

# From Authority to Freedom in Church Life

THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY  
AND UNITARIAN DISSENT

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Reprinted from the Transactions of the Unitarian Historical  
Society in London, 1962. Vol. XII, No. 4



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## THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY AND UNITARIAN DISSENT

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ON the 19th of May, 1662, in the reign of Charles II, the royal assent was given to a measure which has had a decisive effect upon the religious, political and social life of England. The express purpose of the statute was to regulate the worship and define the administration of the Church of England. One of its indirect but most enduring results was the creation of Protestant Dissent in this country. It is known to us as the Act of Uniformity, 1662; to give its full title it was 'An Act for the Uniformity of Public Prayers and Administration of Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies; and for establishing the form of making, ordaining, and consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons, in the Church of England,' and it should not be forgotten that with certain modifications it still remains in force.

Let us look first at the background to the Act. The issue of the Reformation in England had been the establishment of the Church of England as the one and only vehicle through which the Englishman could lawfully express his religious aspirations. The monarch was 'supreme governor as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes as temporal.' The Church was the nation in its spiritual as contrasted with its secular aspect. Religious as well as political unity was thought to be the nation's supreme good and to this end uniformity both in doctrine and practice was zealously sought. This should not surprise us, because at the period of which we are speaking it was inconceivable to most people that there should be within a single nation-state any real variety of religious loyalty. In Germany, the result of the Reformation had been to set up a system whereby each ruler determined the religion of his own state, according to the doctrine, *cuius regio, eius religio*.

<sup>1</sup> A Lecture delivered to the Manchester District Association of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches on May 24, 1962, at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.



A state had to be either Catholic or Lutheran and no other alternative was thought possible. In England, previous Acts of Uniformity had imposed penalties of varying severity, during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth, upon all who for any reasons were disloyal to the national religion.

Now such people were many. There were, first of all, the Roman Catholics. They, of course, had not accepted the Protestant Reformation, and remained loyal to the old religion. There was also the rising tide of Puritanism in all its forms. Basing their claims largely upon Scripture, all the Puritan parties looked to primitive Christianity for purer forms of belief and practice. By far the largest party was that of the Presbyterians. These aimed not so much at the separation of the Church from the State, as at a further Reformation of the Church on Presbyterian lines. Then came the Separatists, or the Independents, later called the Congregationalists, who wanted to break the alliance between the Church and the State. The third main group was that of the Baptists, who not only desired freedom from the secular authority, but who also held tenaciously to their own peculiar doctrine of believer's baptism.

The struggles of the Puritans to express their own deeply felt convictions went on throughout the seventeenth century. They made their greatest impact during the period of the Commonwealth. It is imperative to remember in this connection that during the Commonwealth a systematic attempt was made to organise the established church on Presbyterian principles. Episcopacy was abolished by Parliament in 1643 and on the 6th of June of the same year an ordinance was introduced for the division of England and Wales in Presbyterian classes and was followed by other measures. This 'Presbyterianisation,' so to speak, of the established church was introduced as much for political as for ecclesiastical reasons; it was partly designed to secure the help of the Scots for Parliament in its struggle with the King, under the obligations of the Solemn League and Covenant. It achieved but a shadowy existence; only in London, Lancashire and some other counties was anything set up that approached the Scottish model. The majority of ministers who were appointed during the Commonwealth were, in fact, Presbyterian, but there were also others, not a few Independents and even a small number of Baptists.

In 1660, however, the Commonwealth came to an end. It was clear that with the restoration of the monarchy, the episcopal Church of England would also be restored. The apostolic succession would again be recognised, and the traditional order of bishops, priests and deacons would come again into its own. The problem, therefore, was what to do with the Puritans in the church? Were their principles in any way to be recognised? Were they to be given a place in the re-organised national church? Shortly before his return to England Charles II, in his declaration from Breda, had promised a 'liberty to tender consciences' and that no man would be 'disquieted' for differences of opinion in matters of religion which did not disturb the peace of the kingdom. To that end, an Act of Parliament was promised that would fully grant that Indulgence. Hopes, therefore, ran high that in some way Puritanism would be allowed to exist, and many of the most eminent Presbyterians warmly welcomed and gave their whole hearted assistance to the return of the King.

In the event, whatever Charles's intentions may have been, and there is no reason for doubting his sincerity, it was not he, but the Cavalier Parliament, dominated by the High Church party, which finally decided the religious settlement of the country. A fresh Act of Uniformity, and the most notorious of all, was passed. It made legal only one form of religious policy and worship. What in these modern days, perhaps, we should call a totalitarian form of religion was set up. Let us recall once again the main provisions of the Act. All clergy were required to give their unfeigned assent and consent to the contents of a Prayer Book which denied to some of them their most cherished convictions. Not only ministers but all teachers in Colleges and Universities, all schoolmasters and tutors in private families, were required to conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England. Not only that, but they were required to accept a doctrine of non-resistance, and to renounce all obligations that they had incurred under the Solemn League and Covenant. All ministers and teachers who failed to comply with these requirements by St. Bartholomew's Day, 24th August, 1662, were to be deprived of their livings and their appointments.

As a result of the Act, large numbers of clergy were forced to resign from their benefices. Tradition speaks of the Two Thousand.



Recent research has shown the number to be smaller.<sup>2</sup> There were, in fact, two classes among those whom we call the Ejected. Nearly seven hundred went out in 1660, the year of the Restoration, when the clergy of Episcopalian loyalties claimed the benefices of which they had been deprived during the Commonwealth period. About a thousand went out in 1662, or later, as a consequence of the Act of Uniformity. Of these about one tenth afterwards conformed to the established Church, finding, for various reasons, the path of Non-conformity unacceptable. Of those who conformed a number, difficult to estimate, later left the Church to seek a freedom they could not find therein. About a hundred and fifty teachers gave up academic posts, either in 1660 or in the year of the Act. The grand total, therefore, is a little over 1900.

They counted among their number some of the most conscientious, the best educated, and the most able of the clergy. It was a grievous loss to the Church of England that she should be deprived of their services. It is instructive for our purpose to examine their ecclesiastical loyalties. They were Baptists, Congregationalists or Presbyterians. The Baptists were a mere handful. They numbered about 26, mostly in Wales. The Congregationalists are estimated at 174. The vast majority were therefore Presbyterian in sympathy.

Why, three hundred years later, should we honour these men? They were not particularly liberal in their theology. Not more than one or two of them were at all heretical in doctrine. None of them were Unitarians as we understand the term. Nor were they tolerant or broadminded in their views as we, in this modern age, conceive such an attitude. Why, then, should we honour them? It seems to me that we pay tribute to them at this time for two entirely justifiable reasons. In the first place, they were profoundly loyal to the voice of conscience as they understood it. A supreme challenge came to them from which they did not flinch. They were prepared to suffer for their convictions. Like Abraham of old, they went out into the wilderness, not knowing whither they went. They exemplified the Apostolic faith as it is set forth in the New Testa-

<sup>2</sup> See A. G. Matthews *Calamy Revised*, Oxford, 1934. For the technical reasons which lay behind dissent from the Act of Uniformity see *Calamy Revised* and also the *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. LX, April, 1962, No. 238, articles by the Editor and others on *The Tercentenary of the Great Ejection*.

ment 'We must obey God, rather than men.' Further they did not flinch from all the severe disabilities of the Penal Acts, which, in addition to the Act of Uniformity, were passed against them. We should not forget that whereas the Act of Uniformity excluded the clergy from the Church, the Penal Acts—the Conventicle Act of 1664, the Five Mile Act of 1665, and the Test Act of 1673—were designed to render impotent for ever the whole expression of Puritanism in this country as a social and political as well as a religious force. All these things were accepted in the spirit of Henry Newcome, the ejected preacher of the Collegiate Church in Manchester, now the Cathedral, who, together with laity who were faithful to him, was the true founder of Cross Street Chapel. 'If the Lord bring us to want, and teach us but how of his own good spirit—I care not.'

In the second place, most of the oldest churches in our Unitarian movement owe their foundation to the men and women who were loyal to the ejected ministers. Half of the Unitarian congregations in England have a seventeenth century origin. Seven of the churches in the present Manchester District Association stem from the original stream of Protestant Dissent—Hale (1723), Blackley (1697), Cross Street (1694), Dob Lane (1698), Gorton (1703), Platt (1700) and Monton (1698).<sup>3</sup> Often the oldest Dissenting place of worship in a locality, be it a country district or a populous town, is the Unitarian, as in Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Bolton and so on. Very often orthodox Dissenting churches are off-shoots from the original one which is now Unitarian, as in Manchester, where Cross Street Chapel is rightly called the Mother Church of Nonconformity. These are facts of incalculable importance for our tradition.

But if such are the facts, the question still remains—how did our modern Unitarian Christianity develop out of the revolt of the ejected clergy in 1662? For as I have pointed out, probably no more than one or two, if that, were at all heretical in doctrine. For the vast majority were Presbyterians and less than two decades before the Ejection they had enshrined their religious faith in the Westminster Confession, and in the Longer and Shorter Catechisms. You may remember the story of the lady who in the early years of

<sup>3</sup> The date in each case is the date of the original building.



this century visited Manchester and was being shown the historic shrines of our witness: Cross Street Chapel, the Memorial Hall in Albert Square, and so on. She was particularly impressed with the Memorial Hall, the first public secular building to be erected in this city by nonconformists, and on reading the inscription which runs round the building, to the memory of the Ejected, she was heard to remark: "What: two thousand Unitarian ministers ejected from the Church of England in 1662—how is it there are only three hundred of them now?" Had her visit been in the present year, she would have had to revise that figure. Nevertheless, the question is still relevant and it is what I shall now endeavour to answer.

If the theology of the ejected, based as it was upon the Westminster Confession, was not particularly liberal, neither was their attitude to those who differed from themselves. In 1648, the English Presbyterians, through the Westminster Assembly, urged Parliament to make denial of the Trinity a capital offence. An ordinance to that effect was passed on May 2 of that year, commonly and rightly referred to as the Draconic Ordinance.<sup>4</sup> It has been described as a singular example of Presbyterian intolerance; fortunately it was never enforced. A similar, if less severe example, can be taken from the year previous. On the 14th December, 1647, the Presbyterian ministers of London issued a *Testimony*,<sup>5</sup> as it was called. In it they stoutly declared against the toleration of any opinions but their own. This was taken up a few months later by the Lancashire Presbyterian divines, who issued what they called their *Harmonious Consent*<sup>6</sup> to the petition of their London brethren. With the unanimity implied in this title, they rejected toleration as a great impiety. In the opinion of Alexander Gordon few documents in history have been equal to this in sheer malignity of expression, and yet it was a document that was signed among others by the founders of our churches at Dob Lane (William Walker), Bolton (Richard Good-

<sup>4</sup> See *Cheshire Classis*, ed. A. Gordon, London, 1919, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> *A Testimony to the Truth of Jesus Christ, and to our Solemn League and Covenant; as also against the Errours, Heresies and Blasphemies of these times, and the Toleration of them . . . Subscribed by the Ministers of Christ within the Province of London, Decemb. 14, &c., 1647.*

<sup>6</sup> *The Harmonious Consent of the Ministers of the Province within the County Palatine of Lancaster.* Subscribed 3 March, 1647-8.

win), Blackley, (Thomas Pike), Cocky Moor (John Lever) and by two of Henry Newcome's Presbyterian colleagues at the Collegiate Church, Manchester. Halley, the orthodox historian of Presbyterianism, does not hesitate to affirm that nothing more horrible was ever put on paper by religionists of any sort.<sup>7</sup> These examples suffice to show that the generous spirit of tolerance often associated with our Presbyterian forefathers cannot be attributed to many of them at this period. There was, of course, another side to Presbyterianism during the Commonwealth. No more than any other religious party were the Presbyterians all cast in the same mould. Richard Baxter's Worcestershire Agreement of 1653 was a remarkable attempt to include moderate men of different parties within a single association. The response to his leadership showed among Presbyterians, as among others, a very different temper from that reflected in the violent declamations of the *Harmonious Consent*.<sup>8</sup>

Let us now look at the process which wrought the remarkable change from Presbyterianism to Unitarianism and our modern liberal faith. It is by no means as clear and straightforward as we are sometimes apt to think. The situation which the Act of Uniformity was designed to perpetuate could not last. It could not last, and it did not last. With the banishment of the Stuarts in 1688 and the coming of William III and Mary to the throne, an entirely new policy was tried. It was the policy of Toleration, a grudging policy indeed, but nevertheless one that gave Dissent a measure of freedom. In 1689 the so-called Toleration Act<sup>9</sup> was passed. This allowed nonconformists to build their own meeting houses, under certain limited conditions. It has been estimated that in the twenty years following the Act, between 1689 and 1710, the nonconformists erected nearly a thousand places of worship. But it should be remembered that the ministers who served these congregations had to subscribe to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England; that was the condition of their freedom. That is to say,

<sup>7</sup> *Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity*, Robert Halley, Manchester, 1872 (2nd Ed.), p. 260.

<sup>8</sup> See *History of the Presbyterians in England*, A. H. Drysdale, London, 1889, pp. 362ff.

<sup>9</sup> 'An Act for exempting His Majesty's Protestant Subjects dissenting from the Church of England from the penalties of certain laws.'



they had to subscribe to all the 39 Articles except three, those relating to church government, and a fourth exception was allowed in the case of the Baptists, the article on infant baptism. As far as I am aware, few, if any scrupled to do so. The articles have been recently described by an eminent Anglican theologian as moderate Calvinism. Roman Catholics and Unitarians were specifically excluded from the benefit of the Act. In the Trust Deed of Platt Chapel, built 1700, it is specifically stated that the minister was to be of Presbyterian judgement and practice, and 'orthodox and sound in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ' and he had to 'hold and profess the doctrinal articles of the Church of England.'<sup>10</sup> And yet by the end of the eighteenth century, a sizeable proportion of these Chapels, I have estimated them to number nearly 200, had become Unitarian in theology. Now why? What were the forces that effected that remarkable change?

It used to be said, and indeed, it may still be said, that it was due to their Open Trusts. It was held that the founders deliberately left their Trust Deeds open to allow for further doctrinal development in the future. This has been called the 'Open Trust Myth'—by Alexander Gordon and others, notably by William Whitaker, formerly minister of Platt Chapel.<sup>11</sup> It is a myth in the pejorative sense of that term, for more than one reason. In the first place, they were not always open. You could hardly call the Platt Chapel Trust, which I have just quoted, an open one. Nor a similar one at Walmsley, where I ministered for nearly 13 years.<sup>12</sup> And yet both Chapels had become Unitarian by the end of the eighteenth century. And in the second place, the reasons why the Trusts were left open were quite different from what was once supposed. These were mainly two—primarily, the doctrinal orthodoxy of the ministers and congregations was sufficiently safeguarded by the terms of the Toleration Act. Secondly, they allowed for the possibility that after all they might sometime be included in a general comprehension within the Church of England. A trust deed which assumed doctrinal orthodoxy would facilitate that comprehension. This is well illustrated by an extract from the Trust

<sup>10</sup> See T.U.H.S., Vol. I, No. 3, p. 308.

<sup>11</sup> See T.U.H.S., Vol. I, No. 3, p. 303ff.

<sup>12</sup> See T.U.H.S., Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 16f.

of what is now our Chapel in Hull: Park Street Church. 'If it shall please God so to order or permit that any Bill or Act of Comprehension shall be made whereby the said minister or congregation may freely join with the Church of England or others so that the Chapel be not necessary'—then the property could be sold for the benefit of the poor of the congregation.<sup>13</sup> It may be noted that when comprehension within the Church of England ceased to be a possibility, many of the founders of our churches and their families slipped back quietly into the establishment. We may, perhaps, pause for a moment and inquire how the myth arose. It may have had its origin in a letter written by James Martineau, on 6th August, 1859, to S. F. Macdonald, on the subject of a letter written by the latter on the Unitarian position.<sup>14</sup> "Our attitude," he said, "ought to be just what the attitude of our founders was; we ought to be free and open as our forefathers were." As we have just seen, our forefathers were far from free and open. The myth was taken up by James Drummond, in the first of the Provincial Assembly Lectures "Ecclesiastical Comprehension and Theological Freedom."<sup>15</sup> 'We may regard it as established that, prior to the formal constitution of the existing Provincial Assembly, the congregations composing it had accepted with clear and definite purpose the principle of non-subscription to articles of belief . . .' Again we find it in Brooke Herford's "Story of Religion in England." "The Presbyterians refused to have any creeds connected with their places of worship and instead of tying up their Chapel property to those who should continue to hold the same doctrines, usually settled trust deeds simply for the worship of Almighty God, leaving those who should come after them to form their own opinions and to worship in their own way."<sup>16</sup>

It seems to me that we may count the following among the forces that led to doctrinal change and broader sympathies among the Protestant Dissenters:—

First, the hard school of experience. The sufferings of the Non-conformists under the penal acts that followed the Act of

<sup>13</sup> See T.U.H.S., Vol. I, No. 3, p. 308f.

<sup>14</sup> *Essays, Reviews and Addresses*, Vol. II, p. 371f. London, 1891.

<sup>15</sup> Manchester, 1911.

<sup>16</sup> London, 1893.



Uniformity brought them to see the virtues of toleration; something they had been unwilling, hitherto, to recognise. They became less prepared to inflict on others what they themselves had experienced. When so-called Presbyterian Chapels were opened in the years following the Toleration Act no attempt was made to set up a Presbyterian system on the Scottish model, as had been done during the Commonwealth; they were Presbyterian largely in name only. When, following the Happy Union of 1691, such organisations as the Cheshire Classis and the Lancashire Provincial Meeting came into being, they were associations of ministers only, and lacked the lay element essential to Presbyterianism proper. Our Provincial Assembly cannot be regarded as a direct descendant of the Presbyterianism of the Commonwealth period, as was implied at a dinner recently held in the Reform Club.

Second, among the forces that led to change, the influence of the Unitarian Tracts. In the period immediately following the Toleration Act, doctrinal development ceased among the Nonconformists; they were too much occupied with the task of securing their own survival. But it went on in the Church of England. There was a Unitarian school of thought within the establishment at the end of the eighteenth century. It was led by such men as Thomas Firmin and Stephen Nye. But though discussion and controversy went on inside the church, the ultimate effects were felt outside the Church and in nonconformity.

Third, the Arian movement—again, inside the Church, but having its effect outside. Samuel Clarke, the Rector of St. James's Westminster, was one of many theologians influenced by the method and temper of John Locke. Locke's approach, a free and undogmatic rationalism, created a school of Christian Rationalism. In 1712, Clarke published his epoch-making book: 'The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity.' This book was read with great avidity in the nonconformist academies. It turned the attention of the teachers and students there away from the scholastic definitions of the Trinity to the biblical data on which the doctrine is based. It had profound influence among the Dissenters. This may be illustrated in a curious way: by comparing the first and second editions of a book well known in its day—James Peirce's 'Vindication of the Dissenters.' In the first, 1710 edition, it is said in the preface:

"Whereas in the established Church it was well known there were Socinians, in the Protestant Dissenting Churches, there were none." That is a broad generalisation, and one must always be aware of generalisations, but by and large it was true; the exceptions to the statement were some obscure Independents and some General Baptists. In the second edition of 1717, however, the statement is quietly dropped. The reason was that Clarke's book had helped to make many heterodox thinkers and preachers among the Dissenters.

Fourth, the Salters' Hall controversy of 1719. For reasons into which it is not intended to enter now a large body of Dissenting divines met at the Salters' Hall in 1719 and included in their number were some 80 Presbyterians, some 40 Independents, and some 30 Baptists. It is not easy to disentangle all the conflicting issues of the controversy, but the main result was that a credal basis was not fixed upon Dissent as a whole. The Synod refused, by a narrow majority, to make either the Westminster Confession, or the Longer or Shorter Catechisms, or some other symbol, the test of orthodoxy in Dissent. Alexander Gordon says it was a split between the spirit of uniformity and the spirit of liberty. The controversy resulted in a new flood of pamphlets and the consequent spread of Arianism among Dissenting Chapels which, mainly Presbyterian, but sometimes Independent, became the main stream of our movement.

Fifth, the influence of the Nonconformist Academies. The Academies were probably the finest reply by the Dissenters to the challenge of the Act of Uniformity. Excluded from the Universities, they set up their own seats of learning. Freed from the traditions of the ancient Universities, they departed in striking fashion from the traditional pattern of higher education. Their freedom led to a wider acceptance of liberal religious opinion. That did not happen, of course, in all. Some tried to maintain their orthodoxy by tests and subscription; others maintained the open door and admitted men of different religious opinions. Among such were the first and second Manchester Academies, the most famous of all—Warrington, Hackney, Exeter, Kendal and so on. Caleb Rotherham at Kendal produced many pupils who were set on the path towards Unitarianism—not because he himself was a Unitarian, but because of the spirit of free enquiry and independent judgment that he encouraged.



Sixth, and lastly, the English Bible. In the preface to Bonet-Maury's 'Early Sources of Unitarianism in England,' James Martineau wrote: 'There is one unorthodox influence so powerful and so extensively diffused as almost to supersede inquiry into the personal pedigree of English Unitarianism — I mean the English Bible.'<sup>17</sup>

Such are the forces that in the eighteenth century led to a sizeable proportion of the congregations that worshipped in the Dissenting chapels built after the Toleration Act becoming liberal in spirit and heretical in doctrine. They are indeed many and varied, and the interplay between them is not always easy to record. But behind it all, dare we go so far as to say that we can distinguish a true movement of the spirit? I think we can—and in those men and women of the eighteenth century we can see at work, under different circumstances, the same spirit that led the Apostle Paul to cry—"Brethren, you were called for freedom."

If, for a moment, we may give what I have been saying a local habitation and a name, we can perceive where the break-through came, so to speak, in the story of Cross Street Chapel. Two of the early ministers at Cross Street, John Chorlton, Henry Newcome's co-pastor and successor, and Eliezer Birch, were both educated at the Academy at Rathmell, where Richard Frankland gave his students a training of a 'high Presbyterian character.' Joseph Mottershead came from the Academy at Attercliffe, presided over by Timothy Jollie, an Independent and a Calvinist, under whom his pupils imbibed a strict theology. Mottershead's son-in-law and co-pastor, however, was John Seddon. He had been taught by Caleb Rotheram at the Kendal Academy. There, Rotheram, an Arian, encouraged 'the most free and unbounded inquiry' after truth. With Seddon, we have, at Cross Street, what must have been one of the most uncompromising statements of eighteenth century Unitarian theology ever to be penned. It may be read with interest in Sir Thomas Baker's 'Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel.'<sup>18</sup> One of the authors of a well known work, 'The Manchester Socinian Controversy' has this comment to make on the preaching of the

<sup>17</sup> London, 1884, p. xii.

<sup>18</sup> London & Manchester, 1884, p. 30ff.

ministers of Cross Street Chapel at this time. 'By the Arian preaching of Mr. Mottershead, and the Socinian declamations of Mr. Seddon, the friends of evangelical truth, to the amount of two hundred, were driven to other places.'<sup>19</sup> That is to say, there was a secession from the Chapel. This is denied by Sir Thomas Baker in the work I have just mentioned. He is rather ingenuous. It is true, as he says, that there were no other places for them to go to except the Parish Church, St. Ann's, and a Quaker Meeting House. But it is also true that in the year following an Independent Chapel was opened in Manchester, in Cannon Street. Undoubtedly the seceders from Cross Street formed part if not the whole of the congregation. It was the first Congregational Church in Manchester and is now Chorlton Road Congregational Church.

We may also point to the movement of thought at Hale Chapel. Round about the years 1767 to 1769 there was a vacancy in the pulpit there. The congregation, like many a congregation today, was looking round for someone to occupy it. However, the Revd. Timothy Priestley, brother of the more eminent Dr. Joseph Priestley, and then of Manchester, hearing of the vacancy, offered himself in a most delightful letter for the vacant post.<sup>20</sup> He did so from the highest motives—it was to put a stop to the sad decline of the congregation into Arian and Socinian views, thus departing, as Priestley said, 'from the old Principles of their forefathers.' It is clear that by the seventh decade of the eighteenth century, Hale Chapel had gone far along the road to a broader theology. It may be noted that the congregation did not act upon the gentle hint contained in the Revd. Timothy's letter, and the march to a freer faith continued.

The Unitarianism of which I am speaking and which was characteristic of the late eighteenth century was, of course, a biblical Unitarianism. It was a faith which accepted miracles and rejected creeds not because they were incredible, but because they were unscriptural and it was a faith which still rested its hopes on an external revelation. Unitarianism was equated with the doctrine of the New Testament. It was true because it *was* the doctrine of

<sup>19</sup> Manchester, 1825, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> For the letter, see T.U.H.S., Vol. XII, No. 3, p. 130.



the New Testament. The movement of thought which took Unitarianism away from its scriptural basis was the work of the nineteenth century. It came from the personality and teaching of such men as William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, John Hamilton Thom and above all James Martineau. And that is another story, not to be told to-night. But its result was to complete the development of our faith from the Presbyterianism of our ancestors of the seventeenth century to the religion of the free basis which we hold to-day. It meant that for Unitarians the seat of authority in religion is to be found no longer in creeds and confessions, valuable though they may have been in their time, nor within the covers of the best and broadest books, strong though the Bible's hold upon our affections may be, but in the reason and conscience of man—and not of any individual man, but of mankind. Our ancestors of the seventeenth century won for us freedom from the dominance of the state in matters of religious faith and practice; we are now in possession of a wider and deeper spiritual freedom than ever they dreamt of. It is for us to use that freedom wisely and well, that we may hand on our heritage of three hundred years to the generations yet to come.