

great power or opportunity of judging, we may refrain from the attempt to form an opinion on subjects which are matters of controversy, without having any reason to be ashamed of having no opinion on such matters. There is no folly, no stupidity, no cowardice; on the contrary, there may be truest intelligence and courage in saying, "I have not formed an opinion on a certain subject, because I have not had the means of ascertaining all the facts, without a knowledge of which an opinion would be of no value."

(2) A second piece of advice: *Be contented to act on many opinions which you are not able to verify intellectually*; that is to say, for which you can give no theoretical or speculative reasons. This may, at first hearing, sound very hard, inasmuch as it appears to recommend that men shall act merely from habit and custom, and not as rational and intelligent beings. Yet it is what we—all of us—do, and, we may add, what most of us do every day of our life.

Consider for a moment what are the two great elements in all opinion. They are, authority and personal investigation. It will probably be regarded by many persons as a sign of great lack of intelligence to be told that authority is a proper ground of opinion. And yet it is with authority that our life on earth begins and ends. And, indeed, it is one very great question in every age, in regard to human judgments, to determine the separate spheres of authority and personal investigation; just as it has been the great question, in regard to human actions, to determine the limits of authority and personal liberty. Examples may be furnished in abundance.

We might, for instance, begin with

religion, which, of course, rests upon authority; for it supposes a revelation of some kind or other, a revelation which rests upon the authority of God. But it will be better to take an example from the realm of science. In one sense, no authority avails in science. We do not accept Kepler's law, or any of the other discoveries in astronomy, because of the eminence of its discoverer, or of those teachers by whom it has been approved and commended to our attention. We accept it because it agrees with the facts of observation, and because it explains those facts. But, as simple matter of fact, the great majority of the human race do receive the results of scientific inquiry simply on the authority of others. They have no opportunity of investigating them personally. They are incapable of doing so. Most people, for instance, believe that the earth is round, that it turns upon its axis, that it goes round the sun. They have never verified these doctrines. If they believed their senses, they would say that the world was flat and stationary, that the sun comes up from the eastern horizon, and goes down into the western. Yet we do not allow our senses to deceive us into this belief, because we are credibly informed that it is not so; and we believe this doctrine, although we are quite unable to verify it. So it is in many questions of religion. We are not all theologians. There are very few even of those whose business it is to teach religion who are able thoroughly to investigate all the grounds in history and in reason upon which it rests. Yet we act upon the conviction that its principles are true, and, in doing so, we are not working in the dark, nor are we behaving irrationally.

(To be continued.)