THE VOCATION

OF

UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

British and Foreign Unitarian Association,

AT THE

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THE VOCATION OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS.

EPHESIANS iv. 1:

"I [therefore the prisoner of the Lord] beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

WE meet together to-day with one common purpose in our hearts—that of promoting *religion*—promoting it in the form in which it commends itself to us in greatest loveliness and power, that of Unitarian Christianity. By uniting for this common purpose we show that we recognize in Unitarian Christianity *something* which is common to us all. We are not united only as men who agree to differ, but much more as men who can afford to differ, because they feel how largely they agree. And then it is not we alone who are here to-day that have much in common: though we are not authorized to make the Association meeting here representative of our whole religious community, we cannot forget that there is that community, and that what is common to us is common to a large *body* of Unitarian Christians with us, and that thoughts which may quicken our hearts to-day may awaken a responsive throb through our whole Unitarian people.

And let it not be taken as a narrowness of spirit that I now confine my vision within the field of Unitarian Christianity. We have all of us sympathies extending

far beyond the limits of that field, acknowledging every man that "feareth God and worketh righteousness" as a fellow-member in the same great universal Church; but to-day we meet as Unitarian Christians, and so it is to us as Unitarian Christians that I am called to speak. My work, I take it, is if possible to reach and interpret our common religious consciousness; for in that common consciousness must be revealed our common vocation; what its deepest convictions, reverences, aspirations, call us to do; what the extent of our sympathy with each other will enable us to co-operate in doing.

Of course, in this endeavour to reach and interpret our common religious consciousness, I can only fall back upon myself, and try to find and express what I feel to be the deepest things in which I have experienced communion with brother Unitarian Christians. I feel assured, then, that though I find myself differing from them, now upon this, and now upon that point of theological belief, there is also a large common element of belief and life in which I and they are heartily one. I feel that the very word, "body," by which we usually name our religious community, is suggestive of its organic unity. We *are* a body consisting of members greatly differing indeed from one another, as hand differs from foot, as eye from ear, and yet animated by one common life, fed by one common blood; and so our *common* Unitarian Christianity is not something crystallized into one hard, fixed form for evermore. It is the LIFE of this body, the life of a growing organism, ever changing by orderly development; and therefore to attempt to define it for ever by what it is or has been at any particular stage of its growth, is like attempting to define the life of the man for all his days by what it has been at any particular epoch—to make, for example,

the mental life of the child, with its childish thoughts and feelings, the measure for the mental life of youth, or that of the youth the measure for the man. God's truth is indeed one, but our knowledge of it "grows from more to more." We shall understand the organic unity and development of our body by looking at the history of one of its members. Take, then, a congregation, now Unitarian, descended in unbroken succession from Puritan forefathers. We look back and see that congregation at its secession and settlement Calvinistic after the the type of Baxter. By and by, perhaps, we find it passing through something like an Arminian phase, more after the type of Doddridge. Then we find the influence of men like Clarke and Whiston inducing a change to Arianism. Dr. Priestley and his school lead the congregation by and by to Unitarianism of one school; and then, later on, men like Channing, John James Tayler, and Martineau, aid in a gradual development towards Unitarianism of another school. Attempts have been made from time to time through all this evolution to fix and crystallize the life in the type of one particular epoch; but the strength of the life itself, following its own law of development, has always made the effort vain. And so it happens that though we to-day have doctrines, we have no true dogmas; i.e. no doctrines decreed—*δεδογμένα*—by any authority to bind us down, to arrest or impede our growth. We have not had, because we would not have, any General Council to mark off a catholic orthodox faith—to be held—from heterodox opinions, to be rejected. We have permitted no Westminster Assembly and no Convocation with Parliament to draw up for us a Westminster Confession or Thirty-nine Articles to be believed for evermore. I could not then, if I would, this evening, estimate the common element in our Unitarian Christianity by

pointing to any authoritative standard, and so telling you what it is by defining what it ought to be: for no such standard exists. Unitarian Christianity is a *living* thing, and if we would know it, we must study it in its life. Nor will it do to appeal to etymology to discover what the words "Unitarian Christianity" *must* mean. Etymology may teach us what words once meant, what according to their derivation they ought to mean; but to find what they do mean, you must learn by observation what are the thoughts which they actually cover in the minds of those who use them in the "living present." The words Unitarian Christianity have undoubtedly extended their meaning beyond the old etymological sense of "Unitarian," and beyond what Christendom at large considers the true sense of "Christianity," and now signify in common parlance among us the whole religious life and opinions of the people who call themselves Unitarian Christians, and are nearly synonymous with "Liberal Christianity." I appeal then to no external authority. I appeal simply to your own consciousness, and ask, what do you feel to be common to yourselves and fellow-Unitarians in the Unitarian Christianity which you hold and desire to promote?

At the same time I gratefully own that our *living* Unitarian Christianity has its roots in the past, with which it must preserve an organic connection to be healthy and true. There is a religious consciousness broader than ours running through the life of our Unitarian forefathers, through the long life of Christendom, through the life recorded in the Scriptures, through the life of humanity; and we must compare what is common in our consciousness with what is common in that larger consciousness. Returning to ourselves, there are several elements which are, I think, unquestionably common to us. There is, first,

our religious life itself, considered in its simplest form; second, our claim to mental freedom; third, our reverence for Jesus Christ; fourth, our endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology; fifth, our Antitrinitarianism or Unitarianism proper.

Now I notice these separately for the convenience of treatment, though I know of course that they do not exist as separate elements. They run into one another, and are blended in our minds into one living whole. First of all, there can be no question that among sincere Unitarian Christians there is a universal *consensus* in holding, or aspiring to hold, religion, in its simple essence of a life of love for goodness, opening into love for God and love for man. I say love for goodness, because it seems to me there is often at least a rudimentary stage of religion, in which, like a precious flower in the bud, it has not yet developed into the expanded blossom of love to God and love to man. There is a stage when the mind has only awakened to moral consciousness, has become sensible of a higher and lower within itself, and of an obligation to surrender itself to the higher and suppress the lower, whilst it sees, perhaps, the manifestation of this self-surrender to the higher in the character of the dear mother, or the Christ, or other venerated persons. Its religion is then simply a vague love of goodness within and without, as yet not clearly discerning the elements of which full goodness is composed. By and by, as knowledge enlarges, these are disclosed, and the love of goodness opens into the love for the perfect goodness in God, and the love which seeks to promote the goodness as well as the happiness of man. Now, though the religion after which we aspire is the developed form, we must be patient if we find minds, that sympathize with us in many things, still in the rudimentary stage. Many

in the present day, through some defect of nature, some perversity of education, or the blighting influence of some false philosophy, seem, as in the case of John Stuart Mill, to have the development of religion arrested, at least on the side of the love to God. But I would not deny the name of religion even to this rudimentary stage, and I think it is not for us Unitarians to quench the smoking flax by casting any word of scorn upon it, but to believe rather that it contains the elements which may by and by be fanned into the noblest, fullest flame. We all, then, have the rudimentary form, and without losing that, we have, or seek to have, the developed form of love to God and love to man into which it grows. In our prayers on the Sunday, which are, I hope, some expression of our life in the week, the soul flows forth in adoring, wondering, self-dedicating love to the Father Spirit. It seeks to break loose from the entanglements of earth and sense, and deliver itself up to live for a season in His immediate presence, to forget its own littleness in His greatness, its deformities in His beauty, its sin in His righteousness, its sorrows in His love, its short life below in the hope of sharing His eternity above. In these our prayers the soul flows out also in love to man, and so, in longing for those human virtues which can alone promote man's welfare, and which coming from love make it, as Paul has said, the fulfilling of the law. That human love flows out too in yearning to have all the burdens of sin and woe lifted from human hearts, to see the light of the knowledge of God lighting up the dark places of the earth, to see the dawn of the heavenly kingdom brighten year by year. In all this, and in seeking the life which flows from it, we are perfectly one.

Next to this common element of simple essential religion,

I may perhaps put our claim to mental liberty. *This*, I take it, is an element perfectly common to all Unitarian Christians. And it is in our view invested also with a religious character; for our claim to mental liberty is, if I understand it, only a claim to be free from the usurped authority of man in order to give ourselves to the rightful authority of God. Our claim to *liberty* of mind is, I think, always, consciously or unconsciously, accompanied by a claim to *trust* the mind, which is a claim to trust God who speaks through the mind. For I think we generally recognize Reason and Conscience, the oracles of the mind, as oracles through which God directly or indirectly speaks within us; and so in breaking from all the dogmatic bonds of men, we are only like the child who breaks from the arms of strangers to run and throw itself into the arms of the mother. Our assertion of the right of liberty is no self-assertion. We ask not to think as we will, but as God wills—not as we please, but as God pleases. Believing the ultimate laws of our reason, as well as those of our conscience, to be the guidance of the great hand of God, in giving up all self-will and prejudice to be led by them we are giving ourselves in a truly religious spirit to Him, to "walk with Him as dear children." This same spirit of freedom and trust of mind carries us necessarily on to reverence for science, and for all the knowledge which trusted reason and conscience have brought us. Since God leads our souls, the ever-widening truths in this His universe to which He is leading us are also His revelations, and bring us nearer to Him by disclosing the secrets of His thought and the methods of His action. We are assuredly one in our claim to mental liberty.

3rdly. We are one in deep, tender reverence for him whose name we bear, the great Master, Jesus Christ. For-

give me if I speak of this common element in this wide and indefinite way. I wish to stand this evening on the firm ground of our agreements, and you know that it is in connection with our reverence for Christ that our greatest disagreements appear. It must be so. There is a field of critical and philosophical thought surrounding the person and life of Christ, on which, claiming to use our liberty and trust to our own souls, we can scarcely fail to differ. Accordingly, we do differ in our critical estimate of the recorded facts of the Master's life; we differ in the philosophy by which we interpret these facts, by which we conceive of his nature, and assign him his place in God's providential thought and the world's history. Yet, amid all our diversities, there is certainly among all who claim to be Unitarian *Christians* a common reverence for Christ; a reverence for him as the spiritual rock from which has historically flowed the fountain which has become the stream of our Christian life; a reverence for him as the impersonation of our religion in its universal aspect of love for Goodness, love for God, and love for Man. I would go further, and say that Christ is to many of us an impersonation of our religion also in its reverence and claim for liberty, and in all that reverence for science and intellectual development which flows therefrom. For Jesus seems to us, breaking away in that his age of mental slavery from the bonds of tradition in which he was brought up, and trusting himself to the simple universal teachings of God—Jesus seems to us the noblest hero of mental liberty that the world's history presents. But whether all Unitarians agree with this or not, they will agree that they escape from the region of "dry abstract truths without a way to the human heart," in which Mr. Gladstone seems to imagine that we always dwell, by seeing the universal

part of their religion reflected in a person, the revered, beloved person of Jesus Christ. Thus their religion becomes living, warm, human. Their conceptions of goodness, God, man, become tinted with colours from his life and character. Goodness is that which they see embodied in him; God is loved as seen imaged in him; man is honoured and seen to be worthy of their love because man's nature is revealed in him. It is by living in him and with him, loving goodness, God and man with him, that they learn to live. It is by dying with him in his death, surrendering ourselves as living sacrifices to the Father, that they receive the atonement, the reconciliation to God. Such reverence as this is, I think, truly common. I know that many among us cannot be satisfied with this. They want all to go with them into the critical and philosophical theories which they hold regarding Christ; and I speak of no particular school among us; I speak of all schools alike. It is, I have no doubt, a cause of sorrow with all of us that we cannot take our fellow-worshippers with us into what seems to us the larger, holier truth. And yet, dear brethren, it is a great thing to be one, as we are, in our reverence for this "author and finisher of our faith." We do all in this reverence practically call him Lord, Master; we do all sit together at his feet as loving disciples; we do all confess his authority over us; for what is that authority but the authority of our own religion impersonated in him, the authority of our own souls, which find themselves reflected in him? All parties among us profess to regard with reverence the spirit of the teachings of Dr. Channing. Now that whole spirit seems to me embodied in one significant passage in his discourse on Love to Christ: "What is it that constitutes Christ's claim to love and respect? What is it that is to be loved in Christ?

Why are we to hold Christ dear? I answer, there is but one ground for virtuous affection in the universe, but one object worthy of cherished and enduring love in heaven or on earth, and that is moral goodness. I know no exception to this principle. I can conceive of no being who can have any claim to affection but what rests on his character, meaning by this the spirit and principle which constitute his mind and from which he acts." Let us take to our souls this great thought of Channing, and whatever we may think of the imperfection of our brother's theories, let us be content for him to share with us our Master's name, if only he shares with us some of the disciple's reverence. Let us be content to say with the Apostle, "Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

A fourth element of Unitarian Christianity common to us all is the endeavour after a spiritual and rational, or, as it has been called, scientific theology. This head will be thought by some to be included under the head of mental liberty. But as many may not immediately see how the endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology follows from the exercise of our liberty, I have thought better to give it an especial consideration. I would say, then, that this endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology follows both from our religion and our liberty. First, our religion needs a theology to feed it, then our liberty requires that such theology should be spiritual and rational, by which I mean a theology brought, by the exercise upon it of our mental liberty, into accordance with the spiritual judgments of our conscience and the rational judgments of our reason. First, our religion needs a theology. The life of religion will ever need to be fed by the food of thought regarding things divine. That life can no more exist without that thought, than the

life of this bodily frame can exist without material food. To speak contemptuously of theology because it is not religion, is like speaking contemptuously of bread because it is not the life of which it is the staff. We must therefore have a theology with our religion; but then, secondly, in accordance with our first principle of claim to *mental freedom* in order *to trust the oracles within,* we must have that theology spiritual and rational. Yet, in forming this theology, whilst we are guided by the same common principles of inquiry, we naturally come to very various conclusions of doctrine. This is not wonderful if we consider to what errors we are liable in interpreting the voices of conscience and reason; how apt we are to mistake our own prejudices for their decisions; and what different amounts of knowledge we bring to them as data for their judgments. And yet, great as are our differences, I suspect that there is on the whole more substantial agreement among us than would be found in any other religious body; and I believe this agreement will become larger and larger as sound education advances. I believe all this because we begin with the same great principle of free thought, which really means carrying our beliefs for arbitration to the same tribunals of the soul. Our experience, then, notwithstanding our divergences, coincides with our instinct, and encourages us to go on in the path of free and reverent thought, assured that it is the right path, and that if we press boldly forward we shall only go from truth to truth, from light to light. Yes, we must go on; and we shall make our theology more spiritual and more rational as we turn the light of God within us on the ways of His providence in the past, on the laws in which He works in universe and in soul in the present. Yes, we must go on; and

science and philosophy and scholarship shall be tributaries to the stream of our theology—a theology which shall feed our piety by ever larger revelations of the grandeur and loveliness of God, and shall feed our philanthropy by ever larger disclosures of possibilities for man. We must go on, fearless in our trust in truth. We must go on with Science; and if now she seems to be for a season shutting up the mind in the prison-house, and binding it with the chains of materialism, we must still only try to understand more deeply her meaning, and by and by we shall find her changing into the delivering angel, coming with a great light to open the prison doors and make the chains fall off. We must go on with Philosophy; and if now, leading the mind up her mountain heights, she seems to have brought it into the region of cloud, where it is blinded with the mists of the unknowableness or the impersonality of God, we must still cling to her and ask her to go forward, and by and by she will lead us above the mists into God's open light, and beneath His clear, everlasting heavens again.

The fifth element common to all Unitarian Christians is their protest against Trinitarian error, that is, their Antitrinitarianism, or Unitarianism proper. Of course this is a part of our spiritual and rational theology; but it is our spiritual and rational theology in its belligerent—its polemic—attitude. If there were no Trinitarian errors in Christendom around us, we should never dream of an Antitrinitarian attitude or Antitrinitarian name. We are like colonists who have had to build their city in presence of hostile forces. But for these, they might have arranged it simply in accordance with their own needs and their own conceptions of symmetry and beauty. But

now they have been obliged to build upon the heights, and surround their city with a wall strengthened by many a tower and mounted with many a threatening gun.

We, but for the presence of the great host of Trinitarian errors, might have built our city of theology, placed the palaces and all the pleasant places of its noblest thoughts as we needed or desired them for ourselves; but now we have been obliged to erect our wall and towers, and point our guns of Unitarian protest against these errors. And our whole city of theological belief has been called after our Unitarian, that is, Antitrinitarian, fortifications, much as many an English city, like Chester and Manchester, anciently received its name—as Castra—from the bulwarks that partly or wholly surrounded it. It is certainly a misfortune that our faith should be named from its least permanent and least essential characteristic. For as we find many a city named once after its fortifications, now, in these days of peace, with its ramparts levelled and even all traces of them lost, so let us hope it may be hereafter with our Antitrinitarian protest. Trinitarianism may pass away, and then we shall build our theology for our own internal needs and not for external protest, and there will be no more reason for calling ourselves Unitarians, that is, Antitrinitarians, than for calling ourselves Anti-Gnostics or Anti-Ebionites, or Anti- any other dead and forgotten sect.

That time, however, has not yet come. Our protest we must still continue to make; and if we cannot change our name, we must continue boldly to wear it; only taking care, however, that as long as it is the name for our religious community, and as long as we have no other name to cover the whole religious life and opinions of that community, we jealously watch that it does not stand for any-

thing less than this—that it does not narrow our souls down to the narrowness of its proper signification, and make us think of our religion as *only* sectarian and polemic. There are good and noble Unitarians who rejoice in being fighters. Their place is on the wall and by the guns, and their delight is in the shout of war. Well, they are fine fellows and valuable helpers. We could not do without them. But still we must not let them make Unitarian Christianity mean only our Antitrinitarian fortifications, ignoring the great city itself of positive doctrines and life that lies behind. In thinking of ourselves as Unitarians, we must not think of ourselves as soldiers only of the walls, but as citizens also of the great city of our theology.

And now if I have, however inadequately, yet to some extent *truly*, interpreted our common Unitarian consciousness—if these things, simple religion, claim to mental liberty reverence for Christ, endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology, Unitarian protest against Trinitarian errors, are the things which lie nearest to our hearts, the things in which we are one body in Christ, things which will bear judging, too, by the universal consciousness—then, I think, I have shown the revelation of a very great and very solemn vocation. These things *make* our vocation. They are God's indications in our souls of what He is calling us in common to do. He is calling us in drawing these common breathings of a holy music from our souls. These, rising, make one grand Unitarian anthem, which, if we can but hear and interpret, will make us a people knit together by a grand sympathy in a grand faith, standing shoulder to shoulder in a grand and glorious work.

Brethren, it is plain that we are called to live and give a religion seeing itself in Christ, and also associated with

liberty, which means associated with knowledge; a religion which shall be the fulness of all the deepest reverence of the soul with all the freest, largest, truest thought of the mind. Ours is the work, suggested by the poet, to

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music as before."

Ours is the work to live such a religion and give it to the world—to live it first, or we cannot give it. We seek to commend the lamp of our theology to the masses. It is of little use for us to display the framework, and show how reasonable and simple and yet beautiful it is. We must show men a bright flame of religion burning in it. Our vocation in general may be summed up in one word—it is to combine religion with freedom, that is with a free theology. It is, then, to show the world, what others besides Mr. Gladstone seem to doubt, that there can be religion with freedom; that there can be a Church with an earnest religious life—our Church now, and therefore a grand Catholic Church hereafter—founded, not on dogmas or traditions, but on common affections and common trusts in the oracles in the human soul. Ah! can we come up to this vocation? Can we walk worthy of it? It is not easy to come up to it; we must not flatter ourselves that we have come up to it. Sometimes we are very near it, but we oft fall back again. To unite liberty and religion, to lay the foundations of the Catholic Church, of the City of God, not in the perishable materials of common dogmas, but in the eternal precious stones of common spiritual trusts,—this, as you know, is one of the hardest things in the world; for either religion is apt to shackle liberty, or liberty to blight religion. In no other church

as yet has it been possible to harmonize the two. And *we* have undertaken the difficult task. Ah! shall the result only be to show that the task must be sorrowfully given up as impracticable still? It is difficult to hold religion and yet not give up liberty. The result of liberty, as we have seen, is difference of theological opinion, and this difference it is hard for the religious mind to bear. When my brother, dwelling with me in the same religious home, claiming to be of the same household of faith, wearing, and perhaps I may think *dishonouring*, the same family name, nourished too by the mother's milk of the same religious life,—when he turns round upon me and denies as baneful error what I revere as precious truth, denounces as poisonous superstition what I feel to be the very daily bread of my life,—he hurts me, and must hurt me because he throws slight on things with which my reverence is deeply interwoven. He tends to take away from me and from others what seems to me most needful to the religious life. And so I know, on the other hand, that if I deny what my brother holds dear and sacred, I cause similar pain to him. Now, brethren, the question for us is, Can we learn loyally and patiently to bear this pain without losing our religious earnestness, on the one hand, or letting that pain repel us from our brother or make us seek to check his liberty, on the other? Here is the difficulty which ever opposes the strength of our organization. It is here that comes in the fatal dissociating force that tends to make our body a mere rope of sand. Ah! can we watch and overcome this repellant force? We can do so only by a great-souled loyalty to our principles, only by a wise and manful government of ourselves. When our brother exercises his liberty according to his right, can we abstain from pleading our pain as

a bar to that liberty, as a cause for his silence? Can we so master our pain as that it shall not become a dissociating force to separate between our brother and ourselves—make us eager to thrust him from our religious home or deny him the use of the family name? If we cannot come up to this loyalty, if we cannot exercise this government of self, then we cannot come up to our vocation. Our theory of combining liberty with religion is but a fine theory still; we do our part to show that in practice it remains a hopeless thing.

We shall be helped to bear the pain of difference by keeping in mind that if God does mean us to be free, free to believe that which to our own minds appears to be the truth, then even to believe amiss, if we have come to believe by exercising faithful inquiry, cannot be regarded by Him with any moral disapproval. And surely what *God* does not blame, *we* have no right to shrink from as if it were a sin. And if God looks upon our varieties of belief with all-patient eye, we may be sure that He cannot think any one form of belief, however correct, to be all essential to our religious life. Experience tells us that this is true; for though the religious life is nourished by theological belief, as the bodily life is nourished by food, happily vitality may be supported by very different foods; and as no land with its particular material diet can boast that it alone nourishes strong and beautiful bodies, so no church, no sect, no school with its particular theological diet, can boast that it alone nourishes strong and beautiful souls. There is no doubt that souls which have a noble theology to live from enjoy a great advantage, yet somehow it happens that the advantage is not always used; and there are those who are like the three children in the story of Daniel, and draw more nourishment for

their strength and beauty from a theology as of poor pulse and water, than others draw from one which is like the king's rich meat.

Again, we may help ourselves to bear this pain of difference from our opinion by just looking at our opinion and asking what there is in it that should make us, as it were, fall down and worship it as if it were infallible and divine.

Let each of us imagine the body of our theological opinions written down on a private scroll which we carry in our bosom. Now let each one take out the scroll and read it over, and ask himself if he can honestly say that every one of the opinions there written down has been come to in the sincere desire to find the very truth. Can he honestly affirm that he has gone with each opinion right into the inner court of judgment, and submitted it to the judges, Conscience and Reason, there? Ah! must he not confess, on the contrary, how often, rather, he has allowed himself to be detained by the crowd of his own prejudices, inclinations and passions in the outer court, and has allowed his opinion to be the mere echo of the voices of that meaner crowd? Or even if any one can feel sure that he has gone with any opinion to the ultimate judges of truth and right, can he also feel sure that he provided himself with all the knowledge he could gain in order to form the case to lay before the judges for their judgment? When the decision to be formed was a critical one, has he gone to criticism? or when it was a philosophical one, has he gone to philosophy? or if a scientific one, has he gone to science for the information needed? Can he say that he has not often judged of the truth of an opinion, not by evidence for or against it, but by a bias suggested by its supposed practical tendency? I do not know, brethren, how it may be with you, but for myself I

could not dare to be sure that with any single opinion that I hold I had been thus perfectly truthful.

Let each of us look on this scroll of his opinions, and ask himself if this is what he can venture to hold up as if it were a sacred standard of unquestionable truth, if this is what he dares to call *the truth*, condemning his brother as a dangerous heretic because he differs from it.

And observe, brethren, I am saying this again to no school among us in particular, but to all schools alike; for this self-delusion that *our* opinion, however formed, is *the truth*, belongs to all schools—alas! to all human nature.

We see then this difficulty of really so holding religion as not to give up liberty. Can we try more to overcome it and come up to our vocation, which sets us to make the union of the two?

But now, once more, if it is difficult to hold religion without giving up liberty, it is still more difficult to hold liberty and yet in no way give up religion. This is our vocation still. Let us remember our conception of religion. It is holy *emotion* working out holy *life*. Religion, observe, *is* emotion at its source. It is love, and surely love is emotion—love for goodness, love for God, love for man. Now it is clear that this emotion, this love, must be fed by some belief regarding its objects. He, for example, who does not *believe* in goodness cannot love goodness. He who does not believe in God, and in His lovableness too, cannot love God. Now it is the result of freedom—that is, of free thought—to interfere very much with the beliefs by which the religious emotions need to be fed, and so to make religion difficult, or even to dry it up altogether. The beliefs by which our religion is nourished have been compared this evening to bread, the bread of

life. Let us take the other familiar figure and compare them to water—the water of life. Consider the theological beliefs belonging to different churches as springs flowing at different levels, some down on the very plain, some higher up on mountain sides, and some among the very mountain heights. Now it is the result of free thought to detach and turn away the mind from all the springs of lower and more popular religious beliefs, leaving none possible to their use but very high ones, flowing from the mountain heights where Conscience and Reason reign. Go into many of the churches around us, where evangelists of the type of Mr. Moody, or Ritualists or Romanists of other types, appeal to multitudes and seem to awaken tides of religious emotion, and ask how it is all done. You will find that the secret is, that the preachers lead their hearers to thoughts, to springs of theological belief, on a low level. The people can more easily get to them, and do get to them and drink freely, and go away, I have no doubt, refreshed and strengthened to live a better life. A preacher with us, were he the mightiest prophet, has no such advantage. He addresses men who have left these lower springs, who look upon them with aversion as turbid and poisoned waters. He must point Unitarian hearers to the only springs their free thought has left them, far up among the mountain heights. He must point them to such truths as the eternal beauty and sanctity of goodness, the Fatherhood and eternal goodness and immanence of God, the divine childhood as well as human brotherhood of man, the revelation of our true nature and life, and relation to God and hope of immortality in Jesus Christ. And these lie very high; and simple as it seems to *apprehend* them, it is very, very difficult to reach them so as to *believe* them with all

the heart and soul. It is difficult intellectually, and it is difficult morally. It is difficult intellectually. The thoughts which our theology presents, if simple thoughts, are still great thoughts, thoughts which cannot be realized without some mental effort. The mind must give itself up to them —will, understanding, imagination—in order to grasp them; and multitudes come to their religion in an indolent frame of mind, as to a subject that needs no thought. Alas! no mind, as long as it abandons itself to this indolent mood, will ever climb to the springs of our Unitarian belief. There are many who, through the exercise of their free thought, get far away above the springs of the popular faith, and yet fail to reach the higher springs, and very much, I cannot help thinking, because they will not exert the mental effort and perseverance necessary to climb to them. When in their newly-found liberty they first break away from the popular superstitions, they seem to go on joyously for a time, mounting higher and higher in the freer air. But by and by they get into the region of mists, the mists of doubt, and their zeal for truth begins to slacken. They seem to lose all power of pushing forward, and, as if doomed by some fatality, they go round and round in that same region of mist, never emerging above it. We may be assured that the exercise of free thought will always leave some of these dwellers in the mist among us. These will be generally somewhat dead and cold themselves, through the absence of any intensity of religious conviction, and so they will be like icebergs, chilling the whole moral air around them. Ah! my friends, who of us does not feel how depressing it is to live in a church with those who have no strength of religious conviction, and how their apathy makes us almost ashamed to have any intensity of religious conviction ourselves!

For these dwellers in the mist, and for all of us, there needs the exercise of a greater intellectual bravery and faithfulness in religion.

But, alas! there is the still greater moral difficulty in getting up to the lofty springs of our faith. Even those of us who never seem to doubt, still do not drink habitually from the higher springs, just because they are too high morally for us to reach. Religion is Love; and we shall not love, not deliver ourselves to our love, as long as we are not prepared to do what that love demands. The rich man in the Gospel would have given himself to his love for Jesus, to follow with Peter, James and John, but that love demanded a sacrifice too great for him to make, and he went sorrowful away. Now there is this difficulty in the way of our giving ourselves up to believe our theology with all our hearts, that the high love to which it appeals requires self-sacrifice which we are not often prepared to make. Ah! there lies our greatest difficulty. Our theology is as yet too high for our moral strength; we do not, and we cannot, without more heroism, come up to it. Now I do not wish to indulge in any morbid self-depreciation, but I wish also to discourage any unwarranted self-satisfaction. There is, no doubt, much religious life among us; but if we can be satisfied with this, we must have a very inadequate conception of the ideal which our theology presents. Let us put away for ever those foolish pleas by which we try to hide from ourselves a poverty and coldness in our religious life of which we are truly conscious. Let us no longer say, Oh, we have abundant religious life, only through our taste and culture we are an undemonstrative people, and do not show it. My friends, I look into my own heart, and see how hollow such excuses are. Ah! do I not know by my own experience that there is a deficiency

in the religious life simply because of the great difficulty in coming up to the high springs of faith? Do I not know too surely that my heart is stubbornly hard and dry? Do I not know that I do not, except in rarest moments, get up to my belief in God, and experience that love of God of which the Master speaks, "with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, and with all the strength"? And do I not know that it is because the thought of God which my theology presents is too high for me; it does not touch me, because I do not strain towards it; I do not surrender myself to it, alas! because the weight of earthly sin and habit keeps me back? Ah! how can I delight to go up and believe in God, think of Him in all His perfect goodness, allow that thought to fill my soul, unless I am prepared to surrender myself to the Eternal Goodness, to be and to do what it demands?

And so, again, with regard to that love for my neighbour as myself, that enthusiasm of humanity which I see in Jesus. Do I not know how little I really feel it, and simply because the belief in man, and what I can do for him, and the kingdom of God I can help to bring in, is too high for me, I cannot through my selfishness come up to it? Do I not know that if I really go up to it, giving myself up to this Christ-like love for man, I must be prepared to go forth and sacrifice time and ease and inclination and means to carry it out; and my dull nature replies, "I cannot do it," and I dare not go and drink of the water which might inspire me to do what I am not prepared to do?

Brethren, am I alone in this sorrowful experience? Do not many hearts respond to the confession that our religious life has not yet come up to our theology, and that we have not yet overcome the great difficulty of holding

religion in union with liberty? Can we resolve to make a greater effort to come up to our vocation? We must, if we are ever to become that power in the world of which we dream. We have found a grand and glorious theology up among the eternal heights. But when we go forth to commend that theology to the world, and assure them how pure and good its waters are, men's hearts virtually say to us, "Yes, your theology seems very reasonable, very beautiful, but how about your religion? Do these springs which you say are so pure and wholesome, then, feed your souls with a religious life larger and deeper than is felt among churches fed by lower and impurer streams? Let us look into your churches. How does your theology work? You profess, for example, to hold the thought of God as a Father lovely with all holiness and goodness and fatherly compassion. You remove from His face, as you say, all the clouds of unrighteous wrath with which orthodox error has darkened it. Well, then, does your thought of God in all its loftiness and purity act upon you and awaken in you a warmer, deeper, devouter love than is felt by your orthodox fellow-christians?

"You profess to honour Christ, not, with Christendom in general, because he is God as well as man, but because he is the highest example of moral loveliness which history presents. Does, then, that moral loveliness in Christ awaken in your souls a love greater or more operative on the moral life than the love excited towards him by what you call an idolatrous mistake?

"Once more, you profess to love man, not as Christians in general love him, but simply as a brother and as a child of God. You yearn over the ignorant and the sinful, not as seeing them lying under a dreadful doom to eternal woe, but simply as lying in degradation and moral ruin, far from

God and their own true life, and you would raise them and restore them to themselves and God. Again, does this thought of man really kindle in your hearts the enthusiasm of humanity? Does it really make you take upon you the sins and sorrows of your fellow-men, and bear them as your own? Does that love send you out in missions and other instrumentalities to fight more zealously than others against the great evils of society—ignorance, drunkenness, pauperism, vice and crime? Is your church life—being inspired by such lofty truths—more ardent than that of others? United by such grand common hopes, aspirations, emotions, do you feel bound to one another, hallowed, as it were, to one another?" Ah! what shall we say to questions like these? Simply that they make us feel how much we have to do to walk worthy of our calling; they make us feel that we have not already attained, are not already perfect, but must still follow after, counting not ourselves to have apprehended, but, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before," must "press toward the mark for the prize of the high *calling*—calling of God in Christ Jesus." Amen.

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