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Edited by Charles Gore

Excerpt

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## I.

*FAITH.*

I. IN proposing to consider the origin and growth of faith, we have a practical, and not a merely theoretical, aim. We are thinking of the actual problems which are, at this moment, encompassing and hindering faith: and it is because of their urgency and their pressure, that we find it worth while to go back upon our earliest beginnings, in order to ask what Faith itself means. For only through an examination of its nature, its origin, and its structure, will it be possible for us to sift the questions which beset us, and to distinguish those to which Faith is bound to give an answer from those which it can afford to let alone.

We set out then on our quest, in the mind of those who have felt the trouble that is in the air. Even if we ourselves be not of their number, yet we all suffer from their hesitation: we all feel the imparted chill of their anxieties. For we are of one family: and the sickness, or depression of some, must affect the whole body. All of us, even the most confident, are interested in the case of those who are fearing for themselves, as they sadly search their own hearts, and ask, 'What is it to believe? Do I know what it is to believe? Have I, or have I not, that which can be called "faith"? How can I be sure? What can I say of myself?' Such questions as these are haunting and harassing many among us who find themselves facing the Catholic Creed, with its ring of undaunted assurance, with its unhesitating claim to unique and universal supremacy, and contrast with this their own faint and tentative apprehension of the strong truths, which are so confidently asserted. Such men and women are anxious and eager to number themselves among those that believe: but can they call this temper 'belief,' which is so far below the level of the genuine response which those Creeds obviously expect? Where is the blitheness of faith? Where is its unshaken conviction? Where is its invincible simplicity? Why is it that they only succeed in moving forward with such painful indecision?

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Now, it is to this temper that this essay is addressed. It does not aim at convicting a hostile disbelief, but at succouring a distressed faith. And this it does under the conviction that, in so doing, it is responding to the peculiar character and needs of the situation.

For the urgency, the peril of the hour, lies, not so much in the novelty, or force, of the pressure that is brought to bear against faith, as in the behaviour of faith itself under the pressure. What has happened is, not that faith has been confounded, but that it has been challenged. It has been challenged by new social needs, by strange developments of civilisation, by hungers that it had not yet taken into account, by thirsts that it had not prepared itself to satisfy. It has been challenged by new scientific methods, wholly unlike its familiar intellectual equipment; by new worlds of facts opened to its astonishment through discoveries which have changed the entire look of the earth; by immense masses of novel material, which it has been suddenly and violently required to assimilate; by strange fashions of speech in science and history; by a babel of 'unknown tongues' in all departments of learning and literature.

Faith is under the pressure of this challenge: and the primary question is, how will it behave? What is it going to say, or do, in face of this exciting transformation which has passed over the entire surface of our intellectual scenery? How will it deal with the situation? Will it prove itself adequate to the crisis? To what extent can it afford to submit to the transforming process which has already operated upon the mind and the imagination? If it submit, can it survive? And in what condition? with what loss, or damage, or change? On every side these challenges reach it; they beat at its doors; they arrive in pelting haste; they clamour for immediate solutions.

Now faith, under these rapid and stormy challenges, is apt to fall into panic. For this, surely, is the very meaning of a panic—a fear that feeds upon itself. Men in a panic are frightened at finding themselves afraid. So now with faith; it is terrified at its own alarm. How is it (it asks itself) that it should find itself baffled and timorous? If faith were faith, would it ever lose its confidence? To be frightened is to confess itself false: for faith is confidence in God, Who can never fail. How can faith allow of doubt or hesitation? Surely for faith to hesitate, to be confused, is to deny its very nature. Thus many anxious and perplexed souls retreat before their own perplexities. Because their faith is troubled, they distrust and abandon their faith. The very fact that it is in distress becomes an argument against it.

It is at this point, and because of this particular peril that we are urgently required to consider very seriously the nature and conditions of faith. For our panic arises from our assumption that faith is of

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such a nature, that the perplexity, into which, now and again, we find ourselves thrown, must be impossible to it, must be incompatible with it. Now, is this so? Ought we to expect of faith that its confidence should never fail it—that its light should be always decisive? Is faith incriminated by the mere fact that it is in difficulties?

Let us, first, consider what has occurred. Perhaps the situation itself, if we quietly review it, will give a reason why it is that, just at the moment when we most need vigour and assurance, we should find ourselves stripped of all that tends to reassure.

For the peculiarity of the disturbance which we have got to encounter lies in this, that it has removed from us the very weapons by which we might hope to encounter it. Faith's evidential material is all corroborative and accumulative; it draws it from out of an external world, which can never wholly justify, or account for the internal reality, yet which can so group itself, that from a hundred differing lines, it offers indirect and parenthetic and convergent witness of that which is, itself, beyond the reach of external proof. It is this gradual grouping of an outer life into that assorted perspective in which it offers the most effective corroboration of the inner truth, which faith slowly accomplishes upon the matter which human science presents to it. When once the grouping is achieved, so that the outer world, known under certain scientific principles, tallies harmoniously with its inner convictions, faith feels secure. The external life offers it pictures, analogies, metaphors—all echoing and repeating the internal world. Faith beholds itself mirrored: and, so echoed, so mirrored, it feels itself in possession of corroborating evidences. But the present scientific confusion seems to have shattered the mirror—to have broken up the perspective—to have dissolved the well-known groupings. It is true, as some of the essays which follow will try to show, that the convulsion of which we speak, lies, chiefly, in a change of position, or of level; so that great masses of the matter, now thrown into confusion, will be found to compose themselves afresh, under the newer conditions of review, and will appear again as part and parcel of the scientific scenery. It is a change of perspective more than anything else. But, no doubt, such a change is just of the character to upset us, to disturb us; for, during the change, while shifting from the old position to the new, we are in the very chaos of confusion; everything seems, for the moment, to be tumbling about around us: the entire scene grows unsteady; though, indeed, when once we have got our feet firmly placed at the new level of vantage, much, that once was familiar, is discovered to be back again in its place, looking much the same as of old. It is the *first* shock of this enforced transition which is so calculated to terrify: as when, for instance, men see their habitual reliance on the evidence for design in nature, which had been

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inherited from Paley, yield, and vanish, under the review of the facts with which the theory of evolution acquaints them. What they feel is, that their familiar mode of interpreting their faith, of justifying it, of picturing it, has abruptly been torn from them. That which once seemed to evidence it in the outer world, has ceased to be accepted or trusted. The habitual ways of argument, the accepted assumptions, which they had hitherto used as their supports and their instruments—have been withdrawn—have become obsolete. Faith is thrown back on itself, on its own inherent, naked vitality; it is robbed for the moment of that sense of solidity and security, which fortifies and refreshes it, when the outer world of natural facts, and the inner world of intellect and fancy, all corroborate its confidence in itself, by harmonious attestations of its validity. The old world of things had been brought into this adaptation with the principles of belief. Faith was at home in it, and looked out over it with cheerfulness, and moved about it with freedom. But that old world is gone; and the new still lies untested, unsorted, unverified, unassimilated, unhandled. It looks foreign, odd, remote. Faith finds no obvious corroborations in it: there, where it used to feel buttressed and warm, it now feels chilly and exposed<sup>1</sup>.

This is the first consequence, and it is serious enough in itself to provoke alarm. Faith cannot be at ease or confident, until the outer world responds to its own convictions; and yet ease and confidence are exactly what it is challenged to exhibit.

And then, when a man, under this sense of fear, deprived of external testimonies, attempts to exhibit, to evoke, to examine, his inner conviction, in its inherent and vital character, as it is in itself, unsupported by adventitious aids, he is astonished at his own difficulty in discovering or disclosing it. Where is it all fled—that which he had called his faith? He had enjoyed it, had relied on it, had again and again asserted it in word and deed: and now, when he wants to look at it, when he is summoned to produce it, when he is challenged to declare its form and fashion; he finds himself dazed, bewildered, searching helplessly for that which ever escapes him, grasping at a fleeting shadow, which baffles his efforts to endow it with fixity and substance. And, so finding, he grows yet more desperately alarmed: it seems to him that he has been self-deceived, betrayed, abandoned. He is bitterly sensitive to the sharp contrast between the triumphant solidity with which scientific facts bear down upon him, certified, undeniable, substantial, and the vague, shifty, indistinct phantom, into which his conviction vanishes as soon as he attempts to observe it in itself, or draw it out for public inspection.

Yet, if we consider what faith signifies, we shall see at once that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. on all this, an excellent statement in Mark Pattison's *Sermons*, Sermon 7.

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this contrast ought to carry with it no alarm. It is a contrast which follows on the very nature of faith. If we had understood its nature, we could never have expected it to disclose itself under the same conditions as those which govern the observation of scientific facts. Faith is an elemental energy of the soul, and the surprise that we are undergoing at not being able to bring it under direct observation, is only an echo of the familiar shock with which we learn that science has ransacked the entire bodily fabric of man, and has nowhere come across his soul; or has searched the heavens through and through with its telescope, and has seen no God. We are upset for a moment when first we hear this; and then, we recover ourselves as we recollect that, if God be what we believe Him to be, immaterial and spiritual, then He would cease to be Himself, if He were visible through a telescope: and that if the spirit of man be what we believe it to be, that is the very reason why no surgeon's knife can ever arrive at it.

And, as with the soul, so with all its inherent and essential acts. They are what it is: they can no more be visible than it can. How can any of the basal intuitions, on which our knowledge rests, present themselves to our inspection in the guise of external and phenomenal facts? That which observes can never, strictly speaking, observe itself. It can never look on at itself from outside, or view itself as one among the multitude of things that come under its review. How can it? It is itself the organ of vision: and the eye cannot see its own power of seeing. This is why natural science, which is an organised system of observation, finds that its own observing mind is absolutely and totally outside its ken. It can take stock of the physiological condition of thoughts or of feelings; but they themselves, in their actual reality, are all rigidly shut out from the entire area of scientific research. Wherever they begin, it ends; its methods abruptly fail. It possesses no instrument by which to make good its advance further. For the only instrument which it knows how to use, and by which alone it can search, and examine, is itself the object which it desires to submit to examination. But if *it* is to be examined, who, and what, is to conduct the examination? The observing mind that turns round to explore itself, carries itself round as it turns. It can never say—'Let me look at myself, as if I were a phenomenon, as a fact presented to my own consciousness,' for it itself would be engaged in the act of looking: it itself is the consciousness to which it proposes to present itself<sup>1</sup>. So again, the thought itself can never hope, by rigid analysing, to arrive at last at itself, as the final residue of the analysis, for it is itself, all along, employed as analyst. The process of analysis

<sup>1</sup> It is not intended to deny that the mind can ever know itself, but only that such knowledge can ever be won by methods of empirical observation.

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is, itself, the real disclosure of what thought is: and this disclosure is made just as effectively even though the result of the analysis be to declare that it can discover nothing that corresponds to thought. It is, indeed, impossible that anything should so correspond, except the power to analyse; but this power *is* thought: and every act of the analysis, which issues in the sceptical conclusion, has verified the real existence of thought. It is the same with all profound spiritual acts. None of them can ever be offered to public inspection: they can never be handed across to another, for him to look at. For they are living acts, and not external results. How can an act of will, or of love, be submitted to observation? Its outward result is there to be examined; but it, itself, is incapable of transportation. If anyone were to ask 'What is it you mean by thinking, or loving, or willing?' who could tell him? It would be obviously impossible to explain, except to a being who could think, will, and love. You could give him illustrations of what you mean—signs—instances—evidences; but they can only be intelligible, as evidences, to one who already possesses the faculties. No one can do a piece of thinking for another, and hand it over to him in a parcel. Only by thinking, can it be known what thought is: only by feeling can it be understood what is meant by a feeling: only by seeing, willing, loving, can we have the least conception of sight, or of will, or of love.

And faith stands with these primary intuitions. It is deeper and more elemental than them all: and, therefore, still less than they can it admit of translation into other conditions than its own;—can still less submit itself to public observation. It can never be looked at from without. It can be known only from within itself. Belief is only intelligible by believing. Just as a man who is asked to say what love is, apart from all its outward manifestations and results, must be driven back on the iteration—'Love is—what love is: everyone who loves, knows; no one who does not love, can ever know;' just as a man, who is challenged to describe and define his feelings or his desires, when stripped of all the outward evidences that they can possibly give of themselves, is thrown into inarticulate bewilderment, and can give no intelligible answer, and can fashion to himself no distinct feature or character, and can only assert, confusedly, that he feels what he feels, and that to desire is to desire;—so with faith. The scientific conclusion has shaken and confused its normal modes of self-interpretation, its usual evidences, signs, illustrations: these outer aids at definition, by metaphor or by corroboration, are all brought under dim eclipse for the moment: their relative values have been thrown into uncertainty: they are undergoing temporary displacement, and no one is quite sure which is being shifted, and which can be trusted to stand firm. Faith,

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robbed of its habitual aids to expression, is summoned to show itself on the field, in its own inner character. And this is just what it never can or may do. It can only reiterate, in response to the demand for definition, 'Faith is faith.' 'Believing is—just believing.' Why, then, let ourselves be distressed, or bewildered, by finding ourselves reduced to this impotence of explanation? Far from it being an incrimination of our faith, to find ourselves caught in such a difficulty of utterance, it is just what must happen if faith be a profound and radical act of the inner soul. It is, essentially, an active principle, a source of energy, a spring of movement: and, as such, its verification can never take place through passive introspection. It verifies itself only in actions: its reality can only be made evident through experience of its living work.

II. We may, then, free ourselves from the sinister suspicions which belong to panic. It is not the superficiality of our faith, which is the secret of our bewilderment, but its depth. The deepest and most radical elements of our being are, necessarily, the hardest to unearth. They are, obviously, the most remote from the surface of our lives: they are the rarest to show themselves in the open daylight: they require the severest effort to disentangle their identity: they lie below all ordinary methods of utterance and expression; they can only be discovered through careful recognition of the secret assumptions which are involved in the acts and words which they habitually produce. By these acts and words their existence and their force is suggested, but not exhausted—manifested, but not accounted for. These form our only positive interpretation and evidence: and such evidence must, therefore, always remain inadequate, imperfect; we have always and inevitably to go behind it, and beyond it, in order to reach and touch the motive-energy which is disclosed to us through it. No wonder that we find this far from an easy matter. No wonder that, under the pressure of a hostile challenge, we often lose ourselves in a confused babble, as we struggle to make plain to others, or even to ourselves, these innermost convictions of our souls.

Indeed, such things can never be made plain: no one ought to expect that they should. For, if we think of it, the primary acts of spirit must be the *last* things that can ever be made plain; for the entire life issuing from them is their only interpretation, so that only when that life is closed, can their interpretation be complete. And here, in faith, we are at the root of a life which, as we believe, it will take eternity to fulfil. And, if so, only in and through eternity can its full evidence for itself be produced, or its right interpretation be yielded.

Surely, this truth clears us from many clamorous demands, which ask of us an impossible verification. For if once we saw that we were employed in verifying the nature of that which, if it be real, can,

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confessedly, present us, on this side of the grave, only with the most fragmentary evidence of its character, we should put lightly aside the taunting challenge to produce such proof of our motive principle as will stand comparison with the adequate and precise evidences of a scientific fact, or which will submit to the rigid tests of a legal examination. If faith be faith, it could not, for that very reason, fulfil the conditions so proposed to it. These legal and scientific conditions are laboriously and artificially limited to testing the presence of a motive, or a force, which must be assumed to exist under fixed, precise, complete conditions, here and now. They pre-suppose that, for all practical purposes, its quantity cannot vary, or fluctuate. If it be present at all, it is present in a distinct and formal manner, open to definite measurement, expressing itself in unalterable characteristics. The entire consideration of its activity is strictly confined to the normal horizon of the actual world of present existence. These assumptions are the first necessity of all forms of science, without making which, it could not even begin. They are the conditions of all its success. But they are also its limitations: and as such, they most certainly exclude from their survey, anything that professes to exist after the manner of faith. For what is faith? It is no steady force, existing under certified and unvarying conditions which receive their final determination in the world about us. Faith is, while it is here on earth, only a tentative probation: it is a struggling and fluctuating effort in man to win for himself a valid hold upon things that exist under the conditions of eternity. In faith, we watch the early and rude beginnings, amid an environment that but faintly and doubtfully responds to it, of a power still in the womb—still unborn into its true sphere—still enveloped in dark wrappings which encumber and impede. We see here but its blind, uncertain pushings, its hesitating moves, now forward, now back, now strangely vigorous and assertive, and then again, as strangely weak and retreating. Its significance, its interpretation, its future possibilities, its secret of development—all these lie elsewhere, beyond death, beyond vision: we can but dimly guess, from its action here, what powers feed it, on what resources it can rely, what capacity of growth is open to it, what final issue determines the measure and value of its efforts and achievements here. Such a force as this is bound to upset all our ablest calculations. We can never lay down rules to govern and predict its capabilities. It will disappoint every conceivable test that we can devise for fixing its conditions. It will laugh at our attempts to circumscribe its action. Where we look for it to be weak, it will suddenly show itself strong: when we are convinced that we may expect a vigorous display of its capacities, it will mysteriously lapse. All this may terribly disconcert us. It may tempt us into angry declarations that such an incalculable existence is



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unworthy of scientific attention—is fanciful, is unreal. But the only lesson which we ought to learn is that methods adapted for one state of things are bound to prove themselves futile when applied to another. If we are employed in observing a life, which has its ground and its end in a world beyond the present, then all methods framed for the express and definite purpose of examining life as it exists here and now, will necessarily prove themselves ludicrously inapt. The futility, the barrenness, the ineptitude of our researches, lies, not with the faith against which we level our irritable complaints, but with the methods which, by their very terms of definition, proclaim themselves to be misplaced.

Where, then, must we dig to unearth the roots of faith? What are the conditions of its rise and exercise? Wherein lie its grounds, and the justification of its claim?

Faith grounds itself, solely and wholly, on an inner and vital relation of the soul to its source. This source is most certainly elsewhere; it is not within the compass of the soul's own activity. In some mode, inconceivable and mysterious, our life issues out of an impenetrable background: and as our life includes spiritual elements, that background has spiritual factors: and as our life is personal, within that background exists personality. This supply of life in which we begin, from out of which our being opens, can never cease, so long as we exist, to sustain us by one continuous act. Ever its resources flow in: ever its vital support is unwithdrawn. In some fashion or other, we all know that this must be so: and the Christian Creed only lifts into clear daylight, and endows with perfect expression, this elementary and universal verity, when it asserts that at the very core of each man's being lies, and lives, and moves, and works, the creative energy of the Divine Will—'the Will of our Father Which is in Heaven.'

We stand, by the necessities of our existence, in the relationship of sons to a Father, Who has poured out into us, and still pours, the vigour of His own life. This is the one basis of all faith. Unless this relationship actually exists, there could be no faith: if it exists, then faith is its essential corollary: it is bound to appear. Our faith is simply the witness to this inner bond of being. That bond, which is the secret of our entire existence, accounting for all that we are, or do, or feel, or think, or say, must become capable of recognition by a being that is, in any sense, free, intelligent, conscious: and this recognition by us of the source from whence we derive, is what we mean by faith. Faith is the sense in us that we are Another's creature, Another's making. Even as we not only feel, but feel that we feel; not only think, but know that we think; not only choose, but determine to choose: so, below and within all our willing, and thinking, and feeling, we are conscious of Another, whose mind and will alone make possible

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both the feeling that we feel, and also the capacity to feel it ; both the thought that we think, and also the capacity to know it ; both the will that we put forth, as well as the power to determine it. Every act, every desire, every motive of ours, is dependant on the source out of sight : we hang on Another's will ; we are alive in Another's life. All our life is a discovery, a disclosure, of this secret. We find it out only by living. As we put out powers that seem to be our own, still even in and by the very act of putting them out, we reveal them to be not our own ; we discover that we are always drawing on unseen resources. We are sons : that is the root-law of our entire self. And faith is the active instinct of that inner sonship : it is the point at which that essential sonship emerges into consciousness ; it is the disclosure to the self of its own vital secret ; it is the thrill of our inherent childhood, as it makes itself felt within the central recesses of the life ; it is the flame that shoots into consciousness at the recognition of the touch of our divine fatherhood ; it is the immediate response of the sonship in us to its discovered origin.

Faith, then, is an instinct of relationship based on an inner actual fact. And its entire office and use lies in realising the secret fact. For the bond is spiritual ; and it can only realise itself in a spirit that has become aware of its own laws. No blind animal acceptance of the divine assistance can draw out the powers of this sonship. The reception of the assistance must itself be conscious, loving, intelligent, willing. The natural world can receive its full capacities from God without recognition of the source whence they flow in : but this absence of living recognition forbids it ever to surpass those fixed limits of development which we name 'natural.' But a creature of God that could not only receive but recognise that it received, would, by that very recognition, lay itself open to an entirely novel development ; it would be susceptible of infinitely higher influences shed down upon it from God ; it would admit far finer and richer inpourings of divine succours ; it would be fed, not only from underground channels as it were, but by fresh inlets which its consciousness of its adherence in God would uncover and set in motion. The action of God upon His creatures would be raised to a new level of possibility : for a living and intelligent will has capacities of receptivity, which were altogether excluded so long as God merely gave, and the creature blindly and dumbly took. Faith, then, opens an entirely new career for creaturely existence ; and the novelty of this career is expressed in the word 'supernatural.' The 'supernatural' world opens upon us as soon as faith is in being<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The word 'super-natural' is obviously misleading, since it seems to imply that the higher spiritual levels of life are *not* 'natural.' Of course, the higher the life, the more intensely

'natural' it is ; and the nature of God must be the supreme expression of the natural. But the word 'supernatural' is, in reality, only concerned with the partial and conventional use of 'nature,'