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. July 11th 1136

Endependence of thought is necessary to intellectual power. While The field of the mind is circumscribed originality is forbidden and it acts are furthers, Deference to Muthority has Ever exampled The intellect and presented an momente barries to mental activity, It is the great antagonist to fou refliction; The los cannot agree, Continually opposing isadamantine barrier to the mind it confines it to a narrow encle, It is only when The much trusting in it own power, cuts ttell loose from all external defendence that the fond of blind authority is broke Revelation and the human Hason are alone alternate, when there only can we defend. Then we trust the conclusions of others without having tisted Their balidity; we defend whom principles which when placed in the scale of the ocusion may not stand the lest of truth ! - we admit with our systems as fact what may be mere speculations, and Thus introduce into our pehelocophy a perolific The greet mass of men are defendant for their opinions, Too undolint

to Think for Thurselves, or considering the fuld as all perioccupied, They put inflicit faith in the conclusions of others - adopting their femions following Their plans, and joining in their pursuit, The absolute principles of buth. The only quies for man, he which alone we can find a firm foundation, are laid a side for main authority, A few leading munds and authoritions Spenilo- mark out the road and appoint the clistinies of the sace. Thelosophy, Science and art from alike felt it- baneful influence, it has found it way but the commonest recuperties. of lefe, in our political parties where The masses are quided her by principles the by preguctice, where The Christians of party lead Their Thoughtless and often deluded followers whithersoever they will, it effects are plainly Evident, Our legislative assemblies our judiciary. The associations of the people, are all constant witnesses of the Evil tendencies of authority. If there is influence in these practicul Employment - of life, where the most guarant are accustomed to assent Their openions, is so permeions. Now

much more so must it to with higher and more abstract questions of philosophy? From the days of Aristother & Plato to the commencement of the sextenth dentury originally - and indefendence had bun baurshed from The intellect, The true of the Early Christien Church and the anddle ages were characterings by a total want of invention, The systems of the old south philosophers were studied commented afour and remodelled, but nothing essentially new was added to the domain of Science, The dialecties of Aristothe and The fruttes logomachies of the schools secrewed The whole attention of Scholass The Schoolmen of the middle ages tecupered Themselves within a namor concer Then questionings, never banecucing the principles already laid down, produced no great effect. - There was, to he suri; a development of occase principles which in a manner constituted a growth of scence, but The mind was circumseribed and as a consequence dwarfed, Then who might have immortalized their names, had They but divoted to independent investigation The Thought which They devoted to the

their tare names to feasturing and more abstrack to the commence of the state of the develored organished - and encefore in hed her Fredering from The waterleady Me time of the less Courses and the deminder deer woon shought of a that want of invention who injets: The fell shall be below here there comments from and servelle top with executably new- was adout to the comment course, who dealeded in the title and The produce beginned in selection maying the whole attended to be helder recipied Thumanders with a miner principle shoot has been to be seen a destrobinist of occasion formatifaction please the The anna was accuración hed to a some me distant him who the section to respond the mining wine y le whole they de the I the

development of other's Theories, have left only Their bur names to posterty. But it was the mission of the sixtuath century to break the Enchantment and throw of the bonds of the masters, A reaction had become a massity, The mind, essentially active, must have The power of pu reflection, in matters of selegion it had been bound as well as in saleguon philosophy; and Duccessively The reaction took place - fresh in oelizion Then is philosophy, The me was in a great measure a preparation for the other, The infellibility of the church. The opinions of Anstolle and the physical systems of the universe began to be questioned, South led to movetigation. They were examined, Their weathersess discovered their faults unveiled. The Reformation burst like a Thundercloud apon the church, I'm ages men had reposed upon it infallability, The sole source of touth in religion. The Bible had been forgotten, The defendence of men had been placed in the infallibility of the Tope. The Beble channed in The library of rofunth opened to Sether the have

foundations of religion, He saw at once the dark paths in which onen had followed Their spiritual teachers, and with an independence worthy of the cause, placed hunself on the principles of huth in ofsposition to blind authority. But The How which The reformation had dealt to the church led men to test The validity of Their philosophy also, if the Chunes was fallable Arestotte might be fallable, If the doctrines of the church were opposed to the huther of the Beble the philosophy of Austotte might be opposed to the absolute principle of the human reason, System which for measly twenty centuries had held undesputed sway, were ready to be renounced, Sacon & Deceastes, grounding their principles upon their own investigations casting aside all authority, land the basis of philosophy on a solid foundation, Descartes, while yet a youth, diseason The dogmes which he had been taught and determined to huld up a new philosophy. The results of his method, of his usulation from all former openions, are seen in the structure of modern stilosophy, It was with him it took is resi - upon the busis which he fumedo

it has become what philosophy must be The unit- of scurce, Bucon by his method of unestigation, gave to the physical sciences, new life, with him They date Their second birth, Copernieus came after him, Huss was to the reformation as Copernicus to the sevolution in the physical science . The John Bafatist of the new dispensation; while Bacan and his coadjutors broke the chann of infallibility That had fettind the much to prescription authorit - brave the anothernas of the Schoolmen and law the foundations of the glowous protestantism of scurce. The Einteenth century began a great work in the oyection of former cystems and The putties execulations of the middle ages. The Seventeenthe continued the work prepared a Solid foundation on which Encending ages might ruce a mobile superstructure, This is the work of the present of the future, Set ouch devote his sutme Everges to its consume: onation and we shall the temple of universal severe, infeported upon marble pellars and adonus with costly give, reaching the ethereal vault of Heaven with it golden donne,

Commencement Oration of M. E. Clark, Class of 1856

Transcribed by Michael M. Geduldig, June 24, 2006

Edited by Don Sailer, November 2009

Authority M. E. Clark July 11th 1856

Independence of thought is necessary to intellectual power. While the field of the mind is circumscribed originality is forbidden and its acts are fruitless.

Deference to Authority has ever cramped the intellect and presented an invincible barrier to mental activity. It is the great antagonist to free reflection; the two cannot agree. Continually opposing its adamantive barrier to the mind it confines it to a narrow circle. It is only when the mind, trusting in its own power, cuts itself loose from all external dependence that the bond of blind authority is broken.

Revelation and the human reason are alone ultimate. Upon these only we depend. Then we trust the conclusions of others without having tested their validity, we depend upon principles which when placed in the scale of the reason may not stand the test of both: - we admit into our systems as facts what may be mere speculations, and thus introduce into our philosophy a prolific source of error.

The great mass of men are dependent for their opinions. Too indolent

to think for themselves or considering the field as all preoccupied, they put implicit faith in the conclusions of others - adopting their opinion, following their plans, and joining in their pursuits. The absolute principles of truth - the only guide for man in which alone we can find a firm foundation, are laid aside for man's Authority. A few leading minds and ambitious spirits - mark out the road and appoint the destinies of the race.

Philosophy, science and art have like felt its fanciful influence. It has found its way into the commonest occupations of life. In our political parties, where the masses are guided less by principle than by prejudice, where the chieftains of party lead their thoughtless and often deluded followers whithersoever they will, its effects are plainly evident. Our legislative assemblies, our judiciary, the associations of the people, are all constant witnesses of the evil tendencies of Authority.

If then its influence in these practical employments of life, where the most ignorant are accustomed to assent their opinions, is so pernicious, how

much more so must it be in the higher and more abstract questions of philosophy?

From the days of Aristotle & Plato to the commencement of the sixteenth century originality and independence had been banished from the intellect. The times of the early Christian Church and the middle ages were characterized by a total want of invention. The systems of the old Greek philosophers were studied commented upon and [illegible], but nothing

essentially new was added to the domain of science. The dialectics of Aristotle and the fruitless logometrics of the schools received the whole attention of scholars.

The schoolmen of the middle ages occupied themselves with a narrow circle. Their questionings, never transcending the principles already laid down, produced no great effects. There was, to be sure, a development of science principles which in a manner constituted a growth of science, but the mind was circumscribed and as a consequence dwarfed men who might have immortalized their names, had they but devoted to independent investigation the thought which they devoted to the

development of other's theories, have left only their base names to posterity.

development of other's theories, have left only their base names to posterity.

But it was the mission of the sixteenth century to break the enchantment and throw off the bonds of the masters. A reaction had become a necessity. The mind, essentially active, must have the powers of free reflection. In matters of religion it had been bound as well as in religion philosophy; and successively the reaction took place - first in religion then in philosophy. The one was in a great measure a preparation for the other. The infallibility of the church, the opinions of Aristotle and the physical systems of the universe began to be questioned. Doubt led to investigation - they were examined, their weaknesses discovered, their faults unveiled.

The Reformation burst like a thundercloud upon the church. For ages men had reposed upon its infallibility. The sole source of truth is religion - the Bible had been forgotten. The dependence of men had been placed in the infallibility of the Pope.

The Bible chained in the library of Erfurth opened to Luther the true

foundations of religion. He saw at once the dark paths in which men had followed their spiritual teachers and with an independence worthy of the cause placed himself on the principles of truth in opposition to blind authority.

But the blow which the reformation had dealt to the Church led men to test the validity of their philosophy also. If the Church was fallible Aristotle might be fallible. If the doctrines of the Church were opposed to the truths of the Bible the philosophy of Aristotle might be opposed to the absolute principles of the human reason. Systems which for nearly twenty centuries had held undisputed sway were ready to be renounced. Bacon and Descartes, grounding their principles upon their own investigations, casting aside all authority, laid the basis of philosophy on a solid foundation.

Descartes, while yet a youth, discarded the dogmas which he had been taught and determined to build a new philosophy.

The results of his method, of his insulation from all former opinions are seen in the structure of modern philosophy. It was with him it took its [illegible] - upon the basis which he furnished

it has become what philosophy must be the unity of science.

Bacon, by his method of investigation, gave to the physical sciences, new life. With him they date their second birth. Copernicus preceded, but Kepler, Galileo & Newton came after him. Huss was to the aforementioned as Copernicus to the revolution in the physical sciences. Then John Baptist to the new dispensation; while Bacon and his coadjutors broke the chain of infallibility that had fettered the mind to prescriptive authority - braved the anathemas of the schoolmen and laid the foundations of the glorious protestantism of science.

The sixteenth century began a quaint work in the objection of former systems and the fruitless speculations of the middle ages. The seventeenth continued the work prepared a solid foundation on which succeeding ages might raise a noble superstructure.

This is the work of the present & the future. Let each devote his entire energies to its consummation and we shall the temple of universal science, supported upon marble pillars and adorned with costly gems, reaching the eternal vault of Heaven with its golden dome. —