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Faith

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Faith

Myron William Reece.

Faith is a simple word, yet it denotes a power that is mightier than the sword. Under its fostering touch poetry has sounded forth its sweetest notes, literature has received its greatest inspiration, science has produced its revelations which are the wonders of the age, while for nearly nineteen centuries art has clustered around its altar to pay homage to its Author. Professor Drummond has said that love is the greatest thing in the world but faith is that which brings the love to consciousness. If love is boundless as eternity faith must be its coefficient. It has stopped the mouths of lions, it has conquered mighty armies, it has secured innumerable moral victories, and it has colonized the regions of immor-

talities themselves with a countless company who, through it, have triumphed over the greatest enemy of earth.

It might be asked what is this faith which has worked such transformations? Webster has defined it in its generic sense as being "the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared by another".

It is in this broad sense that we will use the word in the present paper, and we may define faith briefly by saying that it is the supplement of sense. That is the knowledge which does not come to us through our senses we gain by faith in others.

There are some, however, who raise objection at this point. They say that man should be self-reliant and that it is beneath the dignity of strong manhood to pray to anything beyond himself. To such objectors I would

simply say that while self-reliance is essential to strong character, yet, like Peter, they will sink if they depend entirely upon it; and if they wish to be poor and go empty handed to the end just learn to be doubters.

If they wish to become sour and dissatisfied with their lot and with humanity become pessimists. For doubt and pessimism are joined to each other. Sweetness and cheerfulness of disposition are the results of faith.

We may go a step farther and say that man cannot attain his proper place in the world by his own unaided efforts. He reaches out beyond himself and lays hold upon the forces around him. By them he surmounts difficulties. He rises. Now faith leads man beyond himself. Hence it is the cause of his elevation. This truth is apparent in every department of life.

The first in the line of evidences may be seen in the contrast between the ethnic and Christian systems of religion.

Cicero has said "that it is possible to find nations without cities, without arts and sciences, without governments and laws, but not without religion."

The great philosopher recognized what all history proves that man is a religious being and will worship something as somewhat an whom he depends.

Wherever we find him in the ages of the past or present we see traces of his altars and his shrines. Whenever he has followed the true instincts of his nature he has arisen higher in the scale of being, but when he has pursued the perversions of his mind he has fallen below the plane of his horizon.

The ethnic religions sprang originally from the traditions of a primitive true religion. These traditions were perverted

and hence appears the sad picture of a great structure built upon a foundation of sand.

Of the ethnic religions Brahmanism represents the age of priest-craft, the age when the terrible system of caste was developed which curses the generations of India and presents almost an insuperable barrier against the introduction of anything better. If those who talk so much of self-reliance will look at brahminical arrogance and conceit and then see the plane of domestic and social life in which he lives, they will plainly see the failure of self-reliance to elevate.

It was the priestcraft of Brahmanism which gave birth to Buddhism which was a protest against priestly oppression, and which numbers today about three hundred and fifty millions of people. Its nurseries and monasteries and its mendicant priesthood are but

means of oppressing the masses, while its terrible doctrine of transmigration of souls affords a dim outlook for the future. If proud scepticisms will ask why these millions of the humble poor do not rise and shake of the grave-clothes of humility and oppression the answer would come that these are the subjects of systems which are claimed to be essentially atheistic, whose principles are self-sufficiency and who have worked out for themselves a system of religion with the supernatural eliminated, and, as James Freeman Clark has said, without any personality back of it.

Confucianism is in reality nothing more than a system of morals. Its author was a moralist. His teachings were designed for the government of the individual in social relations and in citizenship. His nine virtues to be practiced and five evils to be

avoided from the nucleus of that teaching which has moulded Chinese thought for over two thousand years. His negative statement of the Golden Rule has for its motive selfishness instead of love. If boasted moralists will pause for a moment by the cesspool of Chinese morality and get one view of the awful results of their law of retaliation, which would make the blood of an American run cold, and then ask why do not these people rise from their degradation? A look of pity would come from the eyes of the Celestials and the answer would be these are they who have tried in vain for twenty centuries to arise, under a system of morality, in which it is doubtful whether there is any faith at all in God or immortality...

Taoism, the most ancient religious system of China is a mixture of materialistic philosophy, utilitarian

morality, magic and spiritism. Above all the nations upon earth the Chinese are cursed with the constant dread of evil spirits. These ethnic religions are the best examples in history of the complete failure of man in his attempts to rise to his proper place by his own efforts and speculations.

"We may now cast a passing glance at Mohammedanism." This "unlike the ethnic religions sprang from Judaism and Christianity," and as President Warren has remarked "it may be treated simply as a heresy," which contains some truth and some error.

It is unlike the ethnic religions inasmuch as the element of faith enters largely into its worship. "There is no God but God and Mohammed is His prophet" expresses a definite belief in their system of religion.

They are not infidels for every Moham-
 medan believes devoutly in a personal
 God, in an overruling Providence, in
 the duty of prayer, in the immortality
 of the soul, in future rewards and
 punishments, and in the inspiration
 of the Bible. Their error consists in
 their belief that the Koran is a later
 revelation and that it supplements the
 New Testament just as the New Testament
 supplements the Old.

"Aside from this error there is much
 good in Mohamomedanism. The life
 of its founder was spent not only
 in propagating his teachings but in
 supplanting the gross forms of idolatry
 of his times with a purer morality
 and a more lofty form of piety.

The effect of the ethnic religions upon
 its subjects is degrading. The effect
 of the faith of Islam is elevating.
 Go into a heathen city and behold her

temples to the unknown Gods. Go into a Mohammedan city and five times a day will be heard all over that city from the elevated platforms the sacred rites of the priests singing with melodious strains "There is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet."

I imagine the influence of those sacred rites when at the time of their performance the whole Mohammedan world are hundred and fifty million strong, are bowing upon their mats and directing their thoughts above the things of time.

[The above was suggested to me by Rev. K. H. Basmajian, of Adrianople, Turkey, a converted Mohammedan whom I had the pleasure of meeting April 18th 1893.] The elevating effect of Mohammedanism upon its people is seen in the striking fact that there are no saloons in their borders for they are all temperance people. That they are elevated a little above

their heathen neighbors is plain to be seen and that the faith of Islam has been the means of their elevation is evident to every student of history.

If such a decided advance is made in contrasting Ethnic religions with Mohammedianism what must be the force of the comparison of these systems with the true religion.

Before making this comparison it might be well to notice the relation of faith to the practical affairs of life.

Is not the same thing true of faith in practical things as in the realm of religion? Take for instance the process of education. What is education? Is it simply teaching us that certain letters represent sounds and when put together form words? Is it a mere system of cramming by which a man becomes booky and consequently devoid of any spiritual tone? Is it is neither of

these. Education is that system of training by which our faculties are put in right relations with the sources of knowledge. In this relation faith performs an important part.

We learn much through the five senses. But we learn vastly more by faith in the testimony of others. I believe that there is such a land as England although I never have seen it. But historians write about it and geographers describe it. Through faith in the testimony of others I become acquainted with its physical features and its historical events. The infant learns to eat, when hungry, through the sense of taste, but he no sooner comes to the years of understanding than he learns entirely - by faith in others. You may watch him and as he studies the works of great men the fires of a holy ambition begin to burn in his heart, thoughts begin to

live in his soul and he utters them in numbers that charm mankind and live for ages. What has education done for him? Has it simply saved him from ruin? Yes, more than this. It has brought him into communion with the good and noble of past ages. As he communes with Homer the epic fire burns within his breast. As he drinks from the sparkling stream of platonic thought his soul mounts up beyond the lustriferous ether to the sublime heights beyond. As he becomes acquainted with Paul he is inspired with feelings of loyalty and heroism, and true to those holy convictions he kneels at the sacred mount and listens to the thunders of Sinai. The fire of God's love kindles upon the altar of his heart and that still small voice whispers to his passions. Peace be still. He arises, illuminated with that divine light, to reflect its radiant

orb upon the world. Thus inspired with a sense of duty and obligation he has already become a greater man than he was before, and he enters upon a career of broader usefulness and higher attainments.

As we look at the unparalleled progress of science we see the same striking results of faith. The inventions of today are all its fruits. Not even one of them has been the product of doubt. The Atlantic cable was laid while smiling doubt was prophesying failure. Electricity has been harnessed to mechanical appliances and its light is seen in ten thousand cities and it carries the moving millions in its chariots, and the day may be near at hand when it will light the Atlantic Ocean from one continent to another.

The time was when men said that the iron horse can never cross a continent.

Unbelief looked at the mountains scarred with great agonies of ruin. Faith said I can go through them if I can not scale their lofty heights. Unbelief responded you can't do it. Faith sharpened her tools and went to work. She reached out and seized mechanical appliances, forces beyond her and the result is that tensing millions are going through those tunnels like the pulse of a mighty continent.

Time would fail us to mention the power and influence of the printing press, the convenience of the telephone and the innumerable appliances in mechanics, all the results of faith.

See we not the same lesson in Literature? Where today is the cultivated intellect of the world? Trace it and you will follow the line where the Christian faith moves. Schoolhouses, Academies, and seminaries, Hospitals

and charitable institutions are its fruits. The great poets of today are its exponents. Who can read the works of Tennyson, the Brownings, Bryant, Longfellow and Whittier without feeling the influence of that faith which lifted them above the plane of ordinary mortals and gave them a touch of the divine. But it may be said the poet is born, not made. This may be true in a sense and yet no one has ever been distinguished as a poet without first having familiarized himself with the history of the past, and who has not comprehended the present. From these sources of knowledge, which lie beyond the realm of the senses, he has taken scenes and incidents of interest and has given them the color of his imagination. Whether poetry is inspired or not one thing is certain that the poets who are read most by the world are

characterized by faith. Let him, therefore, who is tempted to skepticism remember that the men who feel most deeply the life of humanity are men of faith and not skeptics.

We learn a similar lesson from the systems of worship in the world. A little over eighteen hundred years ago there was a beautiful system of worship in Greece. The Parthenon one of the most splendid buildings on earth crowned the city of Athens. There were statues of Jupiter, Venus, Minerva and Diana throughout the civilized world. Men offered their sacrifices to these deities and implored them for forgiveness of sin and for protection. The Christian faith began to be preached and this whole system has passed away. No one worships these deities now. The idolatry of today is of an entirely different type.

As we look at the great scholars of the ages the same lesson confronts us.

Where is Plato and Demosthenes in the classics of today? They are simply read as text-books by comparatively few. But thousands are studying the teachings of Christ. Where are is studying the works of Demosthenes or Plato.

All our college and seminary courses cluster around the Bible and are designed to give us a clearer understanding of the Christian faith.

This principle of faith is seen also in statesmanship. Two characters may serve as illustrations. Washington and Napoleon. Both were great men. Both loved this country. The difference between them was that Napoleon was charmed with the achievements of a selfish ambition. He gloried in his victories and when he saw the thrones of Europe tottering that selfish ambition prompted him to

seize them. What was the end of his career? Every school-boy will answer he died a prisoner.

It was not so with Washington. He was influenced by such a faith in God's ideas of liberty and equality that it led him beyond the narrow limits of selfish desires. He saw, not his own unrivaled fame, but the future of a free people. His thought was absorbed, not in his own personal emolument, but in the glory of a Christian republic.

It was for this that he fought and prayed and it was an account of this unselfish faith that God honored him and the nations of earth utter his praise.

The history of nations tells the same story. France withheld the Bible from her subjects while England gave it to her people. France sank from being one of the grandest to one

of the humblest of the nations of the earth. The expression "Infidel France" explains the story. England arose with the Bible and has laid her arms around the extremities of the world.

When we reflect upon the history of our own imperial republic we must remember that our Pilgrim fathers, like Abraham, started on a journey of faith.

The first act in the Embarcation scene was an act of prayer for divine guidance and among the first scenes, on their landing on Plymouth Rock, was that of bowing upon that sacred soil to acknowledge Jehovah with thanksgiving and to pray for His continual guidance. Thus was our nation born under the influence of faith, and if true to the Pilgrim Covenant she may arise still higher in greatness.

If faith has given such excellence

in every department of life why should it not in the realm of morals and religion.

It has been said that "religion has built up every civilization of history; sail up the Nile, and the only ruins one finds are monuments of religion."

Travel in the east and the remains of ancient temples are revealing the secrets of the faith of the generations that are gone.

Thus as we survey all history from the distant past to the present a few facts stand out prominently. That man is a religious being, and that he will worship something or somewhat, and that this worship is propitiatory in its nature. These facts show conclusively that man feels a universal sense of dependence.

Now we are prepared to say on logical grounds that universal instincts are not deceptive. This is manifest in nature's lower departments. Wherever universal instincts

are found they are matched by conditions in harmony with them. For every need of our nature there is an ample supply.

Man's universal instinct is to worship. By means of which he seeks to win the favor of that being which is the object of his devotion. What is that being?

To argue from effect to cause and to go back through an infinite series of causes is a burden that man cannot bear. Therefore he must stop somewhere.

The universal testimony of experience is that when he comes through the series to a personal God his soul finds rest. Why? Because that conscious need of his nature is satisfied. The result that has been reached is, therefore, that as light is suited to the eye and bread to the needs of hunger so faith in God is suited to the needs of the soul.

We may go one step farther than

mere faith in a personal God. Man feels the stains of sin upon his character. The universal instinct of his nature is to enjoy freedom from this burden.

This is the object of all worship. How may he find rest and satisfaction for his soul? This is the problem the world has been trying to solve for nineteen centuries. Some have sought it in self-torture, some by pilgrimages, and many have gone to the fountain of sinful pleasure and have drunk the dregs of sorrow and of woe.

But it was on one of those ancient beautiful mornings when the hills were all a gle and the tepid waters were running into the sea that the problem was solved. A pilgrim, while on his journey saw on a distant hill the form of a cross from which a light shone with radiant hue. He paused for a moment and looked and while he gazed upon the

from his burdens began to grow lighter. His hope grew brighter and his sorrows flew away. Then was he glad and he hastened to tell his fellow travelers who in their turn came and looked and experienced the same joy.

These pilgrims have been telling this simple story of the cross for nineteen centuries. Their number has been gradually growing larger. This look of faith has lifted them above their sorrows, it has strengthened them amid life's toils, it has given them victory over the world and sin, and in short it has lifted them in the scale of being to that high standard to which all should seek to attain.

But the question may arise why do men believe in the immortality of the soul? The answer is plain because the theory of immortality harmonizes with the nature of man and acts upon

his faculties like sunlight upon plants. Thus his thoughts are attracted upward while his path is made glorious through earth. When he comes to the evening of life, and the sun has reclined upon the fleecy pillows of night, and the twilight shades are gathered around, - he beholds the distant hills lit up with bonfires of victory. For as the poet has beautifully said...

Faith builds a bridge,
 Across the gulf of death,
 To break the shack,
 Blind nature cannot shun;
 And lands thought
 Smoothly on the other shore.

Infidelity may laugh and
 Agnostics may say I do not know,
 But what can they give me in the
 place of my faith? They may
 show me earth's beautiful flowers

and roam with me over its grassy hills and when they have shown me all that is grand in the universe still my heart pants for more, and when I ask is this all? They reply is not this enough? This is poor consolation for the demands of a nature whose instinctive longings reach on into eternity.

Universal experience is not satisfied with such an answer.

But Christianity will show me the same beauties of earth and when I ask is this all? How different is the answer. Christianity responds that this earth with all its beauties and the vast system of worlds are but the threshold to my Father's house.

Then I look through the telescope of faith and see that mansion with all its glory and again Christianity steps near and says to me your Father has prepared it for you. Let others

wrap themselves in doubt if they will,
but give me a faith that shows me
a Father, that lifts me to the high
plane of duty, and that teaches me
that heaven is my home.