

## LIBERTY OF THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION.

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IT must have been a matter of regret to many that Mr. Mill did not live to notice and reply to the elaborate criticism of some of his leading opinions contained in Mr. Fitzjames Stephen's work entitled "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity." Not that his opinions have lacked defenders, or that Mr. Stephen's arguments have passed unchallenged; but because it would have been specially interesting to note how Mr. Mill himself would have dealt with the objections urged, and what modifications, if any, he would have found it necessary to make in the statement of his views. Of one thing we can be certain, and that is, that no one would have been readier than Mr. Mill himself to acknowledge the force of any valid criticism directed against his writings. In this respect he offered an example which many who are scandalized at parts of his teaching might imitate with much advantage. If all writers and thinkers strove as hard as he to see the truth, and carried the same candour into all their discussions, a great deal of useless and hopeless conflict would quickly disappear, and the progress of a true philosophy be greatly accelerated.

That the views so vigorously expressed by Mr. Stephen have had a considerable effect in certain quarters, no careful observer can have failed to note. The tolerance towards all shades of opinion, taught by Mr. Mill, may be in accord with the best and, upon the whole, the dominant tendency of the age; but it is far from being in accord with the instincts of all individuals, and so long as it was not seriously challenged it must have weighed upon many minds as a most inconvenient and unwelcome "counsel of perfection." Such, we may well believe, were groaning inwardly for redemption from the yoke; and how gladly they listened to Mr. Stephen when he came forward with an imposing apparatus of logic and rhetoric to tell them that there was no particular need

for tolerance—that, in fact, intolerance served a most useful purpose in society—can easily be imagined. Here was a gospel indeed for saturnine souls—to be able to abuse to the top of their bent those from whom they differed, to give way to every suggestion of personal animosity, to inflame popular passions, and add strength and bitterness to popular prejudices, and to do all this with a comforting sense of performing a public duty! As regards Mr. Stephen himself, we can only look upon him as one of that class whose bark is said to be worse than their bite. His bark is very bad, very savage; but when it comes to biting he holds back. Much as he differs, or fancies he differs, in theory from Mr. Mill, it would be hard to discover in his book one single practical recommendation which is pointedly opposed to Mr. Mill's teachings. Indeed he reminds us in more than one place of the prophet who, trying hard to curse, only succeeded in uttering blessings. Not so, however, with some of Mr. Stephen's disciples. Here we see every disposition to snap right and left—to treat opponents without a shadow of fairness, and to employ against them weapons that have no legitimate place in the field of controversy; and this on the cynical ground suggested by Mr. Stephen, that nobody should broach unpopular opinions who is not prepared for all kinds of opposition, foul as well as fair. Mr. Stephen, as we have already hinted, is not the man to put his own theories into practice; but we are strongly of opinion that he has done serious harm by suggesting to men far less high-minded than himself a justification (though of course a very hollow one) for conduct to which their own instincts make them prone without any external encouragement. We hardly think we are mistaken in attributing to the influence of Mr. Stephen's book the suggestion made in one of our most influential journals, that a suit-