

there is also a mental habit conducive to the detection of error. There are honest doubters in the church, questioning souls who can not always clearly see their way. They are neither radicals nor rationalists. They are men of a speculative cast of intellect who forsake the beaten track to explore realms of thought which the timid inquirer dares not enter.

Belief is spontaneous; skepticism acquired. The believing temper or impulse is natural. Experience begets doubt. Confidence having been misplaced, skepticism follows. The work begun in childhood continues through life. The sifting process is necessary to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious. If one must choose between the two positions—"I can not understand: I love," or "I can not understand: I doubt"—the former is preferable, at least in the present disturbed condition of the religious world. It is a satisfaction to find people who do not drift aimlessly and helplessly about, whose "faith is fixt."

Better still is the mood which combines both the reverent and critical attitudes, which fosters piety and intellectuality. It is safe to say that the world will never go back to the loose thinking and credulity of the olden times. "The scientific habit of mind," observes an ecclesiastic of our day, "is not favorable to childlike and unreasoning faith."* Scientific method makes for clearness, definiteness, exactness. It is so far a gain. By some, belief is placed in the intellect alone; by others, in the feelings. To unite the two, the intellectual and the emotional, to evolve from knowledge and reflection, from intuition and inspiration, a reasonable faith, this is the part of the latter-day Christian thinker. To trust implicitly or to deny outright is to shut the door of investigation. Research should be encouraged, not dreaded. "Whatever is really valuable must retain or even increase its value after the most thorough investigation."†

The pronounced secular tendency of the Victorian era has also been hostile to blind faith. The progress of secularism, or "non-reverent inquiry," means the enthronement of reason, whose function is to weigh evidence and decide impartially. This, too, is desirable and essential. The need of the present is for men and women who have developed the ability for independent, sustained reasoning, who know how to discriminate sharply between what is proved and what is assumed, whose conclusions are uninfluenced by ecclesiastical authority. Says Principal Tulloch:

"Faith is good, but a faith that is neither enlightened nor determined by facts in the shape of evidence, but simply by the blind assent with which the mind sets itself upon its object, may be as much a basis of superstition as religion."‡

But "the dissipation of reverence" is attended by dangers, in that

* Spalding, "Education and the Higher Life," p. 189.

† Stuckenberg, "Introduction to the Study of Philosophy," p. 75.

‡ "Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century," p. 103.