

been surprised out of life in a moment as by a flood or a whirlwind, but condemned to a lingering malady, a living death. And, above all, instead of fleeing from God, and seeking to escape the evils rained down upon him from Heaven, he had fled to God, and was still knocking at his gate, pursuing Him with the inquest of his beseeching looks, besieging Him with his importunate cries for justice and redress, content to risk, and even to endure, all evils, if only he might find God and speak with Him. And, surely, there is no inconsistency here, but rather a subtle harmony and concert.

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FAITH AS A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

ST. MATTHEW xvii. 20 ; ST. LUKE xvii. 6.

THE view of the meaning of the words, *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed*, generally taken is that set forth by Chrysostom :¹ " To indicate that even the least degree of genuine faith can do great things, He mentioned the mustard seed ;" and more recently and vigorously by Olshausen (*in loc.*) : " If ye have faith ready, and hold it fast for the moment when ye are called to use it and to prove it, all distinction between little and much, small and great faith, then falls to the ground : the smallest measure of real living power of faith, disturbed at the moment by no unbelief and doubt, is sufficient to accomplish the greatest things." According to this, the traditional and now current interpretation, the point of comparison is the smallness of the mustard seed. Trench² refers to another view : " Faith as a grain of mustard seed means lively faith,

¹ Homily on Matthew xvii. 20.

² " Miracles," p. 370.

with allusion to the keen and biting powers of that grain ;” but adds : “ It certainly is not upon this side that the comparison is to be brought out ; rather it is the smallest faith that shall be effectual to work the mightiest work.”

Olshausen’s notion of a “ faith which is of the smallest measure,” and yet is “ disturbed by no doubt,” lacks clearness ; for surely an undoubting faith is the greatest faith. Whether such a faith can be momentary—“ at the moment ”—is another point open to serious question. But that which seems fatal to this interpretation is that it is utterly inconsistent with the whole context in which our Lord’s great saying is found.

And, first : How does it agree, how can it be made to agree, with the warning, “ Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting ” ? Are such special means as these necessary to the exercise of the smallest amount of faith ? Scarcely. Secondly : in St. Luke our Lord’s words are a reply to the request of the apostles, *Increase our faith*. To assure them that the smallest modicum of faith was adequate to the working of the greatest works, would surely have been a strange answer to such a prayer. Must it not have suggested the thought, Why, then, need our faith be increased ? Thirdly : Is it not opposed to both the letter and spirit of passages in which strong faith, undoubting faith (as in Matthew xxi. 21), is commended and enjoined, and its absence deplored or reprovèd ?

To try to escape this inconsistency by a resort to the gloss, You ask for faith : if you only had a faith as large as a grain of mustard seed, *provided you had but confidence in your faith*, provided you had but the courage of your faith, or made a right use of it, you would

be able to remove mountains, and so forth, is to substitute faith in our own faith for faith in God—a very common and a very pernicious error.

On these grounds I venture to differ from the traditional interpretation, and in its place to propose the following. Christ sets up the mustard seed as an example of what, in so far as faith is concerned, the disciples ought to be. If your faith, relatively to you, were as great as the faith of the mustard seed is relatively to it, you would as easily remove mountains, or uproot trees, as the mustard seed grows into the greatest of all plants.

But it may be objected, How can a mustard seed be spoken of as having faith? We must not forget that Christ uses the mustard seed analogically, and that comparisons between man and the creatures below him never go on all fours: up to a certain point they hold good; beyond that point they become incongruous. Of course it is not literally true that a mustard seed has faith, but neither is that the question. The real question is, What is there in the seed and its behaviour which fits it to be set forth as an example to men? And I suggest that what our Lord really sets before us by this illustration is the important general principle, that *if men exercised faith to the degree to which the mustard seed puts forth the power in it which answers to faith in man, it would be as easy and natural for them to work wonders as for the mustard seed to become the greatest of herbs.*

Growth depends on the assimilation of nutriment. The assimilation of nutriment is a process in which two factors co-operate: the one, the seed or germ; the other, the surrounding or environment. Each

must be fitted to the other ; each especially must act on the other. Without suitable surroundings no seed will begin to germinate, that is, act ; without action on the part of the seed, no surrounding, however suitable, will produce growth. Given the same surrounding, any differences in the plants which grow out of the seeds must be attributed to the seeds themselves. As every gardener knows, the same culture will not guarantee the same result. But were the action of a seed purely mechanical, there could be no uncertainty ; for men are able to calculate exactly what certain mechanical forces will do in certain given conditions. The reason of the differences lies therefore, without doubt, in the constitution of the seed, whether as originally given to it or as subsequently modified ; for we can scarcely attribute its attitude towards the environment to conscious choice or caprice. On the contrary, so far as its power goes, it acts normally—it assimilates what it can assimilate, and grows unto what it can become. How should this behaviour be described, speaking after the manner of men ? We should say that the seed makes full use of its opportunities ; or, still speaking anthropomorphically, that it unhesitatingly recognizes, accepts, falls in with, the order and constitution of the system to which it belongs. As a matter of fact, a seed that grows properly *does* thus behave : the anthropomorphism of which I spoke lies solely in attributing to it *intention* of any degree or form. It cannot behave otherwise than it does ; but yet its actual behaviour, whatever may be the actual cause of it, is an acceptance of the position in which it is placed. If we could imagine any hesitation on its part to lay hold on that which is presented to it, whatever might be its original

constitution, there could be no satisfactory result. In one word, the secret of growth, so far as the share borne by the seed is concerned, lies in the action by which it appropriates the nutriment provided in its environment, which action rests upon what may be termed an acceptance of the order in which it finds itself.

Let us now turn to man. Like the mustard seed, man must be placed in an appropriate environment, and must behave towards that environment in a certain manner. Of him also it holds good that he must act as well as be acted on. If his surroundings fail to offer fitting nutriment, or if he fail to appropriate the fitting nutriment put within his reach, he will either perish, or at least attain but a stunted growth. As soon as man loses the capability of acting in response to the forces which act upon him, whether physical, intellectual, or personal, he shrivels and dies. So that in his case, as truly as in the case of a seed, the secret of growth is the due assimilation of the nutriment provided in his environment. Up to this point, the same language may be used of both.

Speaking anthropomorphically, this action of the seed implies, as we have seen, an acceptance of the order in which it is placed. And what the seed does blindly, man has to do consciously. At the earliest stages of his existence, indeed, his recognition of the order and constitution of the world is as blind and necessary as that of a mustard seed; but with every approach to maturity he becomes more and more capable of taking his behaviour, whether it be recognition or assimilation, into his own hands—that is, of adopting it by conscious choice. *Now the relation thus*

consciously assumed by man is faith. His behaviour and that of a seed, looked at as a simple relation, are identical : it is in virtue of the consciousness and freedom with which it is associated in man that it becomes faith.

Let us take as an illustration the simple act of eating bread. When we eat, we trust, first, the fellow-man who gives us the bread as fit for food. Then we trust our senses, when they tell us that what we have before us to-day is the same as what we found to be bread yesterday. We further trust the order of Nature in assuming that the bread of to-day will nourish us as it did yesterday. In addition, we trust the baker ; the baker trusts the miller ; the miller the farmer ; each of those in his turn trusts others ; and every one of them has constantly to take for granted that the forces and laws of Nature continue the same from day to day and from year to year. A want of trust at any one point in the long chain which puts bread into our hands would arrest the process by which we derive nutriment from our daily bread. Not otherwise is it with the intellect, which draws its nutriment also from the world in which it is placed. In point of fact, at the back of every movement towards the appropriation of material of growth, whether of body or of mind, there is faith—implicit or explicit, conscious or unconscious. Generally speaking, the faith is implicit and unconscious, though at times, owing to special causes, it becomes explicit and conscious.

In the domains both of our physical and intellectual life, faith is the necessary condition of assimilation ; in that of the heart or of the emotions, through which we enter into relationship to persons, faith is not merely

the condition of appropriation, but also its beginning. Mutual trust between persons is, so far as it goes, mutual appropriation. At any rate there can be no doubt that, where there is no mutual trust, there can be no mutual communication of the specifically personal life. And as personal life can only develop and work as it is nourished by personal life or by communications therefrom, it is clear that here again faith is indispensably necessary.

If the environment from which man is intended to draw nutriment contained nothing but the creatural, in other words, if he were correlated solely to Nature and man, it is obvious that no assimilation, however complete and normal, could secure for him a growth involving the power over Nature referred to in the passages under consideration. Those whose faith and consequent appropriation is restricted to the seen and temporal, must needs restrict their conscious action thereto, and be bound down by its conditions.

But this order of things includes more and higher—it includes God Himself, and man is constituted to derive nutriment and life from Him. To use the scholastic expressions, man is *capax infiniti* as well as *finiti*. Just as he is made to draw nutrition for the body from the purely physical world, and for the mind from the intellectual world, so is he made to draw nutrition from God. Constituted as the universe is, and constituted as man is, the one is as natural as the other. Both relationships, too, are regulated by the same law—there is no appropriation without faith.

Now as man grows, corporeally, by what he draws from the physical world, and intellectually by what he draws from the intellectual world, and emotionally by

his fellowship with other hearts, and thus becomes capable of doing in each sphere the work devolving upon him, so, through the assimilation of God, must he acquire strength for specific work. What is that strength? What is that work? He becomes increasingly one with God, and God becomes increasingly one with him; so that God can work in and through him, and he can work in and through God. In a word, he becomes a sharer in the Divine strength. This may seem to be bold language, but it is the language of the Bible, and it is in conformity with the order of the world. Man and Nature work in and through each other, because each dwells in the other; and God, yea, God Himself, is no exception to the law, because it was He who constituted the universe what it is.

But, if this be true, to the extent to which we are God's and God is ours, to that extent we shall hold God's relation to the rest of the universe. What that relationship is I need not here describe. He who made and rules nature can also use it for his purposes. If He see fit, He can alter its arrangements, whether those arrangements be between atom and atom or between sun and sun. It is of course quite true that the so-called laws of Nature are his own laws—the modes in which He has ordained that natural forces shall move and act; and if there were nothing in the universe higher than mere Nature, God would never interfere with its constitution and order. But there are spiritual as well as natural forces; there are therefore spiritual as well as natural laws, and the latter exist for the sake of the former. Even under ordinary circumstances the spiritual exerts some sway over the natural;

so, at all events, all implicitly or explicitly concede who recognize a real distinction between human thought and volition and mechanical and vital movements. How much more should such sway be expected when extraordinary circumstances arise! An extraordinary, that is, a miraculous subordination of the natural to the spiritual, would then be no less orderly than the common subordination of nature to the spirit and will of man. So far, therefore, as men become one with God by faith, so far will they share the Divine power of using, moulding, rearranging, swaying the natural, for the sake and in the interest of the spiritual; in other words, the Divine power of working miracles.

This, in my judgment, is what Christ means when He says, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove, and it shall remove." The mustard seed develops its full power because it assimilates all that is within its capacity to assimilate; and when man shall have assimilated all that it is within his capacity to assimilate—which includes the life of God Himself—he too will develop his full power, that is, a power to which nothing shall be impossible.

Nothing will be impossible to the believer that is not impossible to God Himself! But the ground of his power is the limit of its exercise. And here is the answer to the objection that, if my interpretation of our Lord's saying be true, then every believing man should be able to work miracles at his own pleasure. It must be remembered that the power in question is due to oneness with God; that oneness with God springs from faith; that to wish to work a miracle not inspired by God must be to interfere, to the degree of

that wish, with the oneness with God which is the secret of our power; and that, in one word, the faith supposed by the objection is in reality unbelief, and, as such, does not come within the range of our Lord's promise. If it is true that by faith God's power becomes ours, it is equally true that our power then becomes God's; and in such an union it is as impossible for us to use God's power for ends foreign to his purposes as it is impossible for God to use man's power for ends contrary to man's good.

For my own part I am inclined to believe that the growth of individual believers into such power as Christ here promises depends on a collective growth of the Church; but that when the Church shall be as a whole full, through faith, of Divine life and power, then, if the furtherance of God's spiritual purposes demand it, elect souls will arise who shall be able to say to a mountain, whatever it may be, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; or to a tree, whatever it may be, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea, and it shall obey them: nay, more, no miracle, however great, shall be impossible to them.

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SOME TRACES OF A HEBREW GOSPEL.

NOT long ago the pages of *THE EXPOSITOR*¹ contained a discussion of much interest concerning the language commonly used by our blessed Lord during his min-

¹ Vol. vi. pp. 81, 161, 285, 307; Vol. vii. pp. 81, 278, 368. The writers of the articles above alluded to did not notice that in the exclamation of our Lord on the cross (Psa. xxii. 1), the words of the Hebrew Psalm are not quoted, but that, instead of the Hebrew *ʿazabthani*, we have the Aramaic *sabachthani*. These words,