

TOLERATION—IN THEORY AND PRACTICE.

Everybody has heard of Locke's letters on toleration. Most people know that they are the most logical and satisfactory defence of religious equality in the English language, or, for the matter of that, in any language at all. It strikes a reader, however, as a little strange that Locke, the advocate, otherwise of impartial freedom, should make one grand exception in his advocacy of toleration, and declares that under no circumstances can the Roman Church lay claim to the rights which ought to belong to every other communion. Was Locke, so liberal in other respects, a bigot in this? Had he some hidden hatred to this communion which played tricks with his logic and confused the "dry light" of his lucid intellect? Most readers have read what he has written about the Church of Rome with a sense of its inconsistency with his general argument, and, reflecting perhaps that even Homer sometimes nods, have passed it by without thinking it worthy of any special attention. We own that we have ourselves formerly done so.

But we have lost by our want of docility. We ought to have reflected that when a great philosopher writes on a great theme he is likely to make it the subject of careful meditation until he sees the meaning and relations of the moral principles to which he has reduced the particular facts with which he has to deal in a flood of light. Is it so very certain that we understand the root principles of religious liberty better than Locke? He had a calm wise head of his own, and a love for liberty of all sorts which glowed with a real, if a subdued fervour. He had suffered for his principles, and thought of them, it is likely, pretty intensely while he was exiled for their sake. Think again, Locke may be right after all. Religious liberty ought to be absolute, no doubt, but there are many rights which can only be made absolute on conditions assumed and understood.

Men have a right to life. If any right can be called absolute, assuredly that may be. Kill a man and you have nothing more you can do in violation of his right, you have invaded them all in one act. And yet even life is guaranteed to men in society only on certain conditions. If I want to live, I must let others live. As soon as I take the life of another man my own is forfeit—my right to life ceases. I hold my life on the condition that I undertake not to interfere with the lives of other men. Do I object to that? Do I desire to do a little shooting when I walk the streets? Society does not see that I have a right to live any longer. It teaches me, and others too, by the effective lesson of the gallows, that the right to life is conditional.

Suppose, now, that a man on trial for a little fancy shooting of this kind defends himself by saying, "I am quite consistent with my principles, for I acknowledge nobody's right to live but my own. But you, on your principles, cannot hang me, for you declare that everybody has an equal right, and if everybody, then I must have it also. It can make no difference that I deny the rights of other men, and act on my denial. If the right is universal, I, who believe at least in my own right, can be no exception." We might think the defence ingenious, but it would avail the prisoner nothing. We should tell him pretty swiftly that he held his rights on the condition of respecting the equal status of other people. Violate that, and you destroy your own claim.

Exactly the same principle applies to property. We acknowledge a right to the possession of a man's own. But if he does not leave other men in the quiet enjoyment of their goods, we make no scruple if it seems expedient of fining him, that is, of taking property from him. So, too, of personal liberty. If I fetter another man's limbs and thrust him into a dungeon, the law, with the unanimous approval of the community, will clap me into jail. The truth obviously is that in civilized society the principle of equality means that every right is held on the condition, implied when not expressed, that he who holds it bears the corresponding right in others unviolated. In no other way can society stand for an hour. Rights the most absolute are held on that condition.

How stands the case then as to the Church of Rome? It is not necessary to prove that that Church denies the right of other communions to religious liberty. Any one of her authorised formularies, in which the relation of the Church to the civil power is treated, will be found charged to the brim with this denial. The Syllabus reiterated it with manifold variations, and the Vatican Council was in part occupied in making it emphatic. Even apart from these renewed utterances of authority, it has been generally conceded that the toleration of other communions, when it exists, is matter of necessity, or at best of expediency, and in no case of fundamental law or principle. Rome therefore is in this position. She claims perfect liberty for herself, but denies it to every one else. She takes the advantages of toleration, while she conspires against the principles on which they are given. Nobody blames her for accepting toleration when she can get it, of course; that is the natural dictate of the law of self-preservation. But the question is as to the logical validity of her claim. She says, Tolerate me. On your principles you are bound to do so, for you believe in religious liberty for all. It is true I would not tolerate you, if I could help it, but that is of no consequence.

Stop a moment, we reply. It is of the very greatest consequence, so much so that it completely invalidates your claim. The principle of toleration—or rather, of religious equality, which is the preferable formula—is, the right of each, so long as each respects the equal right of all. But that condition is essential. It cannot be part of a principle to nourish the seeds of its own destruction. It can be no duty of religious freedom to protect an organized conspiracy against its own existence. The right to life is—Live and let live; and the right to liberty is, in like manner—Be free and leave others free.

The conclusion therefore is, that it is no duty under the principle of religious liberty to tolerate any ecclesiastical community which itself refuses to admit the principle of toleration. It may even be a duty, under some circumstances, to suppress such a Society without reserve in vindication of that principle. It may seem a paradox, but it is true that we may refuse to tolerate in such exceptional circumstances, just because we believe in the principle of universal toleration.

Let us not be misunderstood. We are not for a war against the Church of Rome. Let her live and flourish if she can. But let squeamish consciences understand that they owe her no duty in this matter; it is a question of generosity and good feeling simply. And the moment Rome lifts her hand against

the liberty of other churches, she may, and ought to be, dealt with on exactly the same principle as a man or a society who should use the generous forbearance of the community to attack its property or to plot against its life. So that Locke seems to be right after all. Rome can claim no advantage from the principles of religious liberty; she must be content in a free State to throw herself on the public forbearance.

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DOCTRINAL BELIEF AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

A journal which is first Christian, then free and liberal in tone, belonging to no party, seems the appropriate channel through which to explain some recent action on the part of Congregationalists in England and Canada. Any reader of the CANADIAN SPECTATOR who has no sympathy with such questions can pass by this article; such as have may be glad to understand what has been done by this body of Christians in the matter of the *doctrinal basis of communion*. The subject may be the more interesting because of the time-honoured breadth of view and liberality of practice on the part of the Congregational Churches. They have always held, both in theory and practice, that doctrinal harmony in belief is wholly subordinate to a true Christian life. They ever maintain that there cannot be the latter without the former—that there must be faith in order to good works—and that spiritual life must have its root in the hearty reception of Christian fact and truth, but that is one thing and the recognition of a formulated creed is another and very different thing, and this last they have not required. Their question has been to all applicants for membership: "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity?" and the inquiry concerning them has ever related to a life of godliness and obedience springing out of that professed love. Accordingly, the freest thought on points debated amongst Christians has not only been tolerated, but regarded as the inalienable right of every man and woman in the fellowship of the Church. They might be evangelical Arminians or decided Calvinists without being disturbed, so long as they practically exhibited spiritual life. Now it was an attempted abuse of this breadth of view and liberality of practice which has called forth the action which has to be explained.

Before doing so, however, let it be noted that there has arisen spontaneously among these churches a remarkable harmony of doctrinal belief, greater than is usual amongst those that are creed-bound, a harmony which has been maintained by the simple force of God's revealed truth. The unwritten beliefs of the Congregational Churches have been singularly alike for two-and-a-half centuries. But that harmonious belief has ever been of a progressive character, for the churches have not forgotten the memorable words of Robinson as he parted with the pilgrims on board the "Mayflower," at Leyden: "He was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His Holy Word. He miserably bewailed the state and condition of the reformed churches who were come to a period in religion, and would go no further than the instruments of their reformation. As *e. g.*, the Lutherans, they could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; for whatever part of God's will he had further imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And so also, said he, you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them; a misery much to be lamented; for though they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God had not revealed His whole will to them; and were they now living they would be as ready and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received."

It has naturally followed that leaders of thought have risen up from time to time of advanced opinions. That is, they have read the Scriptures with a clearer vision and a more accurately balanced mind than were common among their immediate contemporaries. The exaggeration of the latter in regard to the condition of human nature ruined by sin, has been corrected by a truer interpretation of Scripture which, while recognizing its desperate wickedness in relation to God, does not lose sight of those elements of another character which make it susceptible of redemption and salvation. So also the one-sided and therefore erroneous estimate of our Lord's atonement, which regarded it simply as the payment of a debt which the sins of the elect had contracted, has been superseded for three-quarters of a century on the part of our theologians, by an estimate of Scripture teaching which presents that greatest of all transactions as an expression of God's love to mankind,—as an exhibition of righteousness, and as bringing ineffable glory to the Godhead in the salvation of everyone who believeth and obeyeth the Gospel—a Gospel which freely offers salvation to all men. There has been advance also in a true estimate of the Bible. Theories of its inspiration and modes of interpretation have been amended as the side-lights of criticism and science have been thrown upon the venerable volume. But the one point to be stated, with emphasis, is that there has not been, and there is not now aught of divergence from the great fundamental facts and truths forming the basis of the evangelical faith. That man is sinful and depraved, renewable only by the grace of God, that the atonement made by the God Man, the gift and expression of the Father's love, is the sole ground of salvation, and that the Holy Scriptures are of supernatural origin, one part of God's revelation to man, and its most important part are truths, or rather facts, most surely believed, and held with a tenacity which springs from a consciousness that eternal life is involved in them.

The inquiry now arises, "Why take any further action?" "Why assume that any dispute can arise?" The reply is that philosophical and scientific speculations have been for some time invading the domain of theology. Criticism of German origin, Positivism of French origin, guesses flowing out of discoveries in physiology, and suggested by half discoveries in other of the material sciences, largely of British origin, have been employed with no little skill, and no little pretentiousness to unsettle the beliefs of the ages in regard to the miraculous; thus denying the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God, and consequently the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also the reality of His resurrection from the dead. The supernatural being denied the authority of the sacred writings is ignored and their teachings regarded as the utterances of a superstitious age. Speculation in regard to the origin of things has led many to doubt the existence of a personal God, and others to deny that there is anything ruling but law. Now some very unwise, though we may hope