

*Sam. Miller.*

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LETTERS  
ON THE  
**ETERNAL SONSHIP**  
OF CHRIST:

ADDRESSED TO  
**THE REV. PROFESSOR STUART,**  
OF ANDOVER.

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*Saml. Miller.*

LETTERS

ON THE

**ETERNAL SONSHIP**

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# CONTENTS.

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## LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY remarks—Thanks to Professor S. for the manner in which he has written—The author, however, not satisfied with his arguments—Circumstances which led him to speak of the eternal Sonship of Christ, in his “Letters on Unitarianism”—Regrets his unguarded language in one sentence—Explains the meaning of that sentence—Deprecates the feelings and language of controversy—No reason to apprehend an unfavourable result from this discussion—Queries as to the prevalence of the doctrine opposed, in the United States—Doubts expressed whether great discoveries in Theology are to be expected—We do not necessarily stand on the shoulders of ancient divines—Conclusion. - - - - - Page 13—30

## LETTER II.

Statement of the doctrine which the author believes, and proposes to defend—He does not admit into his creed on this subject any ideas of inferiority or subordination on the

part of the Son—Objects to a part of Bishop BULL'S creed—Is not willing to acknowledge even TURRETINE as his representative—This doctrine not disputed among the Orthodox till after TURRETINE'S death—Doctrine stated at length—Does not admit of being explained—Quotations from AMBROSE and from BASIL to this amount. - 31—43

### LETTER III.

Testimony of Scripture—The Bible the only infallible rule of faith and practice—Direct testimony of Scripture—FIRST argument, from the correlate titles of Father and Son—SECOND argument, from the manner in which the phrase "Son of God" is used in scripture—THIRD argument, from those passages which represent the Father as sending his Son, giving his Son, &c.—FOURTH argument, from the great stress laid, in the New Testament, on the Father's wonderful condescension and love, in not withholding his beloved Son, &c.—FIFTH argument, from the language in which the New Testament speaks of the incarnation of the Son of God—SIXTH argument, from the fact, that the titles given to the Persons of the Trinity express relation to each other, as well as co-eternity and co-equality—SEVENTH argument, drawn from detached passages of Scripture. - - - - - 44—99

### LETTER IV.

Answer to those arguments which are drawn from scripture by Professor S.—He holds to several different Filia-

tions—Strong objections to this representation—His doctrine, in some of its aspects, tends to Tri-theism—Objections urged against his position that *LOGOS* is the only appropriate title of Christ, as the Second Person of the Trinity—Objections to his manner of speaking of the opinion, that the Son of God appeared to the Patriarchs under the old dispensation—Remarks on a number of passages in detail, which Professor S. adduces in support of his creed—Close of the Letter. - - - - - 100—145

## LETTER V.

Testimony of the Early Fathers—It was not originally intended to confine the appeal to the Ante-Nicene Fathers—Professor Stuart once himself entertained the opinion respecting the Fathers in relation to this subject, which he now opposes—The author never asserted that the Fathers believed in the NECESSITY of the Saviour's Sonship—Several preliminary remarks—The testimony of the Fathers examined in order—*BARNABAS*—*HERMAS*—*IGNATIUS*, with remarks—*JUSTIN MARTYR*, with remarks at large—Bishop Bull defended in relation to Justin—*IRENEUS*, with comments—*THEOPHILUS*—*ATHENAGORAS*, with remarks—*CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS*, with observations—*HIPPOLYTUS*, with remarks—Letter of Six Bishops at the Council of Antioch—Confession of Faith, by *GREGORY THAUMATURGUS*—Genuineness of that Confession defended—*ORIGEN*—Proof of his opinion on this subject—No evidence that his creed was dictated by his philosophical principles—*DIONYSIUS* of Alexan-

dria—Conclusive evidence that he maintained the doctrine of eternal Sonship—**DIONYSIUS**, of Rome maintained the same opinion—**LUCIAN**, of Antioch—His Creed—The genuineness of it defended—**PAMPHILUS**, of Cesarea—**THEOGNOSTUS**, of Alexandria,—**METHODIUS**—Conclusion of the Letter. . . . . 146—207

## LETTER VI.

Latin Fathers examined—**TERTULLIAN**—Several extracts from him—Remarks—**NOVATIAN**—Extracts—Remarks—**CYPRIAN**—Extracts—Remarks—**LACTANTIUS**—Extracts—Remarks—General observations on the testimony of the Fathers, intended to shew the certainty of their belief in eternal Sonship—Reasons why the Nicene Creed could not have been an innovation—The universal reception of the doctrine here maintained, among the Orthodox, from the time of the apostles, to the present day, an important fact in its favour—Concluding remarks.  
208—247

## LETTER VII.

Objections answered—**FIRST** objection ; that the doctrine of Eternal Sonship cannot be understood—Answered—**SECOND** objection ; that if the Sonship of Christ be voluntary, it cannot be necessary and eternal—Answered—**THIRD** objection ; that, if the doctrine of eternal Sonship be admitted, it will follow that the same numerical essence communicates the whole of itself to the same numerical

essence—Answered—FOURTH objection; that if Christ be the eternal Son of the Father, this Sonship must involve inferiority and dependence—Answered—FIFTH objection; that the doctrine of eternal Sonship tends to favour and extend Arianism—Answered—An opinion expressed that the reverse is the case—Doubt suggested whether speculations on subjects of this kind are truly profitable—Closing remarks. - - - - - 248—280

## LETTER VIII.

Circumstances in which the preceding Letters were prepared—The discussion extended greatly beyond the author's original purpose—He feels thankful for being called to re-examine the subject—General estimate of the importance of the question involved in this correspondence—The doctrine opposed, not by any means to be regarded as a fundamental error—Yet, if it be a departure at all from Gospel truth, not likely to be harmless—So far as received, will probably impair the evidence in favour of the Redeemer's Divinity—More mischief to be apprehended, in this case, from the manner in which the doctrine is defended, than from the doctrine itself—Teachers who are truly pious, and substantially orthodox themselves, may, by their manner of communicating instruction, be instrumental in leading others most seriously astray—The author disclaims the character of a "reprover"—He only claims the privilege of exhibiting and defending his own opinions—An unwillingness to continue this discussion expressed—Valedictory remarks. - - - - - 281—295



## ERRATA.

P. 59. l. 4. for *Morænus*, read *Mornæus*.

P. 80. l. 1. for *sometimes* read *generally*.

P. 110. l. 3. from bottom for *Father*, read *Son*.

# LETTERS.

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## LETTER I.

### *INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.*

REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

I HAVE read with serious and most respectful attention the Letters which you addressed to me on “the Eternal Generation of the Son of God.” The subject I cannot but deem highly important. And, as One whom I regard with so much cordial esteem, has thus publickly called upon me, either to defend or abandon the ground which I had taken; and as I do not feel prepared to abandon it, perhaps it is incumbent on me to say something in its defence. In attempting this, though I do not venture to hope that what I have to offer will produce a revolution in your opinion, it will at least serve to shew the reasons of mine.

Before I proceed further, allow me heartily to thank you for the fraternal respect and

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urbanity with which you have written on this subject. I thank you for the honour you have done *me* by your manner of addressing me. I congratulate you on the still greater honour you have done *yourself*, by maintaining, throughout, with such perfect success, the temper and language of a gentleman and a christian. And, most of all, I rejoice in the honour you have done our common christianity, by shewing the enemies of the truth with what freedom from unhallowed feelings a friend of general orthodoxy can plead for his opinions.

But while I make this acknowledgment, and make it with unfeigned pleasure, I must say that your arguments have totally failed of convincing me that the positions which I laid down in my "Letters on Unitarianism," on the Eternal Sonship of Christ, are untenable. Nay—pardon me, my dear Sir, for saying, what candour, and a conscientious regard to truth extort from me—Your pamphlet has impressed me with a stronger conviction than ever of the unsoundness of the cause which it is intended to support, and of the questionable tendency—to speak in the most guarded terms,—of some of the opinions which it contains, and especially of some of the *means* to which you have resorted for maintaining them. This conviction

I shall endeavour, with all possible frankness, to explain in the sequel. May I be enabled to execute my purpose in a manner which shall evince that the attainment of truth, and not victory, is my aim!

It has been the occasion of no small regret to me, that my mode of expressing myself, in what little I have said on this subject in my "Letters," should be considered by any as liable to the charge of undue severity, or as deficient in christian courtesy. Nothing, I can declare, was more remote from my intention or wish than writing a line which might justly be construed as an offensive attack on any one, or which would be likely to provoke controversy. I will not disguise, however, that something which you had said in one of your Letters to Dr. *Channing*, was partly in my view in what I wrote. And as you have set me so noble an example of candour, I will frankly inform you by what considerations I was induced to touch on the subject under discussion, in my cursory remarks on the doctrine of the Trinity.

While I read your Letters to Dr. *Channing* with high respect for the learning and talent which they manifested; and with no little gratitude to a Brother, who was willing to employ his time and his strength in so good a cause;

I must confess that my pleasure in perusing them suffered considerable deduction on account of several things which they contained. I thought that you had made some concessions to the enemies of the truth, which could not fail to impair the strength of your cause; and that, in defending that cause, you had abandoned some of the old, and as I verily believed, scriptural, positions and language, which I had been long accustomed to see the Orthodox maintain, and which I could not but regard as of great value in their system. But I was particularly dissatisfied with the manner in which, in your Second and Fourth Letters, you treated the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ. It appeared to me that you not only opposed the doctrine of the Bible on that subject, but that you did it with a degree of confidence, and even severity, which I was at a loss either to justify or explain. I was not at that time aware that so large a portion of the orthodox clergy of *New-England* agreed with you in opinion, as you seem to believe; nor did I suppose that you were unacquainted with the facts, that the great body of the clergy of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, were of a very different opinion, and that they

by no means considered it as a matter of small moment.

It soon became apparent that many of my brethren of the clergy felt as I did, or rather felt still greater uneasiness and apprehension. They regretted that a work which they considered as containing so much excellent and interesting matter, should also contain what they could not but deem calculated to do harm. They doubted whether it was their duty to contribute to its circulation, especially as exhibiting the sentiments of the orthodox body. I received letters from different and distant parts of the country, expressing with regret these feelings, and also urging the propriety of some publication fitted to counteract the influence of such of its parts as were thought to be erroneous. I read these communications with no little anxiety; but not considering myself as either bound or qualified to enter the lists on this subject; and feeling peculiar reluctance to engage in a discussion which might be viewed with pain, by some of the friends of truth, and would, pretty certainly, be hailed by its enemies with joy; I resolved to lament in silence what was going on, rather than run the risk of impairing the cordiality of intercourse between

Brethren, who certainly ought not to be divided.

Such was, unfeignedly, the state of my mind, when a variety of unexpected circumstances led me to think that it was my duty to address the Members of the First Presbyterian Church of *Baltimore* on the subject of Unitarianism. I entered on the execution of my plan without the most distant thought of saying a word on the Sonship of Christ. But, as I advanced in the consideration of the subject, it appeared to me impossible to avoid saying something on that point, without unfaithfulness to the cause of truth; and without incurring the suspicion among the brethren of my own Church, of being either in error or in doubt with respect to the doctrine in question. I, therefore, felt myself called upon, as it fairly came in my way, briefly but decisively to express an opinion on the subject. The thought of offending, even the most zealous and fastidious adherent to the doctrine which you hold, never entered my mind. To deliver my conscience, and to avert from myself unjust suspicion, without wounding the feelings of a human being, formed the sum total of my purpose. If I failed of attaining it, I must regret the failure, but cannot re-

proach myself with any intention different from what has been stated.

This is a simple unvarnished statement of facts. Some of these facts, particularly that which relates to the feelings of a large body of the Clergy, of the south and west, in reference to your Letters,—if you have not already known, it is, perhaps, not improper you should now be made acquainted with. I will not conceal, however, as I said, that there was a reference, in what I wrote, to your publication. But I was really prompted, my dear Sir, to make the remarks which I did, not by any love of controversy; far less by any disposition to engage in controversy with you. I intended no such thing; anticipated no such thing. Least of all did I think of assailing any one with language which ought certainly to be excluded from the intercourse of brethren.

Yet there is a single sentence, on the subject under consideration, in the Third of my “Letters on Unitarianism,” on which I wish to make a few explanatory remarks. It is in these words—“Where, then, is the absurdity  
“or contradiction of an eternal, necessary emanation from him; or, if you please, an *eternal generation*; and also an *eternal procession* of the Holy Spirit from the Father and



“ the Son? To deny the possibility of this, or  
“ to assert that it is a manifest contradiction,  
“ either in terms or ideas, is to assert, that al-  
“ though the Father *is* from all eternity, yet  
“ he could not *act* from all eternity; which I  
“ will venture to assert, is as UNPHILOSOPHICAL  
“ as it is IMPIOUS.”

Here, it appears to me, that, upon every principle of fair construction, the epithets, *unphilosophical* and *impious* are applied, (as they certainly were intended to be) only to the assertion that God the Father, though he *is* from eternity, could not *act* from eternity. Now you declare that neither you, nor those who think with you, either assert or believe any such thing; and yet you seem to insist on applying the offensive epithets to yourselves. This I most sincerely regret. Nothing, I can solemnly assure you, my dear Sir, was ever further from my thoughts than such an application. The epithets in question were only meant to be applied to those who maintained certain opinions, which I never, for one moment, imagined that you or your friends maintained. It never occurred to my mind that any reader would think of applying them to you. I never could permit myself to use such language in reference to one toward whom I feel

those sentiments of cordial respect and friendship which I have the pleasure of cherishing for you. The truth is, in what I said on this subject in my "Letters," I had in view two classes of opponents—Unitarians, and those pious, and otherwise orthodox Brethren of *New-England* and elsewhere, who, I was sensible thought differently from me on this subject. The *former* were in my view in what is said in pages 86, 87, and 88;—the *latter* in pages 89, and 90, in a paragraph which is commenced by a specifick reference to their character.

Yet, after all, with the most perfect consciousness of innocence, as to my intention, in this case, I can now see, on a review of my language, that it might have been more carefully guarded; and I do sincerely wish it had been differently modified; and especially that the two-fold purpose just alluded to, had been more intelligibly and precisely stated. I hope, therefore, you will not only acquit me of all designed incivility; but that you will, once for all, be persuaded that I am incapable of employing any turn of expression calculated, in the least degree, to wound your feelings. My cause needs no such weapons; and my heart,

if I do not deceive myself, instinctively revolts from them.

In all the earnestness, then, with which you deprecate the unhallowed feelings and language of "controversy" on this subject, I most cordially unite with you. It shall be as you say. We will *discuss*, not *dispute*. And I do sincerely hope that those timid friends, who have apprehended that this discussion would prove injurious to the cause of truth, will be agreeably disappointed. Why should it be productive of injury? Have not differences of opinion existed in all ages, among the best of men, as well as among those of an opposite character? Do not the Orthodox universally acknowledge that diversity of views, as to many points, is quite consistent, not only with real, but also with ardent piety? What, then, should prevent brethren who respect and love one another from engaging in the amicable investigation of doctrines concerning which they may differ? Such investigations did great good, in establishing truth, in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. They were no less useful, though often painful, at the period of the Reformation. And why not equally useful, though sometimes attended with circumstances which render them irksome, now? I will not give up

the hope that you and I can, by the grace of God, with some degree of christian meekness and affection, compare opinions, and examine the grounds on which they rest; and that *the way of truth will not be evil spoken of* on our account.

And as I trust the friends of the Divinity and Atonement of Christ, will have no reason to regret the correspondence in which we are engaged; so I cherish an equally confident hope that our Unitarian neighbours will have no just cause for triumph. Are Unitarians all agreed in opinion? I know of no class of religionists who differ more among themselves. Dr. *Price* and Dr. *Priestley* differed widely in their doctrinal views, and thought it no disparagement, either of themselves, or of their respective systems, to make their points of difference, the subject of an amicable correspondence, as we are now doing. Nor is this all. Ecclesiastical history has shown, that Unitarians can dispute with as much ardent feeling, and even intemperate passion, as others; and that whenever they had the power, they were quite as ready as any other portion of people calling themselves christians, to make their adversaries feel the weight of the secular, as well as the ecclesiastical arm. The stories of Arianism, in

the fourth century, and of *Socinus*, *Blandrata*, and *Davidies*, in the sixteenth, furnish comments on this subject, of which no impartial mind can, for a moment, doubt the import.

I cannot suppose, therefore, that any enlightened Unitarian will be so inconsiderate or forgetful, as to indulge in premature triumph on seeing two professed friends of Orthodoxy differing in opinion, and bringing the points of difference between them before the publick. But I *do* fear, my respected friend, as I shall hereafter more fully state, that some of your opinions and reasonings will turn out to be weapons put into the hands of Unitarians. I do fear, that, whatever may be thought of the leading doctrine which you maintain, your *manner* of conducting the defence of it, will be found to aid a very different cause from that which you and I profess to love. It is painful for me to say this. But I entered on the present correspondence with the resolution to keep nothing back, but to pour out the fulness of my heart to a Brother, toward whom, however he may differ from me in opinion, I cannot help feeling the most cordial and unreserved confidence.

What degree of prevalence the doctrine which you espouse, may have gained in this

country, I am unable with any degree of confidence to decide; but rather suppose it has few adherents out of *New-England*. I do not even know who commenced the propagation of it in the *United States*. It was natural that the speculations of *Roell*, toward the close of the seventeenth century, in *Holland*, and, after him, of *Ridgely*, in *Great-Britain*, should find their way across the *Atlantick*, and make some disciples. And, accordingly, I have no doubt that this was really the case. I have heard of a very short published hint of such opinion, as held by an eminently pious clergyman of the Presbyterian Church in *Philadelphia*, about forty years ago. Another Presbyterian clergyman, about the same time, of, perhaps, equal eminence for piety, but of a more eccentric disposition, published the same doctrine, as an article of his faith. Not a few reproaches were heaped upon us for tolerating such opinions in our Church; but still they were tolerated. No publick notice was taken of them in the way of discipline. To these succeeded the acute and venerable Dr. *Emmons*, of *Massachusetts*. What proportion of the *New-England* clergy may be, at present, believers in that doctrine, I have no means of being accurately informed. It is well known, however, that the illustrious

President *Edwards*, and also Doctors *Bellamy* and *Hopkins*, and other distinguished fathers of the *New-England* churches, rejected this opinion, and to their dying day adhered to the old doctrine. With respect to the Presbyterian Church, my impression certainly is, that the great body of her clergy, at least nineteen out of twenty, adhere to the old *Nicene*, or rather, as, with my opinion, I ought to say, the *true Bible doctrine*. Certain it is, that none of them can consistently embrace any other, as long as they continue to profess their belief in the *Westminster* Confession of Faith, which is so explicit on this subject.

I freely acknowledge, with you, that the doctrine which I now advocate, is that in which I was educated. A venerated Parent, who had studied Theology in *Massachusetts*, his native State, was my preceptor. I can truly say, even more strongly than you do, with respect to the opposite opinion, that, during the early part of my theological life, I never met with the slightest hint of opposition to the doctrine of Eternal Generation, excepting in books; nor ever heard a different opinion spoken of, but as an error, to be regarded with apprehension. The longer I have reflected and inquired on the subject, the more firm has been my confi-

dence that my original instruction was sound and scriptural. But I am not unwilling again to examine into the correctness of that instruction. I rejoice that our lot is cast in an age and a country in which the most unlimited freedom of inquiry reigns. May this freedom never be abridged! If I do not deceive myself, I hold no opinion which I am not heartily willing to have examined to the bottom. No man will ever forfeit either my esteem or affection, by kindly and respectfully calling me to re-investigate any article in my creed, however long since I may have supposed it to be settled. And, in saying this, I verily think I express the feelings of all my brethren in this quarter of the country, who concur with me in sentiment on the subject of the present correspondence. Let us *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

Without stopping to inquire, whether, as you seem to anticipate, great discoveries and improvements are hereafter to be expected in the science of theology, and in the elucidation of the sacred Scriptures;—a question which, indeed, from the nature of the case, we must be but ill qualified to decide—one thing is certain, that, neither as Protestants, nor as Chris-



tians, ought we to allow ourselves to shut our eyes against the light, or to be blindly governed by the authority of our fathers. I accede fully to the truth of your remark, that you and I, situated as we are, ought to consider ourselves as under *double* obligations, to inquire diligently, and to weigh well, what we teach. And, allow me to add, that, as we evidently ought to teach our Pupils, not to rely on the decisions of Councils or Synods, or on human authority in any shape, but to examine with solemn care the only infallible Rule of faith and practice; so, in my opinion, we are equally bound to guard them against that spirit of rash and hasty innovation, either in faith or practice, which has so often proved the bane of the church of Christ. I have long thought it my duty to inculcate on those theological students whose principles I have had any part in forming, that, while free inquiry is commendable, and a christian duty; a rage for *novelty*, an ardent love of *originality*, as such, is one of the most unhappy symptoms, in its bearing on the prospect of future usefulness in the church, that a candidate for the ministry can well exhibit. I would not, for my right hand, exhort a young man always to adhere, whatever new light he may receive, to the old theological

landmarks which our fathers have set up ; but I would certainly and most earnestly exhort him, if he saw good reason to depart from them, to do it slowly, cautiously, respectfully, and with the most solemn and prayerful deliberation.

You observe that “dwarfs,” as we of modern times may be thought, compared with the “giants of yore,” yet that “we stand, at least, upon the shoulders of those ancient giants, and must needs have a somewhat more extended horizon than they.” I am not quite sure, my dear Sir, that the fact is really so. It does not appear to me an easy thing to get “on the shoulders of those giants.” I suspect very few mount so high. Before we can claim to have attained so elevated a station, and to enjoy “a more extended horizon” than they, we must not only have their ponderous volumes on our shelves, but we must have in our heads and in our hearts, all that they had. For one, I lament that I have not a better claim myself to this honour ; and feel bound to cultivate in my own mind, as well as in the minds of those whom I may be called to counsel in their studies, a more enlarged and deep acquaintance with what those “giants” have really attained and published ; as well as a more profound ac-

quaintance with those Scriptures of truth, which they studied, I have no doubt, at least as diligently and candidly, if not with quite so many helps, as we have done.

Such, my dear Brother, are the sentiments with which I enter on this correspondence. While, therefore, I write, I desire to look up to the Holy Spirit of promise, that He may guide my heart and my pen into all truth; that He may guard me from all that irascible feeling, and all that uncandid, cavilling spirit, which I think I hate, and desire to avoid; and that our mutual edification, and the honour of religion may be promoted by whatever shall be written!

## LETTER II.

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*Statement of the Doctrine, with Remarks.*

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REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

BEFORE I proceed to inquire whether the Eternal Generation of the Son of God is taught in Scripture, and was believed by the early Fathers, I wish to make a few remarks on the doctrine itself. As you appear to have misapprehended my views of it, in several respects, I am desirous of stating explicitly, in the outset, not so much what I suppose the doctrine to *mean*, as what I do *not* mean, in declaring my belief of it, and under what aspects I have been accustomed to regard it, as an article of my creed.

I begin, then, with declaring, that, in receiving the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, I do *not* admit into my views of the subject, any ideas of *creation*, on the part of the Father, or of *derivation*, *inferiority*, or

*subordination*, on the part of the Son. 'The idea of a *derived* or *inferior God* is quite as abhorrent to my feelings, and as alien from my creed, as it can be from yours. I know, indeed, that some zealous and able advocates of the general doctrine for which I plead, while they maintained the strict and proper Divinity and eternity of the Son, have used language concerning him as if he were to be regarded as a *produced* and *subordinate* Being. The learned and powerful Bishop *Bull*, admirably as he has written on the Trinitarian controversy, and in support of the doctrine which forms the subject of this correspondence, has yet expressed himself in a way concerning the subordination of the Son, in which I cannot entirely follow him. For, if I understand him, he not only maintains an *official* subordination, as Mediator, which I readily admit; but also a *personal* and *eternal* subordination, which I am by no means prepared to adopt. It ought, indeed, in justice to this learned and able Divine, to be stated, that similar language is found in writers who flourished long before him, and even in some of the most learned and zealous of the *post-Nicene* advocates of the doctrine for which I plead. But I consider speculations of this kind, as really forming no just objection to

the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, any more than the different, and ever varying speculations of philosophick divines on the doctrine of the Trinity, ought to shake our belief in what the Scriptures have revealed to us on that subject; or any more than the diverse, and very unhappy illustrations, which truly pious and ingenious men, have sometimes attempted to give of the doctrine of *Election*, or of the *Holy Spirit's influence*, or of the *Divine Omnipresence*, ought to tempt us to discard them all as inventions of human folly. Allow me to say, then, once for all, that when, in speaking of a Divine Person as *eternally begotten*, you are perplexed yourself, or would press me, with the idea of a *derived* or *inferior* God, I utterly protest against the imputation. It appears, as I said, as incongruous in my view, as it can appear in yours. It makes no part of the doctrine of which I would offer myself as the advocate.

You not only appear to take for granted, that the learned and able Professor *Turretine*, in the chapter in his *Theologiæ Elencticæ*, which treats of the doctrine of eternal Generation, will be acknowledged as a fair representative of the advocates of that doctrine; but you also intimate, that he is to be considered

as having “laid out very much of his strength” on that chapter, so that it may be supposed to contain the substance of what can be said in support of the doctrine in question. This, I believe, is not the opinion of the greatest admirers of that profound and illustrious divine. It is true, such were his talents and erudition, that few writers can safely promise themselves, in common cases, to make very advantageous additions to any discussion, in which he really “laid out his strength.” But the fact is, that many warm friends of *Turretine’s* system consider his chapter on the subject under consideration, as by no means among the most complete and satisfactory in his work. Nor, indeed, could it reasonably be expected to be so, in reference to the controversy as it exists in our day, among different portions of the Trinitarians. Every writer will be apt to lay out the greatest portion of his strength upon those subjects which are most controverted, and deemed most important, at the time in which he writes. Now it is well known, that the doctrine of the eternal Generation of the Son of God, in the days of *Turretine*, was scarcely at all, and certainly not in any prominent or interesting degree, a matter of dispute among the Orthodox. None who, at that time, ac-

knowledged the Divinity of Christ, ever thought of denying his eternal Sonship. The celebrated *Herman Alexander Roell*, of *Holland*, before alluded to, was, if I mistake not, the first Trinitarian who ever distinguished himself by embracing and publishing the doctrine on that subject which you now hold. And he did not bring his opinions before the publick until after *Turretine's* death. Hence the latter, in illustrating and defending the orthodox doctrine in relation to this point, speaks of none as opponents but *Arians* and *Socinians*; and in his mode of treating it, certainly evinces nothing more than his ordinary degree of attention and effort. Indeed I should think most readers would judge that his chapter on this subject was below, rather than above, his usual grade of fulness and ability.

I am not, therefore, willing to acknowledge even the venerable *Turretine*, highly as I esteem him, as my representative on this subject. His language may all be very justifiable; but I do not adopt it; neither do I, at present, impugn it. Nor am I at all more disposed to allow *Gerhard*, or *Brettschneider*, or *Reinhard*, whom you quote, to speak for me on the subject of eternal generation. I will not stop to canvass their respective modes of speaking.



They may all be erroneous; and yet the doctrine which they advocate a real and important article of the christian faith.

Permit me, then, to state, in a few words, the doctrine, as to this point, of which I am willing to be considered as the advocate. And I attempt this, as the venerable *Augustine* declares he undertook to discuss an allied subject—"Not so much for the purpose of *explaining* the truth, as of avoiding silence respecting it, and thus keeping back the truth."

I suppose, then, not only that there are three Persons in the adorable Godhead, and that "these Three are One, the same in substance, equal in power and glory;" but that these three Persons exist in a state of mysterious and ineffable *relation* to each other; that "each," as the illustrious *Calvin* expresses it, "is divinely related to the others, and yet distinguished from them by an incommunicable property;" and that, unitedly, these Persons constitute the only living and true God, so constantly declared in Scripture to be One, in distinction from all the false and multiplied gods of the benighted heathen. So far, if I do not mistake, you and I are substantially agreed.

But when we come to explain ourselves concerning the *distinctive titles*, by which the First and Second Persons of the Trinity are to be designated, we materially differ. We find in Scripture that the first two of these related Persons are distinguished from each other, and from the Third, by the titles *Father* and *Son*. Now, the question is, of what are these titles properly expressive? You maintain, that they are not intended to designate the necessary and eternal relation between these two Persons, but refer to an *official* character assumed in time. While I maintain, that the necessary and eternal relation just alluded to, is immediately intended to be expressed by these titles; that this relation is essentially and eternally such as to afford ground for applying to the First Person, *as such*, the title *Father*, and to the Second Person, *as such*, the title *Son*. What may be the precise *nature* of the relation intended to be expressed by these titles, I do not profess to know. They are, no doubt, used in condescension to the limited faculties of man, as most of those terms are, and must ever be, which are employed to tell us what God is. The relation expressed by them is, of course, *very different*, nay, *infinitely different* from that which is expressed by the same terms when applied to

*men*: and yet we may suppose, *so far resembles it*, as to render the use of these terms to express it, *proper*, and *more proper* than any other. But, however we may speculate on this point, my belief is, that the titles in question are used in Scripture to express, not any official investiture, or event, which took place in time; but the eternal relation of the First and Second Persons in the Godhead. That the First Person was from eternity Father, and the Second Person from eternity Son: Son, not by creation, or adoption, or incarnation, or office; but *by nature*; the true, proper, co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal Son of the Father, because from eternity possessing the same nature, and the same plenitude of Divine perfection with himself.

I suppose, further, that the terms, *begotten* and *generation*, are intended by the Spirit of God to refer to the same relation which the titles *Father* and *Son* express. If so, and if the Father was eternally Father, and the Son eternally Son; then the latter, in the sense meant to be conveyed by the term *begotten*, was *eternally begotten*. In one word, *the generation of the Son was eternal*. This language, I believe, is to be understood in a Divine and ineffable sense; in a sense as much above its

earthly sense, *as the heavens are higher than the earth*. I do not,—I repeat—admit that they imply *derivation, inferiority or subordination* on the part of the Son. Do you ask me, What they *do* imply? I might answer, “I do “not know,” and yet stand upon equally firm and tenable ground with yourself, when you give this answer to Dr. *Channing*, in reply to the question—“What is that distinction in the “Godhead which the term *Person* is intended “to designate?”—But I will not, at present, answer exactly thus; because I think there are several things which the Scriptures enable us, with some degree of intelligence, to say, that the language in question *does* imply. It implies that the Son does, in a sense analogous to, but infinitely above, that which is applicable to a human son, possess most perfectly, *the same nature* with his Father; that he is *the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his Person*. It implies, too, that there is between these ever blessed Persons an *intimacy and endearment of affection*, which passeth knowledge, and which can be expressed by no terms in use among men so properly, as by that love which subsists between a beloved Father, and an only Son. And, finally, it implies, that, *in the order of subsistence*, in a

sense also analogous to, but infinitely above, what takes place among men, *the Son is second to the Father*; that is second in such a sense as to be always named, when a systematick arrangement of the Persons is intended, in the *second place*;—second in *order*, though not in *perfection* or in *time*. I designate the relation which these divine Persons bear to each other by the terms *begotten* and *generation*, because I think the Holy Spirit uses these terms to express that relation: and because these are the terms used for expressing that relation among men, from which the whole of this language has been borrowed. I call it also, without scruple, *eternal generation*, because the relation which it designates is eternal; and I call it *necessary*, because I do not suppose that it is something *contingent*, or that it *might have been different* from what it is; but that it could no more have been otherwise, than we can suppose it possible for the character of the Most High to have been essentially different from that which is revealed.

I contend not, then, for any of those terms or phrases, which systematick writers have been wont to use when treating of this subject. I will not say a word in favour of *eternal communication*,—*eternal emanation*,—*eter-*

*nal procession*,—or any other forms of expression which Divines have been fond of employing in their attempts to illustrate the mysterious doctrine under consideration; although it ought to be recollected that no rational advocate of the doctrine ever thought of applying these terms in their earthly and ordinary sense. I am content, however, with the language of the Bible in relation to this point; and will give as little trouble as possible, by attempting to introduce illustrations of human devising.

If you ask me to *explain* the Scriptural terms *begotten*, *generation*, &c. when used in reference to the Son of God, I must pause, and *lay my hand on my mouth*. *Who*, as the Prophet asks—*Who shall declare his generation?* I will only once more say that I protest utterly against attaching to the terms in question, any of those carnal and grovelling ideas which the same terms excite when applied to the affairs of men. It is certain that there can be no relation of father and son among men, without implying both *derivation* and *posteriority* on the part of the latter: but I should consider myself as indulging no little hardihood, if I should venture to assert, that there could not be such an eternal relation between the First and Second Persons of the adorable Trinity, as might with

more propriety be expressed by the terms *Father* and *Son*, than by any other terms in the language of mortals, and yet not involve the least degree of either *derivation* or *posteriority* in time. No one, I suppose, ever thought of contending for the *literal* sense of these terms, in reference to the Persons of the Trinity; that is *literal*, when measured by their common, earthly sense. Their meaning, on this great subject, is not natural, but supernatural and Divine, and, of course, beyond the reach of our minds. I would say, with the venerable *Ambrose*, a pious Father of the fourth century, when speaking on this subject—"It is impossible for me to know the mystery of this generation. My tongue is silent, and not mine only, but the tongues of angels. It is above principalities, above angels, above the Cherubim, above the Seraphim, above all understanding. It is not lawful to search into these heavenly mysteries. It is lawful to know that he *was* born, but not lawful to examine *how* he was born. The former I dare not deny: the latter I am afraid to inquire into. For if *Paul*, when he was taken up into the third heaven affirms that the things which he heard could not be uttered, how can we express the mystery of the Di-

“vine Generation, which we can neither understand nor see?”\*

In the same strain speaks the learned and pious *Basil*—“Thou believest that he was begotten? Do not inquire *how*. For as it is in vain to inquire how he that is unbegotten is unbegotten; so neither ought we to inquire how He that is begotten, was begotten. Seek not to know what it is impossible to find out. Believe what is written; search not into what is not written.”†


Such is the doctrine of which I profess my belief, and which it is my object in this correspondence to maintain. It shall be my endeavour to exhibit my reasons for believing it in the following Letters.

\* *De Fide, ad Gratianum.*


† *Homil. 29.*



## LETTER III.



### *Testimony of Scripture.*



REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

THE first question which arises with respect to the subject of this correspondence, is, *What saith the Scripture?* It is first in importance, as well as first in order. In fact, all others are comparatively trivial; for I still adhere to the opinion expressed in my "Letters on Unitarianism," that "that which is not found in Scripture, however extensively and unanimately it may have been received by those who bear the christian name, must be rejected, as forming no part of the precious system which God has revealed to man for his salvation." I hope I am truly thankful that neither the Fathers, nor Tradition, nor the Church, are recognized by us as our guide in faith or practice. *To the law and to the testi-*

*mony*, then. I cheerfully join issue with you in appealing to this infallible rule; and sincerely rejoice that I am called to correspond with a Brother whom I can meet in this field with affection and confidence as on common ground.

In entering on this field of inquiry I need not remark to you, that it is a wide one, and that a volume larger than that to which I propose to confine myself in the whole correspondence, would be too small for the full discussion of this branch of the subject. This being obviously the case, I shall allow myself to select and urge only what appear to me the principal topicks of testimony and argument. For, on the one hand, if these should not be thought conclusive, it is not likely that any addition to their number would be more favourably regarded; and, on the other, if they should be deemed sufficient, it will be unnecessary further to multiply particulars.

I propose, in the first place, to adduce the leading testimony of Scripture in favour of the eternal Sonship of the Saviour; and, having done this, to attempt a short examination of what you have advanced in support of the opposite opinion.

I begin, then, with those considerations

drawn from the Word of God, which have fully satisfied me that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the Second Person of the Trinity is a doctrine of christianity. A cursory view of these will occupy the whole of the present Letter.

But, in entering on this part of my task, I am met, my dear Sir, by one passage in your Letters, which, I acknowledge, fills me with despondency, as to the prospect of any satisfactory result from any effort which I can make. It is in the following words—(p. 161.)

“ Let us now proceed one step further. On the  
 “ supposition that there ARE passages of Scrip-  
 “ ture which speak of the Logos as *eternally*  
 “ *begotten* (which you seem to assert, on p.  
 86. but which I find not in the Scriptures)  
 “ would it of course follow, that a *real* and  
 “ *proper generation* was intended to be indi-  
 “ cated, as *Turretine, Gerhard,* and many  
 “ others have asserted? I think not. And my  
 “ reason is, that the nature of God, as a *self-*  
 “ *existent, independent,* and immutable Being,  
 “ forbids us to apply such an exegesis; pro-  
 “ vided we admit that the Logos is, as the  
 “ Scriptures assert, *supreme God. Derivation*  
 “ is incompatible with these predicates.”—It  
 seems, then, that even if I should succeed in

producing passages of Scripture which assert, ever so unequivocally, the doctrine which I maintain, you would, nevertheless, not believe it; but would take for granted that the words, whatever their apparent import might be, meant something else! When I read this paragraph, I certainly should have laid down my pen, had I not trusted that it escaped you in an unguarded moment, and that you really did not mean to express what the language appears to me to import. Wherein the spirit of it differs from the principle of interpretation avowed and acted upon by our Unitarian neighbours, I acknowledge my utter inability to perceive. But I will not so construe it; and will proceed with the same fraternal confidence to adduce my Scriptural testimony, as if it had never been written.

I. My first argument in favour of the eternal Sonship of Christ, is drawn from the correlate titles of *Father* and *Son* which are confessedly applied to the First and Second Persons in the adorable Trinity. I find, as I think, the term *Father* to be the distinctive title given to the First Person of the Trinity *as such*; and that not only in a single instance, or in a few instances, but throughout the New Testament. This is evidently the highest title used to ex-

press the Divine and eternal character of the First Person. If this be not his distinctive and appropriate appellation, as such, I should be at a loss to say what that appellation *is* ; for I recollect no other in all the Bible. Now if the peculiar and distinguishing title of the First Person be *Father*, this fact furnishes, in my apprehension, strong presumptive evidence, that the correlative term, *Son*, is the distinctive title of the Second Person, *as such*. The two titles, in fact, appear to call for each other, and to be inseparably related. Without a Son, there can be no Father ; without a Father, no Son. If the term Son be understood to designate, not the Divine and eternal character of the Second Person, but an official character, commencing in time ; then prior to that time, the title of Father did not properly belong to the First Person, and, of course, is not expressive of his character as a Person in the Godhead. But it appears to me perfectly plain, that the title *Father* *is* applied to the First Person, *as such*, and *is* intended to express his Divine and eternal character ; and, therefore, I infer with equal confidence, that the title *Son* is applied to the Second Person *as such*, and is, consequently, in like manner, intended to express his eternal Divinity. Upon your theory,

what reason can be assigned for one of the Persons being uniformly denominated *Father*? If the three Persons, originally, that is from eternity, stood in precisely the *same relation* to each other, or, in other words, had not each some *peculiarity* on the score of *relation*, I do not see how the *First* should be considered, as he constantly is, *Father* to the *Second*, rather than to the *Third*. This argument strikes me with so much force, that, I acknowledge, if there were no other to be found in scripture, it would satisfy me that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship is a doctrine of revelation.

I am confirmed in my estimate of the strength and value of this argument, by observing the manner in which those who reject the eternal generation of the Son, escape from its force. They are compelled to deny that the term *Father* is the appropriate title of the First Person, *as such*: and are ultimately driven to this conclusion, that the First Person has *no appropriate title as such*. But if the First Person has no appropriate title, how are we to know him, or speak of him in his appropriate character? Nay, how can it be shewn that he is revealed to us at all in that character? Truly, my dear Brother, the more I trace reasonings of this kind to their results, the more I recoil, with a

kind of shuddering, from what appears to me their tendency to unsettle the most established language and truths of our blessed religion.

You observe, that the title Father, when applied to the First Person, may mean to express no more than his relation to his creatures, as their Creator, Protector, and common Parent, and also to the Messiah, as miraculously conceived and exalted to the throne. But if this be so, then we have, in one of the most solemn ordinances of our religion, the ordinance of Baptism, a solemn invocation, which christians have, generally, in all ages, supposed to be expressive of the holy and undivided Trinity, as such; but which, according to this hypothesis, is expressive, not of eternal and essential character, but of posterior and subordinate relations. For after a while we learn, that you doubt, too, whether the *Holy Spirit* has an appropriate title in scripture, expressive of his Divine and eternal character, as the Third Person in the Trinity. Is this really so? One great source of my reverence and pleasure in administering the ordinance of Baptism to others; and in receiving it for my own beloved offspring, has always been, that, in repeating the form prescribed by the Saviour, I supposed I was repeating appropriate titles, expressive of the Persons of

the Tri-une God, in their divine and eternal relations. Have I been always labouring under a mistake? Have the impressions and the language of the great body of christians, for nearly two thousand years, been altogether erroneous? Are there no titles by which the believer can draw near to his covenant God, as such, and in the same Divine and eternal character in which the everlasting counsels of peace were formed?

Besides; does not the Scripture represent the Son of God as bearing an equally near relation to the creatures, as their Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, as the Father? *HE made the worlds. By him every thing was made that was made. He upholds all things by the word of his power. All power in heaven and in earth is committed to him.* So that if either Person is peculiarly entitled to the name of *Father*, on the score of creation and providence, it is rather the *Second* than the *First*. As little reason is there for calling the Father by this name, on account of the generation of the human nature of the Son in the womb of the Virgin; for that was, in a peculiar sense, the act of the *Holy-Ghost*. In short, the title of *Father* cannot, I think, be applied to the *First Person* of the *Trinity* on



account of any of his works in time; works either of creation or providence, of nature or of grace; for in all these the Son and Holy Spirit are undoubtedly represented every where in Scripture as equal agents.

I acknowledge, too, my dear Sir, I am quite as little satisfied with another remark which you make in relation to this point. You say, with a view to obviate some of the difficulties before stated, that you consider the terms *Father, Son* and *Holy Ghost*, as intended merely to designate the distinctions of the Godhead, *as manifested to us in the economy of redemption*, and not as intended to mark the eternal relations of the Godhead, *as they are in themselves, and in respect to each other*. I have always supposed that the principal object of the economy of redemption was to glorify the tri-une God, by manifesting the appropriate and eternal distinctions of the Godhead; by shewing the true glory of God, *as he is in himself*, more illustriously than it ever was or can be exhibited in any other way. The Scriptures appear to me clearly to teach this; nay, to intimate that all the *principalities and powers in heavenly places*, will learn from the redemption of the church the manifold glories of Jehovah. But, if your supposition be correct, I do

not see why something much inferior to this may not prove to be the object of that great work. In other words, that the work of Redemption, instead of being designed to display the character of God, in his essential and everlasting glories; was merely intended to display his relations to a single inferior race of creatures. Am I in an error in supposing that this would follow? I can truly say, that in suggesting it, I state nothing but what appears to me a legitimate inference from your premises.

On the whole, then, the more I contemplate the consequences of other schemes, with the deeper conviction do I return to the position with which I set out. If the title *Father*, be the appropriate title of the First Person of the blessed Trinity, as such, and expressive of his Divine and eternal character, as I firmly believe; and if an eternal Father necessarily supposes an eternal Son, as I must think it does; then it unavoidably follows, that the Second Person of the Trinity is Son, as such, and consequently that his Sonship is Divine and eternal.

II. The manner in which the phrase *Son of God*, is used in the New Testament, especially when taken in connection with the sense in which we have reason to believe that phrase

was popularly understood, under the Old Testament economy, appears to me strongly to establish the same truth.

You confess, my dear Sir, after all the examples which you adduce of the diversified application of the phrases, *Son of God*, and *sons of God*—you confess, that there is an appropriate and exalted sense in which the phrase in question is applied to our blessed Saviour. Some examples of this you have specified. Others, and I think stronger than any you have selected, might have been mentioned. I shall content myself with quoting a very few, for the purpose of at once illustrating and enforcing the argument drawn from this title.

*Matthew xxviii. 19. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. John iii. 16. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, &c. John i. 14, 18. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. John v. 22, 23, 25. The Father judgeth*

no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given the Son to have life in himself. John x. 30. I and my Father are one. John xvii. 1. 5. Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, WITH THE GLORY WHICH I HAD WITH THEE BEFORE THE WORLD WAS. Hebrews i. 1, 2, 3, 8. 10. God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. But unto the Son he saith, THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOR EVER AND EVER, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. AND THOU,

LORD, IN THE BEGINNING HAST LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH; *and the heavens are the works of thine hands.* Hebrews v. 8. *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.* 1 John iii. 8. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* 1 John v. 20. *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.* THIS IS THE TRUE GOD, *and eternal life.*

Some of these passages will be more particularly considered in detail afterwards. In the mean time, I will say of them, in general, that they appear to me clearly to teach, that *the Son is equal with the Father*, and entitled, as such, to equal honours:—That the Son, *as the Son*, had *a glory with the Father before the world began*:—That the Son, as such, was the *Creator of the world*:—That, as Son, HE IS GOD:—That, as Son, he was the object of most peculiar and endeared affection on the part of the Father before the world was; and that, therefore, not *sparing him* to come on such an errand, was an instance of unparalleled condescension and love:—That he did not be-

*come Son*, in consequence of the official honours which were conferred upon him; but that he was *entitled* to these honours, and *qualified* to sustain them, because he was, *previously*, the Son of God.—In short, these, and a number of other passages which speak of the glory of the Son of God, appear to me to be among the very strongest in all the New Testament for maintaining the essential and eternal Divinity of the Second Person in the Godhead; and I cannot divest myself of the impression, that every argument which is employed to show that the Sonship of the Saviour is not Divine and eternal, so far as it prevails, must, in the same proportion, undermine the evidence of the Saviour's Divinity.

The view which I have taken of the force of these passages, seems to be strongly confirmed, by adverting to that sense which is known to have been attached to the phrase *Son of God*, by the Jews of that age, and of the preceding times.

It is remarkable that the expression, *Son of God*, was habitually used by our Saviour, and his Apostles, as well as by those who conversed with them, whether friends or adversaries, without stopping to explain it; with the familiarity of persons who knew that they were

employing a common and well understood title. Now, on the supposition that this was a *new* title, which the Jews of that age were not accustomed to employ, the fact that it was thus frequently employed, without explanation, is wholly unaccountable. But, on the supposition that it had been long in use among them, in a particular and well known sense; then the manner in which it is used by the Saviour and his disciples is perfectly natural. The Jewish rulers appeared to be perfectly familiar with the expression, and at no loss to affix a definite meaning to it. When *Nathaniel* saw Christ for the first time approaching him, he cried out—*Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!* And when the *Centurion*, watching the cross, heard the earthquake, and saw the things which were done, he exclaimed, *Truly this was the Son of God!* We can hardly suppose that these were mere unmeaning or accidental effusions. There is every appearance of language employed in conformity with a fixed popular habit.

The question, then, is, whether there is any evidence that the title, *Son of God*, was actually in familiar use among the Jews at the time of our Lord's advent, in reference to the Messiah; and if so, in what sense it was em-

ployed? And in answer to these questions, I do consider it as conclusively and satisfactorily shewn, by Dr. *Allix*, in his *Judgment of the Jewish Church*; by *Morænus*, in the sixth chapter of his work *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*; by *Gale*, in his *Court of the Gentiles*; by *Cudworth*, in his *Intellectual System*; by *Bishop Kidder*, in his *Demonstration of the Messiah*, and by other learned men, that, at the time of our Lord's appearance in the flesh, the titles, *Son of God*, and *Logos*, or *Word of God*, were in common use among the Jews, and had been so for a number of centuries; and further, that both these titles were considered as interchangeably applicable to the same Person, and both equally implying a proper eternity and Divinity. The examples of this produced by the distinguished writers just mentioned, as well as frequently occurring in *Philo*, a learned Jew, contemporary with our Saviour, I must consider as precluding all doubt of the fact, that the *Son of God* was regarded by them as a Person in the Trinity, and as co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. And if this be so, it must, I think, be considered by all impartial people, as pouring a flood of light on the import of this term as it is used in the New Testament; and also as de-



ending beyond controversy, that it was used in a similar sense, and was so intended to be understood, by our Lord and his apostles.

But if the title, *Son of God*, was in familiar use among the Jews, during our Lord's ministry on earth, as a name of the expected Messiah, which I consider myself as having a right to assume; I ask, what could have been the *ground* of this title in their minds? Surely neither his miraculous conception, nor his extraordinary resurrection from the dead, in neither of which they believed, and of which one had not yet occurred. It was evidently something independent of both, and prior to both.

Accordingly, when the Saviour appropriated to himself the title *Son of God*, the Jews accused him of thereby *making himself equal with God*. I will not here stop to inquire, whether the inference, that taking this title was *making himself equal with God*, is to be understood as drawn by the inspired historian, or by the cavilling Jews. I am content to receive it as the latter. They evidently understood the title, then, precisely in conformity with what the writers above mentioned have proved to have been the sense of it popularly received. I do not forget, my dear Sir, that

you deny that the Jews, on the occasions referred to, *did* understand our Lord as taking a title which in itself implied Divinity. But I cannot agree to your interpretation, for the following reasons.

(1.) If the *popular sense* of *Son*, as applied to the Messiah, was expressive of his Divine and eternal nature, it is most natural to suppose that the Jews understood him in that sense.

(2.) If our Lord meant to give such an explanation of the title *Son of God*, as to shew the Jews that it did not necessarily imply Divinity, and, of course, that he had not been guilty of *blasphemy* in assuming it; it had been easy to do so in a single sentence; but if this was his aim, it is evident that he succeeded very ill in silencing their cavils, and satisfying their minds; for if we compare *John* v. 17—30, with *John* x. 22—40, after all his explanation, they were still as much exasperated as before, and seemed to abate nothing of their horror at the fancied presumptuousness of his claim. To which I add—

(3.) That if the explanation which Christ gives of his claim be attentively considered, in all its parts, it fully and necessarily amounts to all that the Jews alledged. He does not tell

them that he is *not* God, or that he does not *make himself equal with God*; which he would, no doubt, have done, if it had been consistent with truth and justice, in order to repel so serious a charge as that of blasphemy. On the contrary, instead of relinquishing his claim of Divine character, he rather confirms and extends it; representing the honours and works of the Son to be such as belong to Divinity only, and the same, in all respects, as those which belong to the Father. My impression, then, is that he *did* advance claims to his most exalted character, before the Jews, and the result appears to me to confirm my impression. If the Son, as such, be *one with the Father*;—if, as such, he is to be *honoured equally with the Father*;—if, as such, he is to *raise the dead, and judge the world*;—the inference is irresistible, that his Sonship is Divine and eternal.

III. I attach no small importance to those passages of Scripture, which represent the Father as NOT SPARING HIS SON;—GIVING HIS SON;—SENDING FORTH HIS SON, &c. Of this class of Scriptures, I will offer only the following specimen. *John iii. 16. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,*

*but have everlasting life. Romans viii. 3. 32. God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh; and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, &c.? Galatians iv. 4. When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law. 1 John iii. 8. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John v. 20. And we know that the Son of God is come, &c.*

Now the argument which the friends of the doctrine of eternal generation have long been in the habit of drawing from such passages, is this—If the Son of God was *not spared*, was *given*, was *sent forth*; these expressions plainly imply that the Father had a Son to send; and of course, that he was Son *before* he was given, before he was sent forth, before he was manifested. If his Sonship were founded on his incarnation, or his investiture with the Mediatorial office, then it would have been more strictly proper to say, that God sent forth the Mediator that he *might become* his Son. But we find no such expression in the New Testament. If any one were

to say, that a *physician*, or a *clergyman*, or a *nobleman* was sent to a distant country on some important business, would not every one naturally understand him to mean, that the individual sent had sustained the profession, or borne the office ascribed to him *previously* to his mission? Undoubtedly such would be the only natural and legitimate meaning of the declaration. Surely, then, the obvious meaning of all such passages as are quoted above is, that the Son of God was Son, *before* he was given, and that it was in the character of Son that he was sent forth.

You recognize this argument as a plausible one, and acknowledge that it is likely, more than most others on my side of the question, to make a popular impression. Yet you think it of no real force. I am not at all convinced by the reasonings which you employ to shew that this is the case. You say, (p. 141.) “ One  
 “ general objection lies against interpreting  
 “ any of these texts in the manner described;  
 “ for if filiation be understood of the *Logos*  
 “ himself, it would imply, of course, that he  
 “ had been *twice* Son;—Son in his Divine na-  
 “ ture, and Son in his human nature; a doctrine  
 “ which, though believed by some of the Fa-  
 “ thers, and advocated in this form, is not, so

“ far as I can perceive, taught in any part of “ the Bible.”—The force, or even the ground of this objection, I confess, is not apparent to my mind. I know of no advocates of the doctrine of eternal generation who hold or admit that Christ was twice Son. They believe, if I understand them, at least I believe, that the Sonship of Christ is *one* only; that it consists in his eternal relation to the Father. I believe that this Son was *sent forth, given, manifested*; but not *twice born*, as the Son of God. Nor am I able to see how this opinion exposes me, in the remotest degree, to the charge of maintaining “ *two literal filiations.*”

You are undoubtedly correct in saying, that some of the Fathers did speak of *two* filiations; one from *eternity*, and one *in time*. But if I comprehend the meaning of the most of those who speak thus, they intend to convey no ideas materially, if at all, different from what I have just stated. They give the name of *generation*, indeed, to the Saviour’s coming forth at the creation, and to his birth of the Virgin; but, in general, they seem to me to mean nothing more by this expression than *manifestation, or appearing to men, or coming forth to act*. But I propose to consider this more fully in a subsequent Letter.

Nor am I at all more forcibly impressed with the other suggestions which you make for the purpose of repelling this argument. You say (p. 143.) that in the New Testament, the modes of expression referred to,—*coming into the world—sent into the world*—“are often “used in the sense of *entering upon the duties of any publick office.*” And you exemplify your meaning by the case of *John the Baptist. There was a man sent from God.* Here you appear to me to have entirely lost sight of the point of the argument. This case of *John* serves my purpose admirably. *There was a man sent from God.* Was he not a man BEFORE he was sent forth? Or did he *become* a man—was he *constituted* a man, *by* entering on the duties of his publick office? Your other example, from “*Rabinnick usage,*” answers my purpose just as well. “*The master has come,*” you say, means, according to that usage, that the Master *teaches or is teaching.* But this, surely, does not imply that he is not a master or a teacher *previously* to his entering the apartment in which his pupils convene, for the purpose of being taught; or that it is by the *act* of teaching that his character as such is constituted. If you were to be told that a Society in the United States had *sent* a well

qualified and experienced teacher of languages or of science to *India*, would you not suppose that he had borne this character before he went? or, would you rather suppose that his mission created this character? Unless you can suppose the latter, I must believe that all the examples which you draw from the Scriptures or from “Rabinnick usage,” make, most decisively for my doctrine, and not for yours.

IV. Another consideration drawn from Scripture, I acknowledge, weighs very strongly with me in favour of the Divine and eternal Sonship for which I plead. Throughout the New Testament, great stress is laid on the Fathers’ wonderful condescension and love, in not sparing his *Son*, his *only Son*, his *well beloved Son*, who *dwelt in his bosom*, but in delivering him up to humiliation, sufferings and death. The inspired writers represent the salvation of man, purchased, as they declare, by this stupendous sacrifice, as a most amazing, incomprehensible instance of mercy and grace. They represent this gift as expressive of a love passing all knowledge, which *the Angels desire to look into*, but which transcends in its wonderful character even the grasp of their exalted minds. They tell us, in language before quoted, that *God so loved the world, that*



*He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. That in THIS the love of God was manifested towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. The Saviour himself also, in Mark xii. 6. in the parable of the vineyard, very strongly conveys the same idea. Having yet, therefore, ONE SON, HIS WELL BELOVED, He sent Him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my Son, &c. And in the view of this unspeakable Gift, it is said, Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins!*

In all these passages, it seems to be implied, if I can construe language, not only that the Father HAD A SON, before he was sent, who was infinitely beloved, but that in the original *counsel* and *determination* to send this glorious Personage to be the Saviour of sinners, there was a real and immeasurable exercise, if I may so speak, of paternal feeling, put to an unparalleled test, and exercised to an extent incomprehensible by creatures. Whether this is not the spirit of the inspired representation, I appeal to the most cursory reader.

Now, on the supposition, that the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, who became incarnate for our salvation, is really, literally, and essentially, though mysteriously, the eternal Son of God. Supposing that He does truly bear this close, endearing, and ineffable relation to the Father. That is, supposing that He is truly and eternally related to the eternal Father in a manner analogous to the relation between father and son among men, and therefore most fitly represented by terms drawn from that relation, but incomprehensibly above it in glory; then these representations are just, forcible, as full of beauty and tenderness, as of truth, and will meet a grateful response in the heart of every believer, and especially of every believer who is a *parent*. And I cannot but persuade myself that, from the frequency, the particularity, and the peculiar emphasis with which this consideration is dwelt upon, not only in one or a few passages of of Scripture, but in passages innumerable, it was intended to make a deep impression on the minds of all, but especially on the parents' heart.

We are told, however, that all this is mere fancy. That between the First and Second Persons in the Trinity there never was any

paternal relation or feeling whatever. And, of course, that in the determination to send the Second Person into our world, incarnate in human nature, there were no paternal feelings either put to the test or exercised. But, on this supposition; on the supposition, that the Sonship of Christ so emphatically spoken of, is rather *metaphorical* than *real*: if it is not grounded on any Divine and eternal relation to the Father, but on *the office* itself in which He came *to seek and to save* sinners: if He was not a Son at all before He came, but merely had a Sonship constituted or originated by the act of coming: if the Second Person of the Trinity, who was eternally with the Father, but, as such, was not a Son, nor, in this character, the emphatically *well beloved, who was in the bosom of the Father*, and acquired a title to this language only by taking on himself an inferior nature, even the nature of sinful man: if, in short, the Sonship which is made the ground of such frequent and solemn appeal, has nothing more of the character of real *Sonship* on the one hand, or of the feelings of *paternity*, (if I may be allowed so to speak) on the other, than what is constituted by events subsequent to this great, inconceivable act of love implied in the original deter-

mination to give the Son; then I must say, that the whole aspect of the representation appears to me strange and unaccountable to the last degree! Nay, (with reverence I would write it) if this were all that was intended by the Sonship so much and so strongly insisted upon in the passages above alluded to, as an object of wonder, gratitude and praise; I should say, it was little less than practising an imposition on the understandings of those addressed; little less than attempting to impress them with figure, and even bombast, rather than precious reality. In a word, in this case, all our ideas of the peculiar and ineffable tenderness and love of the Father, in giving up his Son to humiliation and suffering for sinners, would be, so far as my feelings can instruct me on the subject, not only essentially diminished, but made in a great measure to vanish away. But I cannot, for a moment, admit a principle which leads me to such a conclusion.

V. Further; the manner in which the penmen of the New Testament speak of the INCARNATION of the Son of God, convinces me that that Sonship is Divine and eternal. And this conviction is decisively fortified by comparing this language with that used, in

other places, to express the incarnation of the Logos, the divine and eternal existence of whom, you acknowledge, admits of no doubt. One inspired apostle tells us, that *God was manifested in the flesh*. Another inspired apostle declares, that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. Again, we are told, that *God sent forth his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*. And again, that *the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil*. How remarkably similar these modes of expression! *God was manifested in the flesh—the Word was made flesh—the Son was manifested—was sent forth in the likeness of flesh*. Judging from these passages, are not God, the Word, and the Son the very same? The two former you acknowledge express Divinity; and why not the latter? If the Divinity of the Second Person existed, underived and glorious before He was *manifested in the flesh*; and if *the Word was with God, and was God*, before He was *made flesh*, every consideration drawn from similarity of expression would lead us to suppose, that the Son also, was Son in a high and incomprehensible sense, *before He was sent forth in the likeness of flesh*, and that his ineffable Sonship was not the *result*, but the

*foundation* of his appointment to the office of Redeemer, and one of his essential *qualifications* for discharging the duties of that office.

VI. Again; the titles, and the representation of the Persons of the Trinity, given in the New Testament, appear to have been intended to express RELATION TO EACH OTHER, as well as co-eternity and co-equality. The Second Person is represented as mysteriously "*begotten*"—eternally begotten of the First, and the Third as "*proceeding*," in a high and incomprehensible manner, from the First and Second. Hence the Holy Ghost is called *the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father*; *John xv. 26.* Again, he is called *the Spirit of the Son*,—*Gal. iv. 6.* And the Son promises to *send him*, and he is said to be actually sent of the Son. *John xv. 26. and xvi. 7.* Accordingly, this has been the uniform belief of the great body of Christians, Catholick and Protestant, for many centuries. This doctrine is incorporated in all their creeds, so far as I recollect, without a single exception. Now, my argument is this. The several parts of this system must stand or fall together; and, I presume, will always be found to do so. Those who deny the eternal generation of the Son, will naturally, and almost unavoidably, deny

the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. The learned and pious Dr. *Ridgeley*, explicitly does this. I gather, from your Letters, my dear Sir, that you also, do the same. Indeed I know of no one who rejects the former, who does not also reject the latter. And, the truth is, the same general reasoning which leads any man to discard the one, can scarcely fail of leading him to discard the other. I know that this fact does not prove that either of these doctrines is true and scriptural; but certainly it proves so much;—that denying the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, is not a mere insulated point in theology; that it bears extensive and by no means uninteresting relations; that it breaks up a system; that it invades pretty seriously the matter, as well as the phraseology, of established creeds; and that it leaves us without any titles or language which seem adapted to express close and endearing RELATION between the Persons of the ever blessed Trinity. Whether this consideration has been, in all cases, sufficiently weighed, I will not undertake to say. But I will say, that it strikes me as a very important consideration; that it presents, to my view, a very serious barrier, which, if I were proceeding in your course, I should consider myself as bound fairly

to surmount, before I could feel at full liberty to go forward.

So far as I know, the orthodox believers in the Trinity have been in the habit, from time immemorial, of considering the Persons in the Godhead as united by **INEFFABLE RELATIONS**, and yet as all **DISTINGUISHED BY INCOMMUNICABLE PROPERTIES**. This has always been a leading and indispensable idea. Accordingly, when we consider the Second Person, as standing related by a *Divine Filiation* to the First; and the Third, as being, in a divine and incomprehensible sense, the *Spiration*, or *Breath* of the First and Second; a system is presented which provides for the idea in question in all its fulness; while it accords most happily with the language of Scripture. But, according to your view of the subject, there would seem to be **NO RELATION AT ALL** between the Persons of the Trinity; that is, there seem to be no *titles* or *representations*, on your plan, which indicate *related states* between these Persons. You speak, indeed, of Persons—and sometimes of “*distinctions*”—in the Trinity; but, while you discard the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as indicating eternal and ineffable relations between these Divine Persons, I cannot see that you substitute any others in their



place. You give us no *names* expressive of either *relation* or *distinction*. In short, you seem to me to exhibit and to leave the subject, as to this point, under an aspect altogether unfriendly to scriptural views of related Persons in one Tri-une Jehovah; and calculated to favour either *Sabellianism* on the one hand, or *Tri-theism* on the other.

VII. I will now proceed to consider some of those detached passages of Scripture, which I am constrained to regard as teaching the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. And as most of them have been much canvassed by late writers, I shall, with respect to the greater part of them, do little more than state my interpretation in the most cursory manner, without attempting to enter largely into that boundless field of verbal criticism, which to many is so tempting; but for which I acknowledge myself never to have had much either of taste or talent.

The first passage, which I shall adduce, and which I cannot help thinking affords powerful support to my cause, is found in *Proverbs* viii. 22—31. You have, indeed, dismissed these verses with an unceremoniousness, which, to one who did not know you so well as I do, would seem to promise but little disposition to

weigh impartially what may be offered in favour of the usual interpretation. But I have so much confidence in your candour, that I am sure you will accompany me, without impatience, for a few moments, while I offer a word or two in support of that interpretation.

That *the Wisdom* here spoken of does not refer to an attribute of *man*, I presume it is hardly necessary to say. Your idea respecting it seems to be, that it is an attribute of the Deity strikingly and beautifully personified. This is the old Socinian exposition of the passage; but to this gloss I have objections which appear to me insuperable. My *first* objection is, that it is contrary to the whole current of Christian expositors in all ages. In the ancient church none ever questioned, that by *Wisdom* here is intended the Son of God; and all orthodox commentators, of any name, since the reformation, have, so far as I recollect, with scarcely any exception, adopted the same interpretation. My *second* objection is, that applying such expressions as these—*I was set up from everlasting—when there were no depths I was brought forth—when he prepared the heavens, I was there—when he appointed the foundations of the earth, then, I was by him, as one brought up with him—*

*and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him*—I say applying such expressions as these, to a mere attribute of Deity, appears to me so great, not to say so violent a departure from all the usages of language, that I cannot suppose a sober writer, much less an inspired one, would pursue a course so extremely likely to mislead. That we should be told gravely that a necessary and eternal perfection of the Most High was *always with him—was set up from everlasting—was brought up with him—and rejoicing always before him.*—That it should be said of Wisdom, as a mere attribute, *counsel is mine, and sound wisdom,*—that is that an attribute may be the subject of an attribute, or that a thing may be said to possess itself—is what I confess I have not, as yet, a sufficient “understanding of the nature of Hebrew poetry, and of poetick language in general,” to enable me to digest. My *third* objection is, that the Wisdom which speaks in this chapter, is evidently the same that speaks in chapter i. 20, &c. of the same book; and that the Wisdom which speaks in the latter, is plainly, I had almost said incontestibly, not an attribute, but a divine Person. My *fourth* objection is, that Wisdom is one of the titles expressly given to Christ in the New

Testament; and also that the principal things here attributed to Wisdom, are elsewhere clearly attributed to the Son of God. My *fifth* objection is, that I think it has been made out to demonstration, by Dr. *Allix*, in his *Judgment of the Jewish Church*, and by other writers on the same subject, as before stated, that the ancient Jewish uninspired writers, were in the constant habit of using the terms *Word* and *Wisdom*, interchangeably, as *proper names* for the Second Person of the Trinity; which clearly renders it more likely that a work written by an inspired Jew, for the use of Jews, would employ the same language in the same signification.

With respect to an expression in the 24th verse, *When there were no depths, I was BROUGHT FORTH*;—and a similar one in the 25th you say, (Letters, p. 127.) “It is the action of *parturition*, and not of *generation*, which is indicated by this language.” Pardon me, my dear Sir;—it is with unfeigned diffidence that I ask the question of one whom I know to be so much my superior in Biblical criticism;—but are you not mistaken? I grant that our English translation of those verses would naturally lead to such a conclusion. And I grant, too, that the radical word חוּל, here

in question, does *sometimes* signify *parturivit*. But do not the best lexicographers tell us that it signifies—*genuit, generavit, cum de viris usurpatur, et peperit, cum de mulieribus*? The word is moreover, in this place, in the Pyhal preterite, in which form the Lexicons give *genuit* and *peperit*: which we are to adopt, is, of course, to be determined only by the question whether a *father* or a *mother* is spoken of. Now, it is evident that, in the place before us, our Lord's relation to the virgin *Mary* is *not* spoken of, for in that case the assertion would not be true. If, then, the passage refers to Christ, what is said is in reference to his relation to God the Father; and this is evident from the context. But, throughout the Bible, the *masculine* gender only is applied to God the Father. The word in question, therefore, in this place, ought to have been translated *begotten*, and will not, as it appears to me, legitimately bear any other interpretation. This, of course, coincides exactly with the doctrine which I maintain, and could not, I should say, be reconciled with any other. To this may be added, that the same word here translated *brought forth*, is used in *Deut.* xxxii. 18, in *Job* xxvi. 13; and in

*Psalm xc. 2*, in every one of which cases the idea of *parturition* is absolutely precluded.

You acknowledge that the early Fathers generally supposed that the Logos of the apostle *John* was the Person speaking in the eighth chapter of *Proverbs*. You ascribe this, however, to their very imperfect acquaintance with the “principles of sacred exegesis.” And you add—“At the present hour, after  
“the lapse of more than fifteen centuries, and  
“with all the advantages which commentaries  
“and lexicons can now offer to the interpre-  
“ters of Scripture, there are multitudes of  
“writers who still find the Logos in the same  
“passage of Solomon’s writings.” For my part, I cordially rejoice that it is so. Long may the friends of truth continue thus faithful to the trust committed to them! Far distant hence be the time—(and in this wish I am sure the respected Brother to whom I write, whatever may be his opinion about a particular passage, will heartily join with me) Far distant hence be the time when the disciples of Christ shall yield themselves to the guidance of those Commentators and Lexicographers who bewilder and mislead by their proffered help, and would teach men to banish the Saviour from the pages of his own word!

Strikingly coincident as it appears to me with the text just commented on, is another passage, in *Proverbs* xxx. 4. *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and WHAT HIS SON'S NAME, if thou canst tell?* On this text, I must say, with the judicious and excellent *Dr. Scott*, that, although other interpretations have been frequently adopted, “ yet it seems to me a  
 “ prophetic intimation of Him who came  
 “ down from heaven to be our Instructor and  
 “ Saviour, and then ascended into heaven to  
 “ be our Advocate; who, as One with the  
 “ Father, created and upholds all things; who  
 “ was known in some measure to the ancient  
 “ church as *JEHOVAH, I AM*, and as the Only  
 “ begotten Son, and from whom alone the  
 “ knowledge of God can be obtained.”—If the Sonship here spoken of, were founded entirely on the Saviour's coming into the world, or being invested with the mediatorial office, I should certainly think the language of this text singular and unaccountable; but on the supposition that it refers to an eternal and ineffable filiation, which far transcends our fa-

culties, and to which nothing earthly can be compared, then it is perfectly natural, and peculiarly appropriate.—Besides; when this text was penned, according to your plan, there was no Son of God. His Sonship did not commence until a number of centuries afterwards. If this had been so, would the sacred writer have been at all likely to use such language?

Again; I am constrained to lay no little stress, as a testimony in favour of my doctrine, on *John i. 14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* Here my argument is, that the *glory of the WORD* is said to be *the glory of the ONLY BEGOTTEN of the Father*; plainly implying, as it appears to me, that the Word, as such, is *begotten*: and, as the Word is acknowledged by you to be Divine and eternal; nay, as the Word is expressly said, in this very chapter, to have been *in the beginning with God, to be God, and to have made the world*; and as the *Son and Word* in this passage are evidently the same; so it is manifest that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

Perhaps it will be alledged, that between the *Word* and the *Only begotten* of the Fa-



ther, only *likeness* is predicated,—not *identity*. But does not the particle ὡς, which our translators render *as*, express in the original much more than *likeness* or *similarity*? Some excellent criticks, I think, assure us that it does; that its import is *indeed* or *truly*; and that it denotes what is *indeed* or *really* the *same* with what had been before mentioned. The learned Dr. *Macknight* expresses himself with regard to this point thus. “ Ὡς is “ sometimes used affirmatively, and must be “ translated *indeed, truly, certainly, actually*; “ for *Hesychius* and *Phavorinus* tell us, that “ ὡς is put for οὐτως, ἀληθῶς. *Nehemiah* vii. 2. “ Αὐτός ὡς ἀνὴρ ἀληθῆς, *He was indeed a true* “ *man, Matt. xiv. 5. He feared the multitude,* “ *because they counted (John, ὡς προφῆτης)* “ *really a prophet, John i. 14. We beheld his* “ *glory, the glory (ὡς μονογενῆς) indeed of the* “ *only begotten of the Father, Acts xvii. 22.* “ *I see that in all things ye are (ὡς) certainly* “ *most religious. Romans ix. 32. But (ὡς)* “ *actually by works of law. 2 Cor. ii. 17.* “ Αλλ’ ὡς ἐξ εὐκρινείας, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐκ Θεοῦ. *But* “ *indeed from sincerity, and from God.*”\*

In this sense of the particle in question, the

\* *Preliminary Essays*, iv. vol. i. p. 160.

learned *Schleusner* concurs; though he does not assign to it the first place in his list.

If the above criticism be correct, then the passage in question may be thus paraphrased—“ *We beheld his glory, that glory which was proper and peculiar to Him who is originally the same in nature with the Father, and eternally begotten of him, in such an inconceivable manner, as none other besides himself ever was.*”\*

In accordance with this interpretation, *Grotius* observes, on this place, that the Evangelist *John* evidently here aims at the *Gnostics*, who represented the *Word* as one, the *Only begotten* another, and *Jesus* the third; and who reckoned the *Only begotten* among their *Æons*, born before this world. This he has no doubt the apostle meant to condemn; and to assert that our Lord Jesus Christ is the only true *Word of God*, the true only begotten *Son of the Father*, as being alone begotten by him before all time.

There is a class of Scriptures which I have long thought worthy of notice in reference to this subject. They are such as these, *Matt. xi. 27. No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father*

\* *Guyse in loc.*

*save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Luke x. 22. No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father, and who the Father is, but the Son, &c. John x. 15. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father. John vi. 46. Not that any one hath seen the Father, save he that is of God, he hath seen the Father. John i. 18. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. All these passages appear to me to assert that the nature of the Son, as such, and the relation which he bears to the Father, are incomprehensible and ineffable; that none can know them but the Father himself; and that the Son, as Son, knows the Father as intimately, as completely, and in precisely the same manner, as the Father knows the Son. But if this be their meaning, I apprehend there is no doctrine to which they so naturally and directly conduct us, as that of a Sonship Divine and eternal.*

Another Scripture, which, notwithstanding all that you say to give it a different aspect, I cannot but deem conclusive on this subject, is *Romans i. 3, 4. Concerning his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according*

to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. The slightest inspection of the original of this passage, will be sufficient, I must think, to convince any one, that there is a contrast intended between that which is asserted of Christ in the third verse, and that which is asserted of him in the fourth. He is said, in the former, to be *of the seed of David*, or the *Son of man*, *κατα σαρκα*, but, in the latter, to be the *Son of God* *κατα πνευμα αγιωσυνης*. Now I ask, what is meant by this contrast? I really cannot assign any intelligible meaning to the apostle's language, but by supposing that he intends to set in opposition to each other the Divine and human natures of Christ; and to say that, according to the latter, He is the *Son of David*, but that, according to the former, He is the *Son of God*. The plain import of the passage, then, is this—“Concerning his Son, who was of the seed of *David*, according to his HUMAN NATURE, but powerfully declared to be THE SON OF GOD, ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE NATURE, by his resurrection from the dead.” This sense of the passage, and especially of the contrasted clauses, *κατα σαρκα*, and *κατα πνευμα αγιωσυνης*, is decisively maintained by Dr. Macknight, and by the learned Schleusner, as well as by

other criticks of high name, whom I need not mention.

But if this interpretation be adopted, it is fatal to your doctrine respecting the Redeemer's Sonship, and conclusively establishes mine. If Christ is called *the Son of God*, not on account of his human nature, but in reference to his Divine nature, then his Sonship is evidently divine and eternal.

Nor can I by any means agree with you that *ορισθεντος*, in the fourth verse ought to be rendered *constituted*, instead of *declared*; so as to make the meaning of the clause to be, that Christ was *constituted* Son by his resurrection from the dead, and not *declared* or *manifested* to be Son by that event. I will only say, that this criticism is contrary to the judgment of our translators; contrary to the decision, as you acknowledge, of *Schleusner*; contrary to the strongly expressed opinion of *Macknight*, *Doddridge*, *Elsner*, and a number of others, generally regarded as among the best authorities in cases of this kind. Besides, Christ was evidently recognized as Son, and styled Son, long *before* his resurrection took place; of course, it is impossible that his Sonship should have been *constituted* by that event, as will hereafter be shewn. I cannot admit, therefore,

that you have rendered your interpretation of this word at all probable ; and, of course, must consider the whole verse as declaring, that Christ was powerfully *demonstrated*, or *determinately marked out*, as the *Son of God*, ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE NATURE, *by his resurrection from the dead*. And, if this rendering of the passage be adopted, your suggestion, to relieve a difficulty, that it is spoken of Christ not as to his Divine nature, but *as the Messiah*, cannot possibly be admitted ; for the apostle expressly says the contrary ; he tells us, that He is *the Son of God according to his Divine nature*.

Indeed I should say, that the single expression—*Of the seed of David*, ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, is enough to refute your doctrine, and establish mine. If Christ is called the *Son of God*, on account of his incarnation, or his investiture with human nature ; on what account, or in what capacity, is he called the *Son of man* ? On the other hand, if he be the *Son of man*, or of the *seed of David*, according to the *flesh*, what is he according to the *Spirit*, or according to his Divine Nature ? Do all these forms of expression point to the same event, and signify the same thing ? I cannot easily believe this. On my plan with

respect to the Sonship of Christ, this language is natural, appropriate, and instructive: but on yours, as I understand it, I am not able to interpret these expressions in a way which appears to me even plausible.

I also attach much importance, as you justly observe others have done, to *Hebrews* i. 2. as a means of support to the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. *God hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, BY WHOM HE MADE THE WORLDS.* This may also be taken in connection with the 8th and 10th verses, before quoted. *But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever—And thou Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens, are the works of thy hands, &c.* If the exalted Person here called Son, were not Son before the creation of the worlds, I do ask, as you suggest, how could the Father make the worlds by him? And if he were Son so long before his incarnation,—nay, *before the foundation of the world*, then how can his Sonship be referred to any thing which took place in time?

And here, I humbly conceive that your remarks respecting the import of the preposition  $\delta\iota\alpha$ , in this passage, can in no degree serve

your purpose. For, even if you were to render that word, as it occurs in the second verse, *for whom*, instead of *by*, as the *Socinians* have long since insisted on doing; and even if it were maintained that *αιωνας*, in the same verse, ought to be translated *ages*, and not *worlds*, as the same class of critics have stoutly urged; still both criticisms would be unavailing; for the 10th verse conclusively ascertains that *the Son, in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and that the heavens are the works of his hands*. A mode of expression which I should suppose could hardly be more precise or explicit in assigning to the Son the work of creation. Nor ought it, I apprehend, to be considered as militating against this interpretation, that in the 10th verse we have a repetition of the idea contained in the eighth. I do not perceive the shadow of a difficulty here. In the second verse, the inspired writer asserts, as a fact, and as an important part of his argument, that *the Son made the worlds*. In the tenth, he represents the Father, in addressing the Son, as recognizing that fact, and speaking of it distinctly, as a testimonial to his essential honour and glory. This is so far from being an improbable repetition, that nothing, it appears to me, can be more natural.



The method of evading the force of this passage on which you appear to rely most, I acknowledge, does not satisfy me. It is, (p. 136.) that “designations originally descriptive “merely of quality, rank, &c. in process of time, “by frequent usage, become *proper names*, “and are very commonly substituted for them, “so as to be descriptive of the whole person “or being.” “Such,” you proceed to say, “is the case with several of the names given “to Christ. The very appellation, *Christ*, “signifies *anointed*; ὁ χριστος, *the anointed one*, the king, the special, supreme ruler of “God’s people. Yet this name, (the same “as *Messiah*, being merely a Greek translation of the Hebrew משיח) originally applicable only to the incarnate *Logos*, or the “*Logos* as dwelling among men, and afterwards reigning over them, in a nature like “theirs, is used also to describe either part of “his compound Person; the human nature or “the divine.” I am not, I say, satisfied with this solution of the difficulty which the apostle’s words, on your plan, present. For

(1.) It appears to me an interpretation which does violence to the language of the Holy Spirit. That declares that *the Son of God made the worlds*. Your solution says, that it

was not exactly so ; but that the worlds were made by him who was not Son, when they were made, but became entitled to this name four thousand years afterwards.

(2.) Granting that your leading idea respecting *proper names*, in this case, is correct; and I admit that it is substantially so ; still it proves nothing in favour of your hypothesis. For, on the supposition that the second Person of the Trinity is the eternal Son, according to my creed, the very same mode of expression which the apostle has actually adopted might evidently have been, even on your own principle, employed, and would have been both natural and proper. Those who hold to the eternal generation of the Son, grant that the *Son of God* is the *Messiah*. Now if, on our ground, the language of the apostle would have been just as correct as on yours, what advantage do you gain by your interpretation? This, however, will be more fully illustrated in my next letter, when I give my ideas of *Luke* i. 35.—But

(3.) The title in question is not strictly parallel with that with which you compare it. The term *Son*, you contend, has no proper application to the divine and eternal nature of Christ, as such. But the title *Christ*, I con-

tend, *has* such an application. With respect to both his Divine and human natures, Christ was the *anointed one*. In his Divine nature he surely was *anointed*, or *set apart*, in the counsels of peace, from eternity to the work which he executed in time; and of course, the title in question is not applied with any liberty of speech, but had a strictly literal and equal application to both natures as such.

I find also, as I think, proof of my doctrine in *Hebrews* iii. 5, 6. *Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant;—but Christ as a Son over his own house, &c.* All agree that the apostle is here shewing that Christ is superior to *Moses*. The former, amidst all his dignity, acted only as a *servant*. He had no inherent and essential authority of his own. It was all given to him. But with Christ it was otherwise. He was AS A SON over his OWN HOUSE. That is, as I understand it, in virtue of his character as Son of God, he had essential authority in himself. As *Mediator*, he was the Father's *Servant*, as we read *Isaiah* xlii. 1. But as *Son*, he had original authority in the house and family of God. It was HIS OWN HOUSE, in a sense in which it could not be constituted his by any official investment.

I am not able to perceive that any thing which you say on this passage (p. 140) in the least impairs its force, as a testimony in my favour. The text which you quote as a parallel one in *Hebrews* i. 2. cannot, I think, be so considered. The Son of God, *as such*, has inherent, essential and eternal authority; and *as such*, of course, has authority in the church, in a sense that no creature ever had. But as Son, he is not necessarily and essentially *heir of the universe*. The lordship of the universe belonged originally to all the Persons of the Godhead equally; to the tri-une Jehovah as such. But the Second Person, or the Son, as I suppose, with a view to the great work of Redemption, was *appointed* to this heirship, or *constituted* heir; that is, the supremacy of the universe was *committed* to the Second Person of the Trinity, for a special purpose, in a sense in which it did not, after this official commitment, officially belong to the *First* or *Third* Person. If so, there is nothing in the interpretation of this latter passage, which at all interferes with the meaning which I attach to the former.

Another passage of Scripture appears to me, still more conclusively, to teach the doctrine for which I contend. I refer to *Hebrews*

v. 8. *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.*—The whole spirit and force of this passage evidently lies in the assumed fact, that the Sonship of the Redeemer naturally elevated him above the obligation of obedience: that, as Son, he was not called or bound to obey, being above it: that he voluntarily condescended to be *made under the law*, which originally had no claim upon him. On his own account, no such obedience was necessary or required of him; but for our sake he learned it, and submitted to it. But if the Sonship of Christ consist merely in his office as Mediator, then the statement of the Apostle will amount to neither more nor less than this—That, though he were Mediator, yet he learned the proper and stipulated duty of a Mediator. In other words, though he bore the office, YET he learned to perform its duties. Or, still more briefly, though he *was* Mediator, yet he *acted* as Mediator. Can we suppose that a sober and inspired Apostle would speak thus? I confess, for myself, as long as this text remains on the sacred page, I must continue to believe that the Filiation of the Saviour is Divine and eternal.

Dr. *Ridgeley*, indeed, attempts to take

away the force of this passage, by alleging, that *καίπερ*, in the beginning of the verse in question, ought probably not to be rendered *although*, but *and*, or *indeed*; by which he would make the Apostle say, that being *truly* or *indeed* Son, he learned obedience, &c. In reply to this suggestion, I shall stop only to say, that the most able criticks whom I have been able to consult, and among the rest, *Schleusner*, give not the smallest countenance to this rendering; but almost with one voice confirm the sense given by our translators.

Another passage which appears to me, to support the doctrine which it is the object of these Letters to maintain, is found in *Hebrews* vii. 3. *Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.* From this, I think, it evidently follows—*first*, that *Melchisedeck* was not the Son of God himself, as some have supposed; and *secondly*, that Christ, as the Son of God, existed before *Melchisedeck*; and, therefore, that he could not derive this title either from his incarnation, or his resurrection. Further; as Dr. *Hopkins* observes, “If there were no Son of God till the human nature of Christ existed, then the Son of

“ God did *begin to exist*; consequently there  
 “ was a *beginning of his days*, and *Melchise-*  
 “ *deck* was not made like him, but was *unlike*  
 “ to him, by having no beginning of days.”

I also find, as it appears to me, no small countenance to the doctrine of the Divine and eternal Sonship of Christ, in *Hebrews vii. 28.* *For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.* Here the inspired writer tells us that *the Son of God was made a Priest.* He was the *Son of God*, then, before he was made, or considered a *Priest*. But he was made or considered as a *Priest*, as soon as he was made or considered as *Messiah*. Indeed his priestly office is a part of his *Messiahship*. It follows, then, that, in the order of nature, he was *Son* before he was *Messiah*. Nay, it was his character as *Son*, that *qualified* him to perform the office of *Mediator*. His eternal and ineffable relation to the *Father*;—his nearness to him;—his *lying in his bosom*; and sharing equally with him in his glory before the world was;—qualified him, at once, to vindicate the divine honour, and to bring in everlasting righteousness for the justification of his people.

Such is the direct testimony of Scripture on which I found my belief of the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the blessed Redeemer. Further quotations might be multiplied to a considerable extent; but I will not longer trespass on your patience on this branch of the subject. I can scarcely suppose that a single argument or thought which I have exhibited, will be wholly new to you; and, of course, can scarcely venture to hope that what I have offered will produce an impression on your mind materially favourable to my creed.

But it is not for me to calculate consequences. They must be left with Him who has all hearts, and all the interests of truth in his own hands. If I accomplish nothing else by my share of this correspondence, I hope I shall be considered as having given an unequivocal testimony of regard to a much respected Brother; and as having manifested a disposition frankly to comply with his call to explain and support my opinions.



## LETTER IV.

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*Testimony of Scripture continued—Objections to some interpretations of Scripture stated and urged.*

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REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

THUS far I have exhibited, as extensively as my plan would admit, the direct scriptural testimony in favour of the doctrine of the Saviour's eternal Sonship. I would now proceed most respectfully to examine those arguments drawn from scripture on which you rely for the support of your system. This I shall endeavour to do with all that frankness which I flatter myself I have exercised in the preceding pages. And I beg you to be assured that nothing which I am about to say is intended to answer any other purpose than to bring forth and elucidate truth. If I know my own heart, I should abhor the thought of attempting, by any artifice, to excite

odium against an opinion which I felt that I could not legitimately refute.

I. And here, my first difficulty arises from the manner in which you have stated the doctrine which you profess to hold.

I am perplexed by your appearing to maintain SEVERAL DIFFERENT FILIATIONS. You seem to me to speak of at least *three*. You speak of a *literal* Sonship, when the Saviour became incarnate, or was born of the Virgin, according to the flesh; of a *figurative* Sonship, on account of his office as Messiah; and in one place, as it appears to me, of *another figurative* Sonship, founded on his rising from the dead, and thus “entering on a new life;” on a restored, reanimated existence.

If I mistake not, this plan of tracing the title of *Son* to SEVERAL SOURCES, is of Unitarian origin, and one which, until a comparatively late period, was confined to *Arians* and *Socinians*, and a few Socinianizing *Remonstrants*. This fact itself is a circumstance of rather suspicious character. But is it so, that the Sonship of Christ is a complex, multiform, *gradual* thing? Is it really so, that it was *begun* at one time, and not *completed* until a number of years afterwards? This view of the subject, I acknowledge, has to me a most sin-

gular and incredible appearance. We are told, indeed, that Christ, as to his human nature, *increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man, Luke, ii. 52*; but I have no recollection of ever having read in scripture, of his increasing in his *Sonship*. That blessed and ineffable relation admitted, indeed, of different *evidences*, and of progressive *manifestations*; but not, I should think, of different progressive stages, as to its *essence*, or that which *constitutes* it what it is. If we take our illustration from any other known case of sonship, either in the Bible, or out of it, we shall find that this relation, however it may be evinced, is constituted by some single event, to the exclusion of all others. Such is the creed which I embrace. I suppose that the Sonship of Christ has been *manifested* in various ways; but that the relation itself is one and eternal.

But this is not the whole of my difficulty. I am at a loss to know which of these filiations of which you speak, is, in your view, the *principal* or *leading* one. You tell me, (page 117) that the title *Son of God* is applied to the Saviour, because he is the *Messiah*, the *Christ*; nay, that, after all, “this is the *principal* or “*predominant* reason for giving him this ap-

“pellation.” But, in page 163, you say, “*Son*, therefore, does *primarily* indicate the “inferior nature, as united to the divine;” in other words, Christ is *primarily* Son, because he was born of a woman. How am I to understand this?

I have another and still greater difficulty. One of the reasons on account of which you suppose the Saviour is called *Son of God*, is that the office of *Messiah* or *King* was conferred upon him; and his generation in this respect is referred to his resurrection, as the *commencement* of his exaltation to this office. But Christ surely did not begin to be the *Messiah* when he rose from the dead. Neither, surely, did he then begin to be *King*. He was expressly called both *Messiah* and *King* many centuries before his birth according to the flesh. He was undoubtedly *constituted* such in the eternal counsels of redemption; *entered* on the *execution* of the office four thousand years before his birth of the Virgin; and was finally *raised to its highest honours*, when he *sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*. Of course, his restoration to a *new life* from the grave, could not have been that which *constituted* him *Messiah* or *King*. Yet, if this were not the case, a number of the principal

texts which you have quoted to confirm this sense of the phrase, *Son of God*, cannot apply to it, for they were spoken *before* the Saviour rose from the dead, and of consequence before his exaltation to his high office, according to your system, *commenced*. And again, on the same supposition, all you say about *οπισθεντος* falls to the ground. For if Christ were not *constituted* Messiah or King by his resurrection from the dead, but only *declared* to be such, then the vital spirit of your comment on *Romans* i. 4, noticed in the preceding Letter, vanishes, and that scripture becomes an indisputable testimony in favour of the doctrine of eternal Sonship.

Still further objections, also, as it appears to me, lie against assigning as the ground or reason of this Filiation, the *resurrection* of Christ. For, in the first place, he rose by *his own power*; in other words, he raised himself up; of course, upon this principle, he ought to be called *his own father*. Again; he cannot be, on this ground, the *only begotten* Son of God; for though he is called the *first fruits of them that slept*, yet all his people will be raised up in a manner gloriously resembling his resurrection; and indeed the wicked themselves will finally be raised up by his power.

And, finally; this, after all, would only be a *figurative*, a *metaphorical* Sonship; whereas, it has been often remarked, the Son of God is called very often the Father's own Son, and by a variety of similar expressions, which indicate a real, true Sonship, that is a genuine Divine participation of the Father's own proper nature.

II. If I do not misapprehend the view of this subject which you present, I cannot see how you are to escape from the charge of *Tritheism*. You contend, and with great propriety, that all ideas of *derivation* or *inferiority* in the Second Person of the Trinity, are, in your view, incompatible with his Divinity; and on this account, as well as others, you declare that you cannot be reconciled to the doctrine of eternal *generation*, because you cannot attach any intelligible idea to *Sonship* which does not imply the *derivation* of existence from another. I am, my dear Sir, as I assured you in a former Letter, no less opposed than yourself to the idea of a *derived* or *inferior* God. The very thought is not only inadmissible, but abhorrent. But in your zeal to recede from a doctrine of this kind, you appear to me to fall into a mistake scarcely less hostile to the scriptural doctrine of the

Trinity. You appear to me to maintain that if the *Logos* be God, equal with the Father, he must be a completely *separate, independent* Being, and that each Person of the adorable Trinity, must be possessed of a separate and complete divine character, independently of the other two. But, as I hinted in a preceding Letter, I cannot perceive how this can be maintained without believing in three Gods. Bishop *Horsley* speaks of “certain injudicious  
 “ antagonists of *Sabellius*, who, to avoid his  
 “ error, divided the Holy Trinity into three  
 “ persons *unrelated* to each other, and *dis-*  
 “ *tinct in all respects*. These, he observes,  
 “ *Dionysius Romanus* condemned, and *Atha-*  
 “ *nasius* quotes his censure with approbation;  
 “ as well, the Bishop adds, he might; for the  
 “ opinion of three Persons in the Godhead,  
 “ *unrelated to each other, and distinct in all*  
 “ *respects, is rank Tritheism*; because what  
 “ are unrelated and distinct in all respects,  
 “ are many in all respects, and being many in  
 “ all respects, cannot in any respect be one.”\*

As I understand this subject, the three Persons of the blessed Trinity *together* constitute One self-existent, independent, and infinitely perfect God. Each of the Persons is to be con-

\* *Tracts in controversy with Priestley*, p. 97.

sidered as equally and completely possessing the same Divine Essence and perfections; but surely we cannot say, that each Person possesses in himself complete, separate, and independent Divinity; for if we could, then each Person would be a perfect God, independently of the other two; and of course, might exist with every infinite perfection without them. Whereas, we suppose that the three Persons are essential to the perfect and independent Godhead; that the Godhead could not be what it is, if either Person was wanting; and, consequently, that no One of them can be said to be, (speaking after the manner of men) *absolutely independent of the other two*. Yet you say, (p. 92.) “The *Logos* is really and verily “divine, self-existent, uncaused, immutable “*in himself*.” Now, I suppose, the phrase “*in himself*,” must mean, as *distinguished from, or independently of*, the Father, and the Holy Ghost. If this be true of the *Logos*, it is also true of each of the other Persons. But if this be so, are there not three Gods?

I think proper to state the above consideration in this place, as forming one of my difficulties with respect to your system. You will see, in a future Letter, that it stands closely connected with one of your main objections to



my doctrine; and that until this difficulty is removed, your objection must be considered as divested of the greater part, if not the whole, of its force.

III. In my "Letters on Unitarianism," I had urged the following query—"If the second Person of the Trinity is not to be distinguished by the title of *Son*, what is his distinguishing title? By what appropriate name are we to know him as distinguished from the other Persons?"

In answer to this question, you say, the term *Logos* is the title for which I inquire. You declare your full belief that the *Logos* is, and, of course, ever was, God, as such. That this term is a title expressive of the Divine and eternal nature of the Second Person. "Here, then," you say, "is a name for the second distinction of the Trinity, as such, which is of apostolic authority—of inspired origin."

I am not, my dear Sir, by any means satisfied with this answer. I do not, indeed, deny that *Logos* is a scriptural term; or that it is a title expressive of true and proper Divinity, and consequently of eternity. But I am constrained to deny that your representation of this matter either relieves any difficulty, or solves my question in a manner which can be

deemed at all satisfactory. In support of this denial, I beg your attention to the following considerations.

1. In the first place, the term *Logos*, or *Word*, though repeatedly used in the New Testament, to designate the Saviour, does by no means appear to be the *favourite* expression, if I may so speak, of the inspired writers, to point out his personal and distinctive glory. It is employed only a few times, and almost exclusively by the apostle *John*, with this meaning. Whereas the term *Son*, occurs with a frequency and a tenderness which shew that it is the chosen expression of the Spirit of God, to convey the idea of his closest and most endearing relation to the Father.

2. It appears to me that the term *Logos*, or *Word*, is quite as expressive of *derivation* and *posteriority* as the term *Son* can be said to be; and quite as liable to *objection* on this account. I may resort to the same mode of metaphysical reasoning with respect to this title, to which you resort in reference to the title of Son: and if so, I should say, the term *Word* signifies something *uttered* or *spoken*. But the *speaker* must be conceived of as always existing before the word spoken by him. Therefore to speak of an eternal Word, is a contradic-

tion in terms. I do not admit this method of reasoning; but it is *your* method. And if you object to the term *Son*, as expressive of an eternal relation, on this ground, I see not but that you must, on precisely the same principle, discard the term *Word*, as designating an eternal and necessary Person of the adorable Trinity.

3. The term *Logos*, or *Word*, though evidently applied in scripture to the Divine and eternal nature of Christ, is certainly not expressive, so far as we can discern, of any close and endearing *relation* to either of the other Persons. The idea of *relation* between the Persons of the blessed Trinity, as I before intimated, has generally been considered as essential to that perfect *unity* which the scriptures every where represent as existing in the eternal Godhead. It was long ago observed by *Calvin*, as I had occasion to notice in a preceding Letter, (nor was it an idea by any means confined to him) that by *Persons* in the Godhead, we mean subsistences ineffably *related* to each other, and yet each *distinguished* from the rest by a peculiar and incommunicable property. Now, I ask, which of the terms, *Word*, or *Father*, is most expressive of such intimate and endearing relation? Which of them is most frequently brought forward in such

connections as appear intended to be expressive of this relation to the other Persons. The answer is obvious. Where the term *Word* is employed to express this relation *once*, I had almost said the term *Son* is employed for that purpose *fifty* times. Indeed, I recollect but a single instance in all the New Testament, in which the term *Word* is introduced in a manner which directly marks the relation of Persons in a Trinity; and that is in the celebrated passage, 1 *John* v. 7. which I have reason to believe you do not consider as genuine scripture. But in how many instances the term *Son* is introduced to express this most intimate and essential union, I need not say to those who are familiar with the Bible.

4. I object to the allegation that the term *Word*, is MORE strictly expressive of a *divine* and *eternal nature* than that of *Son*; because, in sundry places, they are used in a manner which evinces that they are of the *same import* as to this point. It is said, in 1 *Timothy* iii. 16, that *God was manifested in the flesh*; in *John* i. 14, that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*; and it is also said in *Romans* viii. 3, that *God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*. These parallel passages, I should think, would naturally lead

us to conclude, that there was no reason to consider the term *Word* as expressive of a Divine and eternal nature, and the term *Son* as expressive of something inferior. On the contrary they evidently appear to me to mark *identity* of nature and character. Again; we are told that *the Word was in the beginning with God, and was God; and that all things were made by him, and that without him was not any thing made that was made.* And in like manner, we are informed, *Hebrews i.* that *by the Son the worlds were made; that he laid the foundation of the earth, and that the heavens are the work of his hands.* From these and similar passages, I infer that *Son* and *Word* are terms equally expressive, not indeed of *relation*, but certainly of Divine and eternal character.

IV. I object to the manner in which you speak of the opinion, that the Son of God appeared to the Patriarchs, &c. under the old dispensations. You do not, indeed, explicitly deny that Christ *did* thus appear to the fathers of the ancient church; but you evidently draw it into question, and intimate a strong doubt respecting it; (p. 139.) and, if I do not mistake, the whole tendency of the general system which you adopt, in relation to the Son-

ship of Christ, is to lead to a denial of the fact in question. I have long been a firm believer in this fact; and cannot deem it wholly without importance.

The proof that Christ did appear to the ancient Patriarchs; that he was the *Jehovah*, who led the church in the wilderness; that he was the *Angel of the Covenant*, who appeared on a great variety of occasions, to instruct, warn, protect, chastise, and guide his people, especially prior to the giving of his written word *to be a light to their feet, and a lamp to their path*, appears to me to be fairly contained in a great number of scriptures, particularly in *Hosea* xii. 4, 5. in *Acts* vii. 30—40, and in *1 Cor.* x. 4.9. I cannot possibly interpret these scriptures in any other way, than as plainly and decisively teaching the fact referred to. And in the same manner I explain *1 Peter* i. 11. *Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, &c.* Here the apostle speaks of the Spirit of Christ working in the ancient Jewish Prophets, a number of centuries before he became incarnate. And although you seem to quote this text (p. 136.) for a very different purpose, it appears to me to fall in entirely

with the fact which I am now endeavouring to maintain.

Accordingly a number of the early christian Fathers unequivocally assert this fact. *Irenæus* says, “ Jesus Christ was the God who interrogated *Adam* ; who conferred with *Noah*, and gave him the dimensions of the Ark ; who spake to *Abraham* ; who brought destroying judgments on the inhabitants of *Sodom* ; who directed *Jacob* in his journey, and addressed *Moses* out of the burning bush at *Horeb*.” And *Tertullian* declares—“ We believe that Christ was the Word, by whom God made the worlds, and who at various times appeared to the patriarchs and prophets.”

Unitarians have generally thought it incumbent on them to shew that this is a groundless opinion ; and indefatigably indeed have they laboured for that purpose ; well knowing that the fact in question, if established, would be most unfriendly to their cause. I lament that any countenance should be given by an Orthodox Brother, to the smallest portion of their unhallowed system.

But your remarks on this subject appear to be intended to bear particularly on the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, by showing, that if this doctrine be true, insuperable diffi-

culties attend the interpretation of *Hebrews* i. 1, 2. *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, IN THESE LAST DAYS spoken unto us by his Son, &c.* You ask (p. 139.) “Does “ this seem to recognize the fact, that the Son “ of God addressed the ancients?” I answer, it certainly does not deny it. The apostle does not, I apprehend, mean to say, that the Father never spake by the Son *before*; but that, in *these last days*, he spake by him PECU- LIARLY, i. e. more *clearly, expressly, and openly* than in preceding times. In addition to the scriptures before quoted, we are told that Christ spake by the ancient prophets. *1 Peter* i. 11; and that he preached to the antediluvian world. *1 Peter* iii. 19. But how could he have done either, if your question with respect to the *Son* has any force?

As I have long had some doubt whether *Psalms* ii. 7. ought to be deemed a decisive warrant for the doctrine of eternal generation, I did not assign it a place among the list of texts produced for that purpose. But I feel very confident, my dear sir, whatever may be the meaning of that passage, that your interpretation of it cannot stand. The passage in question is this—*I will declare the decree:*



*The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten thee.* You say, (p. 121.) “What is the decree? “why, plainly that which makes or constitutes him king.” I cannot think so. It appears equally plain to me that the seventh verse, though included in the general article commonly called the *decree*, really makes no part of the *decretory clause*, properly speaking; but that it rather refers to the *ground* or *reason* of the decree. I suppose the spirit of it to be exhibited in the following paraphrase: “Thou art my Son; from eternity have I begotten thee: *therefore*, ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen, &c.” This interpretation, if admitted, will of course, set aside your first criticism.

You say further, (p. 121) “Surely no other generation of the Son is intimated here, but his exaltation to the dignity of King and Lord. And it is in exact consonance with this, that *Peter* explains the very passage in question, in *Acts* 13; accommodating it to the resurrection of Christ, which was the very circumstance that *commenced* his elevation to the throne of supreme dominion.” But, in reply, I ask, What are we to consider as the *date* of this decree? I do not ask when

it was first *published* by the Son; but when are we to consider it as *uttered by the Father* to the Son? When the councils of peace were arranged; that is, from eternity? or when the Psalm was written; that is more than a thousand years before the incarnation? or at the time referred to at the beginning of the Psalm, that is, when *the heathen raged*; in other words, when the Saviour was crucified? If we adopt any one of these dates (and one of them I think we must adopt) your interpretation, it appears to me, of course, falls. Because the resurrection of Christ, which you suppose to have been the day spoken of,—the day on which he was begotten—was SUBSEQUENT TO ALL OF THEM; and therefore, it could not be said, upon your principle—THIS DAY have I begotten thee. The Psalm, as you justly say, is *prediction*; and evidently refers to the time of the crucifixion; that is, the *publication* of the decree refers to that event.

If then the clause, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, be a *part of the decree*, it is not true, (if the Sonship of Christ arise from his resurrection,) that he was begotten on the day referred to, that is, on the day of his crucifixion. His Sonship, then, evidently existed *previously* to his resurrection,

and, of course, was not *constituted by it*. And this, I think, furnishes a plain index to the meaning of the apostle, when he applies this passage in the second *Psalms*, to the resurrection of Christ, as he does, *Acts* xiii. 32, 33; and again, *Romans* i. 4. His resurrection was not the *ground*, but the *proof* of his Sonship; —a glorious triumphant proof of it; and because a proof of his Sonship, of course, a proof of his Divinity; the very proof to which he referred his enemies, *Luke* xxii. 69. If this be the interpretation of the passage, your's, of necessity, if I understand it, must be rejected.

I am inclined to the opinion, that the true and proper date of the decree itself, as uttered by the Father, is in the everlasting counsels of peace. If so, the Sonship referred to, is that incomprehensible and eternal relation to the Father for which I contend. And, accordingly, the great body of the early Fathers, and of the orthodox divines, for many centuries unani- mously adopted that interpretation. But, I repeat, whether we consider the expression, *this day*, as referring to eternity or not, in either case, your construction of the passage, must, so far as I can see, be abandoned.

Dr. *Hopkins's* view of the passage is so judicious and clear that I take pleasure in quoting

a paragraph from his system. “ When *David*  
 “ speaks of the Son of God, and represents  
 “ the Father as saying—*Thou art my Son,*  
 “ *this day have I begotten thee,* so long before  
 “ his incarnation, the idea which most natu-  
 “ rally arises in the mind from this is, that  
 “ there was then such a person as the Son,  
 “ who did at that time declare the decree by  
 “ the mouth of *David*; and not that there  
 “ should, in some future time, be a Son be-  
 “ gotten, who should *then* declare the decree.  
 “ *I will declare the decree: The Lord said*  
 “ *unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have*  
 “ *I begotten thee.* It is very unnatural, and  
 “ contrary to all propriety of speech to sup-  
 “ pose, *This day have I begotten thee,* means  
 “ I will beget thee in some future time; and  
 “ that the Son should be made to *declare the*  
 “ *decree* long before any such person existed,  
 “ and when there was, in fact, no such Son.  
 “ The decree which the Son declares, is not  
 “ that declaration, *Thou art my Son, this day*  
 “ *have I begotten thee*; but what follows—  
 “ *Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen*  
 “ *for thine inheritance, and the uttermost*  
 “ *parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou*  
 “ *shalt break them in pieces with a rod of iron,*  
 “ &c. *This day,* that is, *now,* not in time

“ which is passed, or which is to come ; for  
 “ with God there is no succession, no time  
 “ passed or to come ; but he exists, as we may  
 “ say, in one eternal, unsuccessive *now*. There-  
 “ fore when we speak of an eternal, immanent  
 “ act, it is most properly expressed thus, *This*  
 “ *day* or *now*, have I begotten thee. This,  
 “ therefore, is the sense in which the best di-  
 “ vines have generally understood it.”

“ St. *Paul* cites this passage as being illus-  
 “ trated and verified in the resurrection of  
 “ Jesus Christ, *Acts* xiii. 33. But he cannot  
 “ mean, that he, by the resurrection, *became*  
 “ the Son of God, and was then begotten ; for  
 “ he had this title before his resurrection. His  
 “ meaning is explained by himself in the epis-  
 “ tle to the *Romans*. DECLARED *to be the*  
 “ *Son of God by his resurrection from the*  
 “ *dead*. *Rom.* i. 4. That is, this was a fresh  
 “ and open manifestation and declaration, that  
 “ he was indeed what had been often asserted,  
 “ and what he always was, the only begotten  
 “ Son of God.”\*

Do you ask, why it is that this passage (Psalm ii. 7.) seems to be applied in scripture to *so many different events* in the Saviour's history and work?—to his *investiture* with

\* *System of Doctrines*, vol. i. p. 439.

*office*,—his *resurrection*,—his *exaltation*, &c. ? Do you say, that this looks very much like giving countenance to the idea of his Sonship being founded on several things? I answer, I think not. On my principle, the text has an appropriate application, whenever the personal dignity, and glory of the Redeemer are in question. And thus the inspired writers of the New Testament seem to have considered it; and have quoted it accordingly. Christ was qualified and appointed to be Mediator, *because* he was previously the Son of God; he was raised again from the dead, *because* he was the Son of God; he was exalted to great authority and honour in his Mediatorial capacity, *because* he was the Son of God. In short, if, on the one hand, we consider all these facts and circumstances, as so many *grounds* of his Sonship; as so many *means* by which he was *made* Son, or as furnishing so many *reasons* why he was so called; then I should really be at a loss to say, how the phrase *this day* could with propriety be applied to several times and events. But if, on the other hand, we consider the various events referred to, as exhibiting EVIDENCES of his Divine and eternal Sonship; if we suppose that all these great things were done BECAUSE he was the Son of God;

and if we consider the phrase *this day* as referring to *eternity*, and as expressive of the eternal purpose of the Father, then not only the original text, itself, but also all its applications in the New Testament, seem to me to be naturally and easily explicable. If this ground be taken, I see not but that it is proper, and equally proper, to apply the prediction recorded by the Psalmist, to every instance in which the Saviour's glory is under consideration: to every instance in which the Father was pleased to *manifest* that he regarded him, and was disposed to treat him, as his only begotten and eternal Son.

You appear to lay no little stress for the support of your doctrine, on *Luke i. 35. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* I am free to confess, that the most plausible argument which you have deduced from scripture, is drawn from this passage. This argument, however, even if I were at a loss for an answer to it satisfactory to myself, would not shake my belief in the eternal Sonship of the Saviour; because I think I find the doctrine so clearly and frequently taught in scripture,

that a single passage of dubious construction, could not be reasonably allowed to countervail the weight of a number decisive in their character. But I do not find myself in this situation. After all that you have said to prove that this text makes the Saviour's miraculous conception in the womb of the Virgin, the ground of the title *Son of God*, I cannot admit that you have either established your own position, or impaired the solidity of mine. My reasons for entertaining this opinion are the following.

(1.) In the first place, if your interpretation of this passage be the true one, then the *Holy Ghost*, or the *Third Person* of the Trinity, is the real *Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*, and not the *First Person*, as is commonly supposed, and as the scriptures seem plainly to assert. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, &c.* Here the expression is clear and unequivocal. If, then, the Sonship of Christ is referable to this event, the Holy Ghost is indubitably his Father. But how comes it to pass that the *First Person* of the Trinity is always spoken of as the *Father*, and not the *Third*; and that the Saviour himself, in so many instances, distinguishes between his *Father* and the *Holy Ghost*, whom he and his



Father will send? I have never been satisfied with any attempt to solve this difficulty that I have met with: and until it is solved, I can by no means fall in with your exposition of the text in question.

(2.) The title *Son of God* was applied to Christ long *before* his miraculous conception, and his birth according to the flesh. To say the least, more than a thousand years before he was *born of a woman*, he received it familiarly. *David* said—*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry &c.* *Agur* said, *What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?* Besides, if his temporal birth be THE reason, emphatically, why he is called the Son of God, I must think that there is a serious inconsistency in assigning not only *another* reason, for this title, as you do, but another *primary* reason. But as this was mentioned before, I shall not further dwell on it here.

(3.) My third reason for objecting to your interpretation of this passage is, that the birth in question was the birth of our Lord “ACCORDING TO THE FLESH.” Would not this expression, so frequently repeated in scripture, be a strange one, if the Son had really and properly speaking no other birth? What does it mean? Do we ever say of one of our fellow

men that he is the son of such a person *according to the flesh*? But if there be another and higher sense in which he is *the Son of God*, that is, according to his Divine nature, then this language is not only intelligible, but also appropriate and happy. As this thought, however, was adverted to in another connection, in the preceding Letter, I shall not further enlarge upon it at present.

(4.) Again; I object, because, if the Son of God were so called on account of his miraculous conception, then he would be in no other sense Son, than creatures are. *Adam* was miraculously produced; so were *Angels*. But we are told, *Hebrews* i. 5. that his Sonship is above that of angels; above that of the most exalted creatures.

(5.) My fifth reason for declining to receive your interpretation of this passage is, that I think a very different mode of expounding it, more consistent with itself, as well as more consistent with the tenor of scripture on this subject, may be found.

*Justin Martyr* seems to have been of the opinion, that by the Holy Ghost and power in this text, nothing else can, or ought to be understood, than the Divine nature of the Son of God himself. And, indeed, that it was by *his own*

*act* and *will* that the assumption of the human nature took place, is certain. If the sense of *Justin* were admitted, all difficulty would, of course, vanish. Then the meaning would be “Because this Holy Child is born in consequence of the Son of God assuming into union with himself the human nature, therefore he shall be called the Son of God.” This would be assigning the most obvious and satisfactory reason for the appellation in question. Yet I am not willing to take such a liberty with the language of scripture, and therefore, do not adopt as my own this exposition of the venerable Martyr. I merely give it a passing notice, as a plan of explanation which rests on no mean authority; and which, if admitted, removes all objection.

But where is the difficulty of adopting the common orthodox interpretation? According to this, the miraculous conception of Christ was the *evidence* that a union was formed between the Son of God and the human nature. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.* That is, “as, by this miraculous conception, this holy child has become one with the Son

“ of God, therefore the God-man thus constituted a distinct Person, shall be called the “ Son of God :” Or, “ This child shall be “ so called, because of its intimate union, in “ one Person, with Him who is the Son of “ God.”

If this interpretation be admitted, it solves every difficulty at once, and, as it seems to me, in the most natural, simple and easy manner. Perhaps something plausible might be said in favour of that sense of the conjunction *δω*, which has been contended for by some of the advocates of the doctrine of eternal Sonship, and which you so strenuously oppose. But I do not plead for any thing of this kind. My interpretation does not stand in need of it. Nay, if I am not deceived, it stands upon far more solid ground without such aid.

Neither have I occasion to avail myself of any advantage which might be derived from a new translation of the verb *καλεισθαι*. I am willing it should stand with the sense which our translators have given it; which I believe, with you, is the most common and correct sense. The advantage of the exposition which I have given is, that, by adopting it, nothing is forced or perverted, but all is consistent and natural.

I am, further, constrained to object entirely to your gloss of another passage, which, next to that of which I have just been speaking, appears to me among the most plausible you have offered in favour of your opinion, I refer to *Hebrews* i. 4, 5. *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they, For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* Here, you say, (p. 126) “The name obtained by inheritance cannot be literally understood; for then it would necessarily imply the death of the Father, in consequence of which his title descended to his Son.” I am led to suspect, my dear Sir, that I do not understand your meaning in this remark. If I do, I am unable to perceive its force, or even its application. The title of *Son* never was the title of the *Father*, and, of course, could not descend from him. But if it were otherwise, is it not common for a son to *inherit* his father’s name, from the moment that he bears any name at all, and while his father is still living? Nor did I ever hear, until now, that the death of him from whom an inheritance is obtained, must always take place, before the inheritance can be ob-

tained. If it had been so, the Lord Jesus Christ could never have been heir in *any sense*. But I have no idea that *Hebrews ix. 16*, has any such meaning. Its proper signification, no doubt, is, what *Macknight* makes it to be—  
 “For where there is a *covenant*, there is a  
 “necessity that the death of the *appointed*  
 “*Sacrifice* be brought in.”

Again; you remark, (p. 126) that *κεκληρονομηκεν*, which our translators have rendered *obtained by inheritance*, is improperly translated; that it signifies to *get* or *acquire*, by any means. And you then ask, “How could  
 “the Son OBTAIN a better title than the an-  
 “gels? If he were Son *eternally*, did he *ob-*  
 “tain a filiation? And could the prophecies  
 “quoted, speak of his filiation as *future*?”  
 That the *primary* sense of *κληρονομεω* is to *inherit*, or to *obtain by inheritance*, as our translation has it, and that it often undoubtedly has that meaning, I apprehend is too clear to be disputed. I appeal to all orthodox Lexicographers and Commentators that have fallen in my way for authority. You seem to think that the application of this word to the manner in which the Israelites obtained the land of *Canaan*, from its heathen inhabitants, is decisive of the fact, that it cannot mean what

it strictly imported by the term *inheritance*. But I cannot accede to the conclusiveness of this illustration. I think the Israelites *did*, properly, *inherit* that land in the strict sense of the word. They certainly obtained it in virtue of a grant made to their illustrious ancestor, *the father of the faithful*, long before deceased; and even if this illustration should fail, it would be easy to shew, that they received it from the hands, and through a promise, of their *heavenly Father*, and that in a most peculiar manner. It *may*, to say the least, then, signify to *inherit* in this place. Indeed I have not happened to meet with a single orthodox interpreter, *excepting yourself*, who does not thus render it. But if this *be* the meaning of the word, as I contend it is, it coincides exactly with the doctrine for which I plead. The import of the 4th verse will then be, that the Son in virtue of his eternal generation, inherited from the Father the exalted name of *Son of God*;—Son in a peculiar sense;—a sense infinitely above that in which the name of Son can be applied to any creature, even to the most exalted angels.

But if any should hesitate about attaching this sense to the word *inherit*, the passage may be interpreted otherwise, in full con-

sistency with my creed, and without any of the difficulties which appear to me to attend your interpretation. If the exposition given in a preceding page, of *Luke* i. 35 be correct, then it follows, that the title *Son of God*, belongs to the Saviour both as eternally begotten of the Father, and as a *proper name* of the Messiah, as such, as *Immanuel*, or God incarnate for our salvation. In *both* these respects he may be properly said to have obtained the name *Son*, *by inheritance*. In the *latter* capacity, he is, OFFICIALLY, *heir of all things*; having *all power delegated to him in heaven and on earth*, being made *head over all things to the church*; and being called *Son*, in consequence of this official character. In the *former* capacity, he is ORIGINALLY, and by DIVINE RIGHT, heir, or possessor of all things, and has the name of *Son* in virtue of his incommunicable and eternal relation to the Father. This being so, I perceive, upon my plan, no peculiar difficulty in the interpretation of the passage in question.

What you say on 1 Cor. xv. 28, as, in your view, wholly irreconcilable with the doctrine of eternal generation, admits, in my opinion, of an easy answer. If my interpretation of *Luke* i. 35. be admitted, then, it follows that



the name *Son of God* is the proper name bestowed, by Divine direction, on the august *God-man* constituted by a union of the human nature with the Son of God; in other words, the title originally proper to Him who was essentially and eternally the Son of God, is used to designate the office of this God-man, Mediator. Now, although, as eternal Son, he is *not*, and *never was*, *subject to the Father*; yet, as Mediator, he *is*, and *ever will be*. At the end of the world, indeed, he will *deliver up* a certain kingdom *to God even the Father*; viz. that kingdom to which there is a reference, when it is said—*All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Matt. xxviii. 18.—And gave him to be Head over all things to the church. Ephes. i. 22*: That complex kingdom, which includes all the affairs of this world, as well as *principalities and powers in heavenly places*. When *the end cometh*, THIS kingdom will be *delivered up*; but, as mediatorial Head of the Redeemed, over whom he will reign, to all eternity, in his glorified human body, and to whom he will be the everlasting medium of all gracious communications of light, and glory, and blessedness:—In this capacity I apprehend he will always be *officially subject*, and the Triune Jehovah be forever *all in all*.

But it really appears to me, my dear Sir, that there is no more difficulty in expounding the passage under consideration in accordance with my doctrine, than in consistency with your own. You suppose that the *Logos* is a truly Divine and eternal Person; and that the incarnate *Logos* is the “Son of God,” in the language of scripture. Yet you seem to admit that this *Son*; according to the apostle’s declaration, will be *subject to the Father*. Is there not as much objection to this doctrine as there can be to mine? I acknowledge myself unable to perceive any difference as to the point of the difficulty which you have suggested. What interpretation do *you*, on your principles, give of this passage? Will the eternal *Logos* continue, after *delivering up the kingdom to God, even the Father, to be subject to him that did put all things under him*? You must, of course, answer, “He will;” and you would, probably, further say, that this mode of expression was equally justifiable, and to be interpreted on the same principles, with *Acts xx. 28*, in which the church is represented as *purchased with the BLOOD OF GOD*. Be it so. The same principle, and the same illustration, with scarcely any

change of language, will equally answer my purpose.

You say, (p. 162) “ It has hitherto been a  
 “ very severe task for those who believe in  
 “ the doctrine of *eternal generation*, and, of  
 “ course, understand the term *Son of God* as  
 “ in itself implying a nature divine, to explain  
 “ those passages of the New Testament, which  
 “ speak of the Son as not knowing the day  
 “ nor the hour when the destruction of *Jeru-*  
 “ *salem* would take place; *Mark* xiii. 32;  
 “ which represent the Father as greater than  
 “ the Son; *John* xiv. 28; and which speak of  
 “ God as exalting him above every creature;  
 “ *Philippians* ii. 9.” Here again, my dear  
 Sir, I feel constrained to say, that I am not  
 able to perceive that it is in the least degree  
 a more “ severe task” for *me* than for *you* to  
 interpret these passages. You believe that  
 the Son of God, of whom these things are as-  
 serted, is constituted by the union of the Di-  
 vine and eternal *Logos* with human nature.  
 I believe that the Son of God, who spoke thus,  
 in the days of his flesh, was so called, because  
 the Divine and eternal Son of God was united  
 to man; and that this complex Person had  
 given to him, by divine direction, the name  
 before proper to his divine and eternal na-

ture. Here, then, according to the creed of both, there is a divine nature mysteriously united to a human nature, constituting one *Christ* or *Messiah*, who holds a place of *official subordination* to the Father, and concerning whom these declarations are made. On my principle, I find no great difficulty in interpreting them; and I presume that you find, on yours, quite as little. We each of us believe the title *Son*, in these passages, to be a *proper name*. You say that this title *primarily* indicates the inferior nature united to the divine. I maintain that it *primarily* indicates the divine nature united to the human. But I cannot perceive that this difference essentially affects the exposition to be applied to these and a number of other texts of scripture, which present similar modes of expression.

I read, I acknowledge, with some surprise what you have said on *Colossians* i. 15. *who is the image of the invisible God, &c.*; and on *Hebrews* i. 5, as adduced by *Turretine*, in support of the doctrine of eternal Sonship. With respect to the first of these passages, you remark, (p. 134) that “the context going immediately before, affords an easy solution of its meaning. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of*

“ *our sins*;—*who is the image, &c.* Now  
 “ *who is the image?* He by *whose blood* we  
 “ have redemption. And who is it that shed  
 “ his blood? The preceding context tells us  
 “ that it was *God’s dear Son*. Was it, then,  
 “ the eternally begotten and co-equal *Son* that  
 “ shed *his blood*? Or was it the *incarnate*  
 “ *Logos*, i. e. the Messiah, who made atone-  
 “ ment by suffering?”—“ In exactly the same  
 “ strain,” you proceed—“ is the passage in  
 “ *Hebrews*. *Who, (being the irradiation of*  
 “ *his glory, and the express image of him,*  
 “ *and directing all things by his omnipotent*  
 “ *controul) having made expiation by himself*  
 “ *for our sins, sat down at the right hand of*  
 “ *the majesty on high*. Who, then, made ex-  
 “ piation by suffering for our sins? Surely the  
 “ Messiah, and not the eternal *Logos*. The  
 “ same Person, then, is the irradiation of the  
 “ Father’s glory, and his peculiar image.”

Although I forbore to insert these texts in  
 the list of direct scriptural testimonies pro-  
 duced in the preceding Letter, it was not be-  
 cause I doubted whether they were to my pur-  
 pose; but because I considered others as more  
 decisive, and was afraid of extending my re-  
 marks to a tedious length. I still think that  
*Turretine* with good reason made use of them

in support of his cause, and cannot help believing that the more they are impartially examined, the more they will be found to support that cause. He who is *the image of the invisible God, the first begotten before all creatures* (as I suppose the latter part of the verse to import;) he who *created all things in heaven and on earth; he who is before all things, and by whom all things consist;—he who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person, and upholds all things by the word of his power*—I say, the *Son, the first begotten*, of whom all these predicates are asserted, I am not afraid to stile the *eternal Son*.

Besides; in reference to *Heb. i. 5.* if Christ, as Son, does not possess the same divine nature with the Father, he cannot be *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person*. It has been often justly observed, “that the brightness of the Father's glory” here is certainly not to be understood of an *attribute*, or the *manifestation* of an attribute; for if so, the creation, the gospel, the graces of his people, in short, every thing whereby God makes himself known, is “the brightness of his glory.” It is evidently a title given to a Person; and if it does not represent that

Person, as such, as partaking of the *same nature* with the Father, and *equal to him* in all divine perfections, I should be at an entire loss to say what words would express this idea in all its fulness. Accordingly it is observable that the inspired writer immediately adds,—what is certainly peculiar to Divinity—that he *upholds all things by the word of his power*. And although, in his general description, he recognizes some of the attributes of the Son's Mediatorial character; yet he introduces these, by speaking of attributes antecedent to them, and which laid the only adequate foundation for them.

But what I read with particular surprise was the question which you ask concerning both these texts—“Was it, the eternally begotten and co-equal Son that shed his blood?” It surprised me the more, because in the third page following you insist so zealously and justly that “designations originally descriptive merely of quality, rank, &c. in process of time, by frequent usage, became *proper names*, so as to be descriptive of the whole person or being.” With this principle in view, what am I to think of the question just quoted? Might I not with just as much propriety ask you, in reference to your assertion

respecting 1 *Peter* i. 11—Was it the Spirit of the *incarnate* Logos that wrought in the ancient Jewish Prophets, long before he was incarnate, and, of course, before such a being, strictly speaking, existed? I beg you to cast an eye on *Revelation* xix. 13. *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called, the WORD (λογος) OF GOD.* Here there can be no doubt that the Messiah, in his glorified body, is seen and described in vision. But suppose I were to ask, how is the title *Word of God* applied to him? Was the Divine, eternal, incorporeal *Logos, as such, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, as expressive of humiliation and suffering?* How could he suffer at all, or bear the insignia of suffering? I find no difficulty in solving these questions; but on the principle which appears to be involved, and intended to be urged, in your query just quoted, I cannot see very well, my dear Sir, how *you* will answer them.

With respect to the use which the venerable *Turretine* makes of certain *epithets*, which in the sacred scriptures are combined with the word *Son*, I will offer only a few passing remarks. I forbore to introduce those epithets into the list of scriptural testimonies contained in the preceding Letter, because, with respect



to force, though I considered them as of some value, they struck me as being of secondary rather than primary importance. In other words, when we have ascertained the doctrine of eternal Sonship from other scriptures, I think these strong, and frequently recurring epithets, with remarkable aptness fall in with the doctrine, and assist not a little in illustrating and confirming it. The epithets to which I refer are those which you consider in your 129th and the four following pages; viz. *own* (ιδιος;) *beloved* (αγαπητος) *only-begotten* (μονογενης) and *first-born* (πρωτοτοκος.) I see, in all these, an admirable and beautiful harmony with the doctrine for which I plead, rather than arguments adapted *a priori* to ascertain and establish it. And in this point of view I value them, and think that *Turretine* was right in adducing them.

Your remarks on these epithets, I am constrained to say, are far from satisfying me. I think you have barely succeeded in showing, that they may *possibly* admit of a different sense from that which the advocates of eternal Sonship usually attach to them. But I am especially dissatisfied with one of your criticisms on the *third* of these epithets, viz. *μονογενης*. When you say, that your “examination of this

“ term has ended in the conviction, that, as applied to the Saviour it is a mere parallelism “ of *αγαπητος*,” I cannot conceal my surprise. The venerable Dr. *Jacomb*, a pious and learned Puritan divine of *England*, who wrote about a century and a half ago, in one of *several Sermons on the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans*, particularly notices this very interpretation of *μονογενης*, and unceremoniously classes it among those *Socinian* perversions of scripture, which have been employed to oppose the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. He rejects it; and among other remarks, observes, that, so far as the criticism alludes to *Genesis* xxii. 2, 12, 16. it certainly has no force, for that *Isaac* was really the ONLY son of *Abraham*;—the ONLY son of his wife; the ONLY son of promise; the ONLY heir of promise. The examples which you have adduced to illustrate and confirm your interpretation of the word in question, appear to me to prove only that fallible, and perhaps very imperfectly qualified translators, have used much freedom in their versions. What enlightened theologian would be willing to take the Septuagint rendering as, in all cases, giving the true meaning of the Old Testament? I must think that, if such license of criticism be

once admitted, we may make any text of scripture speak almost what we please.

A few insulated texts, of minor importance, as to their bearing on this subject, remain to be considered. I shall say a word or two on several of them, leaving the rest to be interpreted, as I think they may easily be, on the principles already laid down.

In commenting on *Isaiah* ix. 6, You say, (p. 152) “If I might insist on *names*, I would ask, “how can Christ be called the *everlasting Father*? How can the *Son* be the *Father*?” I hardly know how to interpret this question, when I find you yourself, in a preceding page (p. 128) expressing yourself on the very same title, as found in the very same passage of scripture, in the following manner. “Exactly correspondent with this sentiment is that of *Isaiah*, in chap. ix; where speaking of the *Son* who was to be born, and to be made universal King, he calls him, among other names, the *mighty God*, the *Father of eternity* (אֱבִי עֵד) which I understand, with *Rosenmueller*, to be an idiomatick phrase, “simply meaning *eternal*.” I presume, after this, it is not necessary for *me* to say a word in answer to your question in page 152. You have furnished it yourself in the most ample

manner. Other interpretations of it, in my opinion, entirely satisfactory, might, indeed, be given; but, on the principle of the *argumentum ad hominem*, they need not be recited.

With respect to 2 *Sam.* vii. 14, its primary reference was undoubtedly to *Solomon*. He was yet to be born; and, of course, this circumstance modified the language employed on the occasion. Its reference to the Son of God was secondary and remote; and it simply, I apprehend, declares *what* the relation should be between him and the Father. It says nothing about the *manner* in which that relation is constituted, or whether in *time* or *eternity*. I cannot perceive, therefore, that it affords the smallest aid, either to your cause or to mine; or that it is unfriendly to either.

As to *Psalms* lxxxix. 27. *I will make him my first born, &c.*; the original verb here translated, *I will make*, as the learned *Buxtorf* tells us, signifies, not only *do*, *pono*, but also *expono*. The meaning may, therefore, be, “I will set him forth as—or manifest him to be, my first born.” Accordingly, the *Septuagint* has it—“I will SET HIM, (OR EXHIBIT him) as a first born, high above all the kings

“ of the earth.” This relieves the passage, on my principle, of all difficulty.

You assert that *Hebrews* i. 6. *When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him,*” if it apply at all to the subject, is clearly *against* the doctrine of eternal generation. I do not perceive it to be so. To what event does the apostle refer, when he speaks of the *first-begotten* being *brought into the world*? Pretty certainly not to his introduction into office; for this had taken place four thousand years before his incarnation. But probably, either to his *birth*, according to the flesh, or to his *resurrection*. Most probably to the latter; for the expression in the original is *οταν δε παλιν εισαγαγη*—“ when he brings him *again* ;” which we may consider as peculiarly applicable to his rising again from the dead. But, whether these words refer to the Saviour’s birth of the virgin, or to his resurrection from the dead, they equally and perfectly accord, as I conceive, with my creed. I suppose, as before repeatedly expressed, that he was the *first begotten*, BEFORE he *came* or was *brought* into this world;—that he came AS the *only-begotten*, or *first-begotten* of the Father;—and that, accordingly, whether the ex-

pression refer to the one event, or the other, we have equal evidence, with respect to each, that he was gloriously attended and worshipped by *angels*. No legitimate use of this passage can, I think, be made against the doctrine which I am endeavouring to maintain.

But I will here take leave of the scriptural testimony. It is impossible for me, my dear Sir, to concur with you in your interpretation of several other passages. I am afraid, however, of wearying your patience, by pursuing the examination of them further; and will, therefore, hasten to another branch of the subject.

## LETTER V.

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### *Testimony of the Early Fathers.*

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REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

The considerations urged in the preceding Letters, having fully satisfied me, that the doctrine of the Divine and eternal Sonship of Christ is taught in Scripture; I might here lay down my pen. For, if this doctrine be really contained in the Bible, it matters little by whom it is denied. Yet, as I had asserted, that the “early Fathers” maintained it; and as so considerable a portion of your pamphlet is employed in attempting to show the contrary; I ought not, perhaps, with my present convictions, to abandon the cause here: more especially as we all agree, that the fact of the early uninspired christian writers being manifestly and generally in favour of any doctrine

or practice, forms a presumptive evidence in its favour of no small value. I propose, therefore, to take a hasty view of their testimony; examining a little those extracts which you have adduced in support of your allegation respecting them, and offering to your consideration a few others, which appear to me to look very much the other way.

When I said, that “the *early* christian “writers constantly declared that the doctrine “of the eternal generation of the Son was to “be firmly believed,” I certainly did not mean to *confine* my assertion to the testimony of the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers, as the word “early” might seem, at first view, to import. This was evident from my immediately afterwards quoting, in confirmation of my remark, *Ambrose*, of *Milan*, who, it is well known, was not born until a number of years after the Council of *Nice*. It was merely my intention to assert, that the Fathers of the first *four* or *five* centuries were generally uniform and positive in their testimony on this subject. But, as you have proceeded upon a different interpretation of my language, I am quite willing to adopt that interpretation as my own; and do verily believe that it will not be a difficult task to make it good.



And here I hope, my dear Sir, you will pardon me for saying, that after what I had read, in your Letters to Dr. *Channing*, concerning the testimony of the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers on this very subject, it was with no ordinary surprise that I found you speaking in a language so entirely different in your Letters to me. In your second Letter to Dr. *Channing*, you say, “This Council, (the *Nicene*)  
 “LIKE THE GREAT BODY OF THE ANCIENT FA-  
 “THERS, BELIEVED IN THE DOCTRINE OF  
 “ETERNAL GENERATION.” Again, you say, toward the close of your fourth Letter, “THE  
 “MOST OF THE ANCIENT FATHERS IN THE  
 “CHURCH MAINTAINED THE DOCTRINE OF  
 “ETERNAL GENERATION.” And, in another place, you expressly refer, with approbation, to the works of Bishop *Bull*, as containing satisfactory proof of this fact. *Now* you maintain that the body of the *Ante-Nicene* fathers did *not* so believe, and that Bishop *Bull* was in error. I am aware that men of diligent and liberal inquiry may, and sometimes do, alter their minds; and that “second thoughts,” are often the best. But, in this case, I must be permitted to believe that your “first thoughts” were the more correct and the more tenable.

One remark more may not be improperly

offered, before I proceed to the testimony of the Fathers. You call upon me to prove that the fathers maintained, that the generation of the Son of God was not only *eternal*, but also *necessary*. I cannot perceive any just ground for this demand. I never thought, and certainly have no recollection that I ever said, that they *did* thus believe. It is true I am myself a firm believer, in the *necessity* as well as the eternity of this generation; that is, I suppose that the Divine nature, in this respect, *could not* have been different from what it is, any more than it could have been different in any other respect. But I never alledged that the early fathers entertained the same opinion. When, therefore, passages are produced from any of their writings which assert or intimate, that the Son, though begotten *from eternity*, was begotten by or with the Father's *will*, or by an act of his *volition*; such passages may prove, for any thing I know, that the writers did not reason very consequentially, or express themselves very accurately; but they present to our view a point with which I have no special concern. Besides, I mean, hereafter, to call in question, what you appear every where to take for granted, when you allude to this point, viz. that there is any essential inconsis-

tency between what is *necessary* and what is *voluntary*, when properly understood.

If I understand your position with regard to the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers, it is this (p. 17, 18,) that, while they generally and decisively taught the eternity of the *Word*, they considered it as existing in God, before the creation of our world, only as the *Reason* or *Understanding* of the Divine nature, or, in one word, as an *attribute of Deity*; that at, or near, the time when the work of creation was to be performed, it became a *separate Hypostasis*; and that this event, viz. his *coming forth* to create, was what the body of the early Fathers style his *generation*; that at this time, and by this act, he became *the Son of God*; that to this date and transaction they referred at once, the title *Father*, as belonging to the *First Person* of the Trinity, and the title *Son*, as belonging to the *Second*: and, consequently, that these writers can by no means be said to have taught the *eternal Sonship*, or the *eternal generation* of the *Second Person* of the Trinity.—If, in this statement, I have done any injustice to your representation, I can assure you, my dear Sir, that I have not done it intentionally. And I know

that others have understood you in the same manner.

On this representation, if there were time or need for it, I might express my surprise that you should take so much pains to exhibit the Fathers under an aspect which confessedly affords not the least countenance to your own creed. But I will not dwell on this fact. It is of little importance. If historical verity be as you seem to think, undoubtedly every author has a right to make what use of it he pleases. I would offer several remarks, however, which, if I mistake not, will render it probable, that the pious and worthy writers referred to, have been, at least in some degree, misapprehended and erroneously exhibited.

My *first* remark is, that if the charge, as stated by you, be correct, it really amounts, in my view, to a charge of general "patristical" UNITARIANISM, so far as the period prior to the Council of *Nice* is concerned. Truly, my dear friend, if the extracts which you have given were to be considered as a fair specimen of the general manner in which the early Fathers speak of the Person of the Redeemer, I should turn away from their volumes, "sick " to the bottom of my heart," as you say you are, of their speculations. Dr. *Priestley*, indeed,

and others of his school, would persuade us that the early Fathers, were, in fact, as a body, Unitarians. But I am confident that they have laboured in vain; and, what is more, that they have been often and triumphantly refuted. And I have no doubt that you entertain the same opinion.

My *second* remark is, that I do not deny, that *some* of the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers *do* occasionally speak in a manner which would seem, at first view, to justify the charge which you have brought against them. A few of them are found, no doubt, to express themselves in a way sufficiently fanciful and repulsive concerning the *Λογος ενδιαθετος*, and the *Λογος προφορικος*: a notion which has been animadverted on by a number of writers within the last two centuries, and on which Bishop *Horsley* delivered the following opinion, in his controversy with Dr. *Priestley*, nearly forty years ago. “ If any thing be justly reprehensible in the “ notions of the *Platonick* Christians, it is “ this CONCEIT, which seems to be common to “ *Athenagoras* with them all, and is a key to “ the meaning of many obscure passages in “ their writings—That the *external display* “ of the powers of the Son in the business of “ creation, is the thing intended in the scrip-

“ ture language under the figure of his *gene-*  
“ *ration*. A conceit which seems to have no  
“ certain foundation in holy writ, and no au-  
“ thority in the opinions and doctrines of the  
“ preceding age. And it seems to have be-  
“ trayed some of those who were most wedded  
“ to it, into the use of a very improper lan-  
“ guage; as if a *new relation* had taken place  
“ between the First and Second Persons, when  
“ the creative powers were first exerted.”\*

My *third* remark is, that, although it must be confessed there is something in the writings of a few of those venerable ancients, to countenance the representation you have made; yet I cannot think that you have by any means done them justice in the exhibition of them which you have given, in reference to this subject. If it be meant to impute to them the opinion which I before stated, viz. that the Logos *immanent* or *endiathetick*, was not a Person, but an attribute of the Godhead; mere *intellect* or *reason*, or *wisdom*, existing from eternity; and that the Logos *prophorick* was considered by them as the formation of this attribute, just before the creation of the world, into a Person, by an act of the Divine will;

\* *Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley*, p. 63.

that they called this act the *generation* of the Son ; and that they believed in no other generation ;—I say, if it be meant to impute to them this opinion,—I do verily believe that the imputation is unjust. I cannot, indeed, claim so extensive an acquaintance with the early Fathers, as I wish it was in my power to claim ; yet I have read enough in them to be very confident that there were very few, if *any* of them, who really entertained such an opinion as has been just stated. And in this judgment I am supported by the decision of such men as Dr. *Waterland*, and Bishop *Horsley*. The latter, while he acknowledges the distinction which some of them make between the *endiathetick* and *prophorick* Logos, speaks in the following decisive language—

“ The conversion of an *attribute* into a *Person*,  
 “ whatever Dr. *Priestley* may imagine, is a  
 “ notion to which they were entire strangers.  
 “ They held, indeed, that the Son was neces-  
 “ sarily and inseparably attached to the at-  
 “ tributes of the Paternal mind ; insomuch  
 “ that the Father could no more be without  
 “ the Son, than without his own attributes.  
 “ But that the Son had been a mere attribute  
 “ before he became a Person, or that the Pa-  
 “ ternal attributes were older than the Son’s

“ personal existence, is a doctrine which they  
 “ would have heard with horror and amaze-  
 “ ment. With horror as Christians; with  
 “ amazement as philosophers.” And after-  
 wards, when called to re-consider this deci-  
 sion, he still pointedly insists—“ For the con-  
 “ version of an attribute into a substance, I  
 “ abide by my assertion, that it is the offspring  
 “ of your own imagination; and can only have  
 “ arisen from a misapprehension of the lan-  
 “ guage of the Platonick Fathers.”\* You are  
 the first Trinitarian that I remember to have  
 heard of, since the days of *Petavius* and *Huet*,  
 who ascribed such an opinion to the early writ-  
 ers of the Christian church.

My *fourth* remark is, that, with regard to  
*Petavius* and *Huet*, when they are brought  
 forward to prove that the early Fathers believed  
 in the simply *ante-mundane* generation of the  
 Son, their testimony ought to be understood.  
*Petavius*, a learned French Jesuit, who flour-  
 ished about two hundred years ago, was a firm  
 believer, both in the doctrine of the Trinity,  
 and in that of the eternal generation of the  
 Son. But being greatly incensed at the sepa-  
 ration of the Reformed churches from the

\* *Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley*, p. 64. 260.



Catholick communion; and finding that the Protestant cause was considered as receiving very important support from the writings of the Fathers of the first three centuries; he was anxious to take every method of degrading those Fathers, and destroying their authority. In order to do this most effectually, he endeavoured to shew that they were deeply erroneous with respect to doctrines which the Protestants and Catholicks alike held precious. With regard to *Huet*, Bishop *Horsley* observes, that he was the mere “echo of the very learned *Jesuit*.” Of course, so far as authority goes, we have here only the authority of a single man. His arguments, which Unitarians who came after him, borrowed and urged, are supposed by some of the most competent judges in the christian world to be examined and refuted with great learning and force by Bishop *Bull*, in his *Defensio Fidei Nicænæ*.

My *fifth* remark is, that of the eighteen or twenty Fathers whom you quote, a large number afford you no kind of aid; some, as I hope to prove, are decisively against you; and others are inaccurate only in phraseology. The solitary one or two,—for I think there are no more,—who *seem* to assert what you impute to them, if they really *do* so, ought to

be deemed *hereticks*, and of course, to be placed out of the question in this correspondence. Yet,

I remark, in the *sixth* place, that, after all, I do seriously doubt whether ANY ONE of the Fathers whom you have cited, when the testimony drawn from his whole writings comes to be impartially canvassed and compared, can be convicted of holding the opinion which you ascribe to them generally. Even *Tertullian*, (whom, of the whole number, I feel most inclined to give up) was, I firmly believe, a Trinitarian; and, consequently, not an advocate of mere *ante-mundane* generation, as you have represented it. When I find some of those early writers showing, by decisive passages, that they are, in the main, right; and at other times using language (which must be at all times figurative when applied to pure spirit) in an unskilful and incorrect manner;—what am I to infer? Certainly, as it seems to me, that their apparent errors are rather to be ascribed to crudeness of thought, or looseness of expression, in unguarded moments, rather than to any fixed or deliberate system of erroneous thinking.

My *last* remark is, that, in order to make a proper estimate of what is said by the Fathers

on this subject, it is necessary to bear in mind, as Dr. *Waterland* observed, more than a century ago, that there is a *three-fold generation* of the Son of God frequently mentioned by those early writers.

(1.) The *first* is, his eternal *generation*, or *filiation*, that is, his eternally existing *in* and *of* the Father; the eternal *Logos*, or *utterance* of the eternal Mind. It is in reference to this, primarily and essentially, that they represent him as the *only begotten*, and a distinct Person from the Father, but of the same substance with him.

(2.) His *second* generation, of which they speak, was his *coming forth*, from the Father, to exert his power in the work of creation. This is the *ante-mundane* generation, of which you say so much. It is, of course, represented, by those who speak of it, as taking place in time, and as taking place according to the *good pleasure*, or *will* of the Father: and it is in reference to this generation, as some of them supposed, that he is said, by the apostle, to be *πρωτοτοκος πασης κτισεως*—*First born before every creature*.

(3.) His *third* generation, or *filiation*, was when he condescended to be born of a virgin, and to become man. This *third*, as well as the

*first*, is repeatedly referred to in the sacred scriptures. The *second*, represented as a *birth*, appears to be entirely destitute of any scriptural warrant.

Sometimes the early Fathers refer to one of these generations, and sometimes to another. But that a number of them, and especially of those quoted by you, fully believed, and constantly maintained them *all*, I hope to produce satisfactory evidence, before I take leave of the subject. When, therefore, you show that a number of those Fathers used language, which can apply only to the *second* of the generations mentioned, you show what I pretend not to disprove or deny. But if my position be correct, this can avail you nothing, as to the substance of your argument from the Fathers. Whatever fanciful and unscriptural notions some of them might have taken up; yet if the great body of them evidently believed in a *divine* and *eternal filiation* besides; and if even some of those who talk of an *ante-mundane* Sonship, in other places speak in a way which can only be interpreted of a Sonship which had no beginning; then it is manifest that all the speculations concerning the *endia-thetick* and *prophorick Logos* which can be quoted, even if they were tenfold more nume-

rous than they are, can answer no other purpose than to prove that those venerable men sometimes wrote in a very weak and injudicious manner.

With these remarks in view, I shall now produce some of those passages from the Fathers who lived before the Council of *Nice*, which have convinced me that the foregoing representation is a simple statement of facts respecting them. I begin with the Greek Fathers of that period, with the consideration of whose testimony I propose to employ the remainder of this Letter.

And here I shall pass over BARNABAS and HERMAS with very slight notice. I find nothing in either of them decisive of the question at issue between us. Yet two or three short quotations will show that they speak of the *Son of God* very much in the Scriptural style, and evidently mean to include in this title, his divine and eternal character.

BARNABAS says—“ For this cause, the Lord  
 “ was content to suffer for our souls, although  
 “ he be the LORD OF THE WHOLE EARTH; to  
 “ whom God said before the beginning of the  
 “ world, *Let us make man, &c.*—For thus  
 “ saith the scripture concerning us, where it  
 “ introduceth the FATHER speaking to the

“SON, *Let us make man, &c.*—Then he  
 “clearly *manifested* himself to be the Son of  
 “God; for had he not come in the flesh, how  
 “should men have been able to look upon him  
 “that they might be saved?—Wherefore the  
 “Son of God came in the flesh for this cause,  
 “that he might fill up the measure of their ini-  
 “quity, &c. If, therefore, the *Son of God*,  
 “who is THE LORD OF ALL, and shall come to  
 “judge both the quick and dead, &c.” “Be-  
 “hold, again, Jesus, not the son of man, but  
 “the Son of God, made manifest in the flesh”  
 (εν σαρκι φανερωθεις.)\* I shall leave these ex-  
 tracts to speak for themselves. On the last  
 only I shall offer a single comment. The strik-  
 ing similarity of expression between the man-  
 ner in which *Barnabas* speaks of the SON as  
*manifested in the flesh*, and that in which the  
 apostle (1 *Tim.* iii. 16.) speaks of *God mani-  
 fest in the flesh* (θεος εφανερωθη εν σαρκι) will  
 arrest the attention of every reader.

HERMAS also says, as you quote, “The Son  
 “of God is indeed more ancient than any crea-  
 “ture; insomuch that he was in council with  
 “his Father at the creation of all things,”—  
 Again; “The name of the Son of God is great  
 “and *without bounds*, and the *whole world is*

\* *Catholick Epistle*, § 5, 6, 7. 13.

“supported by it—Every creature of God is supported by his Son.”\*

IGNATIUS also, notwithstanding what you have said of him, and of the only passage produced from him, I must still think both a competent, and a decisive witness on the subject under consideration. I do not admit that the most learned and able of the criticks reject as spurious the seven shorter Epistles of this Father, which alone are now quoted. But on this point it is impossible at present to enlarge. The passage referred to, is in these words—“There is one God, who revealed himself by Jesus Christ his Son, who is his eternal Logos, not proceeding from silence.”† The main design of *Ignatius* in this place evidently is to establish our Saviour’s divinity. He shews that he is God, because he is the *Word*, or the *Speech* of God, which, being eternal, is not preceded by *silence*, as the speech of men always must be. In other words, he plainly meant to say that the SON ALWAYS WAS, and IS CO-EVAL WITH GOD THE FATHER.

I believe this to be his meaning, not merely because it seems to me the only natural construction of the passage; nor because Bishop *Bull*, Bishop *Horsley*, and other learned men,

\* *Pastor. Lib. iii. Simil. 12. 14.*

† *Epist. ad Magnes. § 8.*

have confidently asserted, and learnedly proved it; but also because you yourself, while you have objected to this sense, have not proposed any other as a substitute.

Several other short passages scattered through the Epistles of *Ignatius*, though I acknowledge not so strong in favour of the doctrine which I maintain, as that just quoted, yet appear to me evidently favourable to it. The following is a specimen—“Now the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he himself who is our EVERLASTING HIGH PRIEST, THE SON OF GOD, even Jesus Christ, build you up in faith, &c.”—“That ye all by name come together in common in one faith, and in one Jesus Christ; who is of the race of *David* according to the flesh; the son of man and the SON OF GOD.”—“Who truly was of the race of *David*, according to the flesh, but the SON OF GOD, according to the will and power of God; truly born of the Virgin and baptized of *John* &c.”—“Jesus Christ—who was with the Father before all ages, and appeared in the end to us.”—“That so whatsoever ye do, ye may prosper both in body and spirit; in faith and charity; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Holy Spirit.”—“There is one Physician,



“ both fleshly and spiritual, begotten and un-  
 “ begotten ; God incarnate ; true life in death ;  
 “ both of *Mary* and of God : first passable,  
 “ then impassable ; even Jesus Christ our  
 “ Lord.”\* I know that it is possible to put a  
 gloss upon all these passages different from  
 that which renders the Sonship here spoken  
 of eternal ; but it appears to me that the latter  
 is the only natural interpretation. It is evi-  
 dent that, according to *Ignatius*, the title *Son*  
*of God*, is not founded on the *incarnation* :  
 for, *according to the flesh*, he tells us, he is the  
*son of man* ; but it is in a higher sense that  
 he is the SON OF GOD. He is begotten BOTH  
 OF MARY AND OF GOD.

JUSTIN MARTYR is the next to whose testi-  
 mony I shall advert. And here again, I can-  
 not by any means consider this Father as a  
 witness in favour of the doctrine of mere *ante-*  
*mundane* generation, as you seem to imagine.  
 Indeed I am persuaded that what he says on  
 this subject, when the several parts of it are  
 compared and taken together, will be found  
 to look very much like the old Orthodox doc-  
 trine ; or rather that the natural construction  
 of them is reconcilable with that doctrine

\* *Epist. ad Philipp.* § 12. *ad Magnes.* § 6. 13. *ad Smyrn.* § 1.  
*ad Ephes.* § 7. 20.

alone. I beg your attention to the following passages.

“ And when we say that the *Logos*, who is  
 “ the *first offspring of God*, was begotten  
 “ without mixture, even Jesus Christ our  
 “ Teacher, and that being crucified, dead,  
 “ and risen again, he ascended into heaven,  
 “ we do not bring forward any thing entirely  
 “ foreign to what is said by you concerning  
 “ those called the sons of *Jupiter*.”\*

“ But the *Son of God*, who is called Jesus,  
 “ if he had been no more than a mere man,  
 “ was worthy to be called the Son of God on  
 “ on account of his wisdom; for all writers  
 “ agree in calling God the Father of Gods and  
 “ men: but if we also denominate him the  
 “ *Logos of God*, ON ACCOUNT OF HIS BEING  
 “ BEGOTTEN OF GOD IN A PECULIAR MANNER,  
 “ above the common method of generation, as  
 “ we said before, &c.”†

“ But Jesus Christ peculiarly (*ιδιος*) the only  
 “ Son, was BEGOTTEN OF GOD, BEING HIS  
 “ WORD, (*Λογος*) and first born, and power.”‡

“ But by the Spirit and the Power, it is  
 “ not lawful to understand any thing else than

\* *Apol.* i. p. 31. Fol. Edit. *Thirlbii*. Lond. 1723. † *Ibid* p. 33.

‡ *Ibid* p. 35.

“ the *Logos*, who is the first begotten of God.”

“ But the *Logos* of God IS HIS SON.”\*

“ But to the Father of all there is no name given, because he is unbegotten; for by whatsoever name he should be called, he would have those imposing the name older than himself: but the words *Father*, *God*, *Creator*, *Lord* and *Sovereign*, are not proper names, but appellations derived from his benefactions and works. But his *Son*, who only with propriety is called *Son*, the *Logos*, co-existing with him, and begotten before all creatures, (οτε) when, (or since) in the beginning, by him he created and adorned all things; He is indeed called *Christ*, because by him God anointed and adorned all things; but this name embraces an unknown signification; in like manner, as the appellation *God* is not a proper name, but an opinion of an inscrutable thing implanted in the nature of man; but *Jesus* had the title and designation of *man* and *Saviour*.”†

“ Friends, as I said, I will give you another testimony from the scriptures, that God, in the beginning, before all creatures, begat from himself a certain rational Power, which

\* *Apol.* i. p. 54. 93.

† *Ib.* ii. p. 114.

“ is called by the Holy Spirit, *Glory of God*,  
 “ but sometimes *Son*, sometimes *Wisdom*,  
 “ sometimes *Angel*, sometimes *God*, sometimes  
 “ *Lord*, and *Logos*, and once he called himself  
 “ *Leader of the host*, when he appeared to  
 “ *Joshua* the son of *Nun*. It belongs to him  
 “ to be called by all these names, as well be-  
 “ cause he administers the counsel of his Fa-  
 “ ther, as because he was born of the will of  
 “ his Father. But something of the same kind  
 “ we perceive to take place in ourselves, for  
 “ when we put forth any *rational expression*,  
 “ (*λογον*) this word (or idea) is begotten; not  
 “ in the way of abscission, as if we diminished  
 “ our reason by putting it forth. And another  
 “ instance of a like kind we perceive to take  
 “ place in fire; for the fire from which ano-  
 “ ther is kindled, is not diminished, but con-  
 “ tinues as before, and both it, and that which  
 “ was kindled from it, appear in existence at  
 “ the same time: there is no diminution of that  
 “ fire from which the other was kindled. But  
 “ the WORD of Wisdom shall testify for me,  
 “ that HE IS HIMSELF GOD who is begotten of  
 “ the Father of the Universe, and is the *Lo-*  
 “ *gos* and the *Wisdom*, and the *Glory* of him  
 “ who begat him; and by the mouth of *Solo-*  
 “ *mon* thus he speaks. *Proverbs* viii. 21.\*

\* *Dial. cum Tryph.* p. 266.

Again ;—“ But indeed this very offspring  
 “ put forth by the Father, co-existed with the  
 “ Father before all creatures, and to him the  
 “ Father spake, as *Solomon* has declared, be-  
 “ cause, in the beginning, before all creatures,  
 “ this very offspring was begotten of God,  
 “ which by *Solomon* is called *Wisdom*.”\*

Now, when I take up these extracts, and look at them, as a plain man, who had no knowledge of conflicting theories, would be likely to do, they appear to me clearly to evince the following things—*First*, That *Justin* considered *Son*, and *Logos* or *Word*, as convertible names or titles for the same glorious Person ; and that he never dreamed of the latter being *eternal*, and the former only *ante-mundane*. *Secondly*, that he intended to speak of the *Logos* or *Word* as being begotten—begotten in the beginning—before all creatures—in other words, as far back as the *Logos* existed. *Thirdly*, that it is as plainly asserted that the *Son* existed before all creatures, as that the *Logos* existed before all creatures. Now, as you confess, and I think truly, that *Justin* considered and represented the *Logos* as eternal, there appears to me precisely the same evidence that he considered his *Sonship*

\* *Dial. cum Tryph.* p. 270.

as eternal. And *fourthly*, that he considered the *Logos* or *Son* as a Person begotten (not by the mere exhibition of something previously existing, but) by the Father, *out of his own substance*, and in a *peculiar*, and *ineffable* manner.

In the foregoing extracts, however, there are two things of which you avail yourself. The first is, that *Justin* represents the *Word* as begotten *by or with the will or counsel of the Father*. Agreeably to an intimation before given, it is my purpose, in a subsequent Letter, to consider this point more at large. Until I come to that discussion, therefore, I shall content myself with saying, once for all, that I am not bound to justify every expression used by the Fathers on this subject. It is a plain matter of *fact* which I am now endeavouring to establish. But even if it were otherwise, I do not admit of any inconsistency between *Justin's* language, as to this point, and my creed. I maintain that an act of God may be *voluntary* and yet *eternal*. If so, all objection drawn from this source is at an end.

The second thing in the extracts from *Justin* on which you lay great stress, is that clause in the extract from his Second Apology, in which he says, that “ the *Logos* was begotten

“ before all creatures, *when*, in the beginning, “ by him he created and adorned all things.” I shall presently try to solve this difficulty; and will only now say, that when *Justin*, in so many other places, as we have seen, speaks a language by no means favourable to the mere *ante-mundane* generation, which you suppose him here to assert, the natural inference is, either that the place has been corrupted, or that you misapprehend its meaning. I know not of a sounder or a more important principle of interpretation, than that we must ascertain the import of those passages in any writer, which are obscure or doubtful, by those the meaning of which is more plain and certain.

You complain that Bishop *Bull*, in quoting and translating this passage from *Justin*, has acted an unfair part. In fact you charge him with directly corrupting *Justin's* text, as well as giving a false version of it. I know not, my dear Sir, what editions either of *Justin* or of *Bull* you may have used. But in the edition of *Bull's* Works, in the original Latin, from which I quote, (the only one which I have at hand) and which is the folio edition of *London*, 1703—I find that the Bishop gives the text from *Justin's* original exactly as you give it,\*

\* *BULLI Oper.* p. 187.

and as I find it in two editions of *Justin* to which I have access. He does not, then, yourself being judge, corrupt the text. And, with respect to his rendering  $\sigma\epsilon$  by *quoniam*, instead of *cum* or *quando*, it is certainly some mitigation of the Bishop's offence, that, after giving the original text, as far as I can see, exactly, he annexed, *verbatim*, the Latin version which he found made to his hand, and which is given in both the editions of *Justin* which I have had an opportunity of examining; one, that of *London*, (1723.); the other that of *Cologne*, (1686.); both fortified by the authority of some of the most learned men of *Germany*, *France* and *England*, that the seventeenth century produced.

And, after all, I have little doubt that the editors, whose translation Bishop *Bull* adopted, were right; that is, that they have given the true spirit of *Justin's* original. A learned friend has expressed to me an opinion, which, the more I examine, the more I am disposed with confidence to embrace. It is, that the passage in question has been slightly corrupted; that *Justin* wrote  $\sigma\iota$  instead of  $\sigma\epsilon$ ; and, of course, that the proper translation is *quoniam*, and not *quando*. My principal reason for thinking favourably of this sug-



gestion is, that the sense conferred on the passage by introducing *οτι*, instead of *οτε*, appears to me to be the only consistent sense. The venerable Father had just before declared, that the *Son* or *Logos* co-existed with the Father, and was begotten before all creatures; and he proceeds to prove it by saying, *since*, or *because*, by him in the beginning, the Father created all things; in other words, he must have been begotten before all creatures, *since* he was the Maker of all creatures. Nothing, as I conceive, can be more natural, direct, or consistent than this reasoning. But it would be strange indeed if *Justin*, who had said, the moment before, that the *Logos* was begotten before all creatures, should, in a clause of the same sentence immediately following, undertake to say, that he was begotten, *when* those creatures were made.

I am also constrained to think, that you have done some injustice to Bishop *Bull*, when you allege that he misrepresents *Justin*, in making him say, that no name is given to the Father or the Son; whereas, you assert, *Justin* really declares that the Son *has* a name, and has one, on his principle, *properly*; because he was begotten *when* the world was created. Do you not, my dear Sir, misap-

prehend *Justin*? I verily think you do. I understand him precisely as Bishop *Bull* does. I observe too, that Dr. *Waterland*, who certainly is, in general, both a careful and a discerning reader, interprets *Justin* in the same manner. And it appears to me that if you read attentively, a sentence or two further on than those which you have quoted, you will be convinced that this interpretation is the true one.

I have only to say one word more for Bishop *Bull*. You express no little surprize that “ he “ should have passed over in silence all the “ passages from *Justin*, which militate so directly,” against the doctrine which he attempted to support by him. I can scarcely help wondering that you should have “ passed “ over the passages” of which you speak, “ in silence” yourself. For, as I read *Justin*, the only passage which you have produced from him, which in the least degree seems to militate (and I think it only *seems*) against the doctrine of eternal generation, is precisely that which Bishop *Bull* has quoted with the utmost fairness, and commented upon particularly. It would, indeed, be, I suspect, very hard for any man to produce such passages from *Justin*, as you have described; for, until I see

them, I must seriously doubt whether any such are to be found in his acknowledged writings.

IRENÆUS, too, notwithstanding all that you have said on the other side, I am constrained still to consider and quote, as decisively in favour of the doctrine of eternal generation. It is freely granted, indeed, that like most of the early Fathers, he displays but little theological accuracy. Yet I am wholly unable to put any rational construction on such passages as those which I am about to exhibit, which does not make the Sonship of Christ to be properly *Divine* and *eternal*.

“ Having plainly shewn,” says *Irenæus*,  
 “ that the Word, which was with God in the  
 “ beginning, by whom all things were made,  
 “ and who was always present with mankind,  
 “ was, in the last times, according to the pre-  
 “ determination of the Father, united to his  
 “ own creature, being made man, capable of  
 “ suffering : there is no room for the contra-  
 “ diction of those who say, if Christ was then  
 “ born, he did not exist before. For we have  
 “ shewn that the *Son of God did not then begin*  
 “ *to be, having always existed with the Fa-*  
 “ *ther ;* but when he was incarnate and made  
 “ man, he took upon himself the sad forlorn  
 “ condition of man, compendiously procuring

“salvation for us; that so what we had lost in  
 “*Adam*, the likeness and similitude of God,  
 “we might recover in Jesus Christ. For since  
 “it was impossible, that he who was once sub-  
 “dued, and cast off by disobedience, should be  
 “renewed, and receive the reward of victory;  
 “and since it was also impossible that he who  
 “had fallen under sin, should obtain salvation;  
 “the Son, who was the Word of God, descend-  
 “ing from the Father, submitting even to  
 “death, and perfecting the dispensation of our  
 “salvation, accomplished both.”\*

Again, the same Father asserts—“THE  
 “SON, FROM ETERNITY, CO-EXISTED WITH  
 “THE FATHER; and from the beginning he  
 “always revealed the Father to angels and  
 “archangels, and principalities and powers,  
 “and all to whom it pleased him to reveal  
 “him.”†

Again, (Lib. iv. cap. 20.) he says, “That  
 “the Word, THAT IS THE SON OF GOD, AL-  
 “WAYS EXISTED WITH THE FATHER, I have  
 “largely demonstrated.”

Again, in the same chapter, he says—“The  
 “Father made all things by himself, that is by  
 “his *Word* and his *Wisdom*. For his *Word*

\* *Irenæi (Benedict. Edit.)* Lib. iii. cap. 18.

† *Ibid.* Lib. ii. cap. 30.

“ and *Wisdom*, that is, his *Son* and *Spirit*,  
 “ have been always present with him, and by  
 “ them and in them, he freely and sponta-  
 “ neously made all things.”

In another place, *Irenæus* thus speaks to the *Gnosticks*—“ A certain Prophet says of him  
 “ (the Son of God) *Who shall declare his*  
 “ *generation?* But ye, conjecturing the man-  
 “ ner of generation from the Father, and  
 “ transferring the utterance of a word, made  
 “ by the tongue of men, to the Word of God,  
 “ are justly detected by us in gross ignorance  
 “ both of things human and divine. Being  
 “ unreasonably puffed up, ye boldly profess  
 “ to know the unspeakable mysteries of God.  
 “ Although even the Lord himself, the Son of  
 “ God, hath granted that the Father alone knows  
 “ the day of judgment, expressly declaring—  
 “ *Of that day and hour knoweth no man,*  
 “ *neither the Son, but the Father only.* If,  
 “ then, the Son was not ashamed to refer the  
 “ knowledge of that day to the Father, neither  
 “ do we blush to reserve to God things more  
 “ difficult with respect to us. For no one is  
 “ above his Master. If any one, then, shall  
 “ ask us, How is the Son produced by the  
 “ Father? We answer him, that no man  
 “ knows that production, or generation, or

“ utterance, or revelation, or whatever you  
 “ please to call it, since it is inexplicable. It  
 “ is understood by no man; neither by *Valen-*  
 “ *tinus*, nor *Marcion*, nor *Saturninus*, nor  
 “ *Basilides*, nor angels, nor archangels, nor  
 “ principalities, nor powers, nor any one, ex-  
 “ cept the Father alone who begat, and the  
 “ Son who is begotten of him. Since, then,  
 “ his generation is inexplicable, they who at-  
 “ tempt to explain the generations, or produc-  
 “ tions, are beside themselves, promising to  
 “ explain things inexplicable; for that a word  
 “ is produced by thought and sense, all men  
 “ know.”\*

In another place, *Irenæus*, describing the  
 faith of a true spiritual man, a real christian,  
 concerning the holy Trinity, expresses himself  
 thus—“ He has all things; he has an entire  
 “ faith in the one Almighty God, from whom  
 “ are all things; a firm persuasion in our Lord  
 “ Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by whom are  
 “ all things; and in his dispensations by which  
 “ the Son of God was made man; and a true  
 “ knowledge of the Holy Spirit of God, who,  
 “ through every age represents to men, ac-  
 “ cording to the will of the Father, the dis-  
 “ pensations of the Father and the Son.”†

\* *IRENÆI oper.* Lib. ii. cap. 28. p. 158.      † Lib. iv. cap. 33. p. 272.

The conclusion from these passages, I acknowledge, strikes me as irresistible. If the SON of GOD, AS SON, *never began to be*, but *always existed with the Father*; if he was always present with the Father, in the same manner as the Holy Spirit was, that is *distinctly* and *personally*, which one of the extracts seems to declare; if the *Word*, (which you grant the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers consider as divine and eternal) was, according to *Irenæus*, begotten, and on that account compared to the utterance of a word by the mouth of man;—if the SON OF GOD WAS MADE MAN, and of consequence was SON before he became incarnate;—then the Son was meant to be represented by this Father as Divine and eternal.

THEOPHILUS, pastor of *Antioch*, lived about the same time with *Irenæus*. He not only expressly calls Christ GOD, and declares that *the world was made by him*; but he also goes on to say, “When the Father said, *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*, He spake to no other but to his own Word, his own Wisdom, that is to the SON, and the Holy Spirit.” These he styles a “Trinity in the Godhead.”\*

\* THEOPH. ad *Autolyc.* Lib. ii. p. 106, 114, 130.

Here, again, we have the *Word* and the *Son* represented as the same—" *The Word*, THAT IS THE SON :'" and we have the *Son*, as such, represented as one of the "TRINITY IN THE GODHEAD"—Expressions, I should think, very unequivocally importing the doctrine of eternal Sonship.

The testimony of ATHENAGORAS, who flourished about A. D. 175, I can by no means consider as speaking the language which you ascribe to him. I will begin with the same extract which you give, as your only specimen of his manner of writing on this subject.

" I have sufficiently demonstrated that we  
 " (Christians) are not atheists, since we be-  
 " lieve in one God, unbegotten, eternal, invis-  
 " ble, impassible, incomprehensible, known  
 " only by reason and the *Logos*, surrounded  
 " by light and beauty, and spirit and power  
 " ineffable; who by his *Logos* created,  
 " adorned, and upholds the universe. We ac-  
 " knowledge also a Son of God. Nor let any  
 " one consider it as ridiculous that I should  
 " attribute a Son to God: not as the poets,  
 " who in forming their fables, exhibit gods in  
 " no respect better than men: we do not thus  
 " think concerning God the Father, or con-  
 " cerning the Son. But the Son of God is the



“ Word ( $\Lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ) of the Father in manifestation  
 “ ( $\iota\delta\epsilon\alpha$ ) and energy. Because for him, and by  
 “ him were all things made, the Father and  
 “ the Son being one; and the Son is in the  
 “ Father, and the Father in the Son, by the  
 “ unity and power of the Spirit; the Son of  
 “ God being the mind and  $\Lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  of the Father.  
 “ But if, by reason of the excellence of your  
 “ understanding, you should still further in-  
 “ quire what we are to understand by the Son,  
 “ I will briefly declare it to you. He is the  
 “ first offspring of the Father; not as made;  
 “ (for from the beginning God, being an eter-  
 “ nal Mind, had in himself the Logos, being  
 “ from eternity ( $\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\chi\omicron\varsigma$ ) possessed of the Lo-  
 “ gos.) But of all gross matter, and unformed  
 “ nature, &c.———he came forth, that he  
 “ might be the idea and energy. With this  
 “ account the prophetick Spirit agrees; for  
 “ he says, *The Lord created me in the begin-  
 “ ning of his progress to his works.* And  
 “ even this Holy Spirit, who energized in the  
 “ prophets when they spoke, we say is an  
 “ emanation from God. Like the rays of the  
 “ sun, it emanates from, and is borne back to  
 “ him. Who, then, is not astonished, that we,  
 “ who say that there is God the Father, GOD  
 “ THE SON, and the Holy Spirit;—that we

“ who represent their power in unity, and  
 “ their distinction in order, should hear our-  
 “ selves called atheists.”\*

In the same work, a few pages afterwards, *Athenagoras*, addressing the Emperor and his Son, who were sharers in the throne, expresses himself thus. “ I entreat you, Supreme  
 “ Rulers, to bear with me, if in my discourse,  
 “ I should bring forth true reasons : for I do  
 “ not propose to myself to make an attack  
 “ upon idols ; but my object is to repel ca-  
 “ lumnies, and to offer the reasons of our per-  
 “ suasion. You have in yourselves the means  
 “ of conceiving of the celestial kingdom ; for  
 “ as to You, Father and Son, all things are  
 “ subject, having received the empire from  
 “ above (for the heart of the king is in the  
 “ hands of God, saith the prophetic Spirit) ;  
 “ so also to the one God, and his *Logos*, the  
 “ intelligent and INSEPARABLE SON, all things  
 “ are subjected.”†

One extract more from this Father. “ For  
 “ we assert, that God, and the Son, his *Logos*,  
 “ and the Holy Spirit, considered in regard  
 “ to power, are (three) Father, Son, and Spi-  
 “ rit. But the Mind, and *Logos*, and Wisdom

\* *Athenag. Legatio pro. Christ.* p. 10, 11. Edit. *Colon. Syl-*  
*burgh.* 1686.

† *Ibid.* p. 17.

“ are the Son of the Father, and an emanation  
 “ from him; so also is the Spirit, as light from  
 “ flame.”\*

The translation which I have given of the first of these extracts, does not differ materially from yours: yet I confess I am not able to read it with your eyes. To me its natural, direct construction appears very different from the interpretation of it which you have given. *Athenagoras* constantly represents the *Son* and the *Logos* as one and the same; using the two titles interchangeably,—“ The Son of God is the *Logos*” —“ The Son of God is the Mind and *Logos* of the Father” —“ The *Logos*, the intelligent and inseparable Son,” &c. He ascribes Divinity to the Son, as such—using this expression—GOD THE SON. And he, most distinctly, places the personality of the Son and of the Holy Spirit upon the same footing; representing them both as flowing from the Father, or as “ an emanation from him.” But as he evidently considered the Holy Spirit as an eternal Person, so we may also conclude he considered the Son. Besides, the “ coming forth” (*προελθων*) ascribed to the Son, is not called by *Athenagoras* a genera-

\* *Athenag. Legatio pro. Christ.* p. 27.

*tion of the Son.* Of course, the passage in which this expression occurs, makes nothing in favour of the position for which you contend; as all agree that when creation took place, there was what might be called a coming forth of the Divine Agent.

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS comes next in order. You acknowledge, that this Father cannot be quoted with confidence as in your favour. But you seem to think at the same time, that he cannot be adduced as a decisive witness in support of my creed. I am glad to have from you so explicit an acknowledgment that you can find nothing in him that is pointedly *against* me; for, unless I am deceived, I have found several passages in this writer, which it would be difficult to construe in any other way than as supporting my doctrine.

The first which I shall quote, is that which occupies the first place in your list of citations from this author. It is in these words—“The image of God is his Logos; and the Divine Logos is the genuine Son of understanding (or intellect), the original Light of Light.”\* Here *Clemens* calls the Logos, *the image of God*; the very language of the apostle con-

\* *Admonitio ad Gentes*, p. 62. Edit. Sylburg. Colon. 1688.

cerning the first-begotten Son; Col. i. 15. Again; he calls this very Logos the Son, the genuine Son of intellect—A mode of expression in which he is literally followed by *Basil* and *Cyril*, who of all the *Post-Nicene* Fathers, were among the most decisive and zealous advocates of the eternal generation of the Son. They both speak of the Son familiarly, as “coming forth (*ex τού Νου*) from intellect.”\* And, with respect to the phrase “*original Light of Light*,” it is in itself so expressive of underived glory, and so remarkably similar to the language of the Nicene Creed itself, that I imagine most readers will consider it as designating the divine generation which that Creed maintains.

The next passage to which I would refer you, is the following—“The Divine Word, “most manifestly the true God, who was equal “to the *Lord* of all things; FOR HE WAS HIS “SON, (*οτι ην υιος αυτου*) and the Word was “in God.”† Stronger terms could hardly have been used. Here *Clement* declares that the Saviour is truly God; that he is the Divine Word; that he is equal to God the Fa-

\* *BASIL. Homil. in Johan. i. Tom. i. p. 506. CYRIL in Thesaur. Tom. v. p. 45. 48.*

† *Admonitio ad Gentes, p. 68.*

ther; for this reason, BECAUSE HE IS THE SON OF GOD. This appears to me perfectly decisive evidence that he believed in a divine and essential Sonship.

The third passage on which I rely is one to which you allude, in which *Clement* expressly ascribes *eternity* to the Son. “The eternal “ Son (*υιος αιδιος*) overcoming is a lovely spectacle to the Father.”\* This language I consider as requiring no comment.

Again, *Clement* says, “The Son is the perfect Word, born of the perfect Father.” And again, “The God of all things is only “ one good and just Creator, the Son in the “ Father.”† From these expressions we may undoubtedly gather, that in the view of this Father, the *Son* and the *Word* were regarded as the same; and as he, in a number of places, declares that the Word was eternally with God, and that this eternal Word was begotten of the mind, or substance of the Father; so we may infer that he considered the Son as eternal, agreeably to his express declaration in a passage before cited. Nor is the next clause less decisive. When he says that “God is one good and just Creator, THE SON IN

\* *Admonitio ad Gentes*, p. 75.

† *Pedagog.* Lib. i. cap. vi. 92.

THE FATHER," could he employ language more strongly to convey the idea that the *Sonship* was essential and eternal in the Godhead?

You have quoted a passage from the sixth book of the *Stromata* of *Clement*, your version of which I would request you, for a moment, to reconsider. In the edition of *Clement* which I use, it stands thus, as nearly as I can give it. "There is one unbegotten Being, the Almighty God. And there is one begotten before all things, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made. For there is one *true God*, who created the beginning of all things, *by whom is meant the first-begotten Son*, as Peter writes, who accurately understood that passage, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. This is he who is called Wisdom by all the Prophets, &c."\*

It does appear to me that this translation gives the sense of *Clement* more perspicuously, to say the least, than your's; and that the genuine aspect of it, as thus exhibited, is altogether in favour of my doctrine. Indeed, if the doctrine of eternal Sonship be not taught in this passage, I must despair of finding it in

\* *Stromata*, Lib. vi. p. 644.

any document of antiquity. For I cannot perceive that any of those whom you acknowledge to be its advocates, present it a whit more clearly or strongly than *Clement*.

HIPPOLYTUS, who flourished about A.D. 220, commenting on that strong declaration concerning the Son of God, which is found in *Philip. ii. 9.* writes thus—“ He, (the Son) is  
 “ said to be *exalted*, as having wanted that ex-  
 “ altation before ; but this is said in respect  
 “ only of his *humanity*. And he has also a  
 “ name given him, as a matter of favour, *which*  
 “ *is above every name*, as the blessed *Paul* ex-  
 “ presses it. But in truth and reality, this  
 “ was not the giving him any thing which he  
 “ HAD NOT NATURALLY FROM THE BEGINNING.  
 “ So far from it, that we are rather to esteem  
 “ it his *returning* to what he had in the be-  
 “ ginning, ESSENTIALLY and UNALTERABLY :  
 “ on which account it is, that he, having con-  
 “ descended to put on the humble garb of  
 “ *humanity*, said, *Father, glorify me with*  
 “ *the glory which I had with thee before the*  
 “ *world was*. For he was ALWAYS invested  
 “ with Divine glory, having been CO-EXIS-  
 “ TENT with his Father before all ages, and  
 “ before all time, and the foundation of the



“ world.”\* Again, the same writer says—  
 “ We can have no right conception of the ONE  
 “ GOD, but by believing in a REAL Father,  
 “ Son, and Holy Ghost.”†

In the days of *Gregory Thaumaturgus*, occurred the Council of *Antioch*, which was convened with a principal reference to the heresy of *Paul of Samosata*. At this council, six Bishops, probably with the full concurrence of all the rest of the members, addressed a Letter to *Paul*, which was intended to discountenance and put down his heresy, and which appears to me clearly to evince that the writers fully believed the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. Among other passages in that letter the following occur.—Speaking of the Son, they say “ He is the Wisdom, the  
 “ Word, and the power of God, *existing be-*  
 “ *fore ages*, not in foreknowledge, but in *es-*  
 “ *sence and subsistence, God and the Son of*  
 “ God”——“ We believe him *always to have*  
 “ *existed with the Father*, and to have ful-  
 “ filled the Father’s will in the creation of all  
 “ things.”‡

\* HIPPOLYT. Tom. ii. p. 29. *Fabric. edit.*

† HIP. *contra Noet.* p. 16.

‡ *Bibliotheca Patrum.* Tom. ii. quoted from BULL. *Def. Fid. Nic.*

The celebrated *Confession of Faith*, by GREGORY THAUMATURGUS, who flourished about A.D. 235, was given at large, in my “Letters on Unitarianism;” and there would be no need of repeating it here, were it not probable that this page may be perused by some who have never seen my former publication. It is in the following strong language. “There is one God, the Father of the living “Word, of the subsisting Wisdom and Power, “and of Him who is his ETERNAL IMAGE: the “the perfect Begetter of Him that is Perfect, “the Father of the only begotten Son. There “is one Lord, the Only of the Only, God of God, “the Character and Image of the Godhead; “the powerful Word, the comprehensive “Wisdom, by which all things were made, “and the Power that gave being to the whole “creation: the true Son of the true Father, “the Invisible of the Invisible, the Incorruptible of the Incorruptible, the Immortal of the “Immortal, and the ETERNAL of Him that is “Eternal. There is one Holy Ghost, having “its subsistence of God, which appeared “through the Son to mankind, the perfect “image of the perfect Son; the Life giving “Life; the holy Fountain; the Sanctity and “the author of Sanctification; by whom God

“ the Father is made manifest ; who is over  
 “ all, and in all ; and God the Son, who is  
 “ through all. A perfect Trinity, which  
 “ neither in eternity, glory, or wisdom is di-  
 “ vided, or separated from itself.”\*

You call in question the genuineness of this creed ; and refer to *Martini* for your reasons. I have had no opportunity of seeing what that writer has said on this point ; but have certainly never met with any thing which appeared to me sufficient to lead to a denial, or even a serious doubt, that it is the genuine work of *Gregory*. Not only *Gregory of Nyssa*, who is a high authority, but also *Basil*, who is at least as high, vouch in the most decisive manner for its authenticity. The learned *Bingham*, too, and Bishop *Bull*, among the moderns, have vindicated the credit of this creed, in a very satisfactory manner.† The greater part, if I mistake not, of those who have endeavoured to decry it as spurious, have been *Arians* or *Socinians*.

ORIGEN is unquestionably a very decisive advocate of the eternal Sonship of Christ. The

\* GREGOR, *Neocæsar. Oper.* p. 1. apud. GREGOR. *Nyss.* Tom. iii. p. 546.

† BINGHAM'S *Origines Ecclesiasticæ* ; Book x. Chap. 5. BULLI *Defens. Fid. Nic. Sect. 2.* Cap. 12. 2.

following passages, I should suppose, could leave no one in doubt as to this fact. *Athanasius* cites him as saying—“ If he is the Image  
 “ of the invisible God, the Image is invisible ;  
 “ and I dare add, if he is the likeness of the  
 “ Father, *no time ever was when he was not.*  
 “ For when was God, who by *St. John* is  
 “ called Light, without the splendour of his  
 “ own glory, that any one should presume to  
 “ assign a beginning to the Son, before which  
 “ he was not?—Let him who dares speak  
 “ thus—“ *There was a time when he was*  
 “ *not,*” consider what he says, namely, that  
 “ there was a time when Wisdom and Reason  
 “ and Life was not.”\* The same Father, in  
 his commentary on those words in the second  
 Psalm—*Thou art my Son, this day have I be-*  
*gotten thee,* expresses himself thus—“ It is  
 “ said to him by God, with whom all time is  
 “ *to-day.* For he, I suppose, hath neither  
 “ evening nor morning ; but time, if I may so  
 “ speak, co-extending itself with his unbe-  
 “ gotten and eternal life, is the *to-day* in which  
 “ the Son was begotten ; so that we find *no be-*  
 “ *ginning of his generation* any more than  
 “ of the “ *to-day.*” Again ; the same Father,  
 in writing to *Celsus*, says, “ Let those our ac-

\* *ATHANASIUS Oper.* Tom. i. p. 277.

“ cusers know, that this Jesus whom we believe to have BEEN GOD, and the SON OF GOD, FROM THE BEGINNING, is *no other than the Word himself.*”\* And, in another part of the same work, remarking on those words of our Lord, *Matt. xi. 27. No man knoweth the Son, save the Father, &c.* he says, “ For it is impossible that he who was BEGOTTEN FROM ETERNITY, and who was the *first-born before every creature*, should be known, as to his real dignity, by any but the Father who begat him.”†

Accordingly, *Socrates*, the ecclesiastical historian, after expressing his wonder how it could have happened, that a certain great admirer of *Origen*, could persist in retaining the Arian heresy, gives this reason for his surprize, “ that *Origen* every where confesses the Son to be *co-eternal with the Father.*”

The following Creed, delivered by *Origen*, in his work entitled, *Of First Principles*, not only ascertains his own belief on this subject, but also the doctrine of the church in his day. “ The things which are MANIFESTLY HANDED DOWN TO US BY THE APOSTOLICAL PREACHING are these; First, that there is one God,

\* *Contra Celsum*. 1. 3. p. 135. Cantab. Edit. 1677.

† *Ib.* lib. 6. p. 287.

“ who created and formed all things, &c. The  
 “ next article is, that Jesus Christ, who came  
 “ into the world, was BEGOTTEN OF THE FA-  
 “ THER BEFORE EVERY CREATURE, and who  
 “ ministering to his Father in the creation of  
 “ all things; (for by Him all things were made,)  
 “ in the last times made himself of no reputa-  
 “ tion, and became man. He who was God was  
 “ made flesh; and when he was a man, he con-  
 “ tinued the same God that he was before.  
 “ They also delivered unto us that the Holy  
 “ Ghost was joined in the same honour and  
 “ dignity with the Father and the Son.”\*

Again; *Origen*, in his commentary on *John*, says, “ The *Sabellians* did not only make the  
 “ *Father* and the *Son* ONE IN ESSENCE (WHICH  
 “ THE CHURCH ALSO DID;) but they carried  
 “ it so far as to make them one *subject*, or *hy-*  
 “ *postasis*, having only a *nominal*, not a *real*  
 “ distinction.” Here *Origen* not only tells us  
 what *he* thought correct; but he also informs  
 us what THE CHURCH in his day believed—and  
 that the Son, as Son, was one in essence with  
 the Father; and, of course, Divine and  
 eternal.

Again, in his work on *First Principles* (Lib.

\* ORIGEN. Tom i. p. 665.

i. cap. 2.) he expresses himself thus—“ Now  
 “ that you may know the omnipotence of the  
 “ Father and the Son to be one and the same,  
 “ as he is one and the same God and Lord  
 “ with the Father, hear what *John* saith in  
 “ the *Apocalypse*—*These things, saith the*  
 “ *Lord, which is, and which was, and which*  
 “ *is to come, the Almighty.* For who is the  
 “ Almighty that is to come, but Christ?”

In commenting on those words in the Epistle to *Titus*—*An heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject, &c.* *Origen* says—  
 “ Let us describe as well as we can, what an  
 “ heretick is. Every one who professes to be-  
 “ lieve in Christ, and yet says, there is one  
 “ God of the law and the prophets, and ano-  
 “ ther of the Gospels, &c. Our opinion must  
 “ be the same concerning those who have any  
 “ false notions of our Lord Jesus Christ; whe-  
 “ ther according to them who say he was born  
 “ of *Joseph* and *Mary*; such are the *Ebionites*  
 “ and *Valentinians*: or according to them who  
 “ deny him to be the FIRST-BORN, THE GOD  
 “ OF THE WHOLE CREATION, the *Word*, and  
 “ *Wisdom*, which is the beginning of the ways  
 “ of God, begotten before any thing was  
 “ made, before the foundation of the worlds,

“ before all the hills ; and those who say that  
“ he is only man.”\*

The only remark which I shall offer on this extract is, that *Origen*, while, according to your own acknowledgment, he maintained the eternal generation of the Son, yet expresses himself on the subject in exactly the same language with most of the other *Ante-Nicene* Fathers. He says the Son was begotten *before any thing was made—before the foundation of the worlds, &c.*

But there is no need of dwelling on the testimony of this father, since you freely acknowledge that he decisively maintained the doctrine of eternal generation. You attempt, however, to take away the force of this concession, by alleging “ that it was *Origen’s* philosophy  
“ which led him to embrace this doctrine ; the  
“ same philosophy which led him to maintain  
“ the eternity of the world, or of the crea-  
“ tion.” I shall not now undertake to discuss the subject of *Origen’s* philosophical opinions, on which so much has been written, and so many different judgments pronounced. I have never yet seen any thing, however, to convince me that his views of the Redeemer’s Person

\* PAMPHILI. *Apologia*. Ap. *Hieronymi*. op. Tom. ix. p. 117.  
Edit. *Victor*.



were materially modified by his philosophy. But, be this as it may, I think that any one who glances at the preceding extracts will be of the opinion, that *Origen* speaks on the subject of the Sonship of Christ, very much in the same language with the great body of the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers, who certainly did not adopt the singular opinions to which you refer. Besides; *Origen*, in telling us what he believed on this subject, more than once declares, that HIS DOCTRINE WAS THAT OF THE CHURCH IN HIS DAY; that it was “manifestly “handed down by apostolical tradition, &c.” But if, as you agree, and no doubt correctly, he really believed and taught the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the Saviour, I see not but that you will be obliged to grant that it was the general doctrine of the church of that age, and understood to be the doctrine taught by the apostles.

DIONYSIUS, bishop of *Alexandria*, who flourished about A.D. 250, is a very decisive witness on this subject. You observe that he has been claimed by both parties, and seem to place but little reliance on his authority. You give, however, two extracts from his writings, which would seem to indicate pretty strongly that he was no believer in the doctrine of

*eternal generation.* These it is not necessary to repeat. I acknowledge that if we were to judge solely from these passages, my side of the question could hope for little aid from this father.

But it escaped your recollection, that this same *Dionysius*, afterwards finding, that the very passages which you quote, and others like them, which he had written, had given great offence to the orthodox, and encouragement to the hereticks, and were likely very seriously to impair his ecclesiastical standing; he explained, retracted, and left it no longer doubtful what he considered as orthodox, and what was generally considered so in his day. The following extracts, derived from the same source with those which you make use of, will, I think, preclude all uncertainty as to the light in which *Dionysius* ought to be regarded in reference to the subject under review.

Having been charged with believing and saying, that there was *a time when the Son was not*, and that God the Father was not *always* Father, he professes that he did from the heart acknowledge, and always had acknowledged, the *co-eternity of the Son*. In the first Book of his *Refutation and Apology*, he expressly says—“ *There never was a time when*

“ *God was not a Father.*” And soon after he expresses himself thus concerning the Son of God—“ Since he is the Effulgence of the eternal Light, he himself is *altogether eternal*; “ for since the Light is always, the Effulgence, “ it is manifest, *must also be always.*” Again, he says—“ God is an eternal Light, without “ beginning or end; and therefore an eternal “ Effulgence is projected by him, *co-exists “ with him without beginning, and always “ born.*”\* Further he says, “ The Son alone “ is always co-existent with the Father, and is “ filled with the existent being, and is himself “ existent from the Father.” *Dionysius* also severely censures *Paul of Samosata*, because he would not call Christ the co-eternal character of God the Father’s Person. And, in the same work, he thus declares the eternity of the Son—“ As “ then we perceive, when one takes from one “ of our material fires, and neither affects nor “ divides it in the kindling of one light from “ another, but the fire remains; so, incompre- “ hensibly, is the eternal generation of Christ “ from the Father.” Finally, he expresses himself in these very decisive words—“ I have “ written, do write, confess, believe, and

\* *ATHANASII Oper. Tom. i. p. 559, 560. Edit. Paris 1627.*

“ preach, that Christ is CO-ETERNAL WITH  
“ THE FATHER, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON  
“ AND WORD of THE FATHER.”\*

On these extracts I only stop to offer two remarks. The *first* is, that they are incomparably more explicit and unequivocal than those which you quote; inasmuch as they are professedly intended to exculpate the writer from the charge of holding the very opinion which you ascribe to him. There is, therefore, in these passages an explicitness which cannot be exceeded. The *second* remark which I have to make is, that these extracts do not merely prove, in the most conclusive manner, that *Dionysius Alexandrinus* was a firm advocate of the doctrine of *eternal generation*; but they prove much more. They prove that it was the *current doctrine of the Orthodox of that day*. The very suspicion, it seems, that *Dionysius* was not sound as to this point, drew down upon him such general and severe censure, that he was constrained to defend himself by making the solemn declarations which have been mentioned. A Synod was called at *Rome* to consider the accusation against him, and it was to satisfy the members

\* *Bibliotheca Patrum*. Tom. ii. p. 276. 284. 287. 299. as quoted by Bishop *Bull* in his *Def. Fid. Nic.* Sect. iii. cap. iv. § 3.

of that Council, that he wrote his “Apolo-  
“getical and Refutatory Epistle” to *Dionysius*  
Bishop of *Rome*. In his case, then, we have  
not only the solemn opinion on the subject un-  
der consideration, of *Dionysius of Alexandria*,  
and *Dionysius of Rome*, but also of an impor-  
tant ecclesiastical Council. This single record,  
it appears to me, does more to establish the  
fact, that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship  
of Christ was reckoned the orthodox doctrine  
in the *Ante-Nicene* Church, than many scores  
of ordinary quotations could countervail.

With respect to *DIONYSIUS* Bishop of *Rome*,  
who was contemporary with his namesake of  
*Alexandria*, you candidly acknowledge that  
his authority is against you; that he unequiv-  
vocally maintained the doctrine of eternal  
generation. This is undoubtedly a fact. And  
when it is recollected that he held so conspi-  
cuous a place in the church, and possessed  
such a commanding influence as history informs  
us he did possess, his opinion is surely of much  
more than ordinary weight in the scale, in  
examining what was accounted orthodoxy at  
that time. As there is no dispute about him,  
a single extract is sufficient. In his *Epistle*  
*against the Sabellians*, he says—“It is no  
“common blasphemy, nay it is the greatest, to

“ say that the Lord was, after a sort, made  
 “ with hands. For if he was made, there was  
 “ a time when he was not. But he always was.”  
 Again—“ If then the Son was made, there  
 “ was a time when these things were not, yea  
 “ there was a time when God was without  
 “ these. But this is very absurd.”\*

LUCIAN, a Presbyter of *Antioch*, who flourished nearly half a century before the Council of *Nice*, and who was greatly distinguished as a student of the scriptures, as well as a martyr to the cause of Christ, is an important and very unequivocal witness on this subject. I really think you have not done justice to the testimony of this Father. Let me beg you to review the following Creed, which we are assured was drawn up by him. “ We believe,  
 “ agreeably to evangelical and apostolical tra-  
 “ dition, in one God, the Father Almighty,  
 “ creator and maker of all things; and in one  
 “ Lord, Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son,  
 “ God; by whom all things were made, be-  
 “ gotten of the Father before all worlds, God  
 “ of God, Whole of Whole, Alone of Alone,  
 “ Perfect of Perfect, King of King, Lord of  
 “ Lord, the living Word, Wisdom, Life, the  
 “ true Light, the way of Truth, the Resur-

\* *ATHANASII Oper.* Tom. i. 276.

“ rection, the Shepherd, the Door, immutable  
“ and unchangeable, the exact Image of the  
“ Godhead, the Essence, Power, Counsel and  
“ Glory of the Father, the first-born of every  
“ creature, who was in the beginning with  
“ God, God the Word, as it is written in the  
“ Gospel, *The Word was God*, by whom all  
“ things were made, and in whom all things  
“ consist, who in the last days came down  
“ from heaven, and was born of the Virgin,  
“ according to the scriptures. And in the  
“ Holy Ghost, who was given to believers for  
“ their comfort, sanctification and perfection,  
“ as our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his  
“ disciples, saying, *Go ye, therefore, disciple*  
“ *all nations, baptizing them in the name of*  
“ *the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy*  
“ *Ghost*; namely, of the Father, who is truly  
“ Father, of the Son, who is truly Son, and  
“ of the Holy Ghost, who is truly Holy Ghost.  
“ The words not being simple words, of no  
“ signification, but accurately denoting the  
“ subsistence of every one named, and their  
“ glory and order; so that they are in sub-  
“ sistence Three, in consent One.”

This Creed is distinctly recorded by *Athanasius*, (*De Synod. Arimin. et Seleuc. Tom. i. p. 875.*); by *Socrates*, the ecclesiastical his-

torian (*Lib. ii. cap. 10.*) And by *Hilary*, (*De Synodis*, p. 107.) who comments upon it, and vindicates it from the objections which some made against it as favouring the Arians. He not only speaks of it as the genuine work of *Lucian*, but also as having received the sanction of the Council of *Antioch*, which met A. D. 341; “ a Synod, as he says of ninety-  
“ five holy bishops, who intended thereby to  
“ establish the Catholick faith, chiefly against  
“ the *Sabellians*, though not without a suffi-  
“ cient guard against the *Anomæans*, or  
“ *Arians*.”

You remark, that Bishop *Bull* has omitted *Lucian* in his list of writers who testify in favour of the doctrine of eternal generation. If the fact had been so, it would afford no small presumption that the Bishop did not consider him as a witness of much value. This, however, is not exactly the case. It is true that the learned *Bull* has not adduced the testimony of this Father in that particular chapter which treats of the *co-eternity* of the Son of God; but he has very carefully and pointedly brought it forward in a preceding chapter, to which he refers his readers in the commencement of the subsequent one, as not needing to be repeated. He evidently lays great stress upon the ex-



tract which he gives from *Lucian*, and with great confidence decides, that there is every reason to consider it as genuine.

PAMPHILUS, the martyr, a Presbyter of *Cesarea*, a little after *Origen*, has also left ample evidence that he was a firm believer in the doctrine of eternal generation. In his *Apology for Origen*, he strenuously defends that Father against some who doubted or denied his orthodoxy; and affirms that his, (*Origen's*) firm belief was, that “*The Father was not before the Son, but the Son co-eternal with the Father, and that the generation of the Son was without a beginning.*”<sup>\*</sup> Here is a testimony of peculiar value. It not only tells us what *Pamphilus* thought of this matter; and renders assurance doubly sure, that *Origen* was of the same mind; but it also gives us to understand that this was the Orthodox doctrine of that day; inasmuch as *Pamphilus* considered it as a slur on the character of *Origen* to impute to him any other doctrine, and thought proper to defend him from the charge, as likely, if believed, to do him a serious injury in the estimation of the church.

\* Quoted from BULL. *Def. Fid. Nic.* Sect. iii. cap. iv. § 8.

THEOGNOSTUS, of *Alexandria*, who lived about the middle of the third century, in his second *Book of Instructions*, expresses himself thus. “The substance of the Son is not something brought in from without. He was not produced out of nothing; but was begotten of the substance of the Father, as the ray is of the light, or as vapour is of the water; for the vapour is not water, nor is the ray light; but neither the one nor the other is foreign to that which produces it. Thus the Son is, as it were, the gentle flowing of the substance of the Father; yet so that the Father suffers no division. For as the sun is not diminished, though it produces rays continually; so likewise the Father is not diminished in begetting the Son, who is his image.”\* Surely, as Bishop *Bull* justly argues, if the Sonship of Christ was not something superinduced, or “brought in,” it was *eternal*. The same thing is also implied in the declaration, that the Son is begotten from the Father’s substance, as light from light. And all these conclusions are rendered more certain from the consideration that *Theognostus* was a disciple of *Origen*, whom you acknowledge

\* *ATHANASII Oper.* Tom. i. p. 274.

to have been a firm believer in the doctrine of eternal generation.

METHODIUS, also, notwithstanding what you have said of him, I cannot but consider as a good and undoubted witness for the doctrine of eternal Sonship. Your first three quotations from him, furnish, in my opinion, no proof whatever, not even plausible presumption, of his belief in the notion of mere *ante-mundane* generation. They are plainly reconcilable with the doctrine for which I plead. But the fourth, which you find in Bishop *Bull*, and on which you think that learned and able writer has laid much more stress than he ought, I must believe, with him, to be very clear in favour of eternal filiation. *Methodius*, in commenting on those words of the Psalmist, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, expresses himself as follows—“It is observable, that his being a Son is here expressed indefinitely and without any limitation of time. For He (the Father) said to him, *Thou ART my Son*, not, *thou HAST BEEN MADE SO*; signifying, that he DID NOT ACQUIRE ANY NEW FILIATION, nor should ever have an end of his existence; but that he is always the same.”\* That Son who was

\* *PHOTIK Biblioth. Cod. 237.*

NEVER MADE SUCH, who RECEIVED NO NEW FILIATION, and who has been ALWAYS THE SAME, has surely an ETERNAL SONSHIP.

But it is more than time that I should close this long Letter. The few Fathers that remain to be examined, are those of the *Latin* class. The consideration of these, together with some general remarks on the testimony of the whole number adduced, will form the subject of the next Letter.

## LETTER VI.



*Testimony of the Fathers continued.*



REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

LET us now turn to the Latin Fathers, and see how far their language accords with that of their Grecian brethren. If the East and the West, the Greek and the Latin, should be found to agree in this matter, it will afford strong presumption, that neither the mistakes of superficial and blundering individuals, nor the speculations of a local philosophy, gave origin to the passages which have been produced.

TERTULLIAN is one of the Fathers whose testimony you seem to think cannot be claimed in behalf of the doctrine of eternal generation. I am far from considering this Father as either a consistent theologian, or an accurate writer.

Nor shall I attempt to defend every thing which he has written on the subject under consideration. Perhaps, indeed, it would be difficult to find any subject which he has undertaken to discuss, on which he has not sometimes expressed him crudely and erroneously, if not contradictorily. Yet, after all, I must believe that he is a good witness, as far as his character goes, in favour of the Redeemer's Divine and eternal Sonship. Such passages as the following appear to me to place this fact beyond all reasonable doubt.

In his *Apology*, he says—"We affirm that  
 " he was produced from the Father, and by  
 " production begotten; and that he, therefore,  
 " is the Son of God, and called God, from the  
 " unity of his substance, for God also is a  
 " Spirit."—"and because he proceeded from  
 " God, HE IS GOD, and the SON OF GOD, and  
 " BOTH ARE ONE—He is Spirit of Spirit, and  
 " God of God, as light is kindled of light."\*  
 The striking similarity of this language to that of the Nicene Creed, will not be overlooked. Again; in his work against *Praxeās*, he says concerning the Son of God,—“He is the *first-begotten*, as being begotten before all things; “ and the *only-begotten*, as being alone be-

\* *Apologēt. cap. xxi. p. 19, 20. Edit. Rigalt.*

“ gotten of God properly in the womb of his  
 “ heart.” And again; “ This is the true pro-  
 “ lation, the preserver of unity, when we say  
 “ that the Son is produced by the Father, not  
 “ separated from him. For God produced the  
 “ Word, as the root produces a branch, the  
 “ fountain a stream, the sun a ray.”\* Again;  
 “ As he is *made of the seed of David, accord-*  
 “ *ing to the flesh, he is man, and the Son of*  
 “ *man; as he is declared to be the Son of God,*  
 “ *according to the Spirit of holiness, he is*  
 “ GOD, and the WORD, the SON OF GOD.”†  
 Again; “ I will follow the apostle, so that if  
 “ the Father and Son must be named together,  
 “ I will call the Father God, and Jesus Christ,  
 “ Lord. But I can call Christ alone God, as  
 “ the same apostle; *Of whom is Christ, who*  
 “ *is over all God blessed forever.* For I shall  
 “ call the ray of the sun, by itself, the sun;  
 “ but when I name the sun whose ray it is, I  
 “ shall not at the same time call the ray the  
 “ sun. For although I do not make two suns,  
 “ I shall as much account the sun and his ray  
 “ two things, or two species or appearances of  
 “ one undivided substance, as God and his  
 “ Word, as the Father and his Son.”‡ Again,

\* *Advers Praxeam*, cap. vii. p. 503, and cap. viii. 504.

† *Ib.*, cap. xxvii. p. 516.

‡ *Ib.*, cap. xiii. p. 507.

he observes, “ I derive the Son from nothing  
 “ but THE SUBSTANCE OF THE FATHER.”\*  
 And again; “ I every where hold ONE SUB-  
 “ STANCE, and THREE COHERENTS.”† In an-  
 other place he says, “ The Father is God, and  
 “ THE SON IS GOD, and the Holy Ghost is  
 “ God, and every one of them is God.”‡

Further; he declares, “ The names, Father,  
 “ God Almighty, the Most High, Lord of  
 “ hosts, King of Israel, He who is, as the  
 “ scriptures teach us;—these, we say, are  
 “ claimed by the Son likewise; and that the  
 “ Son came in these characters, and ALWAYS  
 “ ACTED IN THEM, and so manifested them in  
 “ himself to men. *All that the Father hath,*  
 “ *said he, is mine.* Why not, then, his names?  
 “ Wherefore, when thou readest, Almighty  
 “ God, the Most High, and the Lord of hosts,  
 “ and the King of Israel, and He who is—  
 “ consider whether the Son be not demon-  
 “ strated thereby, who is, IN HIS OWN RIGHT,  
 “ the OMNIPOTENT GOD, as he is THE WORD  
 “ OF THE OMNIPOTENT GOD.”§ And, to give  
 but one extract more—“ There is, therefore,  
 “ one God, the Father, and there is no other

\* *Contra Marcion.* Lib. iii. cap. 6.

† *Advers. Praxeam.* cap. iv. p. 398, and cap. xii. p. 403.

‡ *Ib.* cap. 13.

§ *Ib.* cap. xviii. p. 510.



“ besides him ; by which expression it is not  
 “ meant to exclude the *Son*, but *another God*.  
 “ But the *Son* is not *another* from the *Father*.  
 “ Furthermore ; do but observe the drift and  
 “ tendency of this kind of expressions, and you  
 “ will find, for the most part, that they con-  
 “ cern only the makers and worshippers of  
 “ *idols* ; that polytheism may be rooted out by  
 “ that sense of the Divine unity which, never-  
 “ theless, includes the *Son* ; who, inasmuch as  
 “ he is undivided and inseparable from the  
 “ *Father*, is to be understood as implied in the  
 “ *Father*, though he be not particularly named.  
 “ And further, had he named the *Son* in this  
 “ case, it had been equivalent to separating  
 “ him from himself. Suppose he had said,  
 “ there is none other besides me, *except my*  
 “ *Son*, he would thereby, in effect, have de-  
 “ clared his *Son* to be another, by excepting  
 “ him, in this manner, out of others. Suppose  
 “ the *sun* were to say, I am the sun ; and there  
 “ is not another besides me, except my own  
 “ ray. Would you not have marked the ab-  
 “ surdity of the observation, as if the ray  
 “ were not to be reckoned as included in the  
 “ sun ?” \*

Taking these extracts, either separately or

\* *Advers. Praxeam.* cap. xviii. p. 510.

together, I am not not able to interpret them upon any other principle than that of *Tertullian* having fully believed that the Sonship of the Saviour was *Divine and without beginning*. It is evident that he teaches, in the first place, that the *Word* and the *Son* are titles of the same import, or at least that they are to be applied, as convertible terms, to the same Being. It is plain, in the second place, that he represents this glorious *Word*, or *Son*, as begotten; that AS THE BEGOTTEN SON he is GOD, and of ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER. It is evident, further, that he represents him as *the Son of man*, in virtue of his *incarnation*; but the *Son of God* in virtue of a much higher *generation* or *birth*. It is plain, also, that he considers the Son as essentially and eternally *one with the Father*, and as no more separable from him than a part of the Divine nature can be torn from itself. And, finally, it is to be recollected, that almost all these statements and reasonings are employed for the purpose of opposing the error called *Sabellianism*; the substance of which was taught by *Praxeas*, against whom *Tertullian* wrote. Surely these passages do not very well comport with the doctrine which you ascribe to the Ante-nicene Fathers. Nor can I admit

that the force of such declarations is set aside by alleging or proving, that *Tertullian*, in other places, expresses himself inconsistently with the foregoing statements. The *general scope* of such a writer is to be estimated, rather than the exact import of his theological language. I should not be afraid of engaging to produce from the pages of this Father, a hundred passages, in which he ascribes to the *Word* Divine perfections, while, in the same passages, or others, he represents the *Son* as the *same* with the *Word*, and speaks of that which is true of the one, as true of the other.

NOVATIAN also, who was contemporary with *Cyprian*, in his treatise *On the Trinity*, expresses himself in a manner which, taking all the parts of the work together, cannot, I think, leave any doubt that he believed and meant to teach, the doctrine of eternal generation. Indeed the only extract from this Father which you have given, and which you seem to consider so decisive the other way, really appears to me to intimate nothing more friendly to your doctrine than this, that the *Son* was begotten *when the Father willed*; in other words, that the generation in question was *voluntary*. This, however, as I hope to

make apparent hereafter, does not materially affect the question.

*Novatian* expresses himself thus—“As nature itself declares that Christ is to be believed to be man, because he is of man; so the scripture declares that he is to be believed to be God, because he is of God; for if he is not to be regarded as God who is of God, so neither as man, although of man.” Again, he says; “Christ is not only proved to be a man because he is the son of man; but he is also proved to be God, because he is the Son of God.” Again, he says, “If Christ was only man, how doth he say, *I came forth from God?* Whereas it is plain that man was MADE by God, and did not PROCEED from him. But though *man* did not proceed from God, THE WORD DID PROCEED FROM HIM.” Still further, he says—“Therefore God proceeded from God; whilst THE WORD THAT PROCEEDED IS GOD, WHO PROCEEDED FROM GOD.” A few lines further on, he says—“If Christ be only man, what is that which he means when he says, *I and my Father are one?* For how can *I and the Father be one*, if he be not both God and the Son, who, therefore, may be called *one*, as being *of him*, and being HIS SON, and

“ being BORN OF HIM, and found to have proceeded from him, BY WHICH HE IS GOD.” Finally; speaking of the angel who appeared to *Hagar*, *Sarah’s* maid, he says—“ Wherefore, if the present passage cannot agree with the Person of the *Father*, whom it would not be proper to call an *angel*; nor to the person of an *angel*, whom it would not be proper to call *God*; still it may comport with the person of Christ, both TO BE GOD, AS THE SON OF GOD, and to be an *angel* too, as sent to reveal his Father’s will.”\*

What can be more clear? If Christ BE GOD, and NECESSARILY GOD, AS SON; if he be God because he *proceeded from God*, then his Sonship is Divine and eternal. There is no evading this consequence, but by supposing that *Novatian* did not mean as he said, either through ignorance or dishonesty.

CYPRIAN comes next in order among the Latin Fathers. He was contemporary with *Origen*, and was probably one of the best theologians and pastors of the third century. You observe that very little is found in his works, which can be considered as belonging to the subject under consideration. This is true. He often, indeed, speaks of the *Son* and

\* NOVAT. *De Trinitate* cap. xi. xvi. xxiii. xxvi.

the *Holy Spirit*, as Persons in the Trinity, and clearly teaches the Divinity of each; but he never expresses himself in a way which renders him a very *explicit* witness on the point before us. Yet we find, I think, some short passages which deserve to be noticed; and which, if I do not mistake, are in favour of my creed.

The quotation from his work *De Idolorum Vanitate*, of which you take a small part, a little more enlarged runs thus. “Therefore  
 “ the Word and Son of God is sent as the ar-  
 “ bitrator and master of this indulgence, grace  
 “ and discipline, who was preached by all the  
 “ ancient prophets to be the enlightener and  
 “ teacher of mankind. This is the Power,  
 “ the Reason, the Wisdom, the Glory of God.  
 “ He came down into the Virgin. The Holy  
 “ Spirit was closed with Flesh.”\*

In the second Book of the *Testimonies against the Jews*, Cyprian, intending to prove that Christ was the *First-begotten*, the *Wisdom* of God, by whom all things were made, adduces *Proverbs* viii. 22—30, in support of his position; and then quotes a passage out of the 24th chapter of *Ecclesiasticus*, in which are these words—*I (Wisdom) came out of*

\* CYPRIANI *Oper.* p. 11. Edit. Amstel. 1700.

*the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before every creature.* And in two places, he quotes 1 *John* v. 7. excepting that, in both instances, instead of *Word*, he reads *Son*, and declares that *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ARE ONE.*\*

On these extracts I have but few remarks to make. I see nothing in them which seems to me to give the remotest countenance, either to your creed on this subject, or to the *antemundane* scheme. On the contrary, every thing looks to me like a belief in eternal Sonship. *Cyprian*† evidently considered the *Word* and the *Son* as the same. He evidently applies *Proverbs* viii. to the *Son*, or *First-begotten* of God, and represents *his goings forth as from everlasting.* And in quoting 1 *John* v. 7. I know not how to account for the fact that he is so careful, in both cases, to substitute *Son* in the place of *Word*, unless it be intended to show that he considered the former as expressive of the same divine and eternal character as the latter, and considered the *Son*, as such, as one of the Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity.

LACTANTIUS is the last Father that I shall allow myself to add to the present list of au-

\* CYPRIANI *Oper.* p. 24      † *Ibid.* p. 79. 310.

thorities. The quotation which you have made from him, does indeed present a humiliating view of the grossness of his conceptions concerning the Divine Being ; but still, I apprehend, it leaves the main point under discussion between us untouched, especially as all grant that *Lactantius*, as a theological writer, is remarkably loose and crude. He speaks, in this passage, of the Word of God as proceeding from the mouth of God with “ a noise  
“ and sound ;” but he does not say WHEN it proceeded, whether from *eternity*, or *in time*. Nothing decisive, then, can be inferred from this language against what you call the *Nicene* doctrine. But I should certainly be altogether at a loss to interpret the following passage upon any other principle than that of the Divine and eternal Sonship of the Saviour. “ When  
“ we speak of God the Father, and God the  
“ Son, we do not speak of different natures ;  
“ or separate the one from the other ; for  
“ neither can there be a Father without a Son,  
“ nor can the Son be divided from the Father :  
“ forasmuch as he cannot be called a Father  
“ without a Son, nor the Son be begotten  
“ without a Father. Seeing, therefore, a  
“ Father makes a Son, and a Son makes a  
“ Father, they have both one mind, and one



“ Spirit, and one substance: but the Father  
 “ is as the Fountain and Original, and the  
 “ Son as the stream flowing from the Foun-  
 “ tain; the one is like the sun, the other as a  
 “ ray projected from it; who, because faithful  
 “ and dear to his Father, is not separated as  
 “ the river is not from the fountain, nor the  
 “ ray from the sun; because both the water  
 “ of the fountain, is in the river, and the light  
 “ of the sun in the ray.” A little afterwards,  
 he explains the unity of the Father and the  
 Son by the following similitude. “ When any  
 “ one hath a Son, who is his dearly beloved,  
 “ as long as he is in his Father’s house, and  
 “ under his hand, although he allows him the  
 “ name and power of Lord, yet, by right it is  
 “ called but one house and one Lord. So this  
 “ world is one house of God; and both the  
 “ Son and the Father who with one mind  
 “ dwell therein, are BUT ONE GOD; because  
 “ the one is as two, and the two as one.”\*  
 Could any man who weighed the import of  
 language, and who thought of what he was  
 saying, speak thus, unless he had considered  
 this ineffable relation of Father and Son as  
 Divine, as implying unity of essence, and con-  
 sequently as eternal?

\* LACTANT. Instit. Lib. iv. cap. 29.

*Lactantius*, in another place, says, “As  
 “ the Mother (the Virgin *Mary*) did in an un-  
 “ paralleled manner, bring forth her Maker;  
 “ so is the Father to be believed ineffably  
 “ to have BEGOTTEN ONE CO-ETERNAL.”\*  
 And immediately afterwards he speaks thus,  
 “ Therefore also the Son must be BORN TWICE,  
 “ that He might be without father, and with-  
 “ out mother. For, in the FIRST SPIRITUAL  
 “ NATIVITY, he was without mother, because  
 “ BEGOTTEN BY GOD THE FATHER ALONE,  
 “ without the office of a mother; but in the  
 “ second, carnal nativity, he was without  
 “ father, conceived in the Virgin’s womb,  
 “ without the office of Father.”

The expression, “ the Father INEFFABLY  
 “ BEGOT ONE CO-ETERNAL,” taken in connec-  
 tion with the thought that the Son of God was  
 TWICE BORN, once in a CARNAL, and once in a  
 SPIRITUAL and DIVINE manner, satisfies me  
 that *Lactantius* really held to a divine and  
 eternal generation.

Again, in his fourth Book, entitled *De Vera  
 Sapiaentia*, he says—“ How, therefore, did the  
 “ Father beget the Son? These divine works  
 “ can be known of none, declared by none.

\* *Instit.* Lib. ii. cap. 9.

“ But the holy scriptures teach that He is the  
“ Son of God, that He is the Word of God.”

When I find this eloquent Father expressing himself as he does in this last extract, concerning the Son, I cannot help thinking that he refers to some more wonderful and incomprehensible generation, than that which consisted in a mere *ante-mundane coming forth*, to engage in the work of creation. If he had intended to speak of this “ projection of energy” only, he would certainly, I think, have adopted very different language. But supposing him to speak of a Divine and eternal generation, the language which he employs, appears to me the most apt and suitable that can be imagined.

In reviewing the foregoing extracts, as well from the Greek as the Latin Fathers, there are several considerations which appear to me to show conclusively that I have not mistaken their general import; considerations drawn from the extracts themselves; and which, though in some instances derived from incidental circumstances, are certainly not on that account, the less valuable.

(1.) The *first* is, that in the extracts which have been given, and in other passages of the same writers almost innumerable, the words

*Logos* or *Word*, and *Son*, are used interchangeably for each other, as of precisely the same application. The writers quoted speak as familiarly and frequently of the generation of the *Logos*, as of the generation of the *Son*. *Ignatius* says the *Son* is the *eternal Logos*. *Justin Martyr* speaks again and again of the *Logos* as begotten, and the *Son* as begotten; he speaks of the *Logos* or *Son*; and after mentioning both these titles, as well as those of *Wisdom*, *Angel*, &c. he says he (the *Son*) bears them, because he administers the counsel of the Father, and was born of the will of the Father, before all creatures. *Irenæus* says, "The *Son*, who was the *Word* of God, descended from the Father;" and again, "The *Word*, that is, the *Son* of God, always existed with the Father." *Clemens Alexandrinus* says, "the *Word* of God is most manifestly himself the true God, FOR he is the *Son* of God." Similar language might be cited from a number of others. Now these men either understood the import of the language which they used, or they did not. If they *did*, and were honest men, it is evident that they could not have made that distinction between *Logos* and *Son* which you represent them as having done. If they did *not* under-

stand the import of their own language, then their testimony on such a subject, is unworthy of confidence in any respect.

(2.) The *second* consideration worthy of notice, is, that a number of the early writers from whom we have seen quotations, as well as others, lay much stress on the fact, that the First Person in the Trinity, had ALWAYS been *Father*, and that the Second Person had ALWAYS been *Son*. We have seen, that the charge brought against *Dionysius* of *Alexandria*, was, that he had denied that the Father had always been a Father, and the Son always a Son; a charge which he solemnly denied, and declared himself ever to have been of a different mind. Sometime afterwards, *Alexander* of *Alexandria*, speaks of it as among the SINGULARITIES of *Arius*, that he would not own the Father to have been *always so*; but alleged that he was once *no Father*, and that the *Logos* was produced *in time*.\* In short, as *Dr. Waterland* observes,† it seems to have been established as a kind of grand theological maxim, among the orthodox, for a number of years before the Council of *Nice*,

\* SOCRAT. *Eccles. Hist.* lib. i. cap. 6.

† *Vindication of Christ's Divinity* against *Clarke*. Query viii. p. 141.

that the Father was *always Father*, and the Son *always Son*, and those who refused to confess this, were branded as hereticks. The evidence of the fact which appears in a number of the extracts just given, I deem too clear to need further comment.

(3.) Some have supposed and insisted, that when the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers speak, as it is acknowledged they often do, of the Son as being begotten *before all creatures, before all ages, &c.* and when they speak of the Father, as the **ETERNAL FATHER**, and of the Son, as the **ETERNAL SON**, they only meant to speak of an *ante-mundane* relation, or of a relation commencing when the *Logos* went forth to exert his power in the work of *creation*. But against this interpretation of such language, I have very strong objections. It is the very language in which the sacred Scriptures frequently speak of God, and of his plans and counsels, which are confessed to be eternal. Of this no one who is familiar with the Bible, will need to have examples cited. He will readily call to mind many examples of Jehovah being said to have existed *before the mountains were brought forth—before the foundation of the world, &c.*; and in which he is represented as having *chosen his people in Christ*

*before the foundation of the world, that they might be holy, &c.* Do these expressions designate eternity, or do they not? Further; it is plain that the *post-Nicene* Fathers, whose opinions on this subject, are, surely, not dubious, have expressed themselves concerning the eternal relation of both the Father and the Son *in precisely the same language*. They say, that the Son was begotten “before all creatures,” “before all worlds,” “before all time,” &c. But we are certainly to interpret these phrases as expressive of a strict and proper eternity. Besides, what is the difference between *ante-mundane* and *eternal*? How is eternity *ab ante* divided and measured? Is not the *ante-mundane* system liable to the obvious objection of making a *division* in eternity, before time itself began?—an absurdity which ought not to be lightly charged on respectable men.

(4.) The *fourth* fact which I shall mention, as evidently, in my view, fixing the sense in which the early Fathers speak of the generation of the Son, is that which is drawn from the *similies* by which they attempt to illustrate it. These, you will recollect, are, the *sun* and his *rays*; a *fountain* and its *stream*; one *fire* lighted from *another* fire, &c. The question

is not now whether these similies are happy, or unhappy, adequate, or inadequate: but what was their evident scope and design? Now they all appear to me to be expressive of something *strictly co-eval* with that from which it flows. Nay, they seem to be selected with the most studious care to convey this precise idea, and indeed to be in a great measure, if not entirely destitute of meaning upon any other principle of interpretation. Of course, however gross or inadequate their ideas of the generation of the Son; yet if they did think and speak of it as *eternal*, that is, as *strictly co-eval* with the existence of the eternal Father, it follows, inevitably, that they maintained the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

(5.) The *last* consideration which I shall now stay to urge as proof that the early Fathers believed and taught the doctrine which I maintain, is, that they uniformly represent the *Son* as included in the *one Godhead* with the *Father*. That is, while they contend that there is only *one God*, they uniformly represent the Son as possessing a Divine nature equally with the Father, and as ever included in that Godhead, which comprehends, if I may so express it, the Father also. But if they



constantly believed the Son, *as Son*, to be *one substance* with the Father; to be always included in the one Godhead; and at the same time, to be a *distinct Person* from the Father; —that is of the same substance, but not the same Person with the Father; *distinguished*, yet *inseparable* from him; then it appears to me to follow, of course, that the doctrine of eternal Sonship was an article of their creed. Yet it is certain that the great body of the early Fathers united in giving this representation of the Tri-une God. I might appeal to all the most conspicuous names that have been mentioned, in proof of the fact.

In connection with this fact, it ought to be recollected too, for what *purpose* the great body of these writers so zealously contended, as they did, for an essential *unity of substance*, between the Father and the Son, and at the same time an essential and eternal *distinction* between them. To this they were led by the two constant objections made by the hereticks, against the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The *Praxeans*, *Noetians*, and *Sabellians* alleged that it implied a *division* of the Father's substance. While the *Arians*, and all their predecessors, who, in substance, agreed with them, charged the Orthodox with

*Tritheism.* It does appear to me that the manner in which the Fathers answered these hereticks, from the time of *Justin Martyr*, to the Council of *Nice*;—the manner in which they spoke of the eternal *unity* and the eternal *distinction*, subsisting between the Father and the Son, must evince to every impartial reader, that they did not, and could not hold the doctrine concerning the Sonship of the Second Person of the Trinity which you ascribe to them. I have not room to enter on the illustration of this point in detail. It is well treated in *Waterland's Vindication* against *Clarke*; and in Bishop *Bull's Defensio Fidei Nicænæ*, and also in his *Judicium Ecclesiæ Catholicæ*.

One method, and a very decisive one, of ascertaining what was held and preached as *truth*, in a given period of the Church, is to ascertain, if we can, what was condemned, during that period, as *heresy*. Now, we know, that *Paul* of *Samosata*, a heretick, who was contemporary with *Dionysius* of *Alexandria*, and his namesake of *Rome*, among other errors concerning the person of Christ, denied his eternal generation and Sonship;—in other words, he asserted, that he was not the Son of the Father *bynature* and from *eternity*; but only

Son by *adoption*, and by his birth of the Virgin. Two, if not three Councils were convened, a little after the middle of the third century, to deliberate and decide on the heresy of this man. The last, a large and respectable one, assembled A. D. 269, by which *Paul* was condemned, deposed from the ministry, and excommunicated from the church. That the above stated opinion was one on account of which he was pronounced heretical, is evident from a comparison of the accounts given of him and his heresy by *Eusebius*, *Epiphanius*, *Philastrius*, *Athanasius*, *Socrates*, and others; and especially from the original documents relating to the case, preserved by *Eusebius*, and in the *Bibliotheca Patrum Parisiens*. Tom. xi. And it may not be amiss to add, that the *Magdeburgh Centuriators*, and *Dr. Mosheim*, in his work *De Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum Magnum*, concur in this statement.

Here, then, we have a large and respectable Synod, pronouncing the denial of Christ's Divine and eternal Sonship A HERESY. Surely nothing can be more unlike the opinion which you have represented as generally prevalent among the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Another source of proof, as to the opinions

of the *Ante-Nicene* Fathers on this subject, appears to me worthy of particular notice. The *Arians*, in the earlier stages of their progress, found it necessary, especially in those parts of the Church in which their numbers were very small, to conceal their sentiments, and for this purpose to adopt modes of expression calculated to persuade the people that they adhered to the old creeds, which had been received from the days of the Apostles. Accordingly they sent, from time to time, to the Emperors and other publick authorities, confessions of faith, which they alleged were precisely in the old language, which had been handed down in ecclesiastical formularies from the time of the apostles, and universally received; and which they declared their entire readiness to subscribe. *Athanasius* has preserved a number of these Arian confessions, which, while they are monuments of Unitarian duplicity and falsehood, are, at the same time, incontrovertible evidence of the sentiments and language universally current among the *Ante-Nicene* Christians, on the subject of this correspondence.

Take the following specimen of these Confessions. One contains these words—“ And  
“ in one only-begotten Son of God, who ex-

“isted before all ages, and was with the Fa-  
 “ther that begat him, by whom all things  
 “were made.” Another has the following  
 clause—“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, his  
 “only-begotten Son, God, by whom are all  
 “things, God, begotten of his Father before  
 “ages.” A third reads thus—“And in one  
 “only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 “by whom are all things, begotten, perfect  
 “God of the Father before ages.” A fourth  
 thus—“And in his only begotten Son, our  
 “Lord Jesus Christ, begotten God of the Fa-  
 “ther before all ages, by whom all things were  
 “made.” Each of these confessions was pre-  
 faced by declarations or acknowledgments on  
 the part of the Arians, that they had, in draw-  
 ing them up, carefully adhered to the rule of  
 faith received from the beginning. Thus, as  
 a preface to one, they say—“We have not  
 “received any other faith than that which  
 “was delivered from the beginning.” As in-  
 troduutory to another, they declare, “We be-  
 “lieve, agreeably to evangelical and apostoli-  
 “cal tradition.”

Here, then, we have evidence of the most  
 unexceptionable kind, the confessions of adver-  
 saries, that the uniform and universal faith of  
 the *Ante-Nicene* Church distinctly recognized

that the Second Person of the Trinity was the Son of the Father, begotten before all ages, that is, from eternity; for, as I observed before, the *Post-Nicene* Fathers, whom all agree to have been believers in the doctrine of eternal generation, use the very same language to express that which had no beginning;—that which was before all time.

Will any man, after reading testimony of this kind, be able to persuade himself, that the Nicene Creed did not accord with the *Ante-Nicene* opinion, but was an *innovation*? With such evidence before me, it is impossible for me thus to believe.

But, after all, the true sentiments of the whole Church on this subject, before the Council of *Nice*, may be best learned from the decision of the numerous, aged, and venerable men, both from the East and West, who sat in that Council, and who, with a most remarkable degree of unanimity, voted its final judgment on the doctrine under consideration. Had that Council been composed of young men, who knew nothing of the writings or feelings of those pious divines who had governed the church toward the close of the preceding century; or had the Emperor *Constantine* dictated its decision in conformity with his own prejudices

or caprice; or were there the smallest evidence of their being impelled by a spirit of opposition to *Arius*, to maintain something before unknown;—were any one of these suppositions supported by even tolerable evidence, your mode of accounting for the decision of the Council might be admitted. But I think, my dear Sir, you have entirely failed of solving the difficulty which, on your principles, that decision presents. Let me beg you to pause a moment, and re-consider the circumstances of the case.

The *Nicene* Council was composed of a large number of bishops, and other ecclesiastical men, to the amount of six or seven hundred at least, and probably many more; collected from all parts of the christian world. A large number of them were as venerable for years, influence, and authority, as any in the church. If there were honest, independent, consistent divines, then on earth, they were to be found, it may be presumed, among those who were there convened. And, although the ecclesiasticks in the immediate neighbourhood of *Alexandria*, might have been agitated and blinded by personal feelings; yet where have we a particle of evidence that such feelings extended to the remotest extremes of the

church? It is known, too, that the Emperor left the members of the Council entirely unbiassed as to his influence in relation to the doctrine then in controversy. For, whatever he might have said and done after their judgment was announced, before it was formed, he entreated the principal disputants to lay aside all strife and be reconciled, and severely reprimanded both of them for disturbing the church with their disputes “concerning things “small, and to the last degree frivolous.” And, accordingly, when the Council convened, and the members of opposite parties put into the hands of the Emperor papers containing mutual complaints and recriminations; he tore them in pieces, and threw them into the fire, declaring that he *had* read, and *would* read none of them; earnestly exhorting both parties to exercise a spirit of forbearance and peace; and expressing an entire willingness to acquiesce in whatever decision the Council might think proper to adopt.

In conformity with this recommendation, the Council sat a considerable time; deliberated cautiously and carefully; canvassed every part of the creed which they drew up with the most eager attention and vigilance; and, at length adopted it by nearly a unanimous vote.



It was solemnly subscribed by every member present, excepting *four*, one of whom was *Arius* himself. Does this look like a set of men impelled by heated feeling, rather than a sacred regard to scriptural truth? Besides; what reason can be given for the remarkably pointed and decisive manner in which the Nicene Creed maintains the eternal Sonship of the Saviour, if it had not been firmly believed and settled as a doctrine of the church? If they had believed, with you, in a *Logos*, co-essential and co-eternal with the Father, and a *Son*, deriving his title of Son from his incarnation and resurrection, could they not, in your opinion, just as well have defended themselves against the Arians, by exhibiting that creed, as by taking the ground which they did? My own opinion, indeed, is, that they could not. But you, doubtless, think otherwise; nay, you certainly suppose, that upon such grounds they could have defended themselves *much better*; and you are therefore bound, upon that principle, to account for the course which they took.—I have never seen any solid evidence; nay, I have never seen evidence which I thought plausible, that the Nicene Creed was an *innovation* on the preceding creed of the church. If it was *not*,

then my point is gained: the Nicene Fathers did not innovate on that creed which they found established. But, if it *was* an innovation, then we have the strange spectacle of, probably, more than one thousand ecclesiastics, coming from every part of the christian world, and some of them among the most pious, honest, and independent men then living, nearly unanimously consenting to abandon their old ground, and to take a novel one, out of pure spite against *Arius* and his followers; and that at the very time, when the plea, that they were contending for the “old and hal-  
“lowed doctrine of the church” was precisely that which they most zealously urged.

But I have another consideration to urge, which appears to me to carry with it very strong presumption against the correctness of your statement, and in favour of mine. I refer to the indubitable fact, that the Nicene Fathers, in defending the doctrine of their Creed against the Arians, constantly appeal to the authority of the Fathers who flourished and wrote before their time, and declare that they coincided with them in opinion concerning the Sonship of the Saviour. *Athanasius*, after having cited in defence of the Nicene Creed, the testimonies of some distinguished writers

who had preceded him, thus addresses the Arians—"Behold, we show you that our opinion HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN FROM FATHERS TO FATHERS; but you, novel Jews, and disciples of *Caiaphas*, what Fathers can you produce for your forms? You cannot name to us one wise or prudent man. All abhor you excepting the Devil. He only was the author of such an apostacy."\* This testimony is in itself a host. *Athanasius* had, no doubt, seen and read the writings of many Fathers who lived before the Council of *Nice*, which are now lost. But speaking of these, as well as of those which have come down to us, he declares that he was not able to name ONE FATHER who was not on the side of the Nicene Creed. Would any man in his senses (to say nothing of honesty) have dared to write thus, if he had not known the fact to be as he so confidently stated?

The same thing is asserted by *Alexander*, Bishop of *Alexandria*, in a letter to his namesake, Bishop of *Constantinople*. He declares, that the Arians refused to appeal to the Fathers who had gone before them; that they rejected their testimony; and maintained that

\* *ATHANASII Oper.* Tom. i. p. 277.

the opinions which they (the Arians) held were communicated to them by immediate inspiration.

The same general fact was evinced a few years afterwards, in the same century, during the reign of *Theodosius* the great. The emperor, being greatly at a loss for some means of putting an end to the ferment which the Arian controversy had so long kept up, consulted with some of the leading clergy on the subject. While this consultation was going on, *Sisinnius*, an orthodox man, of great piety, learning and prudence, but in an humble station; advised, that in order to stop the mouths of the Arians, an appeal should be made to the testimony of the Fathers from the time of the Apostles down to their day; and the Arians be asked, whether they were willing to abide the issue of such an appeal? *Theodosius* adopted the plan proposed, and offered to place the decision of the controversy on this footing. But the Arians, with one voice, refused to abide by the judgment of the Fathers.—These facts are minutely related by *Socrates*, the historian, and the whole story is amply confirmed by his contemporary, *Sozomen*.\*

\* *SOCRAT. Hist. Eccles. Lib. v. cap. 10. SOZOMEN. Hist. Eccles. Lib. vii. cap. 12.*

The former of these writers also tells us, that, after the Nicene Creed was drawn up, and about to be subscribed, the emperor *Constantine* asked *Acesius*, a Novatian Bishop who was present in the Council, whether he was willing to subscribe the Creed? on which *Acesius* replied—"The Synod, O King, has defined NOTHING NEW. I have read this definition of faith, and find it to be the ANCIENT TRADITION, EVEN FROM THE BEGINNING, FROM THE VERY TIMES OF THE APOSTLES."

Another method of ascertaining what the *Ante-Nicene* christians believed, on the subject of this correspondence, is to trace the charges brought against their doctrine by the opposers and scoffers among the Pagans of that day. Among these *Lucian* held a conspicuous place. He flourished about 170 years after Christ. From the talents and learning which he manifests, he could not fail of knowing what the christians of his day believed; more especially; as *Jerome* tells us, in his *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers*, that he was once himself a professing christian, but afterwards became an apostate. Among other reproaches which he throws out against the christians and their faith, the following passage occurs in his

*Philopatris.* “ God, reigning on high, great,  
 “ eternal, heavenly, the SON OF THE FATHER,  
 “ the Spirit proceeding from the Father, One  
 “ of Three, and Three of One,—I know not  
 “ what you say—One that is Three, and  
 “ Three that are One.”

Here is not only clear evidence, that *Lucian* considered the christians in his day as maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity; but it seems to be equally evident, that he considered the title SON, or SON OF THE FATHER as the appropriate title of the Second Person of the Trinity, *as such*, and expressive of his Divine and eternal nature, just as much as the “ Spirit proceeding from the Father” was expressive of the Divine nature of the Third Person.

But you still insist, as a very serious deduction from the enlightened orthodoxy of the Nicene Fathers, that, although they were much nearer the truth than the *Arians*; yet that they differed from those hereticks much less than they themselves imagined, or than many modern advocates of the Nicene Creed are ready to suppose. I do not contend, my dear Sir, that the Fathers of the Council of *Nice* selected, in all cases, the most appropriate and happy language to express their opinions. It

would have been strange indeed, if, in speaking on a subject so sublime and mysterious, they had in no instance employed terms liable to be misinterpreted, and even positively unhappy. I am not able to name a single writer who, in treating of a subject of much delicacy or difficulty, has wholly avoided this infelicity. Still, I think such expressions ought never to be charged against any one, when his language, taken altogether, and comparing the several parts of his discussion or illustration, exhibits, on the whole, a distinct and correct sense. To give an example of my meaning—When, in the 80th page of your Letters, you speak of the *Divine essence* as “the RESULT of a union of certain qualities, attributes, or predicates,” I take for granted that, if called to reconsider the word *result*, you would not attempt to defend it, as either metaphysically or theologically accurate; nay, you would instantly perceive that it must be given up, as equally exceptionable with *derivation*, *emanation*, or any of those words against which you have so zealously protested. Yet, I take for granted, that, as to the point intended to be expressed by that word, no candid reader would think of either charging you with heterodoxy, or say-

ing that you had not, on the whole, with great clearness, expressed your opinions.

On the same principle we ought, in my opinion, to interpret the language of the Council of *Nice*. That the members of that Council, in their Synodical capacity, as well as in their writings as individuals, did really mean, and unceasingly strive, to convey the idea, that the Second Person of the Trinity, whom they called the *Son*, and whom they represent as *begotten* of the Father; was, nevertheless, in their view, strictly and eternally divine; a CO-EQUAL, CO-ESSENTIAL, and CO-ETERNAL Person with the Father; is what, I presume, none will hesitate to admit. If they have succeeded in making this perfectly plain, I think that the remotest alliance in sentiment with the Arians, is one of the last things with which they ought to be charged.

If the foregoing statements be correct, then the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, is a doctrine in which the great body of the Ante-Nicene Fathers harmoniously and decisively concurred; which the whole assembled Church, in the fourth century, solemnly professed to believe, with the exception of a few acknowledged Arians; which was UNANIMOUSLY received by all the orthodox in the



christian world, from that time till near the close of the seventeenth century ; and which has been since opposed by none but Unitarians, and a very small section, compared with the whole body, of Trinitarian believers. Indeed you yourself, I presume, will not hesitate to acknowledge, that, from the Council of *Nice* to the first publication of *Roell*, in 1689, for thirteen hundred years, among all the Witnesses of the truth in the middle ages, your doctrine had not probably a single Trinitarian advocate on earth. And even if this latter be so, to say nothing of the Ante-Nicene period, ought not a prudent, sober minded christian—I appeal to your judgment—to be cautious and slow in abandoning a doctrine which held, for so long a time, an undisputed and elevated place, among the best friends of the Redeemer? For my part, if the evidence from scripture were much more dubious than I think it is, I should certainly feel extremely reluctant to discard a doctrine, which has so long and so generally been considered as making a part of *the form of sound words once delivered to the saints*, and which has been incorporated with all the creeds and confessions of the orthodox, so far as I can now call to mind, at least from the Council of *Nice* to the present day.

Nor will it be forgotten, that the doctrine thus maintained by all the early Fathers, and by all the Witnesses for the truth, from the time of the apostles, at this hour makes a part, not merely of the articles of faith adopted, by the Presbyterian Churches in the *United States*, and in *Scotland*; but also of those professed by the Churches of *England*, *Holland*, *France*, *Germany*, and I believe, by all the Churches of Protestant Christendom. That this will have some weight with all reflecting persons, I cannot for a moment doubt.

Here I take leave of the Fathers. Not, I confess, “sick from the bottom of my heart,” even of what they say on the subject of the Godhead, and the Person of the Redeemer. The more I read them, the more I respect them for their piety, their talents, and their learning. From the time of *Justin Martyr*, indeed, to the time of *Augustine*, every branch of theological doctrine was at a low ebb; and scarcely a single article of it can be considered as taught with uniform and consistent accuracy. If they sometimes talked crudely, and even erroneously, on the Persons in the Godhead, it is no more than they often did on almost every doctrine that I can now call to mind. Yet, after all I find in them so rich a fund of instruc-


tion, even on those subjects on which they express themselves weakly and erroneously, that I cannot help lamenting, that I did not begin to study them earlier in life; and that from the time I began to look through their volumes, I have not had enough either of health or of leisure to admit of obtaining a profound acquaintance with them.

I feel so strained, however, to take this opportunity of saying, (in which I am sure you will concur with me) that if I were to select any doctrines, out of the whole christian system, in support of which the great body of the Fathers, for the *first three hundred years*, taking them together, speak more clearly, more unequivocally, with more studied variety and decision of language;—in short, concerning which there is less doubt as to what they really received, and meant to teach, than any others, I should, without hesitation, select the doctrines of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Trinity in Unity. I will venture to say, that whoever examines the early Fathers impartially, will find, amidst their multifarious, and often very crude lucubrations, more precision, more decisively accurate discussion, more pointed conformity with orthodoxy, more harmonious agreement,


more constant care to maintain fundamental and exact truth—in reference to these doctrines, than any others that can be named. In one word, if I were left at liberty to select any doctrines, which I would be more willing, than with respect to any others, to prove, under the heaviest penalties, that the Ante-Nicene Fathers, believed and taught, I should certainly fix, at once, on those which I have just mentioned.

I know there is no need of my asking you to pardon me for this digression. But I must hasten to another department of my undertaking.

## LETTER VII.



*Objections answered.*



REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

I PROPOSE to devote this Letter to the consideration of the principal OBJECTIONS which you make to the doctrine maintained in the foregoing pages. I say the *principal* ones; for I am obliged, on this as well as on other branches of the general subject, to make a selection of topicks, out of the great number which invite attention. Some of the objections about to be noticed, have been hinted at in the preceding letters; but they are entitled to more particular and careful examination.

I. The first and most serious of all your objections is, that you *cannot understand* the doctrine of eternal generation; nay, that it contradicts all your ideas of the Divine na-

ture ; and that, therefore, if you were to find passages of scripture which seemed to assert that the Son of God was eternally begotten, you could not interpret such passages literally, but must suppose that they meant something different from a true and proper generation. You acknowledge that you have no right to demand that the *nature* of this generation itself be *explained* ; but you insist that you have a right to demand that the language used to express it be altogether intelligible. You undertake, therefore, to pronounce, that when the term “ generation ” is applied at all to a Person of the Godhead, it appears to you either an “ unmeaning term, ” or “ flatly contradictory to every notion of Deity that you can form ; ” and that you are, of course, constrained to reject it as unintelligible. This is a radical objection, to which you frequently recur, and which no explanation seems to be capable of diminishing.

I acknowledge, my dear Sir, I was not prepared to expect this objection from an orthodox Brother. Had I been called, indeed, to maintain my creed against one who excluded from his theological system *all mysteries*, I should have anticipated meeting him on this ground, and have seen him, without surprise,

advancing to occupy it. But in a discussion with one who embraces your general creed, I must say, I had no expectation of being called to answer the objection which has been just stated, especially under the aspect in which you have placed it.

You profess to believe many things, which you can no more understand, than the doctrine for which I plead. You acknowledge, without difficulty, that there are three Persons in one God, “the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” And you profess to believe this, not because you have any distinct notions of the *fact* which these terms express, but simply because you consider that fact as taught in scripture. You also admit, no doubt, the *Divine Omnipresence*; that is, you admit, that not merely a *part*, but the *whole* of God is present in heaven; and at the same time, not merely a *part*, but the *whole* of God is present on earth, and in every portion of the universe. But is this intelligible to creatures of our small capacity? Nay, is it wholly free from the charge of apparent *contradiction* and *impossibility*? Yet no one who hopes to escape the charge of atheism, thinks for a moment of denying it. I acknowledge my inability to perceive, why one who receives these doctrines

without difficulty, should be stumbled at the doctrine of eternal Sonship, as too mysterious to be admitted.

But, you say, (p. 88.) “ What is unintelligible, or surpasses our comprehension, belongs to *things*, and not to *words*. What we *express* respecting things, must of course be intelligible; for language is merely the vehicle by which our thoughts are conveyed to others.” And again—“ It is very easy to draw the line of distinction between mystery which is connected with *things*, or phenomena, and mystery which belongs only to *language*. The latter, I take it, always proceeds either from want of skill, or crafty design, or an intention to speak enigmas.” This is setting up a distinction, my dear sir, which I am inclined to think more mature consideration will constrain you to abandon as untenable, or, at any rate, to regard as of no value. If I understand the spirit of the argument founded on this distinction, it is precisely that which our Unitarian neighbours employ against the doctrine of the Trinity. They say, “ It is impossible that *three* should be *one*, or *one three*. To assert it, is a contradiction in terms. The doctrine involves such a palpable absurdity, that no species of



“evidence can render it credible.” In vain we tell them, that the Persons in the Trinity are not three and one in the same sense; but that the Unity relates to one aspect of the divine subsistence, and the Trinity to another; both of which are alike beyond our comprehension. They are deaf to every explanation, and repeat the charge of absurdity and contradiction the thousandth time, with as much confidence as if no answer had ever been attempted. Now, permit me to ask,—upon the principle which you have laid down, what would you reply to such an objection? When you say there are three Persons in one God, you certainly do not use the word *Person* in any sense which you are accustomed to recognize as applicable to *human* persons. What do you mean, then, by the term, as applied to the Divine Being? You say, you “do not know.” That is, the *word*, as thus employed, is incomprehensible, as well as the *thing*. Wherein this differs, in any essential respect, from the case in hand, I confess my utter inability to perceive. I know, indeed, that the term *Person* is not a favourite one with you. But still you use it, and seem to admit that it must be used, until a more eligible one can be found. But take any other that you may

please to select—the term “distinction,” for example, and say whether you do not employ it without any definite idea whatever of the *nature* of that *peculiarity* in the Divine existence which it is intended to express; in other words, without any definite idea of the meaning of the term? Nay, in all cases whatsoever, when we apply language borrowed from sensible objects, to a spiritual and infinite Being, does not a measure of the same incomprehensible character which attaches to the great Being himself, attach to much of the language in which we speak of his glory? If so, then the distinction, on which you appear to lay so much stress, between what is incomprehensible in *things* and in *words*, must, I think, be considered, in this case, as of no importance.

The application of these remarks to the subject under discussion, is obvious. When you confidently pronounce that the phrases “eternally begotten,” “eternal generation,” and “eternal Son,” must necessarily imply both *derivation* and *inferiority*, and, therefore, “flatly contradict all your ideas of the Divine nature;” you appear to me evidently to assume, as the foundation of your whole argument, that Sonship with God, and sonship among men, must be *essentially the same*. You

virtually reason thus—"We are acquainted  
" with no paternity or sonship among *men*,  
" which does not imply *priority* on the part  
" of the father, and *posteriority* on the part  
" of the son; therefore it must be so with  
" respect to the relation of Father and Son in  
" the Godhead." But can reasoning founded  
on such principles be sound? Have we any right  
to take for granted that the relation of father and  
son among men, is the highest model, the most  
perfect exemplar of that relation in the uni-  
verse; to which every thing else that bears the  
name must be conformed? How know we but  
that sonship among men, is a distant and ob-  
scure adumbration of something Divine and  
eternal; of something as much above it in  
glory, as the eternal Mind is above the feeble,  
grovelling mind of man? You not only cannot  
demonstrate that this is *impossible*; but I will  
venture to say, that neither you nor any other  
man can demonstrate, that it is even *improbable*.  
But until you *do* demonstrate that it is not  
only improbable, but also impossible, I must  
consider your whole reasoning founded on the  
objection which I am now answering, as, sim-  
ply, a *petitio principii*, or, which is the same  
thing, a gratuitous assumption, that, as son-  
ship among men implies attributes inconsistent

with Divinity; so Sonship in the Godhead must necessarily imply attributes of precisely the same kind. Would it not be just as logical to argue, that because God is said in scripture to “rest from labour,” to “repent,” and to be “angry,” therefore these expressions must bear exactly the same meaning when applied to the Divine nature, as when spoken of men?

But, if it be supposed that the expressions, *begotten, generation, Son*, are applied, as we believe, to the Second Person of the Trinity in condescension to human weakness; that they express a necessary and eternal, and, at the same time, an ineffable and incomprehensible relation; that there is the same immeasurable distance between the import of these terms when applied to human beings, and their import when applied to the Infinite and Eternal One, as there is between earth and heaven; then, surely, we must be able to comprehend God, before we can safely pronounce that the terms in question cannot, in ANY SENSE, express a relation in the Godhead. Yet this, it appears to me, is the sentence which you *do* pronounce, whenever you urge the objection which I am now attempting to obviate.

In fine, on this objection:—the eternal Sonship of Christ is, undoubtedly, a great mys-

tery. But if the *fact* itself be of a nature far beyond the comprehension of men, perhaps of angels; why need we wonder, if the *language* which infinite Wisdom has chosen to use for expressing it, (being necessarily the language of mortals) should convey very inadequate ideas to our minds? Is not this, in fact, the case with respect to all that language by which we attempt to lisp our ideas concerning the Infinite One? Nay, when we know so little concerning generation among creatures; and are so totally incapable of tracing the real nature of the relation between father and son even among men; I cannot conceive how it should be reasonably objected, that Sonship in the eternal Godhead cannot be comprehended by us; or how we can be prepared to pronounce, with intelligence, that the title of Eternal Son, can IN NO PROPER SENSE apply to the Second Person in the Trinity, without destroying his Divine nature.

II. Another objection to the doctrine for which I plead, which you seem to consider as of very serious import, is, that if the generation of the Son were *necessary* and *eternal*, it could not be *voluntary*; and if not *voluntary*, that I must then be deprived of the testimony of several of the Fathers, who repre-

sent the Son as begotten when the Father *pleased*, or *according to his will*. But that, on the other hand, if, as those Fathers assert, the Son were begotten *voluntarily*, or with the *will* of the Father, his generation could not have been *eternal*.

This is precisely the old Arian objection, which was urged fifteen hundred years ago, by the adherents to that heresy, and, I think, satisfactorily answered by the Orthodox of that day. The Arians stated the objection thus—"The Father either begat the Son *with* " his consent and will, or *against* his consent " and will. If the *former*, then that act of " the Divine will was *antecedent* to the Son's " existence, and therefore, the Son was not " eternal. The *latter* was evidently too absurd " for any christian to admit." They urged this objection with great confidence, and thought that they had reduced the Orthodox to a dilemma, from which they could not possibly escape.

The Orthodox, however, retorted the argument, and reduced the Arians, on their own principles, to a similar difficulty in their turn. They answered, " Does God the Father exist " *with* his own consent and will, or *against* " his own consent and will? If the *former*.

“ then we have an act of the Divine will *an-*  
“ *tecedent* to the Divine existence. Of course,  
“ the Father is not eternal. The latter, no  
“ one who believes in God at all will think of  
“ maintaining.” The Arians were silenced by  
their own reasoning.

The Orthodox had another answer, equally  
conclusive. They admitted that the generation  
of the Son was *voluntary*, that is, *with the*  
*consent and will* of the Father; in the same  
manner that the Father possessed all his per-  
fections, *necessarily*, and yet not *against his*  
*will*. They stated the argument in the fol-  
lowing manner. “ God the Father is *good*,  
“ infinitely good; *necessarily* and *eternally*  
“ good; he could not be God without this at-  
“ tribute. Yet, surely, he is not good *against*  
“ *his will*; but in the fullest sense of the word,  
“ *voluntarily*. It appears, therefore, that that  
“ which is *voluntary* may yet be *necessary*  
“ and *eternal*.”

Now, if this reasoning be sound, and to me  
it appears perfectly conclusive, then it is evi-  
dent, that the Son might have been begotten  
from eternity, and *necessarily* begotten; that  
is, that his relation of Sonship with the Fa-  
ther might have been *necessary* and *eternal*;  
in other words, quite as essential to the Divine

nature as any thing that can be predicated of it; and yet that this relation might be with the *consent* and *will* of the Father. If so, your whole objection, so far as I can see, falls to the ground.

Take another illustration of the subject, under a somewhat different aspect. All grant that the *Decrees* of God were *eternal*; and yet I know of no christians who deny that they were perfectly *voluntary*. They all flowed from the “mere good pleasure of his will.” There could have been no higher or preceding motive. But what would you think of any one who should attempt to cavil against the eternity of the Divine *decrees* by such an argument as the following—“The decrees of God are acts of the Divine mind; but every mind must *exist before* it can *act*: therefore God existed *before* he decreed; of course his decrees were *subsequent* to his existence; but that which is *subsequent* to any thing cannot be *co-eval* with it. Therefore the decrees of God were not eternal.” Would you not reprobate such reasoning, as absurd in itself, and as not sufficiently respectful to that glorious Being, whose perfections present a subject infinitely too deep for us to fathom? O how incompetent are we to comprehend the



wonders, or to measure the counsels and the glories of Him who is without a parallel in the universe!

You say, (p. 161.) “Take the favourite simile of light proceeding from the sun. Is not the irradiation of light, it is asked, co-eval with the sun? As a philosopher, I should surely answer, No. For if the sun is the cause of irradiation, in the order of time and of nature, the *cause* must precede the *effect.*” I am humbly of opinion, my dear Sir, that if you should answer so, whether “as a philosopher,” or in any other capacity, you would answer erroneously. If it be one of the *essential* qualities of the sun to be *radiant*, I should no more think of doubting, that irradiation is co-eval, in the strictest sense, with the sun, than I should think of denying that fluidity is co-eval with water, or ponderosity and impenetrability with marble.

If the reasoning sometimes employed on this subject were admitted, it would prove, as it appears to me, that there could have been no such thing as an eternal act. In other words, it would go to establish the principle, that although the Father *existed* from eternity, he could not have *acted* from eternity. But can this conclusion be admitted? Does it not re-

volt every thinking mind? Is not God *necessarily* and *essentially* active? Was his existence, prior to the work of creation, an eternal sleep, or repose? If it may be made a question, whether the human soul thinks always; surely it admits of no question, whether the infinite and eternal God thinks always, and has done so from eternity, and done it *voluntarily*; and yet, at the same time, from a *necessity* of his nature. Wherein does this differ from an eternal *emanation* or *generation*?

Nor is this suggestion, that the generation of the Son may be *necessary* and *eternal*, and at the same time *voluntary*, a mere notion of my own, to evade a difficulty. The following quotation from the learned *Stapfer*—a divine who is quoted so frequently, and with so much respect and approbation, by the venerable President *Edwards*,—will show that the opinion rests on very high authority. “Of the  
 “ Father it is declared, that he imparted di-  
 “ vine life, and so the divine essence, to the  
 “ Son; *Psalm* ii. 7. By which he possesses a  
 “ most active existence in himself, even as the  
 “ Father has the same in himself. Whence  
 “ arises the relation of Father and Son.—  
 “ Since the Father has given his essence to

“ the Son, they both possess a common essence.  
“ And so the Father can be said to have com-  
“ municated his essence to the Son. Hence  
“ that generation is rightly termed the com-  
“ munication of the Divine essence. Seeing  
“ it is one thing to generate, and another to  
“ be generated, the first belongs to the Fa-  
“ ther, the latter to the Son. Hence it is ap-  
“ parent that the Father possesses a property  
“ which the Son has not; and as to that par-  
“ ticular, they differ from each other.”

“ Because the Son is true God, the Divine  
“ essence belongs to him, which he has from  
“ himself. Hence he exists *necessarily*, not  
“ *contingently*. Whence it follows that it is  
“ impossible that he should not have thus ex-  
“ isted; his generation, therefore, is *absolutely*  
“ *necessary*. But God is independent, and  
“ therefore, can do nothing *unwillingly*, or  
“ by *compulsion*, but always acts *voluntarily*;  
“ the generation of the Son, then, was *volun-*  
“ *tary*. But it has been proved to be ne-  
“ cessary; therefore it follows that this will of  
“ generating the Son was absolutely necessary.  
“ Whatever is absolutely necessary is eternal,  
“ *must be* eternal; but the generation of the  
“ Son is necessary, therefore eternal.”

“ From what has been said, it appears that

“ although Christ has his essence from him-  
 “ self, and so is self-existent; yet as to the  
 “ *mode* of possessing that essence, he has it  
 “ from the Father. But the Father has not  
 “ only his essence, but the mode of possessing  
 “ it from himself. Whence the Father is al-  
 “ ways said to act from himself, and the Son  
 “ to operate from the Father.”\*

You will readily perceive, my dear sir, that the scope of the foregoing remarks is, not to *explain* HOW it is, that what is *necessary* and *eternal* may yet be *voluntary*. But it is to show how little qualified we are to explore or comprehend such subjects. Truly *such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high; we cannot attain unto it!*

But perhaps you will be disposed to ask, whether the tenour of the foregoing remarks is entirely consistent with the manner in which I expressed myself on the same subject in my “Letters on Unitarianism?” I must say, in candour, it is not. In those Letters (p. 87.) the following sentence occurs. “It has been  
 “ often well observed, that with regard to all  
 “ effects which are *voluntary*, the cause must  
 “ be prior to the effect; as the father is to the  
 “ son, in human generation: but that in all

\* STAFFER. *Instit. Polem.* Tom. i. p. 318.

“ that are *necessary*, the effect must be co-eval  
 “ with the cause; as the stream is with the  
 “ fountain, and light with the sun.” This  
 was an unguarded sentence. I do not, upon  
 more mature reflection, defend it; being per-  
 suaded that *voluntary* and *necessary* are not  
 always inconsistent with each other, and that  
 what is perfectly voluntary may yet be strictly  
 eternal.

III. You further object, (p. 80.) that, ac-  
 cording to the representation usually given of  
 this subject by orthodox divines, “ the Father  
 “ imparts to the Son, the *same numerical es-*  
 “ *sence* which he himself possesses, without di-  
 “ vision. Now, if this be the case, you say,  
 “ it follows, that the *same numerical essence*  
 “ communicates the whole of itself to *the same*  
 “ *numerical essence*; but if so, you allege, it  
 “ follows, that the *essential* power or *virtue* of  
 “ the Father, by which he produces or ge-  
 “ nerates the Son, must also be communicated  
 “ to him; consequently, by virtue of this  
 “ communication, the Son must produce ano-  
 “ ther person of the same condition or *ho-*  
 “ *moousian* with himself; this third person a  
 “ fourth, and so on without end. If this be  
 “ denied, then it follows that one essential  
 “ power or virtue of the Father is not com-

“ municated to the Son, viz. the power of *ne-*  
 “ *cessary eternal generation*. The definition,  
 “ then, seems either to be inconsistent with  
 “ itself, or to imply an infinite number of ge-  
 “ nerations in the Godhead. In either case,  
 “ it must be untenable.”—In answer to this  
 objection, I would remark,

(1.) That this, again, is an old Arian ob-  
 jection, urged with great zeal by Dr. *Clarke*,  
 and his adherents, more than an hundred  
 years ago; and satisfactorily answered by Dr.  
*Waterland*, and others, who lived at the same  
 time. But,

(2.) I know of no one who holds the opi-  
 nion here objected to, as the objection ex-  
 presses it. I know of no one, for example, who  
 asserts or believes, that “ the same numerical  
 “ essence communicates to itself the same nu-  
 “ merical essence.” And when you ascribe  
 this opinion, by inference, to *Turretine*, I  
 sincerely think you do him injustice. That  
 profound Divine, means to assert no more, as  
 I understand him, than that the Second Per-  
 son of the Trinity bears a relation to the First,  
 which the scriptures express by the terms  
*Son* and *generation*; and that, in virtue of  
 this generation, the *Son* possesses the same  
 complete and perfect Divine nature with the

*Father.* I will not undertake, as I observed in a former Letter, to be the apologist of *Turretine's* phraseology, as in all cases the most correct and happy; but, unless I am greatly deceived, his meaning is what I have just stated: and, if so, I think it may be justified.

(3.) Does not precisely the same difficulty, in this respect, attach to *your* system, which you impute to *mine*? You profess to believe that the *Logos* is Divine and eternal; that is, that the Second Person of the Trinity possesses the same Divine nature, complete and perfect as the First. Is this unity of nature, or essence, a *numerical*, or only a *specifick* unity? If the former, the same objection may be made to it, which you urge against my doctrine; if the latter, then I see not how you will avoid the charge of *Tritheism*. But you do not leave me in doubt on this subject. You say, in your Letters to *Dr. Channing*, that the Father and the *Logos* have each, “NUMERICALLY, the SAME ESSENCE.” But the *essence* of any being, you say in your Letters to me, (p. 80.) cannot be considered as a different thing from those *attributes* or *predicates* which constitute it what it is. Therefore, it follows, that all the predicates of the *Logos* are exactly the same with those of the Father;

and, of course, the predicate of being the Father's *Logos*, by whom he made the worlds, must be one of the essential predicates of the Father himself. Suppose I were to adopt such reasoning; what would you think of it? Could you imagine that it was intended to be seriously urged, or that it required a serious answer? But wherein does it differ from the argument which you confidently adduce, in the page last mentioned, respecting the generation of the Son?

(4.) I have still another difficulty to state. You acknowledge that between the First and Second Persons in the Godhead, there is a *distinction*;—a distinction which we are not capable of explaining;—a distinction the nature of which is not revealed to us,—perhaps because we are not capable, in the present state, of being made to comprehend it. Still, however, you expressly grant that there is a *real distinction* between these mysterious and ever blessed Persons. But if there be a distinction, there is a *difference*; that is, the One is not the Other. The *Logos* is not the *Father*, nor the *Father* the *Logos*. In other words, if there be a real and eternal distinction between the Persons of the Trinity, then that which distinguishes the First from the



Second, and the Third from both, is something *peculiar* to each, and not possessed by others. Now this peculiar personal property is either a perfection, or it is not. If it be *not* a perfection, then each Person of the Trinity possesses a property which is not a perfection—a conclusion too shocking to be admitted. But if it *be* a perfection, then there is in each one of the Divine Persons a perfection which is not in the rest, and consequently each does not possess precisely the same predicates in all respects. I merely make use of this argument, my dear Sir, as an *argumentum ad hominem*, to show that you neither gain any advantage, nor get rid of any difficulty, by rejecting the doctrine of eternal Sonship. Precisely the same difficulties occur in your own system. I infer, then, yourself being judge, that the objection which I am combatting must fall to the ground. But this is not all; for,

(5.) By reasoning of the same kind, precisely, we should strike, not merely at the doctrine of the Trinity, *in any form*; but also at some of those perfections of God, which even natural religion teaches. Let me select, as an example, the attribute before alluded to. The Bible teaches that God is *omnipresent*; and the Deist acknowledges the same thing. But,

suppose I were to assail the doctrine of the Divine omnipresence thus—“ God, you say, “ the same individual God, is every where “ present; and the substance of God, is God. “ Now, is that Divine substance, which fills “ heaven, the same individual Divine sub- “ stance which fills earth, hell, and every part “ of the universe? If it be not the *same indi- “ vidual* substance, then it is only *specifically*, “ and not *numerically* the same: and then, “ the consequence must be that the substance “ of God is not one, but many, the parts of “ which are *specifically alike*, but not *identi- “ cally the same*. But further; the Divine “ substance is in heaven. This no one will “ deny. Now I ask whether the substance “ which fills heaven, be *part only* of the Di- “ vine substance, or *the whole*? If it be a “ *part only*, then God is not in heaven, but a “ *part of God only*. If it be *the whole*, then “ how can God be omnipresent? Can *the “ whole* of the same individual substance be in “ *heaven*, and at the same time *diffused over “ the universe*? Can the whole of God be in “ heaven, and at the same time, the whole of “ God be every where else?”——But you will say, that this is an unwarrantable application of the mathematical principles of *space*, and

*part* and *whole* to an infinite Spirit, to whom they cannot with propriety be applied.—I know it; nor should I dare to employ such reasoning, even by way of illustration, did I not hope to show by it, that a mode of arguing which proves too much, or which seems to lead to the most shocking consequences, cannot be sound. But precisely similar, in my opinion, is the reasoning which forms the essence of the objection which I am now answering. My respected Brother will not imagine, for a moment, that I charge *him* with the shocking consequences which have been mentioned.—Far from it. The consequences which he who holds an opinion draws from it are one thing; those which appear to others naturally and necessarily to flow from it, may be quite another. I am endeavouring, as far as I am able, to trace your objection to its elementary principles: and my deliberate persuasion is, that if the doctrine of the Trinity, or any doctrine respecting the nature of God, is to stand or fall by argumentation of the kind in question, we may bid farewell to all theological truth.

IV. Another objection, which appears to weigh not a little in your mind, is, that, if the doctrine which I maintain respecting the Son be correct, then there must necessarily be some

*dependence* of the Son on the Father; which you insist is utterly incompatible with all your ideas of supreme Godhead.

In answer to this objection, it would be quite sufficient, in my opinion, to say, that the consequence with which you charge my doctrine is one which I do not admit. The *generation*—the *Sonship* for which I contend, I suppose to be, as has been before repeatedly said, so *perfectly unique*, so *infinitely* and *sublimely peculiar*, as not to imply either *inferiority* or *subordination*. And until you can prove (which I am sure you never can) that it is impossible there should be a generation, a Sonship of this ineffable character, in the infinite and incomprehensible God, I must consider the objection as having no real force.

But let us see whether this very objection does not lie equally, on your principles, against your own doctrine, of the Divinity of the *Logos*. You say that the *Logos* is Divine and eternal; that he is self-existent, independent, and possessed, equally with the Father, of every Divine perfection. Now, I ask, agreeably to a suggestion in my fourth Letter, do you maintain that the *Logos* has a divine nature altogether and strictly independent of the Father and the Holy Spirit? Do you sup-

pose that the Second Person of the adorable Trinity has, in himself, a separate and complete Divinity, which might exist without the First and Third? Those who admit this idea, appear to me to overlook the important fact, that the essential predicates of Divinity, as self-existence, independence, &c. belong not to any one of the Persons of the Trinity, considered absolutely independently of the other two; but they belong to the DIVINE BEING. The TRI-UNE JEHOVAH is self-existent, independent, &c. In this Jehovah there are three Persons, partaking equally, and without limit, of these predicates or attributes. The fact, then, (if it be a fact, as I believe it is) that the Second Person of the Trinity is *necessarily* and *eternally* begotten by the First; that is, necessarily and eternally bears that relation to the First Person which is called Sonship, and possesses the same nature with him—will not at all affect the predicates which belong to the infinitely perfect and glorious Divine Being as such. If it do, then I think it may be shown, that the same difficulty, to precisely the same extent, will apply to the doctrine of the Trinity as stated by yourself, in your Letters to Dr. *Channing*; You say, you “believe that God is one; that the Father, the

“ Logos, and the Holy Ghost, have, numeri-  
“ cally, the same essence, and the same per-  
“ fections ;” and that each of these Persons is  
truly God. Now, suppose an objector were to  
ask you, whether, when you say the Father is  
truly God, you mean, that the Father possesses  
the essence and the perfections of Divinity,  
altogether independently of the Logos and the  
Holy Ghost? What would you say? You  
would not, I presume, say, yes; for that would  
be to avow a belief in three separate, independ-  
ent Gods. You would probably say, no; the  
Sacred Three do not possess, each *alone*, com-  
plete Divinity. They possess it *conjointly*  
and *equally*. But the objector would proba-  
bly reply. If this be so, then the Father is,  
*in some sense*, (that is by his equal, perfect,  
necessary, and eternal communion in these at-  
tributes with the other two Persons) *dependent*  
on the Logos, and the Holy Spirit. He is  
not, he *cannot* be God *without them*; and,  
therefore, he is not, as a distinct Person, *abso-  
lutely*, and in *every sense*, independent, and,  
consequently, is not *alone* the Supreme God.  
Perhaps you would have much more to say to  
such an objector than I can think of. But I  
acknowledge, my dear Sir, if I took the ground  
on which some of your objections to my creed

appear to rest, the reasoning of such an objector would not a little perplex me.

Allow me, then, most respectfully, to ask you, what your ideas are respecting the relation which the Persons of the Trinity bear to each other? I am induced to ask this, from my being really at a loss to interpret some of your reasoning, without resorting to principles which, I suspect, neither you nor I would be willing to adopt. If, on the one hand, you suppose that each Person of the adorable Trinity has, in himself, a complete, separate, independent, Divine existence, in such a sense as to be alone, the infinite Jehovah, then, I see not, as I have already intimated, how you are to avoid the charge of *Tritheism*. On the other hand, if you admit, with me, that three **INCOMPREHENSIBLY RELATED PERSONS**, constitute the one, self-existent, independent, and glorious Jehovah; that no one of these Persons, (though all equally possess the same Divine nature,) can *alone* have the predicates of the Godhead ascribed to him; and that it is the mysterious union of all which constitutes the self-existent and independent God: then it appears to me that all that reasoning which you offer by way of objection to the doctrine of eternal Sonship, as if the Son, according to

that doctrine, must necessarily be a *dependent* being, may be offered, on exactly the same principle, and lies with just as much force, against your doctrine of the eternal *Logos*. Perhaps, however, you can give such an explanation of your views on this subject, as to divest them of all that difficulty with which they appear to me to be attended.

V. Finally ; you object, that the doctrine I maintain, instead of being friendly, as has been commonly supposed, to an enlightened defence of the Divinity of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity, is really hostile to both ; and though generally held by persons who abhor *Arianism*, yet bears an alliance with that heresy, by no means remote. Nor is this a new objection, or confined to yourself. It has been, long since, frequently made by others with great confidence.

It appears to me a sufficient answer to this objection to remark, that the genuine and natural tendency of any doctrine is, undoubtedly, to be decided by matter of *fact*. What, then, I ask, has been found, in fact, to be the influence of the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, among those who have embraced it, in reference to the point of this objection ? Is it common for the strenuous defenders of the



doctrine of the eternal generation, to fall into Arianism? Or, did you ever hear of a case in which the two doctrines were found together in the same individual? A few Semi-arians, indeed, have professed to believe in the eternal generation of the Son, and, at the same time, in his inferiority to the Father; but examples of this kind are so very rare, that it is hardly necessary to take them into the account. Where, then, is the evidence of natural alliance? I doubt whether any two doctrines are, either in principle or in fact, more remote or abhorrent from each other, than the doctrine for which I plead, and the Arian heresy.

On the other hand, I ask, whether the opinion that the Sonship of Christ is not divine and eternal, but constituted by his incarnation and resurrection, is not often found in connection with Arian principles; and whether it does not appear to have a natural alliance with them? Have not Unitarian sentiments, manifestly, had most prevalence in those parts of our country, in which these ideas of the Saviour's Sonship have been most widely diffused? You explicitly acknowledge that the fact is so; but at the same time contend that it is to be ascribed to other causes than those

which imply an alliance between these two classes of opinions. I have no doubt, my dear Brother, that in saying this, you express your sincere convictions. But I have quite as little doubt that you are mistaken; and that one great reason why so many of the clergy of *New-England* have “turned aside to fables,” in reference to the person of the blessed Redeemer, is, that large numbers of them have been so long in the habit of speculating on that mysterious subject with an unguarded freedom, that, before they were aware, they became inextricably entangled in the toils of fatal error. And I trust I do not forget the profound respect which is due to Fathers and Brethren, at whose feet it would be a privilege to sit and learn, when I venture to add a prediction, that, if the same species of speculation should continue to operate and to spread, the cause of Unitarianism will gain ground in a corresponding proportion. Not that I consider the prevalence of the doctrine under consideration, as the *sole* cause—perhaps not even the *principal* one,—of the spread of Unitarian opinions in *New-England*. I am aware, as you suggest, that others also, of no small force, may be assigned. But that it is *one*, and *by no means the least*, of the real causes, I cannot

possibly doubt, when I attend to the history of theological sentiments in that section of our country.

I have thus attempted, in a cursory manner, to examine and to answer the principal objections urged in your pamphlet. Some others might be noticed; I shall not, however, pursue this branch of the subject further, but proceed to what remains of my task. In general, your objections to my creed appear to me to present no greater difficulties, than those mysteries of our holy religion, which you profess to receive, every where present:—no greater, and, in some respects, not so great, as attend your own system:—and certainly not greater than are presented by several of those attributes of the Most High, which natural religion teaches, and which all who are not atheists agree in receiving. Indeed I deliberately think it would not be difficult to show, that much of the reasoning which you employ against the eternal Sonship of Christ, might with equal force be directed against the self-existence and eternity of God. If “eternal Son” be a contradiction, I see not but that “eternal purposes” are a contradiction,—and that an “eternal covenant” is a contradiction; nay, I see not but

that eternal existence, in any form, is an absurdity!

Before I close this letter, allow me in the fullness of a respectful and fraternal heart, to offer to your consideration one query.—Are not some of the speculations and reasonings in which you have indulged, especially in your *fourth* Letter, and in which I have attempted to follow you in the present, rather calculated to make the mind irreverent, and even profane, than to nourish pious feeling? I do seriously doubt, from my own experience, whether it is possible for almost any man to pursue such speculations to any great extent, without being sensible of a very undesirable influence resulting from them. If I know myself, I do not say this from a wish to skreen any of my opinions from thorough investigation; but from sincere doubt whether it is for edification to be much engaged in such inquiries. I am not afraid of their logical result, but of their practical impression on the mind. It is possible to speculate on the most awful of all subjects in such a manner as to banish every reverential and devout feeling. If I were to judge from the effect of it on my own heart, I certainly should not be willing to recur to it frequently, or to continue it long.

I commit these remarks, my dear Sir, with affectionate freedom, to your candour. If they have been dictated by a morbid sensitiveness, or by something less excusable, on my part, forgive them. If there is any justice in them, you will, no doubt, be disposed to appreciate and apply them aright. In the mean time I hasten to my closing letter.

## LETTER VIII.

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### *Concluding Remarks.*

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REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

I HAVE now completed the task which I prescribed to myself in entering on the discussion of this subject. I have given a brief exhibition of that evidence on which I have been accustomed to rest my belief in the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the blessed Redeemer. How the considerations offered may appear in your view, or in that of others, under whose inspection they may come, is not for me to conjecture. I can only say, they have satisfied me that the old and commonly received doctrine among the Orthodox, is the doctrine of the Bible, and ought to be held fast.

It is not improper to remind you, my dear

Sir, of what your own similar situation will enable you easily to appreciate;—that the foregoing Letters have been prepared in those small fragments of time which the daily recurring duties of a most laborious station, permitted me to redeem, for the purpose; and that, of course, scarcely a single line has been written without the pressure either of that haste or that weariness, which those who are similarly situated know well how to estimate. If, in these circumstances, in attempting to run a race with my engagements, I should have, in any case, misapprehended your meaning; or failed of hitting the point of your argument; or expressed my own meaning vaguely; or, above all, approached to any thing like acerbity of manner;—I trust you will be ready to assign and admit the proper apology for it. It is literally true, that my discussion is long, because “I have not had time to make it shorter.” And it is equally true, that, after all my prolixity, I have been constrained to wave the consideration of a number of things, which it was desirable to have noticed, by the fear that your patience would be exhausted; and that even if your’s was not, that of my other readers could hardly be expected to

hold out through a more protracted correspondence.

This discussion, indeed, has grown under my hands to an extent greatly beyond my original plan. That plan, as I intimated to you, in a private communication, was simply to state, in a single Letter, my general views of the subject of our correspondence, and to assign, with as much brevity as possible, my principal reasons for dissenting from you in opinion on that subject. But I have been insensibly led on from argument to argument, and from authority to authority, until the result is—a little volume.

And here, allow me, my dear Brother, unfeignedly to thank you for inviting me to re-examine this subject.—I will confess, that it had never, until now, fallen in my way to investigate the doctrine before us with more than the ordinary attention with which I had gone over this with the other *Loci Communes* of the system of didactick and polemick Theology. I am indebted to you for an inducement to review and extend my inquiries on the subject. For the impartiality with which these inquiries have been conducted, I cannot undertake to vouch. But with respect to the great addition to the satisfaction and confidence



with which I rest in my old opinion, which have resulted from them, I cannot easily be mistaken.

But you will, perhaps, ask me, what degree of *importance* I attach to the question under discussion? In answer to this inquiry, I will unveil to you my whole heart, as I have so constantly charged myself to do, on every point in the preceding pages.

I do not suppose, then, that it ought to be ranked among the *fundamentals* of Christianity. If a brother maintain faithfully the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity;—avoiding Sabellianism on the one hand, and Tri-theism on the other. If he maintain the strict Personality and Divinity of the Second and Third Persons, as well as of the First, in the adorable Godhead: if, disliking the phrase, *eternal generation* or *Sonship*, he maintain the doctrine of an *eternal Word*, instead of an *eternal Son*; meaning thereby a distinct Person, one with the Father, “the same in substance, equal in power and glory;” and if he suppose that the terms *Son*, *generation*, and *begotten* refer to the *incarnation* of this eternal Word, or his investiture with *office*:—I say, if any one should prefer this view of the doctrine concerning the Personality and Divinity of the

Saviour, rather than that which has been exhibited and defended in the preceding pages; —though I must regret his embracing what I deem an error, and an error by no means likely to be harmless; yet it would never occur to me to think, for one moment, of placing it in the list of *radical errors*. For example, no candid inquirer, I should suppose, would hesitate to acknowledge the general orthodoxy of the pious and venerable Dr. *Ridgley*, or would venture to brand him as a *heretick*, for the doctrine which he has so zealously taught on the subject of this correspondence.

Yet, as I said, I must deeply regret the propagation of such a doctrine, and cannot consider it as by any means likely to be innocent; nay, it does strike me as likely to exert a pernicious influence. My reasons for making this estimate are the following.

In the *first* place, *all* departures from the simplicity and purity of Gospel truth are to be regretted; and especially those which have a reference to a subject so all-important as the Person of the Redeemer. If, therefore, the doctrine which I oppose be really a departure from truth, though by no means a destructive error, it cannot, I take for granted, be deemed entirely harmless.

Again ; if the doctrine which I maintain be the doctrine of scripture, then you, and those who think with you, are chargeable with introducing not only a new doctrine, but also a new phraseology into the Church, which will not well comport with established theological language, and, of course, will be likely both to perplex and mislead. Nor is it easy, in my opinion, to estimate the mischief which such a derangement of current language, as to important subjects, would be apt to produce. I am under the impression, that if the mass of plain unlettered christians were made to believe that the title *Son*, in the form of Baptism prescribed by our Saviour, and in other parts of scripture, did not properly express an eternal relation and Person in the Godhead, as such, but something else, and something less ; no criticism or explanation that you, or any other man could give, would be likely to prevent their faith in the Divinity of the Saviour, and in the Trinity generally, from being seriously shaken.

Further ; if the phrase, *Son of God*, be denied to import a divine and eternal relation, the denial cannot fail, as it appears to me, to render a number of passages of scripture, in which the Saviour is called Son, much less

pointed and decisive as proofs of his Divinity, than they have been generally considered by the Orthodox, and certainly are, on the old, and long established ground. I have long thought, and am still constrained to believe, that some of the strongest passages in the New Testament in favour of the Divinity of Christ, are among those which ascribe Divine attributes to him as Son. A number of these have been recited in preceding Letters. But if it be assumed that his Sonship is not Divine and eternal, will not the argument commonly drawn from these passages be impaired, if not destroyed? If I know my own heart, I am not desirous of claiming a single text in support of the Divinity of Christ, which does not clearly teach the doctrine: but neither am I willing to relinquish any which do really teach that precious truth, which lies at the foundation of all my hopes.

Finally; if the Lord Jesus Christ may be *Son* by *office*, and not by nature and eternally; will not many be ready to suppose, upon similar principles, that he may be *God* by *office*? The Socinians, you know, contend, that this is the only sense in which he is called God in scripture. And, really, I cannot help thinking, that, if the doctrine which I oppose be

once admitted, it will prove, in this way, no small concession to the Unitarian cause. This, I know, is far from being intended by those who hold the doctrine in question. Nay, they insist, and no doubt sincerely believe, that its tendency is directly of the opposite kind. But my impression is, that they are deceived, and that the result will prove the fact to be so.

Such is my estimate of the unfavourable influence of this doctrine, even when held in the least exceptionable form, and when vindicated upon the plan of the pious and valuable Dr. *Ridgeley*, and those of his school. Not that I suppose, by any means, that it is always productive of these effects. For I have no doubt that it is held, and zealously held, by some, who set as illustrious an example of eminent piety, and maintain the Divinity of the Saviour with as much decision, as any other classes of believers. But the question is, whether the genuine *tendency* of the doctrine which I oppose, is not, as I have suggested, unfriendly, in a variety of respects, to the Divine dignity and glory of Him who is the Foundation of our hope, and the Life of our souls? If it be, whatever may be the piety, the learning, or the usefulness of some who may appear as its advocates, no wise man will be reconciled to their

error on this account. The question is, not, how great may be the personal worth, or the ministerial services, of particular individuals who espouse it; but whether it accords with the word of God, and is adapted to honour the Saviour. I will not undertake to say, that no one can hold the doctrine in question, without doing or suffering an injury by means of it; but I will venture with confidence to decide, that, if it be a departure at all from the purity of gospel truth, it cannot circulate generally through the mass of a religious community, without mischief, and probably very serious mischief.

But, my dear brother, I hope you will not ascribe it to the least unfriendliness of feeling, when I say, that the *doctrine* which you maintain on the subject of this correspondence, considered in itself, does not by any means excite so much apprehension in my mind, as the *means* to which you resort for its support. The *doctrine itself* I cannot, indeed, contemplate wholly without fear, in any form; but the medium of proof which you employ, I regard with much more uneasiness. A number of your arguments; the strain of your principal objections; and the license which you indulge, in many cases, in the interpretation of scrip-

ture,—all savour so much of a school with which I should abhor the thought of associating your respected name, that I read them with not a little pain; a pain altogether unconnected with the circumstance of their coming from an opposer of my creed. Yes, my dear Sir, though I know you abhor the sentiments of that school, from your heart; yet, if your name were removed from the title page; and if the several passages in which you profess your firm belief in the Divinity of Christ, were expunged from your pamphlet, I should really suspect that it had come from some member of the Unitarian ranks, rather than from the midst of the Othodox camp. I again deprecate any misconstruction of this remark: but it is the simple truth; and I know it to have been made by a number of others, as well as myself.

Notwithstanding all this, however, I consider you as a sincere Trinitarian, and as a truly pious Christian. I can as cordially reciprocate this acknowledgment, as you kindly make it in my case. I go farther; and hesitate not to say, that I entertain the same opinion of the great body of my fathers and brethren in *New England*, who agree with you in respect to this doctrine. I believe them to be faithful

ministers, daily doing good, and leading souls to glory. Yet, with my views of the subject, I cannot but tremble for the next generation. It is common to say that a stream can never rise higher than its fountain: and, in the natural world, this is ordinarily true. But not so in the intellectual and moral world. As a literary and scientific teacher may put others in the way of being far more learned than himself; so ecclesiastical history furnishes many examples of Theologians, who, though substantially orthodox, and fervently pious themselves, did, in fact, so conduct their instructions, as to send out pupils, many, if not the larger portion of whom were grievously heretical. This is said to have been in a measure the case with the pious and eminently useful Dr. *Doddridge*, of *Great Britain*, and it may be, to a still greater extent, the case again, with men whose praise is, deservedly, in all the churches.

Say, not, my respected Friend, that in making these remarks, I undertake to “administer a reproof” to you, or to others who adopt the same opinion. Far from it. I feel that I have no title to assume the character of a “reprover” of brethren, who have not only the same right to the free exercise of private judgment with myself; but who, also, as



I am bound to believe, have inquired with at least as much intelligence, industry, and candour as myself. In the exercise of the right alluded to, I have come to certain conclusions concerning the importance of the doctrine of the Saviour's eternal Sonship; and the tendency of the opposite doctrine. These I have ventured to express,—I hope with calmness and decorum,—certainly with sincerity. I ask for no further attention to them than their intrinsick character demands. When you address me, therefore, in the language of the Grecian chief—“Strike, but hear me;”—my reply is—Hear you, most respectfully and cheerfully, I will; but strike you, I will not. We are near enough to walk together in love. Certainly too near to allow of hard thoughts or speeches of each other.

I will now, my dear Friend, bring this correspondence, on my part, to a close.—I hope a final one. For although I have too much respect for the reverend Brother whom I address, to resolve, even in my own mind, that I will not reply to any thing he may hereafter write on this subject; and, I trust, too much love of truth to retreat from the defence of it, when there is the least prospect of saying a word usefully in its support; yet the idea of

being engaged in a publick “discussion” with you, in a manner involving difference of opinion, (—and which others will assuredly call a “controversy,” in spite of us)—is so painful to me, that I shall not for any light reasons take up my pen on this subject again. I would much rather that we should spend our leisure hours in the culture of that brotherly love which, it is my earnest hope, may ever subsist between us; and in recommending to our Pupils, and supporting before the world, those great fundamental and practical principles of our common salvation, in which we are substantially agreed, and which we concur in regarding as of infinite importance. Verily, my Brother, there is enough in these principles to engage the whole of the best acquirements, and the best energies, that we can summon to their defence. I especially feel that this is the case now, when a spirit of unhallowed speculation has extensively gone forth; a spirit which, while it calls itself Christian, is employed in denying or perverting every thing worthy of the name. Infinitely rather would I join with you, in devoting myself, such as I am, to the diffusion of a counter spirit; to the dissemination of that precious *Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that*

*believeth.* In such a conflict, however irksome in some respects it may be, there is a consolation not to be described; and a never-failing benefit to the cause of the Redeemer, which it is not for us to attempt to measure. But from the continuance of the present discussion, I acknowledge that my anticipations of either pleasure or advantage, are few and small. I even doubt, as I suggested in the preceding Letter, whether it can ever minister much to “godly edifying,” for those who are in the main agreed respecting the Divine character of the Redeemer, to spend much of their time in speculating, if I may so express it, about the philosophy of his Person. On this subject, and on similar subjects, to walk in the plain light of scripture, and in *the footsteps of the flock*, is the wisest as well as the safest course.

In bidding you farewell, allow me to add, as one more tribute to that cordial amity which I wish to subsist between us, that if I have written a word which is, in the remotest degree, inconsistent with a fraternal spirit, it is my earnest hope that you will forgive it, and set it down to the score of pure inadvertence. I certainly am not conscious of having written such a word; and if, on various occasions, when I was led to state my diversity of im-

pression from your's, or my surprise at your opinions,—I had known how to express myself less pointedly, without impairing both the perspicuity and force of my meaning, I should certainly have used in many instances, language of a still more reduced character. It has been my wish to remember, in every word that I wrote, that I was addressing One whom I regarded as a faithful and devoted Servant of Christ, and with whom I hope, through the riches of sovereign grace, to dwell forever in a more enlightened and a more happy world.

I am, Reverend and Dear Brother,

Yours in the best of bonds,

**SAMUEL MILLER.**

PRINCETON, Feb. 20th, 1823.