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**J. B. BURY**

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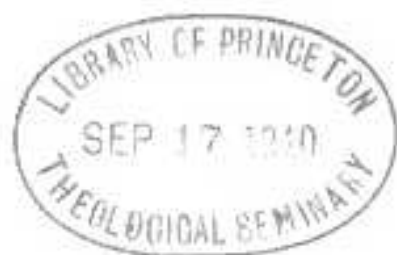
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# A HISTORY OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

BY

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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	7
II REASON FREE (GREECE AND ROME) . . . . .	21
III REASON IN PRISON (THE MIDDLE AGES) . . . . .	51
IV PROSPECT OF DELIVERANCE (THE RENAISSANCE AND THE REFORMATION) . . . . .	71
V RELIGIOUS TOLERATION . . . . .	99
VI THE GROWTH OF RATIONALISM (SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES) . . . . .	127
VII THE PROGRESS OF RATIONALISM (NINETEENTH CENTURY) . . . . .	176
VIII THE JUSTIFICATION OF LIBERTY OF THOUGHT .	233
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	253
INDEX . . . . .	254





# A HISTORY OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

## CHAPTER I

### FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND THE FORCES AGAINST IT

#### (INTRODUCTORY)

It is a common saying that thought is free. A man can never be hindered from thinking whatever he chooses so long as he conceals what he thinks. The working of his mind is limited only by the bounds of his experience and the power of his imagination. But this natural liberty of private thinking is of little value. It is unsatisfactory and even painful to the thinker himself, if he is not permitted to communicate his thoughts to others, and it is obviously of no value to his neighbours. Moreover it is extremely difficult to hide thoughts that have any power over the mind. If a man's thinking leads him to call in question ideas and customs which regulate the behaviour of those about him, to reject beliefs which they hold, to see better ways of life than those they follow, it is almost

impossible for him, if he is convinced of the truth of his own reasoning, not to betray by silence, chance words, or general attitude that he is different from them and does not share their opinions. Some have preferred, like Socrates, some would prefer to-day, to face death rather than conceal their thoughts. Thus freedom of thought, in any valuable sense, includes freedom of speech.

At present, in the most civilized countries, freedom of speech is taken as a matter of course and seems a perfectly simple thing. We are so accustomed to it that we look on it as a natural right. But this right has been acquired only in quite recent times, and the way to its attainment has lain through lakes of blood. It has taken centuries to persuade the most enlightened peoples that liberty to publish one's opinions and to discuss all questions is a good and not a bad thing. Human societies (there are some brilliant exceptions) have been generally opposed to freedom of thought, or, in other words, to new ideas, and it is easy to see why.

The average brain is naturally lazy and tends to take the line of least resistance. The mental world of the ordinary man consists of beliefs which he has accepted without questioning and to which he is firmly attached; he is instinctively hostile to anything which