

A man's photograph is a likeness of him, but it is not himself. The impression upon sealing-wax is not the seal, though it is assimilated to it. So also the assimilation of the intellect to the object known is not the object. In no other system of philosophy are subject and object so clearly distinguished, in no other has each its proper part so emphatically assigned to it in the act of intellection.

SOME ASPECTS OF MODERN UNBELIEF.

ALL who have read the Ethics of Aristotle will remember how he asserts the superior happiness of those who know as compared with those who are still engaged in the search after truth.¹ The assertion, at first sight, seems almost a truism. The perplexity of indecision, the intellectual struggle between conflicting opinions, the insecurity which accompanies a state of uncertainty, the practical difficulties which present themselves to him who is compelled to act without the possession of any fixed principles of action, all combine to convince us of the misery of doubt. "Wer hat die Wahl hat die Qual" must surely be true not only of the minor choices of daily life, but also, and to a far greater degree, of the choice of the dogmas—for dogmas of some kind we all must have—which are to be the governing principles of our whole moral and intellectual nature, to fashion for us our course through the world, to determine our relations to other men, to underlie that portion of the world's history which we call our life, and which is of supreme importance to ourselves, and, perhaps, of no small importance to a wider or narrower circle around us.

Yet, in spite of this, doubt has a certain attractiveness. To hurry into hastily formed opinions and to call them knowledge, is so common a danger that the wise man hesitates before he decides, and this hesitation is often, in certain fields of knowledge, lifelong. If, on the one side, it is painful to hesitate, there is yet a consolation in the thought that the long hesitation will, in the end, secure well-grounded opinions. He who confesses his ignorance and does not pretend to be as yet in possession of the facts necessary for decision, has a consciousness of superiority to him who, pos-

¹ *Ἐὐλογον δὲ τοῖς εἰδόσι τῶν ζητημάτων ἡδία τὴν διαγωγὴν εἶναι.*—Arist. Eth. X., viii., 3.

sessing the same or a smaller number of facts, finds in them a sufficient basis of authority, just as the man who declines to accept some plausible tale of distress feels himself the superior of one who listens with too ready a credence. There is also a flavor of intellectual humility in the confession that he is still *in via*, and it implies that he intends to travel further along the Road of Truth than his neighbor who is comfortably satisfied with the conviction that he is already *in termino*. To have already enlisted in one or other of the many armies which claim the possession of truth, involves a loss of liberty from which the free lance instinctively shrinks. Even in matters intellectual there are many who would adopt the well-known words of Horace :

Nil admirari prope res est una, Numici,
Solaque, quæ possit facere et servare beatum.

And though the lovers of doubt will always be in a minority, they will, nevertheless, be a cultivated and intellectual minority; and those who find themselves content to know or believe that they can know nothing, have not such a bad time of it as might, at first sight, be supposed. If the man of firm convictions talks to them of the misery of doubt, they will answer that doubt is not half so miserable a thing as an obstinate adherence to opinions false or unfounded.

That such men are acting on a principle sound and reasonable, if kept within its due limits, none can deny. There are subjects without end where doubt, or rather the suspension of judgment until a clearer light shall dawn, is a positive duty. If I am asked for an explanation of *thought-reading*, and answer at once that I am convinced that it is the work of the devil, my hypothesis may be a true one, or, at all events, it is not easy to disprove it. But it is rash, silly and superstitious to attribute the phenomena to a diabolical agency until I have some very solid ground for supposing that there are no natural forces which can explain it. The *δαίμόνιον* of Socrates, the unseen companion of whose presence he was so strongly convinced, and whose voice he used to hear warning, advising, directing him, *may* have been his guardian angel, or an evil spirit, but I decline to adhere firmly to either the one or the other explanation as long as I can possibly account for it by the voice of his practical reason, quick to discern what he ought to do or to shun, and acting on a will prompt in its obedience to the call of duty. In matters such as these I am content to know nothing of the source of the phenomena, and if Aristotle's dictum about the superior happiness of those who know holds true in matters such as these, it is because I am not in their respect a searcher after truth, but deliberately acquiesce in my own ignorance.

But how far is this principle to extend? Is there to be no limit to the wise man's acquiescence in ignorance? Is there or is there not a field where knowledge is not only a privilege but a duty, where ignorance is death, and where contented ignorance is far worse than death? I think I can give an answer to this question to which every reader will yield a willing assent. I imagine that all will agree that this suspension of judgment, this satisfied acquiescence in ignorance, is inadmissible in certain cases which I now proceed to define.

1. No man can, without moral guilt, allow himself to rest in permanent doubt where that doubt affects the practical and immediate duties of life, or the happiness or virtue of himself or others.

2. No man can, without bartering away all pretence to be a lover of truth, allow himself to rest in permanent doubt respecting an hypothesis which embraces and explains all that is most important to the moral and intellectual welfare of mankind, but is bound either to accept that hypothesis or show clear grounds for rejecting it.

3. No man can, without forfeiting all claim to be listened to, assert the intellectual or moral superiority of doubt in any field of research, if the history of mankind shows on the one hand that those who have united in themselves the highest intellectual and moral qualities have invariably condemned any permanent contentment in doubt respecting this field of research; and if, on the other hand, doubt and disbelief in the possibility of attaining truth respecting it has generally been attended by some intellectual perversity or moral degradation.

4. No man can, without forfeiting all claim to be regarded as a lover of truth, as a reasoner whose arguments deserve consideration, or, indeed, as a man capable of any reasoning process at all, adopt any position which involves the simultaneous assertion of two contradictory premises. He who declares it possible that A and not A may be true of the same thing, in the same sense and in respect to the same part of it, excludes himself from the number of rational beings, and declares himself to be qualified only for intellectual intercourse with those who cannot discern between falsehood and truth.

My first proposition will, I think, be conceded by every reader as indisputable. I am going to apply it to the subject of the present article, to the question of the suspension of judgment advocated by many educated men in matters of faith or religious belief. Unfaith, whatever its deficiencies may be, professes to be directly practical. Its contentment in doubt results from its conviction that truth, as to the subjects of which it doubts, is unattainable, and it declines the rôle of the foolish child crying for the

moon. They are as little its concern as the politics of Jupiter or Saturn (if Jupiter and Saturn contain living beings capable of political life). Its rule of life is to perform the duty lying immediately before it, without vain speculation about that which is and ever must remain beyond its ken.

But is this possible? Can it steer its course amid the troublous waters because, forsooth, the stars of heaven are far above our reach, and it is but waste of time to form hypotheses respecting them which may never be realized? Can the professor of unfaith find principles of action apart from the influence, direct or indirect, of the faith that he rejects? Can he supply the wants of human nature and the cravings of the human soul when, on almost every subject save those which concern material phenomena, he must, if he is to be consistent, proclaim that there is no means of satisfying the yearning, longing desire of the hungry spirit which cries out for food? Can he provide a sufficient motive to draw back from the dark gulf of vice or crime one whose feet are already on its slippery threshold? Let us take one or two instances which may bring the difficulty before us in concrete form.

A nurse is watching by the sick bed of a man who is hovering between life and death. For ten long years he has been the curse and bane of all around him; cruel, vicious, idle, unprincipled, a drunkard and a libertine, his cowardly brutality has made his poor wife's existence one protracted martyrdom during the period that she has been his slave rather than his wife. How often the nurse has listened with trembling horror to her poor mistress's cries for mercy! How often has she seen the marks of brutal violence on the fair form that she had fondly nursed in childhood, and in the dawning beauty of whose youth she had so often indulged in day-dreams of a happy, prosperous womanhood—all to be so cruelly disappointed! The love his wife once bore him has turned, if not to hatred, at least to abject terror and an unconquerable repugnance, an instinctive loathing of his presence. His little ones have already begun to look askance upon, and shrink in abject terror from, the vile brute who is their father. And now his coarse excesses have done their work, and he is lying between life and death. The doctor has just pronounced the flame of life to be flickering, and has expressed his opinion that before morning all will be over. There is just a hope that he may be saved if the remedies prescribed be administered almost without intermission; but even if he survives he will be a complete wreck, useless in the battle of life, powerless except as a source of misery to that little circle. As the nurse sits there, the thought occurs to her: Why try to save him? A few drops beyond the dose prescribed from the phial labeled "morphia," and the sleep he sleeps will be a sleep that

knows no waking. In comfort and peaceful happiness the mother whom she fondly loves will be free from the black cloud which has made her life a living death. What does she herself owe him? What has she received from him? Oaths, and curses, and blows too, when she has ventured to say a word for her poor mistress. What motive is to hold her back? Egoism? There is not the faintest chance of detection—what a delicious thought to free her mistress from that cruel bondage! What a happy prospect to live in peace with her and her darlings in some quiet country home! Altruism? The sleep of death is for the sick man a preferable lot to the career of wretchedness and vice which may be prolonged for years; what an act of charity to relieve her mistress of the curse which blights her life! What a mercy for the poor children to be freed from the degrading influence of a villain and reckless libertine! Egoism and altruism combine to prompt her to pour into the glass the two or three extra drops—*just by mistake!* Are not the circumstances exceptional and the end to be gained a laudable and excellent one?

Now, I ask, what sufficient motive can unfaith put forward to prevent that poor woman from the crime of murder? I do not suppose that the professors of unfaith would go so far as to say that the deed she contemplated would be a praiseworthy or even a justifiable one. But if they are consistent, they would say that it was both one and the other. If no law descends from heaven, if there is no legislator who proclaims to us: "Thou shalt not kill," or if His voice cannot reach us from the throne where He sits far above out of our sight, then we must bid her consult her own happiness and the welfare of those little ones, and rid the earth of him who has been their curse. The limit which separates what is a crime from what is right and praiseworthy, the narrow limit, often wide only by a hair's breadth, has been wiped away; and who is to replace it when we have banished the legislator who alone can trace it again upon our hearts?

Or, let me take another and a very different instance. Let me place myself in the position of a professor of unfaith, a "moral, law-abiding, excellent man," whose children are just growing out of the years of early childhood. Fostered under a mother's care, they have as yet been kept safe from all that could taint their innocence. True, it is the innocence of ignorance, but innocence under any form is fair and beautiful to look upon. They have been brought up in the principles of unfaith; once and again they have run to their father with the intelligent curiosity of children: "Father, who made the world?" And the answer, the cruel answer, has been: "We don't know, my boy; perhaps we shall know one day, but how we cannot tell." "Father, is there a God?"

and the answer again, the still more cruel and unnatural answer, has been: "We don't know, my boy; perhaps there is, but we cannot tell; perhaps we may be wiser some day." Yet in spite of this, they have never seriously offended against the law of the God whom they have been trained to ignore.

But at length the time comes when the shelter of the home must be quitted, and the youngsters must embark on the perilous waters of school life. What is to keep them safe, now that the innocence of ignorance soon will become impossible? Are there any influences in the public school which can ward off vice, or furnish the young warrior with an armor to defend him against its insidious attacks? Even the weapons which could aught avail have been torn from his hands by his father's teaching. However feeble the safeguards it provides for youthful purity, the average Protestant religion of our day at least teaches God ever present, and the cruel ingratitude of offending Him, and the need of a struggle against temptation, if God is to be our friend and Heaven our home. But all this the poor boy has been taught to regard as an empty fiction, or at all events a piece of mere vague guesswork! Yet it may be true, even on the showing of the professor of unfaith; and if it is true, then he allows that something more is true, that the whole Christian (and Catholic) system is true, and that its practical teaching, its elaborate care of youthful innocence, its heaven-taught safeguards for manly virtue, are in that case not only almost indispensable if his children are to be kept safe from vice, but rest upon a basis of truth, the acceptance or non-acceptance of which will affect their happiness to an almost unlimited extent, not in this world only, but in a future state of existence which will last to all eternity.

And if this is so, if there is a chance, a fair chance of these beliefs and these safeguards being a *sine qua non* for the purity and happiness of his children, what can we think of one who is content to know nothing of those things which are essential, which at all events *may be* essential to the temporal and perhaps the eternal welfare of those he loves? What shall we think of him when he turns them out defenceless, knowing with an almost absolute certainty that their virtue is destined soon to perish under the malignant influences which threaten it? Is it that he cares not for their innocence, or recks not that his boys should return to their home scarred and stained with degrading and loathsome vice? If he were a mere materialist, a denier of the existence of the supernatural, he might be content that they should eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as long as they did not injure body or mind by their debauch and avoided the disgrace of detection. But believing as he does that there *may be* a God, how can he be content to

stand aloof from the two contending armies, when his professed neutrality exposes not only himself, but his young children to what may be the path to eternal death? If there were some distant country on whose sanitary conditions men disputed, if some declared it to be healthy, others full of deadly miasma, would the man who could not gain any sure intelligence respecting it be content in emigrate thither?

I might pile up instances of the guilt of resting content in practical doubt where immediate duties are affected by it. I might picture the professor of unfaith by the deathbed of one tormented by remorse. What would be his immediate duty to such a one? He cannot tell the dying man he need not fear, since death is an eternal sleep, for he feels no certainty about it. He must, if he speaks at all, mock him with the ghastly hope that "*perhaps* there may be no God, no heaven, no hell;" or if these things should unfortunately be realities, that they are out of our ken on earth, and we must wait until the light of another world breaks upon us; in other words, *until it is too late*.

Or I might picture him present in a Catholic church. The bell rings at the consecration, and the faithful adore their God present upon the altar. What is the logical position of him who is content to wait until science shall have settled whether faith or superstition is the mental attitude of those who worship there? If he kneels to adore, it may be a degrading act of superstition; if he refuses to bend the knee, it may be an insult to the King of kings. The sturdy Protestant may sit in peace and pity the poor idolaters around him; but the atheist, he may view with supreme contempt the childish mummerly; but the agnostic, he who dares not pronounce Catholic dogma to be false, but only to be an hypothesis incapable of verification, what is his immediate duty in a case like this?

But it is possible that here an escape from the difficulty may be found. It is in the crises of life, the scenes which decide human destiny, that there comes out most clearly the folly of resting content, not "to force the contest prematurely." It is easy in the midst of a busy, prosperous life, in the eager pursuit of a successful profession, when patients crowd the consulting-room, or clients strive for the advocacy of the rising barrister; when fortune smiles and pleasure sparkles in the cup, to be content to postpone the solution of questions which perplex, to cease from crying after the moon. But in the tragic scenes which from time to time diversify the lives of most, if not of all; in times when some fierce battle is going on against passion and despair; in times when the sky is black, and no ray of hope reaches through the darkness, unless it be the thought of God and of Heaven, then it is that these ques-

tions clamor for a solution, and not to solve them if we can involves the guilt of moral suicide or moral murder.

2. My second charge against unfaith is based on the characteristics of a tenable hypothesis. I need not remind my reader of the elements which must be combined to form a sound hypothesis; how it must explain all the facts of the case, how it must need no subsidiary hypotheses to back it up, how it must be capable of verification, how it must stand the test of a searching criticism. He who refuses assent to any hypothesis, the adoption or rejection of which intimately affects human well-being, must, if he is a wise man, show cause of his refusal. Until he can do this, he is bound to adhere to it, at least provisionally. He may fairly reject it because it pertains to some special department of knowledge which does not concern him, or because he has no manner of means enabling him to test its truth, or because it is not of any practical importance whether it is true or false, or because he is already in possession of some other hypothesis which satisfies him perfectly. If a scientific man puts before me some new theory respecting the Gulf Stream or the nature of electricity, I decline to give a decided assent, simply because I am not a scientific man and scientific theories do not immediately concern me. If a man of too credulous piety presses on me a theory respecting the intervention of the devil in all cases of magnetic influence, I dismiss his hypothesis as incapable of verification and therefore futile. If I am asked to accept the statement that the author of *Junius' Letters* was Sir Philip Francis, I decline to say yea or nay to what may be interesting as a literary curiosity, but seems utterly unimportant except to historians or lovers of antiquarian research. If I am told that a balloon filled with hydrogen rises into the air because there is an occult connection between the heavenly bodies and certain gases, I answer that I am already in possession of a thoroughly satisfactory theory to account for the fact, and that this imaginary connection is perfectly gratuitous and unnecessary.

But if none of these reasons can be alleged against a theory which is presented to me, if it appertains to a department of knowledge which intimately affects my interests; if I have within my reach means of verifying its claims to acceptance; if it is of the most intense practical importance to myself and to all mankind; and if I have no sort of satisfactory alternative to present, I cannot, if I am a sensible man, set aside the theory. I am bound, from every motive of reason and common sense and positive duty, to accept it, or, at all events, to adopt such means as my own intelligence and the suggestions of the friends or enemies of the theory may propose as tests for its positive acceptance or positive rejection. I cannot, without a grave dereliction of duty, without

suicidal folly, remain neutral. Now, the teaching of Christianity affects not one department of knowledge, but all. It bears upon not only one of the interests most important to me, but all that are of any permanent character. It even affects my material interests, since my health of body, my mere physical activity, my position in the world, my conduct in business or in my profession, are continually influenced, directly or indirectly, by it. It is of the greatest practical importance to all mankind; happiness or unhappiness, content or uneasy disquiet, joyousness or melancholy, cheerfulness or depression, hope and glad expectation or despondency and unsatisfied sadness, are the prizes and penalties which are to be distributed as the results of a successful investigation into an acceptance or non-acceptance of its claims. There is no counter-theory which men agree upon as a tenable alternative—in fact, there is no alternative of even respectable pretensions. What folly, what madness, then, if I do not search and inquire with all diligence whether it be true!

But here, perhaps, I shall be told that I am ignoring the very point at issue. The professor of unfaith will allow all that I am saying, but will tell me that it does not apply to the case of those who hold themselves apart from any sort of religious belief or unbelief. Their case, he will remind me, is that of the inquirer who has a hypothesis presented to him incapable of verification. "You ask me," he will say, "to accept the Christian hypothesis, but you furnish me with no means of verifying it." He will allow that it is beautiful, picturesque, dignified, noble, elevating; but where, he asks, is the touchstone of its Truth? He will grant that it explains the facts of the case, perhaps even that the objections of Protestants to Catholic doctrine are futile, ignorant, unreasonable. He will concede that no other hypothesis ever proposed has superseded it. He allows its intense practical importance to himself and to every man who is born into the world. But he tells us that, all said and done, it is impossible for him to accept it simply because it *is* an hypothesis, and must, so far as we can see, ever remain so. It is up in the air, and, climb as high as we can, it is out of our reach, and so we must acquiesce in our inevitable destiny; we must be content to doubt.

To answer this objection would require a volume. But it is the central objection of all professors of unfaith, and I must bring them to look on a single point. No thoughtful, careful student of Christianity can fail to admire the character of Christ. No man of unbiassed intelligence can doubt that He was a real person and trod this earth and preached in the towns and villages of Palestine. No one who has not lost all sense of moral beauty can fail to admire, with an admiration passing all bounds, the exquisite, unap-

proachable loveliness of the teaching and character of Christ. No one can deny its power for good over the hearts of men. No one can paint, in his wildest day-dreams, any possible doctrine higher than the doctrine of Christ, or any person who ever presented to us, as He did, the ideal man. Now, if there is one thing which Jesus Christ claimed, it was to be not only divine, but God. He, humble and meek of heart, nevertheless claims to be King in His own right of heaven and earth. What is the professor of unfaith to assert respecting Him? That He was a deluded fanatic, or a conscious impostor? It is not a happy alternative.

Nor is this all; in proof of His divine mission and consequent credibility, He adduces His resurrection from the grave. It is on the resurrection that the truth of Christianity takes its stand. It is here that every possible hypothesis, except the true one, breaks down and makes him who urges it ridiculous. The swoon-theory and the theory of a pseudo-Christ after the resurrection are equally futile and silly. To hold oneself aloof from any opinion about it is a position untenable for one who loves the words and the character of Christ. It involves an endless holding aloof on a thousand matters of history which at last becomes impossible. Are we to form no opinion about St. Paul and St. John and all the other contemporaries of Christ whose teaching is the reflex of the teaching of their Master? A man who is in his senses must have some theory about Christ and Christianity and miracles, in order to explain what are allowed as matters of history. Every other theory but the true one leads to some puerile absurdity that no one would ever admit unless he was hopelessly biassed beforehand. Perhaps the most puerile of all absurd theories is Comte's assertion that the Christ of the Gospels is an ideal whom His subsequent followers constructed out of their own consciousness.

I say nothing here of miracles, ancient and modern, which are practical and matter-of-fact tests within the reach of all who are men of good will. If the only mode of egress for the professor of unfaith, from facts which he cannot deny, is the childish hypothesis of powers of nature, hitherto latent, of which no hint or sign has ever appeared since the beginning of the world even until now, surely he will be pursuing a more scientific course in at least investigating the claims of the Christian hypothesis than in inventing an explanation of the scientific absurdity of which none can be more conscious than himself.

If Christianity, then, starts with these advantages (and I might enumerate a thousand more, *e.g.*, its value as a practical rule of life; its calm indifference to material prosperity; its joyousness amid suffering and misfortune; its exclusive success in guarding innocence; its *admitted* power in raising the fallen; its doctrine of self-

sacrificing charity and practical altruism; the supreme, intense, inimitable cheerfulness and lightheartedness of those who throw themselves wholly and without reserve into the spirit of its teaching), if it possesses, I say, the sole right to these and other magnificent prizes, what folly to be satisfied to stand aloof from a contest in which the strife is about such high stakes as these! It does not ask for acceptance without trial; it offers as its credentials miracles, and the one great central miracle of the resurrection and the teaching and character of its Founder, the unity of its doctrine, the holiness of its saints, the continuity of its unbroken existence as a corporate body. At least you can verify these. They are historical facts. If Christ be not raised, says St. Paul, your faith is vain and our hope is also vain. Limiting myself merely to Christ and the resurrection, I challenge my opponents on historical grounds. If you find every explanation of a historical fact and of a historical character break down save one, and this one is consistent throughout, backed by incontrovertible evidence and explaining all the phenomena of the case, surely you are bound in common sense to accept that explanation, unless you can clearly show that in one way or other it leads to a positive contradiction. And this no one has ever shown and no one can ever show of Catholic Christianity.

3. My third proposition I need not linger over except for a moment. The respective characters of the adherents and adversaries of Christianity is again a matter of historical inquiry. I will not attempt to enumerate either the one or the other, either its friends or its foes. But this all must in fairness admit, that if they were looking for instances of all that is generous, noble, heroic in human nature, for self-sacrificing devotion, for self-denial without hope of earthly reward, for unflinching loyalty of heart, for innocence unstained and unspotted from the cradle to the grave, for singleness of purpose and purity of intention and life-long benevolence and patient, uncomplaining endurance of evil and all else that in our inmost souls we most admire and recognize as approximating to a perfect, a divine ideal—it would not be among the professors of unfaith ("moral, law-abiding, excellent" men though they be), nor among those who give in their allegiance to the various bungling, half-hearted, inconsistent forms of a spurious Christianity; nor yet among those who limit their beliefs to a deity who has set the world a-going and now leaves it to fulfil its mechanical destiny; least of all among those who positively deny the existence of Him who created them and wage active war against Himself and all that is dear to Him—but in Catholic Christianity and nowhere else.

And on the other hand, if they were looking for instances of all

that is proud, rebellious, independent, for instances of degraded morality, of antisocial theories, of an insidious teaching which undermines, or tends to undermine, all those virtues which appeal most strongly to our higher instincts, it would be among those who have for some reason or other thrown off all their allegiance to God, shrieked the shriek of liberty, proclaimed themselves apostles of free thought, made it the object of their lives to "*écraser l'Infâme.*" Many are the names which rise to my mind of men living and dead—it is needless to mention them. The saints of God need no praise—the names of the devil's heroes shall not disfigure my paper.

4. But my fourth and last proposition is the most important of all; I have discussed it from one and another point of view elsewhere.¹ But I am bound, in order that my present argument may be complete, at least to indicate the internal contradictions which I find in the theory of those who, "fearing to force the impending contest," hold themselves aloof alike from Christianity and from atheism.

The skeptic *putus et purus* needs no refutation. If he doubts of everything, he cannot be certain even that he doubts, and so puts himself out of court without delay. The professor of unfaith is not a skeptic *putus et purus*. But he is a modified skeptic; he declines to accept anything which goes by the name of the supernatural, anything which cannot possibly be matter as a function of matter. About the material as being subject to our senses, and about the material alone, does he feel certain; all else he declares to be pure speculation, a prying into that which is out of the sphere of human knowledge, an attempt after certainty where certainty is unattainable. You may frame, he says, beautiful hypotheses, but how can they be tested? You may build up a fair structure, but who is to know whether it is not a castle in the air. You may assert a Supreme, Omnipotent Ruler, Lord of heaven and earth, the God and Father of us all, but with what magic power have you risen from this poor world into the regions where you say God reigns supreme in ceaseless contemplation? You *may* be right; it may be that the theistic hypothesis, the Catholic hypothesis, is the true one; but I cannot see it, and, therefore, I cannot accept it. I think this is a not unfair statement of the position of the educated agnostic. It is plausible, and has that semblance of cultivated impartiality which allures the modern searcher after truth. But none the less does it contain an inherent contradiction.

¹ Vide the Month, November 1882, art. "Some more Agnostic Fallacies."

When the agnostic, or professor of unfaith (for I am using the two expressions as identical or almost identical), allows that the Christian hypothesis *may* be true, but cannot be verified in our present state of existence, he is asserting A and not A with the same breath. For if Christianity is true (and the same holds good if we limit our belief to theism), God, such as Christianity declares Him, is a really existent being. He is consequently God of truth, God who has revealed Himself to man, God who claims our obedience and our love, God who tells us in clear, plain, unmistakable terms, that in Him we live and move and have our being, that the invisible things of Him, His eternal power also and divinity, may be clearly seen by the things He has made, and, consequently, that those who refuse to acknowledge Him are inexcusable. When, therefore, a man says: God may possibly exist; of this I cannot form an opinion, it is altogether beyond my reach, he says in other words: It *may* be that there is a God who is a God of truth; who says, and therefore says with truth, that the knowledge of Him is within the reach of all His rational creatures; and He *may*, therefore, since I am one of His creatures, be within my reach. But at the same time I have tried in vain to find Him, and therefore I know He is not within my reach. The agnostic, inasmuch as he holds himself aloof from atheism, thereby admits the former proposition: *God is perhaps within my reach* (A). The agnostic, inasmuch as he holds himself aloof from theism, thereby asserts the latter proposition, which is clearly and directly contradictory of the former: *God is not within my reach* (not A). By his very profession of impartiality he declares implicitly: It may be that God is cognizable by man; by the very same profession he declares explicitly: It cannot be that God is cognizable by man. Could self-contradiction be more self-contradictory than this? We who are Christians and Catholics throw down the gauntlet before the modern agnostics, before the professors of unfaith. They are men of ability; let them, if they can, clear themselves of this very serious charge which we bring against them, not only against their logic, but against their very reason. We charge them with an implicit self-contradiction, which makes their position untenable and their arguments worthless; which vitiates all their fair professions of being lovers of truth. We charge them with blowing hot and cold with the same breath. We charge them with being intellectual charlatans, inasmuch as their whole system—if system it can be called—is based on a contradiction. At the root of the specious but poisonous tree of their philosophy, there is a canker-worm which warns, or ought to warn, away all earnest seekers after the tree of life. In spite of all their fancied liberty, no true

freedom is there for their soul, since they are unable or unwilling to perceive that "perhaps there is a lie in their right hand."¹

The reader who has followed my argument will, I imagine, now perceive why I assert that theism and Christianity are not subjects in which a continuance of suspended judgment is either lawful, wise, or possible. They enter so minutely into every detail of our life, our motives and actions are so constantly influenced by our belief or unbelief in them, that doubt never ceases to clamor for a speedy solution. Not only are we ourselves hampered and perplexed at every step by the absence of fixed principles of action, but it tells even more ruinously on the best interests of the young, the weak, and the tempted. In times of prosperity and good fortune we may hush the craving of our souls, but in adversity, sickness, physical or moral suffering, how cruel the lot of one who, as he sinks beneath the waters, feels, and feels in vain, for some ground beneath his feet! The interests concerned are so all-important, so supreme, that we are madmen if we sit content to doubt, with our hands folded, in guilty indecision. We *must*, if we think at all, form some hypothesis respecting virtue and vice, ethical and social questions, the means of advancing the welfare of our fellows, and in each and all of these the religious question must needs enter. The opposing camps present to us their respective champions, and to declare ourselves unable to choose our part is strange indeed, when on the one side are assembled the chosen heroes of humanity, and on the other the very scum and refuse of the moral world. But strange above all is a hesitation which involves an inherent contradiction and confesses itself to have no share or lot in truth.

¹ Non liberabit animam suam, neque dicet: Forte mendacium est in dextera mea. Is. 44, 20.