

Men are not born again of their own volition ; an intellectual revolution cannot begin and end with themselves ; there must be the operation of another power upon their mind and heart before they can rise up and cast the unclean and ignorant spirit out of them. That is the great doctrine taught by Jesus Christ, &c., &c.

So I take it that in many cases men are not altogether responsible for their belief. Responsibility can only be involved when there has been an opportunity for knowing the truth ; when they have been brought into the ways where truth is found ; when they have had the avenues to knowledge opened up before them ; then shall they be held responsible to God for the false faiths they have cherished and lived. There is not one of you who is not responsible for his belief ; you are not limited ; you are not restricted ; you are not confined in a prison-house with forms of liberty traced upon the walls, just to deceive and please you ; you are free to enquire ; to accept or reject ; to keep your opinions or change them. The light is here, flashing all round you ; you can open your eyes and discern and rejoice in the facts of the spiritual world ; or, you can shut them, and profess to believe that there are no such facts for life and time, but for that false faith you are responsible, and at the great assize when motives shall be revealed, and conduct be judged, the Lord will hold you guilty.

But this has raised a question, which to my mind is greater than the one I propounded at first : Is man responsible for his religious belief? viz. : Is man responsible for what he does *not* believe? Probably every man will elect to be judged by and for his faith ; because he is confident that it is right he holds it ; by some process, satisfactory to himself, he has reached the conclusion that his way of thinking is right and good. But, being fully convinced of that ; having for his opinions the glory of prestige, the defence of education, the strength of great institutions which have been based upon, and built up in its name, and yet—when in the clear revealing light of eternity, and before the great Interpreter of all problems and the judge of all men, it shall be found that those opinions were wrong—false as to premises and conclusions—will the man be held responsible for the wrong into which his mental, moral, and spiritual nature has fallen? This is a great question ; it is an important question for you people who are content to take whatever may have been taught you in youth, and whatever your particular church and minister may hold and profess now. Do you, do they hold true views of life, of God and Christ, and salvation? Do you, do they hold half truths when you should know whole truths, by which you might live, not meanly, but greatly, glorifying God and blessing mankind? and if not, are you accountable for that which you do not profess? Will you be finally judged by a standard you have never known applied to man's character and conduct? Let us see.

What I said just now about men being irresponsible for their religious belief under certain circumstances would equally well apply here. It cannot be that a man will have to account for what was beyond his reach. If his mental and moral faculties have been limited and restricted by his conditions in life ; if the right kind of education was withheld ; if avenues to knowledge were closed up by the ignorance or malice of others, then he cannot be held responsible for the fact that he has never found the light and strength of divine truth. If a child has not been trained to walk it cannot be condemned to further pains and penalties because at manhood's estate it has not the full use of its limbs ; and so there are men and women who are no more responsible for what they do not believe than a camel is accountable for the hump on its back ; their minds have been dwarfed, stunted, twisted and put out of shape, so that they cannot perceive, nor understand, nor grasp the truth of life. There can be no doubt about it, that men are influenced very much by early education, and by their after circumstances. By having the thoughts set to move in a certain groove ; by being taught to read a one-sided history of men and things, the mind has been crowded with prejudices, so that there is no room in it for the free working of truth. Accountability must be regulated by circumstances, as of position, of privilege, and of opportunity. Men who have never heard the Gospel doctrine of salvation cannot be chargeable with unbelief, nor with the rejection of a redemption which was never offered to them. And not only, in order to responsibility, must the outward circumstances bring truth within the reach, but account must be taken of all those things which influence the judgment ; all those inclinations which by the nature of them bias the understanding, and colour its conclusions ; in short, whatever in nature, in research, in habit, or in incomplete means of information hinders the mind from appreciating evidence, and prevents it from giving due weight to its value. The persecuting Jews and Pagans in the early ages of Christianity were sincere enough in the belief that they did what was right and good in putting Christians to death. That was the time when men believed that to kill Christ's disciples was to do God service ; they called upon their conscience to answer for their deeds. Were they responsible for the rejection of Christ and Christianity? Was their zeal after all but the wild outflaming of guilty, unreasoning passions? Who shall say? Remember the kind of training they had received in the schools of the Pharisees ; remember the strong passionate faith they had in Monotheism ; remember also how opposed Christ was, in word, in manner of life, and in prophecy to all their preconceived ideas. In order I take it to full moral responsibility the

man must have in himself power to discern and accept the truth, and his circumstances must at least be no barrier in the way of research.

But let us leave the general and come to the particular. Am I, are you, responsible for the truths we do not know and believe? If I am not right in my faith, *ought* I to be? If you utter a false form of words which spring from false ideas in the mind and break out in false conduct, will you lose only negatively, just as uneducated men lose the joy of knowledge, but be praised and rewarded for having believed according to your ideas of life? No, that can never be ; and if you hold that poor conceit you will be rudely undeceived some day. About this matter of belief the majority of people imagine that their privilege, if not their duty, is to remain absolutely passive, and just to accept or reject any necessary and unavoidable result of evidence presented to the mind ; so that it is physically impossible for them to do otherwise than they do, whether they receive, or refuse to entertain, any specific dogma or doctrine. But that is not the truth as to man's duty and rights. His heart is not a mere tabula rasa, to receive impressions ; his mind is not a mere camera obscura ; he is not to keep close in his house, holding a reception now and then, when truths can come if they like ; he is to be in active and constant search, like a merchantman seeking goodly pearls ; he is to busy himself in gathering together facts in history and life, facts of earth and heaven, of man and God ; he is to examine evidences ; sift statements ; analyse arguments ; look again where men have looked before ; try again what men have tried before, to know what has changed, or rotted down with time, and what is permanent—standing well the wear of passing ages. You will not refuse to take Jesus Christ as a teacher in this matter, not only because He was divine, but because of the profound philosophy you find in all His words. You remember that up to a certain period in their career He held the Pharisees of His time as not responsible for the strange, distorted notions they had of God, and sin, and the future life. They knew no better—could have known no better ; they had accepted the teaching of the schools, and were fully convinced that they had the right reading of the past, and the right interpretation of the future. But all at once Christ stood before them and convicted them of sin. A new revelation had been given—the firmament of their common iniquity and ignorance had been broken through, and the Son of God appeared with tidings of the Father and forgiveness of sin. But they shut their eyes against the light—would not allow it to pierce to the chambers of the soul ; they closed their ears to the sound of the great prophetic voice, and barred the way to the heart by prejudices. “If I had not come,” said Christ, “ye would not have had sin, but now have ye no cloak for your sins.” He said : “The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of men.” But they would not examine the works ; they said, “He hath a devil, and is mad.” That was their sin. They would not search ; they would not test ; they would not give the emotions and the reason their rightful play and scope. “Light had come into the world, but they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” And that is where you may find the point of your own duty. You are not free to turn from this work with a weary sigh, or with a light laugh, or an insolent sneer ; as if to say, I cannot, let me alone ; or I need not, do it for me ; or, I will not, there is no necessity. There are certain statements in the Bible for which we claimed a divine origin—as to God's moral government of the world ; as to man's sin and only way of salvation ; as to Christ, His life and death, and man's obligation to believe in Him with joy. Are you bound to investigate those statements? Are you bound to examine our interpretation of them? Are you free to let them alone, or merely to listen to dull sermons in a dull way as a discharge of duty? No, you are not free to do that ; you *are* bound to investigate. Great issues are involved in the acceptance of those statements ; it means a change in the life, which will be a great wrench ; it means the admission of tremendous and eternal responsibilities ; it means that you must submit your soul to God in contrition, in fear, in gratitude ; or, argument and evidence may come like the mists of the morning, hiding for a little moment the rocks of error and the ravines of doubt, and then passing away, leaving the whole panorama wilder and more desolate than before—and yet, whatever the result, you are bound to investigate ; you are under obligation to find the truth, or you will be held as accountable for what you should have found. Because you employ the reason only about matters of bread ; because you chain down the intellect ; because you shut the windows of the soul toward heaven, and let dust and cobwebs darken them ; because you make the will an instrument and creature of appetite, do you think that God will hold you guiltless? The truths of the gospel are presented to you just as other truths are—that is, with evidence suited to man's capacity for receiving them, and sufficient to induce a cordial reception and belief of them ; and more, there is in each one power to discern that evidence, and to bring about that faith—a moral sense which can feel God and Christ, just as you have a sense for friendship, for love, for music, for art. And because you have blunted your moral feelings by indulgence, by pride, or avarice, or lust, which have established themselves on the throne of the affections ; because inclination has been allowed to overbear judgment, do you think you will not be held responsible? In the evening sky great diagrams of fire sparkle, lighting up the mystic deeps of night ; through the eye the soul gets pictures of this measure-