

## **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.**

"The true doctrine is not our right to think for ourselves, but the right of the other man to think for himself."

The impression very widely prevails that the battle for Christian liberty has been fought and won. So far as regards precaution of the more active kind, this is the case in the larger part of the civilized world. The right of the minority to free speech and free action in the line of conscientious conviction, is, in theory at least, conceded.

But it is a mistake to assume that because harsh laws have been softened, human nature has been radically changed. The grosser forms of persecution have disappeared, but subtler forms remain. The intolerant spirit has survived the death of many institutions by which intolerance was once manifested. Christian liberty is still, in a considerable degree, conceded only in theory. Men still endeavor to punish those who have the temerity to differ from them.

There is no cause for astonishment at this manifestation of inconsistency. It is one of the curious things in human history to see how generally the persecuted have become in turn the persecutors the moment the power was lodged in their hands. And why? Because the true principle of Christian liberty had not been grasped, and is to this day apprehended by only a few. The right of any body of men to differ from others has always been claimed by them; there is no novelty in that. From the beginning, every Christian sect that has arisen has vehemently contended for its right to differ from others. It has protested against persecution – that is to say, the persecution of itself by others. But in few cases has any sect conceded the right of others to differ from it, or forbore to persecute when it had the power. And in our own day each man is prompt to claim and assert the right to think for himself, but how loth most are to concede the equal right of all other men to think for themselves. Every one resents any attempt to coerce him into

the avowal of anything that he does not honestly believe, but how few fail to attempt to coerce others.

The true doctrine of Christian liberty is not our right to think for ourselves, but the right of the other man to think for himself. There is no danger now that our right will not be insisted upon and enforced, particularly if our thinking happens to fall in with that of the majority. It is the other man's liberty that is in danger, particularly if he is in the minority. It is his liberty that demands defense at all hazards; for, if liberty is denied him, how long will it be conceded to us?

To demand liberty for the other man, even when he differs from us, is not to admit that truth and error are essentially one, or to deny that it is of great consequence what the other man believes and teaches. It may be our duty to oppose with all our might what he teaches, to denounce it as a deadly error. But this may be done without identifying the man with what he teaches, and without the display of the spirit of intolerance and persecution. We need not try to make the man odious because his opinion is odious to us. To be loyal to the truth, and yet faithfully to recognize the equal rights of all men to free thought and free speech, is not always an easy task. The two may, however, be combined. And nothing can be more certain than that the preservation of Christian liberty for any, is conditioned on the concession of that liberty for all.

– *N.Y. Examiner.*

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