

1. The responsibility of man for his belief accords with the whole *course of nature* and the laws by which the natural world is regulated. Let any of these laws be transgressed, the mere sincerity of the transgressor will not give him immunity from the consequences.

A man may swallow rank poison, firmly believing it to be medicine or food, but the deleterious qualities are not thereby extracted from it. A man may be so foolish as to handle a viper or fondle a lap-dog affected with hydrophobia, believing them to be harmless, but this belief will not prevent the venom being infused and working its fatal course. One may get upon brittle ice, believing it to be strong, but this belief will not prevent its giving way. Another may believe the earth to be stationary and the sun to be in motion, but this belief will not arrest our planet in her course or set a-going the orb of day. A third may discard the great law of gravitation, and leap from a lofty house, but the sincerity and tenacity with which he clings to his favorite notion will not prevent the sacrifice of life and limb. A fourth may so firmly believe in the weight of water and the density of the air, as to be sure that he will be sustained should he plunge into the one or try to mount into the other, but this belief will not keep him from sinking or falling. Thus it is plain, that even in regard to the life that now is, sincerity is no safeguard.

The temporal consequences that flow from our belief declare us to be accountable for it. Have we any right or reason to believe that a different course is pursued with respect to those things which are unseen and eternal? Is it likely to be different with God's moral government from what we thus find it to be with his physical?

2. The responsibility of man for his belief accords with the course of justice. Human justice would be a tyranny without it. Judicial Courts would be worse than the Inquisition. The whole apparatus of law must needs be dispensed with. It would be palpably cruel and unjust to try, sentence, and punish those who were not responsible for what they did. What is an action, but the offspring of thought, of feeling, of desire—the working out of what is within? Habits flow from the heart. Principles tell on practice. Belief affects the character. “As a man *thinketh in his heart, so is he.*” In nothing is this connexion more apparent than in regard to *religion*. The infidel and the indifferent may brave as they please with the hackneyed couplet:—

“For modes of Faith, let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

Yet the behaviour is invariably influenced by the belief. Why does the Pagan differ from the Mahometan and the genuine Christian from both? Why do customs prevail in the lands of the Crescent, and of Idols, that would be at once frowned down in the lands of the Bible? To the religious systems existing in each we must trace the difference. It is all the difference that exists between the Shasters and the Koran, and the Book of God. We know how the principles of infidelity have told on its votaries. The lives of prominent infidels that have been given to the world shew this. Is the mental and moral development of Romanists not affected by the dogmas they hold? Compare Belgium with Holland, Italy with Scotland, Spain with Prussia, Connaught with Ulster, Massachusetts with Mexico, the two sections of our own Province with each other. So with Unitarianism, Universalism, and other false systems. How can a man, for example, hold that there is *no Hell*, without its influencing his habits?

The connexion between faith and practice, between the creed and the conduct, is abundantly manifest. If, then, a man is no more responsible for his belief than for “the hue of his skin or the height of his stature,” how can blameworthiness belong to his acts? how can he be held guilty at the bar of any earthly