

cases, and, in every degree of it, an involuntary act of the understanding. Had this proposition been limited to cases in which the mind is fairly, and undeniably seeking for information, and fully competent to weigh the evidence obtained, there seems to be very little ground for doubting the truth of what it asserts. The mind then proceeds upon clear and satisfactory evidence, and can neither give nor withhold its assent, but according to that degree of evidence which is before it. But, when daily and manifest proofs are constantly at hand to show that mankind form many of their opinions from prejudice, passion, interest, habit, negligence, and indifference about truth, it seems far too sweeping a conclusion, to assert, that all opinions formed in this manner are involuntary. If prevailing desires, interested pursuits, carelessness, inattention, be voluntary acts or habits dependent on choice, the opinions formed in consequence of these causes, must be so also. If these are not voluntary, it will be difficult to show that any acts whatever are of that character.

But it is time to consider the proofs or arguments which the author has adduced in support of his assertion. They may be reduced to three : First, that the evidence in favor of propositions concerning which different opinions are entertained, does not differ in its nature, but only in degree, from that in favour of propositions which command universal assent ; Secondly, that the mind is passive in the reception of all the impressions that influence belief or disbelief, and consequently cannot itself produce any change in that effect ; Thirdly, that every one is conscious of not being able to resist any evidence fairly laid before him.

With regard to the first of these, it is granted by all inquirers, that in the case of propositions admitting of arithmetical or mathematical proof, or of proof from experiments, or of historical events perfectly authenticated, the mind cannot refuse its assent. But it by no means follows, as the author argues, that in doubtful or uncertain propositions, the mind must be still equally incapable of resisting or qualifying according to its choice, the assent which it gives or refuses. In such cases there is often much difficulty in balancing different kinds and degrees of evidence. Wishes and desires lead to overlook doubtful arguments. Previous habits of thinking give an undue weight to one set of arguments above another. All are not prepared to sacrifice every thing in favour of truth. Perhaps no man is prepared to do so with regard to every kind of truth. And if the mind has any predilection in favour of one side of the question more than the other, it soon, too soon,

learns to dwell upon those views of the subject which go to confirm what it desires. And in the end it frequently forgets that there existed any cause for hesitation. It feels as confident in its own belief as if it had never entertained a doubt. These are voluntary acts of the mind, if there are any such.

The act of forgetting is indeed, not a voluntary act itself. But it may be, and often is, the effect of various voluntary acts, such as a desire and an effort, to employ our minds on other and more engrossing subjects.

But because belief is necessary, and consequently involuntary, in cases in which the evidence is complete, the author conceives it obviously, follows, that in cases of doubt the effect produced must be also involuntary. Now this consequence is by no means legitimately drawn. Whenever the evidence of a proposition becomes imperfect, whenever the mind begins to waver and hesitate, and doubt, it begins also to settle upon different parts of the proofs adduced, to select one argument and pass by another, according to its previous habits, and not unfrequently according to its previous wishes and desires, that one side or other may be found to be established. It is undoubtedly true, as in this work asserted, that the mind can have no power to change the nature of the evidence before it. But it appears to have a power to fix attention on one part of that evidence more than on another, to withdraw itself altogether from some of the features of it, and to fix itself exclusively upon others that may be more in accordance with its inclinations, and more directly leading to the conclusions at which it wishes to arrive. It may be perfectly true all this time, that the mind does not desire to wander from the truth ; but finding the truth difficult to come at, it desires to follow its former bent, or the bent that may be agreeable to it, but without perceiving that it has abandoned the path of enquiry. Truth, it is said, is in a well; he who is unwilling to dive for it, must flounder in the waves at the surface.

The mind can probably at no time desire to be in error with regard to any thing which it deems important ; but it may consider things as trivial which are not so : it may desire to avoid the trouble of enquiry, and it may be inclined to avoid unwelcome information while there is a chance of its not being true.

The author's second argument to prove the mind to be involuntary in the formation or adoption of its opinions, is, that it is passive in the reception of all the impressions that influence belief or disbelief. "By mere volition," says he, "we cannot call up any idea, nor, therefore, any number of