

still a need for the service of this denomination as a member of the Christian body, with a distinct work of its own, we rejoice in a name, which however confusing it may be if we consult only a dictionary for its meaning, has clearly enough defined itself in the intellectual and social and religious struggles of the last half century, and has gathered about itself memories and associations of which we have such reason to be glad.

We will only add that this journal will have no official authority of any kind, and that it is entirely independent of any organization — and we repeat that we shall rejoice in feeling that we are working in co-operation with all, who, under whatever name, are helping to advance the cause of Truth and to promote the interests of Christian faith.

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✓ B. Green

“THE TWO GREAT PROBLEMS OF UNITARIAN  
CHRISTIANITY.”

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A SHORT article, with the above heading, appeared in the last number of the Religious Magazine, and read so much like a wail from a sad heart that we have been prompted to write a reply.

In the opening paragraph the writer says, “We believe that Unitarian Christianity is a universal gospel; that it is for the masses as well as for the cultured few, capable of stirring men to greater action, and giving them a more ample religious growth than previous forms of Christian truth. But, before it can become the supreme gospel of the race, two problems must be solved.” Before considering those two problems, I would like to say a word on this opening paragraph.

That “Unitarian Christianity is a universal gospel, intended for the masses as well as for the cultured few,” I devoutly believe; understanding by Unitarian Christianity, simply the Christianity of Christ. That is, so far forth as Christianity can be put into words, into propositions, into philosophical statements. But are we not in some danger of forgetting, that the vital part of Chris-

tianity is not susceptible of statement in words? *It is a spirit of life.* We can make statements concerning this spirit of life; we may hold a philosophy about it, and that philosophy may be susceptible of logical explication, but the vital thing which Christianity, the Spirit of Life, is, cannot be formulated. Now, our Unitarian Philosophy and statements about this vital life-giving spirit, seem to me to be true, and I believe will prevail so far and so fast as men shall be able to appreciate logical and philosophical statements about anything. But the masses are not now able to appreciate. So that acceptance of our statements about Christianity may not, for a long time to come, be very general. But (and here is our salvation as religious teachers) the masses, however lacking in ability to appreciate our *philosophy*, have no difficulty in appreciating the thing about which we philosophize and make statements. The spirit of divine life, when manifested in us, it requires little or no philosophical acumen to see and appreciate.

Our present thought concerning the vital thing which Christianity is, and our present statements of our thought, may both be modified, it would be strange if they were not; but the thing itself is ever the same, and is not in the exclusive keeping of any sect, or party, or school of thinkers.

But to advance to the next, the third belief stated by the writer in the opening paragraph, namely, — that Unitarian Christianity is "capable of stirring men to greater action, and giving them a more ample and religious growth than previous forms of Christianity." I do not believe the first part of this statement, that Unitarian Christianity is capable of stirring men to greater action than previous, or many prevailing forms of Christianity, unless we are to define *action* to be something quite different from what it is usually understood to be in this relation. This is almost too evident to require illustration; yet, at the risk of being prolix and commonplace, for the sake of simplicity let me offer an example of "action," produced by other forms of belief and teaching, and which Unitarianism is not competent to produce. Take an audience of evangelical (unconverted) believers, if the expression may be allowed, under the manipulation of any well-known powerful revivalist preacher. He evidently believes that all before him are in danger of eternal burning, and by his earnestness (for in-

deed how can he help being earnest) he moves the multitude; he impresses them with a feeling, which soon amounts to a conviction, that they are in danger, imminent danger; and soon, *action*, emotional, passionate action is apparent. A shout or a sob in one direction is followed by a sob or a shout in another, until soon there is shouting and sobbing all round; and speedily the "anxious seats" are crowded with those eager to flee from the danger of the wrath to come. This is action. And so long as these continue to believe themselves in such danger, the action in one form or another will continue. And so long as others are believed to be in such danger action will not cease, efforts will be made to save others. Is *Unitarian* Christianity capable of stirring men to any such action? I believe not. Nor is Christianity, under any name, capable of it. It is not Christianity that has done it in the case of the revivalist's audience. The revivalist, and thousands of others, may believe it is, but I do not believe it. It is no more Christianity in this instance than it was Christianity in the instances of the Inquisition and the Massacre of St. Bartholmew. I grant that the form of action was very different; and it may be said one party was moved by a love of souls and the other was not; yes, but all claim to be seeking the glory of God, the establishment of the true religion, the kingdom of heaven. Now, because Unitarianism cannot stir men up to what is called intense action, shall we entertain any doubt of its truth, or its worth, or the wisdom of laboring for its wider prevalence? Not until it can be shown that action can take no other form, or that it cannot exist without being very demonstrative. The value of action is not to be determined by any such tests. When you put an acorn into the ground, and alongside of it the seed of a sunflower, both may grow, but the manifestation of life in the case of each is different. You can almost see and hear the growth of the sunflower, and in less than a year it flames out in garish colors to be seen of all men. But the acorn has no such action. It is hardly noticeable the first year, and a century is not sufficient to perfect it, while the sunflower, meanwhile, has had a wide following in kind. Let not the oak look in contempt at the sunflower, nor the sunflower despise the oak.

The higher the type of life you propose for man, the slower will

be his growth toward it, and the longer it will take him to reach it. While if you are satisfied to tell men that they are in danger of eternal hell if they do not flee from it, it will not take *some* very long to start, and they will give themselves no rest or peace until believed to be beyond danger. But the spiritual quality of the lives which such a system is competent to produce cannot be of a very high order. I would not be understood as holding that there are not multitudes of good, saintly, Christian men and women, who honestly believe in these doctrines and these methods; of course there are; but they are so, in *spite* of their doctrines, and not *because* of them. The writer of the article which I am considering would not pretend that these doctrines are any part of Christianity, and he must know, doubtless does know, that as Christlike men and women as he ever met are men and women of whose belief the doctrine of eternal damnation forms no part. But I do not forget that the question is not one simply of personal character, but of the value of different systems or views of truth; and I recur to the question.

I have dwelt thus at length on the opening paragraph of the article, because I felt that in it lurked the point of the subsequent inquiries.

The writer proceeds to say, "Before Unitarian Christianity can become the supreme gospel of the race two problems must be solved." The first of these problems he regards as the finding of "some motive power to outward action equal to the Orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment." I should state it differently, and say, — Before Unitarianism can become the prevailing form of Christianity, it *must manifest some motive power of inward life superior to that found in connection with all other forms of Christianity*. Considered in its most vital relations, it is not a question of doctrines, or philosophies of doctrines, half so much as many seem to think. It is a matter of *spirit and life*. And it is not a question of more or less noisy demonstration of life, but of sweetness and purity.

Unitarianism and Unitarians need the same motive to outward action that was in Christ. What was that? Was it not Love — Love to God and love to man. His love for God kept him at one with God. His love for man prompted him to give himself to the

work of bringing man also at one with God. It was not so much the sentiment of *fear* in Christ, concerning man's threatened doom, that was the motive to action in him. It was love for that which is essential manhood in all men, that which has divine possibilities. He did not overlook man's danger, he never spoke lightly of sin, but the moving motive in him never seemed so much fear of the consequences of sin, or hatred of sin itself, as love for that which man is capable of becoming. To make Unitarianism the prevailing gospel we must not be content to *say* that it is the best; nor content philosophically to demonstrate its superiority in doctrine over all other forms of Christianity. The merest novice can state, with beautiful simplicity and truth, the mere law of the gospel, — to love God above all things and thy neighbor as thyself. Everybody knows that to practically carry this out is to live a Christian; and we may as well now, as ever, give over all idea of finding any superior *statement* of Christianity, and confine ourselves to the more important work of keeping alive in our own hearts the Spirit which *prompts* to love, and the generation and keeping alive of that spirit in other hearts, where it may not be, or where it exists only in possibility, like the oak in the acorn. In the presence of the spirit of the living Christ, looking out in tenderness through human eyes; falling on the ear in sweet cadences from human tongue; manifesting itself in self-sacrificing deeds among men; in presence of the spirit of life thus set forth, of what moment is the doctrine of eternal punishment, or any other doctrine which is not accompanied with this spirit? And if this be present, we can well spare the doctrine. And the influence and the effect of this spirit, although it might not indeed stir men to shout, and howl, or sob, would it not do what it did of old, draw all men to it in more or less loving sympathy, and awaken in them a kindred spirit?

The second problem, which in the mind of the writer of the article under consideration must be solved before Unitarianism is to prevail, "is, to find a form of truth that shall make God as near and helpful to the soul as the Orthodox doctrine of the deity of Jesus."

A word on this. The human soul will never outgrow its need of a feeling of nearness to God, nor outgrow its need of help from

him. It is sweet to feel him near, but does it drive him off, or does it necessarily rob the soul of all consciousness of his nearness, to believe concerning him as Jesus believed, namely, — that he is the ever present spirit of love, power, tenderness and sympathy? It is true, as the writer says, that, "not much is accomplished when it is proved that Jesus is not God." But is it true that, "When we do this, he ceases to be a central fact, a leader, a Saviour?" Did the sun cease to be a central fact when it was proved that he did not move round the earth? Does Plato cease to be a leader in philosophy, when it is proved he is not somebody else, and never wrote the Iliad? And does Jesus really cease to be all these, "a central fact, a leader, a Saviour," when it is proved he is not God? He must cease to be *such* a central fact as Orthodoxy conceives him to be, of course, but he remains just as important a fact nevertheless. And of course he must cease to be such a leader as Orthodoxy conceives him, but he may remain just as helpful in his leadership still. And as such a Saviour as Orthodoxy believes man to be in need of, of course he must cease to be when the reality of eternal hell is disposed of. But he may be all the Saviour that man really needs still. The writer seems to overlook the fact that Unitarianism does something more than prove that Jesus is not God. It affirms that God was in Christ, and in him for a blessed purpose, a loving purpose, to bring man into sympathy and fellowship of life with himself. Christ is to Unitarian thought a "*central fact*," inasmuch as the divine life, the life of God, becomes a helpful fact in him, and inasmuch as the fact of Christianity has its *visible* root in him, although *invisibly* it is in God. He is a leader, not alone by virtue of what he has taught, but more especially by what he *was* and *is* in the spiritual quality of his life. He was not a leader in literature, science or art, but he was in the divine art of godly living, in the art of setting forth the divinely human life.

And we affirm him Saviour, by virtue of his being the divinely appointed instrument for the generation and keeping alive in us of the only thing that can save, the spirit of self-sacrificing love. Unitarianism, as I hold it, does not oblige me to legislate God out of Jesus, when it teaches me that Jesus was not God. Jesus, aside from the Spirit of God, which was livingly in him, of course,

is no Saviour. It is God *in* Christ that we find to be so precious and so helpful a Saviour.

But here again I am reminded that no mere statement of this can accomplish much. It is the Saviour presented in our own lives, that will be the most effective doctrine. To have its fullest and best effect, the doctrine must be lived, not simply preached.

Dr Sears is quoted as saying "that Christianity was a new influx of divine power," and the question is asked, "Is Unitarianism a new influx of Divine power, or is it only a philosophy made momentarily popular by a few fervid orators?"

In reply I would say, No, Unitarianism is not a new influx of Divine power, it is a natural evolution of the influx which was new in Christ. It is new, of course, in the sense that the spirit is living, and ever new, as well as old. As I understand Unitarianism, it is not "only a philosophy," but Christianity, minus the theology of the middle ages, and plus the common sense of the nineteenth century. It will become the form of religion of the masses, just as far and as fast as the masses learn to value spirituality of life and righteousness of character, above any merely personal reward, either in the form of worldly profit, or other-worldly immunity from threatened doom. But its progress is slow, and the average preacher of it who sighs for a large following must be willing to be disappointed. The less religion is mixed up with worldly elements the longer it will take to make it popular. There is great satisfaction in the reflection that the divinest preacher of all did not have, in his own day, a reliable dozen of followers. There were, who *heard* him gladly, but they did not very closely, or publicly identify themselves with him. And there were not three out of the twelve who did not mix up his religion with a good many worldly policies.

We have no cause for discouragement. It may not be the animus of our movement to build up a great ecclesiasticism, but it can do better; it can continue to make clear the superiority of spiritual religion over the religion of form, of dogma or of traditionalism; and who does not know that one such living religionist is not worth, in his influence for good, ten thousand terror-stricken adherents of some fear-awakening dogmatism. Let us continue to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

J. B. GREEN.