

The Meaning of Faith

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To
MY MOTHER

IN MEMORIAM

*"'Tis human fortune's happiest height to be
A spirit melodious, lucid, poised, and whole;
Second in order of felicity
To walk with such a soul."*

PREFACE

A book on faith has been for years my hope and intention. And now it comes to final form during the most terrific war men ever waged, when faith is sorely tried and deeply needed. Direct discussion of the war has been purposely avoided; the issues here presented are not confined to those which the war suggests; but many streams of thought within the book flow in channels that the war has worn. Since the conflict had to come, I am glad for this book's sake that it was not written until it had Europe's holocaust for a background.

Against one misunderstanding the reader should be guarded. If anyone approaches these studies, expecting to find detailed and special views of Christian doctrine, he will be disappointed. The perplexities of mind and life and the affirmations of religious faith, with which these studies deal, lie far beneath sectarian doctrinal controversy. I have tried to make clear a foundation on which faith might build its thoughts of Christian truth. And while I have spoken freely of God and Christ and the Spirit, of the Cross and life eternal, I have not intended or endeavored a complete theology. I have had in mind that elemental matter of which Carlyle was thinking when he wrote: "The thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain concerning his vital relations to the mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, *that* is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. *That* is his religion."

As in "The Meaning of Prayer," the Scripture has been used for the basis and interpretation of the daily thought. The Bible is our supreme record of man's experience with faith; it recounts in terms of life faith's sources and results, its successes and failures, its servants and its foes. And because faith is not a *tour de force* of intellect alone, but is an act of life, prayers have been used for the expression of aroused desire and resolution.

My indebtedness to many helpers is very great. But to my friend and colleague, Professor George Albert Coe, my gratitude is so definitely due for his careful reading of the manuscript, that the book should not go out lacking an acknowledgment.

H. E. F.

December 15, 1917.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The complex subject of Faith has required an extended treatment, which has made the present volume much longer than the author's previous works. Every item of expense connected with publishing has greatly increased even within the past few months, and, to the regret, alike of publisher and author, it has been found necessary to charge more for this volume than for "The Meaning of Prayer" and "The Manhood of the Master."

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CHAPTER I

Faith and Life's Adventure

DAILY READINGS

Discussion about faith generally starts with faith's *reasonableness*; let us begin with faith's *inevitableness*. If it were possible somehow to live without faith, the whole subject might be treated merely as an affair of curious interest. But if faith is an unescapable necessity in every human life, then we must come to terms with it, understand it, and use it as intelligently as we can. *There are certain basic elements in man which make it impossible to live without faith.* Let us consider these, as they are suggested in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, better than any other book in the Bible, presents faith as an unavoidable human attitude.

First Week, First Day

Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.—Heb. 11: 1.

As Moffatt translates: "Now faith means we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see." When faith is described in such general terms, its necessity in human life is evident. Man cannot live without faith, because he deals not only with a past which he may know and with a present which he can see, but with a *future in whose possibilities he must believe*. A man can no more avoid looking ahead when he lives his life than he can when he sails his boat, and in one case as in the other, his direction is determined by his thought about what lies before him, his "assurance of things hoped for." Now, this future into which continually we press our way can never be a matter of demonstrable knowledge. We know only when we arrive, but meanwhile we believe; and our knowledge of what is and has been is not more necessary to our quest than our faith con-

cerning what is yet to come. As Tennyson sings of faith in "The Ancient Sage":

"She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
She feels the sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage'!"

However much a man may plan, therefore, to live without faith, he cannot do it. When one strips himself of all convictions about the future he stops living altogether, and active, eager, vigorous manhood is always proportionate to the scope and power of reasonable faith. The great spirits of the race have had the aspiring, progressive quality which the Scripture celebrates:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.—Heb. 11: 13-16.

Almighty God, let Thy Spirit breathe upon us to quicken in us all humility, all holy desire, all living faith in Thee. When we meditate on the Eternal, we dare not think any manner of similitude; yet Thou art most real to us in the worship of the heart. When in the strife against sin we receive grace to help us in our time of need, then art Thou the Eternal Rock of our salvation. When amid our perplexities and searchings, the way of duty is made clear, then art Thou our Everlasting Light. When amid the storms of life we find peace and rest through submission, then art Thou the assured Refuge of our souls. So do Thou manifest Thyself unto us, O God!

Our Heavenly Father, we give Thee humble and hearty thanks for all the sacred traditions which have come down to us from the past—for the glorious memories of ancient days, concerning that Divine light in which men have been

conscious of Thy presence and assured of Thy grace. But we would not content ourselves with memories. O Thou who art not the God of the dead, but the God of the living, manifest Thyself unto us in a present communion. Reveal Thyself unto us in the tokens of this passing time. Give us for ourselves to feel the authority of Thy law: give us for ourselves to realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin: give us for ourselves to understand the way of salvation through sacrifice. Teach us, by the Spirit of Christ, the sacredness of common duties, the holiness of the ties that bind us to our kind, the divinity of the still small voice within that doth ever urge us in the way of righteousness. So shall our hearts be renewed by faith; so shall we ever live in God. Amen.
—John Hunter.

First Week, Second Day

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.—Heb. 11: 8-10.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.—Heb. 11: 24-27.

Man cannot live without faith because his relationship with the future is an affair not alone of thought but also of action; *life is a continuous adventure into the unknown.* Abraham and Moses pushing out into experiences whose issue they could not foresee are typical of all great lives that have adventured for God. "By faith" is the first word necessary in every life like Luther's and Wesley's and Carey's. By faith John Bright, when his reforms were hard bestead, said: "If we can't win as fast as we wish, we know that our opponents can't in the long run win at all." By faith Glad-

stone, when the Liberal cause was defeated, rose undaunted in Parliament, and said, "I appeal to time!" and by faith every one of us must undertake each plain day's work, if we are to do it well. Robert Louis Stevenson said that life is "an affair of cavalry," "a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded." But so to deal with life demands faith. The more one sees what venturesome risks he takes every day, what labor and sacrifice he invests in hope of a worthy outcome, with what great causes he falls in love until at his best he is willing for their sakes to hazard fortune and happiness and life itself, the more he sees that the soul of robust and serviceable character is faith.

O God, who hast encompassed us with so much that is dark and perplexing, and yet hast set within us light enough to walk by; enable us to trust what Thou hast given as sufficient for us, and steadfastly refuse to follow aught else; lest the light that is in us become as darkness and we wander from the way. May we be loyal to all the truth we know, and seek to discharge those duties which lay their commission on our conscience; so that we may come at length to perfect light in Thee, and find our wills in harmony with Thine.

Since Thou hast planted our feet in a world so full of chance and change that we know not what a day may bring forth, and hast curtained every day with night and rounded our little lives with sleep; grant that we may use with diligence our appointed span of time, working while it is called today, since the night cometh when no man can work; having our loins girt and our lamps alight, lest the cry at midnight find us sleeping and the door fast shut.

Since we are so feeble, faint, and foolish, leave us not to our own devices, not even when we pray Thee to; nor suffer us for any care to Thee or for any pain to us to walk our own unheeding way. Plant thorns about our feet, touch our hearts with fear, give us no rest apart from Thee, lest we lose our way and miss the happy gate. Amen.—W. E. Orchard.

First Week, Third Day

Man cannot live without faith because the prime requisite in life's adventure is *courage*, and the sustenance of courage is faith.

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.—Heb. 11: 32-40.

When in comparison with men and women of such admirable spirit, one thinks of weak personalities, that ravel out at the first strain, he sees that the difference lies in courage. *When a man loses heart he loses everything.* Now to keep one's heart in the midst of life's stress and to maintain an undiscourageable front in the face of its difficulties is not an achievement which springs from anything that a laboratory can demonstrate or that logic can confirm. It is an achievement of faith,

“The virtue to exist by faith
As soldiers live by courage.”

Consider this account of Havelock, the great English general: “As he sat at dinner with his son on the evening of the 17th, his mind appeared for the first and last time to be affected with gloomy forebodings, as it dwelt on the probable annihilation of his brave men in a fruitless attempt to accomplish what was beyond their strength. After musing long in deep thought, his strong sense of duty and his confidence in the justice of his cause restored the buoyancy of his spirit; and he exclaimed, ‘If the worst comes to the worst, we can but die with our swords in our hands!’” No man altogether

escapes the need for such a spirit, and, as with Havelock and the Hebrew heroes, confidence in someone, faith in something, is that spirit's source.

O God, who hast sent us to school in this strange life of ours, and hast set us tasks which test all our courage, trust, and fidelity; may we not spend our days complaining at circumstance or fretting at discipline, but give ourselves to learn of life and to profit by every experience. Make us strong to endure.

We pray that when trials come upon us we may not shirk the issue or lose our faith in Thy goodness, but committing our souls unto Thee who knowest the way that we take, come forth as gold tried in the fire.

Grant by Thy grace that we may not be found wanting in the hour of crisis. When the battle is set, may we know on which side we ought to be, and when the day goes hard, cowards steal from the field, and heroes fall around the standard, may our place be found where the fight is fiercest. If we faint, may we not be faithless; if we fall, may it be while facing the foe. Amen.—W. E. Orchard.

First Week, Fourth Day

Man cannot live without faith, because the adventure of life demands not only courage to achieve but *patience to endure and wait*, and all untroubled patience is founded on faith. When the writer to the Hebrews speaks of those who "through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6: 12), he joins two things that in experience no man successfully can separate. By as much as we need patience, we need faith.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, becoming partakers with them that were so used. For ye both had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience,

that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.—Heb. 10: 32-36.

The most difficult business in the world is *waiting*. There are times in every life when action, however laborious and sacrificial, would be an unspeakable relief; but to sit still because necessity constrains us, endeavoring to live out the admonition of the psalmist, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him," is prodigiously difficult. *No one can do it without some kind of faith.* "In your patience," said Jesus, "ye shall win your souls" (Luke 21: 19), but such an achievement is no affair of logic or scientific demonstration; it is a venture of triumphant faith. The great believers have been the unwearied waiters; faith meant to them not controversial opinion, but sustaining power. As another has phrased it, "Our faculties of belief were not primarily given to us to make orthodoxies and heresies withal; they were given us to *live by.*"

We beseech of Thee, O Lord our God, that Thou wilt grant to every one of us in Thy presence, this morning, the special mercies which he needs—strength where weakness prevails, and patience where courage has failed. Grant, we pray Thee, that those who need long-suffering may find themselves strangely upborne and sustained. Grant that those who wander in doubt and darkness may feel distilling upon their soul the sweet influence of faith. Grant that those who are heart-weary, and sick from hope deferred, may find the God of all salvation. Confirm goodness in those that are seeking it. Restore, we pray Thee, those who have wandered from the path of rectitude. Give every one honesty. May all transgressors of Thy law return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls with confession of sin, and earnest and sincere repentance. Amen.—Henry Ward Beecher.

First Week, Fifth Day

Man cannot live without faith because he exists in a universe, the complete explanation of which is forever beyond his grasp, so that *whatever he thinks about the total meaning of creation is fundamentally faith.*

By faith we understand that the worlds have been

framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear.—Heb. 11: 3.

Not only is this true, but if we think that there is *no* God, that also is faith; and if we hold that the basic reality is physical atoms, that is faith; and whatever anybody believes about the origin and destiny of life is faith. When Haeckel says that the creator is “Cosmic Ether,” and when John says that “God is love,” they both are making a leap of faith. This does not mean that faith can dispense with reason. In these studies we shall set ourselves to marshal the ample arguments that support man’s faith in God. But when the utmost that argument can do has been achieved, the finite mind, dealing with the infinite reality, is forced to a sally of faith, a venture of confidence in Goodness at the heart of the world, not opposed to reason but surpassing reason. *Faith always sees more with her eye than logic can reach with her hand.* And especially when men come to the highest thought of life’s meaning and believe in the Christian God, they face the fact which the writer to the Hebrews presents:

And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.—Heb. 11: 6.

Indeed, in all stout conviction about the meaning of life there is a certain defiant note, refusing to surrender to small objections. Cried Stevenson, “I believe in an ultimate decency of things; ay, and if I woke in hell, should still believe it!”

O Thou Infinite Spirit, who needest no words for man to hold his converse with Thee, we would enter into Thy presence, we would reverence Thy power, we would worship Thy wisdom, we would adore Thy justice, we would be gladdened by Thy love, and blessed by our communion with Thee. We know that Thou needest no sacrifice at our hands, nor any offering at our lips; yet we live in Thy world, we taste Thy bounty, we breathe Thine air, and Thy power sustains us, Thy justice guides, Thy goodness preserves, and Thy love blesses us forever and ever. O Lord, we cannot fail to praise Thee, though we cannot praise Thee as we would. We bow our faces down before Thee with humble hearts, and in Thy presence would warm our spirits for a while, that the better