

ARTICLE III.

THE DOCTRINAL ERRORS OF MILTON'S  
LATER LIFE.

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THERE is scarcely any thing pertaining to the history of Milton that is not full of interest alike to the student of national thought, as expressed in literature, and the student of individual life, as expressed in character. Of Milton as a poet, all the historians of English letters have fully treated; nor can it be said that the study of his prose writings—political and ecclesiastical—has, in any sense, been neglected. Of Milton as the theologian and ethical philosopher, however, far too little has been said, in order to give to intelligent readers of his life an ample and a satisfactory view. Macaulay, in his brilliant essay on Milton the poet, simply touches upon the subject and passes on to his main purpose. Recent biographers have imitated the English essayist in referring to the question and leaving it. It is not surprising, therefore, that great diversity of opinion exists respecting the later religious tenets of our author, and more especially so in that this opinion has been based altogether upon his poetry and English prose. Although we find herein a full discussion of his political, social, literary, and denominational views, we do not find, save incidentally, a discussion of doctrines distinctively ethical and theological.

In our present purpose, therefore, the special treatise to be consulted is the one entitled *De Doctrina Christiana*, a posthumous work in Latin, translated and published by Bishop Sumner in the early part of the present century. Special interest has, of late, been awakened in the teach-

ings of this treatise, inasmuch as discussion has been rife as to the poet's peculiar views on the Trinity, and in that Professor Masson has seen fit to close the sixth and final volume of his great literary work by calling attention to it. He speaks of it as a "very important and curious book, which, had it been published while Milton was alive, would probably have exerted very considerable influence on the course of English theological thought, as well as on the traditional reputation of Milton himself." Mr. Pattison, in his recent life of Milton, expresses similar views.

It must be confessed that Milton's reputation for orthodoxy, so called, is largely "traditional," rather than historical; based upon a cursory study of his earlier poetry and what should have been, as we suppose, his opinions, rather than upon the more mature declarations of his later years. It is to be deeply regretted that Milton ever penned such a treatise and defended such views; but, still, as Masson adds, "The book exists; it is Milton's, and was his solemn and last bequest to all Christendom." Nothing is to be lost, but everything gained, by strict historical accuracy at this point; and it is for the purpose of literary instruction and moral warning alike that we enter upon the discussion before us.

#### STATEMENT OF BELIEFS.

##### 1. *The Creation.*

As to the creation of all things from nothing, the author enters into a lengthy argument, based on Scripture and common reason, to show its falsity. He contends that it is morally impossible, even to God, since no agent can act externally to himself unless there be some "patient,"—some passive matter, recipient and formative. Advancing, then, to the denial of the eternity of matter, he answers the question pressed upon him as to the origin of this first substance, by affirming, "that all things are of God." "Of him are all things." God, he would say, as

the all-embracing one, is the sum and expression of all causes, formal and material, as well as efficient and final. God is, thus, the material cause of the external world, it being "a substance derivable from no other source than the fountain of every substance." This reads very much as if a refined form of pantheism. He, thus, holds to the absolute purity of matter at the beginning and at present. It is pure as God is pure. And he further contends, somewhat ingeniously, that, as all things are not only from God but of God, nothing can be annihilated. When his opponents reply that body cannot emanate from spirit, he answers, "Much less can body emanate from nothing"; and he adds that this is no more incredible than that what is spiritual should arise out of the corporeal, as we are taught in reference to our bodies at the resurrection. Hence, he is somewhat consistent in refusing to make that sharp distinction between matter and spirit which was insisted on by Descartes, in common with the orthodox philosophy of the time, and broaches a theory as to their essential union more in accordance with the school of Hobbes. He holds it to be unscriptural and irrational "that the spirit of man should be separate from the body." He goes so far along this lower level of expression that he has been accused of materialism, if not, indeed, anticipating, in a degree, the modern theories of evolution.<sup>1</sup>

It is in point, here, to remark that Dr. Johnson had reason to criticise Milton, in that he confounded matter and spirit in his statements as to good and evil angels.

## 2. *The Sabbath.*

As to the origin and obligation of the sabbath, he argues, correctly, that it was instituted by God, at the close of his creative work, in remembrance of a finished creation. He tells us, however, that Moses, writing the Book of Genesis much later than the announcement of the law, inserted this sabbatic statute from the fourth commandment, and that the Israelites, then, for the first time, came to a

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. lines 468-505.

knowledge of its true significance. He tells us that the Jewish sabbath has been abrogated, and that no particular day of worship has been substituted for it, as they affirm who now observe the Lord's Day. He teaches that, if such a day is to be observed at all, it is on the basis of ecclesiastical authority, and not upon the basis of that decalogue which, according to the truest interpretation of gospel liberty, has altogether passed away.

### 3. *Christian Ordinances.*

With reference to public worship, he defines the visible church as, "The whole multitude of those who are called, in every part of the world, and who openly worship God the Father through Christ in any place whatever, either individually or in conjunction with others." As we know from his biography, he preferred communing apart from the public assembly. How such a one as Milton could have "grown old," as Dr. Johnson writes, "without any visible worship," is a question of no common interest to every ingenuous student of the English mind.

As to the Christian ministry, it was a favorite view of the author's, that any believer having the proper gifts is competent to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. "It is a foul error," he writes, "though too much believed among us, to think that the university makes a minister of the gospel." In a word, he sanctions the doctrine of lay preaching. He does this on the ground of scriptural teaching, the example of the primitive church, and the increasing needs of the people. He is, thus, very decided in respect to the support of the ministry. He holds it as indispensable to the success of true religion that its heralds should be truly apostolic in this particular and render a gratuitous service. They are to rely on the providence of God, on the spontaneous liberality of the people. Milton was amazed at the covetousness which prevailed among the clergy of his day. In one of his treatises, where he is speaking of hirelings in the church, he pours forth some bitter utterances against those who

evinced this mercenary spirit. "Of all persons, are they to be reviled and shunned," he says, "who cry out, with the distinct voice of hirelings, that if ye settle not our maintenance by law, farewell the gospel." If it be asked, here, should voluntary aid be lacking, in what way temporal need is to be supplied, the poet still refers to apostolic times and methods. He advocates a bodily support gained through the medium of a lawful trade. He urges the prosecution of such a trade by the ministry, both in connection with their preparatory training and the actual work of preaching. Calling to mind the objections that would be raised against such a proposal, he breaks out with unusual vehemence of language: "Our ministers scorn to use a trade, and count it the reproach of their age that tradesmen preach the gospel. It were to be wished they were all tradesmen; then would not so many of them, for want of another trade, make a trade of their preaching."

#### 4. *Death.*

In his chapter on *The Death of the Body* he argues, at great length, that the whole man, body and soul, is subject to death.<sup>1</sup> It is evident, on this hypothesis, that there can be no intermediate state, either of happiness or woe. Death means the actual cessation of all that of which life can be predicated. If charged with holding the doctrine of annihilation, the author would answer, that this cessation was but temporary; that the bodies and souls of all the dead were to be raised and called to judgment. This doctrine, it will be seen, naturally grew out of the author's views as to the unity of body and soul. He speaks of it as a doctrine that may be discussed without endangering our faith or devotion, and which is in no sense derogatory of the mission and ministry of Christ.

It is a lamentable discovery, made by the studious reader of Milton's religious views, that, as these peculiar opinions increase in number and influence, the author's

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. lines 782-93.

power to distinguish between the true and the false, the essential and the non-essential, seems to be proportionally weakened.

5. *The Holy Spirit.*

Milton expresses his decided dissent from those who affirm the Spirit's equality with the Father. He speaks of it as "contrary to human reason, and nowhere expressly taught in Scripture." As was his custom, he begins the exposition of special passages, and runs over in order the different attributes of the divine nature as applicable to the Father only. Though he had spoken of "The Eternal Spirit," we hear him saying, ere he dies, "The Holy Spirit was created at the divine will, probably before the foundations of the world were laid, but later than the Son"; thereupon he is made to be inferior in name and office.

6. *The Deity of Christ.*

It is interesting to note the various opinions that have been held as to what the author really believed on this subject. Sir Thomas Browne, in his edition of the poetry of Milton, remarks of the Christian Doctrine, that it has been adduced "both in support and in refutation of the charge of Arianism." On the one hand, we read from Hallam, "Milton's treatise gives us the Arian hypothesis." Sir Isaac Newton, on the contrary, asserts that there are in his works "more passages to overthrow the opinion as to Arianism than to confirm it." With this posthumous treatise open before us, it is difficult to account for such diversity of view, or to believe any thing else than that Milton did not hold the commonly accepted doctrine of the Deity of our Lord. A more particular examination of the subject may confirm this. We have already referred to Professor Masson's exhaustive biography. Every reader of it will remember how much stress he lays upon the influence of the time upon the author, and how careful he is to exhibit the continuity of the different periods of the author's life. Bearing this in mind, we note the significant fact that when Milton, a boy of fifteen, was at St. Paul's

School in London, the master, Mr. Gill, was known as the author of a treatise *On the Trinity of Persons in Unity of the Deity*. The work was a refutation of the argument of a certain Thomas Manning, an avowed Arian. Each of these treatises was accessible to the young student, so early distinguished for mental acumen. At this early period may have begun the agitation of that subject which appears in all his subsequent writings. In his *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, written at twenty-one, he speaks of Christ as the "Infant God"; as "sitting in the midst of Trinal Unity." In his tract on *Reformation in England*, in speaking of the possibility of martyrdom for error, he writes, "Witness the Arians and Pelagians, whom we take for no true friends of Christ." He speaks of the General Council of Nice, convened to denounce this heresy; and in his sublime invocation to heaven, on behalf of the suffering church, he calls to the "one, tri-personal Godhead." He laments the danger in which the people stand of being infected by the prayers and hymns of the Arians. In his *Animadversions* he indignantly asks, "Should he move us who goes about to prove an imparity between the Father and the Son?" All this, it is to be remembered, is expressive of Milton in his earlier life and teaching. Shortly after his return from the Continent, however, there begins a gradual transition from an unshaken belief in the Trinity to a position more or less peculiar. This change of view is clearly discernible in his epics, and fully completed in his *True Religion and Christian Doctrine*. Whatever may have been the declarations of his earlier years, these must give place to the later. Turning to the *Christian Doctrine*, we note his assertion, prefatory to his chapter on the Deity of Christ, that he is about to advance an opinion on this subject "much more clearly deducible from the Holy Scripture, and more worthy of belief, than the received opinion." Hence, we must conclude that, whatever the author held on this subject, he did not hold the

commonly received view,—a view with which he was familiar, and to which he had more than once given his assent in the very first of the Thirty-nine Articles. He explicitly states this opinion: "They hold that the Son is also co-essential with the Father, and generated from all eternity"; "a proposition," he adds, "for which it is impossible to find a single text in all Scripture." He then advances to a special exegesis of contested passages. He reaches the result that the generation of the Son was dependent upon the divine decree. The hypothesis that the Son was essentially one with the Father, he calls an hypothesis "no less strange than repugnant to reason; an absurd paradox, sustained by futile subtleties, juggling artifices, and the treacherous aid of sophisms and verbal distinctions." He appeals to the language of the Fathers; to that of the Apostles and of Christ; to reason and to Scripture; to extensive reading and to exegesis, in proof of his proposition. Everything tends to one conclusion. When this is reached, the author closes with a series of sweeping assertions: "Such was the faith of the saints respecting the Son of God; such is the tenor of the celebrated confession of that faith; such is the doctrine which alone is taught in Scripture, and which is acceptable to God."

As to the theoretical beliefs of the poet, therefore, regarding the vital doctrine of the Deity of Christ, we can arrive, however reluctantly, at no other conclusion than that reached by President Coppee, "that he is proved, by his own confession, to be a Unitarian or High Arian." The general drift of all his latest and best poetry teaches the same principles, so often implied in his latest prose,—that the Lord our Saviour, though *verus Deus*, was not *summus Deus*. The few passages which seem to teach the absolute equality of the Son with the Father are but exceptions confirming the rule.

From such a survey of the doctrinal errors of Milton in his later life many questions of deep significance arise:

1. We are led, first of all, to inquire as to the special occasion of this sad transition from early evangelical faith in the Trinity, and other fundamental beliefs, as expressed in the Anglican Articles, to an unqualified endorsement of principles condemned at the Council of Nice and by the general consent of the church. This is one of those questions to which the special biography of Milton and the records of the period afford no satisfactory answer. The full reasons for such a departure must have been known to the poet only.

In answering this question approximately, it may be noted that no characteristic of Milton's nature stands out more prominently upon the pages of his writings than the love of individual judgment. He had adopted the principle, very early in life, "to swear in the words of no master." Every prose treatise that he wrote might be called an "Areopagitica,"—an argument for the fullest freedom of expression. This was, undoubtedly, the leading motive, whatever may have been the subordinate ones, which induced him to abandon his early intention to enter the ministry of the Established Church. As he himself expresses it: "Seeing that he who would take orders must subscribe 'slave,' and take an oath, withal, which, unless he take with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure or split his faith; I thought it better to preserve a blameless silence before the sacred office, bought and begun with servitude." He speaks of himself as "church-outed by the prelates," enslaved by what Dr. Wilkinson would call "the bondage of the pulpit." In those transitional and troublous times this bondage was official, and the prelatie injunctions of Laud were far too stringent to be obeyed by such a man as Milton. Although, as Masson intimates, it was possible for an "English clergyman to advocate Puritan and Calvinistic doctrine, and to step into the diocese of some liberal bishop"; to enter the church in such a manner was not in Milton's nature. It was precisely in such an inde-

pendent spirit that the author sat down to the discussion of all unsettled questions, and to the writing of his Christian Doctrine, based, as it is, upon the exegetical study of the Scriptures and the reading of the Fathers. After he had studied every thing upon these subjects that commended itself to his judgment, we hear him confessing that it is impossible for him to rest his creed or his hope upon any or all of them, and that, in order to the peace of mind which he is craving, he must formulate from Scripture a theology for himself. To this work he addresses himself, under the divine injunction "to prove all things." If this be heresy, he argues, with Saint Paul, "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." So pronounced is Milton's personality as a thinker that, in his argument on the Trinity, his mental independence overreaches itself. The basis of the argument is that this doctrine, as held by the Christian church, is irrational and unscriptural.

Literary historians tell us of "a certain haughty self-esteem" in the author. It is thus that Wood, in his narrative of Milton's university life, remarks "that he was esteemed not to be ignorant of his own parts." Never yielding his opinion on important questions, there were times when that doctrinal humility for which he was earlier noted seemed to be in abeyance. There was an extreme self-consciousness in the discussion of difficult moral problems. He insisted that each man had a divine right to inquire into truth for himself under the guidance of the enlightening Spirit. In this respect he was not only a Protestant against Romanists, but against many Protestants themselves of his time, in that he accepted no ecclesiastical creed whatever, save as he could adjust it to what he believed to be the dictates of right reason and the declarations of Scripture. Milton was, beyond question, ingenuous in his doubtings. Living at the birth of deism, he accepted every occasion to express his faith in the Scriptures and to confirm, in that rationalistic age,

any wavering minds. This granted, however, the purity of his motives did not save him from many a dangerous error, in giving the weight of his authority and example to a method of investigation hazardous to inquirers after the truth.

Taking the entire life of Milton, therefore, and the history of the time, into account, we can discover a partial explanation of this transition from faith to doubt, in that he unduly magnified the right and duty of individual opinion. As to any further solution of the mystery, no light has yet been given us. As to the time of the transition, historians seem to agree in dating its beginning about 1645, and its full completion at or shortly after the Restoration. It is in the presence of this radical change of view that Masson states, "Milton cannot be identified with any one of the English sects of his time." He had some sympathies with the Baptists; many with the Quakers and the Independents. The most that can be said is that he was a Protestant and a Puritan, opposed, alike, to Romish and Prelatical authority. In such isolation he was consistent, for his doctrinal views, as already presented, would have properly excluded him from the orthodox denominations of the time. In this is furnished a lesson to those who insist upon remaining within the bosom of a religious order whose creed and confessions, once endured, they have been led conscientiously to renounce. Their proper place is outside the pale of such an order, either absolutely alone in their opinions, or among those in doctrinal sympathy with them. Milton acted frankly in abandoning the Presbyterian form of government for the baldest independency. No narrower system would have been wide enough for his ever changing views.

2. Accepting, thus, the peculiar position which Milton assumed relative to the Trinity and other vital doctrines, as honestly formed and maintained, a second question of importance presses itself, and we inquire as to their effect

upon his private life and the moral influence of his writings. It is in answering this question that we strangely meet with one of the noblest and purest characters in literary history. From his earliest boyhood we notice that seriousness of soul which, according to Taine, is the central element in the composition of the Anglo-Saxon mind. He confesses that he has but little faculty in frivolities and jests. His face at twenty-one has all the gravity of a face at forty, and the later Milton, so grave and contemplative, was the most natural development of the earlier Milton—the sober-minded boy. In reference to the ethical influence of his teachings we note an interesting fact. The author, being aware that some of the doctrines which he holds are a departure from the accepted faith of Protestant Christendom, and that he may thus become the occasion of injury to the cause of truth, takes every precaution by which to make this result as slight as possible, and will never allow himself to be classified among the enemies of true religion. It is a matter of deep regret to Milton that he is obliged to view these truths differently from others. There is scarcely a page in his religious writings in which we do not see the evidence of this bitter struggle between his own interpretation of the Bible and the commonly accepted creed of the church. The impression that we receive as we read is, that, if it were possible for him to modify his beliefs so as to harmonize them with those of other Christians, he would sacrifice all things to do it. It is this spirit, taken in connection with the general tenor of his teachings and his life, which must ever place the influence of Milton upon the side of evangelic truth. This statement may be confirmed by a reference to some of the errors adduced. Though he denied that God did or could create the world out of nothing, his reverential mind seemed to adore God in creation just as fully as if he had made no such denial. Though holding those particular views of the sabbath which we call liberal, he always observed the day with

scrupulous care. As to his peculiar views of public worship and the ministry, it should be remarked that for many years, at his old home in Horton, he joined the people of God in external worship, and that, when he did retire from public ordinances, he did it as a matter of personal conviction, not to be recommended to others.

Both in the exceptional character of the times and the physical ailments of the author there are to be found abundant causes for the course pursued, while there is everything in the development of the character of Milton to justify the conclusion that in his declining years he became a practical Quietist in his religious life. The supposition, made by so many English commentators, that this retiring from public worship is explainable on the ground of self-esteem is all out of sympathy with the peculiar type of Milton's character as devotional and reverent. Dr. Johnson tells us, on the one hand, "that in the distribution of Milton's hours there was no hour for prayer"; and, on the other, "that his studies and meditations were an habitual prayer." We have in this apparent contradiction the very truth we are anxious to enforce. We shall not be misunderstood when we say that that life is most Christian in which devotion is so interwoven with all its functions that prayer and worship go on without ceasing. It is very suggestive to note the growth of this introspective element in the character of Milton. We know not but that he gained in one direction more than he lost in another, when God closed the eye of his body and opened still more widely the inner eye of his soul upon "things invisible to mortal sight." We speak not now of material inconvenience resulting therefrom; of the loss of social comforts and of the charms of nature and the external world; nor of that natural sense of irreparable loss to which the poet so often gives pathetic expression. We speak of an inner growth of mental and moral sight, a keenness and surety of vision, that could have been obtained by no other agency. It was only when

shut out from the world, and shut in to God and his own soul, that, from the third heavens to the lowermost hell, there was nothing too high or too deep for his visual grasp. It was the working of this habit of mind that, more than all else, deterred him from the open assembly. Even in the most artless ceremonies of external worship there was something too formal and gross for this contemplative spirit, who sings of

“Adoration pure, which God likes best.”

He loved to meditate. As he sat at the organ, half in conscious thought and half in reverie, we have a graphic picture of Milton the worshipper. Who can fail to believe that, in his daily morning readings of the Hebrew Scriptures, there was present the offering of a sacrifice well-pleasing to God! As in apostolic days, there was a church in the house. As in patriarchal times, the father was the priest, the members of the family were the members of the church, and the rites of the household were the ordinances of religion. More specifically, still, there was a church in the heart, a holy *ecclesia*, or calling together of all the powers and affections of the soul to sacred service. Milton did not so much go out to worship as he went in to worship.

So with regard to the other errors referred to and, most especially, that of the Trinity. Objectionable as his position was, so careful was he to avoid the extreme positions of the Deist and Socinian, that he adored Christ as his divine and personal Saviour. He was practically in sympathy with the Reformed churches on this doctrine. When he comes to the discussion of the atonement by the blood and merit of Christ, there is no particular in which his peculiar views as to the constitution of the Godhead are allowed to make that doctrine less important in the experience of believers. Next to the statements of the Reformed Confessions, the best definitions of many of the leading scriptural truths are to be found in Milton's

Christian Doctrine. Even in some of those writings where the errors adverted to are apparent, the general effect of the writings would seem to be salutary.

Bearing in mind the vital relation—ethical and metaphysical—of abstract belief to practical morality, it is not a little puzzling, if, indeed, it is possible, to explain the power of Milton's personal Christian life in harmony with his many and significant departures from the accepted tenets of the church, and from what, as such, were supposed to mark the limits of moral soundness and moral safety. By ordinary logic we should seem to be shut up to the conclusion, either that such deviations from established doctrines are less harmful than supposed, or that, on Milton's part, they were speculative rather than vital. While the first of these suppositions is true with respect to some of the lesser errors adduced, the latter supposition is undoubtedly in place with regard to most of them. It must be confessed that the personal character of Milton would have been more symmetrical, and his moral influence in English letters more pronounced, had these departures from accepted teachings been fewer and less vital. It is, however, a matter of rejoicing, explain the enigma as we may, that his character was so much better than his creed; that the errors which he held lay, after all, upon the surface of his thought, rather than deep down within him at the centre of his life. He was far more consistent than his own theory would allow. He was a far better Christian than theologian; so that, whatever his later teachings may have been, he was really living in the light of his earlier and evangelical beliefs. Of all periods of his life he could affirm, as he did of his journeyings over Europe: "I again take God to witness that, in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from all profligacy; having this thought perpetually with me, that, though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not the eyes of God." This was the principle that he so

beautifully expresses in one of his earliest sonnets, as he dedicates himself to his "great Taskmaster."

It was this sense of communion with the higher forms of being that, to the devout student of English literature, opens up the most attractive features of the author's history. It is no mere figure of speech, or allusion to classical mythology, that he employs, when he speaks of the "music of the spheres,"—

" That heavenly harmony, which none can hear  
Of human mould, with gross, unpurged ear."

It was in fullest accordance with the deep solemnity of his temperament that he felt that, if we would but retire from the bustle of the world, and free our souls from the discords occasioned by sin, we should hear such a silver chiming from the crystal spheres that our souls would be ravished thereby and set in harmony to all that is pure. "He who would not be frustrate of his hope," he says, "to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem." As grand a poem as is the *Paradise Lost*, Milton himself was a far grander one, possessing in common with the written epic itself the element of moral sublimity. The high eulogium pronounced by Wordsworth upon our author's character has thus become a classic among us, and will ever find a quick response in every truly English heart:—

" We must be free or die,  
Who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke,  
The faith and morals hold that Milton held."

In uttering this language Wordsworth is thinking of Milton the younger, and the practical Christian, rather than of Milton the elder, and the speculative theologian.

3. We may refer, finally, to a topic already indicated, and inquire more particularly as to Milton's view respecting the limits of free inquiry. He reasoned as follows: There is such a thing as a true liberalism of thought, an area spacious enough for the exercise of every intelligent

and candid seeker after truth. There is an order of free thinking which has its appropriate place in every progressive mind and age, apart from the constant exercise of which, persons and nations alike become stationary in history or recede to barbarism. Man is essentially free and thought is essentially active. Every developing power needs range and space. Whatever the evils of such a mental liberty may be, he contended that they are no more injurious, in the end, than that excessive conservatism which is the mother of bigotry, and that blind adherence to the traditions of others which flourishes in the soil of ignorance and prejudice. He confessed that the independent spirit in the presence of moral and political questions might bring one into dangerous nearness to various evils, and justify the charge of personal arrogance. Care is to be taken, however, he added, lest, in aiming to avoid the errors toward which we are led, we become guilty of the more flagrant evil of depreciating and repressing that healthful freedom of thinking of which the nations are in need.

Even into the more hallowed sphere of biblical interpretation Milton carried this theory, and thought himself more justifiable in his method than any of his narrow-minded opponents in theirs. He objected to all the assumptions of the Romish Church respecting the liberty of private interpretation, and opposed all attempts, on the part of any, to restrict the exercise of private judgment in matters of faith. He believed the word of God to be divine in its origin and authority. The interpretation of that word he believed to be a matter lying within the human province, as under the control of the Spirit. What is termed the general belief of the church had weight in his mind because it was general, and because to the church in its corporate character the spirit of wisdom is promised. Still, even here, he did not for a moment surrender his personal privilege as an investigator. In all this Milton was right and he was wrong. He was right in zeal-

ously resisting all those influences which tended to enslave the conscience and take from man the prerogative of thinking for himself. He was wrong in pushing this principle to a dangerous extreme, and making each individual thinker a law unto himself. He was right in holding to the duty of freedom of thought and expression; but was wrong when he underrated the influence which the opinions of others should have upon his own. The fact is, that in his closing days Milton was, in every sense of the word, a Free Thinker, insisting upon such latitude of view as to overreach the very end toward which he was aiming. Intending to stop midway between bigotry and liberalism, he went fully up to the limit of this latter extreme, and placed himself among the Levellers and Latitudinarians of his time. Impossible as it is for the literary student to speak in too high terms of his lyric and epic genius, he must be sure to restrict himself to this province, and not aim to found the reputation of Milton upon what he wrote or said elsewhere. The spirit of his controversial prose is so acrid that few critics have had the hardihood to defend it or recommend it to modern polemics. Though the temper of his purely theological discussions in the *Christian Doctrine* is a more kindly one, still, the old spirit of intolerance is apparent. Milton, in all this, was out of his natural and providential sphere. He was a poet, and not a proser, and least of all called to reorganize the church on the basis of a new theology.

We are living in a day when men are thinking for themselves as never before. Tradition is giving place to history, and conjecture to trustworthy evidence. Things once tested are being tested anew, and things always accepted without question are being re-examined. Minds are weary of restraint, and the danger of the hour is in the line of a violent reaction to lawless speculation. The spirit of Milton is abroad.

In fine, the method of the Puritan poet is condemned

by the various departures to which it incidentally led him. He taught more unwisely than he knew or was prepared to apply; and, had he lived at the publication of his questionable views, would have been more than amazed at the serious results to which they were leading. Liberty is one thing; license is another; and, while every man should think for himself, no man has a right to think all athwart the well-established standards of faith. There is a limit to all things. Free inquiry has "ample room and verge enough," even when pursued under healthful limitations. Man is a free agent; but, as finite and fallible, his very freedom must be exercised under rational and moral restraint. God only is absolutely free.