

PREFACE

1. FAITH is on all hands regarded as the criterion of a standing or falling Church; but what is Faith? The question may be approached in two ways, psychologically or historically; *i.e.* we may ask what Faith must mean from the constitution of human nature, or what Faith actually did mean, so far as we can judge from the records, to the Founder of our religion. Those who are interested in the philosophical question will find the satisfaction they require in Mr. Holland's Essay in "Lux Mundi;" the simpler method will suffice for us here. It is noticeable that while our Lord is always demanding Faith, He offers no definition of the Faith He requires; so that there is a presumption that He meant by Faith just what men ordinarily mean by it. And the presumption is increased when it is remembered that faith in our Lord began with being faith in human

[p vi]

qualities, before those qualities were seen to be divine. The faith of the apostles increased under our Lord's careful training,¹ both in depth and breadth; but between the first attraction that drew (say) Peter from his nets and the last declaration of his worship upon the shores of Gennesaret there was no breach of continuity. Indeed, as if to assure us that the apostle's human faith had not after the Resurrection "changed to something else," and become an indefinite theological virtue, we find the word used to express it which, of all the words that labour to express faith, is the one most deeply tinged with human feeling: "Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest* thou Me more than these?" We must ask, therefore, what, as between man and man, is commonly meant by Faith, and then we can examine whether our explanation fits the several groups of passages in the Gospels.

2. To have faith in a man is to rely upon his known character, or upon certain elements of it. If I entrust a workman with an order, or an agent with some negotiation, it is because from past

[p vii]

experience—my own or others'—I rely upon his skill, or secrecy, or despatch, or whatever the quality be that the case requires. My faith is grounded upon knowledge, and limited to the qualities about which I am informed. In regard to the sister graces, such faith grounded upon the past necessarily carries with it a *hope* that in the present also my faith may be justified by the issue; but it may or may not coexist with *love*. For instance, if we have faith in the integrity of our judges, or the efficiency of our army and navy, or the competence of our legislature, we shall hope that a particular offender will suffer punishment, or a particular war be successfully conducted, or a particular bill be passed into law; but neither our legal bench, nor our military services, nor our Houses of Parliament, call out affection. This is because, in the cases mentioned, our faith and hope are inspired by certain qualities only, justice or courage or wisdom; whereas love is not called forth by such single virtues, but by the unity behind all such separate qualities in which they subsist. We love persons, not virtues, however excellent. Now, it is when faith attaches itself, not to this or that talent or virtue, but to the

[p viii]

whole character, and "works by love," as in the familiar relationship of child with parent, and pupil with teacher, that it has its redeeming work upon the subject. For as it is the whole person

that attracts, so it is the whole person that is attracted and lifted up—heart and mind and soul.

3. The Gospel stories make it evident that it was this natural whole-hearted faith that the first disciples felt for Jesus; a growing trust, based upon admiration, and allied with hope and love. No doubt their faith often showed itself imperfect, just as their hope embraced irrelevant objects,² and their love needed chastening;³ but their very failures in faith reveal the true nature of the faith required. “Why are ye fearful?” said our Lord in the storm upon the Sea of Galilee; “have ye not yet faith?”⁴ *i.e.* “have you not yet learnt confidence in Me?” And to S. Peter, when his heart failed him as he was walking on the water, and he began to sink, He said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” It is plain that a “faith” which is contrasted with fear cannot mean

[p ix]

anything else than what we mean by “confidence.” And observe that this confidence is to be based upon the apostle’s past experience; for that is the force of “Have ye not yet faith?” The same interpretation fits such places as “Be not anxious for your life; if God so clothe the grass, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” where experience of God’s lovingkindness is referred to as the basis of confidence in Him; and in a very interesting passage of S. Matthew (xvi. 8-12), our Lord catechizes the disciples on the two miracles of Feeding, which should have sufficed to witness His power, in order to dispel some gloomy apprehension. And let no one think that trust in Christ must be an insufficient account of Christian faith because trust is so simple and familiar a quality; before any such judgment can be passed, the object in view must be borne in mind. Christ was forming in His disciples a new character. Now, the way character is best formed is by the unconscious imitation of parent by child, of teacher by pupil; the younger looking up to the elder with perfect affection, admiration, and trust. And if a parent can raise a child to his own level, and a teacher his pupil, by virtue

[p x]

of this subtle bond of faith, it need not surprise us that faith in Christ, He being who He was, should have been in all who yielded themselves to its regenerating influence the principle of a new life.

4. We must next take account of those passages where Faith is said to be necessary to healing. An examination of these will show that, while a confidence as deep and strong as that of the Twelve could not, of course, be expected from strangers, yet what our Lord did require was at least the confidence that He had the power to grant what was asked. “Believe ye,” He said to the two blind men,⁵ “*that I am able to do this?*” and when they replied, “Yea, Lord,” He touched their eyes, saying, “According to your *faith* be it unto you.” Similarly to Jairus He said, “*Fear not, only believe;*”⁶ and to the father of the deaf and dumb boy, whose prayer was, “*If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us,*” the reply came, “*If thou canst! all things are possible for him that believeth.*”⁷ Again, the “great faith” of the centurion was simply a supreme confidence

[p xi]

that Jesus could heal his servant with a word; and the thought of the woman with the issue of blood, “If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole,” expresses a like certainty of conviction. In several cases this confidence in Christ’s power and love was accompanied by the

belief that He was the expected Messiah; we see this in the story of the blind men who hailed Him as “Son of David,”⁸ and perhaps also in the story of the Canaanitish woman, who fought against the suggested limit of His jurisdiction.⁹ But this belief, though it would help to justify to themselves the confidence they felt in Jesus of Nazareth, would not affect its nature; for both their confidence and their opinion must have rested on the fame of the Prophet that had reached their ears. Why our Lord demanded this faith we are not told. From occasional expressions we are led to believe that it was in the nature of things an indispensable condition, as though Christ’s power, although “present to heal,” could not enter to do its work unless Faith opened the door: *e.g.* we are told that “He did not many mighty works [in Nazareth] because of their unbelief,”¹⁰ *i.e.* the unbelief of the

[p xii]

majority; and the disciples are commanded to heal the sick only where they are received; and we may compare the expression, “perceiving that he had *faith to be healed*,” used of the cripple at Lystra.¹¹ In the case of children, such as the centurion’s slave, even if there was no active trust—though there may very well have been—there would, at any rate, be no active distrust. Those who think that any such limitation to Christ’s power from without is inconceivable, have still to make their account with the fact of free-will, which evidently limits His power in healing the soul.

5. Faith is no less represented as a necessary condition of the spiritual miracles of forgiveness. “Jesus *seeing their faith* said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;”¹² and again to the woman who was a sinner in the city, “*Thy faith* hath saved thee; go in peace.”¹³ It is highly probable that the faith our Lord thus recognized and rewarded was that opening of the heart to good influences, which comes of trust in a higher nature. It is significant that the

[p xiii]

“faith” of the woman is also spoken of as “love.” “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; because she *loved* much.” We cannot be wrong in understanding “faith,” in these cases of forgiveness, to mean such an attachment to Christ’s person, such a conviction of His holiness, and at the same time of His mercy, that the sinner dared to submit himself to the cords that drew him out of his past self, and away from his sin.

6. There remains a final group of passages in the Gospels, where “faith” is made the condition, not now of undergoing, but of working, miracles. The type of them is that great saying to the Twelve, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”¹⁴ Of course, the expression here is figurative;¹⁵ it was proverbial among the Rabbis;¹⁶ and, apart from that, acquaintance with the Gospels suffices to

[p xiv]

show us that the only “mountains” Christ Himself removed were those of sin and its consequences. The words in this place are part of our Lord’s answer to the disciples’ question, “Why could not we cast him out” (the demon that possessed the lunatic boy)? The answer was, “Because of your little faith. Faith will move mountains.” And the nature of this faith is made plain by the succeeding words, “This kind goeth not forth but by prayer.” The strength that

avails to bind and spoil the strong man, or do any other “mighty work,” is the grace of God, which is given in answer to prayer; but prayer cannot be made, and so cannot be answered, unless there is first the confidence that God hears and is ready to help. But given this “faith,” prayer must follow, and then the promise applies, “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”

7. Such an examination as we have here attempted of the places where our Lord speaks of “faith,” supports the presumption with which we started, that by faith He meant trust in the Father, or in Himself as the Revealer of the Father. This faith we know He inspired in
[p xv]

many, such as the women who ministered to Him, and the family at Bethany, and Zacchæus, and in them it became the seed of a new life; and there were doubtless many more whose names are not recorded—sick whom He healed, hungry whom He fed, sinners whom He forgave, weak-hearted whom He strengthened, whose souls responded like “good ground” to His Self-sowing. But the Twelve were not only to be drawn to Him for their own sakes; they were also to represent Him to the world; and so it was obligatory that their faith should be not only instinctive and general, but thorough and also intelligent. Accordingly our Lord, as we see in the Gospels, devoted special pains to the training of the apostles’ faith;¹⁷ ex-

[p xvi]

plaining to them His words and works, expostulating with their misconceptions, at last demanding a reason for the faith that was in them: “Whom say ye that I am?” It was S. Peter’s glory that, as his faith had been the most devoted, so it was he who first brought it to articulate expression in the Christian creed: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Nowadays people sometimes object to creeds and dogmas as though they were in their very nature antagonistic to faith. Of course this is not so; the faith of a rational being should be capable of expression in rational speech, and this is dogma. Dogmas can be objected to only on the score of untruth, or, in a less degree, on the score of inadequacy. At any rate, our Lord approved of S. Peter’s dogma of his Divinity, and declared it to be a revelation to him from the Father, and the sure Rock on which the Church should be built;¹⁸ and it must be clear to every one that the life of Jesus of Nazareth does not of itself constitute a message to the world, unless it be preached that His life was a declaration of the mind of God, and was lived in order to draw men to God. But it is no less clear that

[p xvii]

assent to a dogma about Christ does not necessarily include faith in Him. For assent requires the action of only a part of man’s being, his reason; and it does not follow, because the mind assents to the Divinity of Jesus, that the heart must, as a consequence, admire and trust and worship Him, and the will compel the actions into conformity with His commandments. In a perfect man, creed would no doubt have a direct and potent influence on character; but as most people are constituted without much imagination, they fail to realize much of the practical bearing of their creed. Hence it is that “orthodoxy” has come to have a bad sound in the mouths of many earnest preachers; not that “a right judgment” in divine things can be a small matter, but because right opinions may be unduly exalted over that personal relation of love and trust between the soul and God, which is Faith, and the essence of true religion.

8. A difficulty may be found by some readers in what is said above about Faith being based upon experience. They may ask, Is not "faith" constantly contrasted with "sight," and spoken

[p xviii]

of as a "leap" or a "venture," or even as "belief without evidence"? In answer, it may be explained that what is meant by speaking thus of faith is generally one of two things.

(i.) Theoretically. The final object of all religious faith is the character of God; and in order to ascertain this, there are three chief lines of evidence of which account must be taken: (1) The revelation in Christ; (2) the revelation in History, especially that of the Jewish and Christian Churches; (3) the revelation in Nature,—to which three we may add a fourth, which may be first, a man's own experience of life. From these various groups of experience a modern Christian's faith is compounded in various measures. And what a Christian means by "the venture of faith" is often this—that there are portions of the evidence, especially in (3), which do not seem to make for the Almightyness and All-goodness of God, but which he is content to waive in the face of overwhelming evidence on the other side. In the same way, our Lord's first disciples had many appearances and prepossessions to disregard before their faith in Christ was perfect, and to that extent their faith also was a "venture;" but nevertheless their faith

[p xix]

was a confidence in what they knew of Christ; they were not conscious of making any leap away from the evidence; when appearances were at their worst, their despair could sound no lower note than this: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."¹⁹

(ii.) Practically. Trust in God, and in His purposes and promises, gives men courage to confront difficulties and dangers in endeavouring to carry out those purposes or await the promises. "They endure, as seeing Him who is invisible;" they are convinced of the possibility of substance being given to their hopes. It is this faith, and the "ventures" to which it led, which forms the subject of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Similarly, it is plain that a confidence in God as the Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier of mankind must carry with it a confidence in man's perfectibility, and so help to bring on that consummation, which no one would have the heart to work for who judged of mankind at large simply upon the evidence of his eyes and ears. Such faith in man may well be described as a "venture;" at the same time, it really rests

[p xx]

upon our experience of God as revealed in the "Son of man."

9. In conclusion, it may be worth while to state explicitly once more, that the "faith" which Christ requires, and which Christians profess, is "faith *in God*."²⁰ It is not merely a lifting up of the heart that avails to save us, but the lifting up of the heart "*unto the Lord*." For there is a kind of attempted "faith-healing" in the things of the soul, which consists in trying to persuade oneself that everything is well. Such "faith" is faith in self, a lifting up of the heart to self, and whatever answer it receives must come from self. But faith in God has its immediate answer in the grace and peace of God. For as faith is itself no self-originated impulse,²¹ but the springing up of a man's heart in response to the encircling pressure of the "Everlasting Arms,"²² so its reward is to feel more deeply and ever more deeply their divine support.

¹ On this subject of the apostles' training, the reader may consult with great advantage Mr. Latham's "Pastor Pastorum" (Bell).

² S. Mark ix. 34; Acts i. 6.

³ S. Matt. xvi. 22.

⁴ S. Mark iv. 40 (R.V.).

⁵ S. Matt. ix. 28.

⁶ S. Luke viii. 50.

⁷ S. Mark ix. 23 (R.V.).

⁸ S. Matt. ix. 27.

⁹ xv. 22.

¹⁰ xiii. 58.

¹¹ Acts xiv. 9.

¹² S. Matt. ix. 2.

¹³ S. Luke vii. 50.

¹⁴ S. Matt. xvii. 20.

¹⁵ S. Matthew also quotes it in chap. xxi. 21, after the story of the withered fig tree, as does S. Mark (xi. 23); but that whole story is a very difficult one, and cannot be here discussed.

¹⁶ Edersheim, "Jesus the Messiah," ii. 109.

¹⁷ The consideration of the slow growth of the apostles' faith in our Lord may lead us to weigh the revivalist notion that "faith" is suddenly experienced, and works an instantaneous change of character. Of course, the first attraction and "turning" may be sudden. There came a call to each of the Twelve, to Zacchæus and Nicodemus, just as to ourselves; and as to them, so also to us, for various reasons, the call may first come with a shock of surprise. But character is seldom transfigured even by the greatest shock. And, what is more to the point, the transfiguring power is faith *in Christ*, which cannot exist at all in a man's mind until he has some experience of Christ, and which grows proportionately with the growth of this experience. Again, to a student of the Gospels, it is difficult to recognize in "faith," as the assurance that one is saved, a legitimate descendant of that reverence and love for Christ's person and character which saved (and still saves) the soul from its diseases.

¹⁸ S. Matt. xvi. 13-18.

¹⁹ S. John vi. 68.

²⁰ S. Mark xi. 22.

²¹ S. John vi. 44.

²² Deut. xxxiii. 27.