

PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

When men talk about the right of private judgment, it should be clearly understood what is meant by that right, otherwise they may be discoursing about matters which differ very considerably from each other. It must also be definitely settled as to the right and the source of it, which any other power or influence may possess to interfere with man's exercise of the right of private judgment. Is there any natural, legal, or moral right so to interfere? And in applying this question, it must also be distinctly understood what are the subjects on which it is to be exercised. In what is called a free country, one man has no legal right to compel another to think as he does. A parent may have a natural right to impose his systems of thought, if he has any, upon his offspring; but as the powers of the offspring expand, in proportion as his ability to think and to judge of principles brought before him increases, just in that proportion does this natural right of the parent diminish with regard to all matters which do not interfere with the duties of filial affection and obedience.

Every human right is limited by some other right. In any organized body, every member of it may have a right to think as he pleases, but he has no right to allow his private judgment to disturb the essential principles of the organization. In the body politic, the right of every man to act in accordance with his freedom of thought must yield to such limitations as the state from time to time may find it necessary to make. And so with regard to the Church as an ecclesiastical institution, the liberty of action consequent upon the liberty of thought claimed by the individual, must necessarily be limited by such regulations as the authorities of the general body may find necessary or desirable; there being this difference between the authorities of the Church and those of the state, that the former can claim a divine origin, while every existing specimen of the latter can only find a basis for its origin in the will or acquiescence of the nation.

The right of private judgment, as generally spoken of, has particular reference to the right of an individual to believe or not to believe the general teaching or articles of faith enunciated by the Church. Now the Church being a purely voluntary organization, not only as regards any compulsion exercised by the state, but also as to her

original constitution by Christ Himself, it is plain that there must be more senses than one in which such a right exists. The fact that in the authorized standards of our religion, the intelligence and the reason of men are constantly appealed to, shows that the exercise of a man's judgment, more or less, on the subjects of revelation is an unfailling duty. But the fullest admission of this principle however, must not be allowed to interfere with the right of competent authority to lay down the principles of truth positively and dogmatically. The Head of the Church may have seen fit to announce the fundamental principles of His system, from which there should be no appeal, and may also have left His servants the authority and the guidance necessary to complete that system and to apply those principles, as we believe He has; while He invites, and authorizes His ministers to invite the acquiescence of men's reasoning faculties on subjects which the human mind may be able to grasp. And so it may be, and it doubtless is the duty of every man before whom these things are brought, and who thus has the opportunity, not to forego his judgment, but with the aids and appliances the Christian religion furnishes, to bring his judgment into harmony with the teaching that has been declared on so competent an authority.

It must be borne in mind that any right of private judgment which can exist in the Christian Church does not give to any man a moral right to make his own religion, and thus become his own God. It does not suppose that there is no truth anywhere except what a man may choose to believe; nor consequently does it suppose that the truth can in any way be altered by the opinions of the whole human race put together. Some people however talk about the right of private judgment just as though the Christian religion gave a man the privilege of making up any system of theology his fancy might incline to. In this infidel age, we cannot too carefully guard against a principle so adverse to the whole spirit and character of Christianity—a religion which with all its liberality, is not so thoroughly suicidal as to propose its advantages to those who ignore its teaching, and repudiate its authority.

No man so possesses the right of private judgment that he is not responsible for the exercise of it—responsible to the living Church, and responsible to the Founder of the Church. In fact, this

right is partly the result of his responsibility, and partly involves it. If all exercise of private judgment is denied to a man, from that moment his responsibility must cease; just as much so indeed as if he were acting under compulsion.

And we cannot be too deeply impressed with the principle that the right, reverently to exercise the judgment in matters of religious teaching, does not diminish one iota from the duty implicitly to submit in all its decisions, when the Divine authority vested in the Church has given no uncertain sound. The position taken in this respect by the Church of England is aptly expressed in the following passage:—"Though we say that every private Christian hath a liberty left him of examining and judging for himself, and which cannot, which ought not, to be taken from him; yet every member of a church ought to submit to the church's decisions and declarations, so as not to oppose them, not to break the communion or the peace of the church on account of them, unless in such cases where obedience and compliance is apparently sinful and against God's laws." Archbishop Sharp, *Works*, Vol. v., p. 68., Oxf. 1829.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

The subject of religious education is one which is of paramount importance. We would not say it is second only to the existence of the church herself, but rather that it is an essential means for her continuance and expansion. In Canada, where no provision whatever is made for religious training by the state, and where the national school system recognizes no religion at all, religious training must be the result of purely voluntary efforts in connection with such organizations as may exist among us. Whether the state should so entirely neglect the religious training of the rising generation or not is one of the questions belonging to the great problem of a state church, and included in the same class as that which would ask whether a nation can expect the blessing of a Being, when in its national capacity, it ignores the worship, the teaching, and even the existence of such a Being altogether? The subject is one of those which are agitating the mind in England at this moment. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on laying the memorial stone of a church school at Ramsgate, on a recent occasion, said he was one of those who could not quite see his way out of the difficulties which