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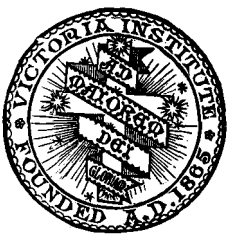

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503RD ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST, 1910.

THE REV. CANON GIRDLESTONE, M.A. (VICE-PRESIDENT), IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting having been read and confirmed, the Chairman referred to the great loss sustained by the Institute since the last Meeting by the deaths of the Rev. G. F. Whidborne and of Colonel C. R. Conder.

Mr. Whidborne was at the time of his death a member of Council, and had been a member of the Institute for over twenty years. His papers and contributions to discussions had always been welcome, and his presence and advice at Council Meetings, more especially during the late period of reorganisation, had been invaluable.

Colonel Conder was one of the earliest supporters of the Institute. His contributions to the Society's *Transactions* had always been much appreciated. His death was a great loss to the Science of Bible Archæology.

The election of the Rev. C. L. Drawbridge, M.A., as a member of the Institute, was announced.

The Chairman then called on the Rev. Professor H. M. Gwatkin, M.A., Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Cambridge, to read his paper on :—

ARIANISM AND MODERN THOUGHT. By Rev. Professor H. M. GWATKIN, M.A., Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Cambridge.

BEFORE we can see the relation of Arianism to modern thought, we must look at its significance for its own time.

The Gospel then begins as the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and indeed nothing short of this will justify its claim to be the full and final revelation of God. If Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God, the revelation must be final; if He is anything short of this, it cannot be final. In the one case, there will be infinite depths of meaning for us to learn; in the other, there will be indefinite possibilities of mistake for us to correct. Our doctrine then is that He is as divine as the Father, and as human as ourselves; and all the

refinements of the Nicene Creed mean nothing else and nothing more than this.

But common opinion in the early Christian centuries was persuaded that God and man are mutually exclusive, so that what is divine cannot be human, and what is human cannot be divine; and the Christians were apt to think as their neighbours thought, without clearly seeing that such a position is fatal not only to an incarnation, but to religion generally, and even to thought itself. So some started from the manhood they had seen, and denied or qualified His deity, while others insisted on the deity they had spiritually known, and denied or qualified His manhood. The history of the doctrine of the Person of Christ is made by the conflict of these two tendencies.

Arianism represents the former, though it concedes so much to the other that some will be tempted to think it a happy *via media*, though in fact it combines the evils of both systems without the advantages of either. Starting then from the Lord's manhood, the Arians were willing to add to it everything short of proper deity. But there they drew the line. He is in some sense divine, said they, and must be worshipped as our Creator and Redeemer; but how can one who is man be in the proper sense divine? We cannot make Him a full revelation of God or more than a creature. He is not even a creature of the highest sort, for His virtue is only the constant struggle of imperfect manhood, not the fixed habit of perfect free-will. And now that His manhood was a mere difficulty, it only remained to say that there was nothing in Him human but a body.

This is the doctrine of the Arians. They establish the Lord's deity by making Him a creature, and end by overthrowing the manhood from which they start. But I need not dwell on the endless confusions of such teaching, for nobody is an Arian in our time. Unitarianism is the most elastic word in theology, and covers a prodigious range of doctrines; yet no modern form of it, so far as I know, is quite like Arianism. But the thoughts from which Arianism arose are thoughts of all ages; and in our own time we can see them plainly, not only in the whole range of Unitarianism, but in much catholic and other agnosticism, and in many schools of philosophy. Modern developments may even have strengthened them in some directions, though upon the whole their tendency seems not only the other way, but more and more the other way.

The modern developments which most directly bear on

Arianism are the scientific and the social. Summing these up for present purposes, we are abandoning the deistic and the despotic conceptions of God which held the field till lately. The old conceptions of a great engineer and of a despot in heaven still linger in the backward forms of belief, and among the backward followers of all beliefs; but we are coming more and more to see that God works directly in common things, and that He is more a Father in heaven who guides His erring children than a king of heaven dispensing arbitrary rewards and punishments.

Now all the Arianizing forms of thought in past ages and in our own entirely depend on these obsolete conceptions. It must be allowed that the modern conception of natural law may be fitted in to the deistic view; for (if taken in a certain way) it destroys the possibility of direct divine action in the world. But then (if taken in the same way) it equally destroys the historical facts which are as vital for Arianism as for orthodoxy. Nor can the Arians bring back divine action into the world by the help of a mediator, for such mediator will have divine work to do, and therefore must be divine. There is no escape from the argument of Athanasius, that if a divine Person is needed to create, a divine Person is equally needed to restore. Yet on Arian principles the mediator cannot be divine. Hence those who hear this way commonly go further, and altogether deny any divine action in the world. They forget that law, like force, accounts for nothing without an intending will behind it. But setting aside these confusions of thought, natural law is nothing more and nothing else than a symbol of our own, which sums up the action of that will, so far as it is at present known to us. Hence anything supernatural must be absolutely natural, and everything natural must be supernatural. The two are co-extensive and form one organic whole, so that the sharp separation of the kingdom of nature from the kingdom of grace required by the deistic systems is a vain imagination.

Even more significant and emphatic are the indications of the social development. We note first that men have formed their conceptions of God and of His kingdom by idealizing earthly rulers and earthly states. Thus the quarrels of tribes and cities are reflected in the anarchy of polytheism, and it was under the shelter of the Roman peace that the unity of God became the belief of the civilised world. Ezekiel's conception of the future is an idealised kingdom of Judah, and there is likeness as well as contrast in Augustine's parallel of the Roman Empire

and the city of God. Now the conceptions of society and government are undergoing in modern times a subtle and far-reaching change, carrying with it an equally subtle and far-reaching change in our conceptions of the divine. To understand it, we must glance back nearly twenty centuries.

The Roman Empire furnished nobler ideals than anything that had gone before it, and those ideals were long sufficient. Indeed, the Empire had a forward look towards better times. Rome alone of ancient empires ruled the nations for their own good and not for selfish gain. Yet in its essence the government was a weak and selfish despotism, and society a structure of selfish class-prides. Like the Empire, but without its nobler features, were most of the kingdoms that followed—that for instance of Louis XIV. Still there was an advance after the Reformation. The philosophic despots reached the stage of everything for the people; and everything by the people was soon to come. Before long the world was startled first by the separation of America, then by the crash of the French Revolution. In England the change was made more peacefully, and through a transition period of softened aristocracy. I need not trouble you with details: suffice it that the modern state in its better forms entirely denies the claim of kings or nobles to govern in their own right or for their own purposes, and calls for the active and intelligent co-operation of all its subjects for the common welfare. Rulers and subjects in their several vocations are alike servants of the common good.

Now this changed conception of society is reflected in a changed conception of the divine, for we must needs believe that God is everything and more than everything that the best of rulers are only endeavouring to be. If such ruler is a guide and father of his country, God cannot be less than the guide and father of mankind. If he chooses his servants for their fitness and not by favouritism, God will do so too. If he is just and right, we know that God is not just and right in some other sense, which in men we should call unjust and unright. If the ideal king never wavers in moods and tempers, the unwavering sternness of the laws of nature becomes a sign of love divine. If the king is merciful, and strives to turn his rebels into loyal subjects, we cannot believe that God will some day burn His rebels in hell. If the king tries to do so much, God will do no less. Above all, if we expect the king to give himself heart and soul without reserve to the service of his people, it becomes easier to believe the Christian story that there is One who gave His life a ransom for us all. Thus the

whole conception of the divine is softened and made humane, and suffused with a tenderness our fathers never dared to realise as we are realising it. The change is immeasurable when we come to this from the hard impassive God of Islam or Arianism—not to add of Rome and Geneva—who sits throned far off in selfish bliss, and has a glory of his own which is not the highest welfare of his creatures.

In yet another direction the social development strikes at the root of all these Arianizing or Unitarian conceptions. The advance of the nineteenth century is shown not only in the changed spirit of governments, but in the wider range of their action, and in the increasing attention they give to social questions. Administration was comparatively simple when it was chiefly occupied with the king's wars, or with the security of life and property. But the modern state regulates factories and provides for the poor; it inspects slums and stamps out diseases; it educates the young and pensions the old, regulates companies from the railways downward, and endeavours to deal with strikes and lock-outs. In all directions it cares for the destitute and the helpless, from the vaccination of infants to the supervision of criminals. No doubt much of this work is badly done, but there is not much dispute that it ought to be done, and that a good deal of it is best done by the state. And this is no passing fancy, but a steady trend of thought, most marked in the most civilised states. There is not much of it, I fancy, in Honduras or Afghanistan. The tide will not recede—we shall not leave the destitute to chance help, or cease to hinder infection. On the contrary, there is every sign that it will advance further. We have all been more or less of socialists ever since the Poor Law of 1835 firmly planted the principle of socialism in the state; and the practical questions which now divide us concern rather means than ends, for we all profess the utmost devotion to the social welfare of the nation. So we are, at any rate, all agreed that social questions are much more complicated and more urgent than they used to be. This means that the social element of human nature is being rapidly developed along new lines. Some think it bids fair to swamp the individual; and though I do not believe this, it certainly plays a larger and a growing part in life.

It is time now to show more precisely what all this has to do with Arianism. If, then, man has in him that spark of the divine which is theologically called the image of God—and he must have it if the universe is rational—then the social element

which forms so large a part of human nature cannot be entirely wanting in the divine. Again, we believe that God is good, for otherwise we could give no account of goodness in ourselves. But goodness is a relation, and therefore implies a second. Were there but one being in the universe, there would be no room for goodness. If such goodness could be supposed incidental, it might possibly be satisfied by a transitory world; but if it is essential as it must be, the second it implies must be eternal. Yet, again, goodness means submission to a rule of goodness which is not conventional. If I am good to some unconscious infant, I confess our common duty to an ideal of goodness which is no creation of my will, however willing I may be to follow it. So if God, who is essentially good, is good to us, He is following a law of goodness which is no mere creation of His will, but the expression of His nature.

As for Arianism and the rest of the half-and-half systems which make the Lord more than man, yet not truly divine, they preach a solitary God surrounded indeed with creatures, but having no true second in the universe. His goodness is, therefore, will, not nature—at least we can never know for certain that it is anything more than the expression of a will subject to change. So of other qualities. Everything becomes arbitrary, and the Son of God Himself can give us no certainty if he is but a creature, and the true nature of the Father is unknown to him as well as to us.

This is all very well for an Eastern sultan with infirmities of temper; but is it a worthy conception of God? And if we can find a worthier, are we not bound to accept it? Now the *ὁμοούσιον* of the Nicene Council, which a logical necessity soon shaped into the full doctrines of the Trinity, simply means that the Son is as divine as the Father. It means nothing more, except that Christian men are not free to explain it away. But it makes a world of difference. If God spared not His own Son, we have a mighty argument; but it does not come to much if He only gave up Joseph's son. Here then and only here we reach firm ground at last. The prophet may tell his vision, but neither man nor angel—no being short of the eternal Son can tell us with full and final certainty the very heart of God our Father.

Again, whatever be the mysteries of the Trinity, there is a simple aspect of it which anyone can understand. It gives us the social element we were looking for; and by making it a relation of eternal Persons, it firmly plants it inside the divine

nature. Here is one reason why I believe that this, rather than some sort of Unitarianism, is the religion of the future. The half-and-half systems may suit the simple administration of past ages ; but we are learning from the infinite complexity of nature and society something of the infinite complexity of the divine expressed alike in the universe and by the doctrine of the Trinity. Shortly to say, Unitarianism in all its forms belongs to an order of thought which has ceased to satisfy either reason or conscience, and both the scientific and the social development make it everyday more visibly untenable. Ideals once transcended are for ever false ; and if the deistic and agnostic mists are once more gathering round us, they will surely vanish in the brighter light which the revelation through society throws on things divine.

Discussion.

Canon Girdlestone thanked Professor Gwatkin, in the name of all present, for his thoughtful paper. He added that many of our theological difficulties arise from changes in the sense which we attach to words, *e.g.*, *Person*. He emphasised the distinction between Unitarianism which leads to the "hard impassive God" of Islam, and Biblical monotheism which involves eternal relationship answering to the words Fatherhood and Sonship, within the compass of the Godhead. The new theology was either Gnostic, on which Mansel's lectures on early heresies should be consulted, or Agnostic, which St. Paul touched in a sentence when he said "whom ye ignorantly worship, Him I declare unto you." Professor Drummond, who was brought up at the feet of Dr. Martineau, has done us good service by his study of St. John's Gospel, which he determines both on external and internal grounds to be the work of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

The Dean of Canterbury expressed his gratitude to Professor Gwatkin for his excellent paper.

Mr. Cory thought that there was a saying of St. Augustine which would always be found helpful towards the realisation of this doctrine, "There have always been a lover and a loved."

Professor Gwatkin.—There was still left the difficulty of the Third Person, yet he thought that he could see a way.

The Rev. H. J. R. MARSTON.—To venture to say anything on this subject is to launch out into deep waters. Professor Gwatkin has to-day said almost the last word on a subject that he has made his own. I hope that we may hear the Professor again in the Victoria Institute.

Perhaps, however, it is not self-evident that every phase of human society in its development must reflect an aspect of the Godhead. Each genuine phase has adumbrated some aspect of the Biblical God, not the naturalistic God.

There is then something to say for the Sovereignty of God once unchallenged, now so much impoverished and caricatured. The idea of Sovereignty is more needed than ever. As a life-long Liberal he hoped that there may be some such thing as a Divine Democracy.

Of the Sovereignty of God, Augustine and Calvin have caught glimpses, but St. John had a real vision.

It is my hope that all those who have ideals of Society, whether democratic or other, may gradually find all worthy speculations and ideals realised and transcended.

REMARKS BY LIEUT.-COLONEL ALVES.

Whilst there appear to be certain differences between ancient Arianism and the forms of modern Unitarianism, I think that, broadly speaking, both practically deny the unique Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; Gnosticism, on the other hand, denying His real humanity. Each of these opposing heresies would render useless His work on our behalf.

The reader of the paper has hinted that God can have no favourites; but is this correct? Abraham was God's friend; it is true that he was a man of great faith; but God must have foreseen that his descendants through Jacob would manifest what a writer on Scripture has called "a genius for perversity." Yet that nation—as a nation—was marked out for special favour; and, although at present in disgrace, is being preserved in order to be a blessing to the whole world, and also its head nation temporally. This is "Calvinism," so called, applied nationally.

As regards individuals, we cannot get rid of this ("Calvinistic") doctrine without destroying the Bible. To say nothing of others, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, Peter and John held those doctrines

of grace ("Calvinism") which, I believe, all the Protestant Reformers held without exception.

The revelation is clear, that some are "chosen in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world" (Eph. i, 4). This is more than an invitation, or free grace which calls, setting the will free to accept or reject; it is Sovereign grace which compels. All are not compelled; those who are, must be "Favourites."

I think that "Calvinism" has suffered in two ways; (1) in restricting salvation to those irresistibly called ("hyper-Calvinism"); (2) in restricting God's plan of salvation to these, and to those others called who accept the invitation. "Arminianism," if not as mischievous in one way as false, "Calvinism" in one direction, is worse in another, inasmuch as it leads men to suppose that they can come to Christ when they themselves choose, and not when God calls them. Both seem to me to narrow the scope of God's plan by the work of Jesus Christ through His Church and His nation; whereas He, through Paul, hints at a vast work extending through the Universe; see 1 Cor. vi, 1–3, and Ephesians i, 1–10. The Bible does not say that the case of those not called in this life is hopeless. 1 Peter iii, 18–22, and iv, 6, hints at a more populous Paradise, but not another or wider door.

I cannot go with one of the speakers in his hints at a Divine Democracy. Differences in degree and position are revealed where Christ bears rule; and the nearest approach to Democracy will be when, after the period known as "the ages of the ages" comes to an end, and everything contrary to God's mind is utterly destroyed out of existence, the Lord Jesus hands over the kingdom to God; even the Father. Even then, it is to me unthinkable that Our Redeemer should stand no higher than even the highest of His Redeemed.