

this discussion, any objections which we know to be urged against our views, we shall endeavour honestly to meet.

1. *The necessity of private judgment.* Every healthy human mind must exercise its own power of discrimination, estimate, decision, on whatever subject comes, through any channel of information, within its ken. And no authority whatever can overbear the conclusions of the mind. You may coerce—you may either persuade or terrify a man to say after you as you dictate, but his true belief must follow the conclusion, or indeed must be the conclusion of his own mind. Mark, that here we do not take into account at all the sufficiency or insufficiency of the grounds on which the individual judgment proceeds. But that, in whatever way men arrive at their convictions, these convictions must be their own—either growing up within them, or accepted by them, not forced upon them from without.

The dogma that bears most severely on private judgment, is the papist one of the Church's infallibility. But even this cannot annul it.—There remains one leading question, which the individual judgment must decide—namely, *whether one may safely shut the eyes of his soul and trust himself blindfold to the guidance of the church; in other words, he must judge that the church of Rome is the church of Christ—that this church of Rome is infallible in her teaching—and that any and every one of her priests infallibly expresses the church's infallibility.* For, alas! if the individual priest should not be duly consecrated according to the doctrine of "Intention," or if he delivers merely his own private judgment of what is the church's belief, you are thrown back on this question—why, should you, in a matter of infinite moment, surrender your own private judgment—to the private judgment of another man!

Thus does the necessity of individual decision cling to man every where. So that if he gives himself up to the dictation of another, it must be because he judges that other to be as trustworthy as he claims, or as infallible as he arrogates to himself to be.

II. From these brief observations on the necessity, I advance to speak of the right of private judgment. And it is incumbent on all who love the interests of truth, the rights of conscience, and the liberties of man, to affirm and vindicate the exercise of individual judgment against all who impugn it; or to express all under two comprehensive categories, against all civil coercion, and ecclesiastical dictation.

1. *Against the coercion of civil governments.* There exists no right in the state, represented by the Sovereign, or the Parliament, or the vote of the people, to impose a belief on the individual subject or citizen. And in especial, the application of any force, or any other argument indeed, save logic and persuasion, in order to produce conformity, is at once unjust, inexpedient, and even absurd. Governments are no more likely than individuals to ascertain and hold the very truth. And when it is said that it is the duty of the magistrates to constrain subjects only to the truth, the question returns, who is the judge of truth? and as each ruler will judge his own system to be the true, this is but a circuitous path to the same assumption, that the ruler or government may dictate belief, and enforce it by pains and penalties.

Now apart from the gross injustice, it is abundantly evident that such coercion is utterly inexpedient, and has never accomplished its designs. History demonstrates, that the uniformity sought cannot thus be obtained—that men are only rendered more positive in their own convictions, and that when pains and penalties are resorted to, the fortitude of individuals will always be found prepared to endure whatever the bigotry of governments may please to inflict. Besides which, the whole attempt so to win the assent of human minds, is a palpable absurdity.

Coercion can never make a man believe the dogma, and system of dogmas in support of which it is applied. And if it makes him say that he believes it—when he does not, all that the coercion effects is, to make him a liar and hypocrite, in order to preserve him from being a heretic—in other words, it debauches his conscience, under the pretext of saving his soul. We protest therefore, in the name of truth and conscience, against all invocation of civil power, to enforce on individual minds any system of belief whatever, be it true or false. We will have as much argument, as much demonstration or persuasion as you please, but no invasion of our mental liberty.

2. But the great enemy of private judgment has been not so much civil coercion, as overbearing ecclesiastical dictation. And indeed, Governments in their attacks on this right, have been most commonly incited by the zeal of a priesthood, who find it easier to persecute heretics, than to refute their heresy.

It must be understood, that we do not plead against all ecclesiastical authority. But we deny that authority and dictation which crushes the sacred principle of individuality. Church despotism merges the individual in the mass, and prescribes accordingly.

Legitimate church authority affirms and enforces the claims of truth, but maintains for the individual man the unabridged and unpunished exercise of his own mind and conscience.—Church despotism requires, that each man shall bind himself blindfold to follow the teachings of a visible church or rather Priesthood. Scripture on the contrary demands that each man shall examine for himself, the teachings delivered to him—and try the spirits, whether they be of God.

The proposition, that we must take our beliefs on trust from the dictation of others, is, to say the least, not self-evident. It must be proved to us. It must be submitted to that very private judgment, which it hates, and must adduce for support those very Scriptures which it tell us, we are incompetent to understand. And if it be proved, it remains still to be shown, who is to us the proper spokesman of such high authority, and how we shall be sure that he, the individual, is a faithful spokesman, and that we, as individuals, rightly and fully apprehend what he speaks.

It has been said indeed, with great confidence, that this is just the liberty which man has—to choose the teacher he will follow—but not to sift the doctrine he is to believe. We are diligently told by certain insidious writers, to enquire, not *what* has God revealed, but *whom* has God commissioned to teach. One would think, the instance of the Bereans might suffice to rebuke this theory. A commissioned Apostle came to them, but the noble Bereans took care to examine his doctrines, by the pre-existing Scriptures. "They searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so; therefore many of them believed." But apart from this—the question—who is the right Teacher, is just as difficult of solution by private judgment, as the question—which is the true doctrine? If a man be incompetent for the latter he is equally incompetent for the former. "The reasoning," as an excellent living author has remarked, "is about as good as that of a father who should say to his child—'Though it is true you are not competent to say what is fit for you to learn, and therefore cannot select for yourself a school, yet you are perfectly welcome to choose your schoolmaster.'" If this is to be a *bona fide* exercise of judgment at all, the search for a teacher will be quite as arduous as the search for truth. There is no celestial stamp upon the Teacher's forehead, or any voice from heaven to authenticate his claims. We must examine his pretensions either by the tenor of his doctrines, or by a lengthened historical investigation into the ro-

ality and value of that apostolic descent on which he rests his immenso authority.

Moreover, in the present state of christendom, which, it may be asked, is the more hopeful inquiry for a private individual—What saith the Scripture?—or which, of all the religious teachers who claim my attention, makes the most rightful pretensions to instruct me in the truth?—I at the same time neither inquiring, nor being permitted to inquire, *what* that truth is!

Sometimes, the ecclesiastical claim is presented in another form. You are told, that the Bible indeed may be a book of excellent statutes, but the Church must be a judge upon the bench to decide cases, to expound or lay down the law. But this analogy, from the imperfection of human statutes and tribunals, we refuse to receive as bearing at all on the question—how a divine revelation may be interpreted. In regard to the tribunal, the analogy is at fault. The judges on the bench do not claim to be infallible—their judgments vary—and it is almost amusing to hear an argument for the certainty of the Church's decisions, brought from the proverbial uncertainty of human law. Farther, the judges on the bench can produce their commission from the Queen, and all faithful subjects at once recognize their authority. But the gentlemen of the robe and tonsure produce to us nothing but their own pretensions, which will not bear the light of historical inquiry. The chief fallacy, however, in this entire allegation, lies in arguing from the confused laws of man, to the perfect Word of God. The former undergo frequent change. One statute is enacted, and another repealed. And as they stand in the statute book, they are too often false in expression, and ambiguous in sense.—But no change and no imperfection can be predicated of the divine revelation. It requires study, caution, prayer—but it is a calumny, to represent it as unintelligible, or dangerous to the people at large. The law of man is imperfect; but "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

From no quarter then, and under no argument, do we admit any legitimate invasion of that which we call the right of private judgment, the right of every human being to examine and decide for himself, on his own responsibility to the God of truth. We do not say that the State has nothing to do with religion (quite the reverse); but, that the State has no right to impose on an individual subject or citizen, any belief which does not commend itself to his own mind and conscience. We do not say that the Church has no authority to teach, or that there does not exist a regular and apostolic ministry (quite the reverse); but the Church has no right to arrogate infallibility, or to overbear with her dictations the sacred independence of the individual Christian mind.

(To be continued.)

#### NOTES ON SABBATH-SCHOOL LESSONS

##### First Quarter—Second Month.

No. 5. Gen. xix. 15—29. *Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed.* These cities doomed to ruin because of sin. In the midst of Judgment God remembers mercy.—Ministry of angels Heb. 1. 14. Notice the power as well as goodness of God in delivering his people—No time to be lost in seeking salvation—weakness of Lot in begging a refuge in Zoar—Condescension of God—Sodom spared till Lot leaves.—Good men like electric rods, preserve even wicked cities from God's anger. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah a warning to the impenitent. Ps. 11. 6—Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt—Danger of apostasy—Relationship to good men ensures not salvation—Deliverance of Lot in answer to Abraham's prayer—Friends and relations should pray for one another.

No. 6. Gen. xxii. 1, 14. *Isaac presented in So-*