

Of course there will be a great difference in the amount of labour required to form one opinion and another. By the ordinance of our Creator, it is comparatively easy for us to form judgments on the commonest actions of our life. Our every-day duties are commonly plain enough. "The way-faring man, though a fool," need not err in these. The grand moral and religious distinctions by which men's actions are determined are, for the most part, plain enough. If we go beyond these, if we will judge and act (as sometimes become necessary for us) in matters of greater difficulty, we must be willing to undergo greater labour. As a general rule, the matters which are the least imperative as duties are those upon which we have least need to make up our minds, and which present the greatest difficulty to the inquirer after truth. Take, as an example, the forming of a judgment respecting our fellow-men. The formation of such opinions need not very often be a duty, and they should be formed with great care and deliberation. It is related of Queen Elizabeth that, at the end of her long reign, she was able to say that she had never formed an opinion as to the guilt of an accused person upon the first reports which reached her.\* It was a principle worthy of that "strong mind and character of that great Queen." It is equally a proof of the mental weakness and incapacity of a large number of our fellow men that they do form judgments instantly, readily, on the very first reports that are brought to them; especially, one is sorry to add, when they contain anything unfavourable to another.

3. So far our remarks have been general. It is necessary, however, that we should offer some suggestions of a more particular, although hardly,

perhaps, of a more practical character.

(1) In doing so, we will begin with a very simple piece of advice, which is however greatly needed. *On many points be content to have no opinion at all.* The philosopher Locke well remarks that "nobody is under an obligation to know everything"; and yet the ordinary run of fairly educated men seem to think that they ought to be ashamed of being ignorant of any subject whatsoever. If it were possible for you to pass a whole day in a club room, or in any of those places of casual intercourse where men exchange opinions, you would receive the most remarkable illustration of this statement. You would find men on every side of you, ready to give the most distinct and assured opinions on all or any topics that might happen to be brought forward; no matter how little they really knew of the subjects to which they belonged. Now and then an exceptionally modest or thoughtful man would say, "I know nothing about it, and am not competent to pronounce an opinion;" but he would certainly be an exception. And yet there is no disgrace in being ignorant of many things—of many things—especially of those things with which our own work in life is little concerned. It is therefore the part of wisdom and common sense, as well as of humility, to be contented, in many cases, to form no opinion at all. We do not, of course, advocate the view that men should refrain from forming opinions when they have sufficient opportunities and means of doing so; much less that in cases in which they are required to act, they should act blindly without considering the grounds and principles upon which rational beings should base all their plans and actions. But what we mean is this—that, where no duty requires us to form an opinion, and where at the same time we have no

\* Thiersch, "Christian Commonwealth."