

This point will not admit of controversy. Scripture makes this as plain as any matter can possibly be made. It is not a thing of inference, but of express, explicit precept, which no honest mind can misunderstand, or will attempt to explain away. And it is mean and wicked in any man who knows and is persuaded that he has done wrong, or given just offence to a brother, not to hasten at once and make all possible amends. The person who, being convinced that he has done injustice, neglects or even openly refuses to make reparation or give explanation, is put on a level with him who, though asked to do so, will not remit the offence. The conduct of the one is as reprehensible as that of the other. The offender and the offended are twin brothers. And the conduct of the one in refusing to ask forgiveness when convicted of an offence, and that of the other in refusing to extend it when asked, being alike deserving of the highest censure.

In addition to the foregoing, this also must be held as a settled point, to wit, that no doubt or difference exists as to the reality or gravity of the offence or injury complained of. Except and until this point be settled, we are not prepared to advance a single step towards the adjustment of any difficulty or dispute. In truth, unless this be first of all determined, there is actually nothing to be adjusted. For nothing can be plainer, and indeed nothing is more common than for persons to differ as to what constitutes an offence or injury. One man may take umbrage at what another will thank you for; and instead of laying it to the accounts of enmity, will regard it as a mark of friendship. Thus if you rebuke a scorner he will hate you, but if "a wise man he will love you." The difference resides not in the thing done, but in the parties whom respectively the thing done affects. The reproof is the same in

either case, but in the bosom of the one it excites hatred, in that of the other love; to the one it is a benefit, to the other an evil.

How, then, is this point to be decided, supposing the parties themselves differ about it? Upon whom, in this case, will the task devolve, of saying whether it is or is not an offence or injury?

Not upon the alleged offender, for he would, of course, exculpate himself; not upon the offended, for he, as might be expected, would criminate the other. To hold that either the assumed offender or the offended is entitled to settle this, is virtually to constitute the one or other of them both judge and jury; that is, lay at his disposal the privilege of both sifting the evidence and pronouncing the decision—a thing repugnant to reason, to justice, and to common-sense. The assumed offender has no right to ask the offended to suppress his convictions, or suspend the exercise of his reason in the matter: nor, on the other hand, has the offended any more right to prefer that request to the offender. When the alleged offender stoutly affirms that he has given no offence, that does not prove that he has given none: on the other hand, when the offended as strenuously declares that he has given offence, that is no evidence that he actually has given it. The affirmative on either side is nothing to the purpose—settles absolutely nothing—does not even approximate to the settlement of the matter in dispute.

There must, then, be some other way in which this dubious or controverted subject can be fairly and finally settled. The religion of Jesus Christ would be essentially defective if there were not. I know of only two ways in which this can be attained.

The first, which is the quietest, least offensive, and, on that account most likely to prove effective, is to commit the case to some neutral parties, and abide by their