

the ways between ourselves and Roman Catholics.

When the Gospel was committed to writing, those who read it exercised their faculties in judging of the truthfulness of the record. There were other books written which they rejected, sifting the literature relative to Christ which came into their hands, separating the genuine from the spurious. And our answer to the claim of the Church of Rome,—that we should not to-day have the Bible, by which we lay so much store, had it not been for the good offices of that Church in determining the canon of Scripture,—is that, apart from the fact that we claim a share in the Council of Chalcedon as well as they, individual scholarly Christian students had long before established what Scriptures were to be regarded as authentic and genuine; so that all the Council did was to ratify the judgment which had already been passed by those who had made the matter the subject of earnest enquiry.

The Rights of Each Person.

Mention has been made of the incapacity of man to compass truth as the divine mind can; yet each person's mental outfit, such as it is, is the apparatus by which he can know things. No one else can do the searching after truth for him. His success in arriving at truth, which is many-sided, depends upon the amount of his experience, what we call his insight and upon his spiritual frame at the moment.

It was in conformity with this law that our Lord promised His disciples: "What ye know not now, ye shall know hereafter." Specially were they to wait upon the Holy Spirit whom the Saviour promised to send, to lead them into all truth.

The early Christians exercised their individual judgment in appraising the claims of Jesus Christ to be a witness for God, as well as in appreciating the testimony which the disciples bore regarding Him. But that privilege was not restricted to them: whatever rights they had as individuals, we have, and whatever privileges were claimed and exercised by the Church as a whole in the early ages, the Church to-day may equally well claim and exercise.

Our first duty is to be loyal to our individual convictions of truth, and this, of course, involves the right of dissent from the convictions of others.

The scrutiny of everything stated in Scripture is the unchallengeable right of every individual. Biblical criticism has, therefore, a rightful place in the programme of our theological schools. For the fullest efficiency as teachers of truth, ministers should know what has been or may be urged against anything in the Scriptures. They must go into the minutest details in order to be masters of the subject. This is sometimes trying to a simple faith: it is not a little perilous for a young student to be confronted with critical questions, or the oppositions of science, still often falsely so-called, as in the Apostles' day. But it is a great thing if a young man is anchored previously to Christ. If he has realized in his own soul the power of divine grace, he can meet unmoved any criticism of the Christian system.

The Rights of the Whole.

But while contending that truth is addressed primarily to individuals and that my own reason is to be my guide in reaching conclusions, I cannot forget that right reason at the same time teaches me that if nine men, equally competent and truth-loving, differ from me in their judgment, that may not indeed exempt me from the duty of obeying my own convictions, but it ought at least to lead me to review the grounds of them; and, if I still have to adhere to them, to do so with modesty, while the nine would be justified in maintaining the presumption that truth is on their side. That is to say, the convictions of others ought to go a certain way

with us. Individual experience and views growing out of it, it stands to reason, must be modified and supplemented by the larger perception and experience of an entire community, and give place to them. This is specially true in matters into which learning enters, or when others have had opportunities for knowledge that we ourselves have not, as was the case with the disciples. Those who had never seen Jesus or heard His voice were expected to accept the testimony of the Apostles whom He constituted His witnesses. Herein is the defence of creeds, which are an expression of the conclusions arrived at by the members of a community as a whole. Not that any position is necessarily beyond criticism because it is an old one, and held by the many; although there should always be a presumption in its favor. That which has continued to be believed in the face of criticism may be assumed to be divinely appointed, adapted to men, and protected by God. There is no special merit in dissent. Orthodoxy is not a vice, nor is heresy a virtue, necessarily to be applauded.

The Critics.

It does not follow, however, that because each man has the right to make his own researches, we must accept every man's conclusions. While cherishing open minds in our quest of truth, we must feel bound to accept the utterances of none. Great names are not to overawe us. Critics frequently come to conclusions which seem to me puerile, and not warranted by the premises before them. Many of them discover preconceptions by which they are manifestly biased. Strongly prejudiced against the supernatural, they are always seeking explanations which will bring matters into line with ordinary observation, and showing a disinclination to believe in anything which has not its counterpart in our time.

Whereas a great many things have happened in the past which are not happening now. Why this solid globe itself, scientific men tell us, was once gaseous; and geology assures us that certainly at one period there was a tropical climate in these northern parts, and that it was followed by an arctic period. If things in the material world, in which it is claimed there is uniformity of law, have not always been as they are now, what right have we to assert that in the spiritual realm, in which there is more of mystery, events could not have occurred in the past which we do not see paralleled in our time? By the use of the methods of the critics many of the unquestioned facts of history would be counted impossible, as Archbishop Whately showed in his "Historic Doubts" some 35 years ago. There has been only one Jesus Christ, as, indeed, there has been only one Napoleon Bonaparte.

Evolution.

I have purposely avoided referring to the much discussed theory of Evolution. Many persons are afraid of being counted ignorant if they call in question its great unproved hypothesis; but I am not, nor am I going to admit that other sciences, theology included, have to take their cue from that hypothesis. But I grant that evolutionists have not a little to support their views in the observed facts of astronomy and geology, and they assume a position contrary to that of the higher critics, namely, that the past is not to be held as necessarily in line with the present, and so we shall let these two classes of troublers in Israel cancel one another, and go comfortably on our way.

Creeds May be Changed.

It follows also that it is the unchallengeable right of the Church in every age to formulate its own views of the testimony which it believes Christ committed to His witnesses. But when we make that concession, it does not follow that every proposed change in the creeds

of Christendom would be an improvement or better set forth the mind of Christ and His Apostles.

The Triumph of the Cross.

Tested by results, our Lord's claim to be the truth is vindicated. The efficacy of the Gospel has been proved for nearly two thousand years. Experience is the test of truth, and history is the record of experience; and it tells of the triumphs of the cross—how a little company of fishermen has developed into the dominant influence of the world to-day, with a brightening outlook that the Gospel shall soon be felt everywhere in the earth as its founder counted it should be. Adopting Coleridge's canon:—"The Bible finds me," Jesus Christ finds us, answers to our longings, and supplies our need. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep my deposit," and that is enough for me. Reading all things in the light of this assurance, we are on the highway to truth, of which Christ is the High Priest. Others have put forth similar claims, and their disciples avowed that their souls have profited by the faith they have exercised; and we are not going to question their experience; but what we think we may fairly say is that every other system has had some measure of truth in it, and it is this modicum of truth that does good. But the difference between Christ and all religious founders is that while His life and teaching were perfect and bring peace, there is much in all others claiming to be prophets of God against which a pure heart and a clear head revolt. The fact of Christendom, with the elevation Christianity has brought to those who have accepted it—the impulse it has given to the best capabilities of those who have come under its spell—all this is such a contrast to the situation in the rest of the world, that it is the greatest of miracles. Christ's advent is, therefore, fittingly made the central point of all history, to and from which everything else is dated. The history of Christianity is its own best apologetic.

Our Commission.

Christ was a witness to the truth; His Apostles again were His witnesses; and now it is the turn of us to whom the dispensation of the Gospel is committed, to bear witness to the testimony which they gave, and hand it on to the generations to come. Jesus Christ lived the truth He taught, and it is for us to witness to Him in a life and conversation becoming the Gospel, as well as by preaching the word. Called of God as was Aaron, set apart to office by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, and owned of Christ in the salvation of souls, we have no doubt as to the validity of our orders. Ambassadors of Christ, His witnesses to our generation, it is ours to emit a full and faithful testimony to the truth as it is in Him. The Master Himself had the whole panorama of truth always before His eyes, truth regarding the material universe, and truth in the spiritual realm; and the more His ministers share in His qualifications, the more efficient witnesses they will be. Yet while all truth is valuable, it is what is revealed in Scripture alone that is able to make men wise unto salvation, and with this limitation the Shorter Catechism, as quoted, is right. Jesus always appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures with the utmost respect, and counted them as specially God's revelation of His will and purposes regarding mankind. The Gospel was foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures; and it is the Gospel, not astronomy or biology, which reveals the living Saviour at God's right hand, whose earthly career as therein witnessed to led up to His present exalted position as King and Head over all things to His Body, the Church, and uplifts man and restores

(Continued on Page 8).