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THE FORMATION OF OPINION.

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A WRITER of our own day has said that he cares nothing for what a man opines, but only for what he knows; nothing for opinion, but only for knowledge. Such a statement may seem plausible, but a moment's reflection will show that it is not sound or rational. It ignores the very conditions 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 be of the nature of opinion and not of knowledge.

In fact, we are under the necessity of acting in many cases in which certainty is unattainable. It would not be possible to put this point more clearly than it has been done by Bishop Butler in the introduction to his "Analogy," in which he shows that, while to "an infinite intelligence" every "object of knowledge" is "certainly true or certainly false," to us, "probability is the very guide of life." Let it be remembered, moreover, that Faith itself, from the intel-

lectual and critical side, is simply opinion. That which to one man is an article of faith, however firm and undoubting, to another is only an opinion more or less probable or improbable.

1. It is already clear, from what has been said, that our opinions are of immense importance, seeing that they do, so to speak, regulate our whole life and conduct. Obvious as such a statement may appear, it has often been lost sight of. 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 measure of truth, is certainly, as it stands, both false and mischievous, seeing that it ignores alike the influence of a man's life upon his faith, and the influence of the truth or falsehood of his faith over the

* Essay on Man, Epist. iii., line 303.