IV.2.c
   Unitarianism   Classical Unitarianism

In addition to the notes given with the
previous mention of Socinianism, the following items
help us get a fuller grasp of the Unitarianism that
swelled the ranks of theological defection. In the
classical sense it is best defined by Channing in his
work UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY (1819). It is set in
particular against a limited atonement...not as
defined by Dordt but in the idea that there are some
who are lost and given to eternal punishment. The
atonement, in classical universalism, covers all. It
also opposes the "divine sonship" and the separate
person of the Holy Spirit. It became increasingly
prominent in New England after 1770 and 1785 saw the
curious group develop known as the Society of
Universal Baptists...just a unitarian group in an
unusual disguise. The Unitarian association was
formed in 1825 with about 125 churches and soon found
lodging in Andover Seminary (founded 1895) and
Hartford Seminary (founded 1833). Among its better
known theologians and preachers was Theo. Parker.

An important decision in 18209 aided the Unitarian
cause substantially. The Dedham Case found a
decision in which it was determined that the church
property was vested in the parish, not the communi-
cants of the church. This was the probable result of
the town-church governmental system but it proved to
be the means whereby the town controlled the church
property even though a minority of townspersons might
be Christians or even church attenders. The ministry
would be simply a popularity affair and in a society
where true believers quickly become a minority, it
dictated the situation where the church properties
were held or controlled by hostile elements. Very
often ministers of theological incompetence were
called by the town who never listened to them anyway.
A great increase of Unitarian pulpit occupancy soon
occurred.

Classical unitarianism was something of a moral
force, however, although in the modern age it has
left most of that (my opinion) since it has no Scrip-
ture for founding its ideas or pinioning its
concepts. Without the legal findings in the Dedham
case it would have remained an almost insignificant
body in the New England community. But with such
findings it came into possession of much of the in-
tellectual climate of New England and from that peak
infiltrated much of the New England church.