

in the Roman Catholic Church. And the remark was perfectly just. We hold it as a theory that each man, not only may, but ought to exercise his own reason and come to judgment in all matters of religious belief. At the first that was our main *raison d'être*,—it was a protest against blind submission to authorities—it was a startling assertion of individual and personal rights—it was the uprising of manhood in grim determination to bear its own proper burden of responsibility. But the creeds which then were formulated have become stereotyped now; that which then was a rough road, requiring from the traveller constant thought and effort, is now a well-worn groove, in which the churches glide along unconscious of the motion, and putting forth no effort. What was then new and fresh and full of a vigorous life has become crystallized, and we want a new Protestantism of some kind. We want a protest against this blind belief which obtains in our churches. Think over for a moment the people you know—regular church-going people—and how many hold intelligent, thought-out views of religious matters? Not many; not ten out of every hundred. They were taken to a certain church when children; they continued in it as youths; they are in it now. But what is it to them? For the most part, a simple observance, a habit, a form—nothing more. How many of the church-going people of this city have a defined idea of what religion is to them, do you think? Not many, I am sure. All our machinery, all our effort is against that.

There is a good deal of enquiry going on in the world—a good deal of mental vigour is being put forth. It is a terrific time. Men think boldly, and act with energy. But only a very little of this is to be found within the pale of Protestantism. Protestantism is just as imperious, just as dogmatic, and just as merciless as ever was Roman Catholicism. It says: "You may think, but see to it that you think along the well-defined lines of orthodoxy;—find new arguments if you can; get more light if you can;—if revelations come welcome them; but arguments, lights, revelations, must all be in favour of orthodoxy—or, your arguments are bad, unsound and unsafe; your light is only a far-off glare from the pit; your revelations are only the vagaries of a diseased imagination." Let a man begin to think and speak his thoughts, be he cleric or lay, and he will find that general religious society is disposed to frown down any such impertinences. As a rule, thinking and searching have to be done outside of the churches. Even the term "free thinker" has become a reproach, implying that we do not think freely, but in chains imposed upon us by our fathers and mothers. And I want to protest against that blind belief. You are Presbyterians because you were brought up Presbyterians—or Episcopalians, or Methodists, or Congregationalists; you are Protestants simply because your parents were; you are Christians because—well, you don't quite know why. In general terms, you are a Christian because this is a Christian community; it has come to you just like your nationality, and your connection with religion is of the same kind, although not so deep and so fervent as your patriotism; and the old creed must no more be enquired into and condemned than the laws and customs of the old country. While that is true, where is our ground of boasting? where is our freedom? what is our life? We talk of blind unbelief, and of the deadly errors into which it falls; but may there not be a blind belief, just as ill-governed and just as ruinous? May it not be more dangerous to the soul to adopt ancient belief than modern scepticism? Is it well to be all through life a child, with undeveloped faculties and untried reason? Is it well to trust the affairs of the soul and eternity to others, as you would not trust your house or your office? Women look after their own domestic affairs, and men after their business; but men and women leave their immortal interests to others of the past and present. Anywhere else it would be bankruptcy, and here it means bankruptcy—mental, moral, and spiritual ruin. I would say to you: Base your religion upon something; let it be *something*; let it be an intellectual conception, product of careful thought; let it be the result of your own calm reasoning. What you hold, have intelligently, that the faculties of your mind may work around it and close in upon it, that you may be firm when the hour of criticism comes. Better still: Let it be *something*—a LIFE; something that is in the mind as an idea, and in the heart as a deep abiding sentiment, giving shape and colour to character and conduct. Hosts of our people—our Christian people—have neither own thought nor own sentiment about religion; they never seek and never find, and never suffer from a sense of loss. But none the less is it sin; and the men who give in to this blind acceptance of theories, caring neither to have thought nor feeling about it, are just as abject in their mental servitude—just as much the slaves of a class—just as unmanly and irreligious as the most unquestioning Catholic in either Spain or Ireland. Unless you have searched, how can you tell that your creed is better than that of the Brahmin? You take other people's word for it; so does he. You have some sentiments about it which you are sure must be right; so has he sentiments which he is sure are right, and he is more fervent than you. Is it better to give yourself in unquestioning obedience to Protestantism than to Catholicism? How can you know, since you have not enquired into the matter? One was born into Catholicism, and he accepted the situation in after-years without so much as a turn of the mind. You were born into Protestantism, and are there now by reason of the same indolence. Which can boast of preëminence? I do not see. Since it

matters so much what a man believes, what do you, my friends, *believe*? *Believe*, I mean. Not simply what you have been taught; not merely what does your pastor teach; not only what is the general opinion of the people with whom you associate, but what are your own opinions upon religious matters? Are they definite? are they strong? are they reasonable? are they in you as the very life of God in the soul? Do you believe in God the Father and Ruler of men? Do you believe in Christ the Saviour from sin? Do you believe in the Spirit of Eternal Wisdom and Truth?—not merely have you heard of these doctrines, but are they vital to you? Have they polarized your will? have they created sentiments of love in your heart? Do we believe or think that religion is nothing more than observance, decorum, profession? Do we believe or think that it is a natural sentiment, a beautiful aspiration? I am afraid we do, too many of us, and so Christianity has become a lost fact to us, a vapid and soulless sentiment. I do not dishonour these things. To have been born into a good set of religious circumstances is worth more than being born into good society and condition;—only, you cannot take your place in the religious world as you can in the general community. You may inherit tendencies, even religious tendencies, which will make it the easier for you to become by the heart and the intellect a Christian; but religion means the conscious life of God in the soul—not the characteristics of father and mother, but of Christ.

I am dwelling upon this with emphasis, because I feel that there is need for it. Vast numbers of our people seem to imagine that a mere acquiescence is all that can be required—they yield their intellect to the church and their heart to the world, and the work is done. And that is as deadly a work as a man can do. It is time for us to begin to preach to our church-goers the great, the sublime doctrine of the new birth unto righteousness which a man must have if he would see the kingdom of God.

But I want to devote now a few words to another class of people who say "It doesn't matter what a man believes, so that he live an honest, upright life." By "*what* a man believes" they mean really that it matters nothing if he believes nothing positive—none of our religious dogmas about God, and Inspiration, and Christ, and redemption, and salvation by faith. It is often said, "Really, I do not understand these things at all; they are too high for me, too mysterious, incredible, and I am not going to trouble my head about them. I am perfectly sure that all that can be expected of me is to be honest and industrious, and do what little good I can toward my fellow-man. I see hosts of men called Infidels who live good lives. "For modes of faith let senseless zealots fight; he can't be wrong whose life is right." I hear that often, and I give it all the respect it deserves. I appraise the value of a good life at a very high figure, and I accept the fact gladly that the time has gone by when free-thinker and loose-liver meant the same person. I rejoice in honesty everywhere—in benevolence everywhere, in Infidel as in Christian. But I do not accept the poet's sneer and implication that religious creeds are more likely to make bigots than honest men. And if some—if many men who are materialists, or infidels, or free-thinkers—whatever you may choose to call them—are men of high morality, as undoubtedly they are, I am not going to allow for one moment that they are men of good character and conduct *because* of their materialism, or infidelity. Their sentiments of justice, and truth, and benevolence date back of the day when they accepted their present notions. Infidelity never gave birth to one idea of honesty, or one sentiment of beneficence. "He can't be wrong whose life is in the right." I accept that. But what is life? what is it to have that "life in the right"? Because you are as honest as society requires you to be, and because you act up to the highest standard known to us of morality—because you help the poor with your money, and are kind to the frail, and do not slander your fellow as some church-members do—do you use all life? Morality, benevolence: do they circle life—no faculties, no forces unused or abused? "In the right," because you are just and tender-hearted? No; you may be all that and be very much in the wrong, just because you are only partly, very little in the right. What does it matter whether whether a man believes in God or not? Let us see what it matters.

First of all. If God is; if He is what the Bible teaches; if He is what we believe, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, the All-wise, the Eternal Good, and you do not accept it, you impose upon yourself an intellectual wrong. You have a mind which by the nature of it seeks after truth and knowledge. Knowledge is its food; truth its life. To know is to see that which *is*. I know that this is wood; this cloth, because I see it. Truth is the object of the intelligence, and the function of the intelligence is to seek, to penetrate, to retain truth, to live by truth, and to live for truth. This is its perfection and its glory. Will you say it doesn't matter whether the mind be allowed its healthy natural play or not—whether it find the one thing for which and by which it can alone exist? Is a man "in the right" when he denies truth to his mind—when he refuses to take ideas which come to him? And here—if this be truth that God is, is the greatest truth—the sublimest idea the mind can possess and rejoice. My mind is enriched by all knowledge; it is *greatened* by every fact of the universe I discover; and will you tell me that it *matters* nothing to my intelligence whether I have this universal, this eternal fact? Does it matter nothing that I refuse to my mind communion with the