

or mar his destiny for ever,—was to determine the judgment of the great and holy God!

In the matter of religious belief men are also unwilling to be disturbed; and if taught erroneously, the teaching being that of the like-minded, and accordant with general views and likings, the error is so far congenial to depraved nature, that there is an indisposition to closer enquiry, and an aversion to the doubts which assail cherished opinions, whether false or true.

Further, until the religious belief of every man becomes, by the grace of God, *a belief of the truth as in Jesus, and a MATTER OF PERSONAL CONVICTION*, it is nothing more than the opinion of others engrafted on his mind,—an accretion drawn from abroad and attached to his spirit, like a fungus on a decaying tree. Such a belief, even if the truth be its object, does never healthily and savingly affect the soul; it does not become a personal possession; it does not penetrate and mould the spirit and the life of the man.

Is not this true, and really startling? How much of our belief has been acquired in no other way? Hence it is so spiritless, so impotent—a “faith without works,” which is dead; properly speaking, no faith at all! We believe in God! Do we fear and love Him? We believe in sin being man’s misery and ruin! Do we hate, and shun it? We believe in heaven and hell! Are we aspiring to the holy life, and fleeing from the wrath to come? We believe in Jesus! Are we following Him,—hearing and obeying Him,—bearing about and manifesting the life of the Lord in our lives?

Tradition, by which is meant the doctrines and commandments of men who lived in former ages, is also injurious to us, and detrimental to the truth as in Jesus.

The same causes which dispose men to receive their faith at second-hand from

present teachers, lead them to accept the traditions of the elders, with this super-added,—that something in a shadowy, hoary antiquity, which extorts regard and reverence, and induces a resting upon the long-established and enduring.

Man is naturally religious; that is, religious sentiment is common to, is a property of the human creature; but man being sinful, depraved, alienated from the life of God by the ignorance that is in him, his natural religion has become superstition, leading him from the true God; or mere sentiment, leading no whither,—simply a habit of his spirit, in the same sense as a coat or other garment is a habit of the body—a sentiment held for the sake of quiet and decency,—putting God out of the way, and preventing us from missing Him, and knowing what we have done.

This natural sentiment meets with congenial elements in the traditions which have come down from ancient times, all coloured, modified, improved by the tastes of the various glossarists of the ages through which they have been transmitted. And we have only to reflect upon the disastrous effects of tradition on the ancient and modern Jews, on the Church of Rome, and, if we are candid and endowed with ordinary intelligence and common sense, on Protestant churches too,—on all societies of men; we have only to think and compare creed-embalmed religious beliefs, and opinions received as heir-looms from the past, with the simplicity of Scripture, and the realness of Scripture, and the good-for-somethingness of the religion which Christ prescribed for man, to understand how deadly a foe tradition has been and is to the truth as in Jesus.

God hath sent forth His light and truth; the revelation of His will to man, and made that the only rule of faith and practice, and the supreme arbiter in controversy; but men have sought other guides, have given heed to commands and traditions, to