

A Letter to Rev. Wm. E. Channing, D. D. By O. A. BROWN-  
SON. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown. 1842.

THAT there is no knowledge of God possible to man but a subjective knowledge,—no revelation but the development of the individual within himself, and to himself,—are prevalent statements, which Mr. Brownson opposes by a single formula, that *life is relative in its very nature*. God alone is; all creatures live by virtue of what is not themselves, no less than by virtue of what is themselves, the prerogative of man being to do consciously, that is, more or less intelligently. Mr. Brownson carefully discriminates between Essence and Life. Essence, being object to itself, alone has freedom, which is what the old theologians named sovereignty;—a noble word for the thing intended, were it not desecrated in our associations, in being usurped by creatures that are slaves to time and circumstance. But life implies a causative object, as well as causative subject; wherefore *creatures* are only free by Grace of God.

That men should live, with God for predominating object, is the Ideal of Humanity, or the Law of Holiness, in the highest sense; for this object alone can emancipate them from what is below themselves. But a nice discrimination must be made here. The Ideal of Humanity, as used by Mr. Brownson, does not mean the highest idea of himself, which a man can form by induction on himself as an individual; it means God's idea of man, which shines into every man from the beginning; "Enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world," though his darkness comprehendeth it not, until it is "made flesh." It is by virtue of that freedom which is God's alone, and which is the issue of absolute love, that is, "because God so loved the world," he takes up the subject, Jesus, and makes himself ob-jective to him without measure, thereby rendering his life as di-vine as it is human, though it remains also as human, — strictly speaking, — as it is divine.

To all men's consciousness it is true that God is objective in a degree, or they were not distinctively human. His glory is refracted, as it were, to their eyes, through the universe. But

only in a man, to whom he has made himself the imperative object, does he approach men, in all points, in such degree as to make them divine. He is no less free (sovereign) in coming to each man in Christ, than, in the first instance, in making Jesus of Nazareth the Christ. Men are only free inasmuch as they are open to this majestic access, and are able to pray with St. Augustine, "What art thou to me, oh Lord? *Have mercy on me that I may ask*. The house of my soul is too strait for thee to come into; but let it, oh Lord, be enlarged by thee. It is ruinous, but let it be repaired by thee." &c.

The Unitarian Church, as Mr. Brownson thinks, indicates truth, in so far as it insists on the life of Jesus as being that wherein we find grace; but in so far as it does not perceive that this life is something more than a series of good actions, which others may reproduce, it leans on an arm of flesh, and puts an idol in the place of Christ. The Trinitarian Church, he thinks, therefore, has come nearer the truth, by its formulas of doctrine; and especially the Roman Catholic Church, by the Eucharist. The error of both Churches has been to predicate of the being, Jesus, what is only true of his life. The being, Jesus, was a man; his life is God. It is the doctrine of John the Evangelist throughout, that the soul lives by the real presence of Jesus Christ, as literally as the body lives by bread. The unchristianized live only partially, by so much of the word as shines in the darkness which may not hinder it quite. This partial life repeats in all time the prophecies of antiquity, and is another witness to Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

Mr. Brownson thinks that he has thus discovered a formula of "the faith once delivered to the saints," which goes behind and annihilates the controversy between Unitarians and Trinitarians, and may lead them both to a deeper comprehension and clearer expression of the secret of life.