

## **DECLINE OF FAITH.**

The invisible, the supernatural, the divine, seem to be unloosing themselves from our grasp, dissolving into unrealities and uncertainties, which we are fain to call mysteries in order to persuade ourselves that we have not quite lost all, or at least that we have got something in their place! Invisible personalities lose all reality, and Him who is infinitely personal, the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, we often find the most difficult of all to realize.

Faith thus ceases to be faith, even when retaining the name; for faith is the recognition of truth as certainty, not as probability. It is no longer the substance of things hoped for, or the evidence of things not seen. At the best it is but a struggle to believe, a struggle against some adverse power that is unconsciously drawing us backward. With many it seems rather a desire not to believe, a secret preference for doubt, as nobler and more independent than faith. We grope, and pray, and strive, and weep, but the reality comes not; nay it seems to recede farther from us every day.

The age tosses, like a fevered man upon his sick-bed, seeking rest but finding none. It tries variety, as men in quest of health try change of air. It rejects finality or completeness, as associated with mental weakness, boasts are into the region of uncertainty, not of certainty; into the domain of hypothesis, not of induction and demonstration. They vanish successively in vapor, and leave only pestilence behind them. The guesses at truth, numerous as they are, often plausible, sometimes beautiful, are the results more of fermentation than of life or growth.

Along with the believing heart the desire for its return has gone out with many, and the materials for faith are silently

disappearing. Faith itself is regarded rather as a prison-house than a palace – a restraint upon thought, not an instrument for its development – linked with bondage, not with liberty. We see, and hear, and touch, and taste, but do we believe. We deal in make-believes, and fill up the hollowness thus created with pleasant dreams, for thorough believing would be limitation and finality, unworthy of intelligent humanity – subjection to a superhuman will and a mind outside of our own. The recognition of anything as true beyond the circle of our senses would land us in the supernatural; and the supernatural is fast becoming to multitudes but a wondrous day-dream – a fable of the mystic ages, like Homer's Olympus, or Virgil's Elysium.

The believing faculty of the age seems to be undergoing a change, or as our modern thinkers would say, "undergoing repairs." Its sphere is considered to have been too wide on some sides, and too narrow on others. Is it safe to credit what lies beyond the sweep of scientific vision? is the question that has broken in upon us with much earnestness. To deliver oppressed humanity from the trammels with which the faith of centuries has fettered it, is reckoned the chief mission of modern culture. This deliverance is to be achieved by first landing us in doubt, that out of that or unbelief a truer, nobler faith may grow. The Christendom of the past has been, it is supposed the Christendom of credulity; the Christendom of faith is now dawning. The credulity of the middle ages accepted miracles in thousands without evidence. Will the new faith of the nineteenth or twentieth century signalize itself by rejecting miracles, though certified by all the proof that the most trusted history has to rest upon? The founder of the new Christianity, the introducers of the Christ that is to be, think the supernatural a defect or blot upon the Bible. The defenders of the old Christianity, the believers in the Christ that is, cannot conceive of a Bible without the supernatural, and would deem the absence

of the supernatural from any professed revelation a sufficient proof  
that it could not have come from God.

– H. Bonar.

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