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THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RULE OF FAITH.

(From the Dublin Review.)

If people really believe that the Church is a mysterious union of contradictory enormities, the marvel is not that they should dislike her as much as they do, but that they should not abhor her yet more.—Yet, as the salvation of souls innumerable must depend on the truth or falsehood of such views—views often very hastily adopted—it may be well to point out the one fundamental error upon which they are all based, and the criterion by which they may all alike be refuted. Our object is to point out to such of our Protestant friends as have a real reverence for Truth, and a becoming sense of the gravity of the matters at issue between the Church and the Sects, that no conceivable multiplication of books, such as constitute the popular literature of Protestantism,—no accumulation of learning, such as that which Mr. Goode, by far the ablest and most erudite, as well as most recent, defenders of its fundamental dogma has brought together—can assist us in discriminating between Truth and Falsehood. It is in vain to go on perpetually deducing the same conclusions from the same premises, if the real question is, whether the premises themselves be sound. It is in vain to go on perpetually weighing and measuring the same objects, unless we have previously ascertained that the weights and measures are themselves correct. If the very watchword of Protestantism be a falsehood, no multiplication of echoes, no gifts of ventriloquism, can convert it into a truth.—The furious denunciation must take its leap in the dark, and perish like other blind and violent things. The ingenious theory must share the fate of theories, and melt into thin air. Even the deprecatory insinuation must die with the compliment in its mouth.—The most magniloquent protest of nations, as of individuals, is worth just so much, and no more, as the fundamental principle on which it is founded; and if the rule of Private Judgment be not the right method for arriving at religious truth, Protestantism, however long it may last, must end at last like a school-boy's "barring out." In the following pages we shall make some remarks, not of a learned, but of a popular character, on the Rule of Faith, with a view of proving that Private Judgment, in theological research, can derive no sanction whatever from common sense, practical judgment, or fact; and secondly, that through the Catholic rule alone is it possible to attain Christian truth in connection with those spiritual and vital effects of truth so ardently, and often so sincerely, sought by Protestants; but in the attainment of which, under purely Protestant circumstances, the enthusiast alone flatters himself that he is successful.

With some not very important differences of detail, the method originally adopted by Protestantism was that attributed to it as a great discovery, and known by the name of "private judgment." That was its Rule of Faith, put forward in opposition to the Rule of church authority. As the rule of faith is, so must the faith formed by that rule be. If the former be sound, it will lead us into truth just in proportion as we observe it; if it be unsound, it will lead us into error, and eventually so imprison us in a world of false associations, that truth itself, seen in a false perspective, must appear to us strange and uncomely. Accordingly, theologians, at both sides, affirm that the rule of faith is the true point at issue between Roman Catholics and Protestants. If this one point really determine all others, we can see at once how it is possible even for the simple to find a way amid the labyrinth of controversy. How comes it, then, that in place of keeping to a question confessedly conclusive, Protestants so commonly throw aside the consideration of it, on the avowed ground that this or that doctrine in detail is repugnant to them?

No candid man will deny that there are circumstances which at least throw suspicion on the method of private judgment. First—It was obviously the only method which could have been adopted by men who had set themselves the task on which the Reformers had embarked. In early times not only the Church, but the vast heretical bodies that contended with, or encamped outside it, commonly claimed to preserve from adulteration the faith they had received by inheritance. The point at issue was the authentic form of the tradition, as well as the authentic reading of Holy Scripture, and the decrees of councils. The Reformers, on the other hand, professed to rediscover a pure faith, which had been buried beneath the superstitions of a thousand years.—No existing tradition testified for them. They were thus compelled to adopt their rule of faith, even though it involved the notion that Christ's promise to His Church had failed in whole or in part. Necessity knows no law. Secondly. An opposite rule, that of authority and tradition, had always acknow-

ledged not only by the Roman Catholic Church, but by the eastern churches in separation. Thirdly—An opposite rule had been acknowledged in England and Germany ever since those countries had been Christian. Fourthly—So fundamental and radical a change ought, at least, not to have taken place, except after long deliberation; whereas the principle of private judgment, (on which all depended) was practically taken for granted, not adopted after investigation; and inquiries upon other points of theology were consequently based on a giant assumption. In principle, nothing short of a general council could have sanctioned a change in a matter so all-important as the rule of faith; in practice the action preceded the deliberation; nations and individuals isolated themselves first, and then found out texts to justify isolation. Possibly a spiritual revolution could not have been otherwise effected; but that a spiritual revolution was either necessary or lawful, rested itself on nothing but assumption. Fifthly—Private judgment, as any one living at the time of the Reformation must have perceived, might, at least, be no theological principle at all, and no real rule of faith, whether sound or unsound, but simply a technical term for a natural instinct, that of "doing every man what was right in his own eyes," and thus resolving religious society into anarchy.—Sixthly, That it actually amounted to no more than this was at least suggested by the fact that the work of destruction, spoliation, and sacrilege, was vehemently advancing at the same moment as the new opinions, the cry of "private judgment" finding its echoes in the falling roofs of monasteries, hospitals, and churches. Seventhly, And also by the circumstance that, while the new principle, if true at all, implied such a sending forth of the Holy Spirit as might well nigh have made every man a prophet, as a matter of fact no such glorious change accompanied the new order of things. The princes who supported the Reformation were, in many cases, its opprobrium; the nobles were too often marked by rapacity and profaneness, the chief clergy were not seldom found pandering to royal or popular passions, and the masses of the people were, by the confession of the Reforming leaders, more immoral and insubordinate than before the Reformation. Eighthly, The corruptions in the Church, when the Reformation broke out, were not as great as they had been at various preceding periods, when a real reform was achieved without involving either schism, a change of faith, or a new rule of faith. Such were the reforms brought about by Hildebrand, and by the Orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic. Corruption of morals and individual wickedness, moreover, must always exist in the Church, as we are repeatedly told by the apostles, and by our Lord, who, as if to preclude all error on this subject, chose a Judas to be one of His apostles. To meet such corruption the ordinary organization of the Church suffices: nor were its powers ever more vigorously put forth than by the great reforming Council of Trent. Ninthly, The corruptions in the church early in the sixteenth century were easily accounted for by the constant tendency of charity to wax cold, the overgrown wealth of religious bodies, the Erastianizing and secularizing influences consequent on the great western schism, the intoxication connected with the revival of pagan learning, &c., causes none of which had anything in common with the rule of faith. Tenthly, No Reformer was able to indicate when the (supposed) false rule (that of authority) had risen up. When the four first general councils passed their decrees, "anathematizing the doctrines they deemed false," and excommunicating all who maintained them, private judgment was as clearly repudiated as at the Council of Trent. Several of the chief Reformers, indeed, till they had committed themselves irrevocably, appealed to a future general council. What authority could its sentence have had, if private judgment was the rule of Faith? Eleventhly—If the church had been for centuries an impostor, arrogating to itself powers which blasphemy alone could claim, it must have been as much tempted to sophisticate the Bible as the creed, in which case, (as the Unitarians, and more lately the Neologians of Germany, have perceived), a very searching species of Biblical criticism must take place before private judgment could find a text on which to exercise itself. Such criticism can, from its very nature, attain but uncertain results, and consequently can afford a basis to nothing more than a "probable" theology. Twelfthly, The institution of a new rule of faith obviously involved the contradictory positions that the Church had become so corrupt, that to reform it schism itself must be boldly incurred, and the fundamental Law of belief changed; and yet that it had remained pure enough to train up men capable of an enterprise such as no one, since the feast of Pentecost, had ever carried out before. Such a paradox could only have been accounted for by the Reformers having possessed a supernatural mission. In this case miracles

would have seemed necessary to attest it. On the contrary, however, miracles, which had been ever claimed by the ancient Church, were commonly repudiated by the new bodies, and classed with impostures, lying wonders, &c. Thirteenthly—No Protestant State was disposed to recognize the claims of "private judgment," except so far as it involved a protest against Rome; yet no Protestant theologian could point out how states, disclaiming infallibility, and at variance with each other, could challenge a higher authority, as interpreters of divine revelation, than the vast ecclesiastical organization which for immemorial ages had included; (over and above its divine claims), the consent of races and nations.—Fourteenthly, The principle of private judgment in reality accorded to the individual no more than he possessed before, viz., the use of his own mental powers; while the method by which it instructed him to use them, involved a loss no less vast than that of the aid which the individual was to derive, (on the opposite rule of faith,) from the collective faculties of the baptized race brought together in the unity of the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas was confessedly a thinker, as well as Luther or Calvin, but the method which he pursued gave him as data the conclusions of the whole Christian world up to his time, and imparted to him thus, beside his own mind, another mind as large as that of Christendom. The use of this larger mind no more involved the suppression of the individual mind than the use of the telescope involves the loss of one's eyesight.

To establish "private judgment" as the rule of faith, must necessarily be to abolish the very idea of the Church as a divine mystery, and living power, the organ of Christianity. Conversely, to restore the idea of the Church, however faintly that idea has looked forth at first from ritual or ordinance, has ever eventually produced more or less a distrust in, or a contempt for, the high-sounding but barren fallacy of "private judgment." Considering, then, that this new rule of faith could not displace the old one without destroying also a vast deal more besides, nay, uprooting a whole system of doctrines hitherto believed in by nearly all Christendom, and attested by countless passages of Scripture, it must surely have seemed to us a duty, had we lived at the time of the revolt, to have tested pretty severely the fundamental norma on which it rested.

"Tempus non occurrit Ecclesie." As God can never change, so neither can His truth or His covenanted mode of revealing it to us. Consequently, what would have been our duty three centuries ago is equally our duty now; and whatever would, three centuries ago, have been our certainty or our uncertainty concerning divine things, until that duty had been faithfully performed, the same must be our certainty or our uncertainty now. That the worldly or the proud should not be disturbed by such uncertainty, is in nowise surprising; but few things attest more a delusion deep-rooted and pervading, than the circumstance that even the devout and the sincere are so often lulled in a fatal security concerning the very foundations of their faith. Environed and imprisoned by a false tradition, and blinded by cherished associations, multitudes, the cardinal principle of whose religion is enquiry, are contented practically to follow the authority of some sect which denounces authority, and to make no real enquiry as to that principle, (the rule of faith) on which, notwithstanding, by their own admission, the whole of our knowledge respecting the will and ways of God, as revealed in Christ, must depend. Accustomed to the absence of certainty, they do not feel its loss. Neither the differences between them and their Protestant friends, nor the secession of some of the most learned among their number, nor their own changes of opinion from day to day, awaken them to the fact that they have never honestly thought out the question of the rule of faith. Like her of old "whom the everlasting thunder lulls to sleep," they repose in a charmed rest; and the syren that subdues them is no spirit of harmony, but the storm of "public opinion," or the crash of systems crumbling ever back into chaos. They admit a purgatory or condemn prayers for the dead; assert the apostolic succession, or repudiate the priesthood; insist on the real presence, or deny baptismal regeneration, avowedly on the ground of special texts, frequently obscure or few; yet they never stay to determine in what relation the whole text of the Holy Scripture stands to the text of Scripture. Too often they play with the subject; or they are afraid of encountering it; deceived, no doubt, in part, by the circumstance that many precious portions of Catholic teaching, their possessions of which they erroneously attribute to private judgment, have descended to them by oral tradition—portions for their use of which they are accountable as for that of their other talents.

If a Protestant of a philosophic mind were once to place himself outside his inherited system, and direct

himself of prepossessions, what would be his mode of conducting religious enquiry? First, as a traveller begins with his map, he would map out the subject of inquiry, not taking now this road, and now that, as caprice or accident determined; but clearly ascertaining by what mode of access a subject otherwise beyond man could be approached. If he found that avenue to truth to be the "rule of faith," he would close his ears to all whispers calculated to check his progress up the heavenly mountain—all whispers about matters irrelevant, such as the corruptions of individual popes, or beyond his present powers of rightly estimating, such as indulgences. If he did not make the rule of faith the sum total of his enquiry, he would at least make it the initiatory and principal part. To that question he would address himself as he would to any new method proposed to him for the prosecution of scientific, historic, or moral enquiry. He would begin by ascertaining how far the proposed method corresponded with the subject-matter of inquiry. If the method was inductive, he would enquire whether the subject-matter admitted of experiment; if it consisted in introspection or analysis, of "what is deepest within us," he would enquire whether the subject-matter belonged to the region of intuitions, or included facts. Above all, he would endeavor to ascertain how far the proposed method was consistent with itself. If it involved self-contradictions he would be sure it could not be sound.

Confining our attention for the present to the last of these considerations, let us enquire how far the Protestant rule of faith is consistent with itself, and with the object which it proposes to itself.

For the investigation of this subject, the following tests would seem to be just and appropriate. The failure of that rule when tried by but one of them, would hardly be compatible with soundness in the rule.

1. If the rule of faith be the Bible only, as interpreted by the individual, then this rule must itself be clearly authenticated from Holy Scripture.

2. Protestant theology must itself be practically based on the observance of its own rule, not on the violation of it.

3. The rule must have been acted on in those primitive times when, as Protestantism affirms, Christianity was purest.

4. We must know from Scripture, not from Church authority, what books constitute the canon of inspired Scripture.

5. We must possess, independently of Church authority, a guarantee for the substantial authenticity of the original manuscripts, and a safe mode of ascertaining the true text.

6. The substantial fidelity of our translations must be also guaranteed to us with certainty, yet independently of Church authority.

7. Our rule must provide a means of interpreting Scripture truly.

8. It must enable us to reach the larger and deeper meaning of Holy Scripture, as well as the narrower and more superficial.

9. The rule must itself be a distinct and unequivocal one.

10. It must be one consistent with the propagation as well as the maintenance of Christianity.

11. It must secure us from the admixture of grave error with truth; and thus impart the faith in its purity as well as in its fulness.

12. It must guard us from all fatal errors in ritual as well as in doctrine.

13. Our rule of faith must consist with faith itself, and with the development of those virtues which have their root in faith; with a real belief in a supernatural world, in the objectivity of revelation, and in the hallowing influence of divine knowledge.

Let us now examine these tests in detail.

First, If the rule of faith be the Bible only, as interpreted by the individual, then this rule itself must be clearly authenticated from the Bible. The utter failure of all attempts to find there any such rule is admitted by the more learned and reflecting Protestants, those, namely, who belong to the High-Church school. They have, indeed, their own special difficulties to contend with. First, they have to decide whether they will denounce and reject all Protestant communities, except the Protestant Episcopalian, or whether they will recognize them as brethren; secondly, they have to show how private judgment, because it includes the Fathers as well as the Holy Scriptures as the subject-matter for investigation. However such questions may be answered, the Tractarian arguments against the rule under examination are as stringent as those of the Church. Almost all the texts so confidently relied on by the great mass of Protestants, are as they have often shown, either absolutely irrelevant, or imply a doctrine the opposite of that in defence of which they are pleaded. Invoked to utter malediction against the hosts of Israel, they cannot choose but bless. Thus we are presented with a catalogue of texts ex-