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WHAT HAVE FACTS TO DO WITH FAITH?

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The question, "What have facts to do with faith?" expresses a rather widely prevalent suspicion regarding the religious value of the facts recorded in the gospels and summarized in the creeds; and it deserves consideration by every one who has religious interests at heart, since it brings up vital problems concerning the possibility of revelation and the value of the Christian faith. Two allied questions have been much debated recently in this country, although they were pretty well threshed out in Germany a decade or two ago; first, what obligations rest upon a man who subscribes to the Christian creeds; and, secondly, whether it is not desirable that the creeds should be so changed, or be given such meanings, that no one would be obliged in confessing his faith to make any assertion concerning matters of historical fact. Back of these questions lies a more fundamental and more practical one: What value have facts for our religious faith? Of what value for our religious life is it to affirm in our creeds the truth of such historical happenings as, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He rose again from the dead"? Of what value is it to read or hear such Scriptures as those which tell us that Christ healed the palsied man let down through the roof, and the blind man who called to him from the wayside; or raised the widow's only son; or had compassion on the multitudes, and fed them? It must be granted, we are told, that doubts may always arise about historical events, since historical knowledge rests on human testimony with all its weaknesses; and granted, too, that events seem but a dry and cold substitute for the living faith craved by our hearts. Would it not, then, be well, we are asked, to omit from our creeds matters of fact (or alleged fact), and to reduce our gospels to "the Words of the Christ"? If not, some sound reason ought to be given for retaining the gospel narra-

tives of our Lord's marvellous deeds, which are stumbling-stones to many feet seeking the path of righteousness, and for affirming in the creeds the most notable events of his life instead of simply calling him Master.

That "the unnecessary is usually evil" is a wise saying. If facts are unnecessary and useless so far as faith is concerned, it is almost certainly harmful to insist that Christians should accept either the few great events of Christ's life mentioned in the creeds, or the many others of a wonderful sort narrated in the gospels. Even though we can establish their actual occurrence, they will inevitably be sloughed off by Christendom, unless they really have something to do with faith. We ought, then, to show plainly that there is a vital connection between faith and facts; or else lay upon the table the much discussed question what legal and moral obligation to accept the gospel facts, as summarized in the creeds, rests upon those who confess the Christian faith. In that case the problem of framing a creed free from any assertion regarding events would have to be taken up seriously. Only, before this course is adopted, we ought to be quite clear that Christendom has been wrong with an almost unanimous consistency in finding value for faith in facts.

The reason commonly urged for revising the Christian creeds is that men long for simple, spiritual truth which appeals to the heart. They long to hear, and are willing to believe, it is often said, the facts of God's fatherhood, the Saviour's love, and the power in human life of the divine Spirit; but they do not want metaphysical statements and discussions. For example, they desire to hear, and they accept, a preaching which sets forth the fact of man's immortal life; whereas they do not want, and will not attend to, metaphysical assertions concerning the reality of Christ's resurrection.

Now this suggests the need of saying what is meant properly by "fact," a word which has purposely been used so far in the rather vague, ambiguous way in which it is commonly employed. For much current discussion is inconclusive because we generally have no clear idea as to what we mean when we talk about "facts." Shall we call such statements as the following, statements of fact? God is love and is our father; Jesus of Naza-

reth is the Christ, the Saviour of men; the divine Spirit is a power for righteousness in human life; there is forgiveness for our sins; we are immortal. It is customary to call these truths "facts," in order to express the universal Christian conviction of their certainty. But, granting their certain truth, this is surely an inappropriate use of the term, especially when "metaphysical statement" is contrasted with "fact." For properly "fact" should be used to denote an occurrence, a phenomenon, that which our eyes can see and our hands handle. "Fact" (or, if any one please, alleged fact) is properly used to denote such an event as that the palsied man stood up and carried his bed home; that the widow's son who had been dead sat up and began to speak; that Jesus of Nazareth was nailed to the cross, died thereon, and was laid in Joseph's tomb; that the grave was empty on the first Easter morning. "Fact," in short, ought not to be used for "truth," but for "event" or "phenomenon."

Again, by a "metaphysical statement" we can properly mean only the statement of some truth (or alleged truth) which is above the phenomenal, the visible, audible, and tangible, some truth that is not a section of the physical world, though it may be known to us through what we see, hear, and touch, and may be a legitimate inference from some series of facts. Thus the statements that nature is a unity, working always according to unvarying laws, that man is morally free, that God exists, are metaphysical. Still more is it a metaphysical statement to assert not merely that God is, but that his nature is love; that he is the father of all, who will have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth; or to say that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, who by his death and resurrection has overcome sin and death; or that our impulses toward good are the result not simply of our heredity and environment but of the workings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; or that in the life to come justice will be done to all who have not found justice here, and that it will be a life of happiness, lived in close relation to God. Such statements are to the Christian not less but more certainly true than such matters of fact as that this table is hard and this paper white; but they are, nevertheless, truths which do not belong to the sphere of the phenomenal, which we can test and be sure

of by ear, eye, and hand. Above all, forgiveness of sins and communion with God are as far removed from sense-experience, as any truths that could be named. And yet they are most necessary for religious life, joy, and peace, and should have their place in Christian teaching always. To sum up the matter, the high truth that God is love and brings us into union with himself is simple, spiritual truth, which appeals to the heart and answers the heart's deepest needs, and yet it is undoubtedly metaphysical.

Are we able, then, to grasp such truth as this? And if we are able, shall those of us who are inwardly certain of God's love and of our mystical union with him through Christ, say to the man who wishes to share in our knowledge and love of God: Our faith rests upon the authority of the Bible; or, upon the authority of the Church; or, upon an inner mysterious experience; or, upon our developing within ourselves, after the example of Jesus, a consciousness that we are sons of God? Valuable as any of these answers may be to the question how we may know God and serve him, a simpler and yet far more profound reply is given by St. John. "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Fellowship with God—that is religion; fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, the Word of life, the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us—that is Christianity. This fellowship is the sublime result of faith. And faith is aroused through the personal appearing among men of the Son of God in human guise, so that men heard him speak, saw him act, and could declare to the world what kind of person this was whom they knew as a man knows his friend. Seeing him, they saw the Father; knowing what Jesus Christ is, they knew what God is. In some such way as this we might

state the view regarding Christian faith and the relation to it of fact, which is given us by St. John.

When we assert the fatherhood of God and his love, man's immortality, and the operation of God's Holy Spirit in the world, it is reasonable for men to ask in regard to any one of these assertions, "Why do you make it?" If there are no facts to prove it, the only answer must be, "Because I feel like it." Now for this attitude of mind there is some justification. The felt needs of human nature make their satisfaction probable, and the antecedent probability of revelation and redemption enable us to accept testimony as to God's dealings with men. But the answer does not of itself carry conviction, or even challenge investigation. Suppose the apostles, when they went about preaching the gospel, had only been able to say in answer to inquiries, "We believe, and urge all men to believe, because we like the ideas we preach." This would never have made the deep impression upon the whole world that was made by the method they actually used. They proclaimed the righteousness and love of God, and called men to repentance and a new life. Why? "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." Why "only-begotten Son"? Because Jesus Christ was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." And when inquiry was made regarding the stupendous assertion, "On the third day he rose from the dead," their reply was, "We are witnesses of his resurrection." They staked everything on this central fact. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain." Their preaching could have convinced no one, had it not been based on such an appeal to facts as this: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know, him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of men without the law did crucify and slay; whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death. . . . This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." These facts were appealed to as a basis for all the inductions of faith. Precisely the same basis is needed for the inductions of

faith now. Indeed it is more needed in this age, so habituated to the methods of scientific inference from observed phenomena.

St. Paul's great sermon to the Athenians, declaring to them the unknown God, exemplifies the apostolic method. He set before them first the truth that God gives to all life and breath and all things, and has made of one every nation of men, that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. And then he declared that, while God had overlooked the times of ignorance in which he was unknown, "now he commands men that they should all everywhere repent; inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead." This is the point his sermon was intended to drive home. His theme is summed up in the simple words, "He preached Jesus and the resurrection." What was the effect of his message? "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; others said, we will hear thee concerning this again. But certain clave unto him and believed." Such must always be the outcome of preaching the Christian message—some will mock, some may inquire further, and perhaps only a few will believe. But the preacher of the gospel must set forth the message as St. Paul did: "I make known unto you that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." For we may bid men look upon nature as God's work, and upon man with his reason and conscience as the image of God, and bid them seek God, if haply they may feel after and find him who enfolds and sustains all men and the whole earth and sky; but still they will worship him, if at all, in ignorance, and declare that he is to them unknown, or even unknowable. They may see in the world of struggle and suffering no certitude of his fatherly love; and discern no evidence

that he really dwells in their hearts and brings to pass what is good in them. But if the Cross is held up before them as the witness of God's love, and the Resurrection as the manifestation of his life-giving power, some *will* believe, and have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Men need to be convinced of the Father's ever-present love and care, actually guiding all things for good, of the Saviour's redemptive work as truly freeing them from sin, and of the Holy Spirit's influencing them with such reality that purity, honesty, and loving-kindness are the actual fruits of the life he imparts. That is, a living gospel must proclaim the Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier as working out the divine purpose for our true well-being in the sphere of present-day actuality. Consequently it must preach God as made known through events of like actuality. To take a particular instance, we can no more be sure of Christ's living existence and power now, if we are not convinced that he actually left the tomb and manifested himself as risen to his disciples, than we can affirm that he died for the sake of mankind, if we say that we do not know or care whether he actually suffered under Pontius Pilate, expired on the cross, and was buried. Let any man ask himself whether he can have an assurance of the Saviour's love, if he doubts whether Jesus Christ died willingly for men; and whether he can know God as love, unless it is true that the cross so reveals him. And if we need to have the love of God and the forgiveness of our sins set forth by the cross as a reality, we equally need the manifestation of the living power of God and of our vital union with him to be set forth by the rising of his Son from the dead.

It is a brave attitude that some would have Christians take, when they bid us hold all knowledge of truth concerning God to be impossible metaphysics, irrelevant to essential religion, and all reliance upon historical facts to be vain; it is admirably brave to say, as religious men we will disregard all else, and will take the attitude towards life that Jesus took. But the man who would be wise as well as brave must feel that he can take only such an attitude towards life as is justified by the real nature of the world, and ought to follow the example of Jesus only if he is truly the Wisdom of God and the Lord of life. If the world

we know and use is not so constituted and guided by the God of righteousness that moral worth can express itself in ultimately effective action, then the attitude of Jesus towards life may be magnificent, but it means death now and no future victory for one's self or for others.

If Christianity is to reach the man in the pew and draw to the pew the man in the street, it must hold fast to the comprehensible facts upon which its inductions are founded. The plain man must base the truth by which he is to live and die on facts that come within view of human senses; and his theology must be simply "a determined effort to think clearly" concerning data upon which the human mind can lay hold. Above all, he must not leave out of his Christianity the Christ who manifested his glory before the plain people. And so most Christians find it a privilege, not a burden, to affirm as of high value the facts stated in the gospels and the creeds, just because they cannot be satisfied with metaphysical speculations in place of faith, and because they see that God's revelation, coming through historical events, gives them not a series of philosophical generalities concerning God and immortality, but a living faith in the Father, with whom they may have fellowship.

The great, simple truths, then, which the human heart needs, and of which the appearing of Jesus Christ gives us certainty, are indeed metaphysical truths, but they are not speculative abstractions. They are made known through occurrences in time, on our earth, which were observed by plain, straightforward men who used their eyes and ears; they do not come through some occult, hypothetical means of attaining knowledge. Like scientific truths, they are based on data that have been experienced; and, like scientific principles, they are truths more general than can be given by any single experience. Only as such can they be adequate to our needs. They are, we claim, as truly inductions from facts that have been observed as the determined and successful efforts of scientists to think clearly about nature are inductions from observed phenomena; and they have been worked out by gradual steps of careful thinking, similar to those by which scientific doctrines are reached. It is beyond the scope of this paper to justify the assertion that the gospel facts

actually occurred and were correctly observed, or to defend the soundness of the conclusions drawn by Christendom from these accepted facts. To do so would require a consideration of historical problems and of biblical theology too extensive to be summarized here. Our endeavor so far has been to show the soundness of a method which aims at giving due place to facts; and it is now our purpose to suggest how facts can be a basis for spiritual faith.

In considering this point it will be well to remind ourselves of the way in which the faith of Christ's first disciples grew up. They came to believe in him as the Son of God through the experience of being with him and learning to know what manner of person they followed. He did not often declare in set words who he was, but he showed it by his life. His chosen witnesses heard his teaching, saw his mighty works, watched his every act, gesture, and expression during months of closest companionship with him. "Of the men that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection." So St. Peter stated the qualifications of an apostle when it was necessary to fill the place from which Judas fell. The disciples had ample opportunity of knowing what their Master was. They were not held aloof by any of the formalities that sometimes give fictitious dignity and importance to eminent men. Following him as he went up and down the country, they saw him under all the circumstances in which even a man of high character and genius will show weakness, irritability, or selfishness; they saw him in great moments, when he was in the public eye; and they saw how he faced the uttermost crises of life and death. It is evident that they were profoundly impressed with the perfection of his character, and filled with reverence for him whom they knew in such intimate and constant companionship. They perceived that his teaching showed the deepest insight into human nature, and that, while it was so simple in form that the common people heard him gladly, its depth of meaning could be sounded by no one. They witnessed his mighty works, manifesting complete control over the forces

of nature and over human health and life. They saw him use his powers with wonderful self-restraint, resolutely refusing to employ them for his own advantage or fame, so that his use of them only for the highest benefit of others, for the wisest purposes of healing and help, showed forth his love no less than his power. Furthermore they beheld his perfect self-sacrifice in its culmination on the cross. And finally they were convinced that, after he had been laid in the grave, undoubtedly dead, the grave upon the third day was found empty, and that during forty days he repeatedly appeared and talked with them, and at last ascended in their sight into heaven. From the observation of these facts, visible to their eyes, tangible to their hands, audible to their ears, his disciples drew their conclusions concerning him.

Their convictions, as the gospel story shows us, were arrived at only by gradual steps. Indeed they came so slowly to understand their Master that whoever looks back now, from the standpoint of those who see his whole revelation of himself, must feel astonished at their slowness. But it is to be remembered that they had before them the most wonderful person whom the world has ever seen, and that the inference they were to draw concerning him was more stupendous and overpowering than any other that men have ever had to draw, even in the face of the most striking phenomena, the most marvellous discovery, or the highest manifestation of human wisdom and goodness.

But if their progress towards complete faith in him was gradual, they came in due course to the great conviction that he was the Son of God. The stages of this progress are indicated by the various confessions of faith to which the disciples gave utterance. When St. Andrew first met with Jesus, he confessed his belief that he would prove to be the Messiah for whom men were hoping. Later St. Peter said in the name of the twelve, "We have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God." After the feeding of the five thousand, and the appearance of the Lord walking upon the sea, the disciples in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." And finally, after months of living and working with him, the conviction to which they had come was voiced in the great confession of faith, spoken by St. Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

During these months their knowledge of him had been deepened and their love for him strengthened, as his personality exerted its ever-increasing influence upon their minds and hearts, until finally there resulted this climax of faith and this solemn assertion of their full belief in him as their personal Lord Christ. Thus they began with facts, and their gradual, perhaps unconscious, induction from what they observed led naturally to the most intense spiritual faith.

It is too commonly assumed that induction belongs only to the study of nature, and the truth is overlooked that Christian thought largely follows this method. In reality the knowledge of God differs from scientific knowledge not so much in its method as in its object. And the difference between the objects of religious and of scientific knowledge consists chiefly in this: science seeks to know natural forces and laws; religion, to know a personal Being. Now there is a realm of vitally important knowledge which gives us the true point of view for understanding faith. This is the knowledge of human persons, which plays so large a part in all our practical concerns. Indeed it is as widely used and quite as indispensable as our science.

How, then, do we know other persons? We observe the face and expression, the voice and manner, the words and actions, of those with whom we are associated; and from such observations we draw, often unconsciously, our inferences as to the kind of persons they are. Then we have opportunities to see how they act in crises, face dangers, withstand temptations, and whether they live up to the highest requirements of friendship. Our judgments are built up from a large number of data, obtained by observation. This is incomplete in most cases, to be sure, and is subtle and delicate in all. Yet we do form judgments of this sort, and the universal conviction of mankind, as shown in action, is that such judgments must be made and can be reliable. Now it is to be remembered that these conclusions are based upon facts observed, even where our judgments rise to the practical certainty of love or friendship; and that even our firmest convictions regarding other persons can never be independent of facts. Thus a man's belief in the faithfulness of his wife, in his paternity, or in the fidelity of a friend, involves

a conviction that certain events have or have not occurred in the phenomenal world.

But though our judgments regarding other persons are intimately dependent upon facts in the physical order, these judgments, and the personal relations resulting from them, may rise to the highest spiritual levels. It is possible for our belief in others to be so strong, and to have such firm foundations, that not the least doubt remains in our minds, or ought to remain. A friend will be trusted with everything a man owns, or with carrying out some duty that involves a man's reputation, honor, and all he holds dearest. A soldier will trust his companion with his life. And the stories of Othello and of Elsa and Lohengrin illustrate the way in which the soundest common sense of mankind condemns lack of trust in those in whom a man ought to believe. Our judgments of others are necessarily more subtle and complex than the most difficult scientific inductions, and yet they may be profoundly reasonable and reliable.

If our knowledge of human persons is thus dependent always upon facts, and yet may be spiritual knowledge of the highest and most secure kind, surely there need be no fear that the simple, spiritual truth concerning God and our relation to him, which the human heart requires, should be lost because faith tries to make use of facts. The data observed by the chosen witnesses of our Lord's life can be employed by us, no less than they were used by them, as the basis for inferring far-reaching spiritual truths, which directly appeal to the heart and affect practically the whole life. The knowledge of God attained by faith proceeds by the method which we might call "personal induction." That is, as our everyday knowledge of men and women begins with outward manifestations, given in the body, and rises thence to the faithful trust and communion of friendship, so our religious knowledge rises from actual historical happenings in our world of human deeds to the closest spiritual union with God. Viewed from this standpoint, the events through which God's revelation has been given do not remain dry, cold facts, but become the outward, visible signs of what God is, who is made known through his Son. They become alive and warm with meaning and with the mightiest appeal to the heart.