

# M A N

RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF.

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM P. BREED.

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*STEREOTYPED BY*  
**WILLIAM W. HARDING**  
INQUIRER BUILDING, SOUTH THIRD STREET, PHILADELPHIA.  
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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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HAVING once presented from the pulpit the subject discussed in the following pages, the writer was urged to throw the substance of the discourse into a shape suitable for publication. Wisely or unwisely, the advice after much consideration was followed. The result is in the hands of the reader. The aim has been to throw together some thoughts upon this topic adapted to popular use.

That the error here combatted strikes at the very foundations of morals and religion, none but its abettors, and not all of them, will deny. Nor can it be doubted that it is

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the mainspring of a prevalent and popular form of infidelity.

It constitutes the zealously defended creed, of certain zealous denouncers of all creeds, that if one *does right*, his *belief* is a matter of which God has no disposition, and man no right, to take cognizance. Meanwhile this "right doing," left to be defined as the fancy may dictate or the capacities permit, has more meanings than Proteus had forms. Epicureans define it to mean the avoidance of pain and the securing of pleasure. The Stoic makes it to consist in burning incense to human pride, by subjecting all sense of ill to the rigid domination of the will. With the Oriental Thug, it consists in strangling the largest possible number of victims, and with the Occidental Mormon, in part at least, in collecting the largest convenient number of wives ; while the sapient "spirit-rapper," has no suspicion

that he is not "doing good," while making Paul under the rapping table contradict Paul at the Areopagus.

A large number practically define it to be the careful discharge of the common duties of life, as exhausting all claims of God upon them. Another class, of no mean rank in the world of letters, and of high pretensions in the sphere of morals and reason, practically assuming that men, or at least the beneficiary classes, are mere animals, seem to think that little well-doing has been omitted by them, when they have poured out piteous lamentations over the ills of these sufferers, and eloquent commendations of them to the kindly regards of the more favoured—accompanied with scathing denunciations of the alleged authors of these ills, and, it is to be hoped, an occasional overt act of charity upon their own part. This done, all other principles and

precepts of both Testaments may innocently be made a laughing stock or an execration, or each in turn.

The influence of this class makes itself felt through all the most popular channels of literature, from the set novel "in cloth or boards," and the stately quarterly, down to the omnipresent magazine and newspaper.

All these, and many others, (for their name is legion,) discrepant on many points, yet united as one man in crying down all "forms of faith," and in denouncing as absurd and impossible all moral obligation to bring the religious creed into conformity with a prescribed standard, go to the world with their *ad captandum* maxim, "Do right—but believe as you please."

The object of the following chapters is to exhibit *unbelief* in its true character and legitimate fruits, and to point out the evidence

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that *right believing* is in itself obligatory upon a moral being, and also an essential condition of *right doing*. That the effort may not be wholly useless is the hope and prayer of

THE AUTHOR. †

## MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF.

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### PRELIMINARY.

“AM I not free?” Yes, in many and highly important senses man is free ; and yet is this freedom coupled with many a necessity. In his thoughts, especially, man is free—free to wing his way whithersoever he may list—free in the general, to decree for himself, what one, of ten thousand objects, shall for the time occupy his attention and be subject to his scrutiny. Yet there are topics that will not always await his bidding to present themselves, that will consult his inclination and convenience, neither as to time and place, nor as to the duration of their visit.

Chief among these is that of religion. Too

often indeed for man's reputation for wisdom, much too often for his happiness, this is a most unwelcome guest in the chamber of his meditations. Sometimes, perhaps, annoyed at its presence, he fain would banish it for ever from his thoughts. But regardless of all repugnances and refusals, now and then, again and again, it forces its pertinacious way through all the jostling crowd of competitors for the occupancy of his thoughts, and triumphantly vindicates its claim to an important share of his attention and consideration.

Sometimes it meets a man in his hours of gladness; oftener in his hours of sadness. Sometimes it presses itself upon his soul in the noisy pathway to political eminence, suggesting to the honest and patriotic, the utter emptiness of even true worldly glory, and to the selfish and unscrupulous, a probable or possible retribution—constraining the ominous exclamation—"If it were *done*, when 'tis done!" "That but this might be the *be-all*, and the end-all!"

Again it looms upon the vision toward the

close of an eventful but godless life, and collating the actual past, with the too probable future, awakens thoughts like those of the waning Talleyrand: "Behold," he exclaimed, "eighty-three years passed away! What cares! what agitations! What anxieties! What ill will! What sad complications! And all without other result than great fatigue of mind and body, a *profound sentiment of discouragement as to the future*, and of disgust as to the past!"

Often, almost always, during the last scene of the earthly drama, when the curtain of our life is just about to fall, and of another just to rise, it sheds a preternatural light over the soul, and calls forth words of touching and even startling interest. As with the mighty one of antiquity, the great Aristotle; "Meanly did I enter this world; in anxieties have I passed my life; in perturbations I go hence! Cause of Causes, pity me!"

Nor is its voice drowned by sounds of hilarity and giddy merriment. It makes its presence felt even where

“ Bright

The lamps shine o'er fair women and brave men,  
And thousand hearts beat happily.”

Even *here*, at its bidding,

“ Thoughts

Of the last bitter hour come like a blight,  
Over the spirit, and sad images  
Of the stern agony, and shroud and pall,  
And breathless darkness and the narrow house,  
Make men to shudder and grow sick at heart.”

“ For even in laughter the *heart* is sorrowful.”

So also, the bleeding victims and smoking altars, the weary pilgrimages and self-inflicted penances, the elaborate institutions and costly offerings of all countries in all ages, attest the omnipresence, and the vast potency over the human mind of the great *Religious Idea*.

A dying Hindu anxiously demanded of his Brahmin attendant—“ What will become of me when I am gone ?” “ You will go,” was the reply, “ into the body of a lion.” “ Where after that ?” “ Into the body of a bird ?” “ And then where ?” “ Then, and for thousands of transmigrations into the bodies of

various other creatures." But tormented, rather than satisfied, with such replies, he gathered all his remaining strength into the final interrogation, "And where last of all?"

Ah yes! "And where last of all?" In the reply to this question we *all* have an interest, conscious and intense; and the uncertainty that hangs about that "last of all," with the rejecters of revelation, may well and often "give them pause."

The general idea of religion is very complex. Its chief elements are suggested by such questions as these: "Am I a mere material being, or a strange compound of matter and spirit? Am I a chance-bubble upon the ocean of existence, or a creature from the hand of a personal intelligent God? Are my own impulses, inclinations, and will my sole rule of conduct, or am I the subject of a righteous moral government? Is this ephemeral life my *all* of existence, or is there an eternal hereafter? And if the latter, what is the relation of this present to that future?"

Now all the questions involved in the whole

subject of religion find solution in "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." This solution has been put into the hands of hundreds of millions, and sent to every quarter of the globe. It has been canvassed, scrutinized, "sifted as wheat;" and this, not unfrequently, by minds furnished thereto with all appliances of intellect and erudition, and more formidable still, the stimulus of a set purpose to find in it, if possible, some fatal flaw. A result of all has been, its cordial adoption by millions, as at once perfectly satisfactory, and the only possible solution of these problems fraught with interest so momentous to our race.

But by many it is rejected. Other schemes abound. Like the successive crops of the fields, have been the ever varying schools of opinion; and systems of religion swarm anew with every passing generation. Widely diverse in many points, in decrying the religion of the Bible they all agree. Some manifest special hostility to this element, some to that;

some assail it from one point, some from another.

One of the shrewdest methods of assault, and with a certain class of minds too successful, is, to lay hands upon a chief foundation pillar, and, bending upon it all available force, struggle to lay the whole Christian temple in ruins. This foundation pillar is FAITH.

#### THE POINT AT ISSUE.

EVEN a cursory view of the religion of Jesus Christ discovers, at its foundations, the *injunction to believe*. The terms *faith* and *belief* in this connection, though often implying very much more, yet always include the subject of the present discussion, viz: an *intellectual or speculative reception of certain prescribed doctrines as undeniable truths*. The Bible demands, as an indispensable condition of interest in its proffered blessings, the adoption into the creed, of certain doctrines respecting God and man, time and eternity; and of course a rejection of all to the contrary.

In Mark i. 15, the command is, "Believe the gospel." In John vi. 29, believing is presented, not only as of *prime* importance among, but as a kind of embodiment of, the divine requirements. "This is THE WORK OF GOD, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Also in Luke xii. 46, a final doom with *unbelievers* is suggested as a most fearful thing. Finally, there are the fearful words in Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth not shall be damned!"

It is thus assumed as indisputable, that the beliefs of man are a proper object of command,—that it is competent to a moral governor to require a believing reception of these or those designated doctrines.

Now no mode of rejecting the whole Christian scheme is, or can be more direct, decisive, and complete, than that which affirms it to be irrational, and hence impossible, that man should be held accountable for his religious creed. And such is just the form of a shrewd, subtle, and, there is reason to fear, prolific contemporaneous infidelity.

It is sometimes declared to be a most patent absurdity that the Almighty should bind man under dreadful penalties to affirm in his soul any doctrine or system of doctrines. Some love to set a "mere faith," in contrast with a "righteous life." "I endeavour," said one, "to do to others as I should wish them to do to me, and that is my religion." "Certainly," responded another, "the Almighty does not concern himself with our opinions."

"For *forms of faith*, let graceless bigots fight,  
He can't be wrong whose *life* is in the right."

Such persons regard the eye of God as fixed solely on the external conduct ; while the state of the mind as to religious truth forms no ingredient in religion. Others, more "liberal" still, throw overboard both belief and conduct, and merge religion in the actuating motives, or in the "sincerity" with which the duties of life are discharged ; thus making *all* equally acceptable to God, if all alike sincere, be they worshippers of Christ, or Kahlee, or the devotees of the Cannibal Islands.

Nor can it be affirmed that the reasonings

employed in defence of these views are destitute of plausibility. "For where there is a will there is a way;" and that must be a strangely obstinate cause, which human genius and erudition, pressed by such motives as *must* here operate, cannot avail at least to set in a plausible light. The truth is, unless these reasoners substantiate, at least to their own satisfaction, their denial of man's accountability for his faith, it only remains to set themselves earnestly and honestly to ascertain the divine requirements in the case, and then to mould their creed and lives accordingly; or to gird up their souls to meet the penalty. But to make such investigation and consequent adjustment of their creed and conduct is farthest from their purposes, and hence the only remaining alternative, is, in self-defence, to construct a rational justification of their position.

Yet, it still remains a manifest doctrine of revelation, that men are held most solemnly responsible for the religious doctrines which they teach the soul to utter, under the mould-

ing influence of which they pass their probation, and with which they venture to the grave and the judgment!

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE INTUITIVE CONVICTIONS OF MANKIND.

THIS is a favourite appeal upon all controverted questions in morals. For all logicians, excepting perhaps the ethereal dwellers in the Transcendental land, are well assured that these convictions, when fairly ascertained, point like needles with more than magnetic certainty to *the truth*. And in this sense none will disallow the adage, "Vox populi, vox Dei est."

It is claimed that this *common sense* of mankind is outraged by the doctrine that *mere opinions* can be the ground of either penalty or reward. But a fair analysis of the moral emotions and judgments of men leads to an opposite conclusion.

When widely different systems of morals or religion are before the mind, is it so, that we instinctively regard the professors of these or

those as equally free from all praise or blame in the matter? In controversies between the champions of diverse creeds, is there not always an instinctive visiting the same condemnation, upon the holder and the system? Let one announce in the presence of others a moral scheme utterly execrable in their eyes, and will there not instinctively and necessarily mingle with their aversion to his creed, a moral indignation against himself? It is indeed most manifest, that while emphatically denying to all *human* tribunals rightful cognisance of such delinquencies, yet that our instinctive moral convictions give prompt and decisive judgment that guilt is contracted in the adoption of a grossly erroneous and degrading moral or religious creed. So imperative are these moral judgments, that even the French materialists are never more eloquent than, when in direct contradiction to their system of physical necessity, they pour forth their execrations upon the holders of the Christian faith; thus showing that even they hold as guilty those whom they thus condemn.

But man goes further and *punishes* as well as condemns for opinions' sake.

Here, let us suppose, is one who openly affirms that the terms *virtue* and *vice* are "mere sounds signifying nothing"—that the marriage tie is a tyrannous enslavement of the "decrees of the heart," which alone should govern sexual intercourse.

To what treatment of such a man, will their instinctive moral convictions prompt a virtuous, not to say a Christian community? Will they, placing him upon a level with those of opposite views, welcome him to the kindly intimacies which are among the sweetest ingredients in the cup of life? Will it be possible for them not to transfer to *himself*, the disgust and abhorrence with which they regard his moral sentiments? In a word, will they not in a great degree banish him from among them, and compel him to dwell like a leper "in a several house?" And what is this but, virtually, a heavy penalty for the entertainment of such opinions?

Again: a man qualified by intellectual

endowments and acquirements to fill offices of trust and emolument, holds, and "one of many" *openly proclaims* that God exists only in the dreams of enthusiasts—that the words *duty, honesty, and virtue*, are mere terms of convenience—that man's chief end is to secure the largest possible gains from the opportunities afforded him for personal enrichment and comfort. Professing such a scheme of morality, he offers himself for a responsible station in a bank, or commercial house, or at the hustings for election to some important office of trust. Will he get a vote, except from some creature who has bargained with him in advance for a share of the income from anticipated embezzlement! Will he find employment? Would any sane man have aught to do with him, except in some menial service, where self-enrichment at the expense of his employer was next to impossible?

And is not this exclusion from that rank in society for which he is in some respects so well fitted, and this compulsion to seek a livelihood by the sweat of his brow, a judgment

hard to bear on his part, yet on the part of society, felt to be perfectly just—and all on account of the opinions he holds ?

On the other hand, whom does a virtuous society welcome to its embrace, and crown with well-rewarded employments and honourable offices? Only those in the general, who *make professions*, not manifestly incredible, of right principles as to virtue and patriotism.

Indeed it will be found upon reflection to be very common among men, to bestow valued rewards, and to inflict what are virtually heavy penalties, simply on account of the *opinions* known to be entertained. And a true analysis of the grounds of these awards, will detect, besides a mere sense of danger to society from immoral sentiments, a conviction also of an inherent criminality in their entertainment. And even if the chief aim be self-defence, as from an infectious disease, yet above the felt right of such defence, there is a conscious justification in the assurance that the condemned is not only an object of dread, but also a criminal.

Turn to the awful page which tells the story of the French Revolution—the falling knife of the guillotine almost keeping time with the tickings of the clock—and the more copiously the blood flowed, the madder the cry for human blood!

Where was the seed of this sanguinary fruit? Without all doubt the moral condition that made such atrocities possible, was the crowning result of the *Philosophy* so called, which, beginning to spread about the commencement of the seventeenth century, developed, popularised, and propagated by such men as Helvetius, St. Lambert, Baron d' Holbach, Diderot and his Encyclopaedists, at length imbued the public mind with the notions that God was a nonentity—man a mere machine—and his chief end, to secure the largest possible number of pleasurable sensations. God thus rid of his being, and man of conscience and soul; death become an eternal sleep, and the slaying of a man no more than the killing of a dog; what marvel if, in such a crater

of passion, human slaughter became a pastime!

Now it is surely a misinterpretation of the moral convictions of mankind to limit their condemnation of those infernal scenes to the mere external and overt acts of butchery, without reference to the degrading, brutalising dogmas respecting God and man, which were the fountain out of which they flowed. What right feeling mind would not be horrified at the prospect of such views becoming universal among us? Nor would it be possible to repress in our minds all imputation of guilt to the members of a community among whom such doctrines were spreading, until they should have brought forth the fruit of open enormity.

The appeal then to the moral judgments of mankind, if not of itself decisive in favour of man's responsibility for his religious opinions, is assuredly not so against it. And it is certainly not without pointed significance that in practical life there occur many instances of penal infliction for opinions' sake, and this

with full approbation of the reason and conscience of society.

But let us probe our subject deeper.

#### BELIEF, UNBELIEF, AND DISBELIEF.

SUFFER it to be repeated, that among the first and most imperative of Scripture requirements, is a right belief—a religious creed conformed to the expressed will of God; while on the other hand, unbelief is the object of its severest denunciations.

For the sake of perspicuity we may make a distinction between unbelief and disbelief. The former let us consider as expressive of a state of mind which affirms nothing and denies nothing. It may arise from lack of evidence, lack of knowledge, lack of believing faculties. The brute is in a state of unbelief from the last named cause. Until quite lately the whole world was in a state of unbelief as to the existence of the planet Neptune: for no tidings had ever reached us of that remote member of our solar family.

*Belief*, however, is a positive state of mind.

It is the result of the mind's action upon certain propositions in view of certain kinds and degrees of evidence. It is essentially an affirmation by the mind of the truth of a proposition.

*Disbelief* is metaphysically the same as belief, differing from it only in the point from which it views the subject of affirmation. What the latter affirms to be true, the former affirms to be false.

To illustrate these together, take for example the doctrine of the resurrection. Unbelief, from utter ignorance, is silent respecting it. Belief cordially affirms, disbelief as cordially denies, its truth. Unbelief as thus defined, silent from utter and invincible ignorance, can be in no way censurable. It is therefore upon Disbelief alone, a positive rejection of truth, that criminality can be charged. That soul that casts truth from it, that quenches its holy light, and degrades it to the level of error—that soul, in the language of Jesus of Nazareth, “shall be damned!”

## TRUTH AS AN OBJECT OF RELIGIOUS FAITH.

THE grand crime of Disbelief is its treatment of truth—what then is *Truth*? In relation to the human mind, truth is the correspondence between an affirmation and the real state of things as they have been, are, or shall be. “Cyrus took Babylon,” is a truth, for what is thus affirmed, authentic history also affirms. “Ireland is an island”—“Steam will move a locomotive,” are truths, for there is harmony between these affirmations and the external realities.

But such truth has no apparent, or at most only an incidental relation to my moral or religious character, nor can its affirmation or denial be characterized as either virtuous or the contrary. To deny that carbonic acid may be solidified; that the tides are influenced by the moon, and any number of such truths, does not bring me into direct and manifest antagonism with moral law. But suppose I, with the light of nature shining all around

me, deny that the universe of being contains a God—this is quite a different matter !

Where now shall we draw the line between these, so different classes of truths ? Clearly just here, between moral truths and truths non-moral—truths that directly involve duties to God and thence to man, and truths which do not—truths, the treatment of which is at once a *development*, and a *display* of the intimate moral character, and those whose treatment in no way, or at least only very remotely and incidentally, affects or is affected by the moral character.

The reason is patent. The one class of truths I may adopt or reject, and, in neither case, give any indication of the moral tone and temper of my soul : nor do I thereby become either better or worse. By affirming or denying that comets revolve about the sun, I give no hint as to the moral bent of my mind, and I thereby neither recognize nor reject any moral obligation.

But an instant and vast difference appears when we pass to truths of the other class.

Take, for instance, the fundamental one of the existence of God. He who affirms that God exists, *thereby* acknowledges himself under the most solemn obligations to that Being. On the contrary he who rejects—disbelieves this truth, *by this very act* casts off all the cords of Jehovah, breaks all his bands asunder, and holds, and *must* hold, that the words *duty, obligation, responsibility*, and the like, are mere empty names, destitute of all serious meaning. For as man is no longer a creature, a subject, a son, (since no Creator, supreme Sovereign, and Father exists,) neither can any of the duties and obligations which are necessarily implied in such relation, rest upon him.

For the belief of moral truths then—truths which involve duties—truths the reception or rejection of which is an index of the moral tastes and inclinations—man lies under most solemn responsibility.

#### THE RATIONAL GROUNDS OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY.

SOME of these have been already hinted at.

1. The oak lies potentially in the acorn, and when the requisite conditions of growth are furnished, a *natural* law transforms the possibility into a reality. What a *natural* law *secures* in the acorn, a *moral* law *demand*s of man. In him there lies potentially a character, a moral beauty and efficiency, which, when realized, meets the divine idea. But moral truth is the essential instrument of this realization.

Who then rejects a moral truth, tramples under foot an instrumentality divinely appointed for his elevation; refuses to rise to his proper sphere, and to be fitted for his proper office as co-worker with, and reflector of the glory of his Creator. And this must involve no small degree of criminality.

2. He hereby also manifests profound and powerful repugnancies to his Maker.

3. Who denies a moral truth, by that act casts off and for himself annuls all obligations to those special duties which such truth imposes—and this is flagrant rebellion.

4. The relative attitudes into which the

Creator and creature are respectively thrown by the disbelief of the latter, is a further manifestation of his guilt therein ;—God constantly and emphatically affirming those truths in which man's duties are embodied, and man as constantly and emphatically denying them ! What an antagonism ! The infinite and eternal One declares, " I exist ! " " It is not true ! " the Atheist responds ! " I have made a revelation of my will," Jehovah cries. " A divine revelation is unnecessary and absurd ! " the Disbeliever answers. " Jesus of Nazareth is my beloved Son ! " the celestial voice proclaims. " There is no divine Son of God ! " replies the Disbeliever. Hence in 1 John v. 10, it is charged upon the disbeliever that he " makes God a liar ! "

Is it any marvel then that disbelief should be held in heaven for a crime ; or that men should be held answerable for those beliefs that bring forth such results ?

5. If man be not responsible for his faith ; if he may not be righteously required

to *believe* aright, then is God not more than half a sovereign.

Our religious tenets give shape to our ends and aims, and character to our motives; and these together are the very life of our external acts. The essence of an action is the principle that lives in it, is expressed by it, and gives it character; and aside from this, the external form is a mere straw upon the surface. And surely it is a sweeping denudation of the divine prerogative to strip it of all sway over human actions excepting their external form, and leave in free independency that inner world, where the beliefs, motives, and aims give to all acts their moral "form and pressure."

And which is manifestly the more injurious to the divine Majesty, to break a law of God, or deny his existence? with the hands to rob a neighbour of his purse, or with the mind and heart to rob God of his being?

6. Again, from the nature of the case it appears that if man be not accountable for his faith, he cannot be for his acts, and there is

an end to all moral government over our race. This point merits the special attention of those who shudder at the thought of penal inflictions for "opinions' sake."

If God require any duty of man, that duty must be in accordance with the truth or actual nature of things. For instance, obligation to worship God were inconceivable, did no such being exist: or to "believe the gospel," were the so called gospel a fiction. But a doctrine disbelieved by me, is to me, so far as relates to any possible effect upon my conduct, precisely as if it were untrue. A gospel disbelieved by me is to me a thing of naught.

Now, plainly, obligation to obey a God, who in the convictions of my mind is a nonentity, is just as absurd and impossible, as obligation to obey, as God, an actual nonentity; *unless* that obligation reach back to my soul in its believing exercises, and there hold it responsible for the sublimely audacious work of "untenanting creation of its God!" Of

transforming for itself the Infinite One into a nonentity !

Or, changing somewhat the point of view, man cannot be morally bound to do what, in the nature of the case, involves contradiction. But such contradiction is involved in obligation to obedience without like obligation to faith. If there be a God, doubtless I ought to bow before him in profoundest reverence. But how can I revere a being, whose existence my soul denies ? If the gospel be true, undoubtedly it lays me under many an obligation to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ; but it is impossible for me to think of executing the peculiar duties involved in the gospel scheme, or even to recognize the possibility of any obligations thereto, so long as I am assured that that gospel is a fiction. As therefore the recognition and discharge of a given duty is in every sense impossible, without belief of the truth or truths out of which that duty flows, so no such divine command can be laid upon man.

In other words a divine command to any

service necessarily includes a like command to all the indispensable preliminaries to such service. And the obligation to the preliminary duties could only be cancelled or weakened, by what would work the like result with reference to the one specified.

If, for instance, God command an Apostle to go to Rome at a set time, and this be impossible without embarking in a certain ship, the full weight of obligation to obey the literal command, binds him also to the preliminary embarkation. And if, for the latter he cannot be held accountable, neither can he for the former. A refusal to enter the ship is *in itself* a refusal to obey the original command, and is palpable rebellion.

So in the case before us. The only possible access to certain manifold duties, is by the ship of faith—by belief of certain truths. Therefore all possible weight of obligation to the discharge of those duties, must also bind man to the exercise of that faith, which, in the nature of the case, is an indispensable preliminary thereto. And whatever relieves from

obligation to the latter, thereby works the same result as to the former.

It thus appears that if God cannot hold man responsible for his faith, He is dethroned. So far at least as man is concerned, his authority is a fiction, his sceptre a name, his dominion a dream. Secure within the defences of an all annihilating disbelief, man may smile at God's authority and set all his laws at defiance.

If then man can be held responsible for *any thing*, he must be for his *faith*; and the whole weight of responsibility binding any man to any course of conduct, rests upon him also to believe those truths, the reception of which is the necessary condition of such course of conduct. And as we thus see that *obedience* rests upon *faith*, we see also a reason for, and the reasonableness of, the declaration that "the disbeliever shall be damned."

Having now discussed the rational grounds of this doctrine, let us turn to its rational conditions.

## THE RATIONAL CONDITIONS.

1. FIRST and most obviously, *all* responsibility implies the existence of a supreme moral Governor. Hence to the Atheist responsibility, for either faith or conduct, is an absurdity.

2. Another very obvious condition is, *the truth of the proposition to which assent is demanded*. Obligation is inconceivable, to believe as true, that which is really false.

3. Also man must be in possession of the faculties necessary both to comprehend the scope of the proposition offered for faith, and also to exercise belief. If it were cruel to beat, for not speaking, a creature destitute of the essential organs of speech, cruelty would be but a feeble term to express the enormity of visiting man with awful penalties for lack of faith, if the ground of that deficiency were destitution of those natural faculties, without which belief were impossible.

4. He must also have all the necessary natural prerequisites for the exercise of these

faculties. No obligation could lie on one to walk though he had feet, unless with them he had also use of the nerves which convey to those members the mandate of the will. But it is of the nature of our believing powers to act in accordance with evidence. Hence to require a man to believe in the absence of sufficient evidence, is to require of him what is contrary to his rational nature—is to require that for which he has no faculties; for man has no faculties for rationally believing without evidence. Without evidence then, adequate and accessible, man cannot be required to believe.

5. It seems further needful that in the constitution of the mind there should be secured an invariable connection between *perception* of evidence and belief—that as rational belief is possible only in view of evidence, so with evidence perceived, disbelief should be impossible—that sufficient evidence being before the mind, belief should be no longer voluntary but necessary. \*

\* See Princeton Repertory. 1846, p. 58.

Otherwise, were it possible that the mind in view of a proposition supported by full, clear, *perceived* evidence, could still disbelieve, this disbelief must arise from some irrational and unaccountable caprice of mind. For, by the supposition, it could not be from any lack of evidence, nor from any seen evidence to the contrary. Were this possible, there could be no certainty of ever reaching or retaining the truth, no virtue in its reception, nor guilt in its rejection. One might toil on day and night, through courses of assiduous and painful investigation with never so honest desire after the truth in a given case, and when all was done, the subject now probed to its foundations, and set with its supporting evidence fully before the mind, yet might he unaccountably find himself a disbeliever. And in such disbelief, he could not be guilty, for it arose, as it were, in despite of him. And had faith been there instead, it might have been equally irrational; equally without any relation to the evidence; utterly uncommendable and worthless.

We are now brought to the very hinge of the matter, and seem to see the very pivot, so to speak, upon which this responsibility turns.

#### TREATMENT OF EVIDENCE.

IN insuperable ignorance, or lack of evidence, there can be no imaginable moral claim upon man for faith. On the other hand, to evidence fairly before the mind the beliefs are as sure and steady as the needle to the pole. In any case then of sufficient offered evidence, the belief or disbelief will depend upon the degree of *access* which this evidence *has to the mind*; in other words, upon man's voluntary treatment of that evidence. If unprejudiced, and honestly desiring the truth, he give the evidence fair entertainment, he will inevitably become a believer.

In this treatment of evidence, man will give unerring indications of his present moral character. Virtue will exhibit itself in an honest, and, if the question be one of importance, eager prosecution of the work of scanning, sifting, weighing the evidence, with heart

ready to gather up every gold-grain of truth that comes to light, *whatever* consequences may follow. An opposite character will appear in an opposite course, slighting, or perverting the evidence, and thus making sure of disbelief.

Here then, in the treatment of evidence, responsibility comes into visible connection with our beliefs. And the more solemn the nature, and the more important the various designed bearings upon human conduct and hence destiny, of any moral or religious truth; and especially the clearer the available evidence in the case, the weightier will be the obligation to its reception, and the greater the guilt in its rejection. And should the truth or truths be the divinely appointed instrument of man's rescue from sin and death, and restoration to the favour of his God, then is the rejection fatal.

As this point is important, let us illustrate it by a supposed example or two.

The Apostle Paul enters a synagogue at Ephesus, and gives a brief account of the life,

death, character, and claims of Jesus of Nazareth. A zealous Jew rises in indignation and retires, muttering curses against both Jesus and his Apostle. He rejects the Messiah, and with the amount of evidence *before his mind*, he cannot do otherwise. Yet (assuming the truth of the Apostle's doctrine), there is evidence *at hand*, which, having convinced Saul of Tarsus, would certainly have sufficed to bring this other rejecter also to faith. The truth is there, and the evidence is there; and nothing but a fair, honest weighing of that evidence, is now wanting to the cordial reception of that truth. But he *will* not sift the evidence. The proof that God in his providence has laid at his door of the Messiahship of Jesus, he turns from with indignation and contempt, and thus makes lasting unbelief inevitable. The consequences must be fearful. He must go to death and the judgment without a Messiah, and must stand trial there without an "Advocate with the Father."

It was an insult to truth, and an insult to

his Maker, and an abuse of his moral nature, thus to slight offered evidence of a truth so momentous; and the rash prejudice and passionate decision of the question involved great criminality. There is also revealed a moral obliquity which disqualified him for either discerning and appreciating the evidence actually offered, or for recognizing the challenge thus divinely given for further search after evidence indicated.

And this present moral state is a tell-tale of the past. The path by which he had journeyed thither, (in his case as in every other,) must have led through repeated wrong volitions, preferences for wrong moral views, indulgence of wrong moral spirit, entertainment and cherishing of low earthly anticipations respecting the Messiah; and all this, not unconnected with pride, prejudice, and self-conceit, as foreign to the whole spirit which the Scriptures would produce in an honest, devout believer, as it was from that of the venerable Simeons and Annas, a few at least of whom stood forth to testify to the

legitimate effect of the old religion upon the mind and heart.

Take another instance—that of an intelligent Gentile, receiving for the first time the announcement and records of Christianity. The command is, “Believe.” Belief requires evidence. The evidence in this case is two-fold, external and internal. The former is the historical; the latter resides in the records themselves, and consists mainly in the character of the truths uttered. It thus addresses especially the moral nature, and its effective force depends upon the degree of correspondence between these truths, and the moral state of the mind and heart. As intuitive truths to the understanding, so are these to the heart, in a normal moral condition.

Announce to a little child that the whole is greater than a part, and if the intellectual nature be in a normal state, the child will inevitably assent. So will mind and heart, if in a right moral state, respond to the intrinsic evidence of moral truth. If we figure to the mind the moral nature as a bell, *unmuffled*,

*unfractured*, and *unalloyed* in that composition which consists in its tastes, preferences, and inclinations, then when smitten by a moral truth it will invariably ring forth a sound pleasing to the ear of the Creator. Let the light of these self-evidencing truths fall upon the soul, as sun-rays upon the well prepared daguerreotype plate, and the impression will be accurate and inevitable. In other words, if the moral state be as God may righteously demand, the soul will respond with a ready and hearty "amen!" to every word that proceedeth out of his mouth.

This latter evidence is at once the most forcible and easiest of access—for it lies in the truth itself and needs only an open healthy eye to make abundant illumination sure.

And as this right moral state is indispensable to the perception and appreciation of the *internal* evidence, so it plays an important part in the treatment of the *external*. It will determine the mode of its entertainment by the mind, and the zeal and honesty with which

the work will be prosecuted of sifting, weighing, and testing its trustworthiness.

In the case supposed, of the Jew, had his moral nature been as it ought to have been, such would have been his instinctive perception and appreciation of the importance of the subject, of the solemnity of his position, and of the moral bearings of the whole, that his conduct would have been very different, and his mind would have reached a very different conclusion.

And so with the Gentile—he is called upon to believe the gospel upon the evidences offered, external and internal. It will depend mainly upon his intimate moral character whether he will instantly adopt, or instantly reject the truth; or whether he will be a longer or shorter period in arriving at a decision. Instances have occurred of instant decision adverse to the gospel claims; and other instances in which men listening for the first time to the unfolding of the gospel scheme, have at once received it to their heart, leaping and rejoicing and praising God!

Thus it is that the treatment of the evidence under impulses from the present moral state, tastes, and inclinations, decides for a man the momentous question, whether he will pass his probation on earth, sink into the grave, and rise at the last day to judgment, a receiver or rejecter of the Son of God, as his Advocate with the Father.

The available evidence then may be said to be the measure of man's responsibility for his creed, and human guilt herein to be in proportion to maltreatment of that evidence.

The criminal act of rejecting moral truth flows from a criminal moral state. But a full account of this matter leads us a step further.

#### THE FOUNTAIN HEAD.

EVERY moral truth is a word of God, and, embraced by man, tends to a friendly intimacy between them. Why then is there not on the part of man, such a thirst for the truth, as would lead to an eager search after it, and an honest and careful sifting of all attainable evidence? And on the other hand, why do

we find the illustrious heathen, speaking forth the experience of the race, lamenting a conscious preference of the known wrong over the acknowledged right ?

Paul unveils the mystery, when he designates man's native moral state, *φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός*, "a carnal heart," and declares it to be *ἐχθρὰ εἰς θεόν*, "enmity against God." Is this native enmity in the creature toward his Creator—in the beneficiary toward his benefactor, a mere arbitrary prejudice ?

A volume upon this elemental characteristic of man's native moral state, is opened in the scripture story of *its origin*. It began in an act of rebellion, landing the rebel in a moral condition, which becomes thenceforth the dire inheritance of the race—Pandora's box without Hope at the bottom !

Chief in this box of ills is *a sense of guilt*. No one can honestly pronounce himself innocent before God. This sense of guilt produces

*Fear*, which is to *love*, as darkness is to light. Love casteth out fear, and fear love.

The convict cannot love either the judge or the executioner. But deep in the soul of man, is the assurance, that God justly fills both these offices. A fugitive from justice cannot love the pursuing officer. But man knows that it is thus between him and God.

Hence also among the residents in the chambers of the soul is *Dread*, sleeping there an unquiet sleep. A shriek at midnight, a sudden death by his side from a thunderbolt, makes man tremble. Earth holds not the man who is not sometimes a coward! Macnish, in his "Philosophy of Sleep," speaking of the terrors that sometimes come "when deep sleep falleth upon man," says—"No firmness of mind can at all times withstand them. Courage and philosophy are frequently opposed in vain." It is not so with sinless beings.

*Shame* is also a parent of enmity, as it is a child of conscious guilt.

It is an old adage that "whom one has injured, him he hates." But each man is a conscious injurer of his Maker.

A sense of utter dissimilarity in moral character increases this alienation and enmity.

As a subject of the moral government of God, man feels himself opposed and curbed in his strong native inclinations, lusts, and appetites, and hears himself threatened with penalties.

Such are some of the elements of man's native moral character, which invariably work enmity to God, and, of consequence, to the truth of God, which bears his image and points to him. And when one hates a doctrine in its source, its nature, and results, no marvel if he be very slow to admit to his mind the evidence which, by substantiating its truth, gives it a rightful dominion over his heart and life !

#### THE BITTER ISSUES.

SUCH is the bitter fountain, mark now *how* its streams converge toward the Dead Sea of Disbelief. A very common result of this foregone conclusion of the heart against the truth is a deliberate shutting of the eyes to all the evidence in a particular case. To produce

this result, the internal depravity may assume one or another of various forms. It may appear as a proud self-conceit, scorning to admit that any such truth could have escaped his knowledge and conscious intelligence; or dogmatically denying its rationality or possibility. Or the messenger chosen in the providence of God to first announce the truth, may be an uneducated fisherman, or tax-gatherer, from whose uncourtly lips, the man of refinement and education *will not* suspect the truth may come, and whose toil-hardened hands the pampered child of wealth will not grasp in fellowship. Or a shrewd suspicion may arise of antagonism between the proposed doctrine and one's set inclinations, and inveterate habits of thought and action; or with certain long cherished opinions, of the relinquishment of which he will not entertain a thought. If admitted, this doctrine would perchance make most unwelcome havoc of his worldly pleasures and interests; sometimes constraining either an abandonment of an occupation or profession, or such modification

in the modes of pursuing them, as would diminish the number of servants, reduce the splendor of equipage, and bring the whole state and show of life, to a lower level. The language of the heart is, "Let religion come down from the CROSS and we will believe and receive it!"

From such causes, often subtle and almost eluding the consciousness, yet greatly influential over the moral perceptions and reasoning powers, many, promptly and decidedly, shut the door of the soul against every ray of evidence of this or that truth, which involves duties numerous and most solemn, and the treatment of which entails consequences the most momentous. With many, the rejection of revelation is a direct and necessary consequence of a diligent and persevering familiarising of the mind with all the arguments, sneers, and sarcasms, gathered from the issues of the infidel press, and from the lip in infidel clubs and coteries; and on the other hand, a most careful shielding of eye and ear from all words and arguments to the contrary, except

ing such as come through infidel channels, and coupled with the antidote of infidel reply and refutation. Such men, were infidel arguments weaker still than they are, and the evidences of Christianity of even demonstrative character, must of necessity remain in disbelief.

Often too, when *some* place is allowed to evidence, it is so dwarfed and marred, through the influence of controlling prejudices, as to leave the mind still under the dominion of the error, from which a little fair moral dealing would set it free. Thus two men enter upon a discussion. Suppose them to be equal in logical acumen and dialectical skill. The same sources of evidence are equally open to each. Yet the result will be, that each will retire from the contest more firmly grounded in his own views than before. And the secret of the matter lies in the difference of treatment, the evidence for and against him receives from each. To the light of evidence for his favourite doctrine, he opens wide the eyes of his mind, till, prepossessed with an

exaggerated view of the one side, it has little power left to place any thing like a fair estimate upon the other.

Thus it is especially with religious truth ; which, when it enters the mind, comes not simply as a gem to take its place in prepared settings ; not merely as a guest to occupy the well-furnished guest-chamber, but as a Lord and Master ! It comes to change the manners ; order the life ; give laws to the innermost springs of action—to the aims and motives—to the inclinations, emotions, and passions ; to bring even the *thoughts* into captivity to itself. And could the maltreatment of evidence in the case of religious truth be analyzed and set forth before the eye (as indeed it is before the eye of the all-seeing God), there would be unveiled to *our* view, also, the grossest dishonesty, arising mainly from the subtle play of a profound and criminal fondness for error, or for the course of life which it allows ; and, on the other hand, of aversion to the truth, or to the self-denying life which it enjoins.

Man sets out in ostensible search for what

he complacently calls "the truth;" cherishing all the while a profound aversion to the *truth actual*, and a strong preference for certain contrary doctrines. This aversion on the one hand, and preference on the other, conspire to distort his views, and warp his judgment; exaggerating the evidence for the doctrine he loves and diminishing that to the contrary. And thus the truth of heaven is extinguished and a passage to the tomb secured through a dark and perilous wilderness.

#### FACTS—CONFIRMATORY AND ILLUSTRATIVE.

FURTHER illustration and confirmation of our argument is found in many striking facts in the history of human belief. Sudden and surprising revolutions are recorded in the religious opinions of men, not only without an increase either of truth, or evidence, but also without any new facilities of access to evidence.

The writer has credible information of a man of no mean talents and attainments, who once cherished a decided and even malignant infidelity. To his infidelity was added, its

common accompaniment, an excessive profanity. Yet, one day, suddenly, without premeditation, without argument or exhortation, without one ray of additional evidence, his disbelief took wings and flew away, leaving in its stead an assurance of the truth of Christianity like that of knowledge!

How could such things be? Clearly, now, for the first time he honestly suffered the truth to concentrate its rays upon his soul. Perhaps his prejudices had been weakened. Perhaps, from deep internal causes, his unwillingness that Christianity should be true had somewhat yielded. However this may be, he now willingly admitted to his soul the light, which hitherto he had quenched by disbelief, and the result was a speedy revolution of all his views respecting the so lately hated doctrines of true religion.

Another, we are told, spent nearly eighty years in building around his soul the rocky munitions of deism. Often did his aged lips boast of the fitness of his scheme even "to die by." For, once and again, he had sickened, and

sunk to the gates of the grave, and through all, his defences remained unshaken. But one day while walking out upon his plantation, a plaintive voice fell upon his ear. Proceeding in the direction of the sound, he ascertained it to be the voice of prayer from the lips of one of his negroes, and for *his* soul! His spirit stirred within him, with unwonted movings. Ere he was aware, his octogenarian deism was gone, and soon he saw in that book, he had so long and so cordially maligned, a system of undoubted truth!

What a hint to disbelievers, that the feeble voice of a praying negro can become mighty, through God, to the casting down, in a moment as it were, of schemes of faith, whose construction had required the misdirected thoughts and energies of nearly fourscore years! If God can make such havoc with man's religious structures by such instrumentality, what can he not do with his own voice in the dying hour, or before, or after! An unbeliever, venturing upon death and the judgment, trusting to his own self-framed defence, is like

a soldier making his way to the forefront of a fierce battle, where cannon, musket, and rifle pour forth their storm of leaden and iron hail, relying for his protection, upon a paper shield ! What now was the process by which the Deist passed from denial to affirmation—from disbelief to faith ? The arguments accumulated and fortified, through a period of eighty years, were not met in detail and confuted. The fact was, he now ceased his active opposition to the truth. That truth, with which he had been familiar from his youth, now first experienced fair dealing at the bar of his mind. The moral nature, abused through a lifetime, and degraded into subserviency to error, was now permitted to act in accordance with the law of Him who made it. The light that he had struggled so long to extinguish, he now suffered to shine in upon his soul with its own proper effulgency, and hence he became a believer. For, to evidence seen, the mind *must* yield.

But there is testimony still more striking. There are instances, not a few, in which men have suddenly cast off determined and blas-

phemous unbelief, and come to a vivid assurance of the truth of revelation, not only without the remotest expectation of ever enjoying any of the promised blessings of religion, but on the contrary, with the deep conviction that the doctrines they now so unwaveringly affirm are the announcement and security of their eternal ruin !

Now all are aware of what surprising delusion in morals and religion, the human mind is capable, under the sway of prejudice, passion, or a fancied self-interest. Under the allurements, for instance, of large prospective pecuniary gains, the conscience can be lulled, and ingenious apologies adopted for courses of conduct which involve lying, deceit, fraud—in a word almost any kind and degree of iniquity.

But here are men before whose minds are certain doctrines to be affirmed or denied. If by a process of self-delusion not at all uncommon, they persuade themselves of the falsity of these doctrines, they may then fearlessly and with an assurance of perfect safety carry their contempt and condemnation to

death, and through death into the future, if future there should be. Never *can* the mind be more strongly bribed to disbelief! But affirming the doctrines, they are well assured that they thereby affirm for themselves a wretched eternity. Yet, with "all their soul and mind and strength," do they declare the truth of these, to them fatal doctrines! Never is the might of truth more manifest! Listen now to the dying

Sir Thomas Scott as he cries out, "Until this moment I believed there was neither a God, nor a hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and that I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of Almighty God!"

Voltaire, through his life, poured forth, with tongue and pen, a stream of scornful, malignant ridicule upon Christ's name and cause—making, "Crush the wretch," the awful watchword of his party. But "in his last hours he sent for Tronchin. When the Doctor came he found him in the greatest agonies, exclaiming with the utmost horror, 'I am abandoned of

God and man! Doctor, I will give you one half I am worth if you will give me six months to live!' 'You cannot live six weeks,' was the reply! Then said Voltaire, 'I go to hell and you will go with me!' Thunderstruck the doctor retired from his bed-side, observing that the furies of Orestes could give but a faint idea of those of Voltaire!"

An intelligent but irreligious young man was suddenly brought to death's door, and among his last words, "uttered in a clear thrilling tone," were these, "I have tried to disbelieve in a future hell—how vain the attempt! And now I know that I shall eternally perish!"

Like instances might be multiplied, but they are too painful to dwell upon. Let these suffice.

But how comes it to pass, that these men first believe the truth of Scripture, just when they see that these truths cannot save them? Why do they *now* affirm what all their life long they had denied? And why *now* cast from them doctrines so long cherished, so zealously defended, and so confidently relied

upon? Why do they *now* exchange doctrines which leave the future without an object to dread, for those which they are well aware enshroud their prospects in the blackness of darkness for ever?

It was not from the force of new argument; from any increase of evidence, nor from any warmth of exhortation. But now first the truth met with honest entertainment in their minds. A criminal hostility to the truth and its practical requirements had distorted and shut it from their minds. But now the farce was over, and it stood face to face with them in all its native majesty!

Had they sought honestly, willing to know and embrace the truth whatever it might be; whatever it might either forbid or enjoin; then might they have reached a faith that would have been their salvation. But cherishing a criminal aversion to it, they offered their eyes to be blindfolded by error, until the time when realities force themselves upon the soul, and then they saw the truth and their destruction together!

They disbelieved through maltreatment of accessible evidence. They believe because, willingly or unwillingly, this evidence, long within reach, but kept in the dark, now confronts the soul and pours down upon it its long smothered light.

#### THE TRUE CHARACTER OF DISBELIEF.

IN the light of all this, Disbelief, which is the same as the "unbelief" of the Scriptures, stands forth in its true character. In origin it is a depravity of the moral nature, in its form and result it is wholesale rebellion. It is no merely neutral state arising from insuperable ignorance, but a positive rejection of truth supported by sufficient evidence within reach of an honest seeker.

In office and effect, Disbelief is the Creator's great antagonist. It is the great rationalistic SEEVA—the Destroyer; all the time undoing for man, the choicest works of God.

The grand realities of the universe are not its gross materialities—its mountains and oceans; nor even its stars, beautiful in their

brightness and great in their magnitude through they be. All these are but the temporary scaffolding, the momentary hand-maid of *the real*, and *the enduring*. Only spiritual things are truly real!

But of the most glorious of these, Disbelief, for each immortal spirit in whose bosom it finds a home, robs the great world of being. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," to shine upon, and thus each for itself, as it were, to kindle into being, multitudes of truths. But upon the grandest of all these, Disbelief forbids the light to shine.

Made in the image of God, the human mind is like a golden bell hung in the skies of eternity to echo abroad with self-thrilling vibrations every word that reaches it from the Creator's mouth. But through disbelief, the most solemn of these words preceptive and declarative are for it turned to silence; the mightiest truths annihilated; and vacuity spread through regions which God has abundantly peopled with realities living and everlasting!

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What is Calvary, but so many cartloads of earth, of no more value, nor sacredness, than any other? The rains wash it away, the beasts browse upon it and the final fires will consume it. But the crucifixion enacted there astonished the angels, atoned for human guilt, and will for ever shine as the most prominent and glorious record in the archives of heaven! Yet Disbelief spares Calvary and annihilates the atonement! What are suns and stars and systems, but transitory, though shining, tablets upon which are engraved the great truths of the divine existence, power and wisdom—their brightest lustre arising from the truths inscribed upon them? Yet Disbelief spares the tablets and erases the recorded truths! To some minds by reason of Disbelief, heaven is nothing, and hell is nothing; the resurrection is nothing, and the judgment nothing; the angels are nothing and God is nothing; but man, and matter, and the present, are all! Disbelief is a destroyer!

It is further, as has been shown, a daring rebel, and this in a twofold sense; first in the

simple fact of not believing, for we are commanded to believe; and second, because it is a casting off of all the peculiar obligations embosomed in the rejected truths. It is thus rebellion based on falsehood; and every disbeliever is both a liar and a rebel. Both these in asserting the falsity of a moral truth, and the latter, abundantly, in treating as nullities the duties which the truth imposes. Hence the beloved Apostle, albeit unused to harshness of thought or speech, exclaims—“Who is a liar,” worthy of the name compared with him, “who denies that Jesus is the Christ?”

Look now at the *Atheist*. Shutting the eye to the light radiated from the heavens above, and the earth beneath; to all the evidence furnished in the providence of God; all inwrought into the very texture of his soul, and exhibited in every organ of his body, he cries out in the face of God, “There is no God!” In some respects, his sin seems more flagrant than even that of Satan. For if the latter rebelled against, the former derides his Maker

as a nonentity ! Ten-thousand voices around chanting the chorus of an existing, all-governing God, the Atheist, with his fingers in his ears, and a smile of contemptuous incredulity upon his brow, seeks to drown that chorus with his feeble voice ! “ I am ! ” the voice of Jehovah, leading the chorus, cries. “ Thou art not ! ” rejoins this ephemeral annihilator of creation’s God ! “ Love me with all thine heart ! ” is the command. “ Love a nonentity ! ” is the sneering reply. “ Obey me ! ” “ Obey a nonentity ! ” Can the God of heaven hold such a one guiltless ?

And the *Infidel*, with evidence accumulated about him from prophecy and miracles, from observation and experience, denies a revelation, and by that one denial annuls for himself all the laws it utters, and makes a mock of all the peculiar duties it enjoins.

The difference between the Atheist and the Infidel is that the one contradicts God in *all* he utters ; the other, only in a *part* ; the one annihilates God, the other suffers him to exist, yet treats him as a deaf mute, permitting him

neither to speak to us nor to hear us when we cry to him.

So other *Errorists*, who, admitting a God and a revelation, yet rob that revelation of its most important truths. Taking the golden candlestick with its thousand flames they extinguish all but the dimmest. Whatever lights they permit to shine, "the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they quench, and this quenched, their pathway is thenceforth in fatal darkness.

#### CONCLUSION.

WE therefore conclude, that God, having on the one hand furnished man with the requisite mental faculties, and the rational conditions for their proper exercise; and on the other hand promulgated through nature and revelation the truths in which the chief duties of man take their rise, and find the whole of their obligatory force, it is not only competent to him, but if he is to be a sovereign more than in name, it is necessary for him to enjoin upon men that *belief* of those truths,

which is an essential condition of the discharge of those duties.

Hence instead of absurdity in the doctrine of man's responsibility for his religious opinions, the absurdity is all on the other side. It is a gross absurdity to say, that "God cares not for man's opinions," when these "*opinions*," in the sense intended, are the conclusions of the mind as to whether a God exists—a revelation has been made—a final judgment appointed—a heaven proffered—or a hell threatened;—which conclusions contain the very pith and soul of all moral duties.

"He can't be wrong whose life is in the right"—a bald absurdity in the sense intended! It is as if one should say, "I care not how bad the *tree* is, if only the *fruit* be good." But a corrupt tree *cannot* bring forth good fruit. And a life *cannot* be right when the very principle in which all *rightness* consists is wanting. But this principle of rightness lies in such rational recognition of divine law as is impossible with one whose "opinion" is, that neither divine law nor Lawgiver exists.

To be in the settled convictions of our minds oblivious of an existing God, a promulgated series of divine laws, and an achieved atonement, is, to say the least, sufficient to strip any act possible to man of all moral worthiness.

God has spread before the human eye certain truths. An injunction solemn as eternity binds every man to whom these truths find access, to echo back a cordial amen thereto, out of a good and honest heart, and then, under their moulding and guiding influence, as a ship before the wind, to move on toward the port of heaven.