

care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away. . . . If a belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence (even though the belief be true, as Clifford in the same page explains) the pleasure is a stolen one. . . . It is sinful because it is stolen, in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence which may shortly master our own body and then spread to the rest of the town. . . . It is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."*

Are we then to conclude that all beliefs are determined by pure reason? To do so would be to fly directly in the teeth of the facts. In truth we find ourselves believing we hardly know how or why. "Here in this room," says Mr. James, addressing a group of Harvard students, "we all of us believe in molecules and the conservation of energy, in democracy and necessary progress, in Protestant Christianity and the duty of fighting for 'the doctrine of the immortal Munroe,' all for no reasons worthy of the name. . . . Our reason is quite satisfied, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand of us, if it can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticized by some one else. Our faith is faith in some one else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case."†

Now, in what circumstances are we justified in exercising the "will to believe?" Under what conditions does a hypothesis presented to us for acceptance become a belief or conviction?

In the first place, it must be *living*, not dead; that is, it must awaken a responsive interest in us, so that we do not at once set it aside as incredible. An hypothesis which has no relation to the individual thinker is dead and therefore never passes into belief. If, for example, we are asked to believe that the Mahdi is a prophet of God, we are presented with an hypothesis which finds no response in us, and which is therefore instantly rejected. In the second place, no hypothesis ever becomes a belief unless the option of believing or rejecting it is *forced* upon us; in other words, we must be presented with an absolute alternative. Such an hypothesis is Christianity and Agnosticism. We must accept either the one alternative or the other. And lastly, the hypothesis presented must be *momentous*, not trivial. In what cases then are hypotheses presented to us which are at once *living*, *forced* and *momentous*? In the first place, such an hypothesis is the belief in truth itself, the belief that there is truth and that our minds and it are made for each other. "What is this," said Mr. James, "but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up. We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonic sceptic asks us *how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! Certainly it cannot. It is just one volition against another,—we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does

*James' *Will to Believe*, pp. 7-8. † *Ibid.*, p. 9.