

rightness of his life. The opposite view has been set forth by Mr. Ruskin* with his accustomed 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 assume, 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 then is the same one-sidedness as in the lines of Pope, although in the opposite direction. 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 from this that he is doing what is right. A man may, in the most conscientious manner, following the best light that he has, and acting from the best of motives, be actually effecting the greatest mischief. But this only brings out more clearly the enormous importance of right opinion.

The hourly actions of our life are determined by our opinions, acting in concert with our habits. Whether we think of religion or politics, of the affairs of the Church or those of the State, we see that opinion is the guide of our life. Take, for example, the case of religious opinion. Surely no one can suppose that it makes no difference what a man's opinions are, on the nature of God and the nature of man, on the constitution of the Person of Jesus Christ, or even on what may be called the subordinate articles of the Christian Faith. These are some of those "modes of faith" for which "graceless zealots" are

supposed to "fight." 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 culpable indifference to truths of the highest interest and influence to regard such questions as unimportant? If the beliefs of the Church on these subjects are untrue, they are enormous falsehoods; if they are true, we should be unable to exaggerate their importance. 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," some one has said, "is Queen of the world." It was a phrase which made a deep impression upon the great Pascal. "I should much like," he says, "to see the Italian book, of which I know only the title, which in itself is worth many books, *Della Opinione, Regina del Mondo*. I subscribe to it without knowing it, except to anything that may be wrong in it, if there is anything." Montesquieu says the same thing of custom, and Herodotus of law; but these are only the expression and embodiment of opinion.*

It may be suggested that there is an exception to the truth of this principle in the case of countries where there exists no public opinion; but the exception is only apparent. Under old 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 another body of organized opinion, he is usually assassinated. In an upstart despotism—the worst of all kinds of government, because it is established on the ruins of liberty—it is still by opinion that the despot

* "Fors Clavigera," June, 1875.

* *Pensées*, Ed. Havet, i. 34. See note there. Smaller edition, p. 41.