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THE CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

*CONDUCTED BY CLERGYMEN AND LAYMEN
OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

VOL. XI.

LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW
1885

these waifs and strays is apparently superior to any system of reformatory routine, however excellent, and even necessary under existing circumstances. All I contend for is simply this—the boy or girl who may become an outcast from home, from whatever cause, is more likely to be softened into gentleness and gratitude and love by being adopted into some family, and cared for as if he or she were part of the household, than if they were provided for under the strict discipline and barrack regulation of any public institution, however good. It is not that I like these refuges less, but that I like the former plan more.

G. W. WELDON.



ART. VI. — PRIVATE JUDGMENT: ITS SCOPE AND LIMITS.

THE right of Private Judgment in matters of belief is, to some extent, pretty generally admitted. It inheres in our moral constitution; it follows from that liberty of choice or free-will which distinguishes mankind from the lower orders of created life. Why should we be denied the exercise of our reason upon the worthiest and noblest of all subjects, religious truth? In the world of nature there is a perfect correspondence between our organs of vision and the light of the sun. Is there not as undoubted a correlation between reason, the eye of the soul, and the light of Divine truth?

The very existence of faculties whereby men reason upon that truth, proves the indefeasible right of exerting them, just as truly as to have been born with eyes, confers upon the individual the right to see. The eye has to be trained, and so become adjusted to objects about it. In many cases it is defective. We do not, therefore, bandage every man's eyes or put spectacles upon him because these are required by certain persons. The maxim *Abusus non tollit usum* obtains here. Persons have grievously abused their right of private judgment; it does not follow that they should be deprived of it. It would be safer to infer, that the faculty for forming such judgments imposes upon them the duty of using it. In the great day of account, the servant who wraps his talent in a napkin and buries it in the earth, will be found to fare no better than he who shall have appropriated or misused his Lord's goods.

The Church of Rome denies to her children the use of their private judgment; she cannot, therefore, be expected to urge upon them the duty of it. Hence the revolt of the Teutonic races at the Reformation; hence, too, the wide-spread alienation from her fold of the educated laity in countries like Italy, France, and Spain. We shall see presently, how she is compelled to grant the right of private judgment in a way fatal to her own consistency.

The late Bishop Thirlwall, in one of his Charges, wrote thus: "The strength of the Papal Church lies in the weakness of human nature, such as: (1) its slavish readiness to accept without inquiry any pretensions, however unfounded, if they are only put forward with a sufficient degree of confident assurance; (2) the cowardice with which it shrinks from the burden of personal responsibility, and is anxious to shift it upon another; and, (3) the intellectual sluggishness which makes it impatient, as Thucydides observed, of the labour required for the investigation of truth." These are undoubted hindrances to the right discharge of private judgment, whether we agree with the Bishop or not in accounting them the secret of the success of the Roman system.

Again; a large mass of language in Holy Scripture is beside the mark, if the right of private judgment be denied, and if it be not upon the contrary a positive duty to exercise it. "If I speak truth, why do ye not believe My words?" To *what*, if not to private judgment, does our Lord appeal here, and throughout the whole of His controversy with the hostile Jews, in the Gospel of St. John? "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God," and the exhortation, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"—what meaning can such words have, if they do not set us about the investigation of religious truth, and hence in some shape the use of our private judgment?

It has been alleged that the Church of Rome substantially admits the right which she formally denies to her children. The late Canon Mozley has very acutely demonstrated the truth of this allegation. He does it in this way. When a Roman controversialist tries to bring us over to his way of thinking, he plies us with certain well-known texts of Holy Scripture, such as, "Thou art Peter," etc. He seeks to convince us by means of these that the Pope is infallible. He thus appeals to our private judgment: if we give it in his favour, we must swallow whole the entire Roman scheme, and as we do so, we are bidden to surrender for ever our private judgment. It is enough for us henceforth to believe what the Church tells us, and to believe it, too, solely because she does tell it us. The flaw, however, lies just here: if my private judgment be

untrustworthy, can I be sure that it did not mislead me when I took the Roman view of certain texts? Is it not a sandy foundation for so imposing a structure? On the other hand, if my private judgment be thus far valid, why must I give it up henceforth and make no more use of it?

The right, then, being conceded, the question arises, What is its scope, and what are the conditions under which it may be used with safety? If it be not kept within bounds, the danger both to the Church and to the individual will be very great. We must arrive at a satisfactory, a workable adjustment between it and the counterbalancing principle of authority in matters of belief. The mind must keep in its normal position by a harmonious balance between these forces, which singly would carry it violently into one or other of two extremes, viz., of superstition or of scepticism; just as the earth revolves in its orbit by means of a similar adjustment between opposing forces.

Very much may be said, it must be admitted, in favour of the principle of Authority. We have to do with fallen humanity. The Fall has affected every department of man's being; it has unfitted him for arriving at religious truth, if left to himself. The eye of the soul must be purged by faith and love before it can see aright. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." Men of the world ignore altogether this cardinal truth: they presume to form judgments about religious truths in utter unconsciousness that they need illumination from above. Hence the devastation wrought by such persons in their incursions upon the sacred domain of theology. From the Christian point of view, those who deny certain fundamental truths—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection of our Lord, Original Sin, and the rest—are hopelessly in the dark in their speculations about the teachings of Holy Scripture. However much the light of natural science, of Greek culture, of critical and grammatical learning, such as modern writers bring to bear upon the Scriptures, may aid the devout student, it should be remembered that the natural man possessed these qualities in large measure when St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, and that he can no more now, than he did then, "know the things of the Spirit of God."

Our Lord sent forth His Apostles to teach all nations, and thus to remedy those defects inherent in fallen humanity whereby, despite its wisdom, "it knew not God." The light was revealed from heaven, but it was through the Church: it shone *through men to men*. The Holy Ghost was given that men might have "a right judgment," that they might be re-

newed in knowledge, "that they might attain unto the full assurance of understanding."

At first there was no variance between the two principles of Authority and Private Judgment. The selfsame Spirit Who spake by the Apostles and prophets, wrought secretly in men's hearts, illumining their understandings and inclining their wills to embrace the truth. Should not this be the case now? Whilst we apply ourselves to search with all diligence after the truth, may we not reverently and thankfully recognise the Church as the means whereby, under God, the truth has been made known to us? As "a Witness and a Keeper of Holy Writ," she gives it into our hands, and bids us to study it for ourselves, with her Creeds and Articles as guides and landmarks. The Church has trained many generations for heaven. The questionings and doubts and difficulties which have perplexed the minds of her children now, were known and experienced long ago; and such difficulties must ever and anon arise, even to the end. The Church has laid down doctrines to be received, and counsels us to submit our judgments to what is prescribed, upon the warrant of Holy Scripture. If men will but wait patiently, the light will shine upon their obscurity. The Church would have us grow up into the truth, and to hold it with the full and loyal assent of our judgment, for thus only shall we be equipped to fight her battles and our own. She rejoices when her children can say, with the Samaritans of old, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

The English Church was clearly guided by the Spirit of Truth in the course she took at the Reformation. As against Rome, on the one hand, she declares that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith or be thought requisite to salvation." As against the ultra-Reformers, on the other hand, she lays down, *credenda*, things necessary to be believed. In this way she upholds the principle of authority in controversies of faith. She leaves such as wilfully cling to their own opinions to find out their errors, "in meekness instructing them, if peradventure God may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of His truth." He who holds to his own conclusions in the face of the "*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*" is very bold; he must go his way whilst we go ours. Only, we must remember that he uses his own prerogative as against us, even though he may be misusing it. We should regard misbelievers with sorrow and anxiety, not with bitterness or

any desire of coercing or browbeating them into our way of thinking. Failure here, lies at the root of much party rancour and strife; we take it ill that anyone should differ from our own, or what we conceive to be the Church's, beliefs.

We may not now pursue a very interesting branch of our subject, viz., that which deals with the relations between the Church and Holy Scripture as guides to religious truth. Canon Westcott somewhere co-ordinates the two as authorities by a very beautiful adaptation of Isaiah's words about the voice which the child of God may expect to hear: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way: walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand or to the left." He supposes a two-fold voice: one the Church, the other the Bible. At the Reformation, as the present Dean of St. Paul's has pointed out, the Reformers appealed from the authority of the Church, as it then existed, to Holy Scripture and the Primitive Church, not from authority to private judgment. As sons of the English Church we cannot but admire the wisdom wherewith she gave its proper scope to private judgment, whilst strenuously asserting the principle of authority. Other Christian bodies dealt with the difficulty in various ways, though none, we venture to think, so successfully as the Church of England.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that some principles have been laid down which may help us, whilst we acknowledge the right of private judgment, and even the duty of exercising it, to confine it within due limits. Church history has its solemn warnings for us: we must beware lest we suppress the healthful working of those faculties whereby men grow up into the full knowledge of the truth. The Nemesis of schisms and strifes has dogged the steps of that Church which has striven to keep back men from error by violent means. Those will be safe who remember their shortsightedness and infirmity, and are ready to hail the light from whatever quarter of the heavens it may come. Their path will be that of the just, "which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

May God grant to all who teach in His Church that they may help His people to see the reasonableness of the truths taught them! Inquirers should be led to the door of the Temple of Truth, and be bidden to kneel reverently and knock for admission. And let us all remember the exhortation, "to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, so that we may be ready to give to every man that asketh, a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear."

F. K. AGLIONBY.