No. 184.

The mixture of belief and unbelief.
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The weakness of our faith &c.
The mixture of belief & unbelief.
At Dr. Pierce, (Brookline) Sept. 12, 1825 - forenoon.
At Mr. Frothingham, Jan. 8, 1826 - afternoon.
At Baltimore, Oct. 15, 1826 - forenoon.
At Medford, Jan. 21st, 1827 - forenoon.
At home, April 13, 1828 - afternoon.

This was the earnest exclamation of an agonized father, who came to Jesus with trembling anxiety for the life of his son. The child was afflicted with distressing discases, and in those days it was common to ascribe to the agency of possession of an evil spirit. This doubtless was a false and superstitious notion; but it was one in which mankind have always been disposed to indulge. A belief in the influence of invisible spirits has been one of the most common errors of the human mind; it cherishes and harmonizes so well with that love of the mysterious and the terrible, so is the underlying passion of the unenlightened, that no wonder it has been a favorite of popular delusion. We are not to suppose by any means, that our Saviour gave his sanction to this error. The language with which he uses in the occasion of healing the cases is accommodated to popular belief, but does by no means indicate that belief to be correct. I make
these remarks merely in passing, because they apply to the case before us. These, who have watched the offspring on the bed of sickness or under the wasting of disease, may understand what were the feelings of the unhappy father, who applied to Jesus for relief. None but a parent can know these feelings. These are natural associations of hope, affection connected with children that when disease invades the little circle of the family, it brings a cloud over some of the dearest anticipations, deals a blow at some of the finest ties of the human heart. The father, who uttered the exclamation involuntarily, had probably built some of his warmest hopes upon this son; had watched him with affectionate solicitude from the feebleness of the cradle of infancy, painted with his playful smile of innocence and happiness. When he looked forward to the future, it was probably connected with this beloved child. Rose in him, perhaps, one, who was to be his pride of his name, his first in coming years, who was to bear up his named to evade his possessors, who was to reflect honor upon him by this manly virtuous conduct. She was to support his age, to sustain him in the days.
darkness & decay by affectionate attentions & kind des-
vices. — We may form to ourselves some such picture
as this, of the hopes & feelings of this parent, — of their con-
ceive what must have been his emotions, when bedis-
tressing disease laid its hand upon his young son, — that
ended the blight every fair hope connected with him. He
doubtedly had heard of the mighty works of Jesus, or
some of the wonderful deeds of his disciples. — Jesus at
this time was absent, so the distressed father applied to
his disciples. But they, it seems, could not heal the
child; as in the language of these times, could not
cast out the spirit. (They probably were not, at that
time, endowed with very full miraculous powers, for
in several occasions they appear to have failed of per-
forming superhuman acts.) — The father then applied to
us, with the earnest entreaty, “if they cannot do
anything, have compassion on us & help us.” — Yes, said
unto him, if they cannot believe, all things are possible
to him that believeth.” On this occasion, as on many
other, Jesus required trust & confidence of those whose
requested of him miraculous favours. This probably was
done in order to bring their bonds into a state proper
for the reception of such favors. It would make them feel, that it was no common or careless act, but a religious act... that the hand of God was there, to be devoutly acknowledged. When this demand was made, we are told, that "the father of the child" cried out, and said with tears, "I believe, help thou my unbelieving heart." How natural was this expression of feeling of his bleeding heart? I believe, i.e. I have confidence in thee; but if I have not confidence in thee, from thy kindness overlook the deficiency, and heal my son. The distressed man was probably not much acquainted with the character and claims of Jesus. He knew that he wrought miracles, but he perhaps knew nothing else concerning him. This was sufficient to create no small degree of confidence, for he might well suppose that no man could do the things, why did, unless he were with him? Yet knowing nothing more, his faith might of course be very imperfect and uncertain; at least, it might be very loosely in his mind... It was in this state of half belief, half doubt, seeing no reason why he should not be convinced, but not being entirely convinced... having no faith, where was...
wanting probably only in an abiding efficacy upon his feelings. It was in this state of mind, perhaps, that he uttered, with the tears of agony of a distressed father, the striking exclamation, "L. Jehovah, help thy unbelief!"

This state of mind, into which the unhappy parent was thrown, may afford some useful reflections: for it is a condition not very uncommon. We ourselves are very often in a situation, where the language of our hearts might be, "L. we believe, help thy unbelief!"; a situation in which our faith is by no means extinguished, but, is wavering or weak. In such a situation, we do not believe firmly or efficaciously; but with our confidence in certain truths or principles, though it be not destroyed, is yet so shaken or paralyzed, as to amount to little better than no confidence at all. If we can say, that we believe, we are compelled to only join the prayer, that our unbelief may be helpeD. There is a great deal of this weakness of faith among mankind, even among the best. The belief in certain truths lies dormant in their minds, and when occasions occur which call for its exercise, they find it to be too feeble to be of any service. But that often there is a practical unbelief, where
there is a professed belief. They habit between two opinions, though they do not fall into scepticism, they lose the comfort of support of an energetic faith. This happens, in many cases, because the objects of belief are distant from us, the circumstances tend to weaken that belief are near; press upon the attention. The truths which call for the exercise of faith lie upon the surface; these things make us doubt of these truths, practically at least, are yet the centre, like the rushing of a subterranean stream, which flows on unobserved in secrecy, till it has carried away every remnant of a solid foundation, the least pressure will break down all that lies above it, which had hitherto concealed its progress. There are certainly some truths, too, to be supposed to lie here, where we should doubtless recollect, as an injury, yet we do not aware how many circumstances there are at work to make our hold upon these truths but the more than nominal. We think we are safeguarded in ourresses; but before we are apprised of it, the gates have been surrendered, the doors unbarred, we fall not into the hands of the enemy, escape but narrowly with danger. Let us consider a few of...
ways in which this weakness of faith of which I speak, manifests itself.

One of the manifestations of this state of mind is, that we often have but a faint or nominal confidence in the providence of God, in the wisdom and goodness of His government of the world. We suffer ourselves, practically at least, to take such imperfect and distorted views that we are easily disturbed in our faith, and fail to find God in the world in which He has created us. We believe, but there is an unbelief about us, which needs to be helped. Very few are hardy enough to deny that God exists and governs the world in wisdom and love. Whenever we undertake to reason upon the subject, we find the evidences of this truth written in beams of light and glory, in the frame of nature, the constitution of our minds, the nature and consequences of our actions, our moral condition, and discipline. From each of these avoice proclaims that God is good and wise... All this we know, all this we see, all this we acknowledge; if not from our own reflections, yet upon the strength of education and authority. But after all, there are circumstances, which scatter oversome minds a spirit approaching to scepticism, with regard
to these essential fundamental truths. There are many irregularities, abuses, oppressions, both in private and publick spheres. Weak and half-thinking minds dwell upon these, till they become confused, dissatisfied, and resolve the whole into a blind, impenetrable mystery; their faith becomes loose & faint. We see much oppression, tyranny, misrule, in the publick affairs of among the great ones of the earth. Ambition goes forth, with famished pestilence before her, devastation & the silence of death behind her. It seems like the pastime of men to destroy each other, & the earth drinks the blood of these, to whom it was made to give nourishment & support. Innocence & virtue are crushed because they are weak, & the law of the strongest is the governing law. And in humble scenes there is much to perplex such as take up with hearty & brief views. Affliction & pain of the sharpest kind are sometimes the lot of these, who by their virtues appear to deserve nothing but happiness, of the good man to meet as bitter disappointments, as the bad. Distress lightens sometimes upon the helpless, even infants that in the diseases & pains, as we are apt to think should be the portion of the vicious & hardened only. These, make all the hopes of society seem to rest, are cut down, & this
men, they seem to corrupt whatever they touch; permitted to live long. I mention these merely as 
examples of these circumstances, which are apt to darken and perplex the minds of some people, with regard to the 
ways of God. Why does a wise God, they say, permit such things? if 
then they look on these things till they become uneasy and 
hesitant. They do not, it is true, give up their faith in the 
providence of God; but it becomes so darkened and 
feeble, that it can serve no purposes of piety or consola-
tion. The evils and abuses, which bring them into this state of 
mind, are near them around them every day; while 
their faith in the wisdom and goodness of God's government 
is but an abstract conviction, a remembrance of education, 
that relates to them at a distance, is never fairly incor-
porated into their minds; of course, the framework of 
things goes ground upon the latter, leaves it at last but a very feeble hold. They believe in the government of 
providence of God; but at the same time their unbelief 
needs to be helped. Now the remedy for this disease, cer-
dition of mind, the strengthening of this feeble faith, is 
to remember that all this manner of viewing the sub-
ject is narrower false. It is making God altogether 
unch as one of ourselves. We gather together all the irregra-
havities & evils of the world into one group, I leave out of view the fact, that each one of these is but the occasional result of general laws, which are intended for the good of the whole; do in fact produce the good of the whole, & that after all there is a great deal more happiness than misery in the world, more virtue than vice.

For one instance of striking irregularity or acute suffering, every day will present you with a hundred instances of enjoyment, wise arrangement, & beneficent provision. It is a very important fact, one which we should always remember, that almost all the evil in the world proceeds from the abuse of our liberty of action.

This could not be taken away without destroying our moral agency, & taking from us all responsibility. The government of God is certainly answerable for very little, comparatively, of the unhappiness & confusion which we witness in this state of probation.

Another manifestation of this weakness of faith is with regard to the truth & worth of religion. On this subject too, there is frequently a kind of timid faith, no less timid scepticism, unhuman the mind, leaves it entirely destitute of the strength & excitement which it might derive from religious persuasions. In this respect too, we
We cannot easily renounce the belief
that there really is something in religion of great value
importance. We hear of its truth, its beauty, and perhaps
from childhood from parents, whom we have revered.
It has been pressed upon us by teachers, whose memory
is connected with every honorable emotion. Many of the
most associations of childhood are blended with its venera-
ble form. We have seen what strength it gives in the hour of
temptation, what consolation of firmness in time of afflic-
tion, how it adorns and guards our youth, and brightens the
evening of life. Some of us have had opportunity, it may
be, to study its evidences, the reasons of arguments on which
its claim to our reception is founded. I have found that
never was a fact in a court of justice proved by more
incontrovertible evidence, than are the facts upon which
our holy religion rests. From these and from various other
considerations, we cannot but be persuaded, that there
is truth in our religion, and that too of a valuable
truth. We even think it to be our duty to cherish an attach-
ment to it, to reverence its forms and institutions. And
yet, after all, there are some things, whose pleasant paths

in the divinity, efficacy of religion. We meet with much
that brings our minds to a stand. It makes us doubt, al-
et after all there is so much in religion, as there is said
to be. We read the Bible carelessly, without the proper
preparatory knowledge, I think we find much that is
objectionable. Nothing so proper views of the nature of the
connexion between the sacred book, religion itself, we
make the latter answerable for all that is contained in
the former. As we pass along in the world, we meet
with many circumstances, which tend to unpeace this
settled state of feeling. We hear religion frequently made
the jest of the profane, sneered at by those, who knew
just enough to go wrong, no more. We are amused with
the wit, of our reverence for what we once valued, dismissed.
Others pretend to reason on the subject, if we are
unable to answer their objections, we are confounded by it.
And what is worse, the pretended friends of religion do one
thing, frequently I may say, much, towards sinking it
in our esteem. Religion has been made the pretext for one
of the worst of human plans and purposes. Ambition,
avarice, selfishness, fraud, a host of black passions,
put on this mask, in order to promote their views, sanction
their abominable deeds. There are men at all times,
as there were in the times of our Saviour, who can make
long prayers, & the next hour, demand or oppress their
neighbours. We see some of these, who pretend to be religious
as passionate, hard hearted, & quarrelsome, as the worst of
men, or some, who make no pretensions of the kind, as be-
student, peaceable, upright, as the best. Now it certain-
ly is not wonderful, that all these things put together
should have some effect on minds, that are not accus-
tomed to discriminate, and are governed more by present
impressions than by general principles. And such is the
fact. They do have a strong effect on many minds, than
them into a sort of neutrality, if not, something worse, in
regard to religion. There are many people, who from various
causes still cleave to the faith, in which they have been edu-
cated, but in whose hearts religion has lost all its force
divorce from circumstances such as I have stated above. They
believe sincerely no doubt; yet there is something like a
lozing unbelief which needs to be helped. This state of
mind, it is true, is wholly wrong! It cannot be justifi-
ed, though it may be accounted for. Those, who have
fallen into this half doubting state, would do well to be
kept held in some considerations, which may bring them back
to firmness of faith, or prepare them to be benefitted by
religion to the Bible, what appears to them incongruous abroad, may appear so, because they have not the proper preparation of mind, or a correct manner of viewing the subject, that the broad grand principles of feelings, sentiments, and inculcated are plain enough, we need not trouble ourselves about anything more. And if religion is scoffed at, make a jest, let them tell me, what good thing has not been so too? He who is moved from his principles by ridicule, soon retain nothing that is good. And with regard to the base purposes, of religion has been the pretext for accomplishing. Let them remember that these purposes are wholly independent of the religion itself, or that in short, the religion cannot be made answerable for any of the abuses or it decidedly condemns. These and similar considerations may serve to help our unbelieving believers from the weakness, wavering into which we had been cast.

One other subject, moral faith is frequently feeble shall be mentioned. I mean, the reality, nature of a future life. This topic, to be sure, is intimately connected with the last; of the joke, but it is important of peculiar enough to deserve a distinct specification. What shall we after death, that unknown hand, from whose house we travelled returns, is a question, oh has exercised agitation.
the minds of men in all ages. We indeed have brighter
evidence on this subject, than former ages had. Whether
dull exist in a future state, so that there our deeds will
be recompensed to us, few would professedly deny. It is a
truth as has always been present to our hearts fromchild-
hood to the present time, done in as our minds have for
dead, much earnestly. It is written in letters of light on
the pages of the N. T., to teach and prove it was the great ob-
ject, for whom Saviour died. We have probably felt
the comfort of this doctrine, when we have been called The
past from friends. The hope, that we should meet them again
in better scenes of action, enjoyment, has taken from the bed
of death much of its terrors, and of its gloom. It is a doctrine,
not in some shape or other has been believed in every nation
day, from the remotest antiquity, amidst the deepest
ignorance and errors. For these and other reasons, we cleave to it
would not be though to entertain a doubt of its truth
value. Yet there are moments, perhaps, when, though
we do not renounce our belief in a future life, we have
doubts of uncertainties, as bring our faith to a sort of chills
any weakening and at of its efficacy. We believe, but
would pain have the shadows of darkness with rest upon
belief taken off; we would have our unbelief belied.
There is such a thick cloud hang over that awful passage.
through the valley of the shadow of death: the tomb seems so suddenly to close its heavy portals, as forbid all investigation of what lies beyond it. That our spirits sometimes have in contemplation over the gulf, till they are dizzy, their vision becomes faint, or feeble. Decay or wasting seem to be the fate of man; but we see no renovation, renewal. Our experience has told us of one, who ever returned from the grave to inform us of what he found beyond it. One generation, it is true, succeeds another; the race is ever continued, renewed; but of the individuals who pass through the gates of death, we see but know no more. These similar thoughts, perhaps, affect us deeply: we almost exclaim like Job: "If a man die, shall he live again?" man giveth up the ghost, but where is he? Thus, it may be, a feeling of uncertainty comes over our faith, it leaves the mind depressed, wearied, earnestly asking to have its unbelief helped. This is a very dangerous state of mind; because if it does not take from us our faith, it takes from us the strength of its blessed consolations and hopes. It is a disease to which remedy should be vigorously applied. Think for a moment, that we have all evidence for the reality of the future life, and the nature of the case will admit evidence too, in other things much more than satisfies us. We may well ask with St. Paul, "Why should
it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Is there any thing more wonderful in our passing into another mode of being, after we have left this, than there was originally in our being brought into existence at all? And think you that all the powers and faculties, capable as they are of endless improvement, are to be extinguished forever, after having been sacri
ted there in a state of imperfection for a few days? Are beings like us created merely to be a harvest for the grave? Man plants the tree, that every year comes forth in renewed beauty; shall man himself die forever? He can produce effects that will last as long as the ages of time; shall he himself pass into annihilation, after this brief existence? I believe every heart must answer—no, it cannot be. And when we consider that every evidence for the yes is an additional evidence for a future life, because the great object of the yes was to bring life immortal
ty to light, we shall find, that the doubts which theorists hold are little better than the dreams of the sick man, baseless, visionary. Let us then apply these remedies to hell; our unbelief, don't desert the dearest truth, as H. thus revealed to man.

These, sir, are but a few specimens of that half-believing, half-doubting state of mind, wh. seemed to be
indicated in the language of the distressed parent in the text... The catalogue of instances might be enlarged, but I have not time... The state of mind, as I have described, certainly one, from which we should use every means to secure ourselves; for sometimes its effects are as bad, as those of spendthrift unbelief... A faith that may be worth as little for any useful purpose, as none at all; so a necessarily weakened faith may be of as little practical value as no faith at all. Let us use with earnestness all the means of strengthening out faith in the wisdom, goodness, and government, in the worth of our blessed religion, in the reality of a future life: of rewards and punishments, so that we shall achieve a faith which will not fail us in time of need... when the hour of trial of distress comes on, we shall find ourselves lifted above all painful doubts, and compelled, like the father of the child in our text, in the weakness of faith, to cry out of despair with tears, 'Lord, believe, help them our unbelief.'

March 1823.

At home, March 16, 1823 - afternoon.
At Mrs. Aikin's, May 4, 1823 - afternoon.
At Dr. Porter's, Aug. 14, 1824 - forenoon.
At Mrs. Williams', Aug. 3, 1824 - forenoon.
At Mr. Parkman's (Boston) Nov. 14, 1824 - forenoon.
At Mrs. Garnett's (C. Port) Jan. 16, 1825 - forenoon.
At Dr. Jernell's, March 24, 1825 - forenoon.