity, and find that every one of them has been tampered with, with more or less plausibility, and that a great variety of considerations have been suggested, wearing a critical aspect, and all tending to render the Trinitarian interpretation of them uncertain or precarious. Now, the considerations that ought to be applied to counteract this impression, are chiefly these two:—

First, There are some passages of Scripture under each of the four leading divisions of the proof which *cannot* be explained away without a manifest violation of the recognised principles of interpretation; and these constitute a firm and stable foundation, on which the whole mass of cumulative and corroborating evidence may securely rest. Trinitarians, of course, do not maintain that all the Scripture passages usually adduced in support of Christ's divinity are equally clear and explicit,—are equally unassailable by objections and presumptions; and they do not deny that there are some which, taken by themselves and apart from the rest, might admit of being explained away, or understood in a different sense. All the defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity do not attach the same weight to all the different passages commonly adduced as proofs of it; and some discrimination and knowledge of the subject are necessary in fixing, amid the huge mass of evidence, upon the true *dicta probantia*, the real proof passages,—those which, after all the arts and appliances of Socinian criticism have been brought to bear upon them, can be really shown to have successfully resisted all their attempts, and to stand, after the most searching application of the principles of sound interpretation, as impregnable bulwarks of Christ's divinity,—as manifestly intended to teach us that He is indeed the true God, the mighty God, Jehovah of hosts. There is a considerable number of *such* passages both in the Old and the New Testaments. They must necessarily constitute the main strength of the case; and no man can consider himself thoroughly versant in this subject, until, after having surveyed the whole evidence commonly adduced in the discussion, he has made up his own mind, as the result of careful study and meditation, as to *what* the passages *are* which *of themselves* afford clear and conclusive proof of Christ's divinity,

as distinguished from those which are rather corroborative than probative; and has made himself familiar with those exegetical principles and materials, by the application of which the true meaning of *these* passages may be brought out and established, and all the common Socinian glosses and attempts at perverting or neutralizing them may be exposed.

Secondly, the full and complete evidence for Christ's divinity is brought out only by a survey of the *whole* of the scriptural materials which bear upon this subject. Socinians are in the habit of assailing each text singly and separately, and labour to convey the impression that they have succeeded conclusively in disposing of all the proofs one by one; while they usually strive to keep in the background, and to conceal from view, the evidence in its entirety and completeness. It is, of course, quite right and necessary that every Scripture text adduced should be subjected to a careful and deliberate examination, and that its real meaning and import should be correctly ascertained. It is also necessary, as we have explained under the last head, that we should be prepared, in maintaining our doctrine, with particular texts, which, taken singly and of themselves, afford conclusive proofs of the truth. But it is not right that the entire discussion should be restricted to the examination of particular texts, without this being accompanied and followed by a general survey of the whole evidence, taken complexly and in the mass. When the Socinians have only a single text to deal with, they can usually get up something more or less plausible to involve its meaning in obscurity or uncertainty; but when their denial of Christ's divinity is brought into contact with the full blaze of the *whole* word of God, as it bears upon this subject, it then appears in all its gross deformity and palpable falsehood. There is, perhaps, no more conclusive and satisfactory way of bringing out and establishing the divinity of Christ, than just to collect together, and to read over in combination, a considerable number of the passages of Scripture which speak of Him, and then to call on men to submit their understandings, honestly and unreservedly, to the fair impression of the views of Christ which are thus brought before them, and to put to themselves the simple question,—Is it possible that the Bible could really have been fitted and designed to be our rule of faith, if these statements about Christ, taken in combination, were not intended to teach us, and to constrain us to believe, that He is

the one true and supreme God, possessed of the divine nature, and of all divine perfections? A minute and careful examination of the precise import and bearing of scriptural statements, will bring out a great deal of evidence in support of Christ's divinity that is not very obvious at first sight,—will show that this great doctrine is interwoven with the whole texture of revelation, and that the more direct and palpable proof is corroborated by evidence, possessed, indeed, of different degrees of strength in the different portions of which it is composed, but all combining to place this great doctrine upon an immovable foundation; but there is nothing better fitted to assure the mind, to impress the understanding and the heart, to satisfy us that we are not following a cunningly-devised fable, when we rely upon Him as an almighty Saviour, and confide in the *infinity* of His perfections, than just to peruse the plain statements of God's word regarding Him, and to submit our minds honestly and unreservedly to the impressions which they are manifestly fitted and intended to produce. We should take care, then, while giving a due measure of time and attention to the exact and critical investigation of the precise meaning of particular texts, to contemplate also the evidence of Christ's divinity in its fulness and completeness, that we may see the more clearly, and feel the more deeply, the whole of what God has revealed to us concerning His Son.

There is one other general observation which I wish to make in regard to the study of this subject. It will be found occasionally, in perusing works written in vindication of Christ's divinity, that some texts which are founded on by one author as proofs of the doctrine, are regarded by another as affording only a presumption of its truth, and perhaps by a third as having no bearing upon the question; and this fact suggests the consideration, that there are two different and opposite tendencies upon this subject, both of which ought to be guarded against. The one is, that of pertinacity in adhering to everything that has ever been adduced as a proof or argument, though it may not be able to stand a searching critical investigation; and the other is, that of undue facility in giving up, as inconclusive or irrelevant, arguments that really are possessed of some weight and relevancy. Both of these tendencies have been manifested by the defenders of the truth, and both of them operate injuriously. Some men seem to think that it is nothing less than treachery to the doctrine itself, to doubt the

validity of any arguments that have ever at any time been brought forward in support of it; while others, again, seem to think that they manifest a more than ordinary skill in biblical criticism, and a larger measure of candour and liberality, in abandoning some posts which Trinitarians have commonly defended. Of course no general rule can be laid down for the regulation of this subject; for the only rule applicable to the matter is, that every man is bound, by the most solemn obligations, to use the utmost impartiality, care, and diligence, to ascertain the true and correct meaning and import of everything contained in the word of God. It is enough to point out these tendencies and dangers, and exhort men to guard carefully against being misled or perverted by either of them; while they should judge charitably of those who may seem not to have escaped wholly uninjured by them, *provided* they have given no sufficient reason to doubt (for, in some instances, the second of these tendencies has been carried so far as to afford reasonable ground for suspicion on this point) that they are honest and cordial friends of the great doctrine itself. There is enough of scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the supreme divinity of our blessed Saviour,—evidence that has ever stood, and will ever stand, the most searching critical investigation,—to satisfy all its supporters that there is no temptation whatever to deviate from the strictest impartiality in the investigation of the meaning of scriptural statements,—no reason why they should pertinaciously contend for the validity of every atom of proof that has ever been adduced in support of it, or hesitate about abandoning any argument that cannot be shown to stand the test of a searching application of all the sound principles both of criticism and exegesis.

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is a peculiarly interesting topic of investigation, both from the intrinsic importance of the subject and its intimate connection with the whole scheme of revealed truth, and from the way and manner in which the investigation has been, and, of course, must be, conducted. There is perhaps no doctrine of Scripture which has called forth a larger amount of discussion,—the whole evidence about which has been more thoroughly sifted; there is none which has been more vigorously and perseveringly attacked,—none which has been more triumphantly defended and more conclusively established. Viewed simply as a subject of theological discussion, apart from

its practical importance, this doctrine perhaps presents fully as much to interest and attract as any other that has been made a subject of controversy.

The evidence bearing upon it extends nearly over the whole Bible,—the Old Testament as well as the New; for a great deal of evidence has been produced from the Old Testament that the Messiah promised to the fathers was a possessor of the divine nature, of divine perfections and prerogatives, and fully entitled to have applied to Him the incommunicable name of Jehovah. A great deal of learning and ability have been brought to bear upon the discussion of this question, both in establishing the truth, and in labouring to undermine and overthrow it. All the resources of minute criticism have been applied to the subject, and to everything that seemed to bear upon it; materials of all different kinds, and from all various sources, have been heaped up in the investigation of it. The discussion thus presents a sort of compendium of the whole science and art of biblical criticism, in the widest sense of the word,—the settling of the true text, in some important passages, by an examination of various readings,—the philological investigation of the true meaning of a considerable number of important words,—the application of grammatical and exegetical principles and rules to a great number of phrases, clauses, and sentences. All this is comprehended in a full discussion of the subject of our Lord's proper divinity. And there is, perhaps, no one doctrine to the disproof or overthrow of which materials of these different kinds, and from these various sources, have been more skilfully and perseveringly applied,—none in regard to which, by a better, and sounder, and more effective application of the same materials, a more certain and decisive victory has been gained for the cause of truth. Every point has been contested, and contested with some skill and vigour; but this has only made the establishment of the truth, in the ultimate result, the more palpable and the more undoubted.

For these reasons I have always been inclined to think, in opposition to some views put forth by Dr Chalmers,* that it is very desirable that a pretty full investigation of the subject of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ should come in at an early period in the study of the system of Christian theology. The study of

this subject leads to the consideration and application of many important principles, both of a more general and comprehensive, and of a more minute and special kind, intimately connected with the investigation of divine truth, and the critical interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, and is thus fitted to teach important lessons that bear upon the whole field of theological discussion. To the humble and honest reader of God's word, the divinity of the Saviour seems to be very plainly and fully taught there; and when men are first brought into contact with Socinian perversions, they are apt, if they have not previously studied the subject critically, to be startled with the plausibility attaching to some of their attempts to involve the evidences of the doctrine, or at least the precise meaning of some particular passages of Scripture, in doubt and uncertainty. On this account, it is all the more satisfactory in itself, and all the better fitted to suggest useful lessons of general application, to find, as the result of a more thorough and searching investigation, and of the most stringent application of the recognised rules of critical inquiry, that our first and most natural impressions of the meaning and import of scriptural statements are fully confirmed and conclusively established,—that the criticism, the learning, and the ingenuity of opponents are met and overborne, on the part of the advocates of the truth, by all these qualities in a much superior degree,—and thus to be brought deliberately and rationally to the conclusion, that what has been in all ages the faith of the humbly devout, though not learned and critical, readers of God's word, is indeed its true meaning, and can be satisfactorily established in all its parts by the highest learning, and the most accomplished and searching criticism.

One leading consideration that ought to be kept in view in the investigation of the scriptural evidence bearing on this subject is this,—that the object to be aimed at is to find out, from an examination of the *whole word* of God, what it is that He wished and intended us to believe regarding it. The Scriptures are manifestly not constructed upon the principle of giving us, in formal, general statements, or in single passages, the substance of what they are designed to teach us upon any particular topic. It was manifestly God's design, in the construction of His word, that men, in using it for the purpose which it was intended to serve, should be called upon to exercise diligence and research in

* Preface to his Collected Works, vol. i., pp. iv., etc. (Edrs.)