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## BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS.

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1 Thessalonians, V., 21: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good."



EXT to the duty of obedience to conscience lies the obligation to have that conscience as fully as possible enlightened, and this is the subject on which I venture to speak to you to-day—the

formation of opinion—a subject which concerns us all, old or young, cleric or layman; and which greatly concerns young men at the period of their life when they are passing from the work of general and fundamental education to preparation for the special business of their life. To those, indeed, who will now prepare to be teachers of men, the matter is one of supreme importance, but it is not of little consequence to any man.

A writer of the past generation (Mr. Ruskin) has said that he cares nothing for what a man opines, but only for what he knows. He pays no regard to opinion, but only to knowledge. Such a statement may seem plausable, but a moment's reflection will show that it is not sound or rational. It ignores the condition of ordinary human thought and action. A large proportion of our judgments must belong to the region of probability, and not to that of certainty, and therefore must belong to the region of opinion and not to that of knowledge.

We are, in fact, under the necessity of acting in many cases, in which certainty is unattainable. This point is put with admirable clearness by Bishop Butler in the Introduction to his "Analogy," in which he points out that, while to "an infinite intelligence" every "object of knowledge" is "certainly true or false," to us "probability is the very guide of life."

It must already be clear, then, that our opinions are of immense importance seeing that they do, to a very large extent, regulate our life and conduct. Obvious as such a statement may appear, it has been lost sight of by many. Writers of power and influence have permitted themselves to use language on this subject which right reason could not justify. Even Pope\* has said: "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight. His can't be wrong whose life is in the right." But this statement, although it contains a certain measure of truth, is certainly, as it stands, both false and mischievous, seeing that it ignores alike the influence of a man's life on his faith, and the influence of the truth or falsehood of his beliefs and convictions upon the conduct of his life.

The opposite view has been set forth by Mr. Ruskint with his accus-

<sup>\*&</sup>quot;Essay on Man," epis. 3, line 303. t"Fors Clavigera," June, 1875.