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A DISSUASIVE

FROM

MORAL INTOLERANCE,

DELIVERED AT BLOOMINGTON, IND.,

BEFORE THE

PHILOMATHEAN SOCIETY

OF THE

INDIANA UNIVERSITY.

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BY HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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This Address has been prepared for publication at the request of the Society before which it was delivered. The Author has taken the liberty, in re-writing it, to suppress some portions of it which contained familiar and admitted truths that he might have room for a more particular enforcement of such parts as might, with some, seem less familiar and more questionable.



## A DISSUASIVE, &c.

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Civil Toleration is the liberty of belief, without interference or penalty of the law. Moral Toleration is the same liberty, without moral punishment inflicted for its exercise. Such a restraint of the understanding, by moral or civil penalties, as shall obstruct its free and honest action, is mental servitude—a form of slavery worse than physical bondage; indeed, physical bondage is to be measured by the effects produced by it upon the moral and intellectual functions; and that is the worst which the most nearly enslaves the mind.

There are degrees in the servitude of the mind, as well as of the body, which, for our present purpose, it is necessary to mark.

The highest degree refuses to the mind, in endeavor, the proposing of its own belief, to itself. To be sure, the mind itself cannot be touched; but all the signs and evidences of its condition are observed; and it must, in semblance at least, think only upon subjects prescribed by authority; and on them only in the way which authority directs. It must believe upon formulas of others, not upon convictions of its own.

We regard this as the worst kind of MATERIALISM. There is a poor, gaunt, speculative Materialism, which rides some dry intellects with a carnal wand whose touch changes all qualities and affections into meat and blood; but what is this abstract spectre, compared with that real, living, practical Materialism, which regards the mind as a physical substance to be moved, like a stone, hither and thither at pleasure?—which treats thoughts and convictions as so much matter, to be hewn,

squared, shaped, pointed, and put up into whatever form the despotic architect pleases? The meagre, evanescent shadow of this, which haunts some philosophic systems, will, in general, do no other harm than to alarm superstitious night-watchers—the legitimate function of all unquiet ghosts; but this actual and potent Materialism of Authority, moral or civil, degrades and abuses the minds not alone of its possessors, but of whole sects, communities, and generations.

In the second degree of mental servitude the mind is permitted to form and enjoy its own belief unmolested, but not to propagate it upon other minds;—it is a liberty of *holding* opinions, but not of *using* them.

A third gradation frees the mind from responsibility to civil law for its belief and the propagation of it, but leaves it under the power of circles, sects, and communities, whose rules or discipline differ from civil laws rather in *degree* than in the *nature* of their power.

A perfect emancipation is effected only when the mind is permitted to form, to express, and to employ its own convictions of truth, on all subjects, as it chooses, without responsibility except to God. As there have been gradations in the mind's actual freedom, so there are gradations in the violence which is wrongfully applied to restrain it.

The stroke of death is the most absolute restraint upon mental action. It comes the nearest of any thing to laying force upon the very mind itself; since it dissolves those conditions, by which, so far as this state of being is concerned, the mind has power to act. All other violence acts upon the mind as a motive, which it may resist if it chooses.

The second class of constraints, in the upward scale, are civil penalties—fines, confiscations, disfranchisement, imprisonment, banishment, and, lastly, torture;—which last is the next in force to death. All these are of the nature of motive—motives from the suffering of the body.

Another class of constraints is found in the usages of limited societies which exist in every community,—sects, parties, lodges, and clubs. Their authority, usually deemed moral, may be, and full often is, of the most arbitrary and enslaving kind.

A fourth class of constraints are purely moral, but as efficacious, as will appear in the sequel, in violating the mind's liberty as iron bars, or civil disabilities. Of this class are prejudices, popular odium, hatred, not of tenets, but of the individual for holding them.

No man, and no human tribunal, has a right to touch the mind with any thing which is of the nature of a punishment for its opinions. Accountability for pernicious tenets is to God; and the remedy for them lies in counteracting reasoning.

If the object of dealing with a man be, to expose his errors and induce him to abandon them, how can *suffering*, mental or moral, become the means of such an end? Neither stripes on the body, nor the action of hatred on the mind, throw one ray of light on the error; but they inflame the errorist. If it be to deter others, this surely may be better done by an exposition of the truth; for the history of sects is the history of sympathy for error arising from the injustice which befell its advocates. If it be to defend society from pernicious errors, without respect to the fate of the individual defender, then I ask men to consider the fact, that almost every pernicious error, and widely mischievous book, which have afflicted the world, have had their origin where intolerance was legal, where the press was under censorship, and where the courts were open to try and punish wrong thinking. England had ten champions of infidelity before she permitted religious intolerance, where she has since had one. In tempting a mind to be untrue to its sacred convictions of truth, you make it an infidel to truth. Infidels have made infidelity; but despotic polemics have too often made infidels.

It is now as much a violation of the law of Tolerance to turn upon a thinker the tide of popular odium, for his tenets, as it was to hand him over to the civil law—as much, though a more refined violation. In either case, it is punishment for free thinking. You have no more right to excite the prejudices of his neighbor, or of his cotemporaries, against a man for his opinions, than you have to take his property or his personal liberty.

In short, it is time to say in plain words, **MORAL PUNISHMENT**

FOR OPINION'S SAKE, STANDS ON THE SAME FOOTING AS CIVIL PUNISHMENT FOR THE SAME OFFENCE. There is no difference between them in *principle*; and although one is less brutal and more specious than the other, both are alike a violation of God's law for the mind's freedom; both are despotic usurpation by men of God's unlent, undelegated rights; both are alike hostile to truth, to mental honesty, and to the peace of society. Nor will truth have a free course, full development, and confirmation, until, by universal consent, it is declared, and the declaration practically enforced, that man is not to be punished for his opinions, by *civil, social, or moral* penalties.

We challenge for the mind the right of commerce with all that the sun shines upon, all that revelation declares, and all which the imagination may evoke. For the use of this, as for the exercise of all liberty, man will account to God. To man he has only a *logical* accountability. Argument may punish argument; one mind may follow another, and expose its wanderings; one system may invade and conquer another system.

Our meaning will be clearer, if we inquire, more particularly, what is meant by moral punishment for belief.

*All intentional pain, damage, or odium, laid upon an individual by the disciplinary sentence of a society, or by public opinion, FOR THE SAKE OF HIS BELIEF, is a moral punishment.*

This is not the assertion, that *opinions* or *tenets* are not to be dealt with; still less does it imply that it is immaterial what a man believes; it simply denies that the right of jurisdiction over the *individual*, for his opinion's sake, lies in human societies, or in the general community.

It is worthy of distinct remark that such jurisdiction over the individual on account of his opinions is almost never claimed except by moral or religious societies; or by the community, except on moral and religious topics. Associations for scientific purposes, while they deal rigorously with facts, supposed truths, or theories, do not molest the individual who advocates them. In like manner, unbounded liberty of speculation is permitted on all questions of a civil, or judicial nature; and, to a very great extent, on social questions. No man is excommunicated from any scientific association merely for

holding theories or opinions at variance with truth; nor does he become, on such account, an object of odium. Speculations in political economy, so long as they are kept out of the vortex of political parties, are harmless to the author of them. The most mischievous notions respecting the family, and social relations generally, have been borne patiently, and promulgated without any moral punishment upon their advocates.

We are at a loss to know upon what grounds a distinction is made between moral and religious truths, and all other kinds of truths. Why is it right to punish men for supposed heresy in religious truth, when it is wrong to do it for secular errors? If experience has shown that such a moral toleration in respect to civil, social, and scientific truths, is entirely consistent with the safety of such truth—nay, eminently conducive to it—why should it be supposed that a similar course would be prejudicial to religious or moral truth?

Once, there was an almost uniform intolerance in respect to all truth. The progress of society has, one by one, emancipated different departments of it from such despotism. From all secular truth, both civil and moral intolerance has been removed. All that we ask, in the plea that we are making, is, that religious and moral reasonings, discoveries, opinions, and beliefs, be put, in respect to liability of punishment from man, upon the same footing as scientific truth.

As, with all upright and honorable minds, the only hindrance to the adoption of these views will be, the fear that by such a course truth will be prejudiced and error assisted, I seriously address myself to the task of showing that this fear is groundless.

I. The mind will be apt, at first, to confound the doctrine of toleration which we propose for *thinkers*—for the individual—with the doctrine of *indifference to truth and error*. Therefore, though asserted before, we make a special and emphatic testimony of our conviction of the vital importance of right belief over wrong belief. We firmly believe that our moral and religious opinions will be a subject matter of solemn account to God; nor do we, for a moment, allow, that *sincerity* is a substitute for *truth*; since it is as much a duty to believe right, when the means are within reach, as to believe at all.

We do not plead for moral toleration, as if, in the contests of truth and error, the one is to be deemed as good as the other. But truth, struggling to be free from error, can receive no aid from intolerance; since it is an advocate which pleads on either side; and, if allowed at all, is more apt to be feed on the side of wrong, than on the side of right. Civil and moral intolerance, being congenial to man's violent passions, has dwelt with them, and dealt more blows on the face of truth, a thousand fold, than on the shield of error.

2. It is claimed that religious societies and moral associations, held together by consanguinity of belief, have a right of self-defence against all such members as violate the common creed: that those who enter, know the condition of membership to be conformity to certain standards, and that, on purpose and with aforethought, they subject themselves to discipline for want of such conformity.

That voluntary associations have a civil right to impose obligations on their members, and to eject them for want of orthodoxy, will not be disputed. But two questions arise: whether such a course in societies for the propagation of truth is, in fact, most conducive to their ends? and, whether in the *practical workings* of such societies, there is such a voluntary consent on the part of their members to discipline for belief, as the *theory* of their organization implies? This last question will be considered in another place. Now, we only say, that, admitting to the full the civil right of a sect or society to discipline for error, it is not wise to do it. It is a course which, upon the whole, is more likely to establish error than to weaken it; it is more apt to prejudice the truth, than to illustrate or defend it. A man has a perfect civil right to act like a fool; has he a *moral* right to do it? A sect has a civil right to employ such means as will ensure their disgrace and dispersion; is it *expedient*, however? An association for the propagation of truth, is not bound by any civil obligation to employ the best means of doing it; but may, if it chooses, (as many do choose,) employ the very worst; but is it *wise* to embarrass or defeat one's own enterprises?

3. Moral punishment, in a popular government, often differs in form only from civil punishment. The measure of punish-

ment is the suffering it inflicts. Therefore, it will always happen that good and generous minds will be more punished by moral inflictions than they can be by civil. With what scorn does a great mind look upon an attempt to punish it for its sentiments, by a confiscation of property, by fines, or imprisonment? The noblest joy which belongs to man on earth, is to be conscious that he is sacrificed for truth. We are not to look into palaces, nor banqueting houses, for the highest forms of delight and joy; for the world would have never known their sublimest forms, had it not been for dungeons, fires, and racks. It hardly needed a divine injunction to induce really great minds, *to rejoice and be exceeding glad when men persecute them: or, to count it all joy when they fall into divers trials.* By the imposition of a fiery hand man feels himself ordained to be a champion of truth.

But it is possible, by moral discipline, to put a good man into so false a position with respect to all those for whom his soul cares, as that he shall feel himself to be disgraced. Cases might easily occur where it would be a thousand times easier for one to bear the loss of all estate and property, than to endure the perpetual frown of a whole community, the scowl of his equals, and, oftentimes, of his companions.

In the greatest number of cases, I admit, such moral inflictions do not act so severely; but it is because they do not act at all. It is the peculiar infelicity of moral punishment for belief, that it either does nothing or does too much. It becomes worse than a civil punishment, or it is no punishment at all.

The same is true in respect to *public sentiment* as an instrument of punishing men for belief. If it acts, it crushes with as much energy as ever did a civil decree. If the popular will chooses to disfranchise a man, it may be done by civil process; or just as surely by moral process. And in either case, with the same justice or injustice; with the same ruinous effects upon the victim.

To be sure, no decree prevents your citizenship for odious opinions; but citizens disown you. Ostracism sends a man to the desert; intolerance makes the crowded city a desert; and in either place, the victim is banished, stripped, and alone.

What is the difference, in effect, between taking from a man his civil rights of character and trust, and leaving those rights to him under circumstances in which they can avail him nothing? What is the difference between having no bread, and having bread which you cannot eat?

✓ Civil intolerance appoints an officer to torment a man for his opinions; moral intolerance appoints the whole community to torment him—which *may* be the lighter evil of the two; as, if a man *is* to be eaten, a pack of wolves is better than one wolf; for the quicker he is eaten the better.

4. Moral intolerance is open to the same objections as civil intolerance. It punishes the same thing—intellectual liberty; with the same liability of scourging the right as the wrong; it is an instrument which error may, when in power, use against truth, as powerfully as truth can employ it against error. It is a violence done to the rights of the individual, who is as much oppressed by moral punishments inflicted for his opinions, as by civil penalties. It seems to be a vexatious trifling with this subject to say that it is unjust to molest a man's body, his goods, or personal liberty, on account of his opinions; but that it is right to inflict a punishment, which, when it affects at all, is the most searching, insidious, hopeless, and helpless of all grievances which afflict humanity. It obstructs the mind's enterprise in investigation; it makes the timid afraid to venture; forces the courageous into extremes; and gives to error, often, the sympathy of all who hate oppression.

But has not society a right to defend itself from errors which would be fatal to its peace or existence? It has. But it has no right to defend itself by wrong means. If opinions are propagated which are fatal to society, instead of repressing, let them be developed, dissected, and the morbid separated from the healthful. Entire untruth is seldom a dangerous thing. Partial truth is the most successful form of error. Therefore, all captivating errors are bated with truth.

It is presumed that no system which has had a great discipleship has been without very much truth in its parts. And on this account, moral or civil penalties laid upon error, seem, to many, to be inflicted upon the truth. Thus, men's best



feelings are often made generously to serve the cause of error. But who will play knight-errant to a stark-naked lie? Let an error be stripped, its nature exposed, its specious alliance with truth destroyed; let the truth stand by itself, and all the false by itself, and the laws of the mind are arrayed against the error. Civil edicts do not refute, nor does public opinion discriminate; both may oppress, but neither of them can reason or expose.

But if men attempt to influence the passions, to teach the most detestable immoralities, to inspire the young with flagitious sentiments, or salacious ardors, may not laws repress such abominations? Is it, then, to be admitted that infernal sentiments in the hands of reprobate teachers are more than a match for the combined force of reason, virtue, and religion, in the hands of ardent and magnanimous men? If emissaries of iniquity go down upon the mass of society with their implements of vice, the worse their sentiments are the more easily will they become a prey to the lion-like courage of truth. Otherwise, we must admit that virtue and truth are intrinsically weaker than vice and untruth. Instead of an evil, toleration may be made an advantage to truth; since men perpetually incline to slothfulness in duty; and, immemorably, God has employed men's dangers to effect the performance of their duties.

But may not a righteous public sentiment visit such monsters with all the fires of its wrath? Is moral intolerance of such tenets to be condemned? This is certainly the extreme question on this subject. And although it is not unincumbered with difficulties, we think the truth to be substantially this: that against all such *opinions*, as against all others essentially atrocious, the utmost indignation must be felt. In respect to the individuals holding them,—if it were possible to conceive one believing and teaching such opinions, *with an honest and upright heart, and an intention of doing good*,—as in every other case of error, the individual should not, *by man*, be punished civilly or morally. But this is a case in which, it would seem, that no possible evidence could exist to show that such creatures were *sincere in their belief*, or *benevolent in their design*. It is not the case of a mind honestly employing error

for a supposed good end; but, of malicious wretches seeking by known lies, to effect the most flagitious designs. Upon such, public sentiment in its most avenging forms,—even if there were fire and brimstone in it—should rain down an intolerable and consuming storm! And, in such a case, it is not moral punishment inflicted for opinions, but for malevolent *actions*; upon infernal designs in which opinions employed are not matters of honest belief, but mere instruments, cared for in no wise as truth, but only as sure implements of destruction. CONDUCT is a legitimate subject of penalty, civil and moral. How far some sorts of sentiments are evidence of depraved conduct, is a fair question; but not to be discussed here.

Would you tolerate mischievous heresiarchs? No; but I would pierce with my pen, not my vote; I would lead them to the stake, logic should bind them and arguments should burn them. If men are bound in conscience not to suffer error, let them be bound in intellect and conscience to refute it. Error answered, is error slain.

“But errors are insidious!” Then truth must be eagle-eyed. “But they are so insatiably industrious!” If truth is not a better warrior than error, it ought to go to prison. It is a great and unsurpassable shame, that truth should be so indolent as to require the cheap and lazy expedient of irrational force to maintain its realm. Is the mind, armed with truth, a match for a mind in error? In the name of truth, then, why not let the contest be so settled. An army is ruined by teaching it to rely on bulwarks and ramparts. You ruin a mind by allowing it to fight behind ecclesiastical bulwarks, and to slay error by votes, or a blind public opinion. There be mighty men behind books, and customs, and ecclesiastical canons, who would groan in spirit, if compelled to deny themselves daily, take up their cross, and *think*.

So long as the cheap resource is permitted of physical obstruction or moral punishment, indolence will not care to employ a more laborious remedy. When it is known that there is no remedy for error but simple truth, the whole desire of the mind will be concentrated upon the discovery and employment of that truth.

5. It is said that liberty of opinion and of conscience breeds innumerable sects. Nay, the want of it would breed more sects. Activity of mind will always produce differences of belief in subjects not demonstrable.

If such diversity is borne in christian kindness, there will be no rupture. If it is shoved to the wall, and made to smart as a culprit, then, with the instinct of self-preservation, it will by association seek sustaining sympathy and strength to resist. Nine out of ten of the nomadic sects of religion would have lacked a name and existence, had they been let alone. But, no: conscience had a work to do. There never was any mischief on foot but conscience had a hand in it. Dissentience is pronounced crime. Then comes trial, ecclesiastical sentence, and a new sect. After looking at the origin of the most considerable sects, ancient and modern, I am impressed with the conviction, that they sprung as much from the intolerance of orthodoxy, (i. e. the strongest party,) as from vagrant ambition and restlessness.

6. Where freedom of opinion does not exist, *hypocrisy* always does. It springs inevitably, in some minds, from the effect just described. A mind not critically observant of its own motions, may be a dupe to its own self; may secretly worship at the forbidden fire of truth, but outwardly burn incense at an idol-altar, without consciousness of deceit.

But other minds do not act without knowing what they do; they *feign* with deliberation; they *practice* on purpose. Both in England and in France, when religious faith was compulsory, the best minds were insincere, and tainted with hypocrisy. It is thus, to this day, in Italy—a land which gives its ignorant over to superstition, and its intelligent to infidelity. At Rome, you will find the firmest disbelievers in the religion of Papacy. We *think* there is no religion in the system; but the Cardinals *know* it.

7. A violent constraint of conscience and opinion, if it becomes general, gives liberty to the vile for purposes of passion; and takes it only from the true and virtuous. The monstrous pretence of Authority, has always been, that freedom of speech demoralizes the community. So it does, if abused. But intolerance demoralizes it, not by abuse, but by its very

nature. The one is food, whose natural wholesomeness may be destroyed by excess; the other is poison, which needs no excess to make it deadly. The rabble cannot write; the myriad mass are not apt to disturb tyrants through the press. It is the educated and the independent minds which speak truth dangerous to bad men in power. Minds able to rise above their own age, to see in their largest view the principles of truth; fearless, earnest, honest minds, sagacious of all truth, are the ones which intolerance halts, hinders, or destroys.

8. Where opinions are penal, multitudes will be induced to disown their convictions of truth, and thus destroy their moral honesty.

No man can pertinaciously violate his sensibility to truth, and long have that sensibility. The mind turning upon new views descries in the distance, that if it thinks, it will in a little time come in contact with tenets which environ him, with the teachers who have fashioned him, with his associates, and with the opinions of the age. He fears to kick against the pricks, to break through that quickset hedge of prejudice which lines and bounds the road of settled opinions, and makes them, too often, mere prison-paths. The man is an infidel to his own convictions. This is *the* infidelity, of all others, the most dangerous; it is outward yes, and inward no;—conformity without agreement; a dead adhesion to unbelieved things.

The effect of this is to take from men all earnestness, all soul-fire. Men write to prove, as a galley-slave rows; it is his task; it is his duty. But that overwhelming rush and ardor of an enthusiastic mind, which devours the way with its speed, and makes error shrink even before the contact, cannot be had by the mind which sees truth which it dares not defend; and defends truth which it does not see.

How comes the spring out of winter? With delirious joy, with brighter leaves, sweeter odors, balmier winds, gentler dewy rains, with bursting buds, and vocal birds, and piping insects, it sweeps a wide train of exulting, animated accompaniments. So comes forth truth from the frigid zones of wintry error. But there can be no such spring, no wild

joy of heart, no sportive luxuriance, no gales, or balmy flowers, or melody, to a mind which advocates an unbelieved thing.

A free and honest, holy mind rushes toward truth as a bridegroom to his bride. He will doubtless pluck down the veil to let her beauteous face declare to him that no counterfeit is there; but that fear allayed, he clasps truth as his very soul's love, and all his life-blood beats in his heart upon her bosom, silently to declare to her that in all the world beside there is not to him so dear a thing.

This is that noble and exstatic heart which intolerance debauches—oh, with how utter a licentiousness, when it will turn and look upon an unbeloved, unbelieved thing, and wed it! Is not this adultery? If men will punish you for not believing as *they* do, will not the bright God of truth punish you more for rejecting his own spotless daughter?

9. But since the *bond* of sects is a common belief, should they not require it? Is not union a prime feature of the christian church?

At present there is not an intelligent, thinking sect in christendom which is consentaneous in opinion. If there be a sect in which the attribute of oneness is inherent, it will be found to be set and bedded in intellectual stupidity. That Romish sect, with a poor, decrepit fiction yet tolerated at its head, what is it? In part, it has the union of the sepulchre; and for the rest, the union of bedlam. When it is quiet, it is dead; when it is alive, it is convulsed.

*The church is to be one.* Therefore, to the Divine eye, before which all things are as if present and accomplished, it is one. But it has yet to grow into it. It is not until mind has differed and agreed again that there will be harmony. The church is like an organ, composed of many stops. It is now being built. It is to be *voiced and tuned*. One by one, its various stops, through all their pipes, shall glide into harmony, and the noble work shall give forth high chorals of solemn grandeur and matchless sweetness, if some imprudent tinker do not thrust in his hand to interrupt the gradual progress. There cannot be union yet, any more than there can be ripeness before the fruit has grown to it. While investigations are

going on, and the struggle is issuing towards a victory, there *is* no union, there *will* be none, there *can* be none. The enterprises on foot to procure it, before the human mind has ripened for it are in defiance of the nature of mind. I do not mean that it is not desirable, to be sought, and to be prayed for; but it must be as the *ultimate* end; as that bright future glory which is to crown a victorious struggle

I am weary of hearing the ten thousand times repeated fallacy, that there *must* be a union some where because it were an insult to say that God should make a *revelation*, which men after all should necessarily disagree about. There is then an insult of eighteen centuries. There is the indisputable fact that revelation *has* been diversely understood among its adherents. If irresistible conviction is a required sign and proof of a revelation, then we have none. It is an insult too not peculiar to Scripture, but thrust upon Nature. I hope God made Nature plain enough, but is science a system without dispute? There is no doubt that God made Nature very plain and the bible very plain; but *is* a very plain bible enough for very blind eyes? We may disagree respecting religious truth as they do respecting natural sciences; not because either of them are less than perfect, but because of the infirmities of the mind itself,

What is the first and fundamental truth which theology recognises? It is the universal wreck of mind—human blindness. How strange that that mind should not be treated then, as an unseeing subject. Fierce disputants put ban and anathema on those who do not believe that men are in darkness; and then put ban and anathema on these blind eyes for acting as if they were darkened. What if Christ had slain the man whose eyes he had touched, for seeing men, as trees, walking? Nay, he touched his eyes again.

The only Being who is infallibly right, and whose exquisite sympathies must needs make crime unutterably offensive, is the most *tolerant* being in the universe. He has been patiently teaching, for six thousand years, a world whose very name should be error; and has not excommunicated it yet; and has God given his disciples a right to do what he will not permit himself to do? The right to punish opinions does not reside in the church! The schism and the heresy of scripture are *conduct*, not speculative opinions.

There may be in the church a toleration arising from stagnation. A green-mantled pool, populated with musical frogs, might as well boast of tranquility and declare itself guiltless of shipwreck and drowned mariners. There is a toleration of weakness. A beginning enterprise has no power to punish. Its struggle is for life—*it must tolerate*: and it preaches it, because all the fruits of toleration in others comes into *its* lap. A wolf among lions would certainly be in favor of toleration; whether, if among sheep, it would not backslide from its orthodoxy, is another question.

There is a toleration of opinion in *mere* ecclesiasticism, ambitious of universality. The heart of such a sect lies in its rind. Like the exogenous plants, in botany, it increases from the outside between the heart and the bark. It is not an atmosphere, but a fence, once within which, all may do as they list. It is an army to which come every variety of men, unquestioned and unmolested, so that they fight for their colors. But a true and christian toleration is like none of these shrivelled and decrepit pretences.

It is that noble estimation of the sacredness of the mind's freedom, and that fearless confidence in the power of the truth to meet every incursion of error, that leads ingenuous, earnest minds to withhold from violence, civil and moral. It is not carelessness of truth, but magnanimous confidence in it: it is not indifference to error, but a love of justice which insists that even error shall be tried by *mind*, and not by force or votes, or frigid canons.

Religious intolerance is, in some respects, worse than all others, as it has conscience on its side. Like every other constitutional emotion, conscience has no eyes of its own. The intellect is its pilot. Of all the emotions, there is not one whose energy is so godlike when right, and so demoniac when wrong. The noble eloquence of the apologist for christianity, and the specious heresies which they attacked, sprung alike from conscience. The trembling refugees in caves, and their relentless pursuers, were alike nerved by conscience. The stalwart recusant, and the judge who condemned him; the heroic martyr, and the scowling monk who burned him; the sweet girl, thoughtless of guile or guilt, imploring mercy from

an inquisitor; she in whose face and form the very beauty of anguishfull sorrow dwells, and that immoveable tormentor whose zeal is to slay her, despite her moaning implorations—all these alike, suffer, or cause suffering, by reason of their conscience. It is a sword turning keenly which ever way the hand that holds it directs.

I pass to a consideration of our own time and nation; and to inquire after the condition of toleration among ourselves.

The idea of toleration has been so wedded to the term republican government, that, to many, it will seem impossible that there can be real slavery of conscience, of speech, and of the press in a Republic.

The existence of this spirit is to be learned from the spirit of a *people*, and not from their *institutions*. Governments do not change as fast as their subjects. Governments are often free in form, after freedom is lost; and monarchical, after popular liberty is established. Laws are the portraits of men's minds: the picture remains young while the man grows old; it thus becomes the likeness of what he *was*, and not of what he *is*.

If civil and religious tolerance were the peculiar attributes of monarchies, we should have abandoned it, when we abandoned them; we should have slain the whelp when we slew the lion. But intolerance was not the child, but the father of political institutions;—they did not make it, it made them. When God forsook, and sin entered the world, then came intolerance also with her father.

Like every essential tendency of corrupt nature, it will appear with every opportunity. It will assume its native form in a despotism.

In a limited Monarchy, if abated in its peremptory power, it strives to regain by cunning what it loses in audacity. In a Republic it feigns death, though "*it is not dead, but sleepeth.*"

In a radical Democracy, intolerance re-appears as young and as audacious as it was in a despotism.

Let us consider what dangers to tolerance are to be feared



from ECCLESIASTICISM; from POLITICAL PARTIES; from DEBAUCHED POPULAR SENTIMENT; and from the reflex influence of SLAVERY.

1. Intolerance of ecclesiasticism. The various sects may be put into four groups—those in whom the reflective and executive faculties are active, and *benevolence* the root-feeling: those in which the reflective faculties are active, and *conscience* the root-feeling: those in which the perceptive faculties are predominant, and *ideality* the root-feeling: those which have no characteristic root-feeling around which all others cluster; but, thrown together by the re-actions of other sects, are variable and inconstant.

The first of these are the most tolerant, and represent the church in its attribute of *progress*. The second is intolerant of all contrary beliefs, and represents the church in its *conservative* attitude. The third is tolerant of doctrine, but scrupulous and intolerant in matters of *taste* and *ceremony*. The last group represents the dust which the church makes in its advance, and is indifferent to all that the others believe, and tolerant of all that they disbelieve; and their providential function seems to be that for which the Canaanites of the mountains were reserved—to be scourges in the sides, and thorns in the eyes of Israel.

We are not to look for the practical condition of toleration in the conduct of sects toward their own members; for the rigor of the theory of government is often relaxed in practice by the gentle influence of personal affection; by the unperceived but natural influence of the gospel; and by the less desirable, and less worthy motives of interest, arising from the inter-action of one sect upon another.

In every denomination composed, to any degree, of reflecting minds, there will be two elements—the moving, and the stationary. It is vain to say that our ideas of religion are obtained exclusively from the bible, so long as the writings of eighteen hundred years are made the expositors of the bible. Our light comes to us through other men's minds,—through painted windows. Some canonical opinions will, by assay, be proved adulterated. Some will be found to be partial, some exaggerated, some false; and many that are true have not

been registered or expressed. Fermentation precedes purification. It is at the stage of fermentation that we are to look for the true condition of tolerance in any sect. If intolerance be sharp, a rupture ensues, and two sects are formed. If there be no explosion, the one or other party, at length, prevails and leavens the whole mass.

In every denomination, there are some restless and fanciful thinkers; some nomadic dispositions; some who love novelty, as others love truth; who regard change as good in itself. Around some idea, or system, a party gathers. If persecuted because untrue, their opinions are made sacred to them by suffering, and friends are prepared for them through sympathy, and they are established. If tolerated and subjected to trial by reason, they are, like vernal snows, changed to fructifying rains, enriching the soil which they overlaid and chilled. The outrageous discords which have raged in various denominations for years past, breaking out at their convocations into shameless quarrels, must be the exponent of the condition of toleration among sects.

To this is to be added the fierce intolerance with which one sect regards another. So much is hatred of other sects deemed a part of duty to our own, that, in many regions, the want of it is scarcely compatible with orthodoxy; and the presence of it is well nigh regarded as a substitute and equivalent for deficiency in every christian grace and feeling. If it be thought that the church will be lowered in the eyes of the world by such declarations by one of her servants, I reply that the mischief is already done. If we are blind to our own faults, others are not. Honesty to admit, and nerve to cauterize these cancers, will be the first sign of returning health.

2. Political parties, when corrupted, tend constantly to destroy toleration.

Party may be an association for the defence and propagation of *ideas*; or it may be a combination of force for mere executive purposes. In its first form, it is noble; and in its second, most evil. In its first form, the motto is, "*My party BECAUSE it is right.*" In the second, it is, "*My party, right or wrong.*" In its pure form, party regards truth, as a worship-

per reveres his God. In its corrupted form, party regards truth as a workman does his tools—to be used and then thrown aside.

It would be difficult to say whether the worst demoralization is thus wrought upon the moral feelings, or upon the understanding; both are debauched. Consider the popular watch-words: "*All is fair in politics.*" "*A lie stoutly defended is as good as truth.*" And this is not theory. It is terrifically true. Lying, deceit, cunning, venality, and bribery; intrigue and over-reaching, slander, infidelity to friendship, political hypocrisy, the intensest selfishness under sleek names, the bitterest vindictiveness, peculation, defalcation, and embezzlement—all are fair in politics.\*

We surely do not say, that all statesmen are crafty; or that all political leaders are unprincipled; or that the individuals of parties are all dupes or demagogues. But that demoralization is extensive, and alarmingly on the increase, is the constant declaration of politicians themselves; and all impartial men are disposed to think that, in this thing, they tell the truth. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that as parties are now conducted, politics exert, to the last degree, a pernicious influence upon the conscience and the understanding. It substitutes policy for conscience; and sharpness and cunning for honest thoughtfulness and sagacity.

Truth is mere merchandise. The right of cotton-bales, wool-packs, and truth, are all one—the right of the highest market price; and, for commercial purposes, to be respected.

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\* When a man steals small sums from private men, not for public good, but for his own, he is a THIEF, and goes to jail.

When one steals from the public, as a small remuneration for services rendered to a party, he PECULATES, and goes to Congress.

When public funds are, by a party, entrusted to one of its creatures, to be used for them, or for safe keeping, and he, true to his oath, *keeps* the money, it is EMBEZZLEMENT, and he goes to Texas.

DEFALCATION is a term employed to designate all those providential remunerations—houses, lands, and funds,—which are mercifully vouchsafed to all in whose hands public funds have made to themselves wings and flown away.

The name of pecuniary transactions of this sort, depends upon the size of the pile; the moral character depends upon the profits made. If the man is inexperienced and disgorges, with some sense of shame, he is dishonest; but if he *holds on* to his gains boldly, and defies men, he is honest; and a Committee is appointed to examine his papers to ascertain the best method of clearing him—which they seldom fail to do.

Mere politicians and party legislators will arrange every question by considerations of profit and loss. They will conform legislation to the principles of toleration when a premium is to be had for it; and just as readily legislate across the violated rights of conscience, if that is popular and politically profitable. There is a signal illustration at hand. For many years, the right of petition was denied in our grand national legislature, for political ends, against palpable right; until that glorious old black knight, CŒUR DE LION, thundering with his battle-axe, amid stones and beams and missiles, at the gates of the castle of Torquilstone, burst them in, and brought to an end the tyranny of *Front de Bœuf*.

While the leaders of the people are prepared to violate the rights of conscience and of speech in one way, the body of the people, and even good men, are becoming more and more resigned to the destruction of it, by the disgust experienced at its *abuse*. For now, I turn to the other side, and am obliged to say, that the exercise of this right has been with such perversion, that liberty has become licentiousness.

Our public press, while it conveys much information to the people, has, to a very great extent, become a special pleader at the bar of man's selfish and malignant passions; and may be said not only to be animated with the spirit, but to imitate the conduct of that one who goeth about seeking whom he may devour. And without violence it may be likened to the Cyclops, dwelling in a dark cave, with one eye, feeding on men.

The insecurity of character, the ruthless and protracted violation of truth on the part of some papers, the extraordinary licentiousness and growing impurity of others, begin to work, in many conscientious men, the fatal idea that no liberty were better than such liberty.

3. Liberty of speech and of belief is openly violated, in a form which differs from the intolerance of Austria, in nothing except in being more lawless and more dangerous.

The United States, is, I believe, the only land in which offensive opinions are **MOBBED**. Other lands have brutal riots, but they are the outbreak of suffering; it is the resistance of slaves to their oppressors; it is the lawlessness of men dying in a land

of enormous wealth from sheer starvation. Mobs in lands of grinding taxation, of excessive servitude, where intolerable want gazes unsupplied upon prodigal and superfluous abundance; where hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness, and love of wife and child and of life itself, are made to hate the law as the conservator of undeserved wealth on one side, and of undeserved poverty on the other; where the morning rises and the sun sets upon those who loathe life for very misery—in such a land there is a reason for mobs, even if the reason is unlawful and unjust. But when have a well-fed, an unoppressed, unprovoked populace risen up enraged, and rolled like a chafed ocean upon victims whose only crime was that of promulgating opinions adverse to the wishes of the majority? America, I believe, with her bills of right, her declaration of Independence, her free constitution, this land of liberty which no man tires of praising, has had the sole honor of such mobs—mobs of wanton abundance, of licentious liberty.\*

This is not the worst part of the matter. There is a widespread, latent sentiment in their favor. As usual, every body disapproves of mobs in the abstract; but mobs to put down abolitionists are not abstract mobs, and therefore do not come under the rule of hatred.

Even good men, too often, virtually justify them. They will withdraw and hide that weight of character and determined purpose to maintain order under which no mob ever rose. It is not, usually, until the hints and hot speeches of the influential portion of a community have conveyed to a mob a reasonable assurance of impunity, that they collect.

Mark, too, the terms in which blame is administered to the respective sides—the murdered victim and the murdering mob. “He had no business to inflame a community.” What business have a community to be inflamed? “He was rash, hot-

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\* In one set of schools, liberty of speech is the right of speaking what the majority speak; liberty of conduct, the freedom to do what you are bid; and liberty of the press, the liberty of destroying printing presses belonging to a minority. Liberty of motion, is that blessing of locomotion permitted to venerable age and trembling youth, for the purpose of escaping from the hospitality of chivalry. Chivalry! what is that? A word used to express an imaginary grain of gold set in a whole continent of mud. Henceforth, all men will know what is meant by *Kentucky toleration and South Carolina chivalry*.

headed, injudicious." Granted, all: he violated no law, nor others' rights; he only exercised his own. On the other side, the laws were broken, personal rights violated; the peace and safety of the community invaded; and the whole fabric of civil liberty shaken to the foundation, that private right might be trampled on! On the one side, mere indiscretion; on the other, monstrous wrong—all wrong: on one side, the sin of violent speech in a land forever boasting of the right of freest liberty of speech; on the other, a revolutionary concussion to punish such liberty, convulsing the whole frame-work of society, and putting everything at the mercy of the passions of mad-men. And yet, having seen many of these outbreaks, I have found in respect to the great mass of citizens, that their sympathies were vastly more enlisted to palliate the crime of the mob than to avenge the wrongs of the victim. This is a sin for which there is not in the range of possible things, a palliation. It begins in ruthless passion, it progresses by brutality, and it ends in a ferocious violation of public and private rights. It is wholesale murder; not of men alone, but of men, laws, and chartered rights. A man who moves with a mob, I account worse than a murderer; the one violates *special* laws; the other destroys the foundation of *all* laws; the one is disarmed of his danger by the horror which his deed inspires; the other attains the very climax of mischief, in that he performs his crimes without horror in the community, or compunction in himself. By the love I have of my country, by the love I bear unfeignedly to liberty of speech and of conscience, by my sense of justice and of right, I abhor, with unutterable detestation, that miscreant wretch whose traitorous tongue has swelled the outcry of a mob, and whose sacrilegious hand has dared to violate the liberties, not of his country, but of mankind, of universal human nature!

But, in cases where no open outbreaks or riots ensue, the feverish state of the public mind, in the presence of a discussion of unpopular topics, indicates anything but toleration. It is said on every hand, as if no man would be hardy enough to gainsay it, that a man has no business to agitate subjects which the majority of citizens do not wish to hear; that no one has a right to inflame a community, to disturb the peace,

to spread revolutionary sentiments, and to threaten the existence of the laws. Every member of these sentences contains a negation of the liberty of conscience and of speech. I have no right, by *force*, to disturb the order of society; but if I can do it by the efforts of my intellect, I have a civil right to alter every law, every institution, every custom of society; and that, whether at the first, citizens wish it or not. If not, how will the oppressed ever cry out against oppression? How can abuse be rectified? Had the apostles a right to urge against the rulers, against the existence of the government, a faith containing the seeds of a new order of things? Were the rulers right in their scourgings and condemnations? Despotisms deny the right of free speaking and unlicensed printing. A Democracy is doing the very same thing, and both are employing the same arguments to justify it. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" They are agreed. An unjust Democracy and a Despotism are the two forms of one spirit; and the passage of liberty, in some portions of the earth, in first breaking away from thrones, and at last ending in corrupt Democracy is very prophetically recorded in the following parable:

*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then saith He (the demon speaks:) I will return to my house whence I came out. Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

Undoubtedly; a whole state full of despots is worse than only one in a palace.

The influence of slavery has proved to be as adverse to intellectual liberty among the free, as it is to the civil rights of the oppressed. To say nothing of the condition of schools, and of the ennobling arts, in regions where slavery exists, it is a mournful spectacle to behold, in one-half of our land, the rights of free discussion virtually disowned. It is treason in the slave-holding States, with a few most honorable and cheering exceptions, to discuss this feature of their civil polity. It is said that the safety of society requires such prohibition. What state of society must that be whose safety requires the sacrifice of a

fundamental principle of civil liberty? What are we to think of a state of things to which darkness is indispensable, and light fatal?

There can be no more significant evidence of the political effects of a system of Slavery than the indisputable fact, that questions, settled two hundred years ago in other quarters of the globe, are yet undetermined at the South. The political right of every man to his opinions, and the undisturbed liberty of promulgating them, is not known, for the most part, in States where Slavery exists with any degree of vigor. Our national Constitution, embodying the results of all the sound political discoveries of centuries of revolutions and progress, is stretched over States in which the worst doctrines and worst practices of feudalism are alive, and likely to live. The future is full of gloom to the liberal mind. Instead of a visible prospect of amelioration, there is not a star in the firmament. Those which began to glimmer are passed away; and thick and deepening clouds have darkly settled over the wide region. The vague declaration, that the Gospel will heal the evil, brings no cheer. For, at present, all the sanctions of the Gospel are found, at the South, in defence of Slavery. Churches are rent and rebuilt to afford a refuge and indulgence to doctrines of servitude. The Gospel Ministry are either prudently dumb, or eager apologists for domestic oppression. That there will proceed from the Gospel a reforming influence I firmly believe. But it is a belief by faith, and not of sight. As yet, the progress has been backward. The Churches in the South were, in their origin, almost free from participation in the doctrine or practice of Slavery. The States have never since been so ready to emancipate, as they were at the adoption of the Federal Constitution. The local and temporary commercial profits of Slavery have given it a power not only to exist, but to extend itself; nor have all the barriers of a free people, nor the moral influence of the Church, nor the doctrines of religion, been able to withstand it. Again the Sun has stood still; again the shadow has gone backward on the dial. And the world is amazed to see a Minerva, full armed for oppression, springing from the head of Liberty.



Gentlemen, there is more than a physiological interest in examining what sorcery that is which has so beguiled the once enfranchised mind of this people. What precious leek and onion, what remembrance of mellon and meat is it which leads this new Israel, after escaping from Egypt, to cast such wistful glances thither again? I pass by the political reasons, as inappropriate here. There are few minds which can resist a sympathy with oppressors, when the three master-passions—love of power, love of money, and of licentiousness—are combined. They have always been united in every system of servile oppression. The influence of the last—licentiousness—is more than the unthoughtful suspect. It is inherent in every system of general servitude. It was this that made the Jews willing, for so long a period, to revert to service—a license not inherent in their own system of slavery, as it was in all oriental servitude. It was of Helot-slavery; of slaves in war; it was the law and practice of imperial and private slavery at Rome. Even when slavery changed to feudalism—hardly a change after all—when the *names* changed rather than the *thing*—and villain and hereditary tenant represented the ancient slave, this love of licence—the *jus primæ noctis*, remained the Baron's right.

Let what will be said of men's natural goodness, an issue cannot be made, before a mixed people, between mere justice on one side, and power, wealth, and lust on the other, but that the multitude will sympathise with the warm passions, and not with cold right. Passions are the property of all; but justice, in a high degree, is the sentiment of but few. Justice was never established except by the sufferers for *themselves*. No people have ever conferred it upon others against their own interests. If the animal parts of our history were taken out, if the land and naval battles, and heroic exploits of various kinds, together with the hatred of Great Britain, there would be, among the mass, very little enthusiasm for the mere, severe principle of justice and of right.

It is from this want of sympathy with mere moral right, and this strong affinity for warmer passions, that we have much to fear. For the evil is growing worse; all things are carried by appeals to the passions, to interest, to appetite. The sound

of a trumpet, and the roll of a drum, are enough to upset all the considerations of justice bequeathed to us from our fathers.

Now, as the popular mind assents to the system of slavery, it gradually sympathises in the method of maintaining it, viz: a bold denial of the right of discussion. It is thus that we are betrayed. The mass of community, by unlawful sympathy with oppression, have turned against liberty of speech and of conscience, and do not hesitate to violate both.

The fact, that the public mind is untrue to the right of speech only on this one subject, is no relief to our apprehension. When a free, a boastfully free people, can sacrifice rights of conscience for the sake of slavery, what is there that they cannot do upon adequate temptation? If it is true that a question of passions is superior to a question of moral truth, then tyrants are our judges—for passions are despots; and they will make war upon mere *right* whenever it assails wrong-doing.

It is in vain to say that science is free; that learning is free; for they were never bound. These are not the influences which shake authority or portend reformation. Tyrants would be glad to found libraries, build laboratories, and dignify science, or to do any thing else, which shall satisfy the hungry minds of strong men and keep them aloof from questions of *human rights*. Arts are apt to flourish in despotic governments. It is the price paid for slaying the prophets, that their sepulchres be decorated; and it is a cheap bargain, to purchase men's rights, and pay in books, statues, painting, triumphal arches,—as Buonaparte knew full well.

In this land, may I fearlessly encounter and disclose the vast iniquities of human passions? I shall not be molested if I only philosophise upon them, or reprehend them, as old Eli did the misconduct of his sons—"What is this I hear—why do ye so—ye cause the Lord's people to sin;" if I prettily pester popular abuses with taps and pats, and many kisses between, it will surely be tolerated. An army of Lilliputians might shoot their tiny arrows at a rhinoceros, unendangered; and even the behemoth, we are told, only laughs at those who fish for his ponderous majesty with pin-hooks. And if, while huge abuses roll their vast bulk in an ocean of license, disporting full many a rood at their pleasure, we will be satisfied only to go down

to the shore and shout at them, they will be satisfied to let us. There is not a lion in Numidia that will take the pains to hunt his hunters; but bring him to bay, pierce his brindled hide, or shake the spear at him, and will he flee, or supplicate? or, with front of majesty, and eye of fire, will he not dart down among his enemies, with death in every stroke?

Every succeeding age is to be more fruitful of reforms than any before it. The nature and province of governments is not yet settled; governments are changing—ours is—no less really, because without open change. No Constitution *can* stand still fifty years, without falling behind its subjects; for men change, expand in ideas and experience; and society, like a hive, asks new apartments. Men know how to meet those changes which accompany open revolution; but not those which occur by a silent, secret, gradual growth, and whose results are only to be seen at periods of ten and twenty years. Yet these are *the* changes. They usually take place in *portions* of society at first; at length are expressed; and then comes the struggle between reform and conservation. The constant recurrence of such trials requires at our hands the earnest maintenance of the doctrine of toleration. There is to be a great struggle also upon the subject of property. Is there no reform to enter such a monstrous condition of things as exists in Europe between the laborers and the employers? Is it to be said that Political Economy has settled its fundamental principles, when ninety-nine citizens are liable to starvation, and the one hundredth has wealth beyond all reasonable wants?

It is admitted that no man has a right to power simply because he may be able to obtain it—might does not make right. Why, then, in a community where subsistence is limited, should a man have a right to all the property that he can make? In a new country, with a sparse population, he may; simply because no harm ensues; there is enough for all. But in crowded cities and nations, where population overgrows their support, I think it admits of a question whether *one*, because more sagacious, has a right to absorb the wealth and leave the majority poor. When it results in the suffering of the mass, why does intellectual might in amassing property have any more right than physical might? I do not teach

agrarianism. This topic is introduced merely as an example of subjects yet to come up for discussion under tremendous excitements—the necessities of the million on one side, the chartered privileges of property on the other. Every step which society makes in improvement, it makes against some entrenched and powerful evil. The Gospel came to bring a sword; it is not warlike; but the enemy which it will supplant, is; and every particular amelioration which the Gospel works upon society, will bring out opposition. The human mind is no longer a morass, stagnant, exhaling only the malaria of superstition. It moves; its motion is continually wider and stronger; and will continue to be, until universal *right* shall breathe universal peace. The necessity of toleration will be greater as the world advances to the conquest of all evil.

It is not because I am doubtful, but because I am sanguine of the future, that I thus speak. We are destined to glorious days; but we shall pass through trying struggles before we reach them. It is to be a struggle between reason and custom; between right and power; between that religion which teaches to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that selfishness which despises any barrier between men and tyranny; between the oppressed of every sort, and their oppressors.

It is in view of such times, that I am constrained to advocate the freest Rights of Reason.

GENTLEMEN:

In presenting you these diplomas will you hear from me a parting word.

You enter a world of factious parties; of venomous sects. You must be in their circle, but you must refuse their spirit; you must labor with them, but not like them; they are full of evil; that evil must never beguile your affections.

Go not with any party, as if truth always belonged to strength; withhold not yourselves from any party, as if truth could not dwell with weakness. Contend with error by your understanding; extinguish it, as the sun doth feeble, false lights, by the brightness of a greater.

Let your convictions of truth be as sacred as the name of God. Men, interest, pleasure, have no right to lay a hand upon them. Live for truth, and you will live as long as it does.

And, as your Model,—to cheer you in many a weariness of your troubled way, to save you in every girding temptation, to inspire you when almost fallen from your integrity through faintness and fear,—I present to you that Solitary One, who, in all excellence, must forever dwell alone,—JESUS CHRIST—the only perfect understanding without spot of error; the only heart that earth ever had which knew how to be patient and gentle with error, that it might take it away. May He give you the key of truth, and you shall find it to be the key of life and of Heaven.































































































