



Wm S. Plumer.

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Man Responsible for his Belief.

BY

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THOUGHTS WORTH REMEMBERING.

Aut undique religionem tolle, aut usquequaque conserva.—*Cicero*.

The way to hell is easy, for men can find it with their eyes shut.—*Castruccio Castracani*.

That those persons should tolerate all opinions, who think none to be of estimation, is a matter of small merit. Equal neglect is not impartial kindness.—*Burke*.

Pride of opinion and arrogance of spirit are entirely opposed to the humility of true science.—*Locke*.

The fact is, men are not always in a mood to be convinced.—*Logan*.

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.—*Jesus Christ*.

Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws.—*Blackstone*.

It is not only the difficulty and labor which men take in finding out of truth; nor again, that when it is found, it imposeth on men's thoughts, that doth bring lies in favor, but a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself.—*Bacon*.

Men are ready to believe everything when they believe nothing. They have diviners, when they cease to have prophets, witchcraft, when they cease to have religious ceremonies; they open the caves of sorcery, when they shut the temples of the Lord.—*Chateaubriand*.

If I would choose what would be most delightful, and I believe most useful to me, I should prefer a firm religious belief to every other blessing.—*Sir Humphrey Davy*.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS :—

If the course of lectures, the first of which is now to be delivered, shall be worthy of any attention, they will justly claim your greatest candor, your most ardent love of truth, and your utmost docility of temper. It will be unworthy of you as men, and as lovers of knowledge, it will be unphilosophical, I think too it will be wicked for you to attend these discussions for the purpose of blindly receiving or rejecting whatever may be said. I bespeak your utmost ingenuousness in listening to the arguments that may be offered. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Your eternal life is the stake involved in the solemn inquiry to be made into the truth of Christianity; for if the Scriptures be not true, there remain to us only darkness and lamentation.

There is found extensively diffused among men a book, called *The Bible*. Besides other lessons, it teaches that one of the highest exercises of virtue is faith, and that one of the most heinous sins is unbelief. It makes salvation to depend upon the former, and a loss of the Divine favor to be the fruit of the latter. It often and clearly settles these points. It says: "Without faith, it is impossible to please God;" and, "He that believeth not is condemned already."

Nevertheless, men are found who utterly reject this book as a revelation, some without inquiry, but not without scoffs, and some with a vain show of reasoning, but evidently without thorough and fair examination. Of the latter class, are those who insist that man is not, because he ought not to be, accountable for his belief in any matter, that faith is involuntary, and so not proper ground of praise or blame, reward or punishment. This opinion has some prevalence, and is worthy of examination at the beginning of a course of lectures on the evidences of Christianity. If it be true, the whole Christian system fails of the authority which it claims. Before entering on the main question, a few preliminary observations are proper.

Truth is the great and proper object of the mind of man, and may with safety be pursued to any length whatever. There is no danger in giving up any error, or in embracing any truth. Forsaking truth, and embracing error, angels shrunk into devils. Forsaking error and grasping truth, sinners rise to the dignity of saints, and to the companionship of angels.

The resemblance between truth and error is often so great as to call for the most patient inquiry, and for the soundest discrimination. Prejudice and passion are enemies to truth, and will defeat any quest after knowledge. All truths and all errors are not equally evident. Some of the most important truths bear no marks of credibility whatever, when first presented to the mind. And some of the most serious errors often for a while seem to be truths. Numerous instances, drawn from every branch of knowledge, might easily be given.

All truths are not equally important. Some we may never know, and yet attain all the highest ends of existence. But some have such a scope and bearing that it behooves all men to seek and find them, and then to hold them fast. Such are the great truths of religion. It cannot promise the slightest utility to reason with one who admits that there is a God, and yet cannot be brought to see that our relations to Him are momentous.

Though mere intellectual belief is not saving faith, yet, by the laws of the human mind, the former is a necessary foundation of the latter. When a man so believes as to be saved, his heart makes no war upon his understanding, his faith is not contrary to his judgment and reason. It is a glory peculiar to Christianity that it requires our religion to be a "reasonable service." "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" is one of its oracles. No man acts more wisely and rationally than when he solemnly and earnestly believes all religious truth.

An early Christian writer says: "He, who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature." And as the author of nature is confessedly the author of all truth, the argument from analogy is both legitimate and important on religious subjects. It does, indeed, furnish no direct evidence of any religious truth. But if difficulties, presented against religion, can be shown to lie with equal force against the constitution and course of nature, they can no longer be urged as valid objections. The nature of the subject

now to be discussed renders a resort to analogy entirely proper. The chief use of analogy in argument is to silence cavillers.

The connection between cause and effect in the moral world is as close as in the physical. Error will give trouble to the traveller to a distant city. May it not be fatal to the traveller to eternity? The former feels the consequences of mistake for a short time, the latter for endless ages. The plague produces pains, blotches, and death. Sin is more dire in its effects. No signals of distress are so appalling as those held out by men living or dying under moral maladies.

Let us now examine the statement that man is not, and ought not to be, accountable for his faith. At this point it is proper to make a few remarks on the grounds of belief in general. Every man finds his mind so constituted that it cannot but believe some things. Consciousness informs him that he exists, thinks, wills, loves, and hates. On these and like points he needs no other ground of belief. It is folly to seek it. This is adapted to the subject, and is complete. When a man tells me that I have the power of reflection, he gives me no new information, and no more evidence of the fact than I had before.

Man also believes some things by an intuitive perception of their truth. The whole is greater than a part, two are more than the half of three, a proposition, admitting of but one construction, cannot be both true and false, are truths so obvious to every sober mind, that to announce them is to prove them, to understand them is to believe them. To demand argument in support of them, is like calling for candles to show us an unclouded sun. We believe such things because we cannot, without violence to the constitution of our minds, deny or doubt them.

Again, mathematical demonstrations built upon the axioms of that science command our belief. The very lowest penalty for expressing a doubt of a proposition thus proven is the contempt of mankind. In long mathematical processes errors may indeed occur, but where each premise and each step are clear, our assent to results, however surprising, is most reasonable. Thus accounts are settled, seas navigated, countries partitioned, and nations divided.

Logical reasonings on moral subjects may be as fair and as conclusive as mathematical demonstrations. Parents should provide for their helpless children, children are bound to the offices of filial piety, the mother who cares not for her own offspring is a monster, he who loves slander, robbery, or murder, is an enemy

to virtue, are moral truths as fairly reached as any result in geometry. It is not true that our knowledge in morals is, in its own nature, less certain than in other branches of science.

Our senses also furnish good ground of belief. When a man sees a rainbow, he believes it has several colors, when he hears the songs of the mocking-bird, he believes it has exquisite musical powers, when he tastes honey, he believes it is sweet, when he feels ice, he believes it is cold, when he smells the incomparable flower of the magnolia, he believes it has strong odors. Nor does he need any other proof of these things. No process of ratiocination would add anything to his reasonableness in believing what his senses had already informed him of.

Consciousness, intuition, mathematical and logical reasonings legitimately conducted, and our senses are all to be relied on in their proper spheres. He, who rejects consciousness, intuition, the senses, and logical reasonings, can make no progress in knowledge, and will simply live and die a fool. He, who refuses to settle an account fairly and arithmetically made out, or to abide by a boundary fairly and mathematically ascertained, will be set down for a knave. Yet in the use of all these grounds of belief, mistake or deception is possible. He, who slanders a neighbor, may say that he is not conscious of malignity towards him. In this case we simply infer that he does not candidly observe or truly report the state of his own mind. But we do not on that account give up all evidence of that kind. Such facts teach us to be watchful and truthful, but not skeptical. So a first truth may not be clearly stated, or from heedlessness one may mistake its import. Would it on that account be wise to reject intuition, and begin to prove that the whole is greater than a part? In the use of the senses, and in mathematical and logical reasonings, errors have been committed. Shall we therefore abandon them all as instruments of advancing in knowledge? All sober men say, No. All these sources of evidence must be restrained to matters falling within their proper and respective provinces. Consciousness, intuition, logical reasonings, and the senses cannot determine how many acres of land are in a given field, or how many leagues a vessel has sailed in a day. Consciousness, intuition, mathematical and logical reasonings cannot prove a stone hard, an orange sweet, or a rose fragrant. One sense cannot testify for another, neither ought one of these classes of evidence to invade the province of another. Yet it is philo-

sophical, reasonable, right and wise to found belief on the evidence obtained from all these sources.

We have another source of information, on which to build our belief. Indeed, in the strict sense of the word *faith*, it is the only foundation of belief. I refer to the testimony of others. The necessity of reliance on testimony is based on our ignorance of many things, which can be known to us in no other way. The faculties of men are so limited, and time and space are so vast, as to preclude the possibility of his knowing thousands of things, important to be known, except by the testimony of others. Millions of men believe that the sea is fathomless, though they never cast a line into it; that lions and elephants are found in Africa, though they never were in sight of its coast; that a vast tract of the earth's surface is never whitened by frost, though they never were within the torrid zone; that there are vast deposits of gold in the mines of California, though they never were within a thousand miles of any part of that Western Empire State. Their belief in these and a thousand other things has no basis but the testimony of others. If a man concedes the reasonableness of so believing, he grants all that is essential for the basis of this argument; but if he denies it, he stultifies himself and all mankind. It is entirely by testimony that we believe in the existence, productions, appearance, or institutions of countries, which we never visited. It is only by testimony that any man's lineage is known to himself or his neighbors. In the same way the law of descents is executed, property is held, guilt and innocence proved, life and liberty legally taken or preserved. It is almost exclusively by testimony that the mass of men come to regard certain drugs, plants, and reptiles as poisonous. Very few men in each age of the world subject them to any actual test. It is solely by the testimony of men long since dead that we have any knowledge of the universal empires of antiquity, and of the men who reared, or who destroyed them. Let all men refuse assent to testimony, and all business must cease, all commerce be checked, and all law be a dead letter. Such a course would make earth a Bedlam, would convert every man into a murderer or a suicide, would produce starvation, dissolve society, and depopulate the earth. Men are therefore compelled to receive testimony, rely upon it, and be governed by it. In so doing they wisely submit to the laws of their nature and of their condition. Who will maintain that the Chinese were philosophical in disbe-

lieving, for thousands of years previous to the present century, the existence of the Northern and Southern Oceans? When a voyager in certain seas and seasons is told by the sailors that if he sleep on deck, it will cost him his life, is he a wise or a good man for believing not a word they tell him? To test the truth is to lose his life. To invite another to test it, is to tempt him to self-destruction. Here is a case, in which one has no guide but the testimony of men, and those strangers perhaps. The penalty, fixed by the Author of nature to such recklessness as refuses the warning even of a stranger, is death. When the king of Siam was told by the German ambassador that in his country water in winter became so hardened by the cold that men could walk upon it, was he wise in forthwith determining that it was a falsehood? Are Virginians unphilosophical in believing on the testimony of several men that the feat of climbing the Natural Bridge has actually been accomplished?

It is no valid objection to the principle of reliance on testimony, that it may be abused. Some witnesses are ignorant, some credulous, some dishonest. That is a good reason for patience, inquiry, candor, and discrimination, but none at all for blindly rejecting all testimony. There are said to be more than a hundred kinds of mushroom. Of these, but one is fit for food. Yet men easily learn to discriminate between the noxious and the wholesome. So we judge of all testimony that is submitted to us, and easily learn to discriminate between the precious and the vile, the false and the true. We wisely and universally receive testimony. The old and the young, the learned and the unlearned, the savage, the barbarian, and the civilized man all do it. If they acted otherwise, they would be madmen.

The whole force of testimony, considered by itself, depends upon the ability and honesty of the witness. We judge of the former by his general intelligence, and by his opportunities of information in the matter of which he speaks. We judge of the latter by his general character for veracity, and by his whole conduct in testifying. When the ability and honesty of witnesses are unknown, an inquiry on the subject is proper. Upon the testimony of competent and credible witnesses, we take property from one man and give it to another, and for offences thus proven, we punish men with loss of liberty, and even of life itself. Nor do good men live in a state of alarm lest they should be ruined by this state of things. On the contrary, it is one of the best means of preserving

all the dearest civil rights of men. Without it, no man is safe for an hour. All nations, therefore, have received testimony. All men have done it. All government rests mainly upon this cornerstone. There is no better proof of high civilization in a nation, than the perfection of its laws on this subject. It is the judgment of mankind that we are bound to admit testimony, and that we are highly culpable for refusing it. Take a few cases.

Serious charges are circulated against one of my neighbors. If true, they ought to lead to a suspension of all intimacy between us. All the facts are elicited. By ample testimony, my neighbor is proven guilty. Yet there is no change in my conduct towards him. Privately and publicly he is still my boon companion. What is the consequence? I declare my belief of his innocence, and give the highest proof of my sincerity. But men say that if I were not reckless of character, or had no sympathy with wrongdoers, I would certainly believe otherwise. If I still cling to him, I must bear a tremendous penalty, the forfeiture of the esteem of the wise and good. Or suppose the charge is fully disproven, and the innocence of my neighbor amply vindicated, and yet I declare my belief of his guilt. Is there no penalty for my rejection of testimony in his behalf? Do not all just men ascribe to malignity my belief of the guilt of one, whose defence has been triumphant? Do I not suffer severely, yet justly, for my belief in this case?

Even in physical affairs men are, by the fixed laws of God, held accountable for their belief, and that under the severest penalties. Here is a white powder. A man is told that it is arsenic, and that a small quantity of it will destroy animal life. He has never known a death caused by this poison. The powder looks as harmless as so much flour or chalk. He does not *know* that it is arsenic. He does not believe that it is deadly poison. He refuses to receive testimony as to its destructive qualities. He says, it is impossible that anything, so harmless in appearance, should hurt any one. He gives it in a dose to some one. Death ensues. He is arrested, tried, convicted, and justly executed as a murderer. Or if he takes the dose himself, and thus gives the highest proof of the sincerity of his belief, an agonizing death, inflicted by God himself, as the Author of the laws of nature, soon follows. The penalty is certain, speedy, and dreadful. He dies in horror and in torture, for refusing testimony. Why is this? Is not God good? Yes, verily. But his goodness leads him to teach men that for their belief in things natural they are respon-

sible to him under natural laws, with penalties as severe as any that can be inflicted on this side of the grave.

Not one man in a thousand has ever seen human life destroyed by a fall from a high eminence, yet upon the testimony of others it is generally believed that it will be fatal. Suppose a man refuses to listen to the warning voice of others, and leaps from the top of a high precipice to the rocks below. His unbelief in the testimony he has heard will not make void the law of attraction, by which he is drawn with fearful violence to the earth's surface, and dashed to pieces. The Author of nature will not suspend the laws of the material world, but will terribly punish those who violate them, even if the violator of them has but heard of, but never proven their power and penalty. Nay, in things natural men suffer for the slightest disregard of the law of testimony. When a colony goes forth to a new country, abounding in plants of unknown qualities, it is under the general declaration that some are wholesome and some noxious, and that it is folly to eat of anything whose nature is unknown. When the first settlers at Jamestown gathered, and boiled, and ate the leaves of the stramonium, they acted rashly, they despised the general law of testimony concerning vegetable plants, and they felt the consequences. The same truth might be taught by many other well-known examples.

Besides, it is the common sentiment of mankind that a man's belief on moral subjects is a sign of his present character, and a good index to his future career. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," is a maxim not only of revelation, but of all judicious men. Take away the fear of punishment, and present the occasion, to him who believes that swindling or stealing are justifiable, and no man of sense is surprised that the belief rules the life. It is said that the great mass of convicts in our prisons believe themselves to have been justified in the perpetration of their crimes. So long as they thus believe, every orderly citizen knows that they are dangerous to society. A man is known to believe that doctrine of devils, that the end justifies the means. Does any wise man confide in him? Will he not lie whenever it is convenient to do so? As it is his creed, so shall you find it his trade to deal in falsehood. No merchant will employ a young man, who is known to believe that he may, without guilt, procure his pleasures at the cost of his master, and without his consent. A man's creed embodies his moral principles. To publish his

creed is to make known his principles. If he, who believes viciously, acts correctly, it is owing to causes foreign from his real character; it is despite his principles, and there is no proper ground of praise in what he does. No respectable code of morals admits of cases of fortuitous or unintended virtue.

Moreover, it is the very office of reason to search for truth, to seek for light, to weigh arguments, and to determine the value of evidence. This whole work is voluntary. In performing it, every human being has the highest kind of evidence that he is a free agent. That evidence is his own consciousness. No man of sense will deny this. Nothing within the range of the human mind can be more free from violence, than the whole process of collecting, receiving, rejecting or weighing evidence. The proof of this is of the same nature with the proof of all our mental operations. All proper attempts to influence the human mind rest upon this basis. All other attempts to influence it are felt to be outrages. Persecution made Galileo submit to a humiliating confession. Good men have ever since felt the wickedness of the treatment he received. But his belief was unchanged. The echo of his confession that the earth did not move was hardly dead, till he was heard to say, "It does move," and if he had not said it, we know that such is the unchained and untamable freedom of all such mental operations, that after his confession, he must have thought just as he did before. If our belief is in any sense so involuntary, or so independent of the native freedom of our minds, that we may not be held accountable for it, what is the use of evidence? If the result cannot be varied by the evidence presented, then the whole process of eliciting testimony and listening to arguments in any cause or matter is a mockery of reason, truth and justice. To answer a matter before he hears it is not folly and shame to a man, if he cannot by candor, by patience, by inquiry, learn what conclusion he should reach. This doctrine carried out into practice would make all judicial proceedings very short, and save much time. Whether it would be satisfactory to mankind, I will not inquire. It would also open the shortest road to science and learning. It would save these young gentlemen the toil and labor of demonstrating problems and theorems. They might be persuaded to believe all things that are told them without looking at the evidence on which they rest. Life at the University would then be a time of elegant leisure to be sure. But whether such a course would

raise up a set of *men*, or advance *solid* learning, you may determine without argument. Why do the laws provide with such care, and why do men labor with such zeal, that as far as possible judges shall be impartial, if the state of the mind has nothing to do in determining the weight of testimony? Why should a prisoner wish to be heard if evidence and argument strongly presented will not influence the belief of a just and good man on the question of guilt or innocence before the court? Why should a man ask for a *fair* trial, if there be not states of mind very *unfair* to the rights of truth and justice?

A court is in session. A cause involving great interests is to be tried. A jury appears. One of the first acts of a juror is to bind his soul under the sanctions of an oath that he will render a verdict according to the law and the evidence. If belief be involuntary and beyond control, this oath is a mockery. But this is not all. The trial proceeds. The evidence is clear and carries conviction to every impartial mind. The law is equally clear. The judge so states it. The jury retires, and brings in a verdict contrary to the law and the facts. What is the result? The public puts a mark of infamy on each of those men. Public indignation is like coals of juniper on their heads. Their reputation is blasted. All respect and esteem for them cease. This is sure to be the case in proportion as the community, in which they live, is intelligent and virtuous. Now why do all good men visit such conduct with so severe a penalty? Simply because the jurors did not stand to their oath. Even if there be no suspicion of bribery, even if there be no suspicion that the verdict is contrary to belief, yet the penalty is inflicted, not by a bailiff or constable indeed, but not less terribly, because the public inflicts it and that without ceremony. Men judge that none but bad men, who did not fear an oath, could entertain a belief so utterly at variance with law and fact. Here is another jury of twelve men. One pays no attention to testimony, argument, or the law. His mind is already made up. Another is a mere trifler. He neither knows, nor cares what is right in the case. Another listens eagerly to the testimony on one side only. Another attends partially to one side and fully to the other. One and but one carefully and candidly hears the whole case and decides accordingly. This is the only innocent man in the panel. Even if the rest agree with him, in the eyes of God they are guilty; and so far as their conduct is known, they are guilty in the eyes

of all good men. They have evinced a criminal recklessness, a base want of love of truth.

Again, if belief is involuntary in any sense, which sets aside the freedom of the mind, and with it accountability, there is a full end of the distinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice. Thus we should fairly conclude that Saul of Tarsus, "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and making havoc of the Church, and haling men and women, committing them to prison," was not criminal, and ought never to have felt remorse for such conduct, for all the time he was doing these things he "verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Saul's belief in this matter was firm but erroneous. It was the result of prejudice and bigotry. He was "exceeding mad" against the Christians. Yet he believed he was doing right. But as soon as he became a candid, truth-loving man, he was covered with shame and filled with sorrow for this conduct. He never forgave himself for it, but went to heaven crying: "I am the chief of sinners—I persecuted the Church of God." And if he were not guilty for his bloody persecutions, neither should we be in doing the same things, provided we could only so far pervert our minds and hearts as to believe that we were doing God service.

By parity of reasoning, when in the midst of extreme perils and suffering and with incredible zeal, Paul preached Christ, there was nothing virtuous in all this, for although he did right and acted conscientiously, yet his belief, according to the error here opposed, was not a proper ground of praise. It was an involuntary result reached by his mind. For the same reason, he who believes in no God, and worships none, he who believes in one God, and worships him, and he who believes in thirty thousand Gods, and worships them, are alike acceptable or unacceptable to the Creator. Such are a few of the monstrous consequences of this huge error.

It has been shown that by the constitution of our natures we receive the testimony of men, that in so doing we act wisely and virtuously, and that if we violate this law of our existence, conscience, mankind and divine providence enforce severe penalties for the transgression. It is impossible for any man to attain the high ends of being or even to maintain that being on earth, unless he will listen to the testimony of others. Let us go a step further. The same law of our constitution, fairly interpreted,

a fortiori, obliges us to receive the testimony of God. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." The Bible claims to be God's testimony to man. It summons men to the investigation of great questions, involving at once the salvation of each man's soul, the general good of the human race, and the glory of our Maker. It declares that God would have our inquiries to be free, fair, thorough, calm and earnest. The tenor of Scripture on this subject is well expressed in such sentences as these: "Come now, let us reason together;" "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say;" "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good;" "In understanding be ye men;" "The truth shall make you free;" "Be ye not as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle;" "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself;" "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Larger liberty of inquiry no man of sense could wish for. The sober legitimate use of all our mental powers is encouraged in every proper way. It is true that the Bible represses and forbids all those tempers, which are unfriendly to growth in knowledge. It says: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." This remark is as applicable to a student of nature, of law, or of medicine, as to the student of the Bible. It says: "He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly;" but the truth here asserted is of universal application. Rashness of mind is no more contrary to religion than to sound philosophy. The Bible warns us against "philosophy falsely so called." Regard to this warning gave to the world the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Franklin. If the Bible calls for profound reverence in contemplating religious truths, it is because those things are divine and awful in their own nature. Levity of mind on sacred subjects is in bad taste, and proves that in such matters a man wishes to be a fool. He who sits on the bench during a trial for life, or investigates the question of the truth of Christianity in the same lightness of mind, with which he may throw pebbles into a brook, or spend an hour with the friend of his childhood, is a bad man, and every one, who is not bad, will say so. But the modesty, the caution, the candor, and the reverence, called for in such an inquiry, do not impair our freedom. They are the surest pledges, and the highest guarantees of its perfection.

It has been shown that man is held responsible for his belief in

temporal affairs; why should he be irresponsible where everlasting things are at stake? If in any case I am bound to receive the testimony of an intelligent, honest man, ought I not, in every case to receive the testimony of God? If erroneous belief in the affairs of this life is mischievous and often fatal, who can show that it will not be equally or more so in the business of the life to come? If the well-being of man on earth requires him to believe the fixed laws of God's natural government, may it not be even more important that he should believe the fixed laws of his moral government? A man heard that the legislature of his State had abolished capital punishment. He committed murder, and under the gallows said he would not have shed innocent blood, if at the time he had believed the penalty was death. His erroneous belief on this one point made him an actual murderer. May it not be as mischievous for a man to disbelieve God, when he says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die?" If man, who is always fallible and often fallacious, must nevertheless in some things be believed, how much more must we believe the true and infallible God? If man's word is ever reliable, God's is always unimpeachable. He commits no mistakes, and is never deceived. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all;" "His understanding is infinite;" "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning;" "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight;" but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do;" "He understandeth the thoughts afar off;" "He searcheth the heart and trieth the reins;" He is omnipresent and omniscient; he knows all causes and all effects; he is in full possession of all the propositions, that constitute universal truth; he knows what is, and was, and is to come, as well as what might have been, might now be, or might hereafter be on any conceivable supposition. He who denies these things must be sent to school to learn Natural Theology. Some of the heathen believed as much of God. Such a witness as God is infinitely fit and competent to testify. If he speak of what shall be, he has infinite power and wisdom to bring it to pass. Failure is out of the question. "To God all things are possible." Nothing is too hard for him. He cannot be defeated. His veracity cannot fail. False testimony is unspeakably abhorrent to the infinite rectitude of his nature. He is a God of truth. Even "if we believe him not, yet he abideth faithful, and cannot deny himself." Natural religion teaches that he is infinitely removed from insincerity and decep-

tion. Despite all his grossness of character, Balaam proclaimed that "God is not a man that he should lie." This truth is never to be yielded. Sound reason unites with revelation in saying, "Let God be true and every man a liar." It is less foolish and less criminal to suspect the truth of all men, than to question the veracity of God. "It is impossible for God to lie." If then we receive the testimony of men, who often deceive and are deceived, is it not much wiser to receive the testimony of God? Could reasoning be fairer?

Nor is there any reasonable presumption against God's making known his will on the highest themes that deserve human thought. He instructs mankind by his works of creation and providence concerning things of comparatively slight importance. He teaches the husbandman when to sow and when to reap, he instructs the mariner when to furl and when to unfurl his sails, he gives men skill in all the useful and ornamental arts, he gives sagacity to statesmen and by them stability to governments. Those who obey the lessons he gives in nature and providence, are so far wise, prosperous and happy. Is it worthy of God to give us such ample and safe lessons concerning the body, health, riches, and the welfare of society, and say nothing of the soul, of the riches that endure to eternal life, and of that boundless existence, which all but brutish men believe to be before them? God is benevolent and knows more than man. It would therefore be worthy of his boundless goodness to teach us. He is our Creator and Law-giver. It is therefore to be expected that he will make known to us his will. There is nothing taught us by Natural Religion, which makes it probable that God cannot or will not reveal to us more than he teaches us in his works. In other words, there is no *a priori* argument of any weight against God's revealing to us his whole will for our salvation. Now if God has spoken to us in the Bible, it is our duty to honor him by believing what he says. "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." He has done a very reasonable and proper thing. He has confided in his Maker's word. On the other hand, "he that believeth not God hath made him a liar." No inference could be more logical. He, that believes not man, charges him with speaking what he did not know to be truth, or with uttering what he knew to be false. Not to believe God is to do what in us lies to destroy confidence in his moral character, and to bring his name into contempt among his creatures. Every virtuous man feels

exquisite pain, when his veracity is questioned. No public person, as a judge, or governor, will brook the insult offered by giving him the lie, if he has power to redress it. God is the Judge of all the earth. He is the Governor among the nations. The harmony and happiness of the Universe depends upon the esteem in which he is held. To make him a liar is to offer him the highest kind of insult, and to sow the seeds of mischievous disaffection among his creatures. Confidence in God's veracity gone, all is gone. It is therefore for the best and highest reasons known to mortals that man is held accountable for his belief in the testimony of God.

If God has in the Gospel spoken to man, and man receives not His testimony, then by such unbelief he impeaches the Divine wisdom in the whole plan of salvation. To reject any measure proposed for our good, is to declare it unnecessary, or unsuited to the end proposed. In either case, it is an impeachment of the wisdom of the author of the plan. So, also, to reject God's word is to deny His ability to make good what He has promised or threatened. Unbelief makes the great First Cause inferior to second causes, and subjects the universal Lawgiver to the power of feeble creatures. It also impeaches the Divine kindness in making a revelation. If the Gospel be from heaven, its overtures of reconciliation are the strongest proofs of amazing love. But unbelief pronounces God a hard master, even in requiring the acceptance of proffered grace.

If the Bible be God's word, every candid man must admit that the Divine testimony contained in it is full and clear on the most important subjects. It abundantly teaches that man is by nature and practice a sinner, that he is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, that he is dead in trespasses and sins, that he is in love with sin and at enmity with God, that he is condemned by a law that is holy, just, and good, both in its precepts and in its penalty, that he is without strength, without righteousness, without hope, and without God in the world. If these things be so, it is kindness in God to testify them to us, especially as they are accompanied by offers of grace, mercy, and peace. Illumination, renewal of heart, pardon of sin, acceptance with God, strength to resist temptation, and victory over sin and death, are everywhere proffered in Scripture. Nor is the method of a sinner's recovery to the favor and enjoyment of God concealed, or obscurely handled in the Bible. Jesus Christ, the sole and sufficient cause of salvation to sinners, is clearly revealed. "The

testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." God has spoken of him "by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." "Yea, all the prophets from Samuel, and all that follow after, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days" of Messiah. In the New Testament, Christ is all in all, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. The Scriptures say that he was "equal with God," that "he was God," that he was "the Son of God with power," "the only begotten of the Father," "the Lord from heaven." They call him Messiah, Christ, the Anointed of God, Jesus, or Saviour, the one Mediator between God and man, the Surety of the Covenant, the Redeemer, the Prophet, Priest, and King of his people, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the true ark of safety, in which all who are sheltered shall be borne to the eternal mountain of God, when the deluge of Divine wrath shall drown the ungodly world. The testimony of God concerning his Son, as the author of eternal redemption, is given in many forms and with great earnestness, is peculiarly full and clear, is confirmed by the solemnities of an oath, and by many unmistakable tokens. The Bible claims that God long bore "witness with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." Before the eyes of successive generations for thousands of years its professed predictions have been in a course of apparent fulfilment. Every generation also witnesses very remarkable transformations of character from vice to virtue, from evil to good, which are ascribed to the power of God's testimony concerning his Son. Under the energy of Bible truth, order, reason, law, civilization, benevolence, piety, patience, humility, public spirit, all that can bless society and honor God, reascend their thrones, and sway their sceptres over men. If these things be so, I appeal to you whether there be not good reason and just cause for God's holding that man guilty, who rejects the Divine testimony? Is not man justly held accountable for his belief?

Some, indeed, object to the threatenings of Scripture against unbelievers, and say that they do not like to be frightened out of their unbelief. But may there not be as good reasons in a moral government for threatenings as for promises, for announcing penalties as precepts? The penal clause of every statute is a

threatening to wrong-doers. Ought the people of this commonwealth to turn felons, because the State, through the Legislature, has threatened to punish perjury, burglary, arson, and murder? Are not some men more influenced by the fear of evil than by the hope of good? In times of great temptation, may not the best of men find their virtue in some measure fortified by fear of the penal consequences of evil deeds? The threatenings of Scripture are chiefly to be regarded as kind and timely declarations of the unimpassioned but inflexible purpose of God to maintain his rights and authority at all hazards. The Bible is a code of laws, and God is a moral governor. Laws without penalties are mere advice, and laws without *known* penalties are among men always objected to. Besides, if we understood the connection between causes and effects in the moral world as well as in the natural, we might see that all the misery of which the wicked are forewarned, is the necessary and invariable fruit of sinful conduct here. As refusing food cannot but produce the death of the body, so refusing to receive Christ Jesus, the true bread that came from heaven, may as necessarily produce the death of the soul. The threatenings of Scripture, if true, are as really benevolent as its promises. Their place on the sacred page may heighten the gratitude of those who, by making peace with God, have escaped the wrath to come. They are also useful in awakening the zeal and compassion of those who preach the Gospel, when they see men ready to fall into the hands of a holy and just God. If the consequences of a wicked life were not clearly stated in a revelation, would not those who die in sin forever find fault with a government, that had observed a profound silence on so momentous a matter? Thus the objection appears to have no force. To urge it, is but to cavil.

A modern writer assigns as a reason why man should not be regarded as accountable for his belief, that the opposite doctrine leads to persecution. If man were responsible to his fellow-man for his religious belief, then, indeed, those monsters of iniquity who have gloated over the agonies, screams, and mangled limbs of their victims, might plead in their justification the doctrine maintained in this lecture. But the Scriptures teach that God alone is Lord of the conscience. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth," is the terrible rebuke of Scripture to all who invade the Divine prerogative, and undertake to punish men in matters in

which Jehovah has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." The pains and penalties due to misbelief or disbelief of God's testimony, and to all other offences of the same class, can be fitly judged of and condignly inflicted by none but God himself. A more daring outrage cannot be perpetrated by any creature than to rush into the judgment-seat of God, and deal out blows of vengeance for offences, the punishment of which the Almighty has reserved exclusively to himself. In civil and social affairs men may make us feel their just displeasure for our wrong belief, and course of action under it; but in religious affairs an attempt to punish us by the laws and courts of man, deserves the execration of men, and will, I doubt not, receive the reprobation of God. This objection, therefore, vanishes away.

Such is an outline of the argument designed as an introduction to this series of Lectures. Its object is to show that man may reasonably be required to believe sufficient evidence. What evidence is sufficient to oblige us to believe the Bible to be God's word, I shall not state. For purposes of illustration and argument, I have hinted at portions of it. I have also freely quoted the Scriptures, where it seemed important to educe their principles, or where they teach truths assented to by all wise and good men. But I have purposely avoided arguing any of the several kinds of evidence by which Christians suppose the Bible to be proven to be a revelation from God. In due time, each leading point will be discussed by those whom you will be pleased to hear.