

A SKETCH OF UNITARIAN HISTORY.*

A TRUSTWORTHY sketch of American Unitarianism, tracing its origin, methods, and results, and written from a Unitarian point of view, has long been a desideratum. More nearly than any book we have yet seen, this modest volume before us seems to meet the need. The author, Rev. Joseph Henry Allen, is a Unitarian by birth and training, and has known more or less intimately the successive leaders in this movement. To the opportunities thus afforded him he has brought an inquiring, earnest spirit, and a patient, plodding mind. Genius he has not in any sense of the word; but of genius Unitarianism feels no lack, and for the historian's task other and less shining qualities are needed. These lectures were given from the chair of Ecclesiastical History at Harvard University, and have, therefore, despite the author's disclaimer, a quasi-denominational authority behind them. The occasion, the subject, and the author, all enlist our interest in the work.

English Unitarianism, to which the origin of the American movement must be traced, counts among its earlier adherents three illustrious names — Milton, Newton, and Locke. These thinkers were all Arians, but their connection with modern liberalism lies in their appeal from dogmatic authority to reason. In the same spirit, the English Unitarians of a later day, like Lardner, met the attack of deism by resting their faith on a rational basis. Their acceptance of the Scriptures as inspired was unquestioning, but we can hardly believe with Mr. Allen that the Bible was the *only* ground on which they anticipated a divine judgment upon evil.

American Unitarianism belongs to the present century. Its history may be divided into three periods, the beginnings of which may be marked by the years 1815, 1836, and 1860. The first period, that of Growth, covers the controversies with other denominations, and is associated with the name of Channing; the second era, that of Criticism, was one of internal struggle, and is represented by Theodore Parker; the third age, the time of Construction, marks the development of the denomination as an organized power, and owes most perhaps to Dr. Bellows and Dr. Hedge, its leaders, one on the practical, the other on the speculative side. Through these three stages the course of the liberal movement is traced, and the relations of each phase to earlier beliefs and to contemporary changes in state and society are indicated. Of the note-

worthy names in the annals of Unitarianism, each is singled out by some descriptive phrase, while personal reminiscences of its successive leaders give warmth and color to the narrative.

The two closing chapters discuss the relation of Unitarianism to modern thought and life. The old "enthusiasm of humanity" is degenerating into a weak humanitarianism on the one hand and a cheerless pessimism on the other. A deep conviction must be stirred, instead of shallow sentiment. To this work the Gospel of Liberalism must address itself, and that gospel is summed up in one word, not *Culture*, the motto of half a century ago, nor *Salvation*, deeper, profounder, but still too personal, but a watchword "at once lowlier and nobler" — *Service*.

Of the general tone of the book we can speak with praise. Aside from a natural tendency to hero-worship and a proneness to superlatives in speaking of the lights of liberal scholarship and eloquence, Mr. Allen's judgments are candid and sober. Alike to his own circle of religionists and to the larger number of thoughtful men beyond these lines, the book will be welcome and instructive.

* Our Liberal Movement in Theology. By Joseph Henry Allen. Roberts Brothers. \$1.25.