

tomed trenchant force, and we may add, with his wonted exaggeration. "It has been a prevalent notion," he says, "in the minds of well-disposed persons, that if they acted according to their own conscience, they must therefore be doing right. But" he goes on, "they assumed, in feeling or asserting this, either that there is no law of God, or that it cannot be known, but only felt and conjectured. You must not do," he adds, "what you think right, but whether you or anybody think or don't think it, what is right."

Here we have the same one-sidedness as in the lines of Pope, but in the opposite direction. We answer Mr. Ruskin, a man is bound to obey his own conscience and he is right in obeying it, and he would be wrong if he disobeyed it. It does not, however, follow that he is doing right objectively, although subjectively he is doing right in following the best guidance he can obtain. Even if, in some cases, a man may be doing considerable mischief by obeying his conscience, still this is his guide, and only on such conditions can he hope to be guided into clearer truth. But all this only brings out more fully the enormous importance of right opinion.

The hourly actions of our life are determined by our opinions, acting in concert with our habits. Opinion is the guide of our life in religion, in politics, in society. Surely no one can suppose that it is all one what our opinions are on the nature of God or quite graceless to fight for such things as the nature of man or of the Christian faith. Is it quite graceless to fight for such things? Even if we had not been told to "contend earnestly for the

faith once for all delivered to the Saints," would it not imply a want of serious thought to regard such questions as unimportant?

Now the principle is the same in every department of thought and life. Opinion is our guide and master everywhere, and in all our relations, private, social and public. "Opinion the Queen of the world," some one has said; and the great Pascal declared that this phrase, which was the title of an Italian book (*Della Opinione, Regina del mondo*) was in itself worth many books. Montesquieu says much the same thing of custom, and Herodotus of law; and these are but the expression and embodiment of opinion.

It may be objected that there is an exception to the truth of the principle in the case of countries where public opinion can hardly be said to exist, in despotisms and autocracies. But the exception is only apparent. Under long-established despotisms the so-called autocrat rules by the opinion of the small body who surround the throne and support it. When he breaks with that, unless he can throw himself upon the support of another body of organized opinion, he is sometimes assassinated. In an upstart despotism—the worst of all kinds of government, because it is commonly established on the ruins of liberty—it is still by opinion the despot rules. The first Bonaparte, Napoleon the Great, was the representative of the opinion out of which his power arose; but he was at last put down by opinion, by the public opinion of Europe, expressed in the form by which he was crushed. The second Bonaparte was the creature of public opinion—wide-spread if unintelligent