

variance with it, then all Protestants would recognise the truth of such an assertion. But if it means, that what Mr. A. or Mr. B., the author of some strange theory, or the founder of some new sect, *thinks* is contained in the Bible is to outweigh the unanimous voice of the primitive church expressed in creeds and confessions, those gentlemen must have a very overweening sense of their own importance; and assuredly the Church of England will never countenance their delusion.

Rom.—But I have heard members of the Church of England as loud in their assertion of the right of private judgment as those of any other denomination. Is it not everywhere asserted to be the very keystone of Protestantism?

Cler.—I think not, although we have very many ignorant members in our church, as you have in yours. But there is a great deal of misapprehension with regard to this “right of private judgment.” No one can read the history of the Church without seeing that at the time of the Reformation such an idea, as that which is now sought to be conveyed by these words, was entertained by no party, and least of all by those who most strongly resisted the spiritual authority of Rome. Not only were they, as for instance Luther and Calvin, the Scotch Presbyterians and the New England Puritans, most vehement in asserting that in their respective creeds only was salvation to be found, but they were by no means reluctant to avail themselves of the temporal sword to force those creeds upon others. In process of time, however, a better spirit prevailed, and men came to see that spiritual weapons are the only ones with which the Church ought to propagate and defend the truth. Then it was that the right of private judgment prevailed; the political right, that is, which every Englishman now enjoys, of following, in religious matters, the dictates of his own judgment, without thereby subjecting himself to persecution or temporal punishment. But while we thus assert that every man has *politically* “the right” to believe what he pleases, so long as it does not interfere with the welfare of the community, it by no means follows that he is *morally* right in believing what is contrary to the truth. The right of private judgment really means that a man may hold his own opinions without becoming, as formerly, amenable to any

earthly tribunal; but there is a far higher tribunal, at which we believe every man will have to give account for any errors which he might have avoided.

Rom.—Well, I agree in all you have stated. I know that in darker times it was judged necessary by the Authorities of most Christian countries to arrest with the sword the progress of heresy and infidelity; but I hope those times are gone by, and for ever.

Cler.—I am glad to hear you say so. Yet you cannot be ignorant, that in those countries where your church is predominant a very different spirit prevails. And even in the United States a writer, whose journal is formally sanctioned by the Bishop of every diocese—I allude to Mr. Brownson—has declared it to be the duty of the temporal authorities to arrest, by punishment and persecution, the progress of heresy.

Rom.—We are digressing from our subject. And you have not answered my assertion that Protestants, including the mass of members of the Church of England, claim the right, morally as well as politically, of believing whatever, in their own private judgment, they think to be the teaching of the Bible.

Cler.—Remember that we are to appeal to nothing but the recognized teaching of the Church in her formularies and articles. And I challenge you to show that she anywhere puts forward such a doctrine. On the contrary, she expressly declares in her Articles, that the Church has “authority in controversies of Faith,” and that she is “a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ.” But yet further, her children never assemble for worship without solemnly declaring their belief in those great doctrines of the christian religion, which many centuries ago were embodied in the primitive creeds. Can you deny, then, that she considers those creeds binding upon all her members; or can you doubt that they, as a matter of fact, do recognize them as binding upon themselves?

Rom.—Yet even those creeds themselves may admit of different interpretations, for we too receive them; and where in your church is there any authority that can decide upon their meaning?

Cler.—I do not think your statement is true. I do not believe that in any honest mind there can be much doubt as to the meaning of the creeds. The differences between ourselves and