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set down. Least of all do we agree with their very weak position on the topic of the League of Nations. On the whole, however, theirs is a book which will be read and pondered with great profit.

One of their points is this. We have taken John the Baptist far too readily at his own modest estimate of himself. He is so overshadowed by Jesus that we have not paid sufficient heed to what he preached. If the question were suddenly sprung on us, What, according to our records, was John's message? it is doubtful how far our answer would do justice to John. We have grown so accustomed to say that John just prepared the way for Jesus. That is quite true; but what kind of a way did John prepare?

In *Jesus Christ and the World of To-day* it is suggested, and the suggestion comes with a thrill like that of a new discovery, that John's call to repent was not only to individuals but to the nation. Further, that questions on social problems were proposed to him, and he answered clearly and definitely.

The really important point, however, is that Jesus in the most public and unambiguous way identified Himself with the movement initiated by John—a movement which had at the very heart of it a call to national or social righteousness and repentance. That identification of Himself with the cause advocated by John is a large part, at least, of the significance of Jesus' much discussed act when He insisted on receiving baptism at the hands of John.

Between Jesus and John, indeed, there were strong contrasts. 'John's preaching was concerned with external righteousness. Jesus, who believed that motives were more important than acts, might well have hesitated before joining a party which did not fully express His own purposes. John and his party seem to have been outside the organized religion of Judaism. Their way of life was so different from the way of Jesus that the methods were sometimes contrasted. Yet Jesus decided to associate Himself with a group of people who were removing some of the obstacles in the way of His Kingdom.'

Fact and Interpretation.

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Much of the perplexity created for reverent minds by certain Biblical statements is due to the failure to distinguish clearly between fact and interpretation. If I say, 'He uttered these blasphemous words, and immediately he fell down dead,' I am making a simple historical statement. It is a fact that he uttered the blasphemy, it is a fact that he died immediately afterwards: the whole statement remains within the realm of demonstrable fact. But if I say, 'He uttered these blasphemous words, and immediately God smote him dead,' I am not making a strictly historical statement. I have passed beyond the realm of fact into the realm of interpretation, I have by implication expressed a theory of the moral universe, I have connected the death with the blasphemy and ascribed it to the punitive intervention of God. But the truth of this explanation of the man's death can never be demonstrable in the sense that the fact of his death is demonstrable: the one is open to challenge as the other is not. To grasp this distinction clearly is to have the key to many a Biblical riddle.

Take, for example, the well-known story of David's numbering of the people. In 2 S 24[1] it begins thus: 'Again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, saying, Go, number Israel and Judah.' Is this fact or interpretation? In form, of course, it is a statement of fact; but a moment's reflexion will show that it is in reality an interpretation. The historical fact underlying the statement is that David took a census of the people,

That was a fact capable of observation, but no amount of observation would have enabled the historian to detect that David was prompted to this act by God. That is really a theory of the origin of the act. And if it be urged that this, too, is a fact, that God did indeed prompt this act of David, and that it is just in such a statement as this that we are to look for the inspiration of the writer, who was divinely empowered to represent the matter thus, the simple and sufficient answer is that in 1 Ch 21^1 another and a very different explanation is offered: there '*Satan* stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.' These two conflicting statements cannot both be correct; but the conflict is in the interpretation of the fact, not in the facts themselves. And when we know how the divergence comes about, the difficulty automatically disappears. The statement in Chronicles, which is hundreds of years later than the statement in Samuel, is really a criticism of it, and a proof that the Chronicler regarded it as unsatisfactory. The census was believed to be a sin (2 S 24^{10}), which was punished by the pestilence which followed it. To the older writer God was the Author of all things, evil as well as good, and therefore the instigator of the sinful census; to the later writer, who lived when the convenient belief in Satan had developed, this was intolerable, and he extricated himself from the dilemma inherent in the older statement by ascribing the act to the prompting of Satan. A modern historian would make no use of either interpretation: he would simply seize upon the fact of the census, which he would claim the right to account for in his own way, as the ancient historians had accounted for it in their diametrically opposite ways. He would endeavour to discover the motive which prompted David to act as he did; he would ask whether it was a love of display, or a desire to secure the better organization of his kingdom for military purposes, or to facilitate the imposition of taxation, or to gain some other end. This recognition of the statements in Samuel and Chronicles as interpretations rather than statements of fact is of far-reaching importance. It obliges us to concentrate upon the fact of the census as the only thing of historical value, it delivers us from all concern about the so-called contradictions, it reveals the religious temper of both the older and the later historians, it registers the advance that the intervening centuries had brought in Hebrew theological reflexion, and it shows how critical and free was the attitude of later writers to the older records of the faith.

Instances of this kind abound, where an innocent looking statement really combines a historical fact with a religious interpretation. The modern historian will welcome the fact, if it can substantiate itself as fact; the interpretation he will, like the Chronicler, consider himself free to challenge. The statement, for example, in Nu 21^6, that 'Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people,' contains a historical fact and a religious judgment—the fact that the people met with fiery serpents in the course of their wilderness wanderings, and the judgment that these were sent by God. The popular murmurs, heard in the previous verse, against Moses and God, were followed by a plague of serpents: the ancient historian connects these facts as sin and divinely ordained penalty. Only a man who took a profoundly religious view of all experience could have written such a sentence as that quoted; but it is necessary to distinguish between the fact it records and the faith it reflects. The faith, however beautiful and suggestive, may be open to challenge and reinterpretation in view of a profounder experience of the mysterious ways of God. Remembering our Lord's searching words in reference to the man born blind, 'Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him' (Jn 9^3), we dare not too glibly interpret the sorrowful facts of life.

A striking illustration of the importance of this distinction may be found in the story of the three years' famine in the time of David. The king, we are told, 'sought the face of Jehovah'—the Hebrew way of saying, 'consulted the priestly oracle.' 'And Jehovah said, Upon Saul and upon his house rests blood, because he slew the Gibeonites' (2 S 21^1). Questions of the most perplexing kind are raised by these simple statements.[1] It would never have occurred to any one trained to a modern view of the world to connect a persistent famine with a treacherous massacre, perpetrated years before by the reigning king, any more than it would occur to him to connect the return of the rain with the official execution of seven of the dead man's descendants in expiation of his crime. It is hardly by a barbarity like this

[1] This incident is fully discussed in my *Interest of the Bible* (Hodder & Stoughton), pp. 69–91.

that the Lord of all the worlds is moved to show His pity for a famine-stricken people. It is as plain as day that the men who wrought such deeds and wrote such tales were far from being competent interpreters of the ways of God. We have not so learned Christ. The famine we accept as a historical fact, and the crime of Saul against the Gibeonites, and the judicial murder of his unhappy sons and grandsons: but in a passage replete with such obviously inadequate views of God, we are surely not bound to interpret the famine as those ancient men did, any more than the Chronicler felt bound by his predecessor's statement to believe that Jehovah prompted David to number the people.

In the career of Moses nothing is more certain than that he never set foot upon the soil of Canaan (Dt 34). To the secular historian that would offer no problem; it would be sufficiently explained by the circumstances. But that is not enough for the Hebrew historian. The pathetic fact that he died within sight of the promised land without reaching it is treated as a penalty; and some adequate sin has to be discovered for a fate so sorrowful. Several gallant attempts were made. One writer ascribes it to unbelief on the part of Moses (Nu 20^{8-12}), another to rebellion (27^{14}), another to disobedience on the part of *the people* (Dt 1^{37} 3^{26} 4^{21}). What we have to remember is that all these statements are only attempts to explain an admitted fact, and they can be nothing more. They do great honour to the religious temper of the historians, who took sin seriously, and rightly regarded it as the explanation of much that happens in this world of ours. But they stand within the region of conjecture and interpretation, not of observed and demonstrable fact.

The latter end of Moses exercised the Hebrew imagination in other ways. Out of the simple fact that the place of his burial was unknown to later generations, it drew the impressive and wonderful conclusion that he had enjoyed the supreme honour of being buried by none other than Jehovah Himself. It is a sublime interpretation. What more fitting close can be imagined to the life of the man who had created the Hebrew nation by his revelation to it of the will of God, than that he should have been laid to rest by the God whom, through good and evil report, he had served with all the energy and fidelity of his incomparable genius? A sublime interpretation truly, but an interpretation. The religious interpretation and the historic fact lie side by side in the words, 'Jehovah buried him in the valley, but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day' (Dt 34^{6}).

Another case where interpretation and fact are juxtaposed occurs in the story of Uzzah; the man who put forth his hand to steady the ark when the oxen stumbled. The sequel reads, 'The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there; and there he died by the ark of God' (2 S 6^{7}). Of these three clauses it is obvious that the only *historical* statement is the third: the other two are really inferences from the fact that Uzzah died after taking hold of the ark. No one could really *know* that Jehovah was angry with him: this is obviously an inference—albeit, to the ancient Hebrew mind, an inevitable one—from the fact that his death followed immediately upon his contact with the ark. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*: the facile theodicy of that early time could come to no other conclusion. But to those to whom the narrative, with its seemingly capricious and unreasonable deity, has been a stumbling-block, it is surely a relief to be able to distinguish between the fact of the man's death, which is certain, and the interpretation—that God was angry and smote him—which is open to challenge. The writer and his contemporaries sincerely believed that Jehovah resented this familiarity, however well-intentioned, with the sacred ark; but we are not bound to share their view either of God or of the ark. Indeed we are bound not to share it, because Jeremiah, to say nothing of Jesus, has taught us better. In answer to those who in his time were deploring the loss of the ark, Jeremiah declared that, so far from its being, as the early Hebrews believed, the guarantee of God's presence (1 S 4), true religion could dispense with it altogether. The time was coming, he declared, when no one would give it a thought, its absence would never be noticed (Jer 3^{16}). In view of a mature utterance like this, we need not, nay, we cannot, believe that Uzzah was struck dead by an angry God. Such an interpretation—for it can be no more—is inconsistent with the Christian conception of God; indeed it would be an anachronism to expect such a conception in so rude and early an age: consequently we are free to interpret Uzzah's death as best we can. 'Whether,' says Prof. W. F. Badè,[1] 'the realization that he had

[1] *The Old Testament in the Light of To-day* (Houghton Mifflin Co.), p. 66.

violated a taboo induced heart-failure or a stroke of apoplexy, it is impossible to tell. In any case, sudden death overtook him, and this fact required an explanation.' But for the explanation we cannot rise above conjecture.

In such a case our search is for secondary causes, but the Hebrew simplified his problem by referring everything to the great First Cause. This habit of mind is reflected also from the pages of the New Testament, and is admirably illustrated by the story, told in Jn 5^{1-9}, of the man who lay at the pool Bethesda (or Bethzatha). The waters of that pool, we are told in v.[7], were 'troubled' from time to time. The phrase describes an intermittent flow of the water, which was probably due to a natural syphonic spring. The original story was not concerned to explain the 'troubling' of the water. It simply ran, 'In these (porches) lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered (v.[3]). And a certain man was there, who had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity' (v.[5]). So the Revised Version. But between these two verses appear in the Authorized Version the following words: 'waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel [1] went down at a certain season [2] into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.' So certain is it that these words, absent as they are from all but one of the best manuscripts, form no part of the original text, that the Revised Version omits them and relegates them to the margin. The omitted words, says the late Professor Sanday, are 'certainly spurious,' 'an insertion which would otherwise be a strange exception to the general sobriety of the canonical Gospels.' But it is a most significant insertion, which admirably shows how the Hebrew religious mind worked; and the fact that it is an unmistakable insertion proves conclusively—what is, on the face of it, plain enough—that we have here to do with an interpretation, not with a historical fact.

In the story of the fate of Herod Agrippa I. the New Testament furnishes an illustration of historical fact and religious interpretation lying side by side. Arrayed in royal apparel and seated upon his throne of judgment, Herod, we are told, delivered an oration before a deputation from Tyre and Sidon, whereupon the people shouted, 'It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.' 'And immediately *an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory*; and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost' (Ac 12^{23}). The italicized words are obviously a religious interpretation of Herod's painful end; and the case is exactly parallel in form to the Old Testament account of Uzzah's death, though here the religious judgment is more profound.

One of the most striking instances of conflicting interpretations occurs in the story of the unhappy Saul. The undoubted fact is the breach between him and Samuel. Saul is 'rejected': rejected ultimately by the facts, for it is not in his descendants but in David and in his descendants that the royal line is continued; rejected also by Samuel; and rejected—Samuel tells him—by Jehovah. 'Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, *he also hath rejected thee* from being king' (1 S 15^{23}). But this is a religious judgment, and it is motived by two very different stories. In the one, Saul's offence is that he did not fully carry out the atrocious command of Samuel to execute the Amalekites utterly (1 S $15^{3.\ 9}$); in the other, it is that he offered sacrifice without waiting for Samuel (13^{7b-15a}). The inadequacy, not to say the injustice, of the latter explanation, however, is obvious, as Saul had, in point of fact, waited for the full seven days appointed by Samuel (1 S 10^{8} 13^{8}); and we begin to perceive that various minds, unfriendly to Saul, are at work to explain the ultimate fact that his kingdom did not 'continue' (13^{14}). The true explanation of this failure would carry us into historical and psychological problems involving a discussion, on the one hand, of the very difficult and almost insuperable task that lay before Saul, and, on the other, of his character and his predisposition to melancholy. A modern historian, by ignoring the religious judgments, and by taking into account Saul's psychological and historical handicaps, could pass a much more lenient judgment upon him.

The tendency to impose a religious interpretation upon a secular fact is well illustrated by the story of Uzziah's leprosy. The earlier statement in the Book of Kings does no more than mention the fact, to which it gives a religious setting: '*Jehovah smote the king*, and he was a leper to the day of his death' (2 K 15^{5}). The Chronicler, however, writing four or five hundred years later,

[1] RV, 'an angel of the Lord.'

[2] RVm, more correctly, 'at certain seasons.'

supplements the record of Uzziah's reign in Kings by a circumstantial account of his arrogant invasion of the priestly prerogative by offering incense; and he characteristically regards his leprosy as the divine penalty for this offence. 'Uzziah had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy rose in his forehead'—silently, suddenly, mysteriously, like the sun in the morning: 'Jehovah had smitten him' (2 Ch $26^{19f.}$). Here again is an interpretation which, as manifestly coloured by the priestly interests of the writer, is open to challenge. We can be vastly more certain of the fact of Uzziah's leprosy than of this explanation of it. Whether it was really due to the royal invasion of the priestly rights—an explanation which seems inadequate and external—there is no possible means of determining. The aggression and the leprosy, we may well believe, are both facts: the Chronicler connects them in such a way as to illustrate his theory of the moral government of the world, that sin is speedily punished by disaster. That is all that can be said.

Perhaps the most instructive illustration of the point under discussion is afforded by the story of Achan in Joshua 7. After her easy triumph at Jericho, Israel sustained at Ai a defeat as severe as it was unexpected. The disheartened Joshua brought the matter before Jehovah in a prayer of remonstrance, and received for answer the explanation that the defeat was due to undetected sin. Some one, moved by covetousness, had appropriated part of the spoil, which should have been reserved exclusively for Jehovah and deposited in His treasury (Jos 6^{19}). 'That is why the Israelites cannot stand before their enemies, but turn their backs before them' (7^{12}); and there can be no victory till the culprit is removed by death. At length he is discovered by means of the lot and executed, and victory falls to Israel's arms once more.

A modern mind is not readily satisfied with this explanation of Israel's defeat. We are well aware how demoralizing the spirit of loot can be in time of war, especially if it is widespread, and how unreliable in fight soldiers would become who were deliberately falling below their own traditions and ideals, as Achan, by his secrecy, was plainly falling below his. Still, after reading as much into it as we can, the explanation that the defeat of Israel was due to the offence of Achan does not carry complete conviction to our minds, for there is no real inner connexion between the two. The narrative itself, however, furnishes an adequate explanation. Here are the significant words: 'Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, saying, Go up and spy out the land; and the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said unto him, Let not all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; make not all the people to toil thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men; and they fled before the men of Ai' (7^{2-4}). Israel's easy victory at Jericho had tempted them to underestimate the enemy's power of resistance. They sent up too few men and were defeated. But the bitter lesson was taken to heart. The next assault, which was crowned with victory (ch. 8), was conducted with more troops and managed with greater strategy. The ancient historian was right in attributing Israel's defeat to sin; but a modern historian would be inclined to say that the sin lay in underestimating the enemy—a folly which is only another phase of conceit. Their success at Jericho had filled them with pride, they made inadequate preparations for the next assault, and sustained the defeat that their arrogance deserved. Here we are fortunate, as we seldom are in Biblical narratives, to possess a clear secular explanation of the facts. The interest of the Biblical historians lies elsewhere. Their aim is to interpret the facts they record in the light of what they believe to be the purpose of God, to see them *sub specie æternitatis*, to bring their readers through the portals of fact into the presence of God. 'To such a degree,' says Bengel on Acts 12^{23}, contrasting the methods of Luke and Josephus—'to such a degree do divine and human histories differ.'