

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

## ORDINARY MEETING, APRIL 9th, 1877.

THE REV. ROBINSON THORNTON, D.D., V.P., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following elections were announced :—

MEMBERS :—J. Dingley, Esq. ; H. F. Hall, Esq., F.G.S., F.R.H.S., President of the Liverpool Geological Society ; G. Harris, Esq., LL.D., F.R.H.S., F.S.A., Vice-President of the Anthropological Society of Great Britain.

ASSOCIATES :—Rev. T. Bliss, B.A. ; R. Sheward, Esq.

Also the presentation of the following Works to the Library :—

“Proceedings of the Royal Society.”	<i>From the Society.</i>
“Treatise on Man,” 2 vols. By G. Harris, Esq.	<i>The Author.</i>
“The Theory of the Arts,” 2 vols. By the same.	<i>Ditto.</i>
“Civilization Considered as a Science.” By the same.	<i>Ditto.</i>

The following paper was then read by the author :—

**THE ETHICS OF BELIEF.** By the Rev. HENRY WACE, M.A., Chaplain of Lincoln’s Inn, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in King’s College, London.

1. **T**HE subject of this Paper, as is indicated by its title, has been suggested by an Article contributed by Professor Clifford to the January number of the *Contemporary Review*. It is an article which has justly attracted a good deal of attention, not merely from its intrinsic force, but because it expresses very effectively a tone of thought which is peculiarly characteristic of an influential school of scientific scepticism. Little, indeed, if anything, is said which directly impugns the faith of Christians, though there are a good many oblique insinuations against it, and as will appear in the sequel, I venture to think that the tests of belief the article lays down are, on the whole, strongly confirmatory of the validity of Christian evidences, as generally received. There is, therefore, no occasion for anything like a polemical discussion of the subject, and this Paper will not, I trust, be conceived in

such a spirit. It is more congenial to the purpose of a society like this to consider the arguments of such an article as matter for friendly debate, and we shall be only responding to the appeal of their author if we institute an impartial inquiry into their value. At the same time it must be explained at the outset that the chief purpose of these observations is to call attention to an essential difference in principle between the spirit of Christian thought and the disposition of mind which the article in question represents. The difference is frequently disguised, or reluctantly recognised, on both sides; and it is the more desirable it should be distinctly acknowledged, and that the practical issue it involves should be fairly faced.

2. To state this difference concisely, it is whether in matters of religion and morals we are to build upon grounds of Faith or upon grounds of Science. In stating the issue in this form, it is not, of course, implied for a moment that there can be any conflict between the legitimate and ultimate results of the two principles. Their essential harmony is, and has always been, a primary axiom with the greatest Christian teachers, and to avow belief in it ought to be a superfluous precaution. The spirit of the following observations would again be wholly misunderstood if they were supposed to be prompted by any lack of sympathy with Science. But the best things, as a rule, have their special provinces and spheres of action, and it by no means follows, because the scientific spirit is admirable in itself, that it ought to be allowed to determine our religious thought and our moral conduct. Such, however, is the tacit assumption, not merely of Professor Clifford's article, but of a large proportion of modern argument on this subject, alike on the part of the advocates as on that of the impugners of the Christian Faith. Christianity seems too frequently regarded as a sort of scientific system, composed of a number of propositions on very mysterious subjects; and the question assumed to be at issue is the possibility or impossibility of verifying such propositions. Now, there may be some truth in this assumption with respect to the primary verities of religion, though the general reception even of these is probably to a great extent dependent on the testimony borne to them by those who exert most authority over men's consciences, rather than on the direct arguments in their favour. It is obvious also that there can be no absolute division between the two spheres in question. The scientific man will, in practice, often act on Belief, while the religious man will check the dictates of his faith by the aid of Reason and Science. But, nevertheless, there is this broad distinction to be drawn

—that the object in moral matters is to act, not only to act rightly, but to act promptly, and to act earnestly, while the object in matters of Science is to know, and to know accurately, and for that purpose to reserve a decision for as long a time as may be necessary. The consequence is that for the purposes of the former province the habit to be acquired is that of forming a rapid and positive judgment upon mere probabilities—those being, by the nature of the case, the only materials for judgment accessible; and the men who have the greatest weight with their fellows in practical life, and who become their natural leaders, are those who form such judgments the most boldly, and follow them with the least hesitation. But in the province of Science the habit to be acquired is that of not forming decided judgments upon mere probabilities; but, on the contrary, of suspecting all appearances, and of demanding the most rigid demonstration before laying down a scientific truth as a sure basis for action. Our whole attitude towards religious and moral controversies must, it would seem, depend on our recognizing at the outset the existence, as a matter of fact, of these distinct provinces of human life, together with the distinctness of the habits they respectively require, and determining to which of the two such controversies belong. According as we relegate them to one or the other, we shall approach them with different mental and moral dispositions, and the “Ethics” we apply to them will proportionately vary.

3. Now, in the article in question, this distinction has been so much overlooked that the special meaning of the word “belief” has been entirely left out of sight. It is a word of which the employment is somewhat vague in popular usage, but which will be generally recognized as possessing a fairly definite meaning for the purposes of such a discussion as the present. It is, at all events, very surprising to find that the distinction is not observed between belief and opinion—scarcely even between belief and knowledge. “Belief,” for instance, “that sacred faculty,” is described as being “rightly used on truths which have been established by long experience and waiting toil, and which have stood in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning.” But what occasion is there for the exercise of this sacred faculty on truths of this kind? They are simple matters of knowledge, if knowledge can be predicated of any mental condition. It would be incorrect to speak of believing the law of gravitation; we have a scientific knowledge of it. Belief is properly applied only to truths which are neither evident of themselves, like mathematical

axioms, nor scientifically established, like the law of gravitation, but which are simply probable. Nor does it in strictness apply to all of these. Where the probability arises from argument and from the nature of the case, our assent is not belief, but opinion. Faith or belief properly arises when our ground for accepting a statement is the testimony given in its favour. In the excellent definition of Bishop Pearson, "Belief is an assent to that which is credible, as credible"—not, that is, so far as it is probable, still less so far as it is demonstrable, but simply so far as it is supported by the evidence of credible witnesses. If we admit the testimony of Conscience as that of a kind of independent authority, bearing its witness within each individual soul, we may bring under this definition those primary religious and moral truths, to which, as Kant observed, our assent has the character of faith rather than of opinion. We can hardly expect a very accurate discussion of the Ethics of Belief when belief is thus confounded with another mental operation; and it is similarly impracticable to form a just estimate of the claims of the Christian Faith when it is treated not as that which is credible, but as that which is knowable.

4. Accordingly it may be described as the main doctrine of the article under discussion that the principles of scientific inquiry ought to be predominant not merely within the sphere of knowledge, but within the whole sphere covered by this vague extension of the word Belief. It commences by insisting on the duty of inquiry, and it treats this duty as always and everywhere incumbent upon us. "No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe." Now this may be a very good rule within the domain of science, and may be a very proper attitude of mind for a scientific man; though it may be surmised with some confidence that Professor Clifford would not listen with much patience to any of those ingenious persons who exercise this universal duty by questioning the roundness of the earth, or the Newtonian system, or the impossibility of squaring the circle. But it may be safely said that, as applied to the practical business of life, such a principle is not only impracticable, but morally wrong. The daily course of life and the organization of society are made up of relations between man and man. Upon what are those relations founded? They are based, as a matter of fact, upon a general habit of mutual trust and faith. The child's first necessity is to believe what is told it, and to believe this in respect to matters which it has no power whatever of investigating for itself. Its instinct, the

first dictate of its nature, is to believe everything, to receive and to assimilate all that it hears and reads. If it be replied that it has sufficient evidence upon which to rest this habit in its experience of its father's and mother's trustworthiness, I would ask what parents would not be distressed to suppose that a child's confidence was based upon a mere calculating estimate of this kind? The essence of the filial relation is a moral confidence antecedent to experience, and capable, in fact, of sustaining severe apparent contradictions to that experience.

5. The case, however, of trust between adults is perhaps a still stronger instance of this principle. Life would be impracticable unless it were the primary rule to believe what is told us. There is not a single relation in adult life in which we are not compelled to depend upon the word of another—of a husband, a wife, a friend, an agent. We believe certain things respecting them—in their honour, their chastity, their affection, their faithfulness. To what kind of condition would life be reduced if we were to apply to these matters “the universal duty of questioning all that we believe”? In some, at all events, of these relations, it may be observed, it is in the nature of the case impossible that we should have “sufficient evidence” for our belief. It is an unquestionable fact that many a man who has been trusted, and who has for years borne an unexceptionable character, has proved faithless; and it is quite impossible I can be sure upon grounds of evidence respecting any particular man that he is incapable of this baseness. But the first condition of a genuine and honourable friendship is to believe this, to refuse to entertain a doubt of it, and, if need be, to uphold a friend's honour until he is absolutely proved dishonourable. With respect to trust exercised in commercial relations, it might perhaps be said that it is a mere application of the principle of probabilities. As a matter of experience, if customers are trusted, the majority of them will fulfil their engagements. It may be doubted whether tradesmen really do act in practice on this mere calculation of probabilities; but at all events the principle does not apply to the other relations of life just referred to. It would be an insult to a friend to say that you trusted and loved him because you thought it more probable he was true than that he was false. He expects from you, as the primary condition of true friendship, that you believe firmly concerning him that of which you cannot possibly have certain evidence.

6. This habit of mutual faith is, in fact, the necessary correlative of the primary duty of men. That duty is the observa-

tion of the Third Commandment—to speak the truth. But if it is the duty of my neighbour to speak the truth, it is equally my duty to believe that he does speak it. I have no right to suspect him of violating this obligation; and to do so is, in practice, to suggest the idea of falsehood to him, and to sow the seeds of it. A corrupt society is above all things marked by two characteristics—“a universal” habit “of questioning” all that is said, and an equally universal habit of saying what is not true. On the contrary, in a healthy society, like that of England, habits of trust and of truth mutually support each other; and it has now become, for instance, a principle of education that the best way to evoke truthfulness in boys is uniformly to assume that they are speaking the truth, and always to give them the benefit of a doubt, even when appearances are against them. In place, therefore, of Professor Clifford’s assertion that “the credulous man is father to the liar and the cheat; he lives in the bosom of this his family, and it is no marvel if he should become even as they are,” we should be much nearer the experience of practical life if we alleged this of the suspicious man. At all events, it may be safely said that the trustful man is father to the truth-speaking and the honest man; he lives in the bosom of this his family, and it is natural he should become even as they are. “With what measure ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again”; and no more forcible appeal can be made to a man’s conscience than by placing trust in him.

7. Accordingly this principle, applied in its highest degree, has been the most powerful instrument of moral elevation and the indispensable means of all great achievements. In proportion as men have become as little children in this respect have they entered into the kingdoms both of heaven and of earth. It is an essential element in the power of great men, of those saints or men of genius who lift their race to a higher level, that they command the allegiance of numbers who are quite incompetent to judge whether there is sufficient evidence for the principles they assert. They throw the spell of personal influence over their followers, and induce them to act, with all the earnestness of intense belief, upon assumptions which it is impossible for them to verify. I will not insist on the well-worn example of Columbus and his followers, though it would be a somewhat harsh judgment to condemn them for having acted upon insufficient evidence in making the most momentous of geographical discoveries. But let us take the case, adduced by Professor Clifford, of the founders of those great

religions, which, with whatever errors and corruptions they have been associated, have still been, beyond question, advances in the elevation of the human race. Let us consider their influence, moreover, within the sphere in which it is admitted to have been legitimate—that of morality and of human experience. Has the chief instrument in these advances been as a matter of fact, the exercise of the duty of inquiry by the prophet's followers? It is very well, and, doubtless, very necessary, to lay down rules after the event as to the limits within which a prophet's authority may be accepted. But it is not by means of any such rules that the religion is established and the new morality enforced. It is by faith; by personal submission to the personal influence of the prophet, and by childlike obedience to him.

8. In matters of morality, in fact, this must always be the case, for moral habits can never to those who first adopt them be matters of experiment. If they are to be real, they must be adopted "with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, and with all the strength." This, at all events, is the ideal to be aimed at; it expresses the spirit in which the most characteristic points of Christian morality were accepted, and it is utterly inconsistent with a doubting habit of mind. Professor Clifford admits that "there are many cases in which it is our duty to act upon probabilities, although the evidence is such as not to justify present belief; because it is precisely by such action, and by observation of its fruits, that evidence is got which may justify future belief. So that we have no reason to fear lest a habit of conscientious inquiry should paralyze the actions of our daily life." But if the observations just offered are valid, we have great reason to fear such a result from a habit of subordinating the duty of faith to the duty of inquiry. To repeat a question I have asked elsewhere,\* what would be now the position of our race if the first Christians had confined themselves to tentative experiments on the relative advantages of monogamy and polygamy, instead of adopting the former in faith, in reliance on the testimony of the Apostles, and resolutely turning their backs upon the innumerable influences to the contrary which the heathen society of the day brought to bear upon them? In a word, if we are to be guided by the experience of mankind, Faith and not Science must determine the practical order of life. The Just, according to Professor Clifford, shall live by Doubt. But the lesson

---

\* The Boyle Lectures for 1875. I. *The Province of Faith.*



alike of ordinary life and of the Scriptures is that the Just shall live by Faith.

9. Whereas, therefore, the first principle laid down in the article under discussion as belonging to the Ethics of Belief is "the duty of inquiry," it would be more true to nature to substitute "the duty of faith." Distinguishing Belief both from Opinion and from Knowledge, and restricting it, substantially, to the field of testimony, it may be laid down as the first principle of the subject that all testimony has a *primâ facie* claim to be believed, and that the *onus probandi* always lies upon those who question it. Such, perhaps, is in great measure the force of that appeal to authority in matters of opinion which has lately been discussed by two eminent writers. It seems too narrow an interpretation to say, as Sir James Stephen does, that "authority is only another name for the evidence of experts." In practice it is much more than this; the consentient belief of a large mass of mankind, even though the experts among them be comparatively few, having a distinct influence of its own. How far this influence may amount, as Mr. Gladstone has been understood to imply, to substantial evidence in favour of an impugned doctrine, would seem mainly to depend upon the character of the particular doctrine in question. The testimony of Christians to the fact that in their personal experience they have found the promises of the Gospel fulfilled must carry, for instance, and does carry, the greatest possible weight; but it can only afford indirect support to the truths beyond their experience which are alleged in the Creeds. It cannot, however, reasonably be denied that such general testimony constitutes a *primâ facie* claim in favour of a doctrine, and casts the burden of proof on those who question it. Our instinct—an instinct no less just than natural—is to believe what comes to us with such testimony, and from this instinct we must start.

10. But of course Faith, like all other instincts of nature, requires to be checked by the exercise of reason. It is like an appetite, a hunger or a thirst, which will insist on asserting itself, but which must nevertheless be controlled. To say, indeed, that a man who has no time to make himself a competent judge of disputable questions "should have no time to believe," is like saying that a man who has no time to study medicine should have no time to eat. A man must believe, whether he will or no. He must act every day of his life on the basis of certain moral and political—nay, religious assumptions, of which few men can be competent judges, and all that can be

asked of him is that he should give as thorough a consideration as his circumstances will allow to objections which are raised respecting them. It is perfectly easy, indeed, to imagine circumstances in which it is his clear duty to commit that "sin against mankind," as Professor Clifford designates it, of "keeping down and pushing away doubts which may arise in his mind." A naval officer who has once accepted a commission, and is in charge of a man-of-war, has no business to let himself be distracted in the enforcement of discipline by doubts respecting the justice of the Mutiny Act. When, moreover, a man has once fairly weighed the existing evidence for and against a certain truth, it is simply a mark of a weak and vacillating mind to be easily induced to re-open the inquiry. When, after full deliberation, we have taken one of two divergent roads, it is childish to be harking back at every difficulty and trying another track. Life was not made for men of science, but for men of action; and no man of action is good for anything if he cannot sometimes form a belief on insufficient evidence, and take a leap in the dark.

11. Nothing, however, is more certain than that it is the indispensable condition of progress to regulate by reason the action of even the most healthy instincts. Let the presumption only be established in favour of faith, as against scepticism, and there is nothing which is more desirable in the interests of a true faith than that the conditions under which it is accepted should be rigidly scrutinized. We may hope in this way to attain to some scientific as well as moral test for distinguishing true from false religious beliefs. Moreover, to every man who is capable of reasoning, the moment may come when he is confronted with some objection which imposes on him the duty of pausing in his course, and maturely judging of his position; while in proportion as opportunities allow him, he will be thankful to investigate anew the grounds of his faith, and to qualify himself to explain its reasonableness to enquirers or objectors. Accordingly, we may proceed with pleasure to enquire, with Professor Clifford, into the criteria to be adopted. In this part of his article he restricts himself with more accuracy to the proper meaning of belief, and simply investigates the conditions under which it is lawful to believe on the testimony of others. There appears to me, as I said at the outset, no reason to take material exception to the principles he here lays down. They are substantially those of Bishop Pearson—namely, that the credibility of testimony depends upon two conditions—first, the integrity, and secondly the ability of the witness. It is not enough to

have a firm conviction of his honesty ; we must also have ground for supposing that he has had the means of knowing the subject respecting which he testifies.

12. So far there is no difficulty. But our critic does not stop here. There can be no ground, we are told, for supposing that a man knows that which we, without ceasing to be men, could not be supposed to verify. This is, perhaps, a somewhat extreme and inconvenient mode of expression ; but it seems reasonable to admit that the testimony of a man with no other than human powers cannot be accepted in evidence of a fact beyond all natural capacity of human experience. It is clear, for instance, to take one cardinal point of our faith, that no mere human testimony can be adequate evidence, or any evidence at all, in support of the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ will hereafter judge all men. But it may here be pointed out that this observation does but illustrate the coherence of Christian evidence. It is not upon mere human testimony that the assurance just mentioned is based. At this point the argument from miracles comes in, and by approaching it in this way its legitimate force may perhaps be more easily stated with accuracy. It seems overstating the case to say, as has been sometimes done, that the miracle is the proof of the doctrine. But this must at least be said, that it proves the person who propounds the doctrine to possess powers and to enjoy privileges which are beyond the ordinary range of humanity, and which transcend our measurement. In other words, we cease to be competent judges of such a witness's ability. He may, for aught we can judge, know things which are beyond human experience, just as he can do things which are beyond human powers. We are, therefore, thrown back upon the sole test of his integrity. Shall we, or shall we not, believe his testimony on his own unverified and unverifiable assurance ?

13. To this question I will return shortly ; but I would interpose one observation on a further principle laid down by Mr. Clifford, which might at first be supposed to render any belief in a miracle inadmissible. To believe a miracle is to believe something entirely beyond our experience ; and on what ground, it is asked, may we go beyond our experience in forming our beliefs ? The answer given is that we may do so when that which we believe is like that which we know, or, in other words, when it assumes a uniformity in Nature. I am not concerned to inquire whether this rule be adequate or admissible without qualification. It is sufficient to observe that whatever may be its validity, Christianity complies with

it by virtue of that analogy of Religion, natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of Nature, which is the subject of Bishop Butler's great work. Butler, following Origen, has met by anticipation any argument against supernatural revelation derived from the necessary unity and harmony—for "uniformity" is a very questionable word—of all divine operations. If, indeed, the word Nature be restricted to physical Nature, the harmony of miracles with its constitution and course is easily contested. But such a limitation simply begs the question, which is whether the moral and spiritual forces of human nature do not necessitate, under certain circumstances, a supersession of mere physical consequences. It is a matter of evidence whether instances of such supersession have occurred, and in considering the value of this evidence we are brought back to the question from which we started on this short digression.

14. That question is whether we can accept the testimony of persons whose competence as witnesses transcends our means of judgment on the sole assurance of their word. If the previous arguments of this paper have been valid, they will at least have advanced us one important step in considering this question. They will have shown that we must approach it from the moral rather than from the scientific point of view, and that we must consider it in relation to action, and not to speculation. The primary question is not, what are we to think? but what are we to do? These men—St. Paul, St. John, St. Peter—for reverential reasons I abstain from directly introducing into this discussion the Name which should be the most decisive of all—invite us to accept their guidance in life and their comfort in death, and to trust ourselves, body and soul, to the belief of their assurances. The function of the Christian Church and of its ministry is to bring that invitation home to every man's conscience, and as long as the Church performs its duty the appeal cannot be evaded. Shall we accept it, or shall we go elsewhere, to some modern guide, who will pronounce upon our duties and our destinies by the light of scientific forecast and legal evidence? The answer to that question can only be given individually, and its nature will depend, in the first instance, partly on the degree in which we retain that childlike habit of faith, of mutual trust between person and person, which I have endeavoured to vindicate as our normal and healthy disposition; and partly on the force with which the moral and spiritual power of such Saints lays hold of our souls. There are those to whom that force is overwhelming, and to

whom it appears idle to compare it with the moral force of other religious leaders. It touches at once the strongest and the tenderest fibres of the heart. It controls the fiercest passions and supports the gentlest. It is associated, in a manner which no similar influence has approached, with whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. To those who are sufficiently sensible of this intense moral illumination, the supposition that it is associated with false testimony on matters of supreme moment is inconceivable. The case completely fulfils Hume's condition that, to establish a miracle, "the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." It seems idle to draw "psychological parallels," as has recently been attempted, between a moral giant like St. Paul and a worthy gentleman like Sir Matthew Hale, and still worse to compare the dark and confused morality of other Eastern religions with the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. His Apostles appeal to my whole being, to every moral sense of which I am conscious, to my weakness and my strength, my sin and my repentance, my intellect and my heart, and evoke towards themselves, and still more to One beyond themselves, that complete allegiance of the whole man which is designated Faith.\* I do not pretend to have a scientific

---

\* There could hardly be a better illustration of the claim of the Apostles in this respect than is afforded by the two following parables, which I take the liberty of extracting from Sir James Stephen's article on Authority in the current number of the *Nineteenth Century*. He appears to suggest their application to the claims of modern religious authorities. Whether or not those authorities would have occasion to shrink from such a test, there is nothing they would more desire than that it should be applied to the Apostles. Perhaps the strongest claim of Christ and His Apostles is that "they have proved themselves to be our superiors by appealing to the faculties"—above all the moral faculties—"which we have in common":—

A blind man and a seeing man were once discussing the existence of sight. The seeing man told the blind man that he had a faculty by which he could perceive innumerable things which he could neither hear, touch, smell, nor taste, and which were at a great distance from him. The blind man challenged the seeing man to prove his assertions. "That," said the seeing man, "is easily done. Hold me by the hand. You perceive that I am standing by you. I affirm that if you will walk fifty steps along the side of this wall, which you can touch with your hand, so as to be sure that you are moving straight on, you will find such and such objects, which I specifically describe, and as to the existence of which you can satisfy yourself by your own fingers."

The blind man admitted that the seeing man had proved his assertion.

knowledge of divine things, or to rest my convictions upon a scientific demonstration; but I can venture to say that "I know in Whom I have believed." Such a belief will be supported by collateral evidence, acquiring from age to age a cumulative and converging force; but its essential virtue will in all ages be derived from the vital sources of personal love and trust.

15. Such, I would suggest, are in substance the Ethics of Belief, as contra-distinguished from the Ethics of Science. Their essential peculiarity is that they are concerned in the first instance with our relation to certain persons, rather than to certain truths. They thus bring into play those obligations of trust and loyalty on which all social life is founded, and they render our religious convictions a matter of personal allegiance instead of mere opinion. The first question a Christian is asked is not whether he believes certain truths, but whether he believes in certain Persons; and he is a member of a perpetual society whose fundamental law is allegiance to its Head. The vitality of our religion and its influence for good have always been in proportion to the distinctness with which this characteristic element in it has been realized. In the early ages of Christianity, as Dr. Newman has shown, this personal devotion was predominant over all other influences, and constituted the supreme motive power of the Gospel. The great achievement of the Reformation was to revivify it, and to substitute a personal faith, involving trust in a person and self-surrender to Him, for mere habits of assent and formal obedience. The effect, wherever the Reformed teaching took root, was to revive at the same time the faculty of faith between man and man, and thus to reinvigorate society. Possibly a similar revival is equally desirable at the present day in order to hold in check the disintegrating forces now at work amongst us. We cannot, at all events, be too careful not to be driven from this ground in upholding

---

Of two men with eyes, A. and B., A. declared that he could see what went on in the sun, moon, and fixed stars, and that when he said "see" he meant not exactly common seeing, but a superior kind of seeing, very hard to describe to any one who did not possess it, which he called "intuing." B. (who had a good pair of eyes of his own of the common kind) challenged A. to read the *Times* newspaper at a distance at which B. could not read it. A. failed to do so. "Why," said B., "should I believe that you can 'intue' things in Sirius, when you cannot read small print on the other side of the room? If you want me to believe that you possess faculties of which I am destitute, you must prove yourself to be my superior by appealing to the faculties which we have in common."

or in propagating our religious belief. The question at issue in the first instance is not whether we think certain opinions on theological questions more tenable than others, but whether we believe certain men more worthy to be followed and trusted than others. Could their testimony be shown to be incompatible with truth scientifically established, of course their authority would be proportionally weakened, if not overthrown. But until this has been done the faith we have once pledged to them imposes on us obligations of trust and loyalty similar to those involved in other personal relations, and we can no more be always questioning their authority than we can be always investigating the faithfulness of a friend, a wife, or a husband. We are willing to entertain such an inquiry upon good cause shown; but our whole presumption is in favour of faith and not in favour of doubt. Of the two errors, it is safer in matters of practice, both for the individual and for society, to err on the side of belief and trust than on the side of doubt and hesitation.

16. Such considerations, it may be added, seem to have an important bearing on the question now under discussion as to the influence upon morality of a decline in religious belief. As the Dean of St. Paul's has observed, the question cannot be properly discussed unless it is understood definitely what belief and what morality are intended. But one thing is evident, that a decline in Christian belief involves a decline in the personal influence exerted by our Lord and by His Apostles. It is impossible that men who feel themselves competent, like most sceptical authors, to criticize the statements of St. John or St. Paul with as much freedom as those of any other teachers should submit themselves to their moral and spiritual influence as completely as Christians, who accept such Saints as supreme authorities, and believe them to have been in possession of truths far beyond our natural ken. The great personages of the New Testament must cease to be, in anything like the same degree as before, the personal guides and leaders of our moral and spiritual life. Whether morality in the abstract would lose in authority may be a matter for argument. But it seems scarcely questionable that Christian morality would in practice lose one of the most potent forces which sustain it. If we would avert such a misfortune, we must adhere to the old, and it is to be feared too much forgotten, Ethics of Belief.

The CHAIRMAN.—I am sure, from the applause, that I may return the

thanks of the society to Professor Wace for the excellent paper with which he has favoured us ; I now invite discussion upon it.\*

The Rev. Principal RIGG.—I recognise, as we all must, the interest and importance of the subjects which have been raised. I confess, however, that I do not altogether go with the esteemed and able writer in the criticisms on the subject with which he has favoured us. For instance, it appears to me that the distinction between faith and science, which, as I apprehend, underlies the whole discussion, is much too absolute. As I understand, Professor Wace, throughout, uses the term science simply in the sense of natural science, and I do not find that the word is ever used in a wider sense.

Professor WACE.—That was not my intention.

Principal RIGG.—I think the word “science” is used throughout in the strict sense of that which can be absolutely demonstrated, which is just equivalent with natural science. But it appears to me that the word “science” should have a much wider meaning. We have been accustomed to read, and think, and speak, about moral science for instance, and I believe there is a basis for moral science. I do not myself find that the intuitional basis upon which moral science must rest, as all science must rest upon an intuitional basis, has been recognized in this paper. There is a very sharp line of demarcation indeed between faith and science. Science is what rests on demonstration—I am speaking now of the paper—faith is that which is antecedent to all demonstration, and not only so, but antecedent to all reasonable ground of belief ; that, as I apprehend, is the general purport of the paper. A child is to believe in and to trust its parent antecedent to all ground whatever for so doing ; a friend is to trust a friend antecedent to any ground for so doing. I confess that I cannot myself look upon the matter in this light. I do not think this would even furnish a basis for faith in the sense of that Church which professes to base all on authority. I think that if we consulted Dr. Newman’s “Grammar of Assent,” we should find that even that authority of the Church, for which he pleads, is made to rest on certain grounds which are different from authority, and which have in them a moral element. As to the case of the child, I apprehend that the reason why a child believes its parent is not antecedent to all ground : the relations between a parent and child, from its birth, have been such as to impress upon the unconscious convictions of the child, the assurance that the parent knows a great deal more than it knows, and is on the whole a safe guide, and that the parent means to do it good and not harm. These are convictions, wholly unconscious it may be, so far as any analysis is concerned in the child’s own consciousness. Of course a child believes its father and its

---

\* Amongst those specially invited for this evening were the Duke of Argyll and Professor Clifford ; the former wrote expressing his regret that he could not hear the paper read, being at present unable to attend any meetings.



mother, until experience, it may be, has brought some counter evidence which teaches that though the parent may love the child, and know more, and wisely guide it, and mean well by it, yet for some reason or other, owing to the parent's ignorance or folly, or worse, for sometimes the parent will deceive the child ; but I do not apprehend that the first trust is a trust without a basis. It rests on a basis, and on a true intuitional basis too, and it is consequently a trust to be recognized as related distinctly to science, to moral science. It appears to me that all our beliefs rest upon induction, more or less imperfect, coupled, it may be, with the verification which is afforded by experience. A belief in the case that I have just referred to rests upon imperfect induction, unconsciously performed, even by a little child. If the induction is very perfect—if you have a great many instances with no exceptions, of the trustworthiness, wisdom, and guidance of the person you trust, your induction becomes more and more perfect, and it may eventually become so perfect as to amount to something tantamount to scientific assurance. I apprehend that belief and trust really rest upon induction, and unless we are prepared to say that induction itself, and all that relates to inductive evidence, is to be banished from the sphere of science, we must admit that belief itself comes within the province of science. So I do not think that men are called upon often, or even once, to take a leap in the dark : they may be called upon to take a leap in the twilight, when they must either do that or be absolutely destroyed where they stand ; but if it be truly dark, so that they can see nothing before or behind, above or beneath, I know no reason why they should leap this way or that, or why, indeed, they should leap at all. They may be called upon to take a leap in an imperfect light, according to the best illumination they can have in the midst of the general obscurity. These are samples of the sort of thoughts which have been passing through my mind. Professor Wace has told us that as it is our duty to speak the truth, so it is a correlative duty to believe that everybody else is speaking the truth, at least in the first instance. Now I do not apprehend that there is any equivalence whatever in the obligation between the one of these things and the other. I apprehend that the obligation to speak the truth rests upon an entirely different foundation, and is an obligation of an altogether different sort from the duty to give a generous or charitable credence to what a stranger may say to me. This is a matter of courtesy or of convenience, or it may be a question of evidence. But it is not constant or invariable, and must be subject to the teachings of experience, which may warrant and lead me, as I get on in life, less and less to believe statements that I hear. As I get older, I apprehend that I am somewhat less inclined to believe everything that I hear at the first hearing of it ; but I trust that I am not the less likely, from experience or from the moral discipline of life, to speak the truth myself in my dealings with others. I think that the distinctions between opinion, faith or belief, and knowledge, need to be very carefully analyzed, and that they have not

been stated in the paper before us with sufficient accuracy for the purposes of scientific discussion. Belief and faith : there is a reference somewhere in the paper which evidently confounds them as though they were one and the same thing ; the belief in a fact, and trust and submission to an authority. Ultimately, it may be, that these two things repose upon the self-same principle of testimony, but nevertheless, there is a very great difference in nature between the belief in a fact upon testimony and trust in authority. In regard to moral conduct these two things are essentially distinct, and it is very necessary indeed, when we are dealing with this wide topic, that we should not confuse things so different as a belief in a fact, and that variety of faith which leads us to trust and to submit ourselves to authority, as if they were the self-same thing. Altogether, I do think it is of the utmost importance that we should not allow men of science to teach us that there are two entirely distinct provinces :—the one, the province of knowledge, and the other, the province of faith. I do not know where science would be if it were not for some faiths on which science itself reposes. I think it will be found that scientific men themselves, in their discussions, are perpetually taking for granted principles not to be distinguished in their nature from what they are pleased to call beliefs : taking for granted, in fact, things which cannot be demonstrated ; things of which we may feel absolutely certain, but which rest on no other basis than an intuitive conviction. The very existence of one's own personality will be found, when we come to analyze it, to be a necessary assumption in a great deal of scientific investigation and discussion, but it is a thing which can never be proved by science in that sense in which scientific men speak of proof to-day. Even in regard to the laws of the universe, there are a great many things which are assumed, as has been shown by Professor Martineau in his discussions on the subject, and we shall find, I think, that it is necessary for us to hold fast by the truth ; that there is no such wide and essential distinction capable of being established, as it is the custom to assume, between the province of demonstration in regard to matters of so-called science on the one hand, and the province of conviction in regard to matters of belief. Doubtless, all our faith as Christians rests ultimately upon historical investigation and demonstration—it rests ultimately, doubtless, upon testimony. Out of the facts of history, established as historical facts, the mysteries themselves come forth to our view, and it is precisely the same with science. There is hardly a fact of science which would not have been rejected beforehand as incredible. There is hardly a fact of modern science which, if it had been stated for the first time, without any sort of preliminary preparation leading up to it, would not have been rejected as a thing altogether inconceivable and altogether incredible. Science has, one after another, and by slow and painful effort, established things which all the world in the first instance, would have declared were things that never could

have been established, and they have been established by what? By observation. But what is observation? It is all testimony; it is the evidence of personal knowledge and observation. It will be found that science is full of mysteries, which, in themselves, are as improbable, not to say incredible, as any mystery which the Gospels rest upon, and they rest also upon the same basis of observation and testimony as the volume upon which our religion rests. We have to investigate these things on the ground where they took place, just as we have to investigate our Lord's life, and thus we gradually unfold mysteries whether of science or of faith which we must accept, though it is impossible for us to conceive or to understand them. I beg pardon for having occupied the ground, I am afraid, a little too long. (Hear, hear.)

The Rev. Principal ANGUS.—I feel deeply our obligation to Professor Wace, and I very cordially concur in many of the sentiments that are incidentally expressed in the paper itself. If I do not give a more formal expression of concurrence, it is because I think it is more to the purpose of our meeting that we should discuss the points which are open to objection. For my own part, beginning with the argument with which the paper closed, I doubt the wisdom or the propriety of distinguishing so pointedly between belief in a proposition and belief in a person. It is a very familiar distinction I know, and it is one which has a very deep significance; but I believe it is liable to considerable misapprehension. Of course there is a wide distinction between *fides* and *fiducia*—between faith and trust. To believe in a person is to have *fiducia* in relation to him, whereas to believe in a truth is simply to have *fides* in relation to it. It may have been the purpose of Professor Wace to set that forth; but I think not. I believe in the proposition that God is love; that is *fides*: I trust that love: that is *fiducia*; but that may be one meaning of belief in the proposition itself. The distinction in fact is not strictly between a proposition as true and a person, but between a proposition as believed in by the intellect, and as accepted by the heart. I believe it will be found that when I have said I believe in God, it really means that I believe a number of propositions in relation to Him—that God is Almighty, that He is holy, that He is loving, He is true. My belief in Him is really a belief in all parts of His character, in all He has done, and in all He will do; whereas my belief in a proposition may be simply a belief in a particular fact. If, for example, I say that God sent His Son into the world, the proposition embodying that particular fact is less wide and less influential as it stands in that naked form, than is the belief in God. But the two mental states may not differ, except in extent. To believe in God is to believe in a large number of propositions, whereas to believe in a simple proposition is to believe in one only. If it be held that a belief in God means trust in Him; so also may a belief in the proposition that God is love. Mere belief in God, say in the proposition, is *fides*: and trust in God, or in God as love, is *fiducia*. I think it unwise, however, to call one belief in a truth, and the other in a person. The fact is, that

the religious life always begins with a belief in specific propositions. The mature Christian may indeed believe in God and trust in God for everything; but religion begins with a specific belief in the statement, for instance, that we are sinners, or that Christ is an Almighty and loving Saviour. My dread of this distinction is partly owing to the fact that I think it an unjust distinction, and partly to the further fact that it produces a tendency to suppose that all we have to do in order to be forgiven and to be made holy, is to have an indistinct trust in God, we do not know why, and we cannot tell how; whereas I maintain, that the religious trust which moulds the character is reducible, if you examine it, to the most definite propositions, differing only from a belief in particular propositions, inasmuch as it involves a belief in many, and not simply a belief in one. On the chief question of the paper I confess that I am not convinced by the course of argument adopted. The "ethics of unbelief" means, I presume, in Professor Clifford's writings, that not to believe is really a duty, until the facts are proved. What, then, is the "ethics of belief"? The paper says, substantially, that "the ethics of belief" means that we ought to believe, because to believe is an instinct, and a tendency to believe is essential to the good of society, and is the correlative of truth-speaking on the part of those we trust. Now there is no doubt that belief, or a tendency to believe, is an instinct. Hume's statement that belief in testimony is the result of experience, is the very opposite of the fact. Men begin with a tendency to believe; and it is distrust that is the result of experience. But why is it our duty to believe? Professor Wace says, "because it is an instinct"; but that does not really give a moral reason for belief. If you tell me, for example, as an historical fact, that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, and if you tell me also, that the sun goes round the earth, what is my duty in listening to the two statements? According to Professor Wace, I am bound to believe both: I am to believe a thing because it is told me. But surely there is no duty or virtue in such belief. What I hold to be the sin of unbelief is the moral state in which we reject truth. Belief is "morally right," only when it is sustained by evidence. I wish to have the truth spoken, I am so made. No doubt it is wrong to suspect needlessly, because that means uncharitableness and the imputation of motives. But the thing I call the sin of unbelief—that which is morally wrong—has always in it this element, that I am rejecting truth, because of the moral state of my nature. You tell me that sin is a great evil, a bitter thing, involving awful penalties and distress; but that is not verified, and it cannot be verified in all its extent and meaning, in this life, at all. The very fact that it is not fully verifiable in this life, is one evidence we give for a future life. Why do I reject it? If I reject it as an intellectual statement, simply because the evidence is defective, it does not seem to me that I am guilty of any sin at all; but if, having sufficient evidence, I do not like to acknowledge the truth; if there is a warping, through sin, of my moral nature, so that I do not recognize or feel the facts on which the proposition

rests, then I hold that in all such cases unbelief is **wrong**, and implies a sinful condition. There are infidels and infidels. (Hear, hear.) There is a form of unbelief that is purely intellectual, and I venture to say that it is as nearly innocent as any disbelief that man shows in relation to any statement. But I believe, as human nature goes, that a large mass of unbelief in relation to spiritual truth—the unbelief which condemns and morally ruins men—is essentially immoral, because it means a state of heart unfit, through sin, for appreciating spiritual evidence, and so much in love with sin that the owner of that heart will not give sin up. It seems to me that the wise thing to say on this occasion is, that while in relation to many of the truths of the Gospel the evidence is purely intellectual or scientific, much of it is also moral: and if, through our sinful nature, we fail to believe in the great spiritual truths which underlie the Gospel, the reason of our unbelief is largely moral, and therefore wrong. I think our wiser course then is, instead of saying that the sin of unbelief consists in a denial of our natural tendency, and in insulting our neighbours, to say that unbelief is practically of two kinds. There is one kind which springs from defective evidence, from defective faculties, or from defective examination, in which there may be no sin at all; and there is another kind which springs from man's sympathy with sin, and man's dislike of a holy system that calls him to a self-denying and a holy life. All the unbelief that springs from this second source is of necessity "ethical" and morally wrong, because it springs from wrong motives, and because the blindness it implies is essentially a blindness of the heart. I hold that the belief which saves a man is partly intellectual but largely emotional, and it is only in proportion as men's hearts are touched that they have wrought in them the faith that is to sanctify and save. I thank Professor Wace, for the many striking and true things which his paper contains; but on the great thesis itself I think that there is a deeper and truer exposition than the one he has given. (Cheers.)

Rev. Prebendary IRONS.—I rise at this early time chiefly to re-call attention to the paper itself, and with a hope that we may not stray from the subject which the lecturer has brought before us. Whether, for instance, it would conduce to Professor Clifford's conversion to Christianity to tell him that his unbelief is immoral, and that a large number of those who think with him are bad men, I very much doubt. I do not think Professor Wace would have taken this course with unbelievers; and moreover, the facts of the case are hardly so illustrative of the immorality of unbelief as Principal Angus seemed to suppose—at least the fact is, that a man like Niebuhr earnestly desired that his son should be a Christian, although he could not possibly convince himself of the truth of Christianity. It is surely a painful position to take up at the very outset, when dealing with infidels, that a great proportion of them are bad men. I would rather deal with them as those who wish on the whole to be right and true. For it is no man's interest to believe in a lie, much less to go down to the grave believing in a lie; and I hope and believe we might have more success

if we treated all men in a fair and candid spirit, as though we trusted at all events that the majority of them were as fair-minded as ourselves. Now it does so happen that every one of the points which have been demurred to by Dr. Rigg,—and I am sure he will forgive my indicating this to his eminently candid mind,—every one of them has been dealt with by the lecturer. I have marked the places to show where Dr. Rigg had overlooked or mistaken the meaning. His first position was that the paper ignored the idea of scientific knowledge of Religion, but this is what I read in the paper itself, in the 11th paragraph :

“We may hope in this way to have some scientific as well as moral test for distinguishing true from false religious beliefs.”

Again, it was said rather too strongly, that the intuitive grounds of faith were denied. Now, Dr. Angus seemed himself at one time to deny these intuitive grounds, and at another to assert that, after all, there were emotional springs of faith of which we must take cognizance. But instead of speaking of Dr. Angus, I will turn to the 3rd paragraph of the paper, where I find this :—

“If we admit the testimony of Conscience as that of a kind of independent authority, bearing its witness within each individual soul, we may bring under this definition certain primary religious and moral truths, to which, as Kant observed, our assent has the character of faith rather than opinion.”

I think that throughout this paper you may call the doctrine of intuitive belief almost an assumption—at all events it is very frequently, if indirectly, alluded to, and a large portion of the paper would be absolutely unintelligible except on that hypothesis. I think that when Dr. Rigg has read the paper once more, he will agree with me that it was rather a mistake to suppose, for an instant, that it did not admit the intuitive beginnings of faith. Even that passage which has been commented on so much, in which the relations of trust between parent and child are dealt with (in the 4th paragraph), it was almost intimated by Dr. Rigg, that a child's faith was made to depend on the facts which the child previously gathered together, in order to convince itself that its parents were trustworthy. But that is so far from being possibly the case, that one is surprised to find such a thought put forward for a moment. Professor Wace says :—

“The essence of the filial relation is a moral confidence antecedent to experience, and capable in fact of sustaining severe apparent contradictions to that experience.”

I must say, I am surprised that of all possible allegations this should be brought forward, when it was distinctly the purpose of the paper to explain the primary grounds and conditions of faith.

Dr. RIGG.—My argument was that there could be no moral consciousness antecedent to experience.

Dr. IRONS.—Surely the germ? It would spring up and grow contem-

poraneously with the experience. There would hardly show a 'fore and after—an antecedent and a posterior, in the case. The child has that confidence which the paper declared to be anterior to experience, only in that sense in which Dr. Rigg himself, as I understand him, maintains that it could not be only the *result* of experience, but must be something more. If my memory does not entirely mislead me, Dr. Rigg seemed to admit that it was absurd to imagine a child trusting a parent only in consequence of a series of experiences.

Dr. RIGG.—On the contrary, I argued that it had trust and faith in consequence of a series of experiences, and I would say that the intuitive part there, is simply a belief in the continuity or uniformity of cause and effect, and their relation to each other.

Dr. IRONS.—The uniformity of cause and effect is not a phrase which occurs in the paper, and a child would hardly trust his parent on that ground.

Dr. RIGG.—No, but that is how I should have explained it.

Dr. IRONS.—Well, I do not want to force any phrase, but only to do justice to the paper; and I must express my surprise that a paper which is, if indirectly, brimful of intuition, should be charged, as I understood, with having nothing of it. But why not deal with the paper according as the author treats the subject? The author has to do with the allegation of unbelief as put forward by Professor Clifford—I hope Professor Clifford is here to-night—and that allegation is, that every man must prove everything for himself. Now, I find it hard to conceive that any one is serious in maintaining such a view as this. Unbelief is to change into belief, in every instance, only after the careful examination of evidences! Why, not one in ten thousand could comply with such conditions; it would be absolutely impossible. You would have a world in which the whole population would be doubters and unbelievers if you could procure faith in no other way than this. Now, instead of finding fault with that theory of authority here drawn out in at least some detail by Professor Wace to meet unbelief, would it not have been more to the point to show how the infidel should be met in this matter, and how on other grounds we should answer men who expect no one to believe except on scientific grounds? I am as convinced as Dr. Rigg or Dr. Angus can be that our Religion is not a matter of guess: it is a certainty. It stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. I am quite as sure it is knowledge. Apostle after apostle significantly speaks of it as being a "knowledge of the truth." In reference to this, it is not to be denied that there are some passages in the paper before us which need to be brought out and greatly enlarged on; but surely the points themselves desired by Dr. Rigg are there, though no doubt they are somewhat latent in certain places. One thing which may be said against the paper is, that it makes too little of the *ego*—the man himself is not sufficiently brought out as a being responsible *ab initio*. Man must be regarded as a

being responsible to God and to his fellow-men, and responsible from the first, for righteousness ; and he cannot be that without faith. But it is the very reverse to tell a man, as Professor Clifford does, that he must ascertain everything for himself before he believes. That would be as good as separating him from all his fellow-men, and repudiating anything like human progress as well as Responsibility. Under such conditions we could not even avail ourselves of other men's experience, nor of the knowledge of ages, until we ourselves had personally verified them. To put that strongly before such a logician as Professor Clifford might perhaps convince him of the absurdity of the position ; and I think that is in some measure done in this paper. I apprehend that Professor Wace has been endeavouring to keep himself within limits and omitted much : he wrote a short paper in order that we might have the benefit of discussing it at greater length. Some of us have fallen into a worse habit, by producing long papers and leaving very little room for the discussion—a very bad plan, as I know from my own experience. But the universal inductive process, which Dr. Rigg has now intimated, with some inconsistency, must be gone through by every one, almost amounts to Professor Clifford's proposition. Once or twice Dr. Rigg seemed to me to endorse Professor Clifford's theory, that we are all of us to examine every point, and not to believe it unless we could prove it by experience. Not only was it knowledge, but personally-tested knowledge, which Dr. Rigg seemed to require. Two remarks in his speech seemed to me to be somewhat in conflict with each other ; in the one place, he thoroughly rejected the notion of omitting the intuitive instinct, and in the other he declared that we must always have the inductive process.

Dr. RIGG.—Which rests upon an intuition.

Dr. IRONS.—Then I do not see where your point of difference is. If there be an intuition, we are perfectly agreed that in process of time, as Professor Wace points out, the knowledge of religion may even become scientific.

Dr. RIGG.—Hear, hear.

Dr. IRONS.—Then gradually we go on to a science of theology, the queen of sciences, which is the very foundation of right knowledge. But it is wrong to find fault with the inductive process in one place and to insist upon it in another. I do not blame Professor Wace for not writing a treatise upon every subject he touched. I am not by any means holding a brief for Professor Wace, but I have read his paper carefully, and I protest against its being so far misunderstood as to lead us off the track of the argument. The point brought forward now is whether there is an *à priori* condition of the mind which claims for itself some knowledge and capacity, and whether there is also an ethical tendency in the religious mind which teaches it to fall back on certain intuitive beginnings of truth, and love, and courage, and devotion, which God has implanted in man. If Professor Clifford be here, I fear he will make some



use of the differences which this discussion has elicited as to first principles, principles which are of such vital importance. I should like to know, however, what he would say to this statement, that the individual man cannot stand alone; he must have *common* first principles in mathematics, in science of every kind, and in religion; he cannot possibly proceed a step without them. I know that somebody has been trying to demonstrate the axioms of Euclid and so to supersede their existence as axioms, but I cannot even imagine any kind of proof that would satisfy us on that point. We must begin with some assumptions: every man assumes his own powers, and trusts them to a certain extent; he cannot help it. Then there is something also that is not himself. Not only does he begin with the *ego*, but he recognizes the *non ego*, that is, something "out of himself that makes for righteousness"—as Matthew Arnold puts it, which, after all, is only a roundabout way of expressing the *à priori*. How, then, *can* we test everything around us before we believe anything? It is almost a contradiction. I do not wish to deprive any one here of the opportunity of criticising the Professor's paper, and therefore, having said thus much to take us back into the right track, which is to inquire—How we are to deal with the infidelity which intends to make every man prove his faith or be a doubter?—I am quite satisfied to leave the matter in the hands of the meeting. (Cheers.)

Rev. G. W. WELDON—I will only occupy your attention for a few minutes. I believe that the author of the paper will have very little to do when he comes to reply, because the critics have answered each other. The paper, I must say, possesses the three points which are essential to success in an essay, sermon or speech—it is short, modest, and above all, it is to the point. I cannot help feeling, however, that though I endorse almost everything contained in the paper, there is one most important fact which we should not forget. The great question of the day is a belief in the supernatural. There are some things which are knowable by reason, and some things which are not. Those things which are knowable by reason have never been revealed, because there was no necessity for it; but other things have been revealed; and it is our duty to accept the testimony which has been put before us, because we believe that those who have spoken for us have seen far enough to be able to guide us. I believe in this kind of testimony. This is the age of doubt, and the question is whether we shall pass through life believing in our fellow-men, with that faith between man and man which is far more manly and chivalrous than constantly recurring doubts. The article of Professor Clifford would break down every possible trust between man and man. The faith of commerce takes it for granted that no man can be honest, but must be accepted as a rogue until he is proved to be trustworthy; but Professor Wace's paper teaches you to believe every man to be true until you have found him dishonest. I believe that paper will leave its trace upon our hearts, and tend to improve our conduct; and that it will enable us to go forth believing, more firmly than ever, that

we have a revelation in which we must believe on the testimony of its authors. (Cheers.)

Rev. C. N. EDGINGTON.—I think it is unforunate that some atheist, sceptic, or infidel has not taken part in the discussion to-night. I protest against its being supposed that Christians are prepared to believe anything that happens to be told to them. Our belief must stand upon something valid if it is to be accepted as true. I cannot agree with Dr. Rigg that we are obliged to accept as truth, matters of faith which are absolutely inconceivable and unintelligible. I think that such statements are much more likely to damage Christianity than any number of articles by Professor Clifford. I am sorry Professor Clifford is not present to hear the paper read, but I entirely agree with that paper, which I think answers Professor Clifford on his own ground. It was not Professor Wace's purpose to go higher than that, or he would have done so. I do not agree with Dr. Irons in thinking that the paper is brimful of intuition, though I think our faith does rest in a great measure upon intuition; and I was glad to see, in the current number of *The Nineteenth Century*, that Mr. Fitzjames Stephen admits that the beliefs which rest on intuition are elements which must be considered. They are facts to be set before a jury, although they do not prove the case. Scientific men sometimes come and tell the clergy, as they have done at Sion College, that if we state to our congregations facts which we cannot prove scientifically, or of which we do not present any sensible evidence, we are more or less lying. Now this kind of statement affects clergymen very considerably, and I am glad to find that Mr. Fitzjames Stephen and others are prepared to admit that some of our beliefs do rest on intuition, and are beliefs which we cannot prove. Theology is not the only science which rests upon something unprovable—even mathematics, the most exact of all the sciences, rests on axioms which you cannot prove, and in the same way we cannot prove the elementary truths of religion; but, given certain facts of our moral and spiritual consciousness, and we are prepared to confirm them by other facts which we can prove. Those who have read Professor Clifford's article will the more fully appreciate the force and value of Professor Wace's essay. It would have added much to the interest of the discussion if some one had taken up and argued the subject from Professor Clifford's point of view. But at the same time it must be remembered that Christian Faith is something far higher than a belief in probabilities, or even than a belief in merely human testimony. Faith is the acceptance of Divine Revelation because it is true, and rests ultimately on the deepest convictions of the heart and conscience.

Dr. IRONS—Let me offer a word of explanation. I did not mean to say that Professor Wace's paper was a full or open defence of the doctrine of intuition; for that you would have to go to such a paper as Dr. Martineau's in *The Nineteenth Century*; but I did mean to say that intuition was the assumption of the whole paper, which would have been unintelligible without it.

Rev. A. C. MACPHERSON.—As a new and untried member of this Institute, I desire to offer two or three remarks upon the paper before us. The first thing I would point out is, that in my opinion some of the statements contained in the paper might have been considerably amplified. There are some things which have not been made enough of, and there are one or two things also which have been made too much of. One of the things not made enough of was, the fact that the region of thought and action in which we have to decide on probable evidence, is very much larger than the region of thought and action where things can be demonstrably proved, and this will always give the claims of faith a great advantage over the claims of proved science. This point might, I think, have been made more of, because, when we have to exercise our judgment upon faith, the matter is one of much more importance than when we have to come to demonstraable conclusions. I was much struck with the argument of the paper, that faith moves in the region where man acts upon man by trust and confidence, rather than in the region of cold calculating intellect. However beautiful and symmetrical a man's doctrines may be, his character and the sum total of his acts, will have far more influence than his words. Another point on which I wish to say something is in reference to the word "belief." Philosophically, the word "belief," like the words "subject" and "object," is of very little consequence or importance. We say "I believe," of things which are altogether out of the region of trust and confidence. I may say I believe the atomic theory, although that theory is not yet fully proved. The fact is, we want a word to express what is generally called "belief," as distinguished from "knowledge." Before we use the word "belief," we should distinguish the region in which we use it. The trust argument was a very strong one, but I think it was pressed too far, and the older we grow the more we shall see that the world teems with gigantic mistakes forced upon it by gigantic liars. The victims of these mistakes are to be numbered, not by millions, but by hundreds of millions, and it could not but have been well if those many millions had had the faculty of trying and estimating the evidence set before them. However, this faculty was not exercised, and to this fact the world is indebted for the progress of Mahommedanism, Buddhism, and all other false religions. We can only accept Professor Clifford's paper however, within narrow limits. It is only just that something should be said on his side of the question, and though no doubt we should be far from saying with him that to believe without questioning is a great sin, which in the future shall cast a man into darkness and oblivion, yet nevertheless it is useful that a man should have and exercise the faculty of trying conclusions, and those who hold the Christian religion and the truths which we have been taught from our childhood upwards, should be the very first to desire anything of the kind. We believe that the more our religion is tested the more firmly it will be found to stand, and therefore I think that, within very narrow limits, Professor Clifford's paper should be accepted. It is surely right to say that a man who can judge is wrong if he

does not exercise the faculty of judging. No doubt it is hard to say what man can judge and what man cannot, but that is no harder than a good many other things in this world; and it is a case of *solvitur ambulando*. There is a sort of rough-and-ready justice which will put men on their proper level, and Professor Clifford's theory seems to give us a stronger argument to rest upon even than the great moral habit of mutual trust. But here comes in the necessary limitation: let us restrict *knowledge*, and, therefore, the duty of proof, to those things which are knowable, and faith or belief to those things which are unknown or unknowable. Unless we can find or coin a new word, this will be the safest way. And starting from this necessary limitation, we shall soon find that the region of the unknown and unknowable is infinitely larger than that of the known or knowable, and that therefore faith has a far wider sphere to act in, than knowledge or proof. There is scarcely one man in ten thousand, in any corner of the world, who will not, at some time or other, have an uneasy consciousness that there is a future beyond the grave. This future beyond the grave is the great unknown and the great unknowable; and the fact that in that future, faith is the only interpreter and the only guide, will always render paramount its claims. Where science ends her course, faith begins; and where science is dumb, faith is eloquent; and it is because of this that the claims of faith will always be most amply acknowledged among millions of mankind. (Cheers.)

Dr. Rigg.—May I be permitted to say just one single word of explanation. I was much grieved to be misunderstood by one gentleman who said that a phrase of mine would do more harm than all the articles of Professor Clifford. I may have been entirely wrong in what I said, but all I meant was that the mysteries of science, no less than those of faith, are things which in themselves are inconceivable, and yet we are obliged to receive them.

Mr. T. HARRIOT.—\*

---

\* Mr. T. Harriot, in a MS. read and handed in, says:—"Learning from the Scriptures that the Supreme oftentimes turns into foolishness the wisdom of the most learned, and that the most simple-minded may, by a life of child-like trust in Him, and humble walk in the light of His countenance become the possessor of perfect intelligence of His will, and inherit the promises, I am emboldened to treat this learned subject on simple grounds of faith alone." He then refers to Professor Clifford's ironical expressions, "the portion left for a divine messenger to occupy is the unintelligible alone," "Religion consists in blind emotions," and says, "I would remark that faith is not the evidence of things seen (for then it would not be faith); but 'of things not seen.' If indubitable evidence of unseen things were furnished to man, the Divine Being who knoweth the heart, could little esteem the recognition of Him,—which intellectually or scientifically could not be withheld. Inexpressibly as I reverence the Bible, I firmly trust that even if it were proved to be utterly untrustworthy it would not affect the soul's deep trust in God, our Father; Religion has a deeper foundation than that, in souls purified by Divine Love, and its light will shine for evermore."

\* \* \* \* \*

The CHAIRMAN.—I am sure the meeting will desire that the discussion should now be brought to a close, and therefore I will not intrude any remarks of my own, but will simply call on Professor Wace for his reply.

Professor WACE.—It would be very unreasonable if I took up much of your time by a reply, as I have already occupied three-quarters of an hour in reading my paper. On several points, moreover, in respect to which the paper was misapprehended it has been sufficiently vindicated by other speakers ; and it will therefore only be necessary to notice the main objections which have been raised against the position I endeavoured to maintain. If I should seem to neglect some of the observations which have been made, I hope it will be attributed, not to want of attention to them, but to the necessity of being as brief as possible. I think it may be safely concluded that the substance of the objections to the paper were stated at the outset by Dr. Rigg. Those objections have been more or less renewed by various speakers ; but I think Dr. Rigg touched the main question, and it is satisfactory he should have done so, because it showed that, although there are points in the paper which might have been put forward more clearly, still it did raise a definite issue, namely, whether there is a specifically distinct basis for the acceptance of the main truths of the Christian faith, and for the acceptance of the truths of science. One of the objects of the paper was to enforce the existence of such a distinction ; and, notwithstanding what has been said, I am disposed fully to maintain it. Take Dr. Rigg's statement. He argued that the truths of science were substantially similar in their evidence to the truths of religion ; and he went so far as to say that the truths of science, like the truths of religion, depend upon testimony. He mentioned the fact of certain truths of science being extremely incredible at first sight ; but, he says, we believe them on the testimony of those who observe them. Now this appears to me very far from being the fact. There is this essential difference between the two cases, that whatever incredible statement is made by a man of science, it can be verified within twenty-four hours, or at all events within a given time, and nothing would be accepted as a truth of science, whether incredible or not, which would not admit of that verification. Nothing can be more incredible at first sight than the statements of every-day occurrence with regard to the truths of astronomy ; but they are verified by the use of the Nautical Almanack, which makes calculations for years in advance, and verifies such statements every hour of every day. The last speaker indeed put the case much too strongly when he said we can suppose the contrary of our religion, because that is denying the analogy between natural and revealed religion. It is, however, somewhat surprising there should have been so much said which seemed to take for granted that the essential truths of Christianity could be matters of intuition or intuitive belief. Take the belief in our Saviour's coming to judge the world. The point is, not that He exercises a judgment, but that He is personally to return to judge the world ; and by what possible process that can be placed

upon a verifiable basis like a truth of science passes comprehension. I may take another illustration. The cardinal doctrine, or one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, is the Atonement; and upon what principle of scientific knowledge can we be assured that God has been appeased? I do not assume any theory of the Atonement, but, speaking generally, and taking the Atonement as a reconciliation between God and man, it seems inconceivable upon what basis of intuition or science we can verify that matter. We may contemplate the facts of our Lord's life, as revealed to us in the Scriptures, and see that His acts are capable of constituting such an Atonement; but that they have actually produced that effect upon the relations of God to man, is surely a truth which it would be an extravagant piece of presumption for any one to assume as a matter of induction. We can only assume it on the faith of our Lord's own statement, and the statements of the apostles; and that also applies to what Dr. Rigg said with respect to the whole life of our Lord. Dr. Rigg says we have to draw certain deductions from that life. Now we have to draw deductions, not from our Lord's life merely, but from His life combined with His statements and those of the apostles, and therefore we throw ourselves to a large extent upon belief in their word on the subject.

Dr. RIGG.—Hear, hear.

Professor WACE.—I am glad Dr. Rigg expresses approval, for if he concedes this, the substance of my paper is maintained. If the doctrine of the Atonement, with all its importance, rests, not on induction but on the faith we place in personal statements, the validity of the main argument of the paper will be seen to be of vital consequence. I have dwelt upon this subject because it seems to me to be a matter of the deepest importance in the present state, and, indeed, in all states of the controversy with infidelity; that we should distinctly realize that the matter must be argued upon a personal as distinct from a scientific basis. The moment you bring the truths of Christianity face to face with pure science, that moment you set a dissolving force to act upon them, and you are incapable of solving all the doubts that may arise. But when you bring the witness and the conscience face to face, the solvent force is exerted not upon the truths but upon the consciences of men; and the more we adopt this course the more we shall return to the original process of Christian conviction. We may safely assume that the process which first propagated Christianity in the world is likely to be in all ages the most effectual. Now that process at its commencement must have been independent of anything verifiable in a degree which we cannot conceive. St. Paul stands up in the Areopagus of Athens with nothing whatever but his own personal authority, however that authority may have been supernaturally attested. It was by the force of the appeal thus made by apostles and saints to individual consciences that their victory was won, and it would be rash for us to attempt to base our faith upon a different foundation. (Cheers.)

The Meeting then adjourned to the Museum, where refreshments were served.