ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BELIEF SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS.

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ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BELIEF

SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS

BEING THE HULSEAN LECTURES FOR 1869.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

The following discourses are intended to illustrate, explain, and work out into some of their consequences, certain characteristics by which the attainment of religious belief is prominently distinguished from the attainment of belief upon most other subjects. These characteristics consist in the multiplicity of the sources from which the evidence for religious belief is derived, and the fact that our emotions contribute their share towards producing conviction.

These are facts which, it need hardly be remarked, have been perpetually noticed before, but I have never met with any attempt to show their full significance, or to work out the inferences which follow from the admission of their existence.

As there are several questions which will very likely be suggested, and which the necessary brevity of spoken discourses prevented me from discussing at the time, they may conveniently be anticipated here.

I have avoided, as far as was possible, commit-

ting myself to the doctrines of any particular philosophical school. The method of treatment here adopted is logical and not metaphysical, and on the field of logic, as a great authority has told us, people of the most opposite schools may meet and shake hands. Of course, however, there must be some extreme views with which one cannot but be in hopeless antagonism. For example, on the theological side, those who range towards the Mystic pole, and hold that we must have an immediate inspiration or revelation of religious truth, will naturally resent any attempt to connect our belief so closely as is here done with evidence. Again, on the philosophical side, those who assert that anything in the nature of a miracle is intrinsically impossible, or that from the nature of the human faculties we cannot conceive, or therefore to any effective purpose believe in, a God, will certainly reject the attempt to support a doctrine by many converging threads, when in their opinion not one of these threads is really attached to any such object as that which they are intended to support. But except in the comparatively rare cases in which any one's first principles thus put an insuperable bar even to the discussion of such questions as those which follow, it will be admitted that religious conviction is at any rate in great part a matter of evidence: if therefore the effective force of this evidence is found to be vari-

able, it seems a point of some importance to make out the explanation of such a fact.

It has just been remarked that belief is treated in the following pages as being founded solely upon evidence, with the implication that in the thoughtful and sound-minded it is rightfully so founded. This will probably prompt the enquiry, What then do you make of *faith?* surely it is hardly in accordance with the usage or the teaching of Scripture to make faith little more than an intellectual state, as it must be if it is founded solely upon evidence? The controversy whether faith belongs to the head or the heart is far too ancient and extensive to be lightly revived; I wish therefore to do no more than express my own view, and this simply for the sake of preventing misapprehension. Faith then, as I understand it, is belief and something more; the something more being a moral element, namely, confidence or love towards God and our Saviour. In so far as it consists of belief (and it is with this element only, let it be remembered, that we are here concerned) I cannot perceive that it differs in any material way from belief on any other topic whatever. Does the difference lie in the state of mind itself, or in the way in which belief is produced? Surely in itself the state of mind is one and the same however it may have been brought about. Without attempting to

offer a full definition, we may give a valid description by saying that belief is that state of mind in which we are prepared to act upon the truth of any proposition in question. If this account be admitted, the description will apply as well to belief in any scientific statement as to that in the articles of a Creed. Again, does the difference lie in the grounds of the belief? Not if we lay down the sufficiently general statement that the belief is caused, or should be caused, by evidence. I am quite aware that Bishop Pearson and others try to establish a difference in the nature of the evidence, saying that Christian belief is distinguished from other kinds of belief by the fact that it rests upon the testimony of God. But what is gained by such a distinction, beyond the occasional opportunity of charging our opponent with disbelieving what God has asserted? Surely no one denies that the testimony of our Creator is to be accepted without hesitation; the only matter for discussion is whether a doctrine does rest on that testimony or not. This would equally apply to those who deny the paramount authority of Scripture as to any others; with them the words of the Bible are not the immediate declaration of God, and they therefore do not undertake to deny what He has asserted.

I apprehend, therefore, that the belief element of faith does not essentially differ from any other

act of belief. If this be not the case, one can only remark that we stand sorely in need of a Christian appendix to our familiar works on Psychology and Logic; and that none of our most devout and orthodox Philosophers, such as Butler, Berkeley, and Chalmers, have made any real attempt to supply the deficiency or shown that they believed that it existed.

The two objections with the statement of which the first Lecture commences are, I apprehend, a subject of perplexity to many. This is more particularly the case with the former one, namely, that which lays the stress upon the vagueness and variability of religious convictions. When we have to deal with distinct differences which could be precisely expressed in words, we appear to be at least fighting in the daylight; but what is to be done when the whole framework of belief, so to say, seems disposed to shift? To read answers to objections does not seem to bring much profit, the mind appears out of tune for that kind of thing. In olden times the explanation might have been accepted that one was the sport of demons who were practising their temptations unseen. We have abandoned this supposition now, but too many substitute what, so far as religious truth is concerned, is a far

more potent and malignant enemy. A Psychological answer is readily offered at the present day, which soon turns into a Physiological one, and then where are truth and falsehood? Instead of fancying grinning apes between our eyes and the pages of Holy Scripture, we say that the nervous system is depressed, or the digestion out of order. It seemed to me therefore very important to cast about for what may be called a *logical* explanation, that is to make out that these fluctuations are really connected with evidence that has been somehow differently apprehended.

With regard to the second of the objections with the statement of which these lectures start. It must be frankly admitted that the explanation does not profess to be conclusive; I have frequently said during the course of them that it is only meant to palliate and extenuate the difficulty; to claim anything beyond this would be the grossest presumption. The real mischief of the differences of opinion with which religion is so notoriously infested does not lie so much in these differences themselves, since a very large number of them cannot be considered fundamental, as in an inference which is very commonly drawn from their existence, viz. that the subject of them is one which proves so intractable by the human mind that it had better be let alone. The complete

reply to such an inference would of course be found in removing the differences which gave rise to it, but since such a reply implies not merely the being in possession of the truth, but the holding it in such an unmistakeable form that every one will accept it, it would, to say the very least, be the extremity of folly to try in that direction. When a difficulty cannot be removed, the next best thing is to diminish its significance. This I have attempted to do by suggesting that the cause of these prolonged differences may be assignable to a circumstance already taken account of, namely, that our emotions enter in as part of the premises in the case of religious doctrines. If this be admitted it is a gain in two ways. For one thing it transfers the defect from the object of belief to the evidence in support of it, and so far removes any real hopelessness of ever attaining to a solid conviction. And again, as shown in the second lecture, it opens to us a plausible way of very greatly diminishing the differences. If we were not so thoroughly familiarized with such a state of things there would surely be something little less than shocking in the consideration that multitudes of thoughtful and honest people after carefully inspecting the same facts should persist from one generation to another in assigning to them different explanations, and drawing from them conflicting inferences. In suggesting as a cause of this the intrusion of emotions into the grounds of our

argument, it should be remarked (as I have been at some pains to show, in the second lecture) that we do not cut ourselves off from the logical treatment of the question.

It will be seen that I have, throughout these discourses, treated simultaneously the two objections just mentioned. It might have made the argument clearer to have separated them, but this would have demanded more than the allotted space of time, and it was not at all essential, inasmuch as it has been shown that they had a common origin. I merely mention this here, in order to avoid the charge of confusion or inconsistency.

It may be said that these discourses attempt to give a partial answer to the very wide question, Why do people continue to differ in opinion? It is partial, for in the case of a very large number we can only reply that the natural sluggishness of mind and unwillingness to change are so great that when a difference has once become established, it would be much more reasonable to ask instead the question, What should ever bring them into agreement? In the case of uncivilized people, and a very great number in every country must still, for intellectual purposes, be placed in this category, a belief when once propagated is persisted in until some very serious cause occurs to

change it. In seeking therefore to account for differences of opinion amongst such people, we should often have to track them back to that time of haze and darkness in which the formation of a belief has very little indeed to do with evidence. At this point Psychology or even Physiology rightly have it all their own way. Such an enquiry as this would lead us to is a very interesting and important one, but it is far too wide for me to venture to touch upon it here.

The question to which I have limited myself is much narrower. How are we to account for the fact that differences still exist amongst people who have advanced to the stage in which they recognize to some extent that their belief ought to admit of justification? I have the same evidence before me now that I had, say, a year ago; why do I not draw the same conclusion and with equal confidence? I have the same evidence before me as others have, how can our conclusions be at variance? These are questions which it surely concerns the thoughtful and candid to answer if they can.

One answer, which was once very common, perhaps almost universal, but is now rejected as a mark of fanaticism, assigns the cause to prejudice and wilful blindness towards the evidence. That these may be occasional and partial causes no one would think of denying, but I cannot believe that they would ever

have been accepted as a general explanation, but for the assumption that something of this kind was required in order to account for the punishment of error. When it is held that error not only as a general rule entails misfortunes, in what may be called a natural way (this is undeniable, being a part of what Bp. Butler calls "the Constitution and Course of Nature"), but also brings on in addition distinctly penal consequences, men would naturally look about for some conduct on the part of the misbeliever that should make him deserving of punishment. And this they could scarcely expect to find except in wilful blindness. But who will consistently hold to this view now? Who will say that the unbeliever is always the one who wilfully rejects evidence and obstinately adheres to preconceived opinions?

Moreover, even in the cases in which such moral causes as these are fairly assignable, they seem to require being supplemented by something else. Prejudice and wilfulness can effect much even when people have begun to enquire, but they cannot effect everything. There must be some external conditions upon which they can work, something which they can make use of as a pretext.

The first of these lectures is an attempt to explain what the nature of this logical foothold for differences is; in other words, to show what there is

in the constitution of the evidence which makes it possible for these differences to commence and persist.

The second meets the question, What then is the criterion of truth? If you admit that people do not only entertain in good faith the varying judgments they express and act upon, but are almost justified in entertaining them, how are we to decide which of them is right and which wrong? As I have repeatedly said, no pretence is made altogether to remove the difficulty thus indicated, but considerable help may be afforded in the way of palliating it.

The third and fourth lectures are devoted to working out into several of their consequences the characteristics of evidence on religious subjects which were explained and illustrated in the first. A certain amount of repetition in the subject matter was rendered necessary by the fact that, owing to the time at which the Hulsean Lecturer usually commences his course, hardly any of the undergraduate portion of the congregation was present at the first two sermons.

LECTURE I.

UPON CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF BELIEF IN COMPLICATED SUBJECTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHICH AFFECT MANKIND.

ECCLESIASTES XI. 7, 8.

"*Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun; But if a man live many years and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.*"

No one can be familiar with the current tone of thought and feeling upon religious matters without having had his attention drawn to two characteristics, in both of which, I apprehend, the present age is distinguished from most previous ages.

(I) The first of these is the indefiniteness of most of the objections to Dogmatic Christianity. Time was when those who rejected its claims did so for the most part upon grounds which they could very clearly state. It was some doctrine which offended them, some historic or scientific assertion by which they were staggered. In other words their

want of confidence in it as a whole was a consequence rather than a cause of their convictions as to some of the details having been shaken. We should not be far amiss in saying that at the present day this state of things is nearly reversed. It is not a doctrine here and there which is exposed to attack; it is not that a collision between religion and science is apprehended just at one or another point. Confer with any one who is in doubt and he may, when questioned, allege some difficulties which perplex him. But are these merely difficulties in the sense in which they may be found in some ordinary and otherwise credible historic narrative, which is accepted at once on the removal of a few doubts? Surely no one will assert that this is the case. On the removal of the first objection the crop that follows seems only the thicker. The resolution of a difficulty produces little more effect in the way of a Restoration of Belief than is produced towards restoring a house, when we put a piece of sound timber into a floor that is penetrated with dry rot. The most you can extract from such a man is the admission of a feeling of dissatisfaction, perhaps almost an instinct of aversion, which he might find it very hard to draw out into articulate objections.

This feature is comparatively new; at least in its present prominence and importance. And yet it is, I think, only the outward expression, in a more open form, of a very old and familiar state of feeling. Everyone must be acquainted with

the way in which his practical hold of his faith is subject to variation without any apparently sufficient cause. It is influenced by his outward circumstances, his health, his age;

> "Produced mysteriously as cape
> Of cloud grown out of the invisible air."

Sometimes his faith appears extinct, often it burns in a way that only just gives evidence of its existence, occasionally it shews a lurid flare at the approach of danger or death. (I am merely noticing a fact here, which will very shortly be fully discussed.) Now so long as the open disavowal of religion is subject to the disapproval of law or public opinion these fluctuations of belief will not attract much notice. Those whose faith is nearly extinct will either conceal the fact, or, if they avow it, will feel themselves bound to do so under the support of some definite objections. That is, we should then look for some distinct ground of quarrel with religion.

When, however, restraints are broken through, and men are in the habit of saying what they feel and of criticising as they please, doubts which were formerly suppressed will begin to make their appearance in public. And they will shew themselves in the shape in which they are experienced. In other words, there will be a wide diffusion of vague and indefinite objection.

(II) So much for the shape in which doubts shew themselves; turn now to one of the principal

causes of them. Amongst these a prominent place must be assigned to the prolonged, in fact incurable, differences of opinion which exist in the province of religion as compared with that of science. Logically this may seem to be assigning as a cause of doubt the doubt which already exists; and to some extent this is so. The mere knowledge that any set of doctrines is suspected is itself a cause of additional suspicion. It is a serious cause to those who are obliged, as we all are now to so great an extent, to take their knowledge at second-hand[1]. Every one who feels a rational interest in any subject must find a real cause of perplexity in the knowledge that there are many and important differences amongst those who have given thought to it. He will at least demand to have some account of the fact, and if possible to know the grounds of it. Now at the present day the contrast is being more and more significantly pointed out between the compact unanimity which exists in Science, at least upon many topics, and the endless discords which prevail in religion. Even where

[1] This, I think, is an important consideration, and one which is telling more and more as science grows more extensive. We are all of us in a position in which we can know but little even of the facts in most sciences, and next to nothing about the evidences of these facts. This being the case, what is our security against being misled or deceived when we accept a result on the authority of those who are enquiring at first hand? Except when we possess the evidence afforded by familiar applications or striking predictions, our main reliance must surely be found in the fact that the genuine students are in substantial agreement. If they coincide in their conclusions, we do not doubt that they have arrived at least at some substratum of truth; if they are still in dispute, we mostly withhold our full assent from any one of them.

scientific points are still in dispute it is asserted that such points are but few in number, and of small importance, compared with the bulk of those which are universally accepted by the competently informed; and, what is more, each successive age sees this proportion still further diminished. On the other hand hardly a generation passes without some Church being shattered into sects, or some sect undergoing still further subdivisions, whilst centuries elapse without shewing any sign of reunion.

Whenever objections are to be discussed it is well to begin by putting them into as precise a form as possible. I think, then, that those which have been just alluded to might, with their implied inferences, be thus summarily stated;

(I) The fact that most persons do not retain their religious convictions with unaltered tenacity, but find them vary exceedingly in practical efficacy according to circumstances,—in other words find them somewhat vague and vacillating,—suggests the conclusion that these convictions are less the product of objective facts than of our own morbid fancies;

(II) The fact of there being such an endless conflict of opinions in religion, (even if we supposed each person to retain his own opinion with unwavering stedfastness) is pretty clear proof that the subject-matter in question is one upon which truth cannot be reached.

Such objections are far too prevalent, and in many cases too sincerely urged for it to be any

use to ignore or denounce them. They are urged as complaints by many without the pale, and are felt as stumblingblocks by many within.

The general design of this course of Lectures is to discuss these objections, or rather to examine the principle upon which they depend (for I think they have a common principle) and to work that out into several of its consequences. In other words, we shall be occupied with some of the characteristics of religious and scientific belief, and the nature of the distinction between them.

Let us first examine some of the facts.

Every one must be familiar with the strange way in which without any conscious alteration of the evidence before us, our beliefs upon many subjects do nevertheless vary in their nature and intensity. In other words, though there may have been no appeal to fresh evidence, no re-valuation of the old, and no resort to new principles or methods of proof, our judgments about the facts in question have undergone a change.

The result might be compared to those alternations of light and dark in a murky foggy day; the intrinsic brightness of the sun has remained the same throughout, your eyes have not varied in their power, you cannot point out any particular cloud as having caused the change, and yet there is a change. You feel sure that there must be some cause for these effects, but you cannot detect that cause in itself, you can only trace it obscurely from its working.

In saying this you will understand that I am not referring to mere *states of feeling,* to those fits of elation and despondency to which every one is liable; but to actual *beliefs,* to beliefs which profess to be founded on evidence and to shew forth their working in our conduct. Closely connected as such mere states of feeling are with our rational convictions, they are of course clearly distinct from them. The sound of a trumpet has an inspiriting effect upon those who march to battle, but we ought not to confound this with belief in the successful issue of the struggle.

Let us take a few examples of the sort of change to which I am referring. They will be simply illustrative.

Have you then never known what it was, to form a judgment, and as you think at the time, a final judgment, upon the motives or conduct of any one? You make up your mind about it, and dismiss the case. But some time afterwards it presents itself to you again, as the phrase is, under a 'new light.' You have not knowingly received fresh evidence, or detected any error in your former conclusion. But somehow the old elements seem to have unconsciously combined themselves in a somewhat different fashion, as though unseen hands had been at work rearranging the materials; and so the result is that former convictions are shaken. Your judgment is modified, perhaps even reversed.

Now turn to another example, and one of a more solemn aspect. Everybody is familiar with the fact

(explain it how we will) that the approach of death often causes a great change in our religious views. The knowledge of this may sometimes be rhetorically abused by preachers, who yield to the temptation of wielding with little trouble to themselves a terribly potent weapon, but the fact itself is notorious. Take but one instance. I give it simply by way of illustration.

Almost every one knows something about the poet Heine, and the great change in his religious views produced by the prolonged and terrible sufferings which closed his life. We need not pause to inquire into the exact extent of this change, it may suffice to say now that it was considerable; but it is worth pointing out that the significance of it is much greater than is commonly supposed. It is not generally remembered that many years before his death, when still in the vigour of health, he had commented upon Schelling's old-age adhesion to Catholicism with a bitter and almost savage contempt, which might well have precluded *him* in turn from expressing anything approaching to a recantation. He says there that such cases belong at best to Pathology: the pious have very little cause to sing their hymns of triumph over them. At most they only shew that you cannot hope to convert the freethinker so long as he walks with clear head under the open heaven. He only turns to religion when sick and old, when he can neither enjoy nor think[1].

Any approach to a reversal of judgment ought

[1] See Appendix.

to count for much when tortured out of one who had formerly pronounced such opinions as these.

But why need I thus appeal to the experience of another for what your own hearts can supply? If any one of us came face to face with death,—not when worn out with sickness, for men will often long then for any relief; still less when any kind of resource was available in self-defence, for in that case reflection is either distracted, or diverted into action; —but with the full life in every limb and with nothing to do but to think, would your convictions about hereafter be what they now are? Only try to realise fully such a case as this;—say that you were bitten by a deadly serpent, or left on a rock with a rising tide, and knew for certain that you had but a few hours to live:—there need be neither fear nor remorse, but when you thus came up to the brink of the abyss and began to look down into it, even though you knew there was no fire there, would not the mere proximity to it give you new views? Can any one say that such a sight would give him no new convictions, but merely perhaps enliven old ones? I dare not say so for myself, and should be surprised if many others could[1].

These are salient instances of the kind of change in our views with which we shall be occupied, but

[1] "On dit que si les hommes deviennent religieux ou dévots en avançant en âge, c'est qu'ils ont peur de la mort et de ce qui doit suivre dans une autre vie. Mais j'ai, quant à moi, la conscience que sans aucune terreur semblable, sans aucun effet d'imagination, le sentiment religieux peut se développer à mesure que nous avançons en âge." (*Pensées de Maine de Biran*, p. 269.)

others might be adduced. For example, sickness will often change a man's views of his destiny here and hereafter; so will old age, so sometimes will bereavement and disappointment and neglect. It is not merely that such changes of circumstances make a man *feel* differently, they can also make him *believe* differently. He may become wiser because he has been made sadder.

So much for the facts. Let us now come to the explanation of them. Two common explanations may be noticed very briefly, as I should prefer indirectly undermining them by the substitution of a more adequate account, to a direct confutation.

(I) One of these may be called for want of a better term, the common religious explanation. It assumes that the man whose opinion or rather the expression of whose opinion has been thus changed has been acting a part, has in a word been acting dishonestly.

On this view the prospect of death terrifies the careless offender into momentary sincerity, and forces him to avow convictions which he had succeeded in suppressing or at least concealing. In other words the truth is got out of him as they used to extort it in that first stage of the old judicial proceedings, in which the rack and thumbscrew were just shewn to the poor culprit who might afterwards have to feel their full force.

(II) Another explanation might as fairly be called the common irreligious one. It assumes that the ravages of sickness and the near approach of

death cause such a decay and perturbation of our faculties that any superstitious fancy has easy access and soon acquires command. The watchmen are grown feeble, and so the powers that prowl in darkness have it all their own way. Newton in his old age becoming a commentator on Scripture is a not unfrequent illustration of such a view: Heine, as I have already said, suggested this of Schelling.

Whatever other objections might be raised to such explanations, they are clearly too partial. They apply to hardly any circumstances but those of danger and approaching death, whereas (what is very important to our argument) similar results are not unfrequently produced by any conditions of acute and prolonged distress. Moreover they are both uncharitable, by which I mean that they underrate the more honest and sturdy features of our nature. The one makes men too dishonest throughout life, the other makes them too weak and cowardly at the last, to be true in any but occasional cases.

I think a better explanation may be obtained if we bear in mind some of the characteristics in the process of the formation of opinions. I do not mean opinions on simple and detached subjects, but rather on those of large inquiry and especially of human interest. As many inferences will follow from these considerations I must ask your attention to them even at the risk of delaying upon topics which to many will seem very obvious.

(I) First then bear in mind that the evidence on such subjects is multiform in character, and de-

rived from various sources. Truth is not drawn from one rill but is distilled from every side through countless channels. In our Systems of Logic, as well as in formal and familiar discussions, we are forced to some extent to neglect this fact, in order to keep the dispute within manageable bounds. Hence the idea is encouraged that when we track a truth backwards and examine its sources, we shall find that many derivative conclusions follow from one more general proposition, that this again is one of many that follow from some still more comprehensive proposition, and so on. On such a view this process of justifying our beliefs would lead us (as one may say) along a converging cone, till we reached as a centre a few fundamental truths which either stand self-supported, or rest upon an immutable basis of experience. That conclusions may be *exhibited* in this form is indisputable, and it cannot be denied that here and there a comprehensive thinker may have thus tabulated his beliefs upon almost every subject, and reduced them ultimately to a few with which he is irrevocably satisfied. But it is to me quite clear that for most men the process is practically precisely the reverse. The moment you question any proposition, you find it linked by a strictly logical connection (inductive or analogical) with many others. Each of these again, when examined in turn, brings you into contact with many more. You thus seem led along a cone which is continually diverging.

There is an illustration in Abraham Tucker's

Light of Nature which, quaint and familiar as it may seem, is so much to the point that I cannot forbear from quoting it. Speaking of the grounds of our religious belief, the author rejects the common illustration of a building and the foundations on which it rests, as inappropriate to describe the real facts of the case. An apter comparison would be found, he thinks, in one of those Dutch buildings which rest, not on well-laid courses of brick or stone, but on an assemblage of many piles driven deep into a soft and yielding bank of mud and sand. It may better please the fancy to picture to ourselves a regular building towering in tier above tier of solid masonry, whose foundations we can assign, and can prove that they rest on the firm rock. But such a symmetrical structure is quite unsuitable to describe the circumstances in which we are actually placed.

(II) But again; not only are the facts upon which our conclusions rest thus infinite in number, they are also themselves far from possessing that simplicity which we commonly assign to them. Subject them to a high magnifying power and it will be found that *they* again are resolvable. What we call a simple fact is in great part the product of our judgment, and therefore often of our fancy, working upon very fragmentary data. What we do in observing a fact is to fill in an outline of which only a point here and there has been actually assigned, an outline therefore which may be no more obligatory than the shapes of the constellations on a celestial

globe. One man thinks that the points arrange themselves into the shape of a waggon, when to another they more naturally seem to fall into that of a bear. As this opens out to us a very important source of variations of judgment, and one which is seldom fully appreciated, I will give one or two simple illustrations of it.

We have all experienced the surprise, in going into a dark room, of seeing, as we think at first, some familiar object, which with more light, or after a closer scrutiny, seems entirely to change its appearance. It may prove to be another object; perhaps no object at all, but a mere phantom composed of patches of light and shade. But the judgment at the time nevertheless seemed final; and had the attention been immediately called away we should never have guessed that the object was anything different from what we had at first taken it for. I am speaking, of course, not of spectral illusions, but of such common misjudgments as we are liable to any day of our lives. What amount of work the judgment or fancy had performed in such a case will be best appreciated by attempting afterwards to see the thing again as it had first appeared to us. For this purpose a real effort is required, and we are startled to find *then* how arbitrary and fantastic the spontaneous arrangement had been. In other words a little more light or a more careful inspection has altogether transformed what we were inclined to call our facts.

Take another equally simple illustration from

sounds. If a question is put in an unfamiliar dialect, or in a language which we do not know well, we may fail at first to extract the slightest vestige of meaning from any part of it. And yet the next time it is uttered, perhaps in almost precisely the same tone, we catch the meaning of it quite clearly. What were before mere fragments of sound have now coalesced and sprung into life. So much has been added by the mind, in the process of arrangement, that it seems afterwards as hard to rob the sounds of the meaning they have acquired, as it was before to confer any meaning upon them[1].

Now this being the case with each separate inlet of knowledge, it will readily be seen what opening there is for differences of judgment and belief when several of these inlets have to be simultaneously employed. A slight disturbance, a little increase or depression in the portion contributed by any one of them, will often produce an immense alteration in the final result. The pilot in a storm may have to shape his judgment by an accurate estimate and correlation

[1] "In aid of the present case, I will only remark, that it would appear incredible to persons not accustomed to these subtle notices of self-observation, what small and remote resemblances, what mere hints of likeness from some real external object, especially if the shape be aided by colour, will suffice to make a vivid thought consubstantiate with the real object, and derive from it an outward perceptibility. Even when we are broad awake, if we are in anxious expectation, how often will not the most confused sounds of nature be heard by us as articulate sounds? For instance, the babbling of a brook will appear for a moment the voice of a friend for whom we are waiting, calling out our own names." Coleridge's *Friend*, I. 189. The principle is there applied in a very interesting way to account for Luther's vision of the devil in the tower at Wartburg.

of sights and sounds. Anything which affected the testimony of any one of these sources of knowledge on which he had to rely in the hurry of action, would have a most important bearing on his conduct. If the light grew more intense or the roar of the breakers increased, he would judge and consequently act differently.

You will now see how close is the connection between the two objections with which we started. They were, you remember, first, that each man's group of religious opinions is so liable to fluctuate; at one time seeming almost extinct, and at another fanned into intensity. Secondly, that the particular groups with which different men are furnished are so various. These phenomena have in part a common cause, and but for accidental circumstances would be found to vary with one another. Anything which tends to detach from a man's mind one class of the facts which combine in the aggregate to make up his proofs will of course diminish the *amount* of his conviction; but since it disturbs at the same time the *proportion* in which these proofs combined it will naturally alter the group of opinions held by him. And it would do this still more completely but for the fact that whereas we are almost entirely dependent upon our neighbours for the articles of our creed, we are mainly dependent upon ourselves for the degree of conviction with which we entertain them[1]

[1] The above paragraph needs perhaps some expansion. What I mean is that if every person had the clearness of head and independence

I will pause a moment to indicate here an inference which will afterwards be drawn out more fully. Any theory of life, that is, any theory of our duty here and our destiny hereafter, must (if one may so say) be many-sided; it must take account of all sides of our nature, and neglect no class of circumstances in which men may be placed. Anything therefore that makes a man either neglect or unduly notice any of these circumstances, will disturb the

of judgment to work out his own religious creed for himself, we should find many more individual differences of belief than now prevail. We should not expect to find exactly the same creed, in all its minutiæ, prevailing over extensive areas of country, and entertained by people in very different circumstances. I am not here alluding to the case of those who take their doctrines upon authority; of course they cannot fail to agree; but of those who do attempt to argue and reflect. Even they, to some extent, think in groups; each tends to come into harmony with his neighbours; and those who deviate from custom seldom do more than take an old system and make some private alterations for themselves. I am far from thinking that they are wrong in thus acting; in fact, for reasons given in the third lecture and elsewhere, there are strong grounds for presuming that any one who neglects the help afforded by comparing his own convictions with those of others will fall into error, that is, on subjects which, like theology, do not admit of decisive experimental tests. But if we did think in theology, each for himself, more than we now do, I suspect that any one's emotional peculiarities would soon stamp their impress deeply on his dogmatic belief. Only one or two leading doctrines might be thus affected at first, but in any closely connected group of doctrines a difference insinuated at one point soon extends to others. Hence, in the case supposed, although the total range of variation could not well be greater than it now is, we should probably find that more differences would exist in any small group of individuals who had been brought up under similar influences. As things now are, the differences of emotional disposition of which we have to speak, expend nearly all their force in loosening or tightening our hold of the entire group of doctrines with which we start; there is still scarcely sufficient independence of judgment to enable them to reach so far as to break up the old group by detaching some of its parts and inserting others. The former moreover involves no trouble, the latter requires considerable attention and power of thought.

delicate adjustment that should exist, and may therefore give him an erroneous view of the whole. We sometimes speak, for instance, of certain sad experiences enabling men to see more clearly some truth which they had before neglected. But it is often the seeing now what had not been seen at all before, notwithstanding that the facts about them may have remained unaltered. A single straggling gleam of light may shew you that what you had taken for a cloud-bank is a frowning precipice straight on to which you were drifting. You saw the object before, in one sense, but your judgment about it has quite altered.

(III) The foregoing considerations supply conditions; they afford a sort of logical foothold by which *bonâ fide* differences of opinion may be retained in the face of facts which are equally accessible to each party. But something more is wanted in the way of a cause which shall give birth to these differences.

Remember then that one of these groups of facts on which our conclusions rest is connected with, and in part consists of, emotions.

The way in which emotions contribute to determine our belief is twofold;—

(1) There is, first, their subjective influence; their influence, that is, directly on the mind of the observer. This influence is generally, and on the whole justly, regarded as of a decidedly disturbing character.

(2) But, secondly, they present themselves in

an objective aspect, as being themselves some of the facts which have to be taken into account in framing or choosing our theories about the world. Under this aspect they have a most important logical bearing.

The influence of our emotions under the first of these heads has been so constantly remarked that it has passed into a commonplace. No exhortation to the pursuit of truth is complete without a word of warning to the inquirer to divest his mind of all disturbing passions. Sobriety and calmness are the recognised laudatory epithets in reference to our conclusions.

"The passions," it has been said[1], "like a fused metal, fill up the wide interstices of thought, and supply the defective links; and thus incompatible assertions are harmonised by the sensation without the sense of connection."

But in listening to such cautions, let us not run into an opposite error. Emotions must not be neglected in their objective aspect. They are a part of human nature, and must therefore have their proper place in any comprehensive theory of man's position and destiny. Just think, for example, what havoc would be made with many of the most favourite and convincing arguments for the immortality of the soul, and for the existence and attributes of God, were our emotional side remodelled, though the judgment might be left untouched! The general prevalence of certain emotions is one of the premises, and

[1] Coleridge's *Lay Sermons*, p. 168.

a most important one, from which our conclusions about life must be drawn. To appreciate this put such a case as the following:—Suppose that from amidst some tribe of Hottentots or Fuegians one man of speculative mind had emerged, rising like a tower above the dead level of animal and savage impulses around him. He ponders on the destiny of his fellow-countrymen, the only men of whom he has any experience. If the common arguments for the immortality of the soul occurred to him, what value do you think he ought to set upon many of them? For instance, many thinkers have, with Pascal, been profoundly impressed by the frustration of worldly desires, the incurable ennui and disappointment and misery which prey upon man;—What confirmation would our speculative savage see of this when he reflected upon the feelings of his countrymen? Would he not be led to suspect that his own feelings, with which others seemed to sympathise so little, were the product of an exceptional or diseased organisation?

Others have recognised again, in the boundless desires of man, an intimation that another scene was to dawn upon him, in which these desires were to receive some satisfaction;—Would such an argument as this count for much in the case supposed?

But it may be asked, What is the practical bearing of these considerations? How do they make any opening for variations in our belief? Because *I* may become highly sensitive, yet others are left as

they were; the *average* is left untouched, and it is this which is, or ought to be, my real premise; it is with this that the theory has to fit in, and not with my own highly wrought frame, which may, to a great extent, be exceptional. True; but remember that one characteristic of emotions is, that they must be felt in ourselves before they can be perceived in others. Our only way almost of knowing how strongly our fellow-men are affected is by being strongly affected ourselves. We know it is not always easy to bring a healthy man to believe that others are weak and suffer, though the facts are patent before his eyes. But it is next to impossible to make one of slow and sluggish feelings even conjecture what may be the turbulence of the passions which surge in the bosoms of those more sensitively organised. Rouse a man to love his neighbour, and by so doing you not only give him a new feeling, you give him also new data, for you make him appreciate, as he never did before, the strength of love about him. Of course it is possible that a man may know how others are affected without being similarly affected himself; but as a general rule our own emotions are the portal through which we are introduced to an appreciation of those of others.

Here then, in the considerations which have thus far occupied us, we have found an opening for numerous and important differences of opinion between one person and another, or between the same person at different times. Let us put them together and see what they amount to, and why

they lead us to perplexity in religious matters rather than in any others.

It is quite true, then, that in the province of science differences of opinion do on the whole tend gradually to diminish and finally to disappear. It is easy to see some of the reasons why this should be so. For one thing it is much more practicable to detach the group of phenomena with which we are concerned from others, and so to reduce our investigation to more manageable dimensions. No science includes more than a fragment, often a very small fragment, of our human experience. Hence the widest of sciences, in the common use of that term, falls far short of the all-comprehensive embrace of moral and religious discussions. Again; if our scientific inferences had led us to different conclusions, we have in most cases a ready verification by a resort to experiment. If we doubt the soundness of our reasoning, we have but to ask, Is the fact so or not? And it is not often that we have to wait long for a decisive reply to such a question as this. A resort to experience, on the other hand, in matters where experience must partly consist of our feelings, will sometimes seem only to aggravate the confusion which it was intended to remove.

Hence, when we step from truths of physical science to those of politics and society, we seem to be moving off the firm land on to a sea which is beginning to heave. Our emotions now come into the discussion, in the double way already

pointed out, and cause us some perplexity. Few persons doubt that there is truth to be found on these topics, or suppose that we shall fail to find it at the last. But the process of finding it is a slow and disappointing one.

Still more, of course, is this the case with religious truth. I should rather say here that the process of *appreciation* is hard, since we believe that the truth in its essentials has been already given to us. As religion has reference to all men, at all periods of time and under all their circumstances, the ramifications of any of its doctrines must of course be infinite. And consequently the difficulty of grasping it with unwavering force will be almost insuperable. The sum of the matter, then, as far as this lecture is concerned, seems to be this; there *are* causes why religious belief should be less fixed and uniform than scientific belief. These defects cannot be wholly accounted for by prejudice, partiality, and sloth; they have besides something of a real logical foothold. And this being the case it is best frankly to admit the fact. We shall be occupied in future lectures with some consequences from the fact just mentioned; I may here indicate in a few words what one of them is.

If we do not obtain what I have called a logical explanation of these fluctuations and differences in our religious belief, we seem driven to one of two alternatives; either to adopt a non-logical explanation, or to conclude that there is none at all. In the former case we assign as the cause some

bodily state or mere feeling, the fault of this being that we are cutting ourselves off from all criterion of truth and falsehood, and degrading religion into a matter of mere taste[1]. In the latter case, (viz. where we can find no explanation) we shall, according to our temperament, either say with the Positivist, "This is what comes of speculating at all upon such subjects, therefore we had better let them alone," or with many Dogmatists, "This is

[1] I am far from denying that bodily circumstances have some influence upon our religious sentiments and thus upon our convictions; but, as I have remarked in the preface, in proportion as we find in them the whole explanation of these sentiments and convictions, religion, as a system of doctrines which must be true or false, is altogether disposed of.

There is of course hardly any difference of opinion as to the general existence of religious sentiments; the only question is, what are we to make of them? Every believer must connect them with his convictions, and thus give them an objective reference; he will say that they refer to certain facts of history and Revelation, and that if these facts were disproved the whole fabric of conviction falls with them. and that of the sentiments will soon follow. The psychologist as such (I refer to the analytical school of Psychology) does not much trouble himself about the objective facts, but undertakes to explain how the sentiments arise, namely either from our bodily organization or by some law of mental association. Thus in Mr Bain's work a section will be found headed "the religious sentiment," just as others may be headed "wonder" and "awe," and so on. Such an explanation is certainly not incompatible with belief in the truth of the facts of religion, but it seems equally certain that its tendency is to make these facts needless, and thus to prepare the way for a denial of them. The Positivist, again, though he rejects almost all the facts of our religion, fully admits the existence of religious sentiments as a constituent part of human nature. But then what is to be done with them? It is the knowledge that they cannot be got rid of altogether, and the assumed hopelessness of admitting what to us is the only legitimate explanation, that drive him to such desperate straits in the invention of a new religion, and make him, as Mr Goldwin Smith says, devise "a shadowy divinity out of the abstract being of humanity, and a shadowy immortality of the soul out of a figment that the dead are greater than the living."

what comes of speculating upon them by ourselves, therefore we had better accept them from the Church[1]."

The course of this lecture has necessarily led me to be critical rather than constructive. It may seem to some a poor thing merely to account for a difficulty rather than to proffer help in the way of removing or reducing it. I shall try, as I have already said, to offer some such help in a future discourse; at present I will content myself with one suggestion.

If the vast comprehensiveness and multitudinous proof of any great religious truth seem to baffle our attempts to grasp it steadily, we may remember that these characteristics offer consolation as well. They multiply the occasions on which confirmation of the truth may be found, and enable us to find it through many a strange inlet. For just think how ample is the range of this confirmation! Close by indeed there is a sort of foreground of obvious facts observable which we may call *proof;* beyond these, but still in connection, there are other facts which are valuable in corroboration as analogies; and beyond these again, towards the dim haze of conjecture, where the horizon seems to fade away in metaphors and similes, there crowd upon us intimations and suggestions of every kind. Take for example some doctrine on the truth of which you have been accustomed to rely, and ask yourself, On what does it

[1] For a fuller discussion of these latter alternatives see the Appendix.

depend? How is it established? As you examine its supports you will find them spreading and ramifying in all directions, and perhaps at every point becoming obscurer and more difficult to track. And so it must be. I am speaking of course of any of those great religious principles on which men can live, and for which they will care to die. Examine their foundations, and what do you find? You cannot generally say with ready certainty, "It is proved by such or such another principle, or it is accepted at once upon its own evidence." You will discover its supports to be infinitely more complicated than this. You will find that it rests partly upon the harmony and connection which fit it in with other truths (and what an amount and variety does this include!) partly upon your own experience of what it can do for you, partly upon the similar testimony of others. Yes; and you will find its foundations assuming stranger and more varied forms than these. You will find it deriving support now from a pain, a disappointment, a pang of remorse; now from our hopes and aspirations; now from a pleasure enjoyed and a time of quiet peace. Now it will find confirmation in a temptation withstood, a resolution painfully adhered to—and now in our failures and our broken vows. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Hence what some might regard as mere trifles have in this way a great and just importance; partly by recalling to us facts of which we were losing sight, partly by putting us into a sympathetic

tone and so enabling us to estimate them more fairly ;—

> "Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears,
> As old and new at once as Nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in the soul."

When a truth is intended for all mankind, every form of human experience, every feature of human human nature, will be found to throw some light upon it, and thus to confirm it. And so it results that wherever we go, in our joy or our sorrow, we may find if we will, that the Spirit which inspired the Scriptures has been there before us. If we ascend into a heaven of joy we may find it there, and if in our grief we descend into the valley of the shadow of death it is there too.

LECTURE II.

THE CRITERION OF TRUTH.

ECCLESIASTES XI. 7, 8.

"*Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.*"

WE were occupied last Sunday with a consideration of the fluctuations and differences of belief which are found to prevail in various directions, but more especially in religious matters. It may serve to illustrate the nature and import of these characteristics of belief if I point out that they may be assigned to three distinct periods or stages, which in most cases might be said, roughly speaking, to succeed one another in historical order.

There is first of course the primitive stage, in which all men think alike so far as they think at all. On isolated matters of fact, and about the details of ordinary life, differences of opinion must always exist, but on higher subjects the most per-

fect unanimity prevails. So far as men actually believe, there is conscious agreement; so far as the saying is true that "he that has never doubted yet has never yet believed," we can at least say negatively that there is no difference of opinion.

But this stage is followed by one in which differences of opinion have become so numerous and obstinate, and have advanced to such important subjects, that they can no longer be neglected. It is to this stage that *Logic* appropriately belongs; Logic, I mean, of the formal or syllogistic type. The conditions favourable to the full development of this art seem to be these:—There must, for one thing, be a considerable difference of belief; otherwise the art would be needless, as there would never be any occasion to resort to it. But there must, at the same time, be substantial agreement on other points, that is on certain general or ultimate truths, or the art would be impossible. There would in that case be no common ground from which to start. Such conditions existed pre-eminently during the time of speculative activity in the middle ages. The progress of inquiry was then multiplying the occasions of disagreement; but the stern control of the Church provided at the same time, directly or indirectly, an abundance of general principles to which appeal could be made without fear of denial. Under such circumstances, also, we should naturally look at a later period for an age of *Evidences;* they are appropriate to a time when, in spite of many differences and doubts

about religion, there is nevertheless a broad background of unanimity as to propositions which both parties will frankly and readily accept.

Sooner or later however there must come the stage in which that universal solvent, the modern spirit of criticism and inquiry, has begun to attack not derivative principles only, but also those which had hitherto been regarded as ultimate and beyond discussion. At this stage the common Logic is powerless. It has not a word to offer at such a conjuncture. For how can men argue to any purpose when they cannot find a basis of agreement from which to work? They can really do little more than state their own opinions each for himself, and trust that these will carry persuasion. Most persons will admit, I think, that many illustrations of this state of things are furnished by the present tone of religious discussion and controversy.

In the first of the three stages just indicated the problems with which these lectures are occupied could never arise, since people really have no differences of opinion of any fundamental character. In the second the resource would be, try to bring your opponent over to your own opinion, either indirectly by acting on the feelings, or directly by persuading the judgment. Work upon him, that is, by logical arguments. In the third we have begun to lose some of our respect towards, and perfect reliance in, these resources. It is hard for the disputants to find any common principles, which both

sides will frankly and fully accept, and from which they can argue.

Now as these differences are thus spreading and intensifying, you will see that a very important distinction begins to emerge and at last acquires remarkable prominence and importance. The distinction is that between a belief being generally entertained, and its being true.

In the primitive stage, when there really are no differences worth mentioning, it is clear that no such distinction as this could ever be thought of. But as differences of opinion multiply, those two properties of belief, namely general prevalence and actual truth, begin to become loosened in their mutual cohesion in men's minds, until at last they are entirely split asunder.

At the present day the separation between them is in fact so complete that they are constantly treated apart from one another. Take up, for instance, a history of opinions such as Mr Lecky's recently published volumes on "Rationalism in Europe," and what do we find there? One belief seems to follow another like the pictures in a magic lantern. Each of them was held in turn in full conviction, and many of them with passionate attachment; but which of them were true? Were any of them true? What is the test of their truth? A particular answer to such questions is doubtless intended to be suggested, but for an articulate assertion of it we must seek elsewhere[1].

[1] "The speculative opinions which are embraced by any large body of men are accepted not on account of the arguments upon which they

Take up, again, any work on Psychology, and what do we find? Even there the question of truth is sometimes overlooked or little regarded. Abundant explanations are given as to the disturbing influence of various circumstances upon the value and accuracy of our judgments; how passion blinds the reason, how self-interest exerts a bias, and so on. Most true; but when we recollect that our beliefs are not like mere states of feeling, but may be, in fact *must* be, right or wrong; the question again recurs, Are they true or are they false? We do not want to be put off by being told the order in which beliefs have succeeded or will succeed one another, nor yet by being told that belief is a sentiment engendered by such or such causes.

Of the two classes of questions therefore which now meet us in reference to belief, the first, namely —How do they arise? where do they prevail? in what order do they succeed one another?—we pass

rest, but on account of a predisposition to receive them. This predisposition depends with many persons entirely upon the circumstances of their position, that is to say, upon the associations of childhood, friendship, or interest, and is of such a nature as altogether to dispense with arguments; with others it depends chiefly upon the character of their minds, which induces them to embrace one class of arguments rather than another. The intellectual character, again, results partly from natural and innate peculiarities, and partly from the totality of influences that act upon the mind." *The Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. II. p 107.

Such a statement as this is quite appropriate on the part of any one who has already decided that the opinions in question are groundless; but it is as well to remind the reader that over the whole field embraced by this sort of historical criticism every conviction is soon rotted through and sinks into nothing more than a taste or sentiment, or it may be a passion. A history of religious or political convictions conducted on this system had better be entitled, A history of prejudices.

by, as not concerning us. It belongs rather to the province of Psychology or History. It is with the second that we are now to be occupied, namely, Which of these beliefs is true? What is the criterion of their truth? Since the time of Bacon much illustration has been given of the "idols" of the human mind, that is of those deceptive images which flit before us and mislead us in our search after truth. But how are we to know when we are the victims of them? When is the mind sound and when is it unsound? I need hardly say that I have not the presumption to offer a new criterion of truth, but at least we may see our way towards effecting some mitigation of the perplexities which encounter us.

Abandoning, then, the Historical or Psychological position, suppose that we are confronted with a difference of opinion deliberately adopted and persistently maintained: what is to be done? Such an occurrence is not unknown; indeed the course of our last lecture has shewn abundant opportunities for it; How is it to be remedied?

I. In science we know what our resource would be, in case such a state of things should be found to exist there. We should have to devise some experiment and see which of the conflicting opinions was correct. Of course such an "interrogation of nature" is one to which an answer is only to be got with difficulty; when however we have succeeded in getting it, it is generally clear and unequivocal. But in reference to religious truth any appeal to

experience in the strict sense of the term is mostly out of the question. For one thing the result may have to be waited for, and the time during which we wait may be just the time during which alone we are practically concerned in obtaining an answer. Take, for example, the doctrine of a Future Life. In the case of ninety-nine out of a hundred generations who have lived on earth that question is long past doubt now; it is settled as decisively and crucially by the result as was ever any physical problem; but if they cannot tell us what they have found, how are we the wiser by their conclusive knowledge? Again, in other instances, experiment is not merely delayed; it is from the nature of the case impossible. An experiment is of course *partial;* it implies the introduction of a thing into new circumstances, the temporary exclusion of an agent, and so on. In truths therefore which are universal, like some concerning the Being and Attributes of God, we can hardly have experimental knowledge in the strict sense of the term[1].

[1] We are so used to meet the word *experimental* in religious biographies that it may be forgotten in what a different sense it is there employed. Of course every individual must be the final judge as to his own mental states and the changes they undergo; he must know whether he is restless or at peace, whether his conscience torments him or not, but more than this is needed for experiment in the common sense of the word. The essence of the term, when used scientifically, seems to imply two things; namely that knowledge as to objective facts may be thus acquired, and that this knowledge is free and conclusive to every one who chooses to put himself into the right circumstances. But who would claim this in religion? Take for example such a doctrine as the Love of God. We cannot prove this to demonstration, in the way in which we can prove that air has weight by temporarily exhausting it from

II. But although decisive experiment fails us, a good deal may still be done towards effecting unanimity in these complicated subjects by the process which, for want of a better term, may be called "living by the doctrine in question." Many a scheme, which at first struck us as very ingenious, will in this way lose all hold upon the mind without its being strictly disproved. And conversely, other schemes, as to the value of which we were once very doubtful, grow in our estimation as we continue to find them harmonising with our other convictions and adapting themselves to the varying necessities of our daily life. As this process plays a very important part in the formation of our convictions it is worth while calling attention to it. Ask any man immersed in practical affairs what is his guarantee for some rule on which he relies? He may assign one or two reasons, but these are probably not so much the real sources of his own conviction as grounds for justifying his conduct to others. The reliance which he feels rests rather on the confirmation obtained in daily life, on the way in which his rule harmonises with his other convictions, on the support which it receives from the convictions and the practice of others. Our opinions thus undergo a process (if

a certain place and then marking the difference; at least we could only do this by admitting Reprobation, and finding some wretch upon whom the brand of God's wrath was stamped for ever. There are indeed plentiful indications of the fact of the Creator's love upon every side of us, abundantly sufficient to confirm the Scriptural revelation of it, but not of that decisive character which forces the man who denies it to lie to his own soul.

one may use a familiar term) of "*shaking down*," which does much to fit each into its relative place. Many of those which were apparently out of place and excentric in their nature come to be removed, those which were ill-assorted come to be united into closer cohesion. I know no other way than this by which we can practically test any of those comprehensive moral and religious truths to which we are referring. If any one should reply that such a circuitous process is needless, inasmuch as we may often see our way to some short cut for establishing or refuting a proposition by bringing it into connection with other indisputable truths, we might rejoin that even where this resource is available the evidence of these test-truths is not intuitive, but would be found to involve a process precisely similar to that which has been just described[1].

[1] An example or two may serve to make the above remarks plainer. In former times a philosophical system, such as that of Des Cartes, could be so displayed as to stand or fall by its intrinsic merits in a very short space. Men were expected to think it over and say whether they accepted it or not. But now contrast with this such a modern scheme as the Association Theory, or such doctrines as those of Development, or of the 'Survival of the fittest,' or many others that might be mentioned. How are these to be proved or disproved? No summary test seems available: certainly it is not to be found within our own minds, and if we seek it in the facts we shall find that these are explicable on more than one hypothesis, the only question being which is the more probable explanation? The facts to be appealed to are so numerous, especially with the resort now made to the Comparative system, that no other mode of conviction seems attainable but that which is indicated above. And if this applies to the establishment of any single philosophical idea, it applies still more to such a group of ideas as go to make up a system or method. When a man has satisfied himself of the truth of some central idea he will, no doubt, very summarily reject or accept a multitude of subordinate doctrines, by one of the short cuts

But it should be observed of such a process as this, that, though it can effect much towards making

alluded to above, but this is a very different thing from admitting that such a central idea itself can be thus summarily criticised.

With regard to the interdependence of these ideas, one upon another, not so much by necessary logical connection as by the analogy of their nature and the harmony of their results, there are some admirable remarks in an Essay by De Quincey. I subjoin an extract:—

"The principle is this,—that in the grander parts of knowledge, which do not deal much with petty details, nearly all the *building* or constructive ideas (those ideas which build up the system of that particular knowledge) lie involved within each other; so that any one of the series being awakened in the mind, is sufficient, (given a multitude of minds) to lead backwards or forwards, analytically or systematically, into many of the rest. If into any Pagan language you had to translate the word *love* or *purity* or *penitence*, &c. you could not do it. The Greek language itself, perhaps the finest that man has employed, could not do it. The *scale* was not so pitched as to make the transfer possible. It was to execute organ music on a guitar. There lies the difficulty; and the principle which meets it is this, that what any one idea could never effect for itself (insulated it must remain an unknown quantity for ever), the total system of the ideas developed from its centre would effect for each separately. To know the part, you must first know the whole, or know it at least by some outline. The idea of *purity*, e. g. in its Christian attribute, would be utterly incomprehensible, and, besides, could not sustain itself for a moment if by any glimpse it were approached. But when a ruin was unfolded that had affected the human race, and many things heretofore unobserved, *because uncombined*, were gathered into a unity of evidence to that ruin, spread through innumerable channels, the great altitude would begin dimly to reveal itself by means of the mighty depth in correspondence. One deep calleth to another. One after another the powers lodged in the awful succession of uncoverings would react upon each other; and thus the feeblest language would be as capable of receiving and reflecting the system of truths (because the system is an arch that supports itself) as the richest and noblest, and for the same reason that makes geometry careless of language. The same principle applies, and à fortiori applies, to religious truth, as one which lies far deeper than geometry in the spirit of man, one to which the inner attestation is profounder, and to which the key-notes of Science (once awakened on the great organ of the human heart) are sure to call up corresponding echoes. It is not in the power of language to arrest or to defeat this mode of truth; because when once the fundamental base is furnished by revelation, the human

a man's opinions consistent amongst themselves, and bringing him into harmony with those in somewhat similar circumstances, it can effect very little indeed towards securing *general* unanimity of opinion[1]. It resembles, in fact, such an agency as party organization. A great number of individual eccentricities are loosened and removed; but the main bulk of opposing opinions continue to confront one another with undiminished force. The all-pervading guerilla warfare which existed before has been merged into the opposition of two or more organized hosts. Now when these parties come into conflict how is the opposition between them to be decided?

Here the conclusions arrived at in the last Lecture seem to confront us with a most formidable difficulty. The difficulty consists in this;—the same objective evidence may produce in different minds or at different times different subjective impressions. Or stated in less technical language, the facts before us being the same, different conclusions may be drawn. You will perceive the nature of such a difficulty more clearly by putting it into an imaginary form; or rather (what will be abundantly sufficient) by greatly exaggerating acknowledged facts. Suppose then that all old people drew one conclusion

heart itself is able to co-operate in developing the great harmonies of the system, without aid from language, and in defiance of language, without aid from human learning, and in defiance of human learning, by a machinery of spiritual counterpoint."—*Selections Grave and Gay*, VIII. 128.

[1] We are speaking of it here not in its scientific, but in its theological applications.

from some of the facts of life, and that all young people draw another; that this conflict existed under all circumstances and in all countries, and having been perpetuated from the earliest records showed no sign of diminution as time advanced. What should we make of such a phenomenon? The question might refer to facts which, so to say, lay apart from the primary interests of life, and did not therefore imperatively call for a decision. If so, we should, I suppose, be driven to the conclusion that for some reason or other our minds were not fitted for these problems; we should take it as a warning to keep off such ground. But if the facts were too comprehensive to be evaded, and too important to be neglected, what then? We should seem to have reached all that the most thorough-going sceptic could desire. The human faculties would be found in hopeless antagonism, and truth or falsehood on such a subject would have lost their meaning. We tell men to test their views in the struggle of life; they say in reply that they have done so and are doing it continually, and yet that they find themselves in no way tending towards agreement.

Now something of this difficulty does unquestionably exist, as I have endeavoured to show. The mere fact that people so generally take different views of the truth and importance of religion when in sickness and in health, when in affliction or joy, is one case in point. Hence the urgent importance of arriving, if we can, at some sort of criterion.

To begin with, there are two modes (amongst

others) of cutting the knot instead of attempting to untie it:

I. For instance, one may sometimes meet with persons who seem to advocate an extension to our belief of that principle of division of labour which is already admitted in our knowledge. They would say, let the old and sick be left in undisturbed possession of the belief which is so suitable to them, and which is so naturally produced by their peculiar circumstances. But don't let them try to propagate their gloomy convictions and impose them upon alien minds. Leave the young and healthy to their gaiety; why chill their joy and check its all too fugitive development? Is not each acting in perfect harmony with his nature and circumstances? Such advice is doubtless well meant, but what renders it intolerable, except indeed upon the ground of dramatic propriety, is the fact that the distinction between truth and falsehood is being dropped quite out of sight. These recommendations are all very well as regards men's pursuits and enjoyments, but when they trench upon grounds of *belief*, they are losing sight of the one important question, which party is in the right? No one who was in earnest would consent to be put off by being told that both parties were acting suitably.

II. The other of these methods is of a far more seductive and dangerous kind. It counsels us once for all to have done with every topic which is subject to such a taint of uncertainty. The state of feeling out of which this doctrine grows is one upon which

we have already touched, and which is not hard to understand. The progress of science has led us to care but little for processes or methods in comparison with results. Men have learnt to withhold their complete assent, not merely from ingenious hypotheses, but even from strong presumptions of analogy and induction whenever there is a chance of their soon finding the firmer assurance of some independent test. Combine with this the fact that the vast extent of science now forces most men to rely in most subjects very much upon the judgment of others, and that in doing this they must take into account whether those others are in agreement; and what will follow?

Will not many an active and busy man be inclined to say, 'I have many pressing wants to satisfy, and but little time to think; I for one shall just wait till those who advocate supernatural theories are in better agreement. Their differences are a sure sign that there is something wrong, I can't stop to inquire what[1]?'

When these feelings begin to be systematized and promulgated abroad as a doctrine, the scheme which they form is what I understand by *Secularism*. When, in addition, they are founded on a philosophic

[1] It is worth remarking that Des Cartes has expressed a similar opinion, though of course on totally different grounds. With him it was the exuberance of confidence in his own method that made him offer the recommendation, "Il ne faut nous occuper que des objets dont notre esprit paroit capable d'acquérir une connaissance certaine et indubitable," a certainty equal, as he elsewhere says, with that of mathematics. Descartes' works, edited by Cousin, Vol. XI. p. 209.

basis, and justified by Psychology and History, we have what is called *Positivism*.

These schemes hardly admit of being *disproved*, any more than the practical resolve which is the germ out of which they spring. They all say to the Theologian, 'Your explanation breaks down, therefore we shall shape our conduct in total disregard of it.' All that we can do, then, is to show that we need not be driven to this last resort. This is what I am aiming at, by endeavouring to shew that the difficulties, which it is urged drive us to this resort, are much exaggerated, and admit of some explanation.

To those then who decline to accept these ways of evading the difficulty, several resources are open for surmounting it. Let us review some of them.

I. There is one well known opinion that in such circumstances the judgment of the *soberminded* man, the σπουδαῖος, should be taken as decisive. In such conjunctures, however, as we are now concerned with, there does not seem much prospect of assistance here. The entire difficulty which would otherwise have been experienced in forming our judgment about the facts presents itself in an undiminished form in the process of selecting the man who is to pronounce judgment upon them. His judgment is pretty well known beforehand. He is therefore a mere delegate, sent to give a predetermined vote; and therefore the decision which it was intended should be transferred to him is retained and wrangled over by those who choose him.

II. Others would say, Each man can judge, or

rather (for the reason just given) cannot help judging, for himself. But let him decide in his cooler moments. He must avoid the times when passion is roaring in his ears, or indeed when there is disturbance of any kind. Let him, in fact, take a time of *dead calm* for the purpose. The objection to this lies, I apprehend, in the fact that there is no such period of dead calm. The advice seems to rest upon the assumption that our minds will, as a general rule, find their way straight to the truth, with the exception of occasional temporary disturbances. If so, avoid these, and there is nothing to fear. But if the conclusions reached in my last lecture be sound this advice is founded on error. We are never free from warping influences. At the times when we think we are free, the chances are that we are exposed to what are really but one class of them, namely, deadening influences. When all in our lives is proceeding easily and pleasantly, men may claim that they are free from bias, but that is the time of course when they will least feel their need for anything beyond what is then found to be so comfortable.

It is true that during most part of our life we may be cool enough for a physical problem; where the external evidence is clear, it will take a great deal to make a man misjudge it who has any real care to reach the truth. But, as I have tried to show, there are influences by which we may be affected not on exceptional occasions only, but for long periods: and these may affect not merely one person

here or there, but whole classes. They may appear but slight influences, and yet be of quite sufficient importance to produce serious effects in matters which demand a delicate adjustment of distinct classes of premises.

III. Another course, and as it seems to me a sounder one, is readily suggested by our previous train of reflection. Evidence on moral and religious subjects is, as we have seen, exceedingly complicated, and also (what is very important) has reference to different classes of our faculties, that is, to our emotional as well as our rational side. Now the causes of any persistent collision of judgments commonly lie in the fact that certain men, or men at certain times, are liable to have one or other of these sides of our nature unduly quickened or unduly depressed. Strike, then, a balance by appealing to the judgment of men under different circumstances, and so avoid the errors into which each singly may be liable. Empannel, that is, a more numerous jury, or, what is better still, choose it from distinct classes of society. I think that most persons act almost unconsciously on some such principle as this in some of the lesser matters of life. When you are depressed, for instance, and things put on their gloomiest aspect, and the judgment becomes infected with the bias of the feelings, and so evils are more strongly anticipated than at other times, have you never said to yourself, 'I am not now in a fit state to judge; I know that my mind is warped, and I will allow for bias'? This is a perfectly sound process of judgment; the

only complaint to be urged being that we do not sufficiently make allowances on both sides. When we are in all the glow of health and spirits, anything gloomy will seem too remote just as before it seemed too near. To be equitable we ought to correct one judgment just as much as the other[1].

I cannot see any sound reason why one of these states should be selected as more likely than the other to ensure a correct judgment. As things now are we surely cannot call one of them more 'natural' than the other, nor is one so normal that the other should be neglected. But let us pause for a moment and see what an advocate of each might urge in his own behalf.

One man, then, will say, the mind, when in full health and strength, is more vigorous. Concentrated attention is then possible, and we can thus follow out our principles into much more remote consequences. In a word, if we are fitter then for science, why not for everything else?

True, the other retorts, and therefore in matters

[1] Mr Bain says (*The Emotions and the Will*, p. 464), "What I should suggest is that every evening we record the impression of the day, or put down the side which preponderates according to the balance of the motives passing through the mind in the course of that day; and that this record should be continued during the whole period that this deliberation lasts. It would happen that in some days we feel more acutely the pressure of the motives on one side than on others; the preponderance being liable to be reversed from day to day in a question where the total of pleasures or pains is very nearly equal. But by allowing a lapse of time we should reduce the casual or accidental biases to a general average, and at the end of the period we have only to sum up the records of the days, and see which side has the majority."

in which close attention is of the greatest importance, the sick and feeble and those about to die had better defer their judgments to the strong and healthy. We freely resign to you therefore the field of scientific discovery. But why abandon our right of decision in moral and religious questions? We have not here so much remote consequences to pursue, for which vigorous undiverted attention is needed. The conclusions are mostly drawn from many and various premises by very short and simple inferences. What is wanted therefore is *reflection* more than discursive power. An occasional lapse of attention is not fatal here, provided only that we can succeed in keeping the proper facts before us. And they might claim more. They might retort that many very important facts of which account ought to be taken are distinctly more likely to have due prominence given to them at such times of weakness and depression. All that dark side of life which our social arrangements so persistently and often successfully endeavour to exclude from sight cannot be ignored then. Nor should they be ignored in a really comprehensive judgment. How does Job insist upon this when his friends had been so fully expounding to him the view of life which their own personal experience suggested and confirmed! "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you:.....Doth not the ear try words, and the mouth taste his meat?...God leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges

fools...He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death."

Let any unprejudiced person look again at those familiar discussions and say whether Job's friends were more likely than he was to see the truth upon such subjects as occupied their attention then.

Several considerations might be advanced in support of the fairness of this way of judging. Who, for instance, have, as a matter of fact, had the deepest and truest views of life, even without introducing specially religious considerations[1]? If we were to exclude such poets and moralists as are not in health and vigour, should we be likely to retain the rest only? I think we might claim even those in uninterrupted health and good humour as bearing similar testimony. What does Wordsworth say in

[1] The following judgment of Mr Mill upon Bentham will serve to illustrate what is meant above:—"He had neither internal nor external experience. The quiet even tenor of his life and his healthiness of mind conspired to exclude him from both. He never knew prosperity and adversity, passion nor satiety. He never had even the experience which sickness gives. He lived from childhood to the age of eighty-five in boyish health. He knew no dejection, no heaviness of heart. He never felt life a sore and weary burden. He was a boy to the last. Self-consciousness, that dæmon of the men of genius of our time, from Wordsworth to Byron, from Goethe to Chateaubriand, and to which this age owes so much of its cheerful and its mournful wisdom, never was awakened in him. How much of human nature slumbered in him he knew not, nor can we know. He had never been made alive to the unseen influences which were acting on himself, nor consequently on his fellow-creatures.....It is obvious what would be likely to be achieved by such a man, what a thinker thus gifted and thus disqualified could do in philosophy. He could with close and accurate logic hunt half truths to their consequences and practical applications, on a scale both of greatness and of minuteness not previously exemplified." Essay on Bentham, in *Discussions and Dissertations.*

his Ode about intimations of immortality—"In a season of calm weather . . . . our souls have sight of that immortal sea which brought us hither"? Again; it has been noticed by Dugald Stewart and others that *humour* is commonly one of the last qualities to be attacked and weakened by sickness and the approach of death; but humour is pre-eminently the faculty of seeing (though under a particular light) broad human characteristics.

Such a doctrine as this requires however some explanation and correction to guard it from misapprehension and abuse. Without this it might be taken to be a mere consecration of existing beliefs, whether true or superstitious. First then we must inquire about those afflictive agencies with which we are concerned, and which has such a tendency to stamp one kind of judgment upon our minds. Are they really permanent agencies, that is, are they universal elements of human nature?

You will observe that it is essential to our argument that they should be permanent; for if ever they could be got rid of in the progress of society they would have no more logical value than the ague and sickness which are dispelled by improved cultivation. This permanence is clearly the case with death; and therefore the only question remaining here is, are men likely to change in the sentiments with which they regard the prospect of it? There surely does not seem to be at present the faintest intimation of any such change. In fact far from men growing indifferent to death by the casting off of superstitious

terrors, the tendency is decidedly the other way[1]. With increasing sensibility, culture and sympathy, the shock which it causes, the strange and horrid inroad which it makes into all that we prize and take an interest in, are I think actually increasing. If therefore the Secularist and Positivist expect to reconcile men to it they are indeed sanguine. If it be urged that these refined sentiments are almost unknown to the savage and to those who have to live by incessant toil, but are the mere product of leisure and refinement; we might fairly demur to the implied assumption that such modes of life make men better fit to judge in the matter. Are refinement and culture such unnatural conditions that the judgments they engender should be regarded with suspicion? We have not time to examine in detail any of the other afflictive circumstances of life, of which I have before spoken, but I think that if you reflect upon them you will find either that they will never, so far as we can foresee, be escaped, or else (what comes to the same thing), that our own estimate of them, whatever they may in themselves be, shows no sign of diminution. The logical importance of these considerations must not be overlooked. If, for instance, all pain sorrow and sickness could be ridded out of the world, religious feelings

[1] "The Greek, for the most part, rose lightly from the banquet of life to pass into that unknown land with whose mystery speculation had but dallied, and of which comedy had made a jest. The Roman lay down almost as lightly to rest after his course of public duty. But *now* if death could really regain his victory in the mind of man, hunger and philosophy together would hardly hold life in its course." Goldwin Smith's *Lectures on the study of English History*, p. 39.

would not improbably begin soon to dwindle away, and eventually might even disappear, through lack of some of their appropriate nourishment. At least, if they subsisted, they would probably be built up into a creed considerably different from that which we now accept. This I have just compared to the extirpation of ague by improved cultivation. A change of outward circumstances would have changed, in one case the sentiments, in the other the bodily health of those exposed to these influences. But we cannot stop at this point: there is a logical distinction between the two cases. If men cease to suffer from illness a century hence, the knowledge of this fact has no effect upon us now. If however they give up their religious belief then, our faith would at once be affected. An argument which is to convince posterity must surely have some weight with us.

You will not misunderstand me as though I meant to imply that the religious feelings and convictions are only appropriate to the dark side of life; as though, except when men were in distress, they need never think of God. Far from it. Turn over the Book of Psalms, and there is not a single happy state, from the joy that exults in the most glorious manifestations of God's power to the quiet contentment that is felt amid the still pastures and the brooks, which does not there find a distinctly religious expression. But though these happy experiences will blend with our religious convictions would they have been sufficient to have excited

them? "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word," is David's own confession. What chance would Christianity have in a world of healthy happy young people? They might play with some of its more attractive doctrines, with the pictures and the stories, but would they be competent to hand it on to others with its dogmatic character unaltered? And yet those same young people when their convictions are otherwise obtained and supported may exhibit brilliant examples of every Christian grace.

There are some important qualifications of our principle which must now be noticed. To what sort of doctrines are we to apply the rule that the individual judgment is liable to be biassed and must therefore be distrusted, whilst truth is rather to be sought in the aggregate judgment as formed and corrected by many minds? Such a rule, I think, is tenable only under the two following restrictions:

(I.) In the first place we cannot fairly claim to confirm in this way any truths except those of an elementary kind; truths, that is, when stated in very general terms, and not when specialized by many limitations. This almost stands to reason, for in proportion as a truth is specialized it becomes less universal, and so fails to answer to the test. In other words, distinct dogmatic statements, and accurate definitions of terms, such as those in our Articles, must be supported by independent reasons. In that precise form we cannot appeal to a sufficiently wide corroborative experience; and even if a wide

experience were attainable, we could not fairly say that so rough a test as that to which we appeal is competent to decide between one of these precise statements and another.

(II.) A second condition is that we must be careful that the confirming testimony is really given under sufficiently independent circumstances. A common error is to trust to the *mass* of those who give their assent, without looking to their varying experience. My conviction of the truth of the doctrines contained in a hymn is not greater when I hear it sung by three thousand voices, than when I repeat it for myself; and I cannot see any better reason for assenting to any dogmatic statement because it has been continuously repeated during many centuries. At least this only gives it the negative value, that had the doctrine been groundless, it would probably have been attacked and refuted during that time. The question is, Do successive generations merely rest their belief of a doctrine each on the fact that those before them believed it also, or do they rest it on the fact, that their own obscure convictions are strengthened by finding them in accordance with the convictions of others? In the latter case, the argument from general consent[1] rightly claims considerable

[1] This doctrine of "general consent" is referred to very briefly above, as I wished to examine it solely upon logical grounds. It is impossible however to say anything about it without suggesting the celebrated rule of Vincentius of Lerins ("quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus"), with all its theological and ecclesiastical associations. I have not directly mentioned it because such a rule could never have found favour, or even have been adopted, without the existence of a prepossession which cannot be admitted here, though

weight. But I apprehend that the doctrines which it is thus attempted to support are often of such a precisely-worded character as to be much more suggestive of the case in which each person's conviction rests really on the conviction of others, than of their being convictions independently grounded, and only deriving *support* from such agreement.

I have been commenting, brethren, upon some of the causes of conflict of opinion and consequent doubt, to which we are subject on religious and moral topics. Now so long as we fix our attention upon that conflict itself instead of looking to the causes of it, we may seem to occupy a position in lamentable contrast with that claimed in science. There men, whether they know much or little, at least think alike, or show a strong tendency to do so; their unanimity being secured by the possibility of prompt and decisive experiment: even where such a test is not yet attained, it is confidently expected that it will some day be found attainable. It has been my principal object in this lecture to shew that

it is perfectly fair on the part of a theologian arguing in support of any particular doctrine. This prepossession is that there must somewhere exist a visible Church in which unity and truth of doctrine are to be found. If this assumption be admitted, the rule in question might serve well enough to detect the doctrines which were essential to such a Church; but if it be not admitted, what right have we to suppose that any doctrines whatever will be found thus universally to prevail except in a very rudimentary shape? And how are we to admit it without resorting to Biblical or traditional considerations?

Those who wish to see all that can be said historically and otherwise on the doctrine of "common sense," which is the philosophical basis of the theological doctrine of general consent, will find it in Hamilton's edition of Reid, pp. 742—803.

if we direct our observation to the *causes* of the much more fundamental differences which undoubtedly exist in non-scientific subjects, instead of laying the stress upon the mere fact of their existence, we may see our way towards a considerable reduction of their importance. We may not have made out any infallible criterion of truth, but we may yet have done much towards smoothing some stumblingblocks out of our way.

One word in conclusion, brethren, about that rough and ready way of getting rid of all religious difficulties which consists in simply turning the mind away from them. By those who take this course the attempt is naturally made to show that there is a very clear and sharp distinction between (as the phrase is) this world and the next; as though all in the one were plain, and all in the other obscure. I have not space now to do more than express the conviction, which I think could be abundantly justified, that there exists no such clear line of demarcation. When we leave simple facts and rise to broad generalizations, we shall find that neither in the subject-matter nor in the methods is it possible to say, 'At this point ends the solid earth of our world, and there you launch into the mists and clouds of the other.'

Let me put this into the form of an illustration. Might we not compare our position here for the investigation of truth to that which would be afforded to men whose only outlook into the world was through a fixed telescope? Straight in the line of

vision all is clear enough, and hardly any two persons differ as to what they perceive there. And most rightly do they make use of it for such a purpose, for in that field of view is the scene of their ordinary life, and of much that is of pressing daily importance. But then round that centre of clear vision there is a vast prospect, clear enough also in parts, but hazy and obscure towards the edge; so that with strained and aching eyes men can hardly say what is there, and some perceive one thing and some another. Now if they were to insist on inserting an opaque disk, and so excluding all that hazy outline from the eye, would they be wise? would they have gained anything? Should no danger be guarded against and no good aimed at until it can be seen straight in the line of vision? It may never come there till we cease to see darkly through a glass; shall we take no count of it till then?

LECTURE III.

CONSEQUENCES WHICH FOLLOW THE ADMISSION THAT OUR BELIEF RESTS ON VERY COMPLICATED GROUNDS.

JOHN v. 44.

How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?

As we shall be mostly occupied during this and the next Lecture with drawing out certain inferences from the conclusions arrived at in the first and second, and as many of you moreover are here to-day for the first time, I must briefly indicate what the nature of those conclusions was;

Summarily stated they were these;—Beyond the province of what we commonly call *science* (within which substantial unanimity is secured by the possibility of prompt and decisive experiments) there is a wide extent of very important subjects in which the comparative absence of such unanimity is felt as a serious difficulty, and made a constant matter of reproach. This failing shews itself in two ways; partly in the differences between one person and another as to what they believe, partly in the varying

intensity with which the same person holds his belief at one time and another. My first Lecture was an attempt to account for these characteristics, in other words to find out some logical reason for them. (I may pause to remind you that such a reason must be found unless we are to be driven to doubt whether it is any good our thinking about such subjects at all.) I pointed out, in explanation, several respects in which evidence in moral and religious inquiries is broadly distinguished from that in scientific inquiries. They were, first, the vast, indeed indefinite, number of the facts which, as proof, combine to secure our assent. Secondly, each of these so-called "facts" is itself compound, being elaborated by the mind out of a little that is actually given, and much that is supplied. Thirdly, and most important of all, emotions make up one of these groups of facts.

But to account for differences of opinion causes us to be at once challenged by the inquiry, Do you mean to justify them? and, if not all of them, then which? In other words, are we not thus losing all test and criterion of truth? A way was suggested not indeed of altogether removing this difficulty, but at least of diminishing it. The main principle of it consisted in correcting the opinions formed under one set of influencing circumstances by those formed under another, instead of adhering exclusively to any one, and looking upon all the rest as meant to be final and therefore proved to be erroneous.

A very likely reply at this point will take the following form:—"We quite admit that you can thus to some extent account for those fluctuations of belief, for indifference, doubt, and so on: but what possible opening is thus gained towards explaining the cases in which the representatives of opposing views confront one another without shewing any sign of change? In fact what can be made of deliberate differences of opinion, such as those which continue to divide men who seem to have quite made up their minds?" This is, in other words, asking that the general principles laid down in the first Lecture may be applied to a special case. We there found that, besides various favouring conditions, the principal cause of prolonged differences of judgment in moral and religious subjects might be assigned to the fact that emotions are some of the data in these subjects.

This, by itself, leaves a considerable opening for differences to establish themselves, but its effect is increased tenfold by the fact that our own emotional states are the principal means we have for appreciating those of others. The question therefore we have now before us is this,—Into what religious doctrines do these emotions enter[1]? Certainly not into all. No one, in looking over the Athanasian or Nicene Creeds, would undertake to say that our acceptance of many of their clauses was likely to be affected by the temper in which we found ourselves

[1] I mean, of course, what doctrines do they precede as data? not, what doctrines do they accompany or follow as consequences?

at the time or the circumstances in which we happened to be placed.

And yet I think that this is really the case with some of them directly and with others by implication. Take, for example, the fundamental doctrine of the Incarnation. This clearly rests in part upon the assumed fact that men are both weak and sinful. Not of course that it is, strictly speaking, proved by these experiences; but it so far involves or requires them, that were they generally denied the doctrine would soon cease to have any hold upon our minds. It might subsist for a time, in so far as faith is an expression of the lips, but in so far as it is a state which excites feelings and results in action, there would be but little of it left. Now bearing in mind what a range of experience is covered by these familiar expressions, the "weakness" and "depravity of man," and what is the process by which their extent is apprehended, it will readily be seen what an opening is here afforded for differences of judgment. I might perhaps express my meaning by saying that there are two factors which combine to establish any of the primary religious doctrines, the absence of either of which would be fatal to their acceptance[1]. The first of these is the historical truth

[1] The following passage from an Essay by M. Guizot, which I have since met with, seems to me to express precisely the above view:—

"La religion Chrètienne puise sa force à deux sources. L'une est sa vérité réelle et historique; l'autre est sa profonde harmonie avec les intérêts et les besoins spirituels et moraux de l'âme humaine. Supprimez l'un de ces deux élémens d'attrait et d'autorité dans le Christianisme; supposez qu'historiquement il ne soit pas vrai, ou qu'il ne donne pas satisfaction aux aspirations de l'âme vers la solution des

of the events narrated (in this case the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ upon earth); this, of course, is of paramount importance. The other, which is almost equally important, is the condition of man (in this case his weakness and depravity). If this were denied the former would be so totally robbed of all its significance, that it would be either denied as a fact, or only admitted when reduced to the rank of some quite ordinary human narrative. But how are we to know what is the condition of man? Simply by observation, which in this case reduces itself mainly to self-inspection. We must judge by our own feelings, employing of course every safeguard which is at hand to prevent us from taking a limited and partial view.

Here then is one instance in which states so yielding as our emotions serve as foundations or buttresses to a structure so rigid as a doctrine. Of course the intensity with which such a central truth as the Incarnation is apprehended will affect all our religious convictions.

When speaking, in my first Lecture, about the courses which lay before us in case we could not find some such means as those just alluded to for at least accounting for the differences and perplexities which confront us, I remarked that we could see at one

grands problèmes qui l'obsèdent; maintenez ensuite, tant qu'il vous plaira ou que vous le pourrez, les formes, les règles, les cérémonies, les symboles, toutes les apparences, toutes les pratiques extérieures de la religion et du respect que vous aurez la prétension de lui témoigner: vous verrez bientôt s'évanouir son efficacité, comme la flamme, la lumière et même la fumée s'évanouissent quand le feu est éteint."

point two roads. They begin in much the same way;—the one asserting that since our reason when applied to the subjects in question leads us to such difficulties, we had better let these subjects alone and frame our theories about the world in total disregard of them. The other insists that this is what comes of thinking about them for ourselves, and that we had better therefore take them on ecclesiastical authority.

It is worth remarking that this latter doctrine is not unfrequently supported by a background of the most thorough-going philosophical scepticism, which loves to embitter the perplexities of our reason[1]. The adherents of an infallible Church are naturally and appropriately the principal supporters of such a line of argument. They have an ulterior design beyond the mere work of demolition. They seek to crumble every other fabric into powder in order to suffer less opposition in the erection of their own dogmatic structure. The choice of the weary wayfarer through life would then lie between that and nothing; shivering with cold and blinded with the tempest, what wonder if he should be ready to turn in at any open door? Pascal, for instance, is a case in point. In a celebrated passage in his *Thoughts*, he abandons all possibility of arriving at the truth upon such a question as, for instance, the Being of God, by natural reason; he does not merely assert that reason, left to itself, would stumble and grope along the right path, knowing however that it was

[1] I have discussed this point more fully in the Appendix.

the right path (this is a perfectly fair view); he goes to the length of asserting that reason would be at an absolute standstill, having not an idea which way to turn. But though reason is at a nonplus as to what we should believe, prudence can suggest what is safest to believe. He compares the solution of such a question to a game of chance. We may not have the slightest reason to guess one event rather than another, and yet the stakes may be such as to make it the height of imprudence not to act upon one assumption instead of the other. Is there a God or not? Man cannot see his way to saying yes or no; but since, if there be one, we have all to gain and all to lose according as we believe the fact or not, it is clearly safest to believe. Since, moreover, the Church provides means for helping us to believe, as prudent men let us hasten to adopt them. The appeal is here made in the coarsest form to our fears. It really comes to this, that whatever religion is prepared to bid the highest by the sanctions and rewards which it offers would deserve to be victorious. You will often find substantially the same argument repeated with such an appeal disguised. I cannot pause now to examine this kind of appeal as one would wish to do, but, having called attention to it for the purpose of distinction and rejection, let me just remark that the essence of it is this;—It does not merely admit that the unassisted reason, when undertaking to handle theological subjects, or those connected with theology, will find itself involved in disputes;—it seeks to foment and embitter these

disputes, and to prove that they are hopeless. It says, "This is what comes of thinking; you will find yourself involved in a maze whence escape is quite hopeless; then do not think, but assent." To make such an appeal as this fully successful some resort to our hopes and fears seems essential; without this men would, so to speak, just sit down in uncertainty and wait where they were; to drive them out of this indifference and force them into selecting a creed we must introduce some kind of rewards and punishments.

(I.) A very important question suggests itself here, to the solution of which we are helped by the principles already laid down. It is that of the innocence or guilt of error. On this question there are of course two totally opposed doctrines; stated in their extreme forms the first of these

(1) Asserts that erroneous belief is morally wrong, at least when the belief refers to the highest of all truth, namely, religious truth. Of course such a doctrine as this cannot stand by itself, as thus stated, for the acceptance of a whole system of truths cannot be regarded as an act of the will. And if it were not an act of the will, how could the conscience be expected promptly to decide upon it? How could it be pronounced right or wrong? Accordingly this doctrine is commonly supplemented, at least in modern times, by the assumption that the evidence in support of the truths in question is so obvious that none but the wilfully blind can fail to be convinced. The fault therefore is here assigned to an assumed

carelessness or obstinacy which will not face and examine the evidence. In the words of Barrow, God has provided arguments abundantly sufficient to convince any man "who is not affectedly blind and stupid, or wantonly slothful and careless, or frowardly stiff and obstinate."

(2) So much for one of these extreme doctrines; the other asserts that belief is absolutely independent of the will. In the words of a supporter of this view;—"Those states of the understanding which we term belief, doubt, and disbelief, inasmuch as they are not voluntary, nor the result of any exertion of the will, imply neither merit nor demerit in him who is the subject of them. Whatever be the state of a man's understanding with regard to any possible proposition, it is a state or affection devoid equally of desert and culpability. The nature of an opinion cannot make it criminal. In relation to the same subject, one may believe, another doubt, and a third disbelieve, and all with equal innocence[1]."

[1] I have quoted the above passage from Mr S. Bailey's *Essays on the formation and publication of Opinions* (first published anonymously in 1828) for its extremely apt expression of the view in question; but it is only fair to the author to say that there are other passages in the same essay which very much qualify the judgment thus enunciated. With the following passage, for instance, few would be disposed to quarrel;—"This attribute of drawing and fixing the attention, belongs in a remarkable degree to all strong emotions. Everyone must have felt, while he has been affected by any particular passion, that he could scarcely attend to anything but what had some connection with it; he must have experienced its power of presenting exclusive and strong views, its despotism in banishing all but its own ideas. Fear, for example, may so concentrate our thoughts on some particular features of our situation, may so absorb our attention, that we may overlook all

May we not find a much truer view between these extremes? Do not both of them lose sight of what may be called (to borrow a popular term from some of the speculations of natural science) the "struggle for existence" amongst the arguments in support of any complicated truth? No man can attend to all; they are far too many and various for that. If they were but few in number the neglect of any of them must really be owing to wilfulness or indifference. But when they are very numerous any predominant mental characteristic, any peculiarity in the circumstances amongst which a person lives, may affect his conclusions, by altering the proportions in which the evidence from various quarters flows in.

We may say, I think, that the causes which together produce in any man that particular group of convictions which we call his belief, may be divided into two classes. They are partly logical,

other circumstances, and be led to conclusions which would be instantly rejected by a dispassionate understanding.

"While the mind is in this state of excitement, it has a sort of elective attraction (if we may borrow an illustration from chemical science) for some ideas to the neglect of all others. It singles out from the number presented to it those which are connected with the prevailing emotion, while the rest are overlooked and forgotten. In examining any question, it may really comprehend all the arguments submitted to it; but, at the conclusion of the review, those only are retained which have been attended to, and are in sight, not of such as have been overlooked and have vanished, it is those by which the judgment will be determined. In this way self-interest, hope, fear, love, hatred, and the other passions, may any of them draw the mind from a perfect survey of a subject, and fix its attention on a partial view, may exaggerate the importance of some objects and diminish that of others, and by this virtual distortion of appearances affect its perceptions of truth."

partly psychological or personal. The former are hardly at all dependent upon the will, the latter to a very considerable extent are so. What is meant by a logical connection between our opinions is so obvious, that we need not pause to examine it, but the psychological may need a moment's illustration. Once admit that the whole atmosphere is, if one may so say, full of arguments, and it will easily be seen that according to a man's character and occupation he will imbibe and assimilate more of one kind than another. If he altogether refuses to think through other persons' experience as well as his own, he may in all sincerity adopt conclusions which others can see to be very one-sided and imperfect. Admit again that emotions comprise some of our data in reasoning upon moral and religious questions, and the tendency just indicated will be strengthened. Men are notoriously disposed to see in others what they feel in themselves, and hence their character and circumstances will imprint a deeper stamp upon their conclusions.

Hence, to put the obvious conclusion in the fewest words, we might say that there are at least two ways in which any one may be morally right or wrong in entertaining particular opinions; *deliberate* opinions that is, since we exclude the cases in which passion or sloth come into play. The first is when they are connected, in the way just indicated, with right or wrong emotions; (for that such epithets may, in certain cases at any rate, be predicated of our mental states will hardly be denied).

The second is when they are the result of partial views following upon partial experience deliberately persisted in[1].

Many important conclusions will follow from the admission of the fact that our belief is thus a result contributed by numerous and distinct classes of evidence. Some of them would, I think, present almost insoluble difficulties upon the very common view that belief is a simple state of mind depending upon a comparatively small number of evidences which appeal to the intellectual side of our nature only. When we remember, however, that our af-

[1] The remark may be added that there is some ambiguity involved in the common phrase 'man's responsibility for his belief.' This may be interpreted in two ways. For one thing it may mean nothing more than that wrong belief frequently involves disastrous consequences in this world, and will probably continue to do so in any future state. For to the Theist who believes that God actually governs the world, consequences which are permanent and regular really do assume the form of sanctions; he will be therefore justified in saying that the actions which are thus followed by painful consequences are distinctly forbidden by God. (Any reader of Bp. Butler's *Analogy* will be familiar with the use he makes of this principle.) In this sense of the word it is a simple matter of fact that we are all responsible for our belief quite irrespective of the question whether we could have known better or not. The child who eats poisonous berries, not knowing that they are hurtful, will perish just as surely as the grown man who designedly eats them in order to destroy himself.

Usually, however, something different from this is meant. The sanctions commonly supposed to be attached to wrong belief are of too appalling a character for most persons to bear to think of their falling on those who knew no better. They would therefore say that by responsibility they understand our liability not to consequences that are merely natural, but to those which are distinctly penal. I think that this distinction is hard to be maintained, even although it were attempted to support it by saying that actions of the latter class are testified against by our conscience; Butler, for instance, would not hesitate to say that both classes of action were wrong and therefore to be condemned by conscience.

fective side contributes its part as well, which often may be, and sometimes really is, in opposition to that contributed by the intellectual side, we shall perceive that a thoroughly stable compound is hardly to be expected. At least it is only to be expected in persons of considerable reach of imagination and strength of judgment, who are thus able to estimate duly and stedfastly the various conflicting elements. This last is the only logically sound condition, but then men are not like those machines to which we can add a fly-wheel, and so correct the impulses which are at one time in excess by those which at another are in defect. There is therefore, as I have just said, a want of scientific stability and cohesion about our belief and consequently about our practice. "In the day of prosperity there is a forgetfulness of affliction; and in the day of affliction there is no more remembrance of prosperity."

(II.) For one thing, may we not thus throw some light upon those strange oscillations in belief, those alternations between doubt and conviction, which so often occur? I am not speaking of cases of conversion, of changes complete and final from darkness to light, but of those smaller fluctuations of which the spiritual experience of most persons must have furnished examples. To some men no doubt God has granted a clearness of vision undimmed from first to last; all their life through hardly a cloud seems to pass between them and the sun. But this is far indeed from being the happy ex-

perience of all. Is not the case with most persons this? They have their days, their irregular seasons. Their faith is sometimes firm, sometimes insecure, sometimes tottering. But these alternations do not appear to be brought about by any adequate cause, nor to be preceded by any sure sign. If any cause at all can be detected it will often appear quite insufficient to account for the effects produced. And so their faith seems to them but little worth, and to others may have the semblance of mere caprice. The satirist will say of them—

> "Perhaps Prosperity becalmed his breast,
> Perhaps the wind just shifted from the East."

But is it not possible that an explanation may be found which shall transfer the reference from merely physiological states or emotional accidents, to grounds of evidence as to which men can be right or wrong? (I hardly know how to insist strongly enough that such an explanation is what we should aim at. Once admit that changes in our religious belief are not connected with evidence which has been somehow differently apprehended, and see whither we are led. It is a very short route thence to the conclusion that belief is a mere "sentiment," as the phrase is; and if so the supposed substructure of fact upon which we assert it to rest may easily be a portentous delusion.) Remember, then, that our convictions ought to be the product, and in the case of thoughtful persons whose experience is not unhealthy and exceptional, really is the product, of a large number of distinct groups of facts. Now what seems a mere

accident may remind us of one or other of these groups which had been suffered almost to drop out of notice, the current of our experience having drifted us out of their way. It is not in itself the cause of the change in our conviction; it is far too slight and transient to lay claim to this; but it may remind us of the real cause. When, for instance, a considerable change is produced in any one apparently by a few words of earnest advice, by a narrow escape from danger or death, by the example of a friend, or even by circumstances more obscure and trifling than these; it may be that these circumstances really comprise the entire cause of the change. If so they have not much evidential value, and one cannot set much store on convictions which can be swayed in this way. But I should prefer to see in them a mere occasion rather than a cause, and should say that what they do is to remind us of groups of facts which we were getting into the habit of overlooking. The facts were about us, on every side, but we had neglected them; then something replaces them in our attention, and they may thenceforth play their rightful part.

It may be as well to call attention here to the fact that I am speaking of the mental condition of the thoughtful and sincere alone, and am addressing them only; we have nothing now to do with those to whom the question has never occurred whether their belief is justified or not.

(III.) Again, may we not in this way throw some light upon conduct in which many persons can

only perceive a mystery of stubborn blindness; I mean the refusal to be convinced by a miracle even when it is admitted at the time to be inexplicable by natural causes. Going back, for instance, to the behaviour of the Jews in our Saviour's time; to some this seems unaccountable except upon the supposition that they were simply determined not to believe. Without entering on the consideration whether such a stretch of power on the part of the will is possible, may we not discover much in the state of mind referred to which is perfectly intelligible and consistent? The process of reasoning through which it is generally supposed that the observer of the miracle would pass is this;—"Here is a work manifestly beyond the power of man, and it is not diabolic; hence it must clearly be attributed to God, and the immediate performer of it must therefore have been sent by God." Now just consider, in such a case as this, what a mass of important considerations there is beyond the mere physical facts which had been observed, all of which have a possible bearing upon the question whether a miracle had been performed or not. Take but this one step in the reasoning, "He is a messenger sent from God;" this step cannot stand alone, but is closely connected with the answers to these two inquiries;—first, what is the character of God? viz. is it such as to make a revelation possible or probable? Secondly, what is the condition of man? Is it such as to make a revelation necessary or serviceable? By saying that we are brought into connec-

tion with these inquiries I mean that, according as a man adopts one or another answer to them, he may find himself easily disposed to accept the miraculous explanation, or only able to do so under extraordinary pressure of evidence. Now what I want you duly to appreciate is that these conclusions about the character of God and the condition of man do not stand like isolated inferences which a hostile fact may readily subvert, but that they are the result of broad generalisations and observations. An enormous mass of experience has been fitted into them, and is accounted for by them. The thoughtful man will be conscious of this, for he recognises the theory of life upon which he acts; but even the thoughtless, according as they consistently lead one kind of life or another, cannot fail to be under the tacit influence of one theory or another.

This being the case, how will any one be affected when he is confronted by a supposed miracle? He will not be like one hearing an ordinary story, which he may accept or reject without disturbance to the rest of his convictions. On the contrary the admission of it as a fact may cause a shock which will run through all his moral and intellectual being. Suppose the case of a man immersed in worldly affairs, and caring only for them. If he has ever given any thought to his position and destiny, he will have some theory of life which accounts for, and is confirmed by, all his experience. And since a man's experience is what he lives amongst, and above all what he attends to, his experience will be excep-

tional. Facts which make against his own view will have been overlooked, those which make for it will, by the persistence with which he dwells amongst them, gain undue importance. His mind is therefore like the house occupied by a strong man armed; no truth which is at all opposed to his predominant way of thought and life can gain entrance except after a desperate struggle.

This being his condition, a miracle is wrought before his very eyes, or reported on unexceptionable testimony; what else can we expect but that he should be staggered and perplexed at the time, and then begin to forget all about it? I think indeed he could more readily accept some story about genii or fairies; for that would not demand such a wide upheaval of all his old convictions founded on his whole way of life. The miracle, or rather the scheme to which it belongs, can obtain, if one may so say, no hold of his nature. It stands therefore by itself, a single unconnected event, trying to hold its ground against a crowd of hostile convictions. All the future course of his experience is quite out of harmony with it, and tends steadily to wear away the impression created by it. So striking an event might completely stagger him at the time, but to effect this is to advance but a very little way towards securing his permanent assent. It is merely like killing one sentry, who is but an outpost of the whole army which must be dispersed before a real conquest is effected[1].

[1] I hope the following extract will not be considered inappropriate, but it is so precisely illustrative of what would apparently

These considerations are often forgotten in current discussions about miracles. For instance, it is a not uncommon device to propose a case in which there is assumed to be some remarkable combination of testimony in favour of a miraculous event. We are then expected to give a categorical answer to the question, Should you, or should you not, believe a statement of this kind? Sometimes, as by Paley[1], this is done

be the feelings of most men in the case in question, that I cannot forbear from quoting it. The reader of the tale will remember that the piece of shagreen was endowed with certain miraculous properties connecting it with the life of the owner. He was determined to counteract these, and accordingly takes it to the leading scientific men in Paris, who meet together and exhaust every effort that science could suggest in vain. They had therefore all the evidence of an isolated miracle that we can conceive attainable.

"Il laissa les deux Savants stupéfaits.

"Gardons-nous bien de raconter cette aventure à l'Académie, nos collègues s'y moqueraient de nous, dit Planchette au chimiste après une longue pause pendant laquelle ils se regardèrent sans oser se communiquer leurs pensées.

"Ils étaient comme des chrétiens sortant de leurs tombes sans trouver un Dieu dans le ciel. La science! impuissante! les acides! eau claire! La potasse rouge? deshonorée! La pile voltaïque et la foudre? deux bilboquets!

"Une presse hydraulique fendue comme une mouillette! ajouta Planchette.—Je crois au diable, dit le baron Japhet après un moment de silence.—Et moi à Dieu, répondit Planchette.

"Tous deux étaient dans leur rôle. Pour un mécanicien, l'univers est une machine qui veut un ouvrier, pour la chimie, cette œuvre d'un démon qui va décomposant tout, le monde est un gaz doué de mouvement.

"Nous ne pouvons pas nier le fait, reprit le chimiste.

"Bah! pour nous consoler, messieurs les doctrinaires ont créé ce nébuleux axiome: Bête comme un fait.

"Ton axiome, répliqua le chimiste, me semble, à moi, fait comme une bête.

"Ils se prirent à rire, et dinèrent en gens qui ne voyaient plus qu'un phénomène dans un miracle." *La Peau de Chagrin.*

[1] Paley, it is only fair to say, does not altogether neglect all reference to the being and attributes of God as bearing on the

by those who consider that we ought to believe, sometimes by those who regard such an imaginary case as a reduction to absurdity. I think that most of these imaginary examples transgress the appropriate limits of hypothesis. It is forgotten that whenever we "put a case," by way of test, in any science;—in physics, for example, or in law or morals;—the condition must always be understood that all other things which could affect the result are to remain as they were. The imaginary case introduces a perfectly assignable change within determinate limits; but of course the supposition of this change is assumed to be in perfect harmony with all the admitted principles of the science[1].

credibility of miracles, though with him this reference is not anything like so prominent as it is, for example, with Bishop Butler. But in the example which he proposes as a test to decide the question, that, namely, of a miraculous story being testified to by twelve men of undoubted veracity, he certainly claims that we ought to yield our assent to the sheer weight of evidence in favour of even that isolated event, regarded as nothing more than an extraordinary occurrence.

[1] An example or two may serve to illustrate the above remarks. Suppose then that in explaining the laws of motion one were to take as an example a supposed sudden stoppage of the earth in its career, and to say that in that case all the inhabitants, together with everything else that was loose on the surface, would fly off into space; it is clear that, wild as such a supposition seems, it does not transgress the fair limits of hypothesis. It only assumes, as I have said above, "an assignable change within determinate limits;" we are not called upon to mention how such a stoppage might occur, and there is nothing in the mere assumption, taken by itself, to prevent us from supposing the laws of motion to retain their integrity everywhere else. In other words, in a legitimate hypothesis nothing ought to be introduced which compels us to ask, But could such a change really occur? What consequences does the supposition of the possibility of its occurrence entail? Now contrast with this such a case

This condition, however, is by no means always adhered to when we are concerned with a scheme so extensive and profound as a Revelation. When, for instance, I am asked whether or not I should yield my assent in the case proposed; I inquire at once whether we are to suppose all other things to remain the same? In other words, am I to approach the question retaining all my present convictions unaltered, as I should do in a scientific example? If so of course amongst these convictions is the one I now entertain as to the nature and sufficiency of the Christian Revelation. But towards this Revelation the new miracle can hardly be considered as neutral; it must therefore, so to speak, be either a rebel or a subject; it must either enjoy the advantage of being confirmed by Christianity, or the disadvantage of being in conflict with it. In either of these alternatives the problem has by now assumed a very different form from that originally contemplated.

On the other hand, if I am not to approach the question with my present equipment of religious belief unaltered, one has a right to ask, How much

as the following: Suppose that a discussion arose about the duty of submission to God. If one of the disputants were to say, But what would be our duty if God were to require a wicked action? (assuming of course that there is some other standard of right and wrong than the will of the Creator) the proper reply would be, "I cannot permit such a supposition; it would so alter my idea of the Deity as not improbably to shake my belief in His existence. Such a supposition would require the whole question to be reconsidered." And yet it is manifest that a precisely corresponding supposition would be perfectly admissible if we were talking of submission to a *human* parent.

of it is supposed to be suppressed? If a portion only, how arbitrary this is! If the whole, what a distinct moral being I am to become! For observe what follows on this supposition. That vast mass of fact and inference which we have coordinated and assimilated into our Christian faith is supposed to be shattered to pieces, our scientific knowledge and principles being left untouched. In plain words it comes to this, that I am assumed to be a Secularist or Positivist judging of the miracle, and as a matter of course I then refuse all credit to it. This is really as if, in illustrating a principle in mechanics, an assumption were made which it turned out when developed would require the solar system to be remodelled. On these grounds, therefore, it seems that in proposing any imaginary example, such as that under consideration, we can hardly avoid, whether we mean it or not, begging the question one way or the other.

(IV.) On the principles we have laid down we may now throw some light upon a problem which has probably presented itself to your minds, and may perhaps have been a cause of perplexity, I mean that strange medley of belief and unbelief with which the minds of so many are occupied. Of the better and more hopeful aspect of such a state we might perhaps take the parent of the dumb child mentioned in the Gospels who cried out to our Saviour, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Such a cry is often taken as an indication that he had some faith, though feeble, and was desirous that it might be

increased. Whatever may have been the individual characteristics of that man, I doubt whether such an explanation, as generally adopted, shows an adequate appreciation of the complexity of the mental state in cases where there is a violent conflict of evidence. Put such an instance as I have mentioned before. Imagine one who has been long immersed in selfish or worldly concerns. These comprising the bulk of the facts with which he is occupied, and scarcely standing in need of any religious explanation, he will probably have no belief worthy of the name about religion. The "trivial round and common task" will not by themselves bring him nearer to God; the mind must be "set to hallow all we find." Now this being his position, any single event which conflicts with the host of his current associations will (as we have seen) hardly effect an entrance. It may stagger him for the time, but will then most likely be quietly dismissed from the mind.

Suppose, however, that he is somehow suddenly brought to realize the existence and bearing of a new class of facts of a totally different kind; suppose that he has come to appreciate, no matter by what agency, the guilt and corruption of man. The new order is entirely out of harmony with the old, and we cannot expect the two to settle quietly into combination. There will be a time of disturbance and of ferment until the new arrangement has been effected. When a man has thus had suddenly opened out before him an entirely new class of considerations, there may well be a time during

which he has grasped the new ideas, and is fully convinced of their truth and importance, but is struggling to fit them into their place and to get out of old grooves of thought and feeling and practice. During his past life his mind has gradually assimilated to itself a vast amount of experience which is mostly of one kind, and is either consciously or unconsciously (namely, by his own reflection, or by following the reflection and the practice of others) built up into a coherent irreligious theory of life. This he is now convinced was a wrong theory. But what is he to do? For a time he is comparatively helpless, perplexed and staggered; hardly knowing what to make of the new facts, and yet well convinced that they are of vast importance and have a close bearing upon his position and prospects. Well may a man in such circumstances cry out, Help mine unbelief, my perplexity! With the old structure shattered and crumbling about me, help me to build up these materials anew. I begin almost to see my way towards doing it, but I need time and assistance before the work can be accomplished.

Such a state of perplexity and delay is, I think, as a general rule, the most natural state, and therefore the most healthy and promising. It is more suggestive of a process of genuine and rational conviction, than a sudden rush out of one state into another.

Another remark may be added. Have we not here an explanation of a fact which hardly re-

ceives sufficient recognition, the fact, I mean, that of many persons in reference to many subjects we really cannot say whether they believe or not? We may often hear it said that any one who attends to a proposition must be in one of the three states of belief, doubt, or disbelief. Upon simple subjects, especially those which are practical, that is which can be at almost any instant translated into action, I think that this is the case. But it certainly does not hold in reference to those subjects which are supported by a complicated mass of evidence arising from widely different sources.

Adopt what test we will, we cannot always extort from a man a single categorical answer as to what is his mental state on this point. By no self-interrogation can he reach a decisive reply for himself, and if others attempt to judge for him by appealing to the only sure test, viz. that afforded by his conduct, they will probably be baffled by obtaining several contradictory answers.

(V.) Hence, finally, may we not offer some justification of a practice which is often condemned as a sophistical tampering with one's conscience; I mean the practice of endeavouring to believe, of putting oneself into circumstances favourable for producing one conviction rather than another. One has to speak about this with caution, and yet I dare not pass it by unnoticed. There is perhaps no point whatever upon which the current teaching of religion on the one hand, and of science and philosophy on the other, are in more determined and hopeless

antagonism. No quarter whatever is given here What is almost universally applauded as a virtue by one party, is almost universally denounced as a vice by the other.

Before siding, as I do to a great extent, with the religious view, at least within its own province, let us hear the worst that can be said of it from the opposite side. The invidious way of describing the process, by those who condemn it, consists in saying, 'Here is a man who is afraid that the free exercise of his reason would lead him to a conclusion which he does not wish to entertain. He therefore drugs his mind in order to impair the power of admitting new conclusions, or else he impresses on it a bias which shall ensure its moving in the direction he fancies.' Of course, if this were really a full and fair account of the matter such a process would be grossly dishonest. Here, less than anywhere, ought it to receive any countenance. A University would indeed be wallowing in the mire when it taught or sanctioned the teaching that truth was not to be pursued anywhere, almost anyhow, and at any risk. But I do not think that it is a fair account of the matter. We might better state it thus;—A man may feel convinced that the whole complexion of the life he leads tends to give prominence to one set of facts, and to suppress or impair the influence of another set. This being the case, it is perfectly fair on his part for him to throw some weight into the scale which he knows is being depressed. I think that such precautions would not be disallowed by

any prudent man, in the instance of lesser matters, say political or social. If you were going into the midst of a society amongst which you well knew that some large class of considerations was neglected or disparaged, and if moreover you felt sure that this was not a mere equipoise to the comparative estimate entertained elsewhere, but that they were unduly neglected; might not any one fairly take measures to guard against the consequent influence? If he thought this needless, it would probably be either because he confided in the perfect security of his acquired convictions, or else because he felt sure that what he was now about to experience would be likely by sheer reaction to evoke a sufficient strength of opposing sentiment. But if he were forced to send his children into a society in which he knew that these partial influences would present themselves armed with the seductive force of sympathy, would he regard such precautions as being wrong or altogether needless?

The words of our Saviour which I have taken for my text to-day contain, I think, an application of this truth, "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?" He does not here seem to be speaking, at least not immediately, of the guilt or innocence of unbelief; the view He takes is quite different and is very striking. For the present He makes it a question not so much of morality as of prudence; He appeals rather to their common sense than to their conscience.

His words seem to ring with that deep com-

passionate sorrow which He who knew what was in man could not but feel when He watched men going on with easy complacent confidence along a road which He saw could lead them nowhere else but where the double-minded go. They are tender with the infinite compassion of One who yearns over those who are now hopelessly incapable of doing anything to help themselves; and yet at the same time stern with the holiness and justice of One who knows that prudence and foresight might once have stopped them in that career.

What then was that fatal obstacle which prevented them from believing? It was the "receiving honour of men," probably what is elsewhere called "the fear of man," a timid inability of forming a judgment unless they knew what was the judgment of others, an anxious desire to be in harmony with those about them, a restless inquiry what others are saying rather than what they are. This feeling binds all classes in one common bond of mutual fear. If it makes some inquire "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" it prevents others from expressing their convictions "because they fear the people."

I have spoken much about the necessity of correcting our often exceptional and always partial experience by the experience of others, and of the consequent difficulty of forming an accurate individual opinion upon religious subjects especially. But there is all the difference on earth between doing this and receiving honour of men. In the

former the judgment of others is merely a means, it is useful for telling us what is their experience; in the latter it is an end, we defer to it because we love and fear it.

For just think what belief in any great Christian truth involves. Take such a doctrine as this;—that we have a Father in heaven who watches over us amidst all the cares and vicissitudes of life. There is much in our experience to suggest and confirm this truth; but when we thus try to secure it, we have to cling to it in spite of much occasional hostile experience. You may have to shake off, for example, such horrible suspicions as those so bitterly described in Psalm lxxiii. and in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Now to appeal to the experience of other men is most useful; the more you do this the broader becomes the basis on which you rest, the more massive become your convictions, and therefore the less liable to be upset by any apparently hostile fact. But if, instead of thus making other men's experience a means by which to help us in drawing our conclusions, we make their opinions an end by which to test our own; if we are ever listening to that discordant din of noises to catch whichever is nearest or loudest, how are we likely to entertain real convictions?

You may get opinions and views in that way, you may feel likings and dislikings for the opinions and the views of others, but there is little chance of attaining to anything which deserves to be called

a conviction. An Inquisition with its threats of the rack and flames could scarcely work more mischief than this. Open avowed intimidation may induce men to conceal their convictions, but a timid sensibility to surrounding opinions may ere long prevent them from having any convictions at all.

Just as one might address the wretched sickly occupants of some crowded court,—not altogether in reproach, for it is not entirely their fault; nor yet altogether in pity, for it is not entirely their misfortune, and say to them, 'How can you expect to be in vigorous health?' So does our Lord seem in these words to address mankind. We may often regard their false superficial judgments, picked up through timid compliance with one another's opinions, as their mingled misfortune and fault, and say to them also, 'How can you expect to believe?' Do not think that the results of such a temper are only to be looked for in open rejection of the Gospel, or in utter carelessness and indifference. Beyond that there may be a wide-spread spiritual languor and weakness, faith diminishing, love changing towards indifference, devotion waxing cold. This may be assigned to many causes, but one of them may be what our Lord has here pointed out. See whether the honour of man is not occupying too prominent a place in your mind, and whether therefore the sad and solemn inquiry of Christ is not still applicable, How *can* ye believe?

LECTURE IV.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PRINCIPLES LAID DOWN IN THE PRECEDING LECTURES.

JOHN v. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?

IN one of Richter's works[1] there is a tale which contains a very striking illustration of that multitudinous variety of the evidences upon moral and religious subjects with which we have been occupied during the last three lectures. The particular doctrine there referred to is that of a Future Life. It seems intended to show that not only is there, what may be called, a central fact of positive testimony in support of such a doctrine, but in addition a numerous confirming assemblage of analogies, many of them springing out of the data afforded by our emotional nature.

It is put into the form of a vision, supposed to be seen by one in that stage of illness in which deep truths not unfrequently present themselves to the mind decked out in all the wild drapery afforded by

[1] Collected Works, Vol. LII.

a delirious fancy. He relates how he seemed to stand with a few survivors amidst the ruins of a world which was fast disappearing into nothingness, without leaving them a single gleam of comfort to brighten their departure. Some they saw who had suffered a life-long sickness and agony, and who now found to their horror that the balance of evil was wholly against them ; some had worn themselves to death for their fellow-men or suffered the sharp pangs of martyrdom, and saw now that they had sacrificed all without the slightest return. He tells how he passed amidst the mouldering remains of his brethren, in some of whose countenances the shattered hopes of a recompence yet lingered—by children stiffened in their first smile—by a thousand mothers with their coffined infants in their arms—how he saw the sages of every land, now dumb for ever, with the light of their truth quenched, silenced as the pall was cast over them, like singing birds when their cage is darkened with a veil; and so one blow continues to succeed another until the climax of all is reached, when the Christ, whom they knew indeed to have died, but to whom, as risen, they had so often sung their Easter hymns of triumph, was found dead without hope of Resurrection : Christ was not risen, so verily their faith was vain.

Dismal indeed would such a prospect be, but I refer to it here, of course, not in connection with the nature or intensity of the shock it would cause, but solely with the number of points at which that shock would be felt. It may serve as a suggestion,

to such of you as are here to-day for the first time, of the way in which the evidence on such subjects is contributed from many and diverse sources, and at last swells into what we call proofs. Let me pass on now to a few obvious inferences from such a condition of things.

I. The first thing, then, which I would try to make you adequately appreciate is this; the prodigious practical importance of the life you lead upon the convictions you entertain. It is not merely that your active and passive nature will thus be altered; I mean, it is not merely that you will come to form different habits and take to new modes of life, on the one hand, or contract a somewhat different character and disposition on the other, according as you are surrounded by one set of circumstances or another. Even this would be a great deal, for it would suffice to imbue you with the sympathies and prejudices connected with your mode of life. But this is not all. The really important consideration is that in addition to all this your *belief* may be affected. Not only may you be led by carelessness to neglect or forget certain classes of facts, but even when your attention is aroused and you have grown thoughtful, you may fail to see facts which actually stare you in the face, and may draw conclusions which are grossly incorrect.

In saying this, let me give one word of explanation as to what we mean by a man's believing this or that. Of course it is not meant that he says he believes it. His statements upon the subject are

only one mode of discovery, and in complicated matters (as we have seen) by no means a perfectly certain mode. The best practical test is found by studying his actions. When a man is acting deliberately, and knows what he is doing, the question, Does he believe this proposition? is best answered by others, if they substitute for it the question, Is he acting upon the assumption of its truth? If he is, I should say he does believe; if not, no; quite irrespective of anything he may say or suppose upon the subject.

We will take this sense of the word, then, in inquiring how any one can succeed in altering his convictions. Instead of dealing with it as a general question, put it in a more concrete form. Suppose then that any one wished to shut out from his mind any sort of conviction, worthy of the name, about the reality of a future life, or the need of repentance, or any other doctrine of Christianity. What course should he pursue for the purpose? What advice would you give him? Of course we must assume that he starts in possession of certain advantages, which are far indeed from being the lot of all men; he must enjoy tolerable health, and be in some degree free from pain and bereavements; without such advantages he hardly could succeed except by an almost wilful drugging of his anxieties, and it is proposed to recommend a more seductive plan.

(1) One very common resource is to plunge into frivolity. Not necessarily, that is, into guilty excesses, but into that gulf of endless, aimless nothings,

whether fashionable or not, which absorbs so many. In a highly civilized state we are beset with an infinite number of petty necessities, many of them the mere cravings produced by *ennui*, some excited by the proximity of the object intended to gratify them, some experienced only because other people are accustomed to gratify them. To give way to some of these necessities soon encourages and multiplies the rest. Hence many persons who might have been driven into better things had the alternative lain between them and nothing, will find full employment of their time in reflecting upon these wants and the best way of satisfying them.

Here then is one resource, and a very common one. But mark at how many points such a course as this requires to be fenced in, if men are to remain upon it with any feeling of security. Not only are men liable here to all the accidents of ill-health, bereavement, and loss of fortune; the road, also, is one which grows continually more difficult. Many of the resources depended on are such as cannot possibly satisfy any but the young. The time, therefore, can hardly fail to come when such persons will be either reduced to machines for the unconscious performance of their work, or to slaves who know too well what they are doing and hate it.

(2) Another and safer advice would be, Absorb yourself in business. Thorough devotion to this pursuit is much more likely to succeed in excluding from the mind all those thoughts that wander through eternity and in restricting them to the length of time

requisite to secure a fortune, than is devotion to pleasure. Partly because in its origin it appeals to more imperious necessities, partly because no limit is here reached beyond which attainment defeats its end, partly also because the pursuit of this end is hardly at all dependent on youthful health and vigour. Let then the man who wishes to forget God, and so to end in practical disbelief of his Revelation, throw himself heart and soul into the pursuit of gain. By the absorbing influence of such a pursuit, he will do a great deal, under favourable circumstances, towards ensuring success. Unto him that hath shall be given, from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

(3) A third and even more successful course, open to those who are competent for it, is absorption in some scientific study. In such a pursuit, when carried on exclusively, there is nothing which need lead us further backwards in the pursuit of causes than to some antecedent phenomenon, nor further onwards in tracking out effects than to such results as admitted of sensible experiments. But are not the effects even more decisive than this? (I am still speaking of exclusive devotion to science.) May it not, by its incessant appeal to experiment, tend to disparage all convictions that do not admit of being forced home upon all persons alike, whatever their circumstances or character? Moreover in reference to that dark side of life, of which we have had so much to say; science regards it, and in its own sphere rightly regards it, as simply mischievous.

Objectively it is an evil which we must extirpate as far as possible; subjectively it is a source of erroneous judgments. May we not thus be in danger of missing the important bearing which these mournful facts have upon the nature of our conclusions when our premises are so far widened as fairly to embrace them?

The practical outcome of all this is evident. The process of building up and strengthening our convictions is to a considerable extent in our own hands. By not leaving the mind in solitude or vacancy, but promptly supplying all its necessities, whether with solid food or with husks, you may often and for a long time prevent it from feeling any hunger or thirst after righteousness. Of course the mind must have some logical foothold to secure such a result, as I am not speaking of any of those freaks of belief which are almost capricious.

But then two questions arise;—Is such a process of *packing* your convictions a fair one? Is it a prudent one or likely to succeed? The first question I have discussed in the former lectures. As a simple matter of drawing conclusions I cannot see that the man who has thus curtailed the facts about which he is really in a fit state to reason, is so competent a judge as he who gives due weight to all. And if it is not fair, it is not likely to be prudent. Only consider what a miserably critical position the man must occupy who is struggling to bank out from him that dark and rising tide of sorrow and sickness and pain and death which is devastating all the country

around him. Hard it is to do it at any time, though when young and strong he may make head against the flood; but as the tide continues to rise he is growing feebler and more lonely, and the points of danger are multiplying, and the prospect of an utter collapse is becoming nearer. Such a sight is one to make any thoughtful mind sad indeed.

II. Will not the above considerations throw some light upon that process which is so commonly called the 'chastening influence' of affliction in certain cases? That this is due to the work of God's Holy Spirit I fully admit, but we may trace somewhat the human side of the means by which He works. Now it is very far from being always the case that suffering produces any permanent effect. (I am speaking, of course, throughout, of its effect upon our belief.) Sometimes men merely repine when they fall into affliction; sometimes they actually resent it as an injury; sometimes they harden themselves against it. Many persons are perplexed at this being the case, and think that the exhibition of such feelings by the sufferer must indicate wilful rebellion on his part: being certain that he must know whose hand is chastening him, they can draw but one inference, that he is stubborn. But must this be so? Surely a good deal of 'filling in' is required before a serious change of views can be shown to be anyhow connected with the mere consciousness of suffering. Undoubtedly the wide prevalence of suffering of various kinds is one of the buttresses of our faith: that class of facts requiring explanation will, of course, confirm any

scheme which does explain them. But it takes much to bring this home. When a man has long lived a life of consistent worldliness, and is at last suddenly prostrated by some stroke of affliction, what will follow? Often he will be merely like one who has just stumbled during a brisk walk, who when he recovers himself goes on his way again as before, and never dreams of putting the obstacle into a place in any scheme. If he does reflect upon it he may only reach to regarding it as a hardship or injury. What else can we expect? Where the suffering stands as a thing by itself, as it almost certainly will in the mind of the person upon whom it has thus suddenly intruded; where it has no group of facts to be connected with, and therefore no end before it, no part apparently to play; why should it effect more than provoke expressions of dissatisfaction and pain? Wounded animals merely show signs of suffering, and make efforts to obtain ease; and many a man gets no nearer to reflection, to say nothing of repentance, than they do. This is quite to be expected. There is nothing in mere pain, say, taken by itself, that should make us reflect. Just the reverse; its main characteristic is to fix the attention upon itself rather than to make us speculate upon its place in a scheme.

III. The next suggestion I would make is one that has already been repeatedly given by implication. Let us remember to allow for bias. The meaning of this recommendation will best be seen by examining two queries which it may very well pro-

voke. One of them is this. Do you mean that we are to try to believe, and make profession of believing, when all the while we do not? Certainly not: once admit that the judgment is warped by the life we lead, and it will follow immediately that conclusions which would otherwise be accepted will have to be modified. This is a principle upon which we soon learn to act in other directions. No matter how clear an inference may seem, no matter how impossible it may be to divest ourselves of the customary associations, the judgment can nevertheless shake itself free and accept what it knows to be the truth, and the conduct will be shaped accordingly. Nothing can well appear more unmistakeable than the size and position of an object under water: but the moment we know that these are distorted, in spite of the intrusion of opposite associations, we shape our conduct by our revised judgment. In other words, we appeal to the deliberate rather than to the spontaneous judgment. Such an appeal is needed in many of the affairs of life. Once get into the vortex of an absorbing pursuit and be left to pursue it in peace and quiet, and you have small chance of seeing other things in a true light. Things of time and sense will seem the only things certain, and therefore the only things to be taken into account. Religion, and all that that word implies, will lose its reality, and seem, if reflected upon, to be nothing else than a product engendered, as the phrase is, by our religious sentiments. But it is perfectly admissible to say, I know this, I know

that my judgment is warped, and therefore it is no treason to that Sovereign power to interpret its real commands in the sense in which we know they ought to be taken.

Such a plan as this, I think, is far more likely to succeed than any factitious recourse to scenes or meditations of a counteracting character. This, of course, was a common resource in mediæval times, especially amongst those who lived by rule. So many hours of meditation on penitential subjects, such and such occasions of enforced familiarity with the outward trappings of death. Attempts of this kind seem founded on a true principle, in so far as they recognize that our convictions are controllable through the medium of our outward circumstances, and that the daily experience of most persons is such as to make their belief develop in a very one-sided form. But these attempts seem liable to failure from the fact of their being artificial. The knowledge that they were so flagrantly out of ordinary routine should be almost fatal to their success. I am regarding them, of course, as instruments intended to work upon the judgment, and not simply to discipline the affections or the will.

Another objection to the plan of allowing for bias might take this form:—Do you wish to frighten us into a change of life by a *memento mori?* Certainly not, if by fear is meant any mental state which disturbs the judgment and renders us unfitted to take a calm and complete view of the evidence which bears on our conclusions. Fear, in this sense,

is of course to be avoided. But in these protests against intimidation the fact is often overlooked, or even excluded from notice, that the making up of our judgments really *is* a very serious matter. It is a process which is carried on far too frivolously about most questions, but when the inquiry is one so solemn as that of our destiny here and hereafter, to neglect relevant facts because they happen to be unpleasant, is sheer madness. Remember that on one supposition only is it legitimate to keep your mind averted from those dark realities which may at any moment strike across your path. It is the supposition of the secularist. If you are perfectly convinced that suffering and death, for instance, are events of which nothing but physical or other natural explanations are possible, so that all those world-old questions—Why are they sent? What do they mean? are intrinsically absurd; then clearly the best thing to be done is to try and keep them out of sight. But except on such a supposition we have no right to take this course. One has no patience with those who protest against reminding men of such undoubted facts as that they shall probably suffer and must certainly die, on the plea that to do this is to try and frighten them into particular conclusions.

IV. Another suggestion follows in close connection with the preceding. It is this;—enlarge your own experience by appealing to the experience of others. Man's nature is so many-sided and intricate that any great scheme like that of Christianity,

which is adapted to meet our wants and correct our shortcomings, cannot fairly be viewed in relation to one man alone. Not only has every one his own peculiarities of temperament, but moreover many of us live in an exceedingly artificial state. I mean that in our present highly civilised condition we may succeed in shutting out, at least for a time, many of those experiences which might yet fairly be called universal, and which ought therefore to be taken into account. Some persons may succeed in excluding them almost to the last. Hence, when any one tests a fundamental doctrine of Christianity by the question, "Do I feel any need for it? Does it correspond to any yearning, or correct any deficiency in me?" we may fairly inquire, "Are you in a fit state to judge?" Admitting that the fact of a religion being out of harmony with the character of man would throw serious doubts upon its truth, we may yet reasonably ask an objector whether his individual experience is such as to make him a fair type of his fellow men.

As I have already commented upon this I will give but one or two illustrations of what I mean. You may learn much, for instance, by intercourse with those in very different circumstances from yourself; the young may learn from the old, the happy from the afflicted. You need not actually bow to their decision, any more than they need to yours, but you may fairly correct your judgment by theirs. Beliefs which have been burnt into the mind of some sufferer by an experience from which others have

been free will often come to us in the light almost of a revelation, so totally are they unlike anything that our own minds would have spontaneously produced. As you come out of some sick room into the fresh air, do not be too ready to say and think, "Those are the ghastly fancies which are bred of exhaustion and fear[1]."

Another valuable help is to be found in religious biographies, or rather we should say autobiographies, for from the nature of the case much depends upon

[1] "The fable of the ancient is still true. The woman even now sits at the portal of life, presenting a cup to all who enter in which diffuses through every vein a poison that will cling to them for ever. The judgment may pierce the clouds of prejudice. In the moments of her strength she may even rejoice and triumph in her liberty, yet the conceptions of childhood will long remain latent in the mind, to reappear in every hour of weakness, when the tension of the reason is relaxed, and when the power of old associations is supreme." He adds in a note, "This very painful recurrence, which occupies such an important place in all religious biographies, seems to be attached to an extremely remarkable and obscure department of mental phenomena which has only been investigated with earnestness within the last few years, and which is termed by psychologists 'latent consciousness,' and by physiologists 'unconscious cerebration' or the 'reflex action of the brain.'" (Lecky's *Rise and Progress of Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. II. p. 101.

This doctrine of latent consciousness is far too extensive to be touched upon here, but I cannot think that the application which Mr Lecky makes of it in the above passage is sound. Is it true that old *beliefs* thus emerge? Our judgments and convictions often do undergo a change towards the very close of life; I have offered a reason for this which recognises that they depend to a great extent upon evidence. Mr Lecky appears to assume that beneath the surface of those beliefs in which we live and upon which we act when in health, there is a lower stratum of beliefs which may suddenly emerge during weakness or illness, and then reign supreme. I cannot think that this is the case. Old thoughts recur, and old associations may regain influence, but except to the limited extent which this may involve (as indicated in the text), old beliefs do not seem to sway us; at least not until the mind begins to wander.

our being able to get access to the diverse experience as nearly as possible at first hand. To give but one instance of what I mean;—Can we learn nothing from such a life as that of Baxter, with his eighty years of bodily suffering, and afflictive experience, and never-ceasing self-questioning? Or go back to Augustine, or further still to the time of Job, Ecclesiastes or of David; taking their sayings if you will simply as records of past experience. Such utterances as these are most valuable to those who, like so many of ourselves, live softly most of our days. But, remember, that for the purpose in question they must not be read too critically; I mean they must not be read simply for the purpose of accounting for them. Their convictions do not necessarily want accounting for any more than our own. The cynical explanation is far too ready to suggest itself in such cases;—

> "Not that the grounds of hope were fixed,
> The elements were kindlier mixed."

..... "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease," Job xii. 5. To make the critical view too prominent will most likely lead you into the habit of regarding your own experience as the normal one, upon which inferences are to be based; whilst that of others is looked on as exceptional, and therefore the source of morbid opinions. Try rather to read sympathetically; there is little danger of being carried too far in this direction; and see, as you do so, whether certain obscure convictions will not become brightened, and

some facts, which in the routine of your own life had been almost overlooked, will not assume greater prominence. There can be few more profitable employments than that of studying such utterances in sympathy, saying to yourself as you do so, "These bitter confessions, these stedfast convictions, are those of one who had passed through such experience as I have little conception of:—am I quite right in assuming complacently that I alone stand face to face with the truth? that I see things as they are, whilst he sees them distorted through a medium?"

> "Oh, not alone when life flows still, do *truth*
> And power emerge, but also when strange chance
> Ruffles its current; in unused conjuncture,
> When sickness breaks the body,—hunger, watching,
> Excess, or languor—oftenest death's approach,
> Peril, deep joy, or woe."

V. There is another remark, suggested by the foregoing reflections, which it is as well to make at this point. Do not be too readily carried away by the very common denunciations against regarding the consequences of the principles you adopt. Such denunciations are not unfrequently groundless, and arise out of a want of appreciation of some of the characteristics of evidence on moral and religious subjects. Where the reasoning rests on a few principles about which we feel absolutely certain (no matter how these principles may have been acquired) of course the consequences must be faced without fear or compunction. If by a deduction from the axioms of geometry a future life could be disproved,

by all means let the belief in such a doctrine be discarded on the day of the discovery. But when the evidence consists of a multitude of inductions and analogies, the consequences are a most important consideration.

In these cases, indeed, it is often accidental or dependent on our own choice whether any given proposition is to be regarded as a premise or a conclusion, and one might just as reasonably be disregarded as the other. If a dozen probable facts confirm one another, any ten you like to begin with will serve as confirmation of the remaining two. I think that one may not unfrequently observe instances in which men have started from some premise, and finding it in apparent opposition to certain recognised conclusions, have abandoned the latter in a moment, when the slightest consideration would have convinced them that the rejected propositions had better claims than that which was employed to subvert them. To do this is much as if one were to lean against a mud bank, in trying to throw down a stone wall. Is not the advice to disregard consequences rather like a relic of the sentiments engendered by the old scholastic disputes? Those who took part in them had to start from certain premises, which if they were not accepted irrevocably would cause the dispute to break down. If discussion is a merely artificial matter to be conducted in accordance with rules, all you can do when you trip upon a hostile fact is to yield yourself prisoner; but if it is a means of honestly endeavouring to elicit

the truth, the best thing to be done is to get up again with your improved knowledge and try again.

In one case, of course, such advice as that in question is perfectly appropriate; but then that is a case with which my present argument is not concerned. When timidity, selfishness and sloth come into play, and people are induced by these unworthy motives to stop short at a certain point, and refuse either to reject the new fact or to reconsider the old ones, they deserve to be denounced. But then such conduct as this is quite incompatible with sincerity and thoughtfulness, and we need not therefore pause to consider it; for (as I have several times remarked) I have been forced, for brevity's sake, to confine myself almost entirely to the case of the sincere and thoughtful.

But I must not forget, brethren, that I am not speaking to people in general, but to a special audience. Let me gather up again such suggestions as have been made, and put them into a form more precisely suitable to the position of the majority of those whom I am now addressing. Many of you are just beginning to enter on a new life here; a life of which one may say this much for certain, that it is as happy a time as you have ever spent before or are likely to spend in future. You have probably been well and wisely warned against the dangers you may encounter. Dangers enough there are here, as well as elsewhere, but I have avoided directly employing any such term, for this reason; with the word danger

we commonly associate the idea of evils which we may fall in with or may escape altogether. We represent to ourselves some sin or bad habit, or some religious error, something definite, that is, which we can distinctly anticipate; whence the conclusion is easy that we can probably avoid it, and that if we do avoid it, we escape uninfluenced. What I am speaking of on the other hand is not the contingent, but the certain; not the possible future, but the actual present. I am discussing influences under which you certainly live, and which do without doubt affect our convictions; the only question is to what extent do they do so? Let me point out to you a few of the characteristics of college life which peculiarly distinguish it from life elsewhere, confining myself, of course, to such as fall in with the general aim of these Lectures.

(I) In the first place, then, there is no question but that you are unusually protected here from a large portion of the dark side of human life. Sorrow and sickness and pain and death are but rare and fleeting visitors amongst us. I do not merely mean that you are called upon actually to suffer less than the common run of men. The very sight of suffering in any of its more acute forms is very unusual here. We seldom see any deep misery, we seldom hear of any lasting pain. Elsewhere the mere existence of friendship, and natural ties, and association with our fellow men, can hardly fail to insure the continual excitement of our sympathies. Most men are so closely con-

nected with others of different ages and ranks and circumstances, that it is barely possible for them to go on long without encountering much to distress and pain them. Here, on the other hand, you are for the most part artificially protected from most of the events which wound men's better sensibilities. Such things are heard of, but seldom seen. You are not forced into the contemplation of patience under protracted suffering, of resignation under bitter affliction.

A single hint on this point will suffice. Some of you may have experienced the strange and solemn contrast caused by a sudden change from the happy routine of life here to one of those distressing scenes which men are sometimes called upon to witness. If so, you will have felt what I am alluding to with a power which no words can describe. To say that such scenes give us a "deeper" or a "sadder" view of life, is to use an expression utterly inadequate to express their full effect. We might rather say that they have power to create within us new convictions. Truths which had been often presented to us before, but which had commonly remained unnoticed, may thenceforth assume a startling importance. Perhaps we may have been in the habit of thinking that we believed them, perhaps we may have regarded them with indifference. The experience of a few days or weeks may burn them indelibly into our minds.

I cannot but think, also, that a similar effect, though of course in a smaller degree, will have

been experienced by many of you in the alternations between your life here and that at home. Have you never felt, in this way, how a more chequered experience, and exposure to distress through other and wider sympathies, can enable you to grasp new truths? and deepen your interest in them and your assurance of them?

(II) There is another consideration connected with this which is also deserving of notice. If contact with suffering and sorrow is essential for the adequate and duly-proportioned belief of any great Christian doctrine, is it not almost equally essential for such belief that there should be intervals of quiet reflection? But in that incessant social intercourse which the fact of your living close together, combined with community of pursuits and community of interests, cannot fail to secure, how very little prospect is there of the solitude in which alone such quiet reflection can be attained! Of course, by solitude I do not mean the mere fact of being alone. You may be alone in study, you may be alone in simple rest from exhaustion, you may be alone in sheer vacancy. In all such cases the mind is either altogether unemployed, or it is concentrated upon something without us. By solitude I understand that state in which the mind is forced in upon itself, in which we can review our conduct and motives, in which we reflect upon what we are, and have been, and may be hereafter.

In most other positions of life men are not unfrequently thus thrown upon their own resources.

They are the more likely to be driven to this, since they will often find themselves in a position in which the only other alternative would be to sink to the veriest frivolity and trifling. But you are under the pressure of no such alternative here. The peculiarity with you is that that incessant social intercourse, which withdraws us from ourselves, presents itself under a very seductive form. It appears not merely innocent, but justifiable, and in many ways delightful and useful.

Such a situation cannot be without its influence. If our practical acceptance of the truths of the Gospel depends in part upon the need we feel for them, and if the time in which we are most likely to feel any such need is during our occasional solitary hours, what will be the probable effect of filling up those hours with employments which yield real satisfaction? Such social and intellectual pursuits will scarcely supply us with lasting mental food, but they may satisfy for a long time. In other words, though you may be far indeed from trying to appease your hunger with a stone, you may yet be feasting richly upon that which will prevent you from feeling your need of the bread of life.

(III) There is one other remark I have to make. Elsewhere in life our social and selfish tendencies are constantly coming into conflict with each other. If we wish to please others we cannot always continue to please ourselves. If therefore we do not sink into utter selfishness, we have often

occasion to be reminded that we have need of Higher Help. It is during such conflicts that men can really appreciate how sorely they require strength for their weakness, and light for their blindness, and salvation from their selfishness. It is then that we feel our need of a Spirit who shall guide and strengthen us.

Here again, college life stands in striking contrast with life elsewhere. There is, perhaps, no other place on earth in which the pursuit of your own happiness is so nearly coincident with securing that of others. With a large choice of friends each can suit himself according to the humour of the moment. You have common pursuits and common pleasures. The routine of college life assists this tendency by leading each to occupations similar to those in which others are engaged at the same time. The result is that many of you may have scarcely an occasion, perhaps not even an opportunity, for an act of real self-denial throughout the term. By self-denial I mean the having to forego our own pleasure, because it comes into conflict with the pleasure of others. I do not mean a struggle for our own intellectual advantage, still less of course, a scramble for prizes.

I cannot think that a condition so exceptional as this can be without its influence upon the character and the belief. It may not actually produce a complacent satisfaction with one's own moral worth, but that I think is the direction in which its tendency lies. It leads a man unduly

to depreciate the terrible strength of his selfish propensities, it induces him to estimate but slightingly the help which is offered to counteract those propensities; it may loosen his persuasion of the existence of such help.

Such then, I think, are some of the principal respects in which your experience here differs from that of other men elsewhere. None of them can be regarded as unimportant, and their aggregate effect may be considerable. Do not misunderstand me as though I meant to deplore the existence of these exceptional conditions, or to recommend an ascetic escape from them. Most emphatically the contrary. Use your privileges whilst you have them: they will not last too long. Extract to the uttermost the pleasure and the profit which they can lawfully yield: it will be none too great. But use them as not abusing them; and as you enjoy them bear in mind that they are both exceptional and transitory.

The final conclusion therefore is simply this; Do doctrines to which some persons cling as of infinite value ever seem to you as of small or no importance? Are you ever disposed, in fact, to think that you could "get on well enough" without truths which others look upon as their stay in life? If so, just reflect whether this difference may not in part arise from those exceptional circumstances in which you are placed. Our assurance of any great truth rests on very varied grounds, and these grounds are mostly to be found

in the details of our practical life. Take the three cardinal doctrines of our Faith;—that we have a Father in Heaven whose creatures we are, and who watches over us amidst all the cares and sorrows of this mortal life;—that we have a Saviour who died for us, that we might be saved from sin and death;—that there is a Holy Spirit whose work it is to sanctify our unruly affections and to grant us that strength to resist temptations which we cannot find in ourselves. Do you suppose that our practical belief of these wide-spreading truths will not take its tone from the influences under which we live, from the cares and trials to which we are subject, from the wants we experience and the satisfaction we find provided for these wants?

All I now urge upon you therefore is to guard against such bias;—to recognise freely that your judgment is sure to be imperfect and therefore cannot be final. To employ an old illustration, I only ask you to appeal occasionally from your own judgment when you know it cannot be trusted;—to appeal from what you are now when intoxicated with youth and health and every form of social enjoyment;—to what any of us may soon be, to what all must ere long be, when we have passed into other scenes, and find that many earthly supports upon which, without knowing it, we were accustomed to lean, are torn for ever from us. I do not want even to seem to adopt the cynical tone of one who says to you, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee

in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." There is no punishment for mere pleasure; there is no evil eye above, that loves to take its revenge upon our happiness. Only live with the sobriety of those who know that their life here is exceptional, and the caution of those who know that it may very soon change, and that these circumstances may greatly affect our judgment. "For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain; for the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things. And hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us; but the things that are in Heaven who can search out"—without in every way widening his experience, and chastening his judgment, and laying open his heart to every influence by which the Holy Spirit is accustomed to teach him the deep things of God?

APPENDIX.

Note to page 8.

The following is the passage alluded to in the text; it is taken from the *Salon*, ed. 1834, p. 275:—

"Wir dürfen es nicht verhehlen, weder aus Pietât, noch aus Klugheit, wir wollen es nicht verschweigen: der Mann, welcher einst am kühnsten in Deutschland die Religion des Pantheismus ausgesprochen, welcher die Heiligung der Natur und die Wiedereinsetzung des Menschen in seine Gottesrechte am lautesten verkündet, dieser Mann ist abtrünnig geworden von seiner eignen Lehre, er hat den Altar verlassen, den er selber eingeweiht, er ist zurückgeschlichen in den Glaubensstall der Vergangenheit, er ist jetzt gut katholisch und predigt einen ausserweltlichen persönlichen Gott, "der die Thorheit begangen habe, die Welt zu erschaffen." Mögen immerhin die Altgläubigen ihre Glocken läuten und Kyrie Eleison singen, ob solcher Bekehrung—es beweist aber nichts für ihre Meinung, es beweist nur, dass der Mensch sich dem Katholizismus zuneigt, wenn er müde und alt wird, wenn er seine physischen und geistigen Kräfte verloren, wenn er nicht mehr geniessen und denken kann. Auf dem Todtbette sind so viele Freydenker bekehrt worden—aber macht nur kein Rühmens davon! Diese Bekehrungsgeschichten gehören höchstens zur Pathologie und würden nur

schlechtes Zeugniss geben für Eure Sache. Sie bewiesen am Ende nur, dass es Euch nicht möglich war, jene Freydenker zu bekehren, so lange sie mit gesunden Sinnen unter Gottes freyem Himmel umherwandelten und ihrer Vernunft völlig mächtig waren."

In support of the other statement in the text I may quote the following passages. They are taken from the preface to his *Vermischte Schriften*, written in the winter of 1854.

"Gottlob ich war sie los! Ach könnte ich doch alles, was ich einst über die deutsche Philosophie drucken liess, in derselben Weise vernichten! Aber das ist unmöglich, und da ich nicht einmal den Wiederabdruck bereits vergriffener Bücher verhindern kann, wie ich jüngst betrübsamlichst erfahren, so bleibt mir nichts übrig, als öffentlich zu gestehen, dass meine Darstellung der deutschen philosophischen Systeme, also fürnehmlich die ersten drei Abtheilungen meines Buches de l'Allemagne, die sündhaftesten Irrthümer enthalten." * * * *

"Einem ehrlichen Manne bleibt aber unter allen Umständen das unveräusserliche Recht, seinen Irrthum offen zu gestehen, und ich will es ohne Scheu hier ausüben. Ich bekenne daher unumwunden, das Alles, was in diesem Buche namentlich auf die grosse Gottesfrage Bezug hat, ebenso falsch wie unbesonnen ist. Ebenso unbesonnen wie falsch ist die Behauptung, die ich der Schule nachsprach, dass der Deismus in der Theorie zu grunde gerichtet sei und sich nur noch in der Erscheinungswelt kümmerlich hinfriste."

I know that some persons think he was jesting to the last; but the obvious reply is that such passages as these have no fun in them. Irreverent expressions do occasionally occur, but they seem to me indicative of nothing but the feelings of a born jester face to face with grim realities of which he had hardly thought before.

NOTE TO PAGE 61.

The reference in the text to Pascal affords a good opportunity of discussing two or three questions about which some confusion seems to exist.

The first of these is the propriety of acting, and avowing that we do act, upon the chance of securing salvation; in other words of balancing a present loss, certain and small, against a future gain, probable and vast. Pascal's name is often alluded to as that of one who had introduced the Doctrine of Chances into the question, in some vicious way; what is there to be discredited in an appeal to these principles?

We may obviate at once an answer which is sometimes offered. Some persons seem to think that, if we venture to decide religious questions upon these principles, we are acting upon mere self-interest and neglecting the question as to what is the truth; that is, we are simply thinking of saving ourselves. I apprehend however that any such antithesis as this between self-interest and truth is quite a mistake. *Extraneous* interests of course may lead a man from attending simply to the truth of a proposition; he may, for instance, be bribed somehow by additional rewards or punishments into accepting or rejecting it; but when, as in the case in question, the gain or loss he may incur are the natural and necessary consequences of the events whose truth is in question, it is not easy to see how self-interest could afford to neglect their truth. The fact is that all successful action, and therefore that dictated by self-interest, rests upon truth; in other words if we wish to succeed we must have as many true beliefs and as few false ones as possible. Every question about practice can be resolved into one about the truth of propositions. This is equally the

case with the partial truth of what are called probable events, as with those which we regard as more certain. The successful gamester is the one who most often acts in accordance with the truth in the class of events with which he is concerned; in other words who most often assigns its due value to the chance of all these events.

I cannot therefore admit as philosophically correct the common reply that we must simply accept what seems to us most likely to be true. In matters of strict demonstration where things can definitely be shown to be either true or false such a course is sound enough. If a statement is known to be false, no action the success of which presupposes the truth of the statement can be of any use, nor conversely can we be lawfully terrified into admitting its truth by any horrible consequences which might follow were it true and we had neglected it. When however, as is usually the case in the affairs of life, we are confronted by rival alternatives each of which rests upon a probability only, it is sheer madness to adopt the one which seems the most probable simply because it is so, and in defiance of the loss and gain which we thereby incur. Let any one try to act upon such principles in the affairs of common life, and he will soon find them lead him to mischief and destruction. Truth and falsehood are not merely of little or no value except in reference to the practice which rests upon them, and which thus becomes successful or unsuccessful; some philosophers would even go further and assert that the words truth and falsehood have no meaning or explanation except in reference to our conduct.

I do not mean that we must *believe* events to be more probably true than they really are; far from it; but we must constantly act upon the hypothesis that an event may really happen when we well know that such a contingency is very unlikely. I know, say, that the chances are a thousand to one that my house will never be burnt down; my belief

in the contingency is very small, but I act upon the truth of it and insure the house[1].

Why then are we to make such a broad distinction between temporal and spiritual matters that a principle of action universally adopted in the one is to be rejected and disparaged in the other? If a man is to be applauded for undergoing the annual sacrifice of paying a premium to guard against the bare chance of having his house burnt over his head, why is he not to submit to the various sacrifices required by religion, if these sacrifices will in any way remove the chance of a far worse catastrophe? I mean, why

[1] It may be objected that there is the following reply to the justness of any such parallel as that suggested above;—"I *know* that in this town one house in a thousand will be burnt down; I do not know whose house it will be; so I insure mine. Now suppose I knew that immortal misery awaits even a fraction of the obstinately vicious, it would be prudent to endeavour to escape at any sacrifice; but I have not this knowledge. In other words, a foundation of absolute knowledge is the basis of my conduct in insuring my house, there is no such foundation in the case of morality and religion as connected with a future state."

It is quite true that the parallel would be much closer in such a case as that here suggested, but I think that that in the text is sufficiently close for similar inferences to be drawn. To discuss the question fully, however, would involve too long a digression for a note, and there is the less occasion for me to do it here, inasmuch as I have already discussed the same question elsewhere (*Logic of Chance*, pp. 84—91).

I have there attempted to shew how the theory of Probability may be applied to events which cannot recur in a man's life, and as regards which therefore he cannot expect to obtain that justification in the long run which is generally to be obtained as regards the petty ordinary affairs of daily life. I apprehend that we must still refer the event to the nearest allied class of similar events as to which anything like statistical accuracy can be obtained, and judge of it as possessing the degree of probability which those statistics establish for that class of events. In the case of a religious scheme as to which we feel doubtful, if Probability is to be employed at all, we must take account of the arguments by which it is supported, and say of it, Statements thus supported are true in such a proportional number of cases; I shall therefore treat the scheme as belonging to this class. *It* does not recur, but events thus allied with it do recur, and that is enough for practice.

is he not to avow in one case as in the other that these, and these alone, are his motives?

There is great danger, I think, in admitting any sharp distinction between the principles upon which we act in regard to our temporal and spiritual interests. We should avoid, as far as possible, breaking the continuity of the future life with the present by avowing motives in the one case which we reject in the other. Those who admit that this continuity is complete; both on our side, inasmuch as we are the same living thinking beings now that we shall be hereafter, and on that of God, inasmuch as He is equally our Father now as He will be hereafter, will shrink from such admissions. They seem too decidedly to support the opinion of the Secularist, namely that this world is the only one about which sufficient security can be attained to suffice for practical men.

The real reason, I apprehend, is the following: When we have to do with events of our ordinary life here, even those of such importance as fire and shipwreck, we never doubt that they do or may occur; we do not think that the benevolence of God is at all at stake by our knowing that we have to act upon these contingencies. Experience is continually proving that houses are liable to be burnt down, it would therefore be the height of folly not to take account of the chance. No general reasoning as to whether God would be likely to suffer such visitations to come upon his creatures is of any avail against the undeniable fact that they do come upon us. When however we contemplate a scheme so comprehensive as a Revelation, which embraces in its scope the destinies of all mankind for all eternity, we cannot help feeling that the fact of having to speculate entirely upon chances would cast serious doubt upon the truth of the religious doctrines involved. For one of the supports of such a scheme is founded on our opinion of the

character of God. But for any high estimate of this character confidence on our side and love on that of God are indispensable. But how can confidence exist when, not merely an occasional incident, but the whole end and aim of life turns on an awful contingency? How can love survive the calculations which could scarcely fail to arise as to whether we were not paying too high a premium for the insurance effected? And at the present day, unless we believe in a God of love who expects love in return from His creatures, Theism would not long survive.

The considerations just mentioned amount, I think, to much the same thing as is often expressed in the statement that we believe in a general but not in a special Providence. In other words, in the common affairs of life we are liable to many a blow which seems to come from no father's hand, and out of the way of which we have therefore to escape, as we best may, by the exercise of prudence and foresight. Sometimes we do seem to trace a purpose in their infliction; but often we cannot do so, or at least can only blindly guess in the dark. So long as these blows are not crushing and overwhelming, we can get on in spite of them, but what would it be if the sum-total of our conduct in reference to this life and any other had to be carried on upon such principles as these? Would not this be leading us backwards towards a heathen conception of the Deity?

It is a confirmation of the view just expressed that in proportion as people refuse to introduce, as a portion of the evidence, any considerations about the attributes of God, Pascal's calculations and recommendations would seem quite natural and appropriate. Pascal himself is, I think, a case in point. To the Romanist the doctrines of theology have always been a matter of authority. The tendency therefore is to regard the evil and the good of a future life, as being in a similar category with those of the present. When a

doctrine is presented to us peremptorily and dogmatically, if we entertain some doubt as to its truth we should, I think, class its possible truth merely amongst other risks, and should see no harm in resorting to ordinary precautions to guard ourselves against loss. So long as it stands on this footing of authority, any uncertainty which we may still feel could hardly be turned into an additional adverse argument; for us to be at liberty to do this, we must, I think, introduce the character of the Deity into the question as one of the considerations to determine our assent.

Again, Protestant writers sometimes make the truth of Christianity entirely, or almost entirely, a matter of historical evidence; that is, they make but little use of the character of God as one of the elements in the proof. So long as any one takes this view there is nothing which could fairly be denounced as selfish in a man's avowedly and openly acting upon the chance of salvation. By doing so he is only taking lawful and proper precautions, he is "insuring his life" in a somewhat higher sense. Passages in illustration might be quoted from Paley, but the following from Locke is perhaps as apposite as any:

"The rewards and punishments of another life, which the Almighty has established, as the enforcement of His law, are of weight enough to determine the choice, against whatever pleasure or pain this life can show, when the eternal state is considered but in its bare possibility, which nobody can make any doubt of. He that will allow exquisite and endless happiness to be but the possible consequence of a good life here, and the contrary state the possible reward of a bad one, must own himself to judge very much amiss if he does not conclude that a virtuous life, with the certain expectation of everlasting bliss which may come, is to be preferred to a vicious one with the fear of that dreadful state of misery which it is very possible may overtake the guilty. . . .

"Who in his wits would choose to come within a possibility of infinite misery, which if he miss there is yet nothing to be got by that hazard? Whereas on the other side, the sober man ventures nothing against infinite happiness to be got, if his expectation comes to pass. If the good man be in the right, he is eternally happy; if he mistake he is not miserable, he feels nothing. On the other side if the wicked be in the right, he is not happy; if he mistake he is infinitely miserable. Must it not be a most manifest wrong judgment that does not presently see to which side, in this case, the preference is to be given?"—*Essay*, Bk. II. ch. xxi.

But although there is nothing illogical in the above mode of arguing, the same cannot be said in favour of that portion of Pascal's advice which suggests a mode of procuring belief, or rather of strengthening it beyond the point of conviction at which it ought to rest. ("Vous voulez aller à la foi, . . . Suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé; c'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyaient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire les messes[1].") If a contingency has to be faced, let its chance be taken for what it is worth, as when we insure a house, but not for more than it is worth. Such a determination to intensify one's belief involves, I think, an impossibility to any honest-minded man. But if it were possible thus to superinduce a state of conviction it would be a close parallel to the conduct of those who deliberately get drunk, and then plead that they are not to blame because they could not know what they were doing when intoxicated. I have pointed out indeed, in the fourth lecture, one mode in which we may legitimately try to believe a doctrine to which as yet we hardly give full credit, but this is only in the case in which we have reason to know that we are neglecting a

[1] *Pensées de Pascal*, as given from the original by Cousin, p. 295; the common editions have been much altered.

class of considerations which have real probative force; that is when we have an opportunity of revising our conclusions by means of real evidence. If this is asserted also of the effect produced by holy water and masses, well and good; but if not, if any effect that they are conceived to produce upon our convictions is not brought about in a strictly rational and probative way, but only, say, in the way in which opium may bring on drowsiness, one can only remark that such a doctrine evacuates the terms, evidence, and pursuit of truth of most of their meaning. If any device can be found which will help us to true beliefs, by all means let it be welcomed and admitted into our treatises on Logic; but if it does not do so the less we trust to it the better. I am quite aware that with many Romanists the line of reasoning would take the form, "The doctrines in question are certainly true, and the resources which are offered you will help you to believe them; therefore make use of them." But directly we begin to ask, How are we to know that they are true? this reasoning becomes inadmissible. It is not sufficient then to show how to bring on a particular belief, even were that possible; it must be shown that the belief so brought on is correctly brought on; in other words, that the process is a legitimate logical one.

The slight vestige of truth which really underlies this doctrine of working up our assent artificially to a higher point, consists in the fact that when a resolution is once formed, even upon slender grounds, we must nevertheless act heartily and efficiently or else let the matter alone. A man who has resolved to insure his house does not dawdle on his way to the office, or neglect any of the requisite steps. As Browning's *Bishop Blougram* says (who may by the way be recommended as an inimitable psychological study upon this point):

* * * "certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang."

But then comes the fallacious suggestion of the sluggish and timid mind,

"If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too *decisive* in our faith,"

a 'decisive' faith being understood to be one which makes dogmatic statements upon very many points, and makes them with very great positiveness. Hearty resolute action, as daily experience proves, is perfectly compatible with the knowledge that we are acting on a mere contingency; but for this purpose there is no necessity to profess that our conviction is more intense than it really is.

If it be now enquired whether the admissions which have been made do not lead to the conclusion that we ought to accept whatever religion promises the highest rewards and punishments; the reply would be: *Yes;* the evidence in their favour being nearly the same, and provided always that we exclude from the question all those considerations about the character of God which have been previously alluded to. It is as with insurance offices; *caeteris paribus,* the one which offers the best security upon the lowest terms would be preferred: but if its terms are too low, of course they excite suspicion. So with religious evidence; if no general *a priori* considerations were to be admitted and we found ourselves confronted by two conflicting religious schemes whose historical probability was nearly equal, it would only be prudent and right to accept the one which promised and threatened most. And this prudence, as already pointed out, implies some measure of belief. But of course few high-minded or pious persons would be willing to admit that they were acting thus; and why not? Because those considerations as to what a faithful and loving Creator

would be likely to set before his creatures cannot be excluded. This, I think, is the true answer to the occasional Romish argument that their own Church is the safest, inasmuch as Protestants admit that Romanists may be saved, whilst Romanists deny the same security to Protestants. Base the religion on mere authority, or mere historical evidence, and I think the above argument ought to convince any prudent man. I fully agree, as has been already said, with those who think that such a way of regarding religious evidence is miserably false and degrading, but so long as the question is treated on the grounds to which it so often is confined, I cannot see what other course should be pursued.

Another question, suggested by the passage from Pascal, remains to be discussed now. How are we to account for that tendency towards a strong dogmatic faith like that of Rome, which is so often to be witnessed in persons who are involved in some amount of speculative scepticism? The reality of this tendency, as a matter of fact, cannot I think be denied; and M. Cousin has shown very clearly how thoroughly Pascal's mind was imbued with it. To examine at all fully the general causes of this tendency would involve a very long discussion; I shall therefore limit myself, as I have throughout these lectures, to a far narrower enquiry, namely, What is the evidential or logical value of this tendency? In what cases can it be justified as a tendency towards truth?

Suppose, then, that any one is in considerable doubt about the truth of Christianity, so far as historical evidence is concerned. His belief is certainly in a bad way, but it need not altogether perish. It is quite possible that the other of those two factors, spoken of on page 53, may exercise considerable power. All those sentiments, the satisfaction of which concurs in securing our assent to the Revelation, may still be powerful. Taken by themselves they

have no power to maintain a rational faith, no more than can a buttress support a wall without foundations; but to carry on the illustration, the existence or absence of buttresses may make all the difference between a wall standing or falling when its foundations are somewhat loose. I can quite conceive that two persons may be in the same condition of certainty or uncertainty as regards purely intellectual considerations, historical or logical, and yet that the one whose emotional nature was more sensitive should be able to believe, and to justify his belief, when the other found himself unable to do this. Compare, for instance, such men as Bayle and Pascal; does any one who has looked into their works suppose that as regards that kind and degree of scepticism which depends upon purely intellectual considerations there was any very great difference between them? And yet the tender sensitive mind of the one might be able to rest, and I should say justly so, when the other was left in utter uncertainty. Of course the existence of such a divergency between one mind and another is unsatisfactory, and needs correction (as explained in my lectures), but so long as it exists, divergent conclusions are natural and right.

The foregoing remarks will serve to explain the meaning of the difficulty which one may sometimes meet with here, but which seems more prevalent in Romish countries, and which finds expression in the phrase, that "if we are to trust to reason we are sceptics, if to faith, Catholics." I think that the antithesis is very unfairly stated, since faith when it is referred to a complicated system of doctrines, and is thus contradistinguished from reason, can amount to nothing else than belief on insufficient grounds, in other words to prejudice. That portion, however, of the aid to our convictions which is contributed by the satisfaction of our sentiments and emotions is much more likely to act unconsciously than strictly logical arguments. It is certainly wrong to contrast

these aids to our convictions with reason, as though they were not also themselves reasons, but it may nevertheless very likely be the case that many persons do not recognize them as reasons. At the same time, however, they may feel their force, just as ordinary arguments may be quite conclusive to those who cannot analyse them and who know nothing of logic; but since they do not perceive that such methods of persuasion deserve to rank amongst evidences, they class them by themselves, and for want of a better term call them faith.

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