

ly acquainted with the statements on both sides, and at the end of his investigation, he will either believe, doubt, or disbelieve the fact in question. Now apply any possible motive to his mind, blame him, praise him, intimidate him by threats, or allure him by promises, no alteration can, by such means, be produced in his discernment of the truth or falsehood of the fact."

Now this statement is, without doubt, perfectly correct as far as external means are concerned. No degree whatever of outward force can in any way change the state of the mind's assent or dissent. But the same thing is not true of the mind's own partialities, its own affections, habits, likings or dislikings. These not only may, but actually do in very many cases, give a coloring to the result of the mind's enquiries, and affect it in almost every case of uncertainty and deliberation. It requires much care and attention to free the understanding, even to a moderate degree, from those prepossessions. Hence the frequent and repeated exhortations of the lovers of truth to all enquirers, to free their minds from such influence. Hence the difficulty of finding historians, or men fitted to write history in consequence of their freedom from all improper bias and partiality. How necessary such a quality is in a historian, all confess; and yet how few have been famed for the possession of it in any eminent degree. Not one can be cited, who has not, in some instances, failed in the practice of it.

The result of these considerations, appears to be, that belief is so far from being entirely involuntary, that it is so in such cases only as are accompanied with such evidence as to render the assent or dissent necessary. In other cases it ought to be so also; it ought to be moved even in its doubts only by evidence and probability. But what man continues to be that compound of habits, passions, partialities, and antipathies that he now is, it is too much to expect, that in all his opinions, he will be governed by evidence alone.

In section third, the author proceeds to consider the opinions of writers who have treated of this subject; but they will be found remarkably to coincide with the view which has been given in these remarks. A quotation is given from Locke, in which is stated strongly and most justly, the impossibility that there is of the mind's refusing its assent to any proposition which is clearly understood, and its evidence decisive. But this quotation is concluded with the following important sentence:—"Yet we can hinder both knowledge and assent, by stopping enquiry, and not employing our faculties in the search of any truth."

This surely is an admission, that the mind possesses at least an indirect influence over its conclusions.

Lord Kames is another author whose opinions are referred to on this subject. He states, indeed, very distinctly, and for reasons which he details, that the mind cannot call up ideas at will, and as it pleases. Yet he adds:—"But though we cannot add to the train an unconnected idea, yet it frequently depends on our will, to attend to some ideas, and to dismiss others."* This is all that is necessary to render our opinions voluntary, to a certain degree at least, on a variety of subjects.

Another celebrated metaphysician referred to, is Mr. Dugald Stewart. His opinion coincides with those of the authors already quoted. After making statements similar to theirs, he adds:—"Notwithstanding the immediate dependence of the train of our thoughts on the laws of association, it must not be imagined that the will possesses no influence over it. This influence is, indeed, not exercised directly and immediately; but is nevertheless, very extensive in its effects." It is no small pleasure to the author of these remarks to find them so fully confirmed by the authors who had been cited to prove the very opposite position.

What has probably led so many great men to consider belief, as in every case, completely involuntary, is the supposition that the understanding acts the same part in cases of decisive, as in those of doubtful evidence. Now many, or most of the important propositions that are submitted to the understanding, have for, or against them, some liking or dislike. We have our wishes on the one side or the other. Wherever the evidence, as seen by the mind, is clear and indisputable, belief or disbelief will of course follow, according to the nature of that evidence. The understanding must yield. But wherever the evidence is such as to give rise to much balancing, pondering, and deliberation, these previous preferences and dislikes will generally have some effect, and in many cases much. Our author admits that this wilful partiality of attention or examination, is possible; but he thinks "its effects are very circumscribed and uncertain." It is highly probable, on the contrary, that they are very extensive. And as to their being uncertain, this circumstance rather serves, and indeed, serves much, to augment the evil arising. There exists among a large portion of mankind, a very strong and general desire to think

* Elements of Criticism, chap. 1, part I.