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LITTLE BOOKS ON THE DEVOUT LIFE

VI

THE SOUL'S WRESTLE  
WITH DOUBT

# THE SOUL'S WRESTLE WITH DOUBT

BY

F. B. MEYER, B.A.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES

London: Thomas Law, Memorial Hall, E.C.

MCMV

"O LIVING Will that shall endure,  
When all that seems shall suffer shock,  
Rise in the Spiritual Rock,  
Flow through our deeds, and make them pure.

That we may lift from out the dust,  
A Voice as unto Him that hears,  
A Cry above the conquered years,  
To one that with us works, and trust,

With faith that comes of self-control,  
The Truths that never can be proved,  
Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul to soul."

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# I

## FAITH IN GENERAL

FAITH is part of the original endowment of every human soul. The guileless faith of children is proverbial. All the fabric of human life rests on the confidence we have in each other's personalities and statements. Commercial life is affected by the slightest suggestion that the financial condition of a firm, a bank, or a nation are not worthy of credit. We exercise faith every time we accept a cheque with its promise to pay.

\* \* \*

What the eye is to the face, faith is to the soul—*it receives*. Some eyes are naturally stronger, brighter, more beautiful than others, and are more capable of being trained to distinguish colours and objects, but the optic orb is the common heritage of the human race ; so you may have more or less power of faith, but as certain as you are a human



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## 2 The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt

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soul, you have the germ of faith somewhere in your constitution. It may be hidden under much superincumbent rubbish, like an ancient chalybeate spring I know in Hampstead. It may resemble a little runnel of water choked with weeds. It may be as a spark in the slowly smouldering flax, which sadly needs to be gently fanned into a flame. But it is undoubtedly in you, even as it was in doubting Thomas. Of course you can, if you choose, do what Hubert was charged to do for the young princes in the Tower, but such a deed is not thinkable of you; and even if you had gone so far, Christ can renew blinded eyes and create new orbs of clay.

\* \* \*

*Faith consists of five different phases, or steps.*

(1) Faith accepts as true some statement about a person or thing which we cannot verify for ourselves, but we think that the information given is trustworthy. "By faith we believe that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear" (Heb. xi. 3).

(2) Not only have we faith in certain specific statements, which have been made about a person, system, trading company, bank, or corporation; but, after careful consideration of their course and policy, we

arrive at a certain estimate of their general character and policy. We account them as worthy of confidence: we believe that their statements may be implicitly trusted. Though that public man should be placed in circumstances of exceptional trial, we are quite sure that he will never run back on his record. If that great national party is put in office, though we cannot foresee the problems it may be called upon to solve, we are prepared to believe that it will always act in the interests of righteousness and peace.

(3) We not only believe in a person, or persons generally, but we entrust our personal and private concerns into their care; sure not only of their general integrity, but that they will do as well for us as we could do for ourselves, and better.

(4) We accept as true the assurances of those to whom we have committed our interests. If they assure us that they have made every provision, and that there is no cause for alarm, we lay our heads at night to sleep on soft pillows.

(5) Such faith becomes ultimately a close bond of affinity and union with some other nature, whom once we only admired from a distance, to whom we have committed our interests, but with whom every dealing in the past

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## 4 The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt

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has been straightforward and friendly. Heart opens to heart. We receive and communicate influences of personal inspiration and soul-magnetism, that greatly add to the joy and efficiency of life. Here faith becomes *trust*.

\* \* \*

You have become aware that all society is talking of some individual, and you accept the many statements made of his wisdom and goodness; presently you are possessed with the same spirit of admiration and enthusiasm; though worshipping at a distance you feel that he is the elect soul of the age; next you find yourself in his presence, asking him to assume the directorship of your life, to train you for some great object, and to make the most of your poor powers; from that moment you repose absolute confidence in his slightest word, and accept it as final; but finally heart has leapt to heart, and his great nature pours itself through the warm channels of your being—there is affinity. Such are the phases of the life of faith.

## II

### *RELIGIOUS FAITH*

THIS does not differ from faith as we have already discussed it, except that its objects are specially and exclusively those which we class as religious.

\* \* \*

Religious faith is ordinary faith directed towards God, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute.

\* \* \*

There is a natural affinity between faith and these transcendent objects in all child-like, simple, transparent, and guileless souls. We expect children to have visions of angels. "Heaven lies around us in our infancy." I should suppose that if the malign influences of heredity could somehow be eliminated, all souls would spend their early years in the vision of God, just as children's eyes fill with

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## 6 The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt

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awe as they watch sunrise, sunset, the first stars of night, or the first daisies of spring.

\* \* \*

(1) We hear statements about Christ—statements made by those we love; statements made by those who speak from their own experience of what He can be and do for the soul; statements which, though they surpass our thoughts, are not inconsistent with—nay, they coincide with—our highest intuitions and ideals. We accept these statements as true. If we take trouble to investigate we find them corroborated by historical records of indisputable accuracy; and specially by the inimitable description given of His character by the four Evangelists.

(2) We form the highest estimate possible of Christ. In our soul's secret place we enshrine and bow before Him. We recognise Him as Son of God, the Word Incarnate, the Saviour of men, the Lord of Love, the King of the Ages.

(3) We commit to Him the sin and shame of our past for forgiveness and cleansing; the trials and temptations of the present; the keeping of our souls for all the future.

(4) We believe that He is absolutely trustworthy. He promised to take all the burdens that the weary and heavy-laden

would cast on Him, and when we transfer all our sins, sorrows, anxieties, perplexities, and difficulties to His hands, we are certain that He accepts them and undertakes. He promised that He would forgive all our sins and treat us as though we had never sinned ; that He would cleanse us from the love and power of sin ; that He would turn our darkest night into day, and we are absolutely sure that He cannot fail. He is Yea and Amen to the Divine promises. Immediately we realise that the whole burden is now on His shoulders, the peace that passes understanding descends to the door of our heart.

(5) The floodgates are opened then, and within our innermost being arises a fountain of eternal love, fed from Himself ; we yield ourselves to Him for the execution of His purposes and for strengthening by His power. We abide in Him and He in us ; and we can do all things in Him who strengthens us.

\* \* \*

Really saving faith, therefore, is not to believe about Him, as (1) and (2) ; but to hand over all to Him as in (3). Peace issues from (4) ; whilst success in Christian service depends specially on (5).

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## 8 The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt

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We must never forget this distinction between what we may describe popularly as *the faith of the head*, which has no life, and *the faith of the heart*, which contains the life germ, as a grain of mustard seed. Has your faith life in its heart? It does not at all matter whether it is as small as the tiniest grain of the vegetable world ; the question is, Is the spark of eternal life burning as a torch within ?

\* \* \*

*How may we know that our faith is of the right kind?* The one answer to that question is to ask another, "What is the object of your faith?" ALL FAITH IS RIGHT WHICH HAS THE RIGHT OBJECT.

\* \* \*

*What, then, is the right object of faith?* *The Creed?* No! *The Bible?* No! *The Church?* No! *The Sacraments?* No! CHRIST, only CHRIST is the right object of faith.

*Not doctrines about Christ*, but He of whom they tell us. *Not the cross on which He died*, but the Lamb of God, Who died on it. *Not the Church*, but the Head of the Church. *Not the Sacraments*, but He to Whom they point. *Not the Bible*—you may hold its inspiration in every sentence and be lost—but

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the Shechinah which irradiates that holy shrine.

Does your desire go out towards Christ? He died, He rose, He lives, He is beside you. Does your heart go out towards Him as the flowers turn sunwards? Are the inner tides swelling up towards Him, though dark shadows still brood upon the face of the waters? Do you choose, at any cost, this union with the Bridegroom of souls? Then be comforted, your faith is of the right quality, and the good part can never be taken away.

*Faith is the capacity of the soul for God.* (John i.). The land-wind rushes towards the ocean, to cast itself in an ecstasy of enjoyment upon its broad expanse. And as it leaves the shore it strikes equally on the long reef of rocks, beneath which the fishing boats are sheltering and on their bellying brown sails, which quiver and fill. The rock remains stationary on the site which it has occupied for millenniums, while the boats are soon far out to sea—black specks on the horizon. Why? Because they possess, what the rock lacks, the capacity for appropriating the energy of the wind. Faith is the sail that flaps at the mast waiting to be filled by the blessed energy of the Divine



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## 10 The Soul's Wrestle with Doubt

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Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.

\* \* \*

Take a tiny seed, in the heart of which is the germ of life ; a spark placed in the tiny lantern by the Author of life ; and in the same hand-palm place a flake of flint ; then plant them together in the rich loamy soil of Mother Earth. The flint will remain where you placed it, giving no sign of movement or fructification, whilst the seed will yield the shoot and stalk, flower and fruit, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. Why? Because the flint has no power to unite itself with the generous energies of the soil ; whilst the seed can throw open its minute microscopic doorway to welcome to its heart all that Mother Earth has to give. The golden grain is the resultant of the union between seed and soil ; between the capacity of the seed to receive and the power of the earth to give. So by faith a junction is effected between our emptiness and His all-sufficiency, and they issue in benediction to the world.

\* \* \*

God's all-sufficiency surrounds us like an ocean or atmosphere of light. On myriads it falls without eliciting any recognition or response. Such persons resemble possible

houses situated on the shores of the Mediterranean facing south ; the radiant light falls in sheets of exquisite and exhilarating beauty ; but every window is closely shuttered, so that no ray can penetrate, and in the blackness of the inner darkness loathsome things breed. But happy are they who have learnt the art of throwing every aperture wide open to God. "They that *receive* the abundance of grace shall reign in life."

### III

#### *TRUE FAITH MAY COEXIST WITH MUCH THAT IS UNDESIRABLE*

**T**HIS must be so in the early stages of our experience. This is expressly taught us in the carefully grouped miracles which Matthew records immediately after the Great Discourse (Matt. ix.).

\* \* \*

*True faith may coexist with much ignorance and selfishness.*

It was so in the case of the woman with the issue of blood. She saw the mighty Miracle-worker on His way to the house of the rich ruler ; and felt that there was little likelihood of her succeeding in attracting His attention, if she were to make her appeal to His face ; but she thought that she might obtain what she needed by stealth. She had no idea that our Lord's love, or willingness to help, or power, had anything to do with the

blessing she craved. And when it was obtained, and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague, she thought of stealing away without one word of grateful recognition or thanks. Jesus, to her, was little more than a reservoir or well of water in the midst of a thirsty city, to which the inhabitants come with their empty pitchers, and go away with their ample supplies; but they never think of the source as sentient, or stay to thank it, or indulge feelings of special gratitude to those who may have instituted it long years before.

But amid all these crude and erroneous conceptions, like a spark of fire in the midst of an accumulated heap of rubbish, there was a very true faith, to whose mute appeal our Lord gave an instantaneous reply; and forthwith He set Himself to correct her mistakes and inform her mind and conscience more adequately.

He healed her by sending forth a pulse of His own mighty life, which swept through the avenues of her wasted and exhausted nature, carrying vigour and vitality everywhere. Then, since she did not come forward to acknowledge the benefit that she had received, He arrested His steps, looked around the crowd, and waited until she came before

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Him, threw herself at His feet, and declared all the truth. It was a great ordeal to face those many eyes; but she had already received His strength, which was now called into requisition; and it was necessary for her well-being that she should become a confessor of the great benefit conferred upon her. Nothing could have been worse than to have permitted her to go quietly off in the crowd without a thankful recognition of His saving grace. In addition, He laid stress upon the fact that her faith had saved her. It was not her touch which had wrought her cure; there was no real connection between the hem of His garment and her healing. It was the faith that lay behind the act which secured the instant response. Moreover, how tenderly He addressed her, as He bade her be of good cheer, and called her "daughter!"

It is thus that He addresses those who seem to suppose that salvation depends upon some external means of grace. It is not so. The true means of contact between the sinner and the Saviour is the touch of the spirit by faith; and even faith is nothing in itself; it only heals us by bringing us into union with Him in whom all health dwells, as water in its native spring.

Many Christians make the same mistake

as this woman—they attach importance to rites, ordinances, sacraments, outward connection with some Christian Church, the touch or assurance of some priest. This mistake is always present, and especially in lands where the visible Church has been for years before the minds of the people. Men *will* cling to the hem of the garment instead of to the heart of its wearer; they *will* suppose that the Divine grace can only come through certain specified channels. Let us not un-Christianise such; there is no doubt that they do actually obtain help. Our Lord suits Himself to demands which are beclouded by much ignorance of Himself and His way of healing. But many a poor soul, grasping a crucifix, really embraces Him who was crucified, and through the wreathing smoke of the altar the penitent beholds the face of the Saviour. It is good to feel that amid the evil superstitions that through the dark ages covered Europe there were many penitents in monasteries and convents, in the halls of the noble, and the cottages of the poor, that truly found Christ, and were saved by Him, as we hope to be. To these our Lord has said long ere this: "Be of good cheer, your faith has saved you." He has graciously corrected the mistakes which threatened to

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undo the benefit they had received, so that in His light they now see light, and realise that their faith has saved them.

\* \* \*

*True faith may falter on the brink of great blessing.*

Thus it was with Jairus. When the messengers came from his house to say that it was useless to trouble Jesus further because his child's life had flickered out, it seemed as though he could not dare to hope that Christ would raise even from the dead, and therefore the Lord graciously bade him still believe. If only he would trust Him, the little channel of communion between them would be kept open, and through its narrow orifice the healing energy would raise even the dead. "Only believe," the Master said, "everything depends upon your not letting go your faith." Let us not look on the face of the child over which the death pallor has cast its ashen hue. Let us not think of the impossibility of summoning creature aid. But look to Him, rest in Him, believe in Him.

It would seem as though our Lord's behaviour in the ruler's house was intended to strengthen his faltering confidence. As they entered they were encountered by the doleful

music and shrill outcry of the Eastern mourners. These broke in upon the solemnity of death, and were in striking contrast with the majestic presence of the Life-giver, besides greatly interfering with the calm quiet of heart in which faith would most likely be nurtured. The noisy crowd were therefore sent forth with startling curtness. Was it not that our Lord desired to rebuke all hollow and tumultuous scenes, where unreality held riot, especially in the solemn presence of death? And did He not imply that the calm attitude of soul which is divested of the tumult of outward expression is the condition most conducive to faith? Next, He spoke of the child's death as sleep—not that He denied that she was dead, but that He desired it to be understood that death was not more to be dreaded than sleep, and that He could as easily awake her from the one as her mother from the other. He wanted to make as light as possible of death, that Jairus's faith might be encouraged; and the same end was served by the presence of Peter, James, and John, who had so often witnessed His mighty works that they would certainly expect Him to raise her, and their calm, helpful expectancy would do much to quicken the faith of the almost despairing parents.



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It is so that Christ comes to us. He longs for nothing so much as to quicken our faith. When it gives signs of faltering, have you not often felt His touch upon your hand, and heard His voice saying, Only believe? Have you not realised that He was minimising the difficulties by which you were confronted, as when He compared death to sleep? Has it not been your experience that in some moment of keen agony wise and true friends have been thrown in your way, who have nerved you to endure and believe? Sometimes it has been the voice of a little child remonstrating with your doubt, sometimes a leaf out of a biography, sometimes a letter written from some distant land, but timed to arrive in the darkest hour of your life! Your Lord knows "that all things are possible to him that believeth," and therefore lends His strength to keep your feet upon the track which they find so difficult, and which is so often veiled in the gloom.

Let me urge you not to look at difficulty, but at Him; not to look down, but up; not to look upon the dead face of the child, but upon Him who stands radiant with life and glory beside her. What can He not do? For what emergency is He not sufficient? All power is His. "Behold," He says, "I am He

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that liveth and was dead : behold, I am alive for evermore."

\* \* \*

*True faith may coexist with a very slender creed.*

Leaving the house of Jairus, our Lord went forth into the highway, to be there accosted by two blind men. At first He took no notice of their outcry, but went into a house, where they followed Him. Note how sturdily persevering they were—perhaps, because begging was their trade, and they were used to overcome refusals by their persistency. They recognised that Jesus was the Son of David, but that was all. They may often have spoken together of the old words which told them that Messiah would open blind eyes ; and holding Him to be such, they asked Him to perform a miracle of healing. How their poor blind faces must have been suffused with hope as they stood by Him, and heard Him ask if they believed that He was able to do this for them ! How eager their impetuous "Yea, Lord" ! How much was put into that monosyllable ! This was all He needed.

He was more than Messiah—He was Son of God. He was not only able to heal the blind, but to be the propitiation for sin. It was a comparatively small thing merely to

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meet physical need when He longed to impart salvation ; but He was willing to waive all considerations of how much truth had entered into their creed, if only they were true to the creed they had. Their trust in His all-ability was enough, and the gracious hand was laid upon their eyes with the words, "According to your faith be it unto you."

This is the supreme law. Faith may take what it will from God. There is no stint or limit to God's willingness or power but that which we ourselves impose. All around us the Divine fulness is poured. The river of God is full of water which will take the shape and fill the measure of our bucket. Whatever we need most may be ours without upbraiding, and not to the half of an earthly kingdom, but to the measure of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

\* \* \*

## IV

### *FAITH HARD-PRESSED*

IT was in this plight that John the Baptist found himself, when he sent his two disciples to Christ, asking, "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" (Matt. xi. 6.) At this time he was in prison, in the dungeon of the gloomy castle of Machaerus, on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, surrounded on all hands by the desolation of mountain and valley, and far away from the thoroughfares of human life. The vast walls of those dungeons are still to be seen, but the rest of the castle is in ruins. It must have been to the Baptist what the Wartburg was to Luther. From time to time the gay court of Herod would fill the upper floors of the building with gaiety and mirth, and the sounds of music and laughter as they came down to the gloomy depths in which the prisoner languished only made his own case more terrible.

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He seems to have been permitted an opportunity of converse with the outward world through his disciples, a few of whom were still loyal to their master, and braved Herod's hatred in their visits to him. The one topic which engaged them all was the ministry of the Lord, who at this time was at the very height of His popularity. Each time they came John's most eager inquiries would be as to what Jesus was saying and doing; and when they left it was with his eager injunctions that they should carefully bring him every detail they could gather of Him, who, coming after, would yet be preferred before him, because He was mightier than himself.

It was thus that he heard in the prison of the works of Jesus, brooded over them through the long hours of isolation, and finally decided to send two disciples to Jesus, opening his heart, and telling the secret question, which had been oppressing him with such vehemence, whether after all He were the Messiah.

\* \* \*

The Bible does not scruple to tell us of the failures of its noblest children: of Abram, thinking that the Egyptians would take his life; of Elijah, stretching himself beneath

the shadow of the desert bush, and asking that he might die ; of Thomas, who had been prepared to die with his Lord, but could not believe that He was risen. And in this the Spirit of God has rendered us untold service, because we learn that the material out of which He made the greatest saints was flesh and blood like ourselves ; and that it was by Divine grace, manifested very conspicuously towards them, that they became what they were. If only the ladder rests on the low earth, where we live and move and have our being, there is some hope of our climbing to stand with others who have ascended its successive rungs and reached the starry heights.

\* \* \*

For some days at least John's mind had become overcast, his faith had lost its foothold, and he seemed to be falling into bottomless depths. We can easily trace this lapse of faith to three natural sources :

(1) *Depression.* He was the child of the desert. The winds that swept across the waste were not freer. The boundless spaces of the infinite had stretched above him, in vaulted immensity, when he slept at night or wrought through the busy days ; and as he found himself cribbed, cabined, and confined

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in the narrow limits of its cell, his spirits sank. He pined with the hunger of a wild thing for liberty to move without the clanking fetters; to drink of the fresh water of the Jordan; to breathe the morning air; to look on the expanse of Nature. Is it hard to understand how his deprivations reacted on his mental and spiritual organisation, or that his nervous system lost its elasticity of tone, or that the depression of his physical life cast a shadow on his soul?

We are all so highly strung, so delicately balanced. Often the lack of spiritual joy and peace and power in prayer is attributable to nothing else than our confinement in the narrow limits of a tiny room; to the foul, gaseous air we are compelled to breathe; to our inability to get beyond the great city, with its wilderness of brick, into the country, with its blossoms, fields, and woodland glades. In a large number of spiritual maladies the physician is more necessary than the minister of religion; a holiday by the seaside or on the mountains, than a convention.

What an infinite comfort it is to realise that God knows how easily our nature may become jangled and out of tune! He can attribute our doubts and fears to their right source. He knows the bow is bent to the

point of breaking, and the string strained to its utmost tension. He does not rebuke His servants when they cast themselves under juniper bushes, and ask to die, but provides them food and sleep. And when they send from their prisons, saying, "Art Thou He?" there is no word of rebuke, but tender encouragement and instruction.

(2) *Disappointment.* When first consigned to prison he had expected every day that Jesus would, in some way, deliver him. Was He not the opener of prison-doors? Was not all power at His disposal? Did He not wield the sceptre of the house of David? Surely He would not let His faithful follower lie in the despair of that dark dungeon! In that first sermon at Nazareth, of which he had been informed, was it not expressly stated to be part of the Divine programme, for which He had been anointed, that He would open prison-doors, and proclaim liberty to captives? He would surely, then, send His angels to open his own prison-doors, and lead him into the light!

But the weeks grew to months, and still no help came. It was inexplicable to John's honest heart, and suggested the fear that he had been mistaken after all.

We can sympathise in this also. Often in



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our lives we have counted on God's interfering to deliver us from some intolerable sorrow. With ears alert, and our heart throbbing with expectancy, we have lain in our prison-cell listening for the first faint footfall of the angel ; but the weary hours have passed without bringing him, and we have questioned whether God were mindful of His own ; whether prayer prevailed ; whether the promises were to be literally appropriated by *us*.

(3) *Partial Views of Christ*. "John heard in the prison the works of Jesus." They were wholly beneficent and gentle.

"What has He done since last you were here ?"

"He has laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them ; has gathered a number of children to His arms, and blessed them ; has sat on the mountain, and spoken of rest and peace and blessedness."

"Yes ; good ! But what more ?"

"A woman touched the hem of His garment, and trembled, and confessed, and went away healed."

"Good ! But what more ?"

"Well, there were some blind men, and He laid His hands on them, and they saw."

"Is that all ? Has He not used the fan to

winnow the wheat, and the fire to burn up the chaff? This is what I was expecting, and what I had been taught to expect by Isaiah and the rest of the prophets. I cannot understand it. This quiet, gentle life of benevolence is outside my calculations. There must be some mistake. Go and ask Him whether we should expect *another*, made in a different mould, and who shall be as the fire, the earthquake, the tempest, while He is as the still small voice?"

Let us not blame Him too vehemently, lest we blame ourselves. Is not this what *we* do? We form a notion of God, partly from what we think He ought to be; partly from some distorted notions we have derived from others; and then, because He fails to realise our conception, we begin to doubt.

We think, for instance, that if there be a righteous God, He will not permit wrong to triumph, or little children to suffer for the sins of their parents, or the innocent to be trodden beneath the foot of the oppressor and proud, or the dumb creatures to be tortured in the supposed interest of medical science. Surely, we say, God will step out of His hiding-place and open all prisons, emancipate all captives, and wave a hand of benediction over all Creation!

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Thus we think and speak, and then, because the world still groans and travails, we question whether God is in His high heaven. We form a notion, founded on some faulty interpretation of Scripture, that God will act in a certain preconceived way—in the thunder, the whirlwind, and the fire ; and when He pursues His tender, gentle ministries, descending in summer showers, speaking in soft, still tones, distilling in the dewdrops, winning His empire over men by love, we say, “ Is it all a mistake ? ”

\* \* \*

As John's disciples stood beside Him, in that same hour our Lord healed quite a number of sick folk ; and at the close, turned to the ambassadors and bade them hasten to their master with the tidings of what they had beheld. There was nothing startling in the proceedings ; no thunderstorm gathered in the sky, as in the case of Job ; there was no conspicuous or striking manifestation of the Godhead, as to Moses through the ravines of Sinai ; only sweet and gentle deeds of mercy ; but by these works of beneficence our Lord drew the Baptist's attention to the fact that this was God's chosen method. The time had not yet come when by some Divine act of power He would arrest the trans-

gressor and right the wrongs of time. That was the age of construction, of repair, of healing and salvation.

This is the lesson that we all must learn. The world is full of evidences of God's gracious and healing power. They are not so striking and masterful as deeds of judgment and wrath may be ; they need a quicker eye to discern and a purer heart to understand ; but they are no less significant of the fact that He liveth who was dead, and that He is alive for evermore. God is doing more in the world than we conceive.

Is it not so with your life ? You have been offended because God did not give more conspicuous proofs of His interposition against the wrongs by which it is desolated ; and all the while He has been pouring forth comfort, rest, and peace ; He has been enabling you to endure ; He has been engaged in putting right the wrong and in leading to a cessation of the trouble ; His hands have been gently untying the knot. Be of good cheer ! The storm may rattle around you, but in the midst the presence of Jesus is stealing towards you, saying, " It is I, be not afraid."

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One of the most touching and beautiful episodes in our Lord's life comes into view at

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this point. No sooner had the two disciples departed to tell their master what they had seen, than the Lord began to speak to the people about John, asking them if there was anything in him which made them think of the reed that bows to the passing breeze. The inference which He desired to draw, of course, was that it was not so ; that, so far from being pliable and suppliant, John was like an iron pillar or brazen wall.

But is it not surprising that our Lord should lay stress upon this characteristic immediately after such an inquiry had been put to Him by His imprisoned friend? We should have thought that if on all other occasions John had stood erect as a spreading oak, at this time at least he had shown himself to be only the bowing reed ; but our Lord takes this very opportunity of attesting the stalwartness of His forerunner. It was as though He insisted upon viewing him, not as he appeared in the stress of his momentary depression—this was only a passing phase and mood, which did not indicate the true inwardness of his being ; and our Lord insisted upon his being truly and essentially, not what he appeared to be at that moment, but what he had proved himself through long years of noble service. Therefore, though

the disciple had seemed in danger of being offended in the Master, the Master was absolutely unoffended in the servant.

That is a lesson for us all. We too have our lapses and failures ; we are swept before the gusts of temptation like the leaves of autumn. The good we would, we do not, and the evil we would not, we do. We lie among the pots, although we were meant to flit through the air on wings of gold. We do and say things which are foreign to our real nature, and bitterly regret. We have thought the Master would never look at us again, and that we had forfeited all right to His goodwill ; we hardly dared to enter into His presence, or look up into His face ; we concluded that we must for ever take a back seat, from which perhaps we should be able to see His face, but it was not possible, so we deemed it, that we should ever "attain unto the first three," or stand right or left of His throne ; and then, to our great surprise, we find that He read us more truly than we thought, and knew how to distinguish between that which was ephemeral and transient, and that which was deep, real, and permanent.

Our Lord deals with us as we with children. The dearly-loved child may have its passionate outbursts, but what mother would judge

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the child by that transient manifestation? She knows that it is a mood, perhaps traceable in part to physical conditions; she realises that beyond the passing cloud there is the blue sky of disposition; she says to herself, "The mood will pass, but the disposition will remain. Let me wait patiently and help the child to regain its true balance." It is not otherwise with us. This is the human side of the great doctrine of imputed righteousness. The Apostle says that God looks on us arrayed in the righteousness of Christ. He sees what we shall be, when in the meridian of Eternity we are perfectly conformed to the image of His Son. We may go to God and say, "I have not been myself to-day, but Thou knowest what I would be. I come back to myself, to Thine ideal, to the Christ ideal, and I stand before Thee 'accepted in the Beloved.'" Even when we seem most feeble and unstable, the Lord believes in our essential self, which lies beneath all these moods, in the very depths of our being, until He shall call it forth.

# V

## FAITH TAKING IN SAIL BEFORE THE STORM

WHEN the sailor sees the storm coming down on him from windward, he makes all haste to put his vessel into as good a condition as possible for meeting it ; and when there is an epidemic of unbelief in the air, or when you feel that you can no longer ignore without cowardice some grave suspicions which have been haunting the shadows of the background, it is well to attend to a few obvious preliminaries.

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(1) It is of the utmost importance *to be honest*. Thomas never would have got right if he had pretended to believe when he didn't.

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(2) *We must watch and pray against temptation to be proud of our intellectual difficulties,*



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as showing that we are more far-seeing than our associates. The only way some people have of attracting notice is by questioning what all other people hold. Fools and lunatics will fire cathedrals, stored with the wealth of centuries, to get a headline in the papers. For some people to renounce their doubts would be to forfeit their only claim to be counted intellectual. It is obvious that God, who resisteth the proud, will never send a ray of gracious illumination to such. To the true soul doubt is an agony.

\* \* \*

(3) *Be sure not to parade your doubts needlessly.* The good Asaph said that he kept silence, and locked his secret deep in his soul. His face may have become a little graver and greyer. Those who knew him best said to each other, now and again, "What can Asaph be carrying in his heart? Has he some secret trouble, or is he ill?" But no one could extract his secret. He said, "If I shall speak thus, I shall offend against the generation of my people; I shall scatter thistledown; it will only spread to others the fatal contagion and infection of my own disease!" Can we wonder that one day, when he was present at one of the great temple feasts, when the anthem was

being sung, or the sacrifice offered, or the priestly benediction was being pronounced, a rift of light cleft the dark panoply of gloom, and made him feel that to have God is better than His gifts, and that the heart which is fortified with His strength may face a world in arms? Don't talk about your doubts except to those whose wisdom and information may help to steady your way on these dark paths.

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(4) *You must distinguish between essentials and circumstantial.* It is not essential to your salvation or power to believe that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish which vomited him out on his native shore ; nor is it essential to your salvation to believe that Balaam's ass literally spoke, or that the sun literally stood still at the bidding of Joshua. It may be desirable to clear up these matters, because they will affect your views on such subjects as the inspiration of the Scripture, and the balance of the Divine and human in Jesus ; but it will be quite absurd to discontinue prayer and Christian work and to pose as though you were outside the Church of God till these things are settled. Faith is the reception of God to be the life, the joy, the strength of your soul. Keep clear on

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*that*—the spiritual side of things—and it will probably supply the solution to the minor and non-essential questions. They will curiously drop out of notice, or be left for the clear light of eternity.

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(5) *Be careful to take your difficulties into the presence of the Spirit of Truth.* He has permitted them to come to test you, to see whether you will confess the ignorance of a little child, and be content not to know. The twilight of partial ignorance is rather irksome to those who thought that they were about to emerge into the perfect day; but probably it is wholesomer, healthier, more pride-subduing, more consonant to the sweet sonnet which begins: O Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, nor do I exercise myself in matters too great for me.

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(6) *Be careful to ascertain that there is nothing between God and yourself.* Anything like unconfessed and unforgiven sin, or an evil habit harboured, or a known duty neglected, or an unforgiven spirit cherished, will at once draw a veil over "the eyes of the heart." Self-examination, to see if for any cause the sight has ceased to be single, is the first thing that demands the attention of

the Christian knight who is about to cross from one side to the other of the Valley of Death-shadow, so marvellously portrayed by Bunyan.

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(7) *Be prepared to give as much time to study the arguments for as those against.* This caution is very necessary. Some persons seem infatuated in the meshes of infidel literature; they read nothing else; they become familiarised with destructive criticism, and know absolutely nothing of the vast learning and brilliant gifts which have been enlisted on the side of Truth. There are hundreds to-day who could name three infidel writers for every one of the front-rank champions of the faith.

It should, also, never be forgotten that the constructive argument requires much more patience to follow and appreciate the force of, than the destructive. It is easy to destroy. A bomb may shatter a dynasty which represents the conquests, legislation, and deliberations of fifty generations.

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## VI

### *FAITH WHEN THE FOUNDATIONS ARE BEING SHAKEN*

**C**OMPARATIVELY few readers of this little book will be called to pass through such an experience as the Psalmist alludes to when he says, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?"

(1) Some, however, are called to this that they may be able to sympathise with others, who else would detect no brother's voice amid the gloom. Mr. Spurgeon tells how once, after days of unutterable depression, he could only preach on the Cry of Forsakenness that burst from the cross. It was a sermon which seemed to have come from a soul abandoned, as a derelict vessel, to drift under moonless skies. On reaching his vestry a man with a haggard face encountered him, and said, "Sir, how came you to preach that sermon to-night? You are the

only person whom I have ever heard that has understood my case."

Adapting the words of another—it is easy to suffer when there is unbroken consciousness between the Highest and the lowest; nay, suffering is not, while that consciousness remains unbroken, for the light of the higher makes darkness in the lower impossible. There is a suffering men have to face, that every helper of his fellows must face, where darkness broods on the deep of human consciousness, and never a glimmer comes through. A few must know the pang of the despair felt by the human soul, when there is darkness on every side, and the groping consciousness cannot find a hand to clasp.

(2) Then, also, such experiences, when they have been passed through, tighten the hold upon the essential verities. At such a time one learns to distinguish (Heb. ix. 23) between the forms of the things in the heavens and the heavenly things themselves, and is quite prepared to surrender tassel or curtain, Shibboleth or Sibboleth, if only he may keep the life-spark burning on the heart-altar. How absurd those demands appear, made by little pretentious priestlings on the behalf of their pretty ceremonials, when the soul is ploughing its way heavily through great seas!

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(3) These periods of foundation-testing are generally the inauguration of a higher age. When Jerusalem fell and the Levitical system passed away, never to be rebuilt, it must have seemed to myriads of devout but non-Christian Hebrews that there were no longer left foundations on which to erect the religious life. They had to learn that there were things which could not be shaken, that when the storm had passed over, all that was most divine and precious in Judaism remained still. Some sea-lichen and mussel-shells had been disintegrated and swept away, but the eternal foundations of God's truth were unaffected. The essential ideas which Moses strove to perpetuate had passed forth to dominate the universal heart of man, clothed in less material and cumbersome dress.

Without doubt this has been the marked effect of the Higher Criticism movement. Some half-century ago there was a danger that the Church would lose sight of the perspective in the Bible, would magnify the letter to the sacrifice of the spirit, and would insist on belief in the narrowest interpretation of the great truth of inspiration as essential to salvation. Nothing could have been more disastrous to the growth and vigour of Christian thought. Then came the movement to

which we have referred, which in some cases went to the other extreme, but which has as certainly discovered for us the Minor Prophets, as Luther discovered the Epistle to the Galatians, which has unfolded the plan of God's self-manifestation through successive ages, and which has certainly led to an application of the principles of the Kingdom of God to current affairs as has never been equalled in the Christian centuries.

(4) Comparatively few are compelled to face questions which touch on the existence of the Eternal World, on the Being of God, on the literal credibility of the statements of the Gospel, on the nature of Jesus Christ. Something less slender than these pages will be required, and can easily be obtained, by such. All that I have to say to them is : Remember that faith is spiritual as well as intellectual ; intuitive as well as ratiocinative. Often when you cannot discover where you are by poring over your calculations in the chart-room, if you go out and stand on the quarter-deck you may *see* the configuration of the coast. Remember also that we are sometimes driven to exchange God above us for God within ; and when we have searched for Him in vain through spaces strewn with star-dust, we may discover that the inner



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sky is glowing with the splendour of His presence.

There are phases also of the soul's quest in which it will be helped by the conclusions of the late W. H. Myers as to "human personality and its survival after death"; and by the admissions of the students of comparative religion. It repays one to wash through a good deal of sand to obtain a few grains of virgin ore.

At times like these keep within sound of the laughter and prattle of children's voices; see that life is sweet and simple in its springs. Occupy yourself less and less with human reasonings. Go and stand under the stars, whilst the Jabbok rushes past at your feet. You will become aware of a mysterious antagonist engaged in conflict with you, testing every nerve of your body in resistance. In the darkness of the night you will count him to be an enemy intent on tearing from you your most cherished beliefs; but you will discover as the grey dawn breaks the kindly face of One who longs to bless you, and as you yield to Him He will whisper words of royal assurance and endow you with a new power over God and man.

It never should be forgotten that eyes were in use millenniums before telescopes were in-

vented. It should never be forgotten that Enoch and Abraham walked with God before a line of the Bible was penned. It should never be forgotten that the facts which the sacred writers record are not made true by their recording them, any more than the survey of a new land affects the existence of the land—the chart may be lost, but the hills and valleys, savannas and prairies, still stretch out beneath the overarching canopy of the sky. It should never be forgotten that our duty is always to live up to our sweetest, strongest, and noblest ideal. The path may be rough, the sky swept with heavy masses of cloud, but our steps must be up towards the shining table-lands. To take any other direction is to land in the bottomless pit. It should never be forgotten that every realm of thought and existence has its own method of proof. The physical in the physical ; the mathematical in the mathematical ; and the spiritual in the spiritual. We cannot see a sound ; we cannot weigh love ; we cannot demonstrate by Euclid the things of the Spirit. "They are spiritually discerned," but they will be revealed by the Spirit to those who love.

## VII

### *DIFFICULTIES ARISING FROM MORAL CONSIDERATIONS*

**I**T is probably here that most of us have to fight our lonely fight against Doubt. One of the firstfruits of the new life is a constantly heightening standard of morality, and we are rightly extremely sensitive when any statement of Scripture or any tenet of the Church appears to conflict with the most refined conceptions of morals.

The high morality of God's nature and dealings with men must be beyond challenge. As David says, it is like "the great mountains," which are the ribs of the habitable earth, and on them dews are born and rivers cradled. His thoughts may be higher than our thoughts, but they are the same kind of thoughts—*i.e.*, Love, Righteousness, Justice, are not different in Him than in us, but cleansed from all evil ingredients, and carried

to any infinite degree. On every ground, then, the Divine morality must be indisputable.

*The happiness of myriads of spirits demands it.* No arithmetic can count the innumerable hosts that stand to-day in the light of God's Being! How happy they are! And they are happy because they are in harmony with God. They know the glorious principles that rule His nature and control His government. They are persuaded that those principles are as immutable as Himself, and they know that on the perpetuity of God's Being depends the blessedness of their own.

But suppose that God could be unjust in the least particular. Suppose—which of course is unthinkable—that God could countenance with equanimity, in some remote corner of existence, an act of injustice to a little babe. The tidings would at first spread slowly, uttered in whispers, and received with incredulity; but when authenticated and confirmed, a paroxysm of horror would seize on those bright hosts. Clouds would veil the light in which, as in their native element, they had been wont to revel. Sighs would drown their songs. Uncertainty would mar their blessedness. If God could be unjust in one particular,

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He might in another ; if in a smaller incident, then in a greater, and in all. There could be no security against His vacillation or caprice.

*The rectitude of the moral universe demands it.* God is our model. We are to be holy, as He is holy. Made in His likeness by our original creation, we are able to appreciate the moral qualities that characterise His glorious nature, to love Him for them, and to imitate them. But if there had ever, in the remotest ages, been a suspicion of injustice in God, even in the smallest and remotest particular, there would be some license given to obliquity in ourselves.

Already we fall short of His glorious excellence. We are always willing to justify ourselves by extolling its infinite grandeur, to palliate our faults by saying that the perfection of the Creator cannot be expected of the creature ; and how gladly we should seize on the slightest deviation of the Divine Nature as an excuse for our deeper and wider aberrations.

Then the pillars of the temple would rock ; the foundations of the Throne would be sapped ; the walls of the New Jerusalem would show great rents and breaches ; and as the tidings spread to Nature, the stars

would fail in their courses, the sun would be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and a darker than the primeval chaos would engulf the universe.

Yes, God must be just. Whatever His love may prompt Him to do for the recovery of His fallen creatures must be consistent with the claims of perfect and infinite Justice. For the sake of His own nature, for the sake of the myriads of holy beings who find their element and vital breath in His unimpeachable Justice, for the sake of the stability of the universe, He cannot forgive irrespectively of the claims of Justice. He must be Just, and the Justifier of those that believe in Jesus.

*One example will for ever stand on the page of history to prove how absolutely disastrous to national well-being it is to forgive, without complying with the claims of Justice. David did this when he recalled Absalom from Geshur, and reinstated him in his favour, without a word of confession, or attempt at reparation on his part, for the murder of his brother Amnon. From that moment the king's authority was shaken, and the fabric of government tottered to its fall. If David had had his way Absalom would never have suffered penalty; but the rough justice of*

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Joab, who did not hesitate to put the dart through his hanging body, avenged his crime and saved the State.

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Let me help you, however, with respect to some of the charges which have been made against the Divine morality. We shall find that there is no need to fear them, as they have so often arisen from misconception or misstatement. There is no need for the Christian warrior to give back a single step in consequence of allegations that have been made in the camp of the Philistines, and have caused profound suffering to young souls.

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It must be confessed, for instance, that the great fact of *our Lord's sacrificial death* has often been presented in a form which has made its acceptance by persons of a sensitive moral nature as difficult as possible. The Anglican Homily teaches that the heat of God's wrath, "the heat of His wrath," "His burning wrath," against man, a firebrand of hell and a bondsman of the devil, could only be "pacified" by Jesus. Flavel says that "to wrath, to the wrath of an infinite God without mixture, to the torments of hell, was Christ delivered and that by the hand

of His Father." Bishop Jeune says that "after man had done his worst, worse remained for Christ to bear. He had fallen into His Father's hands." Of course any one can see that these expressions are intended to enforce the great doctrine of Propitiation, but the unfortunate matter is that they contain no reference to the voluntariness of Christ's sacrifice and the Father's identification with Him in every step of the *Via Dolorosa*. The texts which more than any others in Scripture light up the midnight of Calvary are first that in which the Apostle says, "*God was in Christ*," reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and second, "through the power of the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot unto God" (2 Cor. v. 19; Heb. ix. 14).

The death of our Lord is a profound mystery, and it is probably impossible for us, in this state of being, to understand all that it stands for. There are depths in it we shall never fathom, heights in it we shall never scale. But we can accept the fact, if we cannot explore it. We can accept the fact, though we have no theory, no philosophy, no adequate explanation. This much is clear, that in the person of the Man Jesus Christ



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*the eternal God* reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, because he took them on Himself ; not exacting a ransom, because He gave His own blood as a ransom for all ; not allowing us to be involved in the ultimate results of sin, because, by His obedience, He undid the results of human perversity, and made possible for us a new standing in grace and righteousness, through His accepted work on our behalf.

We must never permit this wonderful fact to be stated, as though the Son were tenderer in pity than the Father, or that He pacified and mollified the Father's anger. Always and everywhere we must make it clear that *God* was in Christ, and that it was "by the eternal Spirit" that Christ offered Himself without spot to God. The whole Trinity was, so to speak, present at Calvary, doing what Jesus did. His pity was the pity of God ; His sacrifice was the sacrifice of God ; His sufficient oblation was the gift of God ; His travail of soul was the travail of the Divine nature. When God set Him forth as a propitiation, it was Himself taking on Himself the brunt and burden of a world's sin. There surely is no trace of injustice here. It would be unjust to make an un-

willing and innocent victim suffer for sins he had never committed that the guilty might be free ; but it cannot be unjust for one who is without taint of sin to identify himself in the penal consequences which sin has brought on the sinner. If that be unjust, it is unjust for a parent to suffer for his child, or a friend for his friend.

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*But is it not inconsistent with perfect righteousness to be compelled sadly to admit that Christianity has reached so small a portion of the populations of the world in this or in any age?* On the surface there may appear some force in this objection. We have no difficulty in feeling the perplexity of honest minds in being asked, on the one hand, to believe that justice rules on the Throne, and that love canopies the cradle of every child, and, on the other, to believe that the supreme revelation of God in Christ is imparted to so few. The difficulty, however, is more apparent than real ; there is probably no creature under heaven, possessed of ordinary intelligence, who has not had some inkling of the Father, *suited to his capacities*. It would have been, of course, absurd to have sent the Beloved Disciple, John, to the tents of Judah and his brethren

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when they were plotting to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. It would have been equally useless to have sent Paul to talk about justification by faith to the Hebrews when groaning under the bondage of Pharaoh. Different dispensations, different orders of thought, different stages of culture and civilisation, require different handling. The words with which the Epistle to the Hebrews opens reveal the Divine method: God has spoken to men "by divers portions and in divers manners." But to all men He has spoken somehow, and in the manner which their special training and idiosyncrasy enabled them to appreciate.

You cannot speak to infants in the words that you use for your grown children. The sounds and words which convey a mother's meaning to her babe are hopelessly incoherent, and to prosaic minds a little stupid. But the wee faces wax radiant with intelligent laughter, the little voices crow in response, and the tiny hearts are assured of a love that seems omnipotent. God has had His infant races as well as His intelligent ones, like Greece and Rome.

*The methods of revelation have been various.* He did good and sent rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food

and gladness ; He marked out the span of their lives and the boundaries of their homes (as Paul told his audience on Mars Hill) with the sole design of inciting them to seek after and find Him ; He sent them great teachers and reformers ; He wrote His law upon their hearts ; His Spirit moved amongst their myriads, seeking such as worshipped Him in spirit and in truth.

As the result of all these endeavours on the part of the Love of God to breathe His message into human hearts, Malachi, speaking in His name, was able to make this remarkable affirmation : " From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, My name is great among the Gentiles ; and in every place incense is offered unto My name, and a pure offering : for My name is great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." (Mal. i. 11, R.V.)

The whole meaning of the Father's heart, the cost to Himself in removing every obstacle to its full outpouring to every creature, the heights and depths and lengths and breadths—all these things could only be uttered when the Lord gathered around Him His inner friends on the eve of His death, and told them that the Father loved them with the love with which He loved Himself

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and was willing to admit them to His inner secrets.

There is a remarkable old fragment by the mystic Valentinus which records that after His resurrection our Lord spent eleven years with His disciples, unfolding the mystery of the Divine love. This is not supported by Scripture, and would have made Pentecost needless; but it at least suggests the deep consciousness of the early Church, that long years of patient study would be needed to remove all doubts, solve all puzzles, and unfold the length and breadth and depth and height of the Divine Love.

This at least stands forth in daylight, that our Lord's death was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that as Lamb of God He bore away the sins of the whole world. The whole race has been potentially and radically affected by the death of the cross. Each child is born into a redeemed world. Whatever condemnation might have attached to us as members of a race of sinners has been met and cancelled because of the blood and tears of the Christ. If any are lost and cast away ultimately, it is not because they were excluded from the benefits of Christ's death, but because they have closed their hearts against the entrance

of the Spirit of God coming in some very unobtrusive and humble form, or because, knowing better, they wilfully did the worse.

It is not necessary to be familiar with the fact of Christ's sacrifice to derive benefit from it. It is not necessary to have a theory about it in order to be saved by it. We need not understand the process of bread manufacture or physical digestion to get nourishment from good household flour.

Wherever God sees in any soul that attitude towards such light as comes to it, which in a land like this would undoubtedly result in happy saving faith in Christ, He imputes righteousness to that faith, as in Rom. iv.; and in the heavenly kingdom to which such are coming from the north, south, east, and west, they shall not only sit down with the elect souls of every age, but shall be led forward to a full understanding of the mystery of God and of Christ.

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*But is election consistent with perfect justice? Are not some men born to be damned? Who says so? "God willeth all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4), is the straight affirmation of one who should know of what we speak.*

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*Yet can it be good and loving that some should be born with a worse chance than others?* But put your objection round the other way, and be thankful that all are not allowed to start on the same low level to which the sins or ignorance of their ancestors might have reduced them. By the special gift and grace of God some are permitted to start life under better conditions, and more richly gifted, that they may be able to help others to their own higher plane. Where would the race have been to-day, through the results of its own sin, had it not been for the elect souls who have shone like brilliant stars in the dark night, and have been the teachers, healers, inspirers, and leaders of their fellows? We are elect to *serve*.

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*But how can suffering be reconciled with almighty and regnant love?* Be advised, for answer, to read that remarkable book, *De Profundis*, which recounts the conclusions arrived at by a child of pleasure, like Byron, richly gifted, the darling of society, with every refinement that travel, culture, and art could furnish, but who frankly confesses, after two years in the stone walls of a cell, that he never understood the true meaning of life until the prison doors slammed

heavily behind his entrance. Take these words, for instance : " Clergymen and people who use phrases without wisdom sometimes talk of suffering as a mystery. It is really a revelation. One discerns things one never discerned before. One approaches the whole of history from a different standpoint. What one had felt dimly through instinct is intellectually and emotionally realised with perfect clearness of vision and absolute intensity of apprehension. I remember," he continues, " talking once on this subject to one of the most beautiful personalities I have ever known, and saying that there was enough suffering in one narrow London lane to show that God did not love man, and that wherever there was sorrow, though but that of a child in some little garden weeping over a fault that it had or had not committed, the whole face of Creation was completely marred. I was entirely wrong, and she told me so ; but I could not believe her. I was not in the sphere in which such belief could be attained to. Now it seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world. If the world has been built of sorrow it has been built by the hands of love, because in no other way could the soul



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of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full measure of its perfection." Nothing need be added to these eloquent words.

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*But the lake of fire—is that consistent with goodness?* It is certainly an awful symbol. Yet, remember fire is one of the most beneficial agents of purification known to man! Jerusalem would have been perennially cursed with plague, since she commanded no river to carry away her drainage and refuse, unless the fires had been kept burning day and night in the valley of Hinnom. The imagery of the lake of fire is also clearly borrowed from the awful scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, which turned the tropical district on which they stood into the Dead Sea. Jude tells us that the fate of these cities was intended to give an example of what "eternal fire" means. Was it not good for the world that Herculaneum and Pompeii should be blotted out? If you doubt that, obtain special permission to go through the museum there, which is not open to the ordinary visitor. And the blotting out, as excavations show, must have been instantaneous. In alluding to the whelming of the continent of Atlantis, Mrs. Besant, in her *Esoteric*

*Christianity*, ascribes that catastrophe to the fact of men becoming giants in knowledge and also giants in evil, "till the cry of a trampled humanity rang through the worlds." All thoughtful people agree that, out of pity to the universe, God must have His destructive agencies, must have His rubbish-heap, where the fire and the worm are always at work.

That there is terrible pain and suffering in the other life awaiting those who have wilfully and persistently violated the laws of their own nature and of God is undeniable; but we must carefully inquire which passages in the New Testament refer to it; how much is to be taken literally and how much is due to the rich colouring of Oriental phrase; what refers, as John xv. and 1 Cor. ix. do, to the children of God, and what to the despairful condition of those who have trampled underfoot the tenderest and strongest arguments that could be addressed to human hearts.

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*Yet think of all the carnage in creation. How is this consistent with love? Yet have you ever pondered Paul's remarkable assertion, that "the creation was made subject to vanity" (i.e., failure), "not of its own will,"*

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but because of the fall of its occupant or tenant? It may be that all this is part of the necessary process through which the plan of redemption is climbing upwards. But in the meanwhile, by the power of fascination, and because it is the habit of the immense majority of beasts of prey to strike at their victim's most vital part, death is probably a much less terrible thing than it seems. There are some apparent exceptions, but these demand fuller investigation before we can admit them to disprove the affirmation of one of the sweet singers of Hebrew minstrelsy, "Thou art good, and doest good, and Thy tender mercies are over all Thy works."

Is it not abundantly clear that the whole created world with its inhabitants is passing through a process of emancipation from the bondage of corruption, *i.e.*, from the mastery of impulse, passion, and sensuousness, into the kingdom of self-sacrificing love? This is its redemption; but the redemption is slow in progress. The travail-pangs are acute. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth." But there is no doubt as to the result. "It shall be delivered." And if the order and beauty of the physical world took untold millenniums ere they stood forth complete, is it to be wondered at, that the upward progress to the new Heavens and Earth is slow and painful!

## VIII

### *FAITH'S HIGH VALUE*

**D**IRECTLY we believe that Christ has borne our sins in His own body on the cross, and entrust ourselves to Him, we realise that we need be no longer anxious as to the entail of penal consequences. Christ, so to speak, has intercepted these. His Cross and Grave are as impassable a barrier to their pursuit as the Red Sea to Pharaoh's hosts. Even the secondary consequences of wrong-doing lose their terror because of this transforming touch.

This is part of what the apostle means in the memorable declarations, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1); "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God" (Rom. viii. 34).

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But as we ponder the words of Paul there is more. Directly a man believes in his heart that Christ has died and risen for him, and trusts Christ with his eternal interests, he is dealt with by God as a justified person. Though still a sinful man, with many things yet to learn, battles to fight, temptations to encounter, he is reckoned as occupying an absolutely new position. To use the phrase of the apostle, "His faith is imputed to him for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 22-25).

Your feelings may vary; sometimes your soul may be as full as possible of the realisation of God's gracious presence and smile, and at other times you may be seriously questioning whether you are worthy to be reckoned among the saved; but if you are united to Christ by a living faith, which avails to link you to Him, even though it fails to give you joy, your standing is still assured. Your acceptance does not depend on your frames and feelings, but on the all-sufficient merit of Him with Whom you are identified, and in Whom you stand. "He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30).

But even this is not all. Faith, as we have seen, is the living link between the soul and

Christ. It is the artery through which His life-blood flows into us. It is the tiny duct which conveys the sap from the vine-root to the branchlet. Therefore we are saved through our faith from the love of sin, the power and desire of sin. How can we love it or yield, when all the while the grace of the living Saviour is pouring into us?

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There is a distinction between justification and salvation which is clearly recognised in the New Testament, as in the passage: "With the heart man believeth unto *righteousness* [*i.e.*, justification], but with the mouth confession is made unto *salvation*" (Rom. x. 11).

There are many people who may be reckoned among the justified, who are evidently far from being saved from evil things that mar their testimony and grieve the Spirit of God. In other words, they are not being sanctified. That they will be, we cannot doubt, for it is written, "Whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. viii. 30).

Our salvation in this sense, *i.e.*, of our deliverance from the *love* and *power* of sin, is a gradual matter, and entirely depends on the openness of faith's channel to the incoming power of Jesus. Where there is nothing to

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obstruct the river-bed, the power of the risen Lord is an easy solvent of all that resists.

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But even this is not all. The believer learns the art of handing over to Christ moment by moment each anxiety as it arises. Every question about the unknown path ; every unexpected disaster, perplexity, and worry ; every fret, annoyance, pin-prick, and gnat-sting ; all responsibilities in connection with His work—all are made known to Christ ; nay, more than made known, they are *committed, transmitted* to His hands. And when once the act of surrender is made, the strain is gone. The Pilot has come on board to steer the vessel through shoals and straits with which He is perfectly familiar, and therefore the captain, who has not had his clothes off for nights together, may go and lie down.

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But there is still something beyond. Faith not only links to Christ, but leaves the door open to Him, that at any moment He may embody Himself in our nature and achieve what else He could not effect. Nothing is more remarkable than the dependence of the beings of the upper world on us, who inhabit the lower, for the use of our personalities.

The very demons crave for possession. "Send us not out into the deep," they cry. And above all, the Spirit of Jesus craves it, that He may clothe Himself with us, as He did with Gideon (Judges vi. 34 ; 1 Chron. xii. 18 ; 2 Chron. xxiv. 20).

But this leads us into a great subject, which we must reserve for our next chapter.

"My soul in storm is but a tattered sail,  
Streaming its ribbons on the torrent gale,  
In calm, 'tis but a limp and flagging thing ;  
Oh ! swell it with Thy breath, make it a wing,—  
To sweep through Thee the ocean, with Thee  
the wind,  
Nor rest until in Thee its haven it shall find."



## IX

### *FAITH'S CHANGE OF STRENGTH*

"They that wait on the Lord shall renew (*change*) their strength."—ISA. xl. 31.

THERE are two sources of strength mentioned in this sublime paragraph.

First, we have the strength of young manhood—"The youths . . . the young men." Browning rehearses for us the song of the young shepherd before Saul, as he describes the wild joys of life, the plunge in the morning pool, the clamber up the hillside, the wrenching of the fir-trees from their sockets, the wrestle with wild beasts, the sleep in the bed of a dry torrent, the simple and hardy fare.

The zest of life is keen in us all ; and even those whose years forbid them to be classed amongst the young cannot forget the elasticity of their hope, the buoyancy of their strength

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## Faith's Change of Strength 67

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But the days come when the morning sun has climbed to its meridian, and shines with the noontide light; then the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall. As we trudge over the burning sands, our ankles sinking deep at every step, as we find ourselves unable to realise the projects with which we started, as our ideals disappoint and our hopes miscarry, we realise that we need a source of strength other than the wells of our own endeavour.

There is another source of strength—God “fainteth not, neither is weary.” He faints not, though for millenniums He has upheld the fabric of the universe; though as a shepherd drives forth his sheep, He has led myriads of worlds in their mazy dance, calling each by its name; though He has borne with the provocation and rebellion of generations of mankind. Listen to His name: “The Everlasting God, the Maker of the ends of the earth, Jehovah!”

Happy are they who have “changed” their strength — who no longer draw from the stagnant cisterns which they have hewn for themselves, but receive the living water that springs from the throne of God and of the Lamb; who meet the demands of life through reinforcements supplied from the Divine

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energy and received by faith! May this change from the human to the Divine, from earth to heaven, from the temporal to the eternal, be for us all!

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*What makes the contrast between the savage and the civilised man?* There are many external differences, but probably the most important exists in the means by which he achieves their ends.

The savage relies on his deft hand, swift foot, quick vision; he paddles his canoe across the lake, engages in strenuous wrestle with his antagonist, sows, reaps, grinds the corn. As yet he knows little or nothing of the great forces of the natural world. If he would build the pyramid, or mighty fortification, or hew out the massive stones of his temples, it must be by the efforts of immense numbers of men acting in concert.

The civilised man, on the other hand, has learned to utilise the great natural forces which lie hidden from ordinary gaze, but which were as literally present in the first hour of creation and during the generations of primeval existence as they are to-day. They only waited for the insight and patience of a Newton, a Stephenson, or an Edison to discover and yoke them to the machinery of

daily life. The weakest child of civilisation, who knows how to turn this switch or that, is able to move with more rapidity, and to achieve greater results than the strongest man of the generations that lie at the base of the human pyramid. The Titanic forces of Nature toil for us at the forge, in the factory, in the steamer, on the railway, in the home. They await our bidding. We touch a button, and instantly vast masses of machinery are set in motion, and man has but to gather up the results of their production.

Is it not clear, therefore, that mankind has changed its strength, from its own activities to make use of those forces whose laws have been discovered within recent years? This will serve to illustrate our subject, because what has taken place in the realm of Nature may equally, though on a higher scale, take effect in the realm of spirit.

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*A similar change took place on the day of Pentecost in the story of the Church.*

Before that august moment individual men were able to avail themselves of celestial help, but the majority of religious people had no idea of the good things which God had prepared for them that love Him. They

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were hidden from sight, no whisper of them was spoken to the ear, no surmise entered the heart. The Spirit of God was as the sun which strikes Alpine summits, but has not reached the valleys. An Elijah, a Daniel, an Isaiah, spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, but even they were left to search out what the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify. It was left for Jesus Christ to bring the mighty power of the Holy Spirit within the reach of our sons and daughters, of our old men and children, of our servants and handmaidens, that they might have access to the same Divine power as had been realised by the saints of the Old Covenant, though only "at sundry times, and in divers manners." When our Lord ascended and passed through the heavens to the right hand of God, He received from the Father the fulness of the Holy Spirit. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell bodily." He became the cistern or storehouse, replenished and filled with that same Divine Spirit who brooded over the primeval world, to whom we owe the Holy Scriptures, and by whose occasional impulse the great deeds of the Old Testament were accomplished ; and now any Sunday-school child, the humblest and weakest believer, may at any

moment draw upon that eternal reservoir, and receive out of the fulness of the glorified Christ "grace upon grace."

A marvellous change was brought about when the Holy Spirit descended to dwell amongst men. It was no longer left to them to realise the Divine purpose by the exercise of their own spiritual faculty, but they are permitted to know "the communion of the Holy Spirit"—His fellowship, co-operation, and co-partnership. We are not left to go to the battle at our own charges. As the motorist passes swiftly along the road, borne swifter than fleet horses could carry him, simply by the application of great natural forces to his car, so a babe in Christ, who has learned in all simplicity to attach his weakness to the dynamic of the Holy Ghost, is able to realise the results which compel men to cry, "This is the finger of God!"

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*This change may be illustrated also in the history of individual believers.*

Abraham changed his strength. In his early life Ishmael was his ideal, and as he watched the wild-ass youth wrestling with and throwing men twice his size, or issuing his imperious command to servants who had grown grey in the camp, the patriarch was pleased

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as he anticipated his own decease and thought that here at least there was power to keep the vast camp together, and resist the encroachments of the heathen. But as the years went on, and he saw Isaac willing to surrender himself to the will of God, and being raised, as it were, from death, becoming the organ and instrument of the Divine power, a voice within his soul whispered : " In Isaac shall thy seed be called ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." Stronger than the Ishmael prowess was the Isaac nature which yielded itself submissively to the influx of the Divine.

Moses also changed his strength. In his first endeavour on behalf of the people, with one blow of his mailed fist he floored the caitiff who oppressed the Hebrew, supposing that the whole nation would rise and follow him ; but it was not by his might that God would deliver the oppressed people. Therefore he was carried off to Midian to cool, and wait, until, at the end of forty years, he seemed to have lost the power of speech and was willing enough that any should take the foremost place. He changed his strength and led forth the Exodus by faith that made nothing of himself and everything of God.

Peter also changed his strength. On the

night of the betrayal he said to the Master, in effect : " I have often braved death. Repeatedly on the Lake of Galilee I have looked into the eyes of the last enemy without blanching. If I say that I will die, then I will ; if I make up my mind to follow Thee through the dark waters, nothing shall hinder me. I mean to die to-night with Thee, and die I can." " Nay," said our Lord, " thou canst not follow Me now ; thy mortal strength will fail in the great encounter ; thou must learn the secret of another strength than thine." And so it befell. Before the first question of the servant-girl he flinched, and denied his Lord with oaths and curses. In the Easter garden the Lord explained to him the cause of his failure ; on the shores of the Lake re-appointed his work ; and on the Day of Pentecost charged him with a new power ; and when he was full of the Holy Ghost he was able to withstand, with perfect ease, the whole brunt of the storm which beset the infant Church.

Mr. Moody was wont to tell the story of how he, too, changed his strength. In earlier manhood he was able to fill the Farwell Hall with crowds who were attracted by his rugged simplicity, quaint humour, and graphic narratives ; but he was conscious that there was



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something lacking, and this was accentuated by the assurance of some humble woman, who told him there was something better. One summer afternoon when passing through Broadway, New York, he felt impressed to go by himself and pray. Entering the house of a friend, he asked for the use of a room, locked the door, threw himself on God, saying: "My Father, I am sure there is a source of power which I have not yet tapped; reveal it to me, I pray Thee. Let me know all that can be known of the mighty power which raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at Thy right hand." His prayer was answered, and from that moment he moved amongst men with a vast accession of spiritual power, of which immense multitudes became conscious.

But we can never forget the outstanding statement concerning our Lord that He was crucified in weakness, but that He now liveth by the power of God (2 Cor. xiii. 4). Let us, therefore, be content to be weak with Him, that we may also live with Him through the power of God. It is to those who have no might that He increaseth strength. They who are reminded by the sharp prick of the thorn in the flesh that they are weak, helpless, and contemptible, but who have heard a voice

say, "My grace is sufficient for you ; for My strength is made perfect in weakness"—these are they to whom nothing is impossible.

Are you weak, conscious of failure, full of lamentation over frustrated purposes and hopes? May it not be that all these have been permitted to come to bring you to an end of yourself? Is it not a good thing for us to have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead (2 Cor. i. 9)?

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*How great a transformation the change of strength would effect!*

Take the case of the soul which has striven against some masterful sin. Perpetually it has approached the conflict with hope, but in each result it has been worsted. Every morning the struggle of the preceding night has been renewed. Resolutions, sacred pledges, promises have been in vain. Is it not time that there should be a change from this strength of the first Adam to that of the Second, from the striving of a religious self to the enduement of the Holy Spirit? Is it not possible to say with the apostle: "I can do all things through Christ which

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strengtheneth me"? May we not dare to believe that God will yet use the worm to thresh the mountain, and make the weakest of His children as David or the Angel of the Lord?

Again, a soul has been for a long time fretted and worried by the pressure of anxiety, the strain of innumerable small details, the friction of another temperament with which it is compelled to live. How constantly it has broken down! Nervous exhaustion, feverish excitement, incessant strife are leaving their indelible marks upon inner and outer life. But supposing that such an one could realise that in the Risen Lord there are resources of love, sweetness, graciousness, tenderness, and joy, and were to begin to draw upon them, would there not be an instant transformation? Would it not be as when the ocean pours its tides over the sands, or the morning steals over the troubled, stormy night, descending from the mountain? The peace of God would hush the storm that tossed the waters into a great calm.

Or take the case of some young minister, who has entered on his first charge with a determination to carry all before the rush of his impetuous genius. The masses of black hair bespeak his virility; his compressed

brow, the student's brain; the resonant, rich voice, the poet's soul. He attracts the admiration of man, but is always disappointed of the highest results. There is a shaking amongst the dry bones, but no life. Then physical weakness supervenes. He is ordered to the Engadine. He spends the first weeks or months of his enforced exile in the angry arraignment of God that He has dashed the cup from his lips at the moment when it was so sweet. But after a while Nature and grace induce a better mind, and some fair morning in the spring, when the snows are melting on the high Alps, and the torrent beds are swollen, when the flowers are exhaling their richest fragrance, and the fir-trees array themselves in tender green, walking to and fro in the sunny air, musical with the distant cow-bells, he kneels before the Master, and yields himself to be a channel through which His power may flow. When he returns to his charge the least observant detects the difference. There are a new pathos, tenderness, entreaty, spiritual power, which are the best witness that he has changed his strength.

Let us wait upon God, let us open our hearts to receive the Divine fulness, let us meditate upon the Divine promises which show what God waits to do for those who

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are perfectly surrendered to Him. Then our life-work will be effectual, because, as far as possible, our own might will have been exchanged for His, who longs for channels through which to pour Himself forth upon the world.

“Lord, what I once had done with youthful might,  
Had I been from the first true to the truth,  
Grant me, now old, to do—with better sight,  
And humbler heart, if not the brain of youth ;  
So wilt Thou, in Thy gentleness and ruth,  
Lead back Thy old soul, by the path of pain,  
Round to his best—young eyes and heart and  
brain.”

## X

### *FAITH'S FAILURE*

"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said, Because of your unbelief."—MATT. xvii. 19.

**I**T was a beautiful summer morning; the light was falling softly over the plain, the great plain that lay at the foot of Mount Hermon, when our Lord and His disciples descended from the Mount of Vision. It had been a wonderful time for them, which they could never forget. They had beheld Jesus in unparalleled glory, had seen a new light thrown upon the Old Testament Scriptures, and had received the most conspicuous and indubitable testimony it was possible to receive of their Master's unique relationship to God.

Suddenly they came upon an excited multitude, who ran to meet them, the Scribes

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in their midst, whilst a father, full of anxiety about his child, emerging from the crowd, threw himself at the feet of the Master and told Him of the demon-possessed boy, "who had been so from a child," and of the failure of the Master's disciples to help him. They came to Him afterwards with the inquiry of the text.

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"Why could not we cast him out?" It is a question that is always being asked, and always should be asked. We have no right, in our conflict against evil, to sit down content to fail. God has so constituted the world that, strong as evil is, good is stronger; mighty as Satan is, Christ is mightier. There is no reason, therefore, for perpetual defeat, and it becomes us most earnestly to investigate the reason why we cannot cast out the great antagonist of good. The Greeks tell us of Sisyphus, who was always rolling the stone uphill that was always returning upon him. One of the saddest things for us all is to find that the world is still possessed with the same demon that assailed it centuries ago, and we go back to our Master, as our forefathers have done, saying, "Why have we failed? Why could not we cast him out?" And what is true of the whole Church is true of

the individual. The youth becomes conscious of the power of an evil habit ; he says, " I will soon overcome it," and girds himself to wrestle with it as though victory were easy and certain ; but the habit proves itself too strong and resists his effort, and the young soul sinks down tired and amazed at its impotence, saying sadly, " I suppose I cannot help it." So year after year he allows himself to be led in chains. We fight, we try to exorcise the demon, but he laughs at us. We bid him begone, but he returns ; and even when our feet are beginning to touch the waters of Jordan we cry in supreme surprise, " Why could not I cast him out ? "

And why is it that the evil is too strong, whether of drink, of impurity, of jealousy, or of pride ? Why do the old strong evils resist the Church to-day as in early days ? Why does that man fail in his inner conflict ? Why ? The Master says, " Because of your unbelief."

This was the mistake—there was no *faith*. Faith is the union between the Divine and the human, the receptivity on the part of man of the Divine dynamic, and unless you have these two united, Satan will laugh you to scorn. Only let there be faith, let the soul of man be saturated with the Holy Spirit of



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God's power, then the might of God working through a human soul as its yielded agent will be more than a match for every form of evil. The chisel, says Phillips Brooks, is nought without the sculptor's hand, nor the sculptor apart from the chisel; unite them, and the result is sure. Man without God is impotent, and God refuses to do His miracles apart from man, but Faith is the union of the twain.

Take the case of a man who is fighting against his own special form of evil, and probably there is some back door in every man and woman's life through which some special form of evil finds its way, and has so often entered that it is almost habitual to expect it to come. But directly the soul opens its whole capacity towards God, weeping its tears of bitter repentance, making its vow in the Divine presence and strength, willing to obey His commands, and keeping out of the way of temptation, victory is certain. Our faith must open itself to God, who will not act outside us mechanically, but in and through us spiritually. God does not save us, as He created the worlds from without, but with our acquiescence and fellowship, *i.e.*, by faith. God works in us to will and to work, but we must work out what He works

in. Ask, then, why you have failed, and you will find it there.

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"Nothing shall be impossible to you." *Here* is a seed lying inoperative; it cannot produce its kind for want of soil, and *there* is the soil full of energy, but of itself, without the seed, it cannot produce mustard-trees. So man is helpless without God, and God will not act without man. Now put the seed into the soil. At first it is despoiled of its beauty, and seems overwhelmed by death; then the energy of Mother Earth knocks at its tiny door, and a kindly voice says, "May I come in?" The tiny, hopeless seed replies, "I am so small, so spoiled by the dark earth, so unable to give you aught, but you may come in if you like." Then Mother Earth enters gladly, her energy forces down the rootlet and forces up the tender green shoot, and presently the slender stalk begins to grow up into the great tree. Seed and soil working in co-operation produce the tree.

Perhaps in your family there is some demon-possessed one; in your place of business, or in your workshop. But each of these might be delivered from this demon power. It does not matter how evil they are; probably it is in part due to your unbelief if the demons

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still possess that place, and to your unbelief if the demons still possess that life. There is ample power in the Risen Christ, and if you would only yield your entire nature to Him, His omnipotent might would enter and flow through you to salvation.

No demon power can stand before Christ if Christ is in you, but there must be prayer and fasting. Prayer—*that* is, the transfiguration mount ; fasting—*that* is, the putting away of everything that hinders the Spirit. We keep saying, Why cannot we have a revival ? But we must put out of our own lives the thing that hinders Him who alone is the author of revival. We must abstain from wrong things, doubtful things, and questionable things. "This kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting." It is at ruinous cost to the spirit that we pamper and indulge the flesh ; but when the body is kept in its right place, and the spirit exerts its rightful supremacy, it becomes as receptive of the power of God, as the seed is receptive of the power of Mother Earth. Moreover, as the power of Nature in the seed is often strong enough to burst open leaden coffins, to disintegrate brick and marble walls, and to roll down masses of earth from the cliffs, so the power of God, working through yielded souls, is irresistible.

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"All things are possible to him that believeth."

The father said, "If Thou canst do anything for us." But the Lord replied, "If thou canst believe." Not, Can God overcome the power of evil within my heart? but, Can I believe that He will? Not, Can God work a revival? but, Can His people in united prayer believe that He can? Not, Can God save the heathen? but, can His Church believe as much? What art thou, great mountain, casting thy shadows far across the plain? Thou shalt be levelled to the earth before the faith of one who is little else than a helpless worm, but is entirely surrendered to the indwelling and inworking of the Omnipotence of God.

## XI

### *FAITH'S RECKONING*

"Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God" (*i.e.*, "Have the faith of God").—MARK xi. 22.

THIS is altogether a remarkable incident. Coming, on one of the last mornings of His life, from Bethany to Jerusalem, our Lord, being hungry, saw a fig-tree, whose leaves suggested the supposition that there might be some figs also. Approaching this tree, He found that there were leaves only, and therefore pronounced upon it His anathema, that it might stand for evermore upon the page of inspired truth as a reminder that the fruitless soul, or nation, which abounds in promises but not in fruit must be exposed to the Divine curse. This was only doing in a moment of time what is constantly being done throughout the universe—that that which ceases to fulfil its function is put away.

On the following morning, when He and His apostles again traversed the same route, they saw this fig-tree standing shrivelled and dead upon the side of the path. It immediately arrested the attention of Peter especially, who pointed it out to the Master, and said, "See, Master, how pertinent your curse was; the fig-tree is withered."

Now, we might have supposed that the Lord would have then turned to the apostolic band, and pointed out the lesson of the cursing of the fig-tree, and perhaps have gone forward to show how, for souls of men and nations and Churches alike, such a doom must ensue upon barrenness. Instead of that, however, He said "Have faith in God, for if you do you will have power, not simply to wither fig-trees, but to remove mountains." In other words, instead of deducing an obvious lesson from the stricken tree, He proceeded to indicate the power by which it had been stricken, that it had been by an act of faith in His Father; that the tree stood there blasted, not by the putting forth of His own inherent Divine power, but by the reception from the Father of His power which awaited His demand. Then, turning to the apostles, He said in effect: "The very power that I exercise may be exercised by you;

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and the attitude of spirit by which I put Myself into union with God, so that His might may pass through Me and work with Me, is the function that you too may exercise—have faith in God.” It seems, therefore, as though Christ stands in the midst of His Church, unfolding the conception of an altogether new force which is within the reach of spiritual men.

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Suppose, as we opened our newspapers to-morrow morning, we were to see heading one of the paragraphs or articles the announcement of the discovery of a new motive force. There have been several such discoveries. There was the discovery, for instance, of the mighty power of steam, of the mysterious force of electricity, of the novel power of compressed air. But suppose, in addition to these, there should be the announcement of the discovery of a new and yet more compelling dynamic, would not wealth and commercial enterprise set all the scientific men of the world to work to discover the laws of its operation?

But Jesus Christ has discovered a new force, the operation of which He discloses in this word. Mountains have always stood in the way of the improvement of the world.

They have reared their mighty crests and ramparts, forbidding men to go farther. Man has been pent and confined, so to speak, in the valleys, and has longed for room to spread himself out right and left, but the mountain ranges have forbidden him. He has imagined, therefore, that mountains should be removed by engineering, by excavation or tunnelling. And accordingly he has sought by all the ingenuity in his power to remove the mountains of evil by which the progress of the world has been arrested. Still, age after age the mountains have laughed at his efforts to remove them. Finally he has resigned himself to his fate, and has piously wished that the time might be hastened when God would remove the mountains. Man tries his best and fails. Then he looks to God, but God does not come out of His hiding-place. The mountains still stand.

Then Jesus Christ stands amongst us and says: "There is another method of dealing with the mountains—not man by himself, not God by Himself, but by a new unit of power, in virtue of which God and man may blend perfectly, man becoming the receptacle of God, and God indwelling man, working through man, co-operating with man. You



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may depend upon it, that there is a method of submission of the human will to the Divine will which makes way for the Divine power to enter the soul, and so the soul becomes empowered with an altogether new energy ; and when it steps forth in union with the eternal God to confront the difficulties by which the world is cursed, it cries, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Jehovah thou shalt become a plain." The temple, the building of which seemed surrounded by every obstacle, is completed, to remain for centuries as the House of God.

Jesus Christ has introduced among men a new conception, a new unit of power ; not of man alone, not of God alone, but God received into the heart—into Livingstone's heart, into Spurgeon's heart, into Müller's heart—so that things which man would be unable to effect become easy by virtue of his union with the Almighty.

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*But faith must be nurtured.* To some extent it is possible to create and foster this attitude of soul by studying the promises of the Bible—taking up promise after promise, looking at them, and setting one's heart to believe and expect ; but even thus the soul often fails of strength, and the palsied hand

falls back in its impotence. No, we cannot get this wonderful attitude of soul, before which trees shall wither and mountains disappear, until we learn to live in constant fellowship with the Promiser. We must know more and more what it is to enter into the chamber of God's presence. The *eye* of the soul must be directed towards Him, receiving within it impressions of His majesty and truth and love. The *ear* of the soul must always be attent to His voice, that through His Word spirit and life may be generated. We must spend time—hours of fellowship, days of intense communion, in fact, all our life must be spent in the very presence-chamber of God; we must summer and winter with Him until the thought of God engrosses us.

There are three methods which will help us.

(1) *The Study of Nature.* To look up at those wonderful stars, perhaps from the deck of a steamer on the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, and to realise that God sent each of them upon a mission, and sustains them by His mighty power, and to say to oneself: "The God that made the Milky Way, the Creator of that clustered light, is mine; I am His child. I am greater than this ocean, greater than this world, greater than this

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universe. I am a child, and in my heart there is a spark of His own nature." Thus one has climbed up the ladder of Nature to realise the greatness of God, and, turning to some difficulty, some mountain which has stood right in the path, one has said to oneself: "God made these stars and sustains them by His power; He is in me, and through me He can make that mountain disappear. He built the mountains and He can destroy them."

(2) *The Study of Scripture.* The promises are faith's natural and necessary food. As we take up the Bible and consider the wonderful things which God has done for His saints, we are tempted to forget our own special difficulty and trouble. As we become absorbed with the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, of the falling of the walls of Jericho, of the mighty deliverances vouchsafed to God's ancient people; and as we think of the God of history, the God of the saints of all the ages, our souls expand, and we exclaim, "What are mountains, the mountains of difficulties which hem in our lives, to Him?"

(3) *The Study of our own life-story.*—There are times when we forget Nature and History, and begin to recall the wonders of

our own redemption—how we have been brought up from the miry clay and horrible pit; how our sinful souls have been cleansed by His precious blood; how the whole force of preference and desire, which were once toward evil, has been turned toward God. We know the aspirations of our heart are towards Him; we realise what He has done in our moral and spiritual nature; and we reckon that He who has brought us to this moment will perfect what concerneth us. Know God, live with God, call on history, call on Creation, call on the record of your own soul, and get great thoughts of Him, and then throw wide your entire nature to Him, and let the tide of His Being come flooding up into the bay, let the light of His glory permeate the hemisphere, let the whole being be empowered by God in you, with you, and through you, *then* speak. Say to the mountain, "Remove!" Dare to believe that God in you can accomplish everything which He allows you to claim and trust for.

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*Notice here one of the deepest words Christ ever spoke.* He says: "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray"—the old version puts it, "believe that ye receive them"—but

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the new version suggests, "believe that ye have received them." Now here is the great law.

"Believe that you have received and you shall have." Oh, if I could rivet those words upon you so that you could never forget them! "Believe that you have received." O servants of God, what prerogatives are yours when by faith you get within the veil, and receive from God definitely that which is not yours as yet in experience!

Hudson Taylor says, "Have faith in God" might be rendered, "Reckon on God's faithfulness." Put it as you will, it is only when the soul looks away from emotions and appearances, and counts on God, that it becomes able to believe that it has received when as yet there is no outward and visible sign. You see the mountain, but you look at God, you take from God. There is a definite transaction, a promise, and a guarantee. You leave the presence of God knowing you have received, though as yet your hands are empty, and the difficulty as great as ever, but you are not discouraged, you know that you have your petition. By faith and patience you inherit the promise. Hour after hour passes, the mountain is there; day after day, the mountain is there; week after week, the

mountain is there ; and then some morning you wake up and the mountain is gone !

Some are face to face with the mountain of guilt, of unforgiven sin, and penalty. Look at the Cross ; there a Sacrifice is being made which is to put it away ; look into the face of God and receive His forgiveness ; then go forth, not necessarily feeling it, but counting on it ; not rejoicing in it, but reckoning on God that He *has* done in the spiritual sphere what presently will appear in the emotional.

Some may have an awful difficulty to meet to-morrow, the result of circumstances over which they have no control, which, like a mountain, cast a shadow over their life, hiding their sun. Do not look at the difficulty, look at the great Father-heart of God, and receive His deliverance ; and then, if the actual emancipation tarries, know that deliverance must come. Increase your capacity of receiving by greater thoughts of God, until you realise that He grants deliverance ; and when you come to the hour of difficulty the mountain will have become a plain.

Some are perpetually being met by terrific temptation, and always fall under it. Have a transaction with God to-day, receive deliverance — a deliverance which will be

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yours as long as you live. Count on God to be true, and face your temptation ; it will have become a plain.

Some are doing Christian work, but are overpowered by its difficulty — the poor neighbourhood, the squalid people, the drink, betting, and impurity. Deal with God about it, and then go forward : "He shall have whatsoever he *saith*." Say it ; speak out ; dare, in the name of God, to utter the word of emancipation, of deliverance. Say to the mountain, "Begone !"

Let us take this as our motto from to-day : "I will make my mountains a way," and what has resisted and opposed you shall be the very pathway by which you advance to new victory. Oh, what victory is ours when we have learnt the secret of union with God, of receiving from God, of meeting difficulty in God ! For the soul that rests in Him there are no more mountains of insurmountable difficulty. He makes the crooked places straight and the rough places plain, and reveals His glory to the soul. "All things are possible to him that believeth."

## XII

### FAITH'S RETROSPECT

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back."—ISAIAH xxxviii. 17.

THIS text consists of three clauses, on the Revised Version rendering of which a great deal of interest and helpfulness turns :—

A.V.—"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness."

R.V.—"*Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness.*"

A.V.—"But Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption."

R.V.—"*But Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of nothingness.*"

A.V.—"For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back."

R.V.—"*For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.*"

The circumstances out of which Heze-



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kiah's psalm arose were very disastrous. At that time the hosts of Sennacherib were surrounding the city. Two hundred thousand of the fiercest soldiers that ever drew sword were encamped, with the intention of capturing and demolishing the city of "the virgin daughter of Zion," which had defied them on so many occasions. This element in the situation is referred to in ver. 6. In addition to this, Hezekiah was sick, even to death (ver. 1). Indeed, the prophet Isaiah had uttered an ultimatum, speaking as from the mouth of the Lord, bidding him set his house in order, for he should die and not live. The sickness lay heavily upon the soul of the good king. He wept sore, turning his face toward the wall, lamenting that the home of his life would be presently swept away as "a shepherd's tent before the winter floods," that the tapestry of his life would be "cut off from the loom" before the pattern was completely woven, and that his fate was as sure as that of the gazelle which has fallen into the power of the lion (vers. 12 to 13).

Under the weight of this terrible affliction he cried out to God: "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me"; and in answer to his tears and entreaties Isaiah was re-commissioned to carry to him the message,

"I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears ; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." The shadow which had crept down on the dial went backward, the life-blood began to course through his veins, and he anticipated, with eager desire, his appearance in the House of the Lord, where his song and thanksgiving might be sung to the stringed instruments (vers. 20 to 22).

In this psalm we have the review and retrospect of one who has come through a great storm, who has seen it gather amongst the mountains, and come down towards him, but it has passed over on its way far down the valley, where the clouds burst, drenching it with torrents of rain. He has learnt to put the right interpretation upon the trials which befall us in this mortal life, and to say, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." It is a great moment in life when we discover this. For the most part, as men look at calamity and trouble, they say, "By these things men *die*." It is only by the work of God's Spirit that we can say, "By these things men *live*." Have you learnt that secret? Do you realise that all the discipline of life is intended not for death but for life, that God does not mean to crush,

but to raise and ennoble, that the circumstances of home and business, friendship and occupation, are all ordered to furnish the nutriment by which the soul's vigour may be maintained at its highest point, so that we may find, with our Lord, that it is meat and drink to do His will, even though that will includes sacrifices and suffering which would daunt the children of this world?

Let us consider the retrospect of former trial; the retrospect of besetting sin from which we have been delivered; and the retrospect of forgiveness.

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THE RETROSPECT OF FORMER TRIAL,—  
“*It was for my peace that I had great bitterness.*” If we were to take the Authorised Version, it might seem that God had given His servant great bitterness instead of the peace which he used to enjoy; but this is not the meaning of the original. The thought which was in Hezekiah's mind is, that out of great bitterness He had come into a tranquillity and serenity of soul which only such hard experiences could have afforded. He sees that God had a meaning in permitting the iron to enter into his soul, he understands the Divine intention, he reads the heart of his Father, and realises that

nothing less than such a terrible ordeal could have furnished the staircase by which to climb into peace.

*Take the case of the early struggles through which some pass.*

How often the calm peacefulness which one sees on the face of a man in mature life comes from the bitterness of his earlier experiences. Luther's early struggles are a good illustration of this. Few have passed through rougher trials than he did. He tells us that his schoolmaster was so hard on him that sometimes he was birched fifteen times in a single day; at Magdeburg, and afterwards at Eisenach, he was sent out with other lads to beg his daily bread, and when he entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt he was not only set to do the most menial duties, but with a bag on his shoulder perambulated the streets seeking provisions for the lazy monks. His bitterness and anguish when his soul was convicted of sin are a matter of history. But how clear it is that out of all these hardships came the sinewy strength and endurance which enabled him to withstand the vehement hatred of the Papacy. The peace that filled his soul, and was reflected on his face when he confronted the Diet at Worms, was born

out of the bitterness through which he had passed.

*Take the effort of a man to find a firm footing for his faith.*

How many have been passing through this experience in these later years! Brought up in pious houses, with everything that could stimulate and strengthen their religious convictions, accustomed to look upon the truth of our holy religion as indisputable, they have suddenly discovered that their most cherished beliefs were the subjects of stern controversy and criticism, that the Bible itself was not accepted with the unquestioning faith of former days, and that the soul must discover some inner line of defence. What agony it is when the young soul is first exposed to the blasts of adverse criticism, and finds that the foundations on which it has built the house of its life threaten to crumble amid the constant chafe of the waves! Presently another basis of belief is found in the *experimental* knowledge of those great truths which were first received on authority. Nothing but the blood of Christ can give peace to the stricken conscience, nothing but the power of Christ can deliver from besetting sin, nothing but the words of Christ can give a clue to explain life's

terrible mysteries ; and so, by way of experience, the soul arrives at a position from which no criticism or objection can dislodge it. The absolute calm which the soul reaches when it has explored for itself the basis of its faith, and finds it impregnable, is a further illustration of the truth of these words : " Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness."

*Take the case of overwhelming disappointment.*

A man may start out as Abraham did, illumined by a great hope, expecting to find a country which should be his undisputed possession, and a city which should be his enduring home. But as the years pass, he is still a wanderer, shifting his tent and pasture-lands, moving to and fro. The city with foundations is always on the horizon ; and, finally, he comes to see that he must look beyond the bourne of this world for his settled abiding-place. But what bitterness it is to the flesh to renounce the lower for the higher, the earthly for the heavenly, the human for the Divine ! You thought that that friendship would be your strong city, but it has proved faithless and fickle. You expected to acquire a competence which would secure you against want, but it

vanished as the hoar-frost in the morning sunshine. You expected that the prestige and influence which came so freely to your hand in those early days would be a permanent security against the shocks and ills of fortune. But you have lived to see hosannas changed to "crucify." Ah, the bitterness of such disillusioning! How the heart's strings crack when the vision which had allured the soul suddenly fades, when love deceives, and when life is swept bare of its dearest treasures! And yet, who has not met men and women who have gone through such a storm, and have been saved by the merest raft? But they are so calm, so benignant, with so placid a face, and so winsome a smile, as are alone possible at such an expenditure. Concerning these also we may say it was for their peace that they had great bitterness of soul.

Let us remember, therefore, that all bitterness is intended to produce the peace of God which passeth all understanding, when it is humbly, meekly, and believingly endured. The bitter waters of Marah are allowed to pour across life's pathway, not for us to drink, but to drive us to find the tree which will make them palatable and sweet. God has no desire to embitter our lives for the

sake of giving us pain, but because the things which cause us deep anguish are the raw material out of which He weaves His celestial endowments. When, therefore, the next bitter cup is placed to your lips, look from it into the face of God, and say: "Father, even so, since it has seemed good in Thy sight." Expect the far-off interest of your tears. Anticipate the harvest for which this is the bitter seed-time. The day will come when you will be glad that you were afflicted, when the affliction which is but for a moment will have wrought out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and when the bitterness of this hour will be forgotten amid the radiance and glory of the life from which storms are banished for ever.

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THE RETROSPECT OF BESETTING SIN.—  
"*Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of corruption.*" What a graphic picture this phrase presents! We are reminded of the words: "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the pit of Malchiah, the king's son, that was in the court of the prison; and they let Jeremiah down with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire; so Jeremiah sunk in the mire," (Jer. xxxviii. 6).



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With this we may also compare the cry of the Psalmist: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, wherein there is no standing" (Psa. lxxix. 1, 2). Above the orifice of such a pit the blue sky shines like a man's ideal, but the steep and precipitous sides prevent his climbing into the fresh air; each attempt to escape results in failure. The air is stifling, and there is no foothold in the slime, where the captive sinks beyond his waist.

Is not this a type of besetting sin? No man means to be entangled when he first begins to play with it; it is only as the years advance that he finds himself hopelessly held as in a vice. Perhaps this has been your lot. You, too, have the ideal of something better which you are constantly striving to attain, but life has been one series of vain efforts, and the stain of your besetting sin has soaked through the garments of your soul. Will the time never come when you shall stand glad and free on the other side of the pit?

Certainly it shall! If only you will roll the entire burden and anguish upon God, you will find Him "a very present help." He will bring you out of "the horrible pit and the miry clay, and set your feet upon a

rock"; He will put a new song in your mouth; He will make it possible for you to say, "Thou hast loved my soul from the pit." Some morning you will wake and your hands will no longer clank with the fetter, you will go to the door, and the old enemy will be no longer waiting for you on the step, you will feel the fresh air upon your face, and know that the walls of the pit no longer confine you. Believe that there is a finality with respect to besetting sin. Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. Amalekite, Midianite, and Canaanite might await them in their onward march, but the Egyptians, at least, would never terrorise them again. So it is possible for each of us definitely to leave behind us certain forms of sin, and to escape pits of corruption, not by the strength of our right arm or the sureness of our foot, but because God has extricated us.

Then as we look back upon all that has befallen us, we shall realise that it was by His love that we were redeemed. Just as the good eunuch put down ropes to extricate Jeremiah, which were prevented from cutting his flesh by the rags with which they were enswathed, so, though the discipline may have been sharp which broke off the power

of evil habit, we shall know that love was behind it. God's gentleness makes us great, God's love delivers, God's tender mercy is greater than the tenacity of dominant passion. Love is Lord of all.

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THE RETROSPECT OF FORGIVEN SIN.—  
“*Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.*”  
In his first prayer Hezekiah said: “I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight.” But there is no trace of this self-congratulation in this psalm; on the contrary, he speaks of his sin as needing forgiveness. It was as though in those long sad hours, when his face was turned to the wall, he saw sin where he had never discerned it, and felt that his heart was being searched with lighted candles.

In the story of a woman who was a sinner, we are told that she stood *behind* Christ weeping; here, however, we learn that the forgiven sinner and his sin have exchanged places. He is no longer behind Christ, but stands before His face for ever; whilst his sin is put behind the Redeemer's back, like the graves of Kibroth-Hattaavah in the wilderness march—forgotten, left behind, erased from memory.

Lay stress upon that word *all*. *All* sin has been put away. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin." It was borne in the past in His own body on the tree, and as He has left the grave behind Him for ever, so He has left your sin and mine. It will never come into judgment again.

These are the experiences that make life. Out of these materials men become strong. The memory of such things is priceless, enabling us to understand the significance of God's dealings with men, and in hours of darkness and tribulation we are able to give others the clue to the maze, and the answer to the riddle of existence. For all these reasons it was good to be afflicted. Do not say with Jacob: "All these things" are against me; but "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

### XIII

#### *FAITH ON THE THRESHOLD OF ETERNITY*

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."—2 TIMOTHY iv. 6-8.

AT the end of the two years that Paul spent in his own hired house at Rome there is every reason to believe he was set at liberty to go back to Philippi and Corinth and elsewhere to preach the Gospel, for which he was willing to live or die.

Then the conflagration of Rome took place, and Nero tried to cast the stigma of it on the Christians. Under such circumstances it was not to be expected that Paul, the ringleader of Christianity throughout the world, would be allowed to escape. And he was probably apprehended so suddenly that he was not able to make preparations for his departure, but, leaving his cloak and parchments, was brought a second time a prisoner to Rome.

On this occasion, however, he did not stay in his own hired house, but was imprisoned in the Mamertine, a terrible hole. The upper dungeon was bad enough—there was only one orifice through which air could reach the unhappy prisoners. But the lower dungeon, which was almost certainly the place where Paul spent some time before he was executed, was a most atrocious place, for all its light and air came in through the upper dungeon, and there was no other outlet. In such a place, amid everything that could offend the senses, the great gladiator of the Cross was at last cornered by the enemies of the Gospel, and lay, perhaps, for months like a lion with a dart in his noble side.

It was in that place that he wrote this inimitable Epistle, which smells of the prison damp. He was a very sensitive and highly-strung man, as much shrinking from pain and rebuke as any one, and yet more than a conqueror through Him that loved him, and looking with perfect content upon the past, with complacency upon death, and with keen rapture and eager longing for the crown which seemed waiting for his brow.

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*First, there had been a fight.* In the Greek, it is, "I have agonised the beautiful agony."

That is to say, it was not so much that Paul took part in the great movement of the troops of Christ as in battle array they marched against the foe, but that he looked upon his life as one long, lonely conflict, a wrestling match. "I have agonised the good agony," and the word *good* is our word noble, beautiful; the conception being that it was for a worthy object, one in which even those who seemed defeated were more than conquerors.

And if you had asked him with what he conflicted, he would have replied it was a threefold foe. First, against the evil one, with whom he wrestled daily; second, against the world, that came to him like some fair syren to divert him from his love to God, and to tantalise him with her promises and her gifts; and third, against his own evil nature. He did not believe a man could leap up in a moment into mature, symmetrical, and untempted manhood; but all through his life he realised there was a conflict, a contest, in which the believer must be engaged.

The Apostle writes to Timothy, crying with a clarion voice, "Fight the good fight of faith"; from which he wants us to understand that we may always be receiving from Jesus Christ, through faith, the grace that makes us conquerors. The more you know of Christ

the more you will know of the personal devil ; the more spiritual you are, the more liable you will be to attacks of the senses ; but by faith that opens the heart to God, faith that sees the unseen and grips the eternal, faith that is ever receiving into itself the living power of the living Christ—by this you will fight the good fight successfully, you will agonise the beautiful agony.

*The Apostle's life had been a course.* The word is borrowed from the arena. It was his favourite thought, that when the Lord Jesus converted him upon the road to Damascus, He put him on the crease line and pointed to the prize at the far end, and said, "So run that you may obtain." From that moment he commenced to run, not uncertainly, but looking off unto Jesus and remembering he was surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. And now, as he comes towards the close, he says: "I have finished honourably and successfully the course."

It is a great comfort to one to remember that Jesus Christ has marked out one's course. Do you not sometimes feel you can lay your head back on His breast and say, "Master, Thou knewest what my life-course was to be, everything in it has been adjusted to my strength, and there is nothing in it, therefore,



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for which I may not be made sufficient"? What beauty and simplicity come into life as, day by day, we realise that we have nothing to do but to go forward fulfilling our course, so that we may say, at the end, "I have finished the course, fulfilled my plan, worked out God's purpose."

*To the Apostle life had been the keeping of a sacred trust—"I have kept the faith."* The idea may have been suggested of a number of soldiers placed as a garrison in a fortress. Up the steep come the swarms of assailants. The garrison stand upon the battlements in defence, and as the foe comes up they hurl him back and keep the fortress, even though at the cost of their lives. Paul taught that the holy Gospel Jesus once delivered to the saints was entrusted to his care, and wherever there was a breach made by men who desired to win salvation by works, or by those who wanted to make it an appendage to Judaism, he, by his words and Epistles, had been enabled to "keep the faith."

In these days, when the enemy is making an assault on the doctrines of inspiration, of justification, and the very Deity of the Lord, see that you contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Every day let us strive the good strife, every day let us run

the straight course, and every day let us stand up for truth and righteousness and purity, whenever these things are assailed.

As one looks on the placid face of the glorious ocean, after a night of storm, one seems to be able to realise something of this man's experience when he said : " I have had my agony ; it has not been easy to rise above its tumult and fury, not easy to finish my course, not easy to repel the assailants of Christian truth ; but it is all behind me now, and I have done with it. I have kept the faith. As I stand upon the topmost pinnacle, with the sunrise of the eternal morning around me, above me is the heaven of God's love ; before, the illimitable horizon."

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*His outlook.* The Apostle had hoped that the Lord would come before he died, but this fair vision seemed to fade, and the Apostle realised that he must pass through death to the glory. It may be that such will be our lot too. We have longed that our spirit may not be unclothed, but clothed upon, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air ; but it may be that we shall find it to be God's way for us to pass through the valley of the shadow. Like Paul, we must be content, because God has determined it so.

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He describes his death in two ways. First, as a *drink-offering*—"I am willing to be offered." It was as though he said, "Hecatombs of victims are being sacrificed now to fulfil the cruel lust of Nero, and I am willing for my blood to be poured out as a gift of wine on the sacrifice." The offering of wine, in the ancient conception of sacrifice, was the drink of God ; and may we not take it that God Himself is satisfied and refreshed by the noble self-sacrifice of those who are willing to lay down their lives for His cause.

The other conception of death is very beautiful : "The time of my departure is at hand." The Greek words are : "The time of *the loosing from my anchorage* is at hand." It is as though he were some yacht with all the sails ready to be filled with wind, the breeze catching them now and again, and dying off ; but there is a race to be run, and the yacht is waiting for the signal. How she frets against the restraint ; how she sighs to be loosed from her chain ; for the waves to be surging and tossing around her ! The Apostle says, "That is my case ; my sails are all ready, and I am chafing to be gone ; I am ready to be loosed from my anchorage."

Life is, after all, our lying at anchorage. The body anchors us to this world, but the

time will come when God will just cut us from our moorings. We shall hear the Captain cry, "Loose the shore rope"; and we shall be free. Then the ocean, then the free air. The ship, as Rudyard Kipling says, will find herself. "I am ready to depart to be with Christ, which is far better." That is dying. Do not be afraid of dying. It is so blessed to think that in a minute, perhaps before we know it, we shall have passed into the presence of God, just passing out of the harbour to the ocean; out of the river on to the mighty tide.

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"*The crown of righteousness*"—that is, the crown of vindication. Do you notice the Apostle lays the stress on the Righteous Judge? Paul, one of the greatest of men, standing before Nero, one of the most infamous, knew he could not count on a righteous judgment; but he appealed, as Sir Walter Raleigh did in the Tower, from his unrighteous judge to the Righteous Judge, and he knew that the Righteous Judge would give him the crown of righteousness—*i.e.*, of vindication.

You may be misunderstood, maligned, and viewed with suspicion. Men cannot read the secrets of your life, and often put misconstruc-

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tions upon its actions ; most undeserved censure falls to your lot. Is it not wonderful sometimes to hear the stories that pass from lip to lip about oneself, imputing matters that one's whole soul revolts from? When you hear these things you are amazed that men can entertain such notions of you. It is next to useless to vindicate ourselves. Perhaps it does not much matter. Men say hard things of us, but they would say harder if they knew us as we know ourselves. Though they may be wrong in some directions, they could be right in a good many others. But the Righteous Judge understands ; He reads our motives, He discerns our principles, He can make allowance ; and when we emerge out of the dark into the light, and stand before Him, we shall discover in His hand three crowns : The crown of *joy*—you will be glad for ever ; the crown of *life*—you will drink of life at its secret springs for ever ; and the crown of *glory* that fadeth not away.

Oh, the reversions of earth by heaven for all who love Him ! There is blood to wash away our sins, and righteousness to mantle our souls, and the Christ who understands and vindicates. Let us possess our souls in patience, and hope to the end for the grace to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus

Christ. "I reckon," each of us may surely say, with this same great and noble soul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed."

"It shall be  
A Face like my face that receives thee ; a man like  
to me,  
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever : a Hand  
like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee ! See  
the Christ stand !"

## XIV

### *CHRIST HIS OWN CREDENTIAL*

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."—JOHN vi. 29.

CHRIST'S perpetual appeal was for faith: "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me," was His incessant demand. When men asked for a sign, He referred them to His miracles and to the testimony borne Him; but it seemed as though He felt that He was Himself the most convincing and overwhelming warrant for faith. The most eloquent proof that Jesus is the Son of God arises from what He was and is, from what He taught and teaches, from what He did and does. We do not, therefore, in the first instance, say to men, "You must believe in these doctrines about Christ"; we do not hand them a New Testament, saying, "You must believe that from cover

to cover in order to be saved" ; but we bring them face to face with the living Christ, with Him "who was, and is, and is to come," with the Word of God, the Presence behind all presences, the Substance beneath all substances, the Speaker at the back of all voices ; we urge them to open their souls towards Him, even though they cannot discern Him or be sure that He cares.

An old Scotch professor, whom no one could accuse of any lack of love towards the young men whom he addressed, once said, "The great charge that I have to make against the young men of to-day is this, that they will not look the Lord Jesus Christ in the face." Surely there was a great truth in this ; much of what passes for unbelief arises from a want of courage to face Christ, because the soul instinctively realises that He is likely to make some rather serious demands upon its moral life.

Consider for a moment the credentials that Christ presents in His character and life.

(1) *His Sinlessness.* Of all the holy men whom this world has ever seen, He stands alone as being absolutely devoid of a single trace of penitence, of regret, of remorse, of any realisation that His life had in any



respect been a failure. None had such a perception of the sinfulness of sin, none such an instinctive horror of it, none so much of the white light of Divine purity; but He had no consciousness of sin; indeed, the Master challenged those who knew Him best with the inquiry, "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" He has set the world weeping, but He had no tears for His own transgressions.

How can you account for this? The problem baffles us. The holiest saints that have shone upon the page of history have given us their confessions, blurred with tears and full of the asterisks which indicate breaks and chasms of unmentionable wrong; but here is One who did nothing amiss. "He offered Himself without spot to God." Son of Man though He calls Himself, He is not as other men; He towers above them as the white Jungfrau among the Alps.

(2) *The Comprehensiveness of Christ.* He is without the limitations which attach to all other beings. When Tissot, the great French painter, desired to paint a series of pictures to illustrate the Gospels, he went to Palestine for the types. The portraits in those pictures of the Pharisees, Scribes, and Apostles were taken from the most

Hebrew types of countenance which he could discover in Jerusalem and Palestine; but the great painter did not dare to represent Jesus with a Jewish physiognomy. Instinctively he felt that in Jesus was "neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free"; there were no racial limitations in Him. Though He sprang from the most exclusive nation in history, He belongs to the whole race.

We date our chronology from Christ. The centuries before Christ, the centuries after, end and begin in Him. He is the watershed of history, but He belongs to every age; His words are dateless; He is neither an Arian of the Arians nor a Semite of the Semites.

How can we account for this? Buddha is exclusively Eastern. Zoroaster, Confucius, and Mahomet are so marked in their characteristics that you cannot transplant them; but Christ, like the corn-plant, flourishes on every soil. Surely this attests a unique and Divine personality.

(3) *His Divine Consciousness.* The one remarkable thing about our Lord is that He was constantly asserting His Divine mission and Sonship. In every Gospel He speaks of Himself as the sent of the Father,

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and in the fourth Gospel describes Himself as "the sent One," in sixteen chapters out of the twenty-one. As the Risen Lord He is reported as making the same claim. He said to His disciples, "As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you." Throughout the whole of His ministry our Lord was insisting upon the direct authorisation of the Father.

In John v. 17, 18 He distinctly claimed a relationship to God which the Jews recognised as blasphemous; and blasphemous it would have been had it not been true. How could He, who was perfect Truth, have described Himself as one with the Father, in an essential and unique oneness, unapproachable by the children of men, unless in this He was reflecting Eternal Truth? It is impossible to suppose that He who was the humblest and meekest of men would have dared to include Himself with the Father in the use of the common pronoun "*We*," when He said, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23). You cannot account for this deep consciousness of Christ if it were not absolute truth.

(4) *Christ completely satisfies the cravings of the human heart.* Surely this is one of the greatest of His credentials. In some men

the most clamant need is for a *way* into the Holiest, so that a sin-stained soul may pass into the Presence of God without fear ; this the Lord Jesus meets as our Propitiator, who has put away sin by the Blood of His Cross. With others the most urgent necessity is for *Truth*, and to these Jesus speaks of the nature of God in such a way that the soul instinctively recognises that all must be as He affirms and teaches. With yet others the prime necessity is for *Life* ; they complain that their veins are scant of life and that they pant for more, and through these He pours the sap of His own Eternal Being.

Christ came not only to reveal, but to reconcile ; He knew that it would not be enough to bring to men the truth about God ; they must have reconciliation with God. He knew also that they needed more than Light, and therefore He brought them Life. No one else has so understood the heart of man ; no one else has been able to fit the wards with the appropriate key ; no other has so opened the mystery of Life and Death, that His explanations have fitted with all the facts. May we not, therefore say, with the woman of Samaria, "He told me all that ever I did : is not this the Christ" ?

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There are many things we cannot understand about the Bible, the world around us, and the mystery of evil ; but we can at least stand before this Majestic Figure, presented to us, not in one Gospel alone, but in four ; we can allow the influence of His nature to soak into ours ; putting aside the curiosity of the intellect to know, we may give the heart an opportunity to go forth in yearning desire, reverence, and worship ; and what is this but faith ? We must reiterate again and again that faith is the act of the whole soul, not of the intellect alone, not of the emotions alone, but the movement of the entire nature towards its supreme goal, as the river towards the ocean, as a spark towards the sun.

Remember what Newman once said : "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." The Bible may be full of difficulties, but there is no need to doubt the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ or the absolute safety of every soul that commits itself and all its interests into His hands.

## XV

### *THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH*

"Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth?"—  
JOHN xviii. 37, 38.

ON the horizon heaven touches earth, so here two kingdoms met—that of Augustus Cæsar, represented by Pilate, and that of the Kingdom of Heaven, as embodied in its King. There was an expression of contempt on Pilate's face as he heard Christ's claim to be a king. "Art Thou a king? Thou tear-stained, poorly-clad child of the people? Thou art surely weak-brained; the kings whom I know would not acknowledge Thy claim, nor can I." But for all that our Lord did not abate His claim, He still affirmed it: "Thou sayest that I am—a king."

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He went on to explain that His kingdom was not of this world ; but how grievously men have misunderstood the significance of that preposition "of." They have thought that Christ meant to imply that His kingdom had nothing to do with the things of this world, did not concern itself with them, but was content to go on its way, satisfied if here and there it could obtain a follower to own His sway.

A proper interpretation of the Greek leads to a very different conclusion. "Of" translates the Greek word which signifies *out of*. Our Lord is indicating the origin of His kingdom, saying in effect, "My kingdom does not resemble the great kingdoms of antiquity which the prophet Daniel beheld coming up out of the sea. It did not spring from the brain or will of man, but descended, and came down from God out of heaven."

\* \* \*

The heavenly origin of our Lord's kingdom demands that it should be propagated by other methods than those which obtain ordinarily. The kingdoms of this world are maintained and extended by vast bodies of armed men. Their servants *fight*; but when Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high-priest, the Master

said, "Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

No, the kingdom of our Lord was commenced, and is being propagated, by one method alone. He came into the world to bear witness to the Truth, and all through His life was a faithful witness to the realities of the unseen eternal world.

When the missionary lands in some heathen, uncivilised country, before ever he can speak a word of the strange new language which he hears on every side, he erects, almost unconsciously to himself, a new standard of life, in contrast with which the customs of heathendom are weighed in the balances and found wanting. He bears witness to the sanctity of marriage, the one woman for the one man; to the spirituality of the Divine Nature which must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; to the necessity of justice, patience, forgiveness, self-control. His testimony repels and attracts, and out of those whom it attracts a church is ultimately constructed. Thus our Lord bore witness to the nature of God and of man, to the value of a child, to the blessedness of holiness, to the worth of the passive virtues, to the true Sabbath, as against the mistaken



notions of the age. Man resented his testimony and crucified Him for bearing it, but His kingdom has outlived Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, and must prevail.

This outlook of Christ was corroborated by the great Napoleon in a remarkable utterance intended to silence a group amongst his followers who disputed the Divine claims of Christ: "Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I," he said, "have founded great empires, but upon what do we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force, and they have crumbled away; but Christ founded His on love, and to this day there are myriads of men prepared to die for him."

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The closing words of this remarkable reply are, however, most pertinent to our present purpose. Mark the words, "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." This sentence deserves careful pondering; our Lord seems to say, that wherever His gospel goes, it will strike a responsive note in the hearts of those who are absolutely devoted to "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

When two instruments are perfectly attuned

it is impossible to strike one without eliciting an immediate response from the other; so when the soul is attuned to the truth of things, when it is absolutely determined at all costs to be real, when it is not tinctured by the desire to win human approbation or avoid censure, when it is prepared to make any sacrifice if it may find the Golden Grail, then, as the voice of Christ speaks from the long past the words recorded by the Evangelists, that soul will recognise that it is the voice of the King of Truth, and will hasten to confess himself His loyal subject. He who is of the Truth, *i.e.*, whose life has originated from the same heavenly quarter as the Kingdom of Truth, cannot fail to recognise the accent of the King.

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A remarkable instance of this came under my notice recently in the life-story of a man whom I know well. He began life with good parentage and prospects, but somehow drifted away from his early training into absolute unbelief. Whilst still in his teens he gave way to habits of dissolute life, crossed the Atlantic, passed through various phases of experience in the land of his choice, but fell, like the prodigal son, always downward, until he found himself compelled to earn a

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livelihood by doing the most menial and repulsive work possible. From this he drifted as a soldier into the Cuban war, and at the close of hostilities found himself almost penniless, and working as a day labourer, with no clothing but a sack with a hole in it for his head and another sack with two holes in it for his legs.

One day the thought suddenly struck him : "Perhaps after all there is a God ;" and this was immediately followed by another : "If there is a God, He must be true, and if I am perfectly true, I shall find Him for myself." From that moment he began to be absolutely true, doing whatever he knew to be right, true in speech, in act, and in the entire attitude of his life towards those around him. It was not long before he found himself face to face with the nature of God. It was as though the mists which had filled the landscape had suddenly rolled up the mountain side, and had left the whole world open to the monarch of the day. He was a child and follower of the Truth, and became a loyal subject of the King of Truth, whose gospel he began to proclaim.

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This experience suggests some very serious questions. I would not for a moment assert that *all* unbelievers are in some way offending

against the higher intuitions and impulses of their moral nature : there is such a thing as "honest doubt," as Tennyson reminds us in his *In Memoriam* ; but I do say that it becomes us to ask ourselves very seriously whether we are absolutely transparent and "of the Truth."

Perhaps you doubt because in your early life you met with a type of evangelical piety that professed a high standard which it failed to practise. This prejudiced you against Christianity, the more so as you were a sufferer from these un-Christian practices and habits, but surely you must put away this warping memory of your early life. You are well able to distinguish between the type of character which Christ inculcates and that spurious travesty of it from which you suffered. You do not refuse good money because once, when a child, a bad shilling was given to you as change. You do not eschew the rich product of the orchard because you have come across some sorry specimens of apple and plum.

Perhaps you are naturally pugnacious and awkward. It is your habit to refuse entrance to new ideas. You always take the unpopular side. It is against the grain with you to give in. It is hardly right to class yourself as an

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"honest doubter" until you have made allowance for these characteristics of your mind. Is it possible that there is something of this sort as the root of your unbelief? If so, should you not confess and put it away before you give your final verdict?

Again, it is conceivable that your doubts and difficulties are not the natural outcome of your own thought, but have been borrowed from the hearsay of the workshop, the casual talk of your companions, or some ephemeral article in a magazine or newspaper. In this case you cannot quote such second-hand impressions as a sufficient reason for rejecting the claims of the King of Truth. Because another man, for some reason best known to himself, doubts Christ, it is no reason why you should refuse Him. Be true to yourself and to the more generous instincts of your nature, and you may realise that you are masquerading in arms which you do not properly know how to wield. This also must be put away before you will be in a position to judge of the claims of Christ.

Perhaps you are not really in earnest, you are a trifler with life; you resemble Nero, "fiddling while Rome was burning"; you do not apprehend the seriousness of the issues that await your decision; you have built so

much "wood, hay, and stubble" into your character that it has become deficient in those great qualities which the judgment-seat demands. Pilate was too frivolous to estimate aright the claims of Christ. "Jesting Pilate," Lord Bacon calls him, who would not wait for an answer to his flippant jest, "What is truth?"

Lastly, there may be some evil and baneful influence in your life which warps and deflects your judgment. How absurd it is under such circumstances to suppose that your eyes can discern or appreciate the matchless purity and glory of the Son of God !

"Still to the holy soul  
He doth Himself impart,  
And for His dwelling and His throne,  
Chooseth the pure in heart."

## XVI

### *IF NOT FAITH IN CHRIST—WHAT?*

“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”—JOHN vi. 66-68.

THE scene was the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus had stood face to face with the crowds who had followed Him across the lake. A materialised instinct had prompted them to follow Him. They sought Him because they ate of the loaves and were filled; and the Master made use of the occasion to speak of the mysteries of His life and death. He announced that He was Himself the Living Bread, of which those who ate would live for ever.

As He spoke thus there was a murmuring amongst even His disciples. The crowd began to thin as the twilight deepened.

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## If not Faith in Christ—What? 137

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Many of His disciples stole out of the synagogue, determined to walk no more with Him.

It would almost appear as though one by one all the people had dispersed, with the exception of His apostles. Never had one of them expected that the Master's popularity would be shattered within the limits of a single day. Last night it was with difficulty that Jesus escaped being made king; to-night He is deserted by every one except those whom He had first called from their ordinary walks of life. Very sadly He asked the question, "Will ye also go away?" The winnowing-fan had indeed done its work, and the floor had been thoroughly purged. Simon Peter, speaking, as he was in the habit of doing, for the rest, replied in the memorable words, "Master, to whom shall we go? Thy teachings tell us of the life of the ages, and we have come to believe and know that Thou art indeed the Holy One of God" (Dr. Weymouth's translation).

Suppose for a moment it be granted that Christianity is only an hypothesis which is incapable of absolute demonstration and for which there are only nine chances out of ten, still we might well cling to it, not only



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because it explains the mysteries of the universe more satisfactorily than any other hypothesis with which the human mind is acquainted, but because there is no alternative to it, save absolute despair.

Abandon Christ, if you choose ; turn your back on all the history and experience of the past nineteen centuries ; refuse the irreproachable witness of those who have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into that of God's dear Son ; grant that Christ never rose, and that the entire body of Christian revelation is a delusion, what have you ? To whom shall you go ?

Surely not to Zoroaster, to Confucius, to Buddha, or to Mahomet. The type of character which these have created, either of individuals or civilisations, will not for a moment bear comparison with the products of Christ's character and words. Besides, they can cast no light on the problems of being, in such absolute harmony with the loftiest intuitions of the soul, as Christ casts, even where His teachings reveal things that the unaided mind of man might not have been able to discover ; He has revealed nothing which, when the revelation is carefully pondered, we do not recognise as "the words of eternal life."

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## If not Faith in Christ—What? 139

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Christ answers the persistent appeal of our nature as none other can. You may question about Christianity, argue, speculate, and philosophise, but never reach a satisfactory conclusion; whilst, on the other hand, if you will give yourself to Him, as your Saviour, King, and Teacher, you will find that He will so speak to your heart, answering its deepest longings, its clamant questionings, its eager cry for God, that you will exclaim with Peter, "We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

In the earlier part of this discourse the Master said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (ver. 29). But you answer, "That is just my difficulty; how can I make myself believe?" That objection has been powerfully met by Professor James in his chapter on "The Will to Believe." The question is, Are you *willing* to believe? Will you hand yourself over to the teaching of the Son of God? It is not necessary at this point to believe *about* Him, but will you believe *in* Him. You may believe the most orthodox creed *about* Him and be lost, but no man can surrender himself to obey and follow Him without being led out into His marvellous light.

"If any man *willeth to do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself," so spake the Master in the next great discourse (vii. 17, R.V.). The question is, therefore, Are you willing to do His will? Will you begin now to act and speak as He would wish you act and speak? Will you from this hour refrain from all that might grieve His tender, holy nature? Will you behave yourself, so far as you know, as Christ would have done in your circumstances? If so, it will be as when a traveller in an unknown country entrusts himself to a stranger who professes to be able to guide him to his destination—the longer they travel together the more absolutely sure he becomes that his guide is trustworthy; his behaviour generates increasing confidence and respect; at each difficulty his skill and ability approve themselves; and when some supreme emergency arises there is no kind of hesitation, but a reliance which is born out of weeks and months of experience.

Supposing, then, it be granted that Christianity is an hypothesis, why should you not accept and act upon it?—with doubt and hesitation perhaps for the first few steps, but as you begin to prove it by obedience

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## If not Faith in Christ—What? 141

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and experience you will become absolutely convinced that you are not following a cunningly devised fable.

“You say, but with no touch of scorn,  
Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes  
Are tender over drowning flies,  
You tell me, doubt is devil-born.

I know not : one indeed I knew  
In many a subtle question versed,  
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,  
But ever strove to make it true.

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.”

That is precisely it. If you are perplexed and worried as to Christ and His claims, give up for a time the constant round of argument and set yourself to obey Him. Practise the high code of morals which His teachings suggest, with reverence to Him who spake as never man spake, with your heart and soul ever turned towards Him, and ever open to the in-breathing of His Spirit. Do not make “your judgment blind” by any wilful deviation from the straight path of obedience ; and almost before you are aware you will become conscious that One is going at your side whom you know not, that a radiant

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Presence is illuminating your pathway, and that your eyes are being opened to discern a Face in which the glory of the Uncreated God blends with the tender pity of the purest, noblest, tenderest, strongest Man that ever trod our world.

“He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the spectres of the mind  
And laid them : thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own,  
And Power was with him in the night.”