

Pittsfield , Mass. Sept, 27 '08.

Subject, / The Value of doubt in the religious life.

I recently heard a discourse on this general subject of the relation of faith to doubt. It was so erroneously presented that I resolved to try to give it a more adequate presentation. We read that there is nothing in all this world that ever lead man on to real victory but faith. ;that we are justefied by faith; x that salvation is through faith; that faith is the ga gateway to the kingdom of God. We are saturated with the idea that faith and faith alone is ggod. All this is true. Pauls old doctrine of justefication by faith is fundamental. I pointed out ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ last Sunday the factt that every man must have some kind of a

a faith in life in order to continue to exist. The great question is as to the quality of that faith and the kind of a life that it will produce.

But the attitude of mind that contrasts faith with doubt, and relegates doubt to the world of sin and evil is quite as disastrous in its results as it is narrow and ignorant in its methods. To try to confine faith to that mental debasement which shall ascent to a few theological dogmas, and accept them on the authority of another, and under the fear of condemnation is the most immoral and disastrous influence of our time as it has been of all times. To characterize as sin all inquiry and all honest doubt as to the nature of these dogmas bespeaks a mind too narrow to be measured.

To one who at all feels the pulse of the mind



of man to day, the most apparent fact to be relied upon is the fact of religious doubt. Every where people of all ages and conditions are either doubting , or have rejected those dogmas which, it is considered the essence of faith to accept and believe. Some years ago appeared the novel, Robert Elsmere, which portrayed ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ in a very able manner this fact of doubt in modern life concerning the traditional dogmas of religion. That book is very well worth reading now . The criticisms against the book pointed out the fact that the book is fundamentally at fault in that it does not explain how these doubts happen to arise in the mind of Robert Elsmere. Those who condemned the book said that the book was valueless unless unless the author could point to the source of the influences that had

caused these doubts to make their appearance in<sup>-4-</sup> the X  
life of this young man. But this seeming weakness in  
the book is indeed one of its strong points. The author  
does not explain the origin of these doubts because s  
she knows as does every one else that they are the pre-  
dominant force in the atmosphere of our time. If faith  
is to be regarded as that attitude of mind which acce-  
pts these dogmas, then one may say that this is ind-  
eed a generation of doubt and sceptitism. Nor from X  
this point of view is there any hope for a revival of  
faith. Whereever you may cut a cross section from the  
life of modern society, you will find that the rising  
generations are either courageously questioning, or al-  
ready have rejected those forms which the kind of faith  
to which I have referred , demands that they shall ac-



cept. When these people who doubt and questions the objects of faith, are tearfully urged to return to the faith of the olden time, to the faith of their fathers they can point as the ancient authority for their ~~xxx~~ scepticism to the old preacher whose words of scepticism are preserved for us in the Old Testament in the book of Ecclesiastes. They can cite in defense of ~~ix~~ their doubts these words,-- Say not thou , What is the cause that the former days were better than these ? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."

It is true that this is an age of doubt, so are all ~~x~~ ages. Jesus may well be described as the prince of doubters as well as the prince of peace. Show me that body of men in which there is no doubt, no free bold questions asked concerning the nature of life and the

opinions that are held concerning it, and you will show me only those who are morally and intellectually dead.

As a good illustration of the nature and the moral quality of religious doubt let me refer to the experiences of Frederick W/ Robertson, the great English preacher. Robertson was one of the greatest and most inspiring of Modern English preachers. He was at Oxford just after the tractarian movement had stirred \* all England. He opposed the attitude of Newman who in the interests of faith turned from the church of E England to the Catholic Church. Robertson left Oxford in an unhappy and unsettled frame of mind. As a pupil he had been taught the old dogmas of the English~~XXXXX~~ Church, but in the free life he had also drunk heavily of the mod4rn spirit which was awaking in the English





done. A few years of active turbulent work ~~in~~ as minister in Winchester and Cheltenham, finds him leaving the world to go away into the mountains of Switzerland to fight out the great problem which was before him. The passage which I read for a scripture lesson gives his own ~~XXXXXX~~ description of his feelings~~X~~ at this time. You have already noticed that the passage read covers the three phases through~~X~~ which the doubting ~~x~~ person must pass.

Let me point them out. He had been taught as all too many are taught to-day that his religious faith depended upon those forms which are only the passing forms of expressing that essential faith in life which belongs to the human soul. He had never been taught to walk alone in the religious life. He had constantly @ -



depended upon props. Without any question he had accepted the ~~XXXX~~ statements that had been given to him and had been taught to believe that upon them he must depend. Then comes the time as it must come to every one who has been taught to believe that the leaves ~~XX~~ that cover the trees in summer are the permanent and the abiding thing in the life of nature. They leaves begin to fall and with them falls the faith that rested upon the passing and the transient. With the departure of the passing comes the days of despondency which Robertson so well depicts in these words,—" It is an awful moment when the soul begins to find that the props on which it has blindly rested so long, are, many of them, rotten, and begins to suspect them all; when it begins to feel the nothingness of many of the

opinions which have been received with implicit confidence, and in that horrible insecurity begins also to doubt whether there be anything to believe at all. "

Notice that he has been taught to depend upon props which his mature ing years can see are rotten. These rotten props give away under him, and he begins to doubt abd suspect all the foundation, even that w which may be sound. This is the essential occasion of the kind of doubt of which we are speaking. Some passing opinion, some local form of ritualism, some meaningless sacrement, has been held up as the essential object of faith and indded the foundation of faith: The time comes when the true character of this passing form appears. As a support to faith it is no more. In its crumbling fall it carries with it the faith that



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upon it. This is the occasioj of that doubt which causes so much consternation, and indeed which leads at times to discouraging results. We are living in a world ordered in truth. We have certain capacities ~~wh~~ which enable us to find out something of the truth of the world in which we live. Our life and indeed all X human life is engaged in the discovery of the truth of the relation of the individual life to the unseen world in which he lives as well as to the seen world. It happens that a certain man in working upon this question, offers to the world what seems to him to be certain truths connected with life. He has tested ~~th~~ these truths in his own experience, and he has confirmed

firmed

*In conflict,*