THE

PRINCETON REVIEW.

By Whom, all things; for Whom, all things.

FIFTY-SEVENTH YEAR.

JANUARY—~~JUNE~~. Dec

NEW YORK.
1881.

CHRISTIAN MORALITY, EXPEDIENCY, AND LIBERTY.

THERE is an expediency which is the hand-maid of rectitude. There is another which usurps its place and tramples it in the dust. When the high-priest Caiaphas said, referring to Christ, "It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John xi. 50), this is the climacteric instance of the latter kind. Without inquiry or concern in regard to his guilt or innocence, it was made the ethical basis of the crime of crimes, the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. Such expediency has been the great justification of the slaughter of the innocents in all ages. It was this that drenched Paris in blood in the days of the Revolution and the Commune. But the former kind of expediency has a rightful and necessary place in sound ethics. That place is carefully and even philosophically defined in the New Testament by one justly styled the "philosophic apostle."

In 1 Corinthians x. 23, Paul declares to us, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." In chapter vi. 12, we find the same words with a change of the last clause: in place of "all things edify not," it reads, "but I will not be brought under the power of any." It is hardly necessary to say that the "all things" mentioned as being "lawful" do not mean "all things" in the most absolute sense of all beings or acts in the universe, actual or possible, but all things of the class of which he was speaking; *i.e.*, all actions which in themselves are morally indifferent. The actions that in this sense are permissible, or lawful in themselves to be done or abstained from, according as they are or are not for edification, are innumerable.

They become right or wrong according as circumstances do or do not render them conducive to edification, to the glory of God, the advancement of his church, and the welfare of man. To this class belong the species of actions which the apostle has in view in his ethical discussions in Romans xiv. and 1 Corinthians viii., ix., and x. They are such as eating herbs or meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols; keeping days and rites prescribed in the Jewish ceremonial. As concerns actions of this kind, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient, because they edify not." There is another class of actions that fall not under this category, which are never lawful and may never be done. Such is everything prohibited in the decalogue. Otherwise, what is lawful is not lawful. Paul never meant such an absurdity. Contrariwise, in the practical parts of his epistles he is constantly reaffirming them, and putting them not only on the ground of natural, but of Christian obligation as well, and this alike with regard to the God-ward and man-ward part of the decalogue. Witness his injunctions of piety towards God, insomuch that he insists that all things be done as to the Lord and to his glory, while he enjoins, in forms the most varied and explicit, parental fidelity and love; filial obedience and reverence; regard for the sacredness of life; chastity, industry, honesty, veracity, fidelity; avoidance of all acts or feelings antagonistic to other men's just rights, privileges, and possessions. The actions thus respectively commanded and forbidden are morally good or evil in themselves. No circumstances can alter their nature or annul the obligation to do the one and shun the other. Not only does this stand in all its force as an original law of nature, written alike on tables of stone and in the natural conscience, but its obligation is enhanced by every new relation and motive of the Gospel. That there is such a thing as intrinsic moral good and evil, which no circumstances of supposed expediency can make otherwise, which cannot be set aside by any alleged tendency to promote good arising from their violation, he clearly teaches when he repels, with indignant denunciation of its authors, the charge that Christians act upon the abominable maxim of "doing evil that good may come," and declares their "damnation just" (Rom. iii. 8). There is moral evil then, that remains immutably such, no

matter what good may be effected or intended by doing it. When any principle of truth or righteousness was involved, the apostle was the last man to countenance the remotest deviation from, or shortcoming in adhering to it. When piety, veracity, profaneness, or fraud are involved, one might as well measure them by the yardstick, or seek their market value, as ask, Are they expedient? Paul rarely rises to a more superlative intensity of expression than in the outburst, "Tho we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. i. 8). Tho persecutions unto death awaited him for his fidelity to truth as it is in Jesus, yet when this was at stake he was inflexible, and, in the face of terrors which stagger humanity, he could say, with a heart dauntless and serene, "None of these things move me."

Now, of the things lawful in the sense of being morally indifferent *per se*, he says, all are not expedient, which raises the question, mooted from the very beginnings of ethical science and controversy, What is the place of expediency as in any way the foundation of morality, of moral obligation, and as a guide to moral action? On a right adjustment of its true sphere, beyond all doubt, depends the possibility of a true theory of ethics, or a true code of practical morals. In answer, it is quite safe to say that true principles on this subject are as rational as they are Scriptural. They are as adequately set forth and reasoned out by Paul, in the places already indicated, as if he were giving us a complete chapter on the right use of things indifferent, in a formal treatise on Christian ethics.

Before proceeding further, it is to be observed that this inquiry covers the whole distinction between positive and moral laws. Positive law cannot go beyond the domain of expediency. It is applicable only to actions to which expediency is applicable; *i.e.*, to actions *per se* indifferent. No positive law can annul a moral law. It can, however, make actions not in themselves morally binding, become so, when enacted by a competent law-giver. It is not within the prerogative of positive law to authorize worship of more Gods than one, or the practice of blasphemy or perjury. Nor is a positive law enjoining acts adiaphorous in their own nature, rightfully enacted unless, in the circumstances, the performance of such actions tends to good.

So, as moral laws are immutable and irrepealable, positive laws admit of repeal, suspension, or modification, when required by the interests to promote which they were enacted. Of this character are the police laws and regulations, indeed the larger part of all the legislation, of states. When warrantable, they must be adopted for the promotion of righteous ends; but changing circumstances require a constant change of laws for the most effectual furtherance of the same ends. Nearly all have recognized the positive character of the Jewish ceremonial laws in contrast to the decalogue—the former being liable to abrogation, and actually vanishing away at the coming of Christ; the latter so perfect and immutable, that sooner shall the heavens pass away than one jot or tittle thereof shall fail. The moral and religious truths and interests subserved by these ceremonies abide. The means of promoting them are changed with changing circumstances. Circumcision and the passover give way to the Christian sacraments, all being alike "signs and seals of the righteousness of faith." The hard ritual observance of the Jewish Sabbath disappears with the other ceremonial regimen of that economy. The true rest from worldly distractions by a joyous rest in God, under an economy of greater liberty, is best atained by sloughing off integuments which once protected, but longer continued, would hamper, its power for good. It would sacrifice the true well-being of man to a stiff outward ceremony, the very end of the Sabbath to a mere outward form, so reversing the law that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

The subjects of the controversies and divisions which led Paul to make his deliverances to the Roman and Corinthian Christians had reference in part to the sacred days of the Jews, regarded as still being such by some Jewish Christians, while not so in fact, nor so regarded by the more enlightened converts. But these days having been constituted sacred by positive statute, ceased to be such with the cessation of the law and the reasons for it—*cessante ratione cessat lex.*

Many persons confound the positive with the moral law, and argue as if each were equally subject to revocation or exception, not merely by the mere fiat of the law-giver, but at the behest of strong personal sentiment. As if a ruler could be equally

entitled to obedience in enjoining idolatry, imposing an income-tax, or making a police regulation. Something of this sort displays itself in that passionate but brilliant outburst of Jacobi in his letter to Fichte, which seems to sink ordinary morality in a super-sublimated sentimentality:

"Yea, I am that atheist, and that godless person who, contrary to the will which wills nothing, will lie like the dying Desdemona; will lie and deceive like Pylades representing himself as Orestes; will murder like Timoleon; will be a law and oath breaker like Epaminondas and John de Witt; will resolve on suicide like Otho; rob the temple like David—yea, will pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath for this reason only, that I am hungry, and the law was made for man and not man for the law. I am that godless person, and despise the philosophy which therefore calls me godless, despise it and its very essence; for with the holiest certainty of my soul I know that the *privilegium aggratiandi* for such offences against the simple letter of the absolute universal law of reason is the peculiar prerogative of man, the seal of his dignity and of his divine nature.—*Jacobi's Letter to Fichte*, Hamburg ed. pp. 32, 33.

The confusion of moral with positive law here is manifest. The shew-bread acquired its sanctity solely from positive institution. No moral principle was violated when its necessary use for ends higher than any mere outward ceremonial was tolerated. The same is true of the relation of plucking corn on the Sabbath, to appease hunger and preserve health, to the charge of Sabbath-breaking. The Lord of the Sabbath makes a very summary disposition of it—which is comprehended under a broader principle respecting the immolation of piety, morality, and humanity on those altars of external rites which are ordained only in furtherance of them—"I will have mercy and not sacrifice." "The Sabbath," says our Lord, "was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." While this shows that no such rigor of outward Sabbath observance is to be insisted on as to make man a victim of such rigid formality, nevertheless it does not annul the sacredness of the day, or the duty of abstinence from all worldly labors and recreations not demanded by necessity and mercy. But Jacobi treats this positive and dispensable element in the Sabbath as if it were on the same footing as absolutely moral laws, grounded in the nature of things, and beyond all suspension or repeal; as if the obliga-

tions to abstain from idolatry, profaneness, murder, adultery, theft, and lying, were on no higher ground, and it could be properly said of these in relation to man, "They were made for him, not he for them." The reverse of this is true of the moral law, whether as emanent in express statute, or immanent in God's perfect nature and will. It is not *made* in the sense of being capable of non-existence, so long as God and his accountable creatures exist. It is not *made* for them in the sense of being subordinate to them or their interests, if these could properly be conceived to be in conflict with it; or capable of annulment if found in real or supposed conflict with them. Conformity to this law, which is perfect, does indeed make man perfect in character and condition. But this goes to prove that man is made for it, and must make it his supreme standard; not that it was made for man, and must be flexible to his vacillations. Is it not a sheer solecism to say that the law of truth is a mere arbitrary enactment, made for the benefit of man, and revocable at pleasure when it goes athwart man's pleasure or interest? Is it not the case, rather, that man, by virtue of his moral and rational nature, is made to love, maintain, speak, and act the truth, and every other part of that perfect and immutable law no iota of which shall ever fail? It is the province of human legislatures to protect and enforce truth by punishing perjury, libel, and fraud. What would be thought of their affixing pains and penalties to the utterance of truth, or the practice of honesty?

There is indeed a border-land here, as nearly everywhere outside of pure *a priori* sciences, in which the two kinds, however distinct, still overlap and interpenetrate. The moral law, tho not any creation of mere arbitrary will, in which *stat pro ratione voluntas*, is nevertheless what God wills, and in this sense is binding because divinely commanded. Positive precepts of religion, tho only obligatory because positively instituted, are nevertheless so instituted of God because, for the time being, they serve moral ends. Sometimes these so interblend that it is not easy to find the precise boundary-line between them. This is peculiarly true of the Christian Sabbath, which, as to the nature and ends of the sacred rest it provides and enjoins, is moral, and in its own nature obligatory. But as to the precise

day, its order and frequency of recurrence, and the external form and rigor of observance—this is matter of positive enactment, and depends upon it. It would be safe to say that he is no Christian who observes no days or times of sacred rest. But it would be quite aside of the mark to say that one who, lost in the forests or on a desert island, or through mistaken calculations, fixes on the wrong day as a Sabbath, is therefore any the less a Christian. Something of this kind must be conceded to different persuasions as to the required form and manner of its observance. But because modern life is so conditioned upon facilities for public travel that even church-going requires forms of public carriage not formerly needed, it does not follow that there should be no restriction of railway travel or transportation on the Sabbath, or that these agencies of locomotion should promote its desecration by excursions for pleasure and revelry on that day. Because it is right to take the first rope or boat one can lay hold of to save a drowning man, it does not follow that St. Crispin was right in stealing leather for purposes of charity to the poor. The difficulty here, however, respects the application of principles more than the principles themselves. There is always less difficulty with principles in the abstract, as such. The chief perplexity and controversy arise as to their application to concrete cases. To render to creatures the homage due to the Creator, or worship them as God, would be unquestioned idolatry; but some Romanists, admitting this, insist that in kneeling before images of Christ and the saints, or literal figures or emblems suggesting the Trinity, they are not bowing down to these, but to the divinity they symbolize. A lie is a false representation made with intent to deceive, when the circumstances imply at least, a promise to utter truth. But in regard to how many cases may questions arise, whether there is a misrepresentation in fact or intention, or whether a promise is fairly implied to make accurate statements? It would be agreed that feints and stratagems in war, made with the design of mystifying or misleading the opposing general, involve no promise, implied or otherwise, to give him light, or not to mislead him. But communications made under a flag of truce involve a recognized pledge to utter the truth. The violation of this would make the offender an outlaw. It would hardly be

said that a mother using every deception to hide her child from the murderer or kidnapper was under any implied promise to enlighten, or not to mislead him in her communications. But go a step further. Suppose it were to save her property from robbery, spoliation, confiscation, extortion. Do we not soon reach a point where false representations with intent to deceive do break the implied understandings amongst men, and incur the guilt of lying, unless all falsehoods to protect one's interests are to be taken out of the category of lying and approved as guiltless? And then what faith can remain in the word, promise, or honor of men? The very bonds of society are thus sundered, and all men become Ishmaelites to each other. Yet while this is so, it is impossible to formulate rules to meet every case which will not become a snare by being made, without much stretching, to cover cases which admit of no justification that would not be a defence for lying in general. .The only safe course in respect to this, as to all moral precepts, is to proceed on the assumption that they form the only rule of conduct, and to provide no rules for anomalous cases. Abnormities require no norm. Each case has its own peculiarities. If eccentric to all general laws, it has its own line of deflection not described by any other. If it justifies any apparent transgression of the moral rule, it will furnish its own reasons and motives of sufficient strength and urgency. There is no danger that he who recognizes no law in his utterances and promises but that, "putting away all lying, every man speak truth with his neighbor," will not be likely enough to feel and act upon the reasons which *in extremis* may palliate or justify partial, ambiguous, or misleading answers to robbers, murderers, or simply impudent inquisitors trying to extort what no duty requires to be disclosed to them, without attempting to formulate rules and make out hair-breadth casuistical distinctions and formulas defining when false statements will be admissible. The moment we begin this we enter the confines of Jesuitism. There is no surer way of dulling the moral sense, and paralyzing the mainsprings of morality, than the process of finding or inventing reasons and occasions for being excused from it. It is not the way to grow truthful to become an expert in ways, means, and opportunities for evading or denying the truth. It is like the attempts to

cultivate Christian feeling and enthusiasm by a morbid introversion of the mind on itself to see whether it possesses or is destitute of them, instead of contemplating the objects fitted to excite them. It is like vitalizing the body by practising anatomy and vivisection upon it. But we must now consider more positively and fully the relation of duty and expediency to things adiaphorous.

In approaching this, it is to be observed that, as in the seeming exceptional cases just noticed, each specific instance of action is quite beyond all general rules applicable to all its details. It is thrown back upon the individual conscience and judgment to make a candid and right decision, when perhaps a great complexity of considerations comes in. It is very different from the categorical yes or no, which may be the easy and unmistakable answer to such questions involving veracity as—"Are you a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, a Methodist?" or, "What ought you to do about refunding borrowed money which you have promised to pay?" The question, how much pocket-money ought you to allow a spendthrift, or an economical son, is one which you alone can decide, which brings an individualizing of duty, and of the determination of it to yourself, as a far more formidable personal problem than the question of keeping an oath, or paying a debt.

1. This class of actions, tho in themselves neither binding nor prohibited, is nevertheless not in such a sense extra-moral, or beyond the scope of conscientious oversight and direction, that we are not amenable to conscience and to God for our course in respect to each and all of them. From our very constitution as free, voluntary, accountable agents, we are responsible for each and every voluntary act. We are bound, not only to do acts intrinsically good and avoid those intrinsically bad, but in respect to those not such, the obligation holds, to do or refrain from doing them according as they, apparently to the doer, in the exercise of his candid judgment, and in view of the best light he can get, tend to the furtherance of that which is morally, religiously, Christianly, good or evil. Herein each one is responsible for the exercise of due diligence and candor in seeking the truth. Thus, what food, dress, furniture, equipage one shall have is, in itself, a thing indifferent; but if it be

noxious to health of ourselves or others; if it be beyond our means of honest payment; if it tend to tempt others to an extravagance of ostentatious expenditure that works evil, and evil only, in the church and society; if, from unsuitableness to our position, it curtails our influence for good; in short, not to go into further detail, if the visible consequences be evil only, or evil with no compensating good; or if upon ourselves the effect be to inflame evil lusts—anything but for edification—then there is a clear obligation to abstain from it. Yet, on the other hand, it will never do to say that we must deny ourselves all of what are called luxuries, because life and efficiency in the service of Christ could be sustained without them; to rule out all that ministers to the temperate gratification of the tastes which God has given us, physical, artistic, intellectual—in short, the appetencies, "whether of the palate or of the soul." To proscribe refinement and culture, and relapse into the privations of asceticism, barbarism, or semi-civilization—this is not Christianity, tho sometimes mistaken for it. There is little danger in this direction. It is mostly the other way in this day of abounding self-indulgence, pampered by superabounding material wealth. The poor, too, are far better supported by industry in ministering to the wants of those able to employ them, than by charity so bestowed as to support idleness and vagrancy. Still, men are accountable for every free act in respect to things indifferent. They are bound, while "free from all men and the servants of none," in all things to seek their own and others' welfare, and the honor of God; or, as Paul sums up all his teachings on this subject in the all-inclusive charge: "Let every one please his neighbor to edification" (Rom. xv. 2). "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31).

2. We are thus finding our way to the true scope of Christian liberty in such matters. For there is beyond doubt a liberty in these things that has no application to lying, stealing, licentiousness, profaneness, idolatry, or atheism. We are bound to do that which appears to be for the highest good. But who shall judge and determine this question? Each one clearly, getting the best light he can, must judge for himself. "Let each one," says Paul, "be fully persuaded in his own mind"

(Rom. xiv. 5). He is bound, indeed, to judge candidly and carefully, but still he must judge for himself. Others may not usurp the prerogative of judging him, or judging for him. In such matters he is not a law to other men's consciences, nor they to his. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." (Rom. xiv. 4.) In respect to other men, therefore, in things indifferent, he is not in bondage. He is in the sphere of liberty which, in all proper ways and on all suitable occasions, he is to maintain in the fear of God, indeed in the face of, and, if need be, against all men. But—

3. How is he to use this liberty? This depends on circumstances, one thing alone being invariable—that he is always responsible to God for the right use of it. At the threshold, too, it may be further added negatively, that he is not to use it for selfish gratification when this conflicts with the spiritual good of the subject of it, of his brethren; in a word, the blessing of man and the glory of God. In the epistle to the Galatians (v. 13), the apostle tells them, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not your liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." So his uniform charge, however varied in form, in treating of these subjects, is to "follow the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. xiv. 19). Since "None of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord." (*Id.* 7, 8.)

So the use of this liberty is to be governed by charity, not only in the general sense of using it for the edification of others; of doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the household of faith (Gal. yi. 10); but in a charitable consideration and treatment of one another's infirmities, or differing judgments and practices in respect to the right use of things indifferent in themselves. This, indeed, is the great stress of the apostle's elaborate exposition of this subject in the parts of his letters referred to. He treats of the observance or non-observance of certain days which in the eyes of some were sacred, so that to them their non-observance was a sin, while others knew them to have no sanctity above other days. In the same way, some abstained from meats as having been pol-

luted by being offered to idols; others knew that there was no sin in eating these things, and accordingly indulged in them, disregarding the scruples of their weaker brethren. Thus, on the one hand, they wounded their weak brethren's conscience by doing that which in their eyes was sin. But while thus grieving, they also tempted these weaker ones to sin, by following the example of the more enlightened, in doing what in the eyes of the latter, and in itself, was not sinful, but became sinful when done by the less enlightened, because the latter believed it so. For tho in these matters indifferent, as the apostle declares, "all things are pure," yet "it is evil for that man that eateth with offence" (Rom. xiv. 20). That is to say, if a man, in whatever he is doing, believes he sins, and intends to sin, he does thereby sin. Whatever be the nature of the act, there is the sin of evil intent. In Paul's expressive words, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth; and he that doubteth is damned [condemned] if he eat, because he eateth not of faith. And whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (*Id.* 22, 23.) Irrespective of all questions about any other faith, whatsoever a man does without any faith in its being what, according to his best light and judgment, is pleasing to God, is sin.

Now, instead of acting in the pride of a "knowledge that puffeth up," rather than the "charity which edifieth" (1. Cor. viii. 1), and thus speeding weak Christians on to destruction, we should sacrifice our own pleasure and emolument, when we can do so without moral compromise, to their spiritual welfare, in a charitable estimate of their scruples and judgments, however groundless, if yet they be conscientious. What can surpass the conclusiveness of the apostle's argument, or the urgency of his appeal? Speaking in reference to the treatment of those who felt that in eating meat which had been offered in sacrifice to idols, they were incurring the guilt of idolatry, he says: "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. For if any one see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge

shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the weak brethren, ye sin against Christ." (1. Cor. viii. 8–12.)

4. The grand conclusion of the whole matter is then reached by the apostle, in which we would approach the practical outcome of this discussion: "Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1. Cor. viii. 13). A conclusion somewhat amplified in the correspondent part of his letter to the Romans, when he declares: "It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. xiv. 21). This is only a segment in the grander sweep of that all-inclusive practical and theoretical law of the Christian life already emphasized, in which his treatment of this subject culminates—"Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

A man may be a Christian without being a Christian gentleman, and this, too, without being amenable to church discipline for being rough, coarse, boastful, self-asserting, and regardless of the just feelings and claims of others. But, it hardly need be said, this is a most unseemly and unedifying assertion of Christian liberty. How much finer and nobler is that exercise of it enjoined by the apostle—"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8). No wonder at the eulogium attributed to the infidel Bolingbroke, who is reputed to have declared his admiration of the apostle Paul "because he was so perfect a gentleman."

But the law of charity is not one-sided. If they who have knowledge that some things are sinless, which their weaker brother deems sinful, may not use their knowledge uncharitably in a haughty or uncaring contempt of his ignorant scruples, or in tempting him to commit that which, tho no sin to an enlightened Christian, is a sin to him, from his narrow standpoint; neither, on the other hand, may the weaker brother judge and condemn one who differs from him in his views and practice respecting these non-essential and indifferent matters. He is to presume that his brother acts in the case according to

his best light, and in all good conscience. Most flagrant breaches of charity tending to hurtful, and even fatal strifes and divisions, have often resulted from the fanatical and bigoted anathematizing of practices innocent in themselves, by ultraists, by one-idea reformers, by those "righteous over-much" in single lines of self-denial, who make abundant amends for this by swinging over to heedless and even foul self-indulgence elsewhere; who are monomaniacs in some one reform, and licentious in general living; whose prototypes were depicted once for all by our Saviour as those who "pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matt. xxiii. 23). From all such uncharitableness, good Lord, deliver us. Says Paul: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him" (Rom. xiv. 3).

And further, it may sometimes happen that, when narrow, ignorant, and fanatical people undertake to enforce, as a matter of absolute, universal, and intrinsic obligation, what, after all, falls under the category of things indifferent, and is to be determined by each one's conscientious judgment as to its expediency and propriety in the circumstances, it may be a duty to say so, and act accordingly. A principle may be involved in yielding to demands that we treat that as a sin, in its own nature and in all circumstances, which is only so by accident and in some circumstances, of which circumstances and their moral bearings each one, in all candor, must judge for himself; herein being subject to no man, and not at liberty to allow himself to be subject to any other. It may sometimes be a duty to do what otherwise would be better refrained from, for the simple purpose of asserting and vindicating a liberty unwarrantably threatened or invaded. Even in cases in which Paul exhorts to abstinence from things offered to idols, for the sake of the weak believer who protests against it as partaking of idolatry, he says: "Eat not, for his sake that shewed it; and for conscience' sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, NOT THINE OWN, BUT OF THE OTHER: FOR WHY IS MY LIBERTY JUDGED OF ANOTHER MAN'S CONSCIENCE?" (1. Cor. x. 27–9.)

So, while he declares, "All things are lawful for me; but

all things are not expedient," he adds, "I will not be brought under the power of any." He charges us to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v. 1). Because, of itself, external circumcision is neither morally good nor evil, in peculiar circumstances Paul circumcised Timothy, so as to avoid exciting the prejudices of the Jews against Christianity, and thus hindering his access to them for good. But when this concession came to be perverted so that Jews and Judaizing converts insisted on the circumcision of the Gentiles as essential to their salvation and recognition as Christians, and when Peter was giving some countenance to the demand, he discarded and denounced it utterly, because, practised in compliance with such a demand, it amounted to a sacrifice of principle and a surrender of the Gospel. Therefore he declares that Titus, who was with him, being a Greek was not "compelled" to be circumcised; and this, because false brethren "came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. ii. 3, 4). And herein he declares he "withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed."

It is obviously a chief problem of the Christian life, and of common morality as well, rightly to adjust the true maintenance and use of liberty in things indifferent, so as not virtually to sacrifice it and fall into a bondage, galling, ensnaring, debilitating, on the one hand; yet so as to promote the honor of Christ in our own and others' edification, on the other. We are not to allow others to impose on us super-scriptural standards of morality and conditions of salvation, on the one hand; or, on the other, to use our liberty in things indifferent so as to turn it into licentiousness, or to sacrifice, or subordinate the spiritual welfare of others to our own self-indulgence. While "free, yet not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness" (1. Pet. ii. 16). Charity, love, in every aspect and outworking of it, is to be the grand overmastering impulse of the Christian life. With tireless assiduity, with a heavenly tact and wisdom, we are to aim to adapt ourselves to all; to come into sympathetic, winsome communication with all, that so we may be in the best position to do them good; to gain them to Christ, holiness, and

salvation. So the practical conclusion of the whole matter is, that each one for himself, and especially all who would be wise to win souls, should make the great apostle's line of conduct their own, in due adaptation to time, place, and circumstance. "For tho I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law as without law (being not without law to God, but under law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, if by any means I might save some." (1 Cor. ix. 19–22.)

But here we must mark the boundary between Christian and Jesuitical expediency, wisdom, and prudence in upholding and propagating the church and Gospel. Within the sphere of things lawful, *i.e.* not sinful, all the resources of Christian ingenuity, benignity, fidelity, should be exhausted to devise ways and find media of successful approach to the souls of men, "if by any means we may save some;" if we may allure them away from sin, vice, evil, to Christ and clean Christian living. In things non-essential and indifferent we must accommodate ourselves to their prejudices, and infirmities even; yea, with sweetest persuasion and gentlest insinuation go down into their hearts, and draw them as with the cords of a man and the bands of love; or if they be defiant and presumptuous in their wickedness and irreligion, it may be expedient to awe them with the divine threatenings; by the terrors of the Lord to persuade them, and to pierce their self-inflation by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is our opinion that the Protestant and evangelical ministry fail far more grievously here, than in regard to preaching the substance and marrow of Christian truth. They may often fail of due earnestness, which is very much like want of blood in the body. But they fail still more, we apprehend, in that ineffable tact which rightly divides the word of truth, so timing, proportioning, adapting it that it shall stand forth, not in dead heartless abstractions, often abstractions of abstractions; but in living concrete forms, so that

men shall behold themselves in it as in a glass, and, with their needs, shall behold "Him that liveth, and was dead; and is alive forever more, and hath the keys of death and hell." If the weakness of the pulpit lies largely here, much more, unless we mistake, does great weakness out of the pulpit lie in just this region: in the want of heart, zeal, tact, to bear the heavenly message from house to house, and from heart to heart, with the kindling warmth of love, and the aptness of a heaven-inspired wisdom. We are sure that many pastorates now fearfully barren would be more fruitful, if this vacuum of kind face-to-face dealing with souls were properly filled. This is not the duty of the pastor only. It is the province of all Christians, especially office-bearers in the church. And no service is more rich in blessings to its doers, its objects, and the whole church. But it can scarcely be expected that others will be very efficient in this work, however much exhorted to it, with no stimulus and guidance of pastoral example. There have been pastors utterly refraining from such service, almost as much as if it were a *malum prohibitum*, who contented themselves with publicly scourging their people for not doing it, or into doing it—a process very impotent and unsatisfying to all parties, so long as the minister does not himself thus "allure to brighter worlds and lead the way."

But while they are, within the limits prescribed, "to become all things to all men, if by any means they may save some," they are not to go the length of doing evil that good may come, or of the Jesuitical maxim that "the end sanctifies the means." They are indeed to be "wise as serpents," but "harmless as doves." We are to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "Other things shall be added" unto us in due order. But we are not to commit unrighteousness as a means of promoting righteousness, much less for the sake of decoying people into the church, which so far as built up in this way is a very fabric of iniquity, not the temple of God. A fontal error is the subordination of other, even moral, obligations to that of promoting and enlarging the church. Pre-eminent is that doctrine concerning veracity which requires or permits the confessor to deny his knowledge of what is told him at the confessional, because he does not know, with a communicable knowledge—

scientia communicabile. This is one form of the doctrine of mental reservation in our affirmations; *i.e.*, making them according to truth, save wherein the mind secretly reserves the privilege of having it otherwise—a principle which, carried out, undermines all confidence between man and man, and disorganizes society.

The other bad maxim, once, if not now, in vogue with Jesuits and others, is found in Probabilism, so named. That is, as duty is often doubtful, according to some almost always so, probability may be our guide. This probability may pertain to the nature of the act, or the opinions of casuists about it; and since these opinions often differ, thus leaving pure probability for our guide, this will be followed if we take the less, or least probable authority. For even then we shall be following probability, which is our lawful guide. It is obvious that such a principle of duty undermines all foundations. There is no standard of right. Right may be the most, or least, probably right. We can never know what or whom to trust. Probability in any form never applies, more than expediency, to actions in themselves moral. It is only applicable, where expediency is, to things morally indifferent; and then only in reference to their most probable bearings or tendencies. But even here the doctrine that the least probability may overbear a greater and predominating one is itself monstrous, and subverts all ethical standards. It installs mere caprice as the guide of the vast majority of human actions. It is only matched by that climacteric proverb of unscrupulous greed and ambition—"Nothing succeeds like success."

In close neighborhood to this, lies the application of the principle of expediency to the times, ways, degrees of fulness, of communicating truth by those who possess it, not only to other classes, but to those in a state of mind incapable of appreciating or not perverting it. This includes also the case of those who consider themselves to have reached views of truth and degrees of knowledge beyond their generation or church. In respect to this general subject certain principles are beyond dispute. (1) No one can innocently proclaim as true what he knows or believes to be untrue; or that as certain which to his own mind is doubtful. (2) No man may from

selfish or worldly motives hold back truths or portions of truth known to himself, which appear suited to the wants of those whom he addresses; or when the non-avowal of them amounts to a failure to make a good confession before many witnesses, a "shunning to declare the whole counsel of God" (Acts xx. 27). But within these limits there is a certain liberty, which often becomes a duty, of reserve in the communication of truth or portions of truth, because, for one reason or another, those addressed are incapable of not perverting or abusing it. This is determined very largely by the knowledge or ignorance, the maturity or immaturity, the candor or obduracy, of those with whom we have to deal. We are not to cast pearls before swine. Babes in Christ must be fed with milk, the rudiments of truth, not with meat, or with truth in forms more advanced, abstract, or methodical, because they are as yet unable to bear it. It is beyond their powers of digestion and assimilation. It would therefore minister not strength, but debility. The Great Teacher thus held back important teachings until his disciples should come under fit conditions of training and discipline to receive profit and not harm from them. He told them, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12). Yet there are limits to all this. It is easy to stretch it so as to make it a pretext for unfaithfulness and time-serving, rather than a principle of wise and conscientious discretion in "becoming all things to all men for the sake of saving some." It would be absurd in itself, and a gross breach of trust, to always be withholding what the souls of the people need, because some are confounded by it, while others wrest it to their own destruction. It would be like keeping the sane in ignorance or error on account of the whims of the insane; like refusing to make the Scriptures profitable for "reproof and correction" to the great mass who need it, because it might still further distress some wretched victim of religious melancholy; like keeping the well on a starveling diet in order to avoid overloading spiritual dyspeptics. To withhold saving or edifying truth because it will be so misapplied by some as to become unprofitable and injurious to them, would amount to withholding it altogether. To some the preacher must be "a savor of life unto life;" to others, "of death unto death"

(2 Cor. ii. 16). Each new case presents its own peculiarities. None can be fully provided for by any minute, cast-iron rule. The heavenly wisdom, zeal, and love of the preacher are brought into constant requisition. He must do his best, without treason to truth and God, "if by any means he may save some."

The esoteric and exoteric, the progressive and conservative, and the obligation to publish or keep silent in regard to supposed discoveries in advance of standing beliefs, come under similar methods of adjudication, subject to one special qualification. While one who supposes himself illuminated beyond his brethren, or his time, is to judge before God whether the present voluntary promulgation of his views is, in the present condition and temper of those affected by them, likely to be for edification; and while he is never to deny or disguise them if called in providence to declare himself; he may justly feel bound to keep silence until he is sure they have passed beyond their crude and immature state to that ripeness which comes of long study, reflection, and experience. Nay, he ought to feel bound to this, rather than cause disturbance and convulsions by that very rawness which time will defecate from them. That brilliant genius, Horace Bushnell, late in life, characterized those works which thirty years ago convulsed the Congregational churches of Connecticut as "green."[1] Perhaps, had he waited till his views ripened before promulging them, much sad agitation would have been spared himself and his communion. But it must never be assumed that any man, body of men, churches, are infallible, or that they have mastered the *omne scibile*, or that the whole meaning of the Scriptures has been evolved, or that no new light will come forth from them, and upon them, through diligent study, and the illumination of God's Providence and Spirit. All plausible claims to new light should be candidly considered and weighed. The most charitable construction should be put even upon apparent aberrations. But if they strike at fundamentals, upon what within the pale of the Christian church has, not in the speculations of theorists and dogmatists, but in the faith, life, prayers, and hymns of Christian people, been accepted *semper*, *ubique*, *ab omnibus*, then we may conclude that, if the church has not found the substance of the Bible's teach-

[1] Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell, p. 553.

ing so far, it is undiscoverable. The Bible has then failed as a revelation to man. Infidelity is the true creed. This will not do. Our course is plain here. Accept whatever real light comes to us. "Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. v. 21.) "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 10). The charity that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, is a charity that rejoiceth in the truth. Indeed the whole matter of liberty, duty, and charity, in the manner of mutual dealing between those who suppose themselves more enlightened in doctrine and those whom they deem less so, is closely akin to the case of those who have more or less light in regard to the right or wrong of using things indifferent. To find the point of practical junction or reconciliation of the two principles—"If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not uncharitably," and "Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?"—is one of the chief problems of Christian life.

The application of the principles thus conspicuous and unmistakable in Paul's treatment of this great subject, which touches life at nearly all points and all times, must be left very much to each one's individual judgment and conscience. It is eminently the sphere of personal liberty and responsibility combined. Here we call no man Lord. One is our Master, even Christ. Questions of practice incessantly controverted—games, amusements, indulgences that have been and are sharply debated—find here the principle by which they must be tried. Are they, in a given case, for edification? Do they promote the moral and religious welfare of men? Are they conducive to good, all things considered?

It seems to us a beneficent use of Christian liberty to abstain from intoxicating beverages, not because all use of them is *per se* a sin, but because, while no duty requires them to be taken except in special cases for medicinal or hygienic uses, such abstinence promotes their disuse and so lessens great perils to ourselves, to others, to society. The evils averted by their universal disuse in our view surpass all calculation. But this does not justify us in making such abstinence a test of virtue, uprightness, or religion, or the want of it an iniquity to be visited with social ostracism, civil penalties, or church excommunication.

Different views of expediency and obligation may and do obtain here, and the liberty of each is not to be judged by "other men's consciences." Much less may we do evil that good may come, or maintain unscriptural doctrine in order to raise the supposed stringency of the obligation of abstinence above the plane of expediency to that of intrinsic and immutable obligation, like the duty of abstaining from poisoning wells. Such we esteem the doctrine, maintained by some, that all the wines, any use of which is permitted in Scripture, were unfermented and non-alcoholic. If the cause of temperance, as dependent on abstinence, can be placed on no stronger basis than this, it cannot stand or prevail. Not only so. But the system of torturing the Scriptures out of their obvious meaning, in the supposed interest of so excellent a cause, is capable of wide application, and may easily be made effective for emasculating them of whatever clashes with the baldest rationalism, or "the desires of the flesh and the mind;" in a word, for undermining the authority of that on which every good cause must find its firmest foundation. What higher ground of appeal do we want than that of Christian expediency—the duty of so using our liberty that it may offer no stumbling-block or occasion to fall to others? "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. xiv. 21). So says Paul. So say we. If this does not suffice, what will? When ceremonies indifferent in themselves were demanded of, and enforced upon, the reformers as a condition of unity, they deemed it the time not to yield even in things indifferent, if the demand was enforced by persecution. Says the Formula of Concord, *de cæremoniis ecclesiasticis:* "Credimus, docemus et confitemur, quod temporibus persecutionum, quando perspicua et constans confessio a nobis exigitur, hostibus evangelii in rebus adiophoris non sit cedendum" (Art. x. 4.)

We say this not only in interest of truth as such, but because we believe the cause of total abstinence itself, in all its most benignant influence, will, on the true basis, have a far wider prevalence than on that which many, as we think, in this respect, injudicious friends of it, have so long been attempting to substitute for it.

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