

THE CLUE OF THE MAZE (70 ARTICLES)

by C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon's seventy articles addressing spiritual confusion and doubt, offering guidance through spiritual darkness toward clarity of faith, speaking to the fog that dims and chills the believer's day.

9 Chapters

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BOOK: Clue of the Maze: Honest Faith(70 Articles)

The Clue of the Maze

Honest Faith by Charles Spurgeon

Preface

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Preface

Preface

Doubt dims and chills the day. A fog is over all things, and men move about like Egypt's ancients when they felt the darkness. Oh that this mist would lift! The best we can hope is that the present gloom may pass away right speedily, and that the cloud may leave a dew behind, to nourish a more intelligent and unquestioning faith. In this clammy scepticism no race but the puniest can be nurtured. Men who are greatly good are hill-born, and love the fresh air of the mountains of truth. The paragraphs of this little book are not supposed to be an argument. It was not my aim to convince an opponent, but to assist a friend. How I have personally threaded the labyrinth of life thus far, may be of helpful interest to some other soul which just now is in a maze. I hope that by these pages some true heart may be assisted to "fight his doubts and gather strength." Let no man's heart fail him, for the prevalent scepticisms are but "spectres of the mind." Face them, and they fly. A great poet let fall the expression, "honest doubt." How greedily it was clutched at! Modern unbelief is so short of the quality that it seized the label, and, in season and out of season, it has advertised itself as HONEST doubt. It was in dire need of a character.

Feeble as our voice may be, we lift it on behalf of

HONEST FAITH.

Clues #1-10

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #1-10

1. Let us live The most important part of human life is not its end, but its beginning. Our death-day is the child of the past; but our opening years are the sires of the future. At the last hour men summon to their bedside a solemnity of thought which arrives too late for any practical result. The hush, and awe, and faraway look, so frequent in departing moments, should have come much sooner. Commend us to the example of the Hebrew King, who fasted, and wore sackcloth, while the child was yet alive. "Wisely did he foresee the uselessness of lamenting when the scene should close." Can I bring him back again?" was one of the most sensible of questions.

It may be a serious business to take the cold iron from the anvil; it seems to us far sadder to be standing still, and seeing the hot bar grow chill. Brother, at my side, whoever you may be, let us strike!

2. How shall we live? With what hammer shall we strike? Ay, there's the rub. Not that it is any question to me personally; but desiring to be a true brother to you, my reader, I put it so; and for your sake, and in fellowship with you, I look around the work-shop. Here are hammers, light, bright, many! See the trade-mark,—Warranted brand-new. The old smith over yonder says he knows nothing of them. They were left here by a new firm, who are always inventing fine things. "Leastwise," says he, "they call themselves a new firm, but I believe they might better be called 'the long firm': they trade under new names, but they are old rogues." The smith swings aloft, with brawny arm, a hammer which makes the sparks fly and the iron yield:—"There," says he, "the old hammer suits me best" You see, good friend, he is only a blacksmith, and knows no better. Some people are unreasonably fond of old things. Are these mental Tories any more foolish than those who are fascinated by novelties? We think not. The old hammer in our forge is Faith in God.

3. Faith has wrought Wonders

Faith is a great worker. The men of strong convictions fashion the world upon their anvils. Confidence girds a man's loins, and nerves him to the putting forth of all his energy. In the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul brings forth a bead-roll of faith's heroes, and erects an Arc de Triomphe to their memory. The names stand out in capitals of light, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and the sculptured scenes are such as these,— "subdued kingdoms,"—"stopped the mouths of lions,"—"quenched the violence of fire." If the panegyrist of faith comes to a pause it is not because matter fails him; but he exclaims, "What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the Prophets."

4. What has Doubt achieved?

How is it that no such trophy has ever been raised to the honour of unbelief? Will the poet of infidelity and the historian of scepticism yet appear? If so, what will be their record? "Working

righteousness" and "obtaining promises" are rather out of the line of doubt, and it is not likely to endure much suffering to "obtain a better resurrection," for it sneers at the mention of such a thing: the eulogist of doubt would have to content himself with lower achievements. But what would they be? What hospitals or orphanages has doubt erected? What missions to cannibal tribes has infidelity sustained? What fallen women or profligate men has scepticism reclaimed and new-created?

"Sing, muse! If such a theme, so dark, so wrong, May find a muse to grace it with a song."

The Milton of this subject may well turn out to be like him whom Gray describes in his Elegy as "mute, inglorious." "By their fruits ye shal know them." What are the precious outcomings of "modern thought," which is the alias for new-fashioned unbelief? "We hear the shouts of the craftsmen as they repeat their cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" But where are the holy and happy results of the "advanced criticism" which is so busily undermining the foundations of faith?

5. Doubt is sterile The fact is that doubt is negative, destructive, sterile. It constrains no man to nobler things, and begets in the human mind no hopes or aspirations. It is by no means a principle upon which to base life's fabric; for whatever force it has is subversive, and not constructive. A principle which tends to nothing but universal smash is not one to which an ordinary man may contentedly commit the ruling of his life. What if some religious notions be mere fancy, impractical, and imaginary? It is no great thing after all to be good at breaking up the bric-à-brac of the house. However much the coldly-wise may rejoice to be rid of what they call rubbish, it will be no great feat to sweep away all the frail fabrics; the genius required is akin to that which is incarnate in a monkey or a wild bull. Our ambition lies in a higher region: we would construct rather than destroy. Since we aspire to honourable and useful lives, we seek a positive force which will bear us onward and upward. Those who prefer to do so may doubt, and doubt, and doubt to the dregs of nothing; but our choice is to find truth and believe it, that it may be a life-force to us. No partisan has yet had the hardihood to preach an evangel of "doubt and live"; for too manifestly doubt is akin to death: but believe and live is the essence of the message from heaven, and we accept it.

6. Self-reliance and a better Reliance

Self-reliance is inculcated as a moral virtue, and in a certain sense, with due surroundings, it is so. Observation and experience show that it is a considerable force in the world. He who questions his own powers, and does not know his own mind, hesitates, trembles, falters, fails: his diffidence is the author of his disappointment. The self-reliant individual hopes, considers, plans, resolves, endeavours, perseveres, succeeds: his assurance of victory is one leading cause of his triumph. A man believes in his own capacity, and unless he is altogether a piece of emptiness he gradually convinces others that his estimate is correct. Even self-conceit, immodest though it be, has sometimes acted forcefully, just as, at a pinch, Dutch courage has supplied the place of valour. The essence of the matter is that confidence of some sort is an item of great importance in accomplishing our designs, and distrust or doubt is a source of weakness in any and every case. Faith, then, we choose, rather than doubt, as the mainspring of our life.

7. Reliance in God—our chosen Life-principle

Now if self-reliance can make a man, how much more can God-reliance! This latter is more justifiable, more humble, more sure, more ennobling. Our own powers can only reach so far and

no further: we are all tethered, and cannot go beyond our limit. But the divine power is unlimited and unchangeable, and therefore he who makes it his trust has a force at his back incomparably beyond all other. For all ends which he may wisely pursue he will have no need to calculate his strength: he may draw upon All-sufficiency. The Greatest Power must in all emergencies prove great enough for us. That power being immutable we may depend upon it as long as eternity endures. It is no small advantage to place our reliance where we may increase it from day to day without hazard of excessive confidence.

8. This Reliance works for good The moral results of trust in God are admirable. Setting out in life with a sincere and unaffected reliance upon God, a man's success will not make him vain, for he will give the honour to him in whom he trusted; and could such a man sustain an entire defeat while thus depending upon the divine arm, he need not be crushed by the disaster. His failure would involve more dishonour upon God than upon himself. It were an awfully sublime fate to perish through too great a faith in God. It is clear that in case either of success or failure, the influence of faith in the living God must be beneficial. As to whether or no faith in God will produce for us that which is best worth living for, we must each one prove for himself. The probabilities all look that way. It is reasonable that a man trusting in his Maker should find himself largely benefited by his faith. Certain of us are so well assured of the excellence of faith by many joyful facts already ascertained, that we are content to run all the future risks of an experiment in our own case upon the largest scale. We deliberately say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him."

9. Scepticism—no very great Achievement

It has been well said, "Nothing is easier than to doubt. A man of moderate ability or learning can doubt more than the wisest men believe." Faith demands knowledge, for it is an intelligent grace, able and anxious to justify itself; but infidelity is not required to give a reason for the doubt that is in it: a defiant mien and a blustering tone answer its purpose quite as well as argument. In fact, the present acme of unbelief is to know nothing: and what is this but the apotheosis of ignorance?

Great is the glory of knowing nothing! A man may glide into Agnosticism insensibly, and remain in it languidly; but to believe is to be alive,—alive to conflict and watchfulness. Those who think faith to be a childish business will have to make considerable advances towards manliness before they are able to test their own theory. Shall we prefer doubt because it is so ready to our hand, or shall we become truth-seekers even if we have to dive like pearl-fishers? That depends upon the mind which is in us. We shall elect our life-rule according to the spirit within. A brave soul will not tamely follow the ignoble way of the many, but will aspire to the higher paths even if they be the more difficult.

10. Faith in the Unseen That we should limit our confidence to the region of our senses is an absurd supposition. No man has seen, or heard, or tasted the greatest of known forces. Steam, electricity, gravitation, and the rest of the giants are all invisible. The earth is preserved in its orbit by forces which we cannot grasp. "He hangeth the world upon nothing." The visible powers are of minor rank: the more completely a force can be compassed by human thought, the more insignificant it must be. Take an illustration from daily life: the old Latin proverb hath it, that it is the mark of a poor man that he can count his flocks. The few pounds which he has saved can be handled by the artisan every hour of the day if their jingle pleases him; but the great banker has

never seen his millions, and the evidence that he possesses them lies in certain bonds and bills in which he places unquestionable reliance. He is rich by faith. He could hardly be very rich, and actually see his wealth. For a great life a man must trust a great force; and that force must be to a large extent unseen, and beyond ordinary comprehension. This surely can be no difficulty to a reasonable man. If we must inevitably depend in some circumstances upon forces beyond our sight, why should we not in all circumstances rest ourselves upon the Eternal God, though he is and must be invisible? The practice of trusting in a higher power will prove to be elevating, and help to raise us above the dull level of materialism. May not the habit, if pursued in life, be the best possible preparation for death, which, according to the judgment of so many, is a pilgrimage to a dark and unknown land? The blind man is as well off in the darkness as those who have their eyes; nay, his habit of finding his way in the dark makes him the better of the two. If, therefore, faith teaches us to go where sight fails, we shall be the readier for that region which mortal eye has not seen. This much is certain, that if we follow God by faith, we need not be distressed because of his apparent absence and his actual invisibility; for as the dog, which hunts by scent, needs not to see its game, so he that follows in the way of obedience by faith, has no necessity to seek signs and tokens, for his faith supplies him with a surer sense.

Clues #11-20

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #11-20 11. God can be known

It has been asserted that God cannot be known. Those who say this declare that they themselves know nothing but phenomena; and therefore they are bound, if candid, to admit that they do not themselves know that God cannot be known. As they confessedly know nothing about it, they should not be offended if we leave them out of our consideration.

He who made the world is certainly an intelligent Being; in fact, the highest Intelligence; for in myriads of ways his works display the presence of profound thought and knowledge. Lord Bacon said, "I had rather believe all the fables of the Talmud and the Koran than that this universal frame is without a Mind." This being so, we do in that very fact know God in a measure: ay, and in such a measure that we are prepared to trust him. He that made all things is more truly an object of confidence than all the things that he has made. It would be a strange Mind that did not make itself known: as strange as fire that did not burn, and light that did not shine. We should find it hard to believe in the eternal solitary confinement of the Being who made the worlds.

12. Faith in God permitted May a man trust in God? There is another question which answers both itself and this,—Wherefore should not a creature trust its Creator? What is to forbid it? Such confidence must be honourable both to the man and to his Maker; it is according to the need of the one and the nature of the other. Who by the closest search can discover the faintest trace of a reason why we should not rely upon the living God?

13. God's Existence not taken for granted Do we take God's existence for granted? Certainly not. We believe it to be a fact proved beyond any other. To the candid mind, not diseased with cavilling, but honestly rational, the existence of a work proves the existence of a worker, a design necessitates a designer, a forethought involves a fore-thinker. Now if we were even in a desert with Mungo Park, a bit of moss would be argument enough that God was there: or for the matter of that, the sand under our feet, and the sun above our heads, would suffice to prove that fact. But dwelling on a fair island, teeming with all manner of life, we may count as many proofs of the Godhead as there are objects of sight, and hearing, and taste, and smell.

This, of course, is called "a mere platitude"; but, by the gentleman's leave, his Latin word makes no difference to the absolute certainty of the argument.

If more proofs were offered, they would no doubt be blocked in the same captious manner: but contemptuous epithets are no replies to fair reasoning. We conceive that one sound proof is better than twenty faulty ones; and if that one does not convince, neither would a legion. The French savants, en route for Egypt, pestered Napoleon with their denials of a God, but his astute intellect was not led astray. He took them upon deck, and, pointing to the stars, he demanded, "Who made all these?"

14. Doubt logically carried out

Doubt as to the being of a God has but a short way to run to finish its legitimate career. No man, who believes that he has a soul can give better proof of his mental being than that which we can give of the existence of God. Let him try. He claims that his own consciousness is a proof of his being alive. We reply that it may be very good evidence to himself, but it can be none to us, nor would a rational man attempt to use it in that way. Our friend answers, "I work, and my work demonstrates that I am." Precisely so, and God's works demonstrate that he is. Quickly it is replied: "But you see me work, and you see not God." To which we answer,—We by no means see you work: your body is not yourself, your true self we have never seen. Your mind executes its purposes through your external frame, and we see your limbs moving; but the soul which moves them is out of sight, and it is a mystery of mysteries how a spiritual subsistence, such as the mind is, should be able to operate upon matter. The initial impression of mind upon matter is a secret which no mortal has unveiled. You cannot prove the existence of your soul to another man except by the same arguments which prove the being of God.

If then you stretch your wings for a flight of doubt, be brave enough to fly onward to the Ultima Thule. Doubt your own existence. Doubt whether you doubt; doubt whether there be any you to doubt; doubt whether there be anything to be doubted. A thorough-going Agnostic ought not to be sure that he is an Agnostic; he should not in fact be too confident that he is himself, or that he is at all.

15. No Soul A certain preacher had wrought his best to benefit his audience; but one of them came to him, and somewhat rudely remarked, "Your preaching is of no use to me. I do not believe that I have a soul, I don't want to be talked to about an imaginary here-after: I shall die like a dog." The minister calmly replied, "Sir, I have evidently failed through mis-apprehension. I did my best for the good of all my hearers; but I prepared the entertainment under the notion that I was catering for men with souls. Had I known that there were creatures present who had no souls, and would die like dogs, I would have provided a good supply of bones for them." "Banter," says one. Commonsense, say we. What more gentle dealing than playful sarcasm can be expected by men who hold such degrading views of themselves? Assuredly no soul need be worried by them. They confess their own inability to help us, and tacitly admit that we are not bound to let them hinder us. "There is no such thing as light." cries one, "for I have no eyes wherewith to enjoy it." Is there any argument in this? No, the blind gentleman is to be pitied, but his opinions upon colour and optics can have no weight. Soul-less beings may hold what philosophies they please; their opinions may be interesting as curiosities, but they cannot influence men with souls in the least degree.

16. God in the Sphere of our Life

Trusting in God, we are not exercising a dreamy dependence upon a far-away and inactive power. It is asked whether God ever does operate on behalf of those who trust him; and it is hinted that he is otherwise occupied, and will not stoop to the petty cares of men and women. Obviously this is an error. God's work is at our doors and in our chambers; yes, in our bodies, and in our minds. The child's father is very busy, but he is busy in the room where his child is in need; and therefore he is where he is wanted to be. The ordinary talk is of "The operations of Nature." Pray, Sir, what is Nature? The gentleman who has used the term looks round with surprise. He stutters, and stammers, and says that everybody knows what Nature is. Tell us, then, what it is. "Why," says he, "it is easy enough, Nature is—; Nature is Nature." The truth is that the real Worker is God himself,

and other force than his own power is nowhere to be found. The movements around us are not produced by laws, as simpletons say: laws do nothing; they are neither more nor less than certain observed methods of the great Creator's working; but HE, himself, doeth the work. We may well trust him to work for us who is working all around us.

17. The great God answering to Faith

Moreover, we may not refuse reliance upon God on the ground of our insignificance; for it is not conceivable that anything can be too little for God. The wonders of the microscope are quite as remarkable as those of the telescope: we may not set a bound to the Lord in one direction any more than in the other. He can and will show his divine skill in a man's life, as well as in a planet's circuit.

Witnesses are alive to testify to the Lord's making bare his arm on the behalf of them that trust him. Any man may also put the principle to the test in his own instance; and it is memorable that none have done so in vain. There are no reasons in his nature why God should not answer to his creatures' confidence; there are many reasons why he should; at any rate, as far as we are concerned, we are ready to put it to the test, and to let the experiment last throughout our whole existence.

18. Why is not God relied on? Does it not seem remarkable that so few men should lovingly reach forth to the idea of linking their lives to God in faith? Why is it! The severe moralist would rightly answer—because they have no desire to lead lives with which God could have any connection: they seek not such purity, truth, justice, holiness, as God's energy would work in them. Doubtless this is the case; but let it not be true of us. Virtue is so admirable that we cannot have too much of it, and the fact that the divine power makes towards goodness is one of its chief attractions in the eyes of right-minded men.

19. We ought not to be despondent

Possibly there may be some who are not so much averse to goodness as despondent about the attainment of it; it may be helpful to these to reflect that despondency is out of court when once God is concerned in a matter. In this case no doubt should enter, for God can raise the most polluted to innocence, since he is able to do all things. It is shocking to refuse to rely upon God because we do not wish to be pure; it is dishonouring to his glory to decline confidence in his power to elevate us because we are as yet so unrighteous. God is good, and it is a characteristic of a good being that he desires to make others good; God is omnipotent, and his power governs the world of mind as well as that of matter: it is clear that both will and ability are united in God concerning the object of our desire, namely, the purity and usefulness of our lives, and therefore we may with much alacrity fly to him, and with much hopefulness repose upon him.

20. Further causes of Non-belief

Secretly men have a confidence somewhere, even when they refuse to rely upon God. They have made gods of themselves, and have come to rest in self-sufficiency. He who has never seen his own face may easily believe in its superlative beauty, if he be aided therein by flatterers. So a man who knows not his own heart may readily form a high opinion of his own excellence, and find confidence in his own wisdom a plant of rapid growth. This is one of the worst enemies of faith. He

who can for all time rely upon himself has no patience with talk about faith in God: he relegates that lowly stuff to underlings; he is of courtier mould. His self-restraint is perfect, his judgment is infallible, his appreciation of the morally beautiful is fully developed: he is a self-made man, and is both his own Providence and Rewarder.

"Tut:—the man is a fool!" Quick and sensible minds speak thus impatiently; and the cooler observations of the charitable are sorrowfully driven to confirm their verdict. We, with whom the reader now communes, are not such grand self-governing infallibles. We fear that our appetites and passions may betray us, that our reason may misguide us, that our prejudices may impede us, that our surroundings may stumble us; and therefore most deliberately would we look to the Strong for strength, and cast our folly upon the wisdom of the Eternal. Of course we shall not expect imitators among the vain-glorious, the frivolous, and the fancifully perfect.

Clues #21-30

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #21-30

21. The Sneer

Sneers are poor, paltry things; they are not born in good men's bosoms, and most wise men despise them when levelled at themselves. They break no bones, and men of backbone smile at them. Yet with the weaker sort they are terrible weapons of war, and the dread of them has made more cowards than the roar of cannon. When faith in God is sneered at, the exhibition is a wretched one, verging upon the utmost degree of imbecility. To trust a quack is excused, but to trust the Almighty is reviled. Persons who never question their own wisdom, laugh to scorn those who rest in the wisdom of the Lord. In such a case, it ought to be easy for a man of common-sense to bear himself bravely. Laugh at a creature for believing his Creator? It is to despise the plainest argument of reason, to dispute an axiom, to assail a truism. As well ridicule a man for mathematical accuracy, for honesty, for learning: as well despise an engineer for trusting to the laws of gravitation, or a farmer for depending upon the return of the harvest! Of course, if men like to be slaves, they will pay attention to the jeers of the foolish; but we write for men who can each one say from his heart—

"I had as lief not be, as live to be In awe of such a thing as I, myself."

22. More Knowledge of God desirable

However willing a man may be to put his trust in God, his faith must largely depend upon his knowledge. It is almost impossible to have confidence in a Great Unknown. The variety and breadth of our knowledge of God will help faith in exercising herself upon matters which a narrow knowledge would exclude from the list of practical objects. What we perceive in Creation might well cause us to rely upon God's power, if we could be sure that it would be exerted on our behalf; but what if there be a doubt on that point? What we observe in Providence may reasonably cause us to depend upon the divine goodness, unless we shall in any way have rendered it necessary for that goodness to withhold itself. This a conscientious man may not consider to be altogether improbable. If our knowledge of God be confined to his greatness, goodness, and wisdom, we are already in an awkward condition, for we have not yet met with that divine quality which can satisfy a certain uneasiness of which we begin to be painfully conscious. Having upon our heart a suspicion that we are not all that we ought to be, we need to know far more of God if we are to enjoy a comfortable confidence in him.

23. How is more to be known?

All probability goes to show, upon the face of it, that the more we know of God, the more easy it will be for us to put our trust in him. The quality of goodness so preponderates in the known that we expect the like to pervade the unknown. But how is more knowledge to be obtained? Can we go from Nature up to Nature's God? Perhaps. But it would be a far more effectual business if

Nature's God would come down to us, and be his own Expositor. No man can be altogether known by his works, much less can God. God's universe is so immense that if it can be proved to be a full revealing of himself, it is too vast for our mental grasp. How can we know all that the universe would teach? The works of God are too many for us to know them all: how then can we learn the many-sided wisdom which they would reveal? If they were replicas we might learn all from one; but as they are infinitely various our capacity is overflowed, and there is urgent need that divine condescension should make an abstract for us, and communicate it in a manner suited to our nature.

24. God revealing Himself

If it be a most natural thing that the intelligent creature should trust in his Creator, and if it be necessary to that trust that he should have more knowledge of the Creator than he can gather by observing his works, is it not reasonable to suppose that the wise and beneficent Creator will enable his intelligent creatures to know him, at least so far as may be required for the purposes of faith? If it were essential to the well-being of his subjects that a king should be personally known to them, we cannot conceive of a good monarch shutting himself up entirely from public view, or refusing to address his people. True, the glory of God does not need man's observation, nor may we suppose that God's motive could be selfish in seeking to be known; but since man's feeble condition needs a divine revelation, it is not unreasonable to hope that One who is supremely good would of his own accord make himself known. For rocks and trees and animals, the manifestation of God in his works of Providence, by giving them stability, fruitfulness, or food, is abundantly sufficient, and more than sufficient; but for intelligent minds there must be a manifestation of God to the soul and spirit, or else faith under many forms must be impossible, and the soul will be left in a forlorn condition. Such a forsaking of the work of his own hands we do not expect from the Infinitely Good.

25. A Word-Revelation

Language is the best means of communication between one mind and another: it is, therefore, natural that God should use the best means of communication, and that, therefore, he should converse with men in words. Language reduced to writing becomes at once more accurate and more permanent; and hence, again, it is in every sense most probable that when the Infinite God communicates with finite men it should be in the speech of men, and that this speech should be embalmed in writing. Divine writings do not, therefore, come before us at all out of the expected order of God's procedure; the announcement of their existence does not create in us any overwhelming surprise, neither do we see in the notion of such writings anything forced and abnormal. A mind entirely locked up within itself could hardly belong to an energetic worker: he who makes is pretty sure to communicate, and it seems right to expect that so abounding a Maker as the Most High God would also hold converse with other minds, even though they might be inferior and subordinate, especially upon a topic so needful as his own nature and requirements. One does not expect to hear of a great artist that he is a hermit; the qualities of a great Worker are such as produce a Friend, a Brother, a Father. We may expect the Creator to be communicative. True, a clever workman may never speak, for he may happen to be deaf and dumb; but he that made all ears and tongues is not in such a case.

26. The Book should be examined

If there were nothing more than a rumour, floating about respectable society, that a book had been inspired by God as a revelation of his own character, thoughts, and will, an honest man, desirous to be right in his life, would speedily and with great care examine the claims of the much-needed writing. The Book venerated by our fathers, which claims to be the Word of God, has been accepted as such by so vast a number of wise and righteous men that we cannot speak of its appearance as a mere matter of rumour. It has been long before the world, and it has been reverently received by many of the best of our race.

27. Effects of the Book The effect which it has produced upon the nations who have yielded it even a partial obedience is very remarkable: they are now far in advance of those who give it a secondary place, and they are out of sight before those who are unacquainted with it. The result which follows its introduction, in our own day, to the most savage races, is beyond all question exceedingly beneficial. Nobody can doubt that the South Sea Islands have been lifted out of the worst savagery by the teaching of this volume. We have not yet heard of any other book producing such effects, and thus the volume is pressed upon our attention by the undeniable results of its influence, both in former ages and in our own times. It is very easy to discover persons whose entire character has been changed by reading this Book; easier still to find individuals who assert that it is their comfort under all circumstances, their guide out of all difficulties, and the priceless food of their spirits.

Many other books have been warmly praised by their readers; but we have never yet met with any other volume which has commanded such frequent enthusiasm, and such devoted affection, as the Bible; neither have we heard of one which answers so many and such diverse purposes in connection with the lives of men.

28. Seeing for One's self

We are not exacting when we demand that each candid man should read the Bible for himself. In testing a Book, which professes to be the revelation of God's mind, we shall act unworthily if we trust to others, be they who they may. Second-hand information lacks assurance and vividness; a personal investigation is far more satisfactory and beneficial. The highly superior person, who dismisses the whole matter with a final verdict, which closes the argument before it is opened, is probably not so cultured a being as he affects to be. At any rate, he lacks the judicial mind so helpful in the pursuit of truth. Doth our wisdom decide a matter before it heareth it? Nature demands attention, hard and persevering, from those who would be true scientists: the Word of God certainly deserves as reverent an investigation as his Works. Why should not the Scriptures be studied thoroughly? Even as mere literature they will well reward the scholar's care. It is the part of a wise man calmly and earnestly to search those famous writings which are prized by so many master-minds. The voice which cried to Augustine, "Tolle: lege;" was no sound of folly. To take up and read a great and good book cannot be to our detriment.

29. The Reading which the Book deserves

It would be disgraceful to borrow second-hand criticisms, and turn the Bible away unheard. It ought not to be read hurriedly, for that is not fair to any author who is dealing seriously with weighty subjects. A Book which master-minds have revered can only be despised by fools. To read the Book is to feel that it is full of power: a man must be wilfully wicked who should refuse this

verdict, even if he hated that power.

It has more thought in it than its opponents could have displayed. Their counter-thought is only Bible-truth turned upside down, and therefore it owes its origin to the Book it assails. A singular fact may here be mentioned; it is certain that those who love this Book best are those who have read it most, and, as a general rule, those who rail at it have not attained to more than a scanty knowledge of it.

30. Somewhat more than Reading accorded

Much of the instruction contained in the material universe can be at once discerned by the eye of the thoughtful observer, but a portion of its secrets no man can thus read: for the discovery of much scientific truth experiment is needed. The chemist, for instance, will acquire little knowledge if he does not engage in tests and analyses. We will not, therefore, in the pursuit of truth, restrict ourselves to mere reading: if the Scriptures ask for experiment, or experience, we shall be prepared to perform or to undergo the required processes if at all reasonable. Christian teachers everywhere tell us that the religion of the Bible cannot be known except by experience, and the statement is not more unreasonable than when the chemist sends us to the laboratory and the crucible. To be able to trust God we must know him; to obtain that knowledge we desire a revelation. Given the revelation, it requires us to let it operate upon our mind: shall we draw back? No. If there be a truth to be known, we wish to know it; if there be a life to be received, we would receive it; if there be a perfect way to be found, we would follow it.

Clues #31-40

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #31-40 31. Style of the Bible

He who should begin to read the Bible at the Gospel according to John would be met by such words as these, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If candid in spirit and cultured in mind, he would be exceedingly struck with the sublime simplicity of the language, and the fathomless depth of the meaning. There is a case on record of an instantaneous conversion to faith in God by the first hearing of these wondrous words. Nor do we wonder.

It little matters where the perusal begins: let the volume fall open as if by chance, and the reader will still discover the same singular majesty of manner. It is unique. Although the many books, which compose the library, called the Bible, were written by some forty or more authors, and each writer has his own idiosyncrasy of utterance, yet the style of the entire volume is one. It is indeed singular that the unity of tone should be so eminently preserved amid the plurality of voices. The Bible style, we venture to say, is per se, and altogether inimitable. It would be impossible for any man to compose a supplement to the Pentateuch, or to dictate another Gospel, or even to write another Epistle. The fabrication has been tried, but there has been no chance of palming it off upon readers of the Scriptures. Forgeries of great authors have been common, and some of them have well-nigh succeeded. The church has disposed of all attempts to force apocryphal books upon her with far less difficulty than the literary world has been able to dispose of forgeries of Shakespeare. Neither the honesty nor the religiousness of men would have prevented the crime of adding vile inventions to the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments; but the attempt itself must for ever be futile, because of the impossibility of an impostor's imitating that style of perfect truth, which is the peculiarity of the Word of God. We cannot imagine a mere man speaking after the manner of God; assuredly no uninspired person has yet spoken after the style of the Holy Spirit.

We would trust an ordinary schoolboy to detect the wide difference between any apocryphal or pretendedly sacred book, and the writings of an inspired psalmist, prophet, or apostle. The notion that the Vedas of the Brahmins, the Avesta of Zoroaster, and the Koran of Mahomet, are comparable in style or manner to the Word of God is ridiculous. Max Müller tells us that those who believe "that these are books of primeval wisdom and religious enthusiasm, or, at least, of sound and simple moral teaching, will be disappointed on consulting them." As well might the uncouth rhyme of a clown be mistaken for the stately verse of Milton, as the noblest language of man be thought by an instructed mind to be the utterance of God. The style of Scripture is never stilted nor bombastic, yet it has a quiet, unostentatious royalty, all its own; and this sets the Bible altogether apart, and marks it as the king of books. Far from being fettered by conventionalities, it is as free as the air, and yet its music is ever tuned to the same harmonies. It is varied,—joyous, denunciatory, plaintive, descriptive, simple, intricate; and yet it remains in every phase true to its own manner: ever human, and yet at the same moment always divine.

32. Fulness of the Book

One of the marvels of the Bible is its singular fulness. It is not a book of gold-leaf beaten thin, as most books are as to thought; but its sentences are nuggets of unalloyed truth. The Book of God is clearly the god of books, for it is infinite. Well said a German author, "In this little book is contained all the wisdom of the world."

"We search the world for truth; we cull The good, the pure, the beautiful From graven stone and written scroll, From all old flower-fields of the soul; And, weary seekers of the best, We come back laden from the quest, To find that all the sages said Is in the Book our mothers read."

Two literati held a brief discussion as to which of all books they would prefer in prison if they were shut up to the choice of one, and could not obtain another for twelve months. The first made a sensible selection when he proposed to take Shakespeare as his companion; for that great author's works are brimming with fresh thought and masterly expression: but we think the second man gave an unanswerable reason for preferring the Bible. "Why," said his friend, "you do not believe in it!" "No," said he, "but whether I believe in it or not, it is no end of a book."

We thank him for that word: it is indeed "no end of a book." Its range of subjects is boundless, and its variety of treatment is indescribable. Its depth of thought and height of expression are immeasurable. It is altogether inexhaustible. It is a million-times magnified Bodleian of teaching, and its Bibline or book-essence, is of the most concentrated kind. The Scripture has incidentally suggested masses of human literature; and it is the actual material of books to an extent that few would credit. It contains vast stores of what we may call mother-of-thought.

After having been catechized, criticized, caricatured, and crucified, for all these centuries, it still remains a new book, commencing its circulation rather than ending it. When the world grows older and wiser, and attains to the sixth form of its school, the sacred volume will be its final classic, just as it was its first handbook when the new-born Hebrew nation began to spell out the rudiments of truth and righteousness.

33. The Bible to be tested

Let the Book be tried by its internal evidences, and let its undesigned coincidences be thoroughly studied. It is rich in them, and they are deeply interesting: some readers prefer the observation of them to the perusal of the last new novel.

Let it be tried by ancient records and memorials. Is it correct in historical matters wherein it would have surely failed had it been of human concoction? Providence has arranged for frequently testing it by this process; for away there in Egypt, Palestine, Moab, Bashan, Nineveh, fresh inscriptions and monumental sculptures are being found, and all of these, as they are brought to the surface, cry out as witnesses for Scripture history. With what delight would a slab have been welcomed, from any mound or catacomb, which would have contradicted Moses or the Prophets; but hitherto the sacred record has been vindicated. Of late years certain of its bitter opponents have strung together a number of its supposed blunders. The work has been performed with the most acrid hate, and with magnifying glasses of a high power, and the result is nil. Reading with fairness, the mind is annoyed by the recklessness of the objections, the arrogance of the objector, and the ignorance which he imputes to his audience. It would be easy to refute the charges laid

against the historical accuracy of Scripture; but it is an endless work where men do not desire to know the facts, but amuse themselves with quibbling.

34. Influence an excellent Test The better test is that which believers alone are able to describe. How has the Scripture influenced them? Has it flattered their conceit, lowered their ideal of virtue, nourished their selfishness, or dispirited their hopes of better things? No. They find God as revealed in the Book to be their Father and their Friend, and his methods of righteousness to be most elevating and purifying, so that they are enabled to trust him in their struggles after that which is good and noble, and always find their faith abundantly justified. Day by day they see for themselves that God's declarations are true, and that they are attended with power. The words of God awaken echoes in our hearts. The Book is omniscient and omnipresent, like the Spirit that inspired it; it knows all about us, and tells us our secret thoughts. It must be divine, for it touches secret springs known only to him who fashioned the heart at first. He has watched the fouling of its machinery so closely that its present movements cannot deceive him; and he speaks of it as only such an Observer could do. The Bible revelation exactly meets our needs, and allays our fears: we mean not the shallow wants and dreads of worldly frivolity, but the deep and terrible necessities of a mind ready to despair through a crushing sense of past failure. This Book is a salvation for men doing business on great waters, where trifles are out of the question. It is a guiding star to minds around whom the midnight of despair is gathering. O matchless revelation of truth, if thou didst not come from God, whence didst thou come? If all thou tellest us be a dream; fain would we dream again, or die in our sleep! Hitherto we have found all thy teaching true to our inner life, and we cannot but bear witness to the fact!

35. The Sinless One A clear proof of the divine origin of Scripture is afforded by its portrait of the perfect Man. Jesus is sinless in thought, and word, and deed; his enemies are unable to find a fault in him either of excess or defect. Nowhere else in the world have we such another portrait of a man; it would be superfluous to say that nowhere have we such another man. Jesus is unique: he is original, with peculiarities all his own, but without any divergence from the straight line of rectitude. He is not a recluse, whose character would have few relationships, and therefore few tests; but one living in the fierce light of a King among men, coming into relation with the world in a thousand ways; a great ethical Teacher, inculcating a system far surpassing any other, and embodying it in his own life; above all, crowning the edifice of a perfect life with the surrender of himself to death for his enemies. Whence came this portrait if the man never existed? No painter goes beyond his own ideal; no imperfect mind could have invented the perfect mind of Christ. The record is divine.

36. Science and the Book at one

Between the revelation of God in his Word, and that in his Works, there can be no actual discrepancy. The one may go further than the other, but the revelation must be harmonious. Between the interpretation of the Works and the interpretation of the Word, there may be very great differences. It must be frankly admitted that the men of the Book have sometimes missed its meaning: we have never held the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripturists. Nay more, it is certain that, in their desire to defend their Bible, devout persons have been unwise enough to twist its words, or, at least, to set them in an unnatural light, in order to make the Book agree with the teachings of scientific men. Herein has lain their weakness. If they had always laboured to

understand what God said in his Book, and had steadfastly adhered to its meaning, whatever might be advanced by the scientific, they would have been wise; and as professed science advanced towards real science, the fact that the old Book is right would have become more and more apparent.

37. Scientific Statements not infallible

Those who have addicted themselves to the study of Nature, and have despised the Word, certainly cannot claim such immunity from mistake as to demand a revision of Scripture interpretation every time they enthrone a new hypothesis. The history of philosophy, from the beginning until now, reads very like a Comedy of Errors. Each generation of learned men has been eminently successful in refuting all its predecessors, and there is every probability that much of what is now endorsed as orthodox scientific doctrine will be entirely upset in a few years' time. When we remember that one coterie of savants has proved to a demonstration that there is no such thing as mind, and that another has been equally successful in proving that there is no such thing as matter, we are led to ask the question, "When doctors differ, who is to decide?"

38. Little settled in Science

There are many voices in the world, some powerful, and others weak; but there is not yet a consensus of thoughtful observers sufficiently strong to demonstrate any one system of science to be absolutely true. The inductive process of Bacon, no doubt, yields the nearest approach to certainty; but even this cannot raise a deduction beyond question, for no man of science knows all the instances that can be adduced, and his deduction from what he knows may be upset by equally sure inferences from what he does not know. The time over which scientific observations can travel, even if it be extended into ages, is but as a watch in the night compared with the eternity of God; and the range of human observation is but as a drop of the bucket compared with the circle of the heavens; and, therefore, it may turn out, in a thousand instances, that there are more things in heaven and earth than were ever dreamed of in the most accurate philosophy of scientists. These good people have done their best, from Aristotle downwards, but they have hardly accomplished more than to prove us all dunces, and themselves scarcely a fig better than the rest of us.

39. Where Alteration is easiest

Instead of altering the Bible, or allowing that it may be mistaken upon mundane matters, it is a far safer course to continue the long-ago-begun process of amending science, which is made of a substance so plastic that no great effort is required to change its fashion to the reverse of its present shape. From the first doctor in the school of science down to the last, error has not only been possible, but almost unavoidable, from the limitation of human faculties and the mystery of phenomena. Even the interpreters of Scripture have been less absurd than the interpreters of Nature; though certain of these have gone to grievous lengths. Yet The Book retains its impregnable position. If it ever comes to a matter of decision whether we shall believe God's revelation or man's science, we shall unhesitatingly cry, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

40. No remarkable present Difficulty At the present moment we see no considerable difficulty. Scripture may not square with proposed hypotheses, but it agrees with known facts. Scripture, interpreted in an intelligent manner, displays as clear an agreement with Nature and Providence

as Words can show with "Works. An article in the Illustrated London News may describe in words a scene which, on the opposite page, is depicted by the pencil of an accurate artist: the two forms of instruction may fully coincide, and yet the impression upon the reader, who fails to see the engraving, may not be the same as that produced upon an observer who only notices the sketch, and neglects the letter-press. The man who cared only for the typography might quarrel with the votary of the wood-block, while the picture-observer might equally well retort upon the reader: but if the two could be combined, the intent of the author would more surely be understood. Let him that readeth the Word consider the Work, and let him that observeth Nature attend to Revelation, and growing wisdom shall be the reward of both.

Clues #41-50

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #41-50 41. Anchorage and Root-hold of Faith When the Bible is fully accepted as God's own revelation of himself, the mind has come to a quiet anchorage; and this is no small gain. A safe resting-place is an urgent need of the soul. To find a sure foot-hold somewhere, men have tried to rest in an infallible church, or in their own supposed infallible reason. Of two earnest brothers one became a Papist, and another an infidel. We do not feel attracted to either haven, if haven either of these can be called: we prefer for our own part to cast anchor once for all in an infallible revelation. Drifting about must be injurious to character, and fatal to influence: root-hold is essential; here then is ours. When first the anchor goes down, or the root strikes, little can be known of the anchorage or the soil, compared with that which will be discovered by the test of experience. Thousands are quietly moored in the Fair Havens of Scripture; myriads are growing and bearing fruit in the garden of the Lord. Their witness is assuring, but our own experience will bring the most satisfactory conviction.

Down goes the anchor: the rootlets embrace the soil.

42. Sin disturbing Faith

Accepting Holy Scripture as God's revelation of himself, we now know more of him for practical purposes than we could have otherwise known, and especially upon one matter not hitherto mentioned. Our conscience (for which we are most grateful, for our struggle upward would be hopeless without it, if indeed it could ever have been thought of) reminds us that we are not quite beginning life, for we have already proceeded some distance, and that not altogether as we might desire to have done. With a sigh, our memory holds up sundry records which we cannot look upon with composure. We may not have been the worst of men, but we are sorry that there should be any worse than we are. We have possibly steered clear of the rocks of vice, but into the whirlpool of indifference we have hitherto been drawn. We have not done our best; and we begin to suspect that our best might not have been so very good if we had wrought it. Happily this divinely-inspired Book treats largely of the subject of sin, and of the effectual method by which the guilty can be purged of their defilement, and equipped for clean walking in the future. Here then we shall learn how the imperfect may dare to rely upon the Perfect, how the offender may venture to trust in him whom he has offended. Happy is the man who has been born to such knowledge, and to the possibilities which already are discerned within it!

43. Prayer suggested When a new discovery, either of danger or advantage, bursts upon a devout man, he is led to address God in some form or other. He prays, or he praises, as the case may be; and this comes of very proper and natural instincts, especially when they are intelligently based upon the faith which is found within the soul. Since we see that God has increased our knowledge by revealing himself through a Book; and since we hear that he has cleared up a dark and difficult point, which might have hindered faith, it becomes us to praise him. This done, we should set about reading that priceless writing of his with earnest prayer to him for help to our understanding, that we may perceive its meaning, and for strength to our will that we may obey its precepts. The

Book is for our use, not for our amusement. It behoves us to handle such a gift after a worthy manner. It is not to be played with, but to be put to most earnest, immediate, and continued use. It professes to be meant for guidance in this life as well as for instruction as to the next: it must not therefore be laid aside as a pillow for some distant day of death, but we must ask God to make it our present instrument for righteous living, our daily tutor in the art of shunning evil and attaining good.

44. Removal of the great Obstacle to Faith

Concerning the consciousness of evil in the past of our lives, and the tendency to wrong-doing in our nature, the Bible is very clear, and it is most admirably explicit as to God's way of removing this barrier to our future progress. In Holy Scripture we see a most wise and gracious method for the putting away of guilt, without injury to the divine justice. The atonement offered by the Lord Jesus, who is the essence of the revelation of God, is an eminently satisfactory solution of the soul's sternest problem. Our feeling is that God, the universal Ruler, must do right, and must not, even for mercy's sake, relax the rule that evil done must bring evil as its consequence. We would not, when in our best frame of mind, for our own little sake, wish to have this sanatory law abrogated. Sin ought to be punished: let the rule stand, come what may of us. An unrighteous God would be the most terrible of conceivable evils. Sin linked with reward, or divorced from ill consequences, would be the death of the great principle of righteousness, which is the aspiration of all perfect moral sanity. Scripture proposes no abolition of law, or relaxation of penalty; but it reveals the plan of substitution: the offended Judge bears in his own person the consequences of the offence of rebel man; He assumes human nature, that in His own person human sin may be visited with chastisement; He bears the burden of human transgression, and concerning Him we read these self-evidently divine words, "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." The whole transaction of substitution, descending to death upon the shameful tree, and rising into resurrection and ascension, is a great marvel: it cannot be a fiction, it surpasses all invention; it is the fact of facts. Carefully studied, looked at, weighed, the sacrifice of Himself by the Son of God carries into many minds a conviction not to be resisted, and works a peace only to be conceived by those who enjoy it. Accepting the sacrifice which God has accepted, we ourselves are accepted of the Lord.

45. God's Method of Mercy

Forgiveness of sin through an atonement satisfies a dim but true decision of humanity in favour of justice—a decision which is well nigh unanimous in all races. Even the unenlightened conscience of the savage heathen will not rest till the sword is bared, and a victim has fallen. Man as a rule dares not approach God without a sacrifice. The more enlightened mind is not content without a measure of explanation as to the need and result of sacrifice: such explanation is given in the inspired Scripture, given with great amplitude. The vicarious death of the Son of God, when understood and accepted, yields such peace to the believer that he feels as much at ease as if the law had never been broken. By the death of the divine Victim the law is so vindicated that it stands higher in the veneration of the universe than if its full punishment had been exacted. The heart is therefore quieted once for all upon sound principles to which conscience gives its full assent. Jesus has put away sin by an atonement which is the marvel of eternity, and there is no more cause for dread to the believer than Samson had reason to be afraid when the dead lion lay at his

feet full of honey.

46. Faith's earliest Work The dread of guilt being removed by faith in God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, the mind is overwhelmed with gratitude for the great love displayed in the gift of the great Propitiation, and it is moved to an intense hate of the evil which required such a Sacrifice. This immediately initiates a purgation, the like of which the heart had never known. In the blaze of divine goodness the pleasure once felt in sin is dried up, and utterly evaporated; and out of the midst of that consuming fire there leaps forth a new-born passion for righteousness, born of the immortal flame of infinite love. This becomes a motive force for a higher life, surprising to the receiver, who is amazed at the joy and the hope which abound within him. The stronger the faith in the revealed Propitiation, the fuller the rest, and the more intense the energetic desire for perfect holiness. To trust God is now an instinct, and to rely upon the Lord Jesus Christ becomes a joy, as we read his cheering words, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

47. Faith delights in a plain Gospel

It is a matter for deep gratitude that the gospel is as plain as a pike-staff. If it had been intended to be a secret remedy for an elite few, it might have been recondite and philosophical; but it is meant for the poor, the illiterate, and the undeveloped; and therefore it must needs be what it is—simplicity itself. Thank God, the gospel does not lend itself to quackery! To hear our fashionable thinkers talk, one might suppose the gospel to be an exclusive and aristocratic system for their excellencies to amuse themselves with, whenever they might condescend to develop it a little further. We are glad to find it in the Scriptures in the form of a plain, common-sense, perfect doctrine, which has saved its millions already, is saving multitudes at the present moment, and will save its myriads, when all its superfine critics are mouldering in their graves.

Sometimes faith has great need of patience, when it is pestered with objections against a system which is everywhere in grand operation, and proving itself by its results. Why do not these objectors raise an outcry against the sun? Why not deny that he gives either light or heat?

48. Faith's Discovery When the new-born faith has wondered for a while, she asks herself the question, "Whence am I? How came I into the heart?" The answer which she receives from the Book, and also from her own consciousness is—This is the operation of God. The Holy Spirit must have wrought this faith, which is so new, so vivid, so potent, so much above the ordinary range of the mind. If this be so, a new source of reliance is opened up. The man says, "God has actually begun to operate upon my nature, and as he is unchangeable, he will carry on this work, and complete it." Thereupon God-reliance enters on a fertile country, a land which floweth with milk and honey. The Holy Alliance is an actual fact. The Father must have drawn, or the man would not have come to Christ; and herein is love. The Christ has made a complete atonement for sin; and herein is love. The Holy Ghost has wrought faith, and its blessed consequences; and herein is love. The believing heart is introduced into a new relation to God; it has reached an unexpected nearness to him; it has received the first-fruits of the power which it desired to rely upon. That same Spirit, who is evidently in the heart, is declared to be an abiding Comforter, a Sanctifier, an inward and effectual Teacher: this makes the future quite another thing from what it had ever threatened or even promised to be. The revelation of the Book has become a revelation within the heart; the man believes after a higher fashion, and is girt with a strength which his most sanguine hopes had never dreamed of realizing.

49. Faith's Change a radical one

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for complete salvation, and being assured that he is thereby saved, the believer comes under a new master-principle. Before he knew himself to be redeemed by Christ he laboured for his own salvation; that is to say, his every embryo virtue had self for its aim. He acted or abstained from action, was just or generous, praised God or prayed to him, with the one design of benefiting himself. How little of the essence of virtue could be found in deeds proceeding from such a motive! Yet from that motive the worker could not be set free with any safety, unless by saving him the Lord could lift him beyond need of seeking self-salvation, and then could cause him to pursue things noble and benevolent from pure love of God and man. It is natural that while a man is in danger he should look mainly to his own safety; hence nature itself is at first the enemy of unselfish virtue. But when the man's best interests are graciously secured, and he is set above all hazard, he looks beyond himself to his Deliverer, and regulates his life not by selfishness but by gratitude. This is a grand uplifting of our manhood from servile fear to filial love. No mere animalism will ever understand a passion like that of Xavier—

"My God, I love thee; not because I hope for heaven thereby, Nor yet because who love thee not Must burn eternally.

"Thou, O my Jesus, thou didst me Upon the cross embrace; For me didst bear the nails, and spear, And manifold disgrace "And griefs, and torments numberless, And sweat of agony;

Yea, death itself; and all for me Who was thine enemy.

"Then why, O Blessèd Jesu Christ, Should I not love thee well? Not for the hope of winning heaven, Nor of escaping hell."

In grateful love we have a fulcrum for the moral lever; a principle noble and elevating, potent to produce works of infinitely more value than any which can come from the slavish dread of punishment, or the mercenary hope of reward.

50. Faith and the Nature of Christ No idea of the Lord Jesus Christ approaches to correctness which does not see in his one person the two natures of God and man united. In that person, wherein were blended, but not confused, the Godhead and the Manhood, a practical faith has its most ample help. Jesus sympathizes with the condition in which the struggler after excellence finds himself, for he also was tempted in all points like as we are; he knows the difficulties which grow out of the infirmities of flesh and blood, for he felt sickness and pain, poverty and hunger, weakness and depression. It is a great gain in a human career, a specially suitable assistance, to have an unlimited power at one's side sympathizing with our weakness. Nor is the advantage less in the other direction, for here is a Man, bound to us by relationship and affection the most intense, who is not only tender to the last degree of our suffering nature, but is also as wise as he is brotherly, and as mighty to subdue our faults as he is gentle to bear with our frailties. His Manhood brings Jesus down to us, but united with the Divine nature it lifts us up to God. The Lord Jesus thus not only ministers to our comfort, but to our betterment, which is the greater concern of the two. Could faith believe in a Being more answerable to all our needs, more helpful to our noblest longings? Allied to Jesus, we confidently aspire to such likeness to our Creator as it is possible for a creature to bear.

Clues #51-60

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #51-60

51. Enthusiasm for the Person of Jesus The love of the believer to the Lord Jesus is intensely personal and enthusiastic. It overtops all other affections. His love, his sufferings, his perfections, his glories fill the heart and set it on fire. There is more force in the love of an actual living person than in subscription to any set of doctrines however important they may be. The courage of a leader has often produced deeds of daring which no philosophy could have demanded. Our glorious leader, Christ Jesus, inspires his followers with a burning passion, an all-consuming zeal, an irrepressible enthusiasm, which supplies all the energy which the noblest life can need. It is no small aid to our noblest ambition

52. Faith in the Life of Christ on Earth The more we examine the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more are we filled with admiration of it. In the gospels we have a fourfold photograph of his countenance, taken from different positions. Putting these together, or even meditating upon any one of them, we are charmed with its singular beauty. Nor is this at all remarkable, for almost every man in the world, believer or unbeliever, has acknowledged the singular excellence of the life of Christ. It is so original, so transcendent, so perfect, that all men, except certain blinded partisans, sworn to run-a-muck at all things holy, have bowed before its glory, and regarded it as the beau-idéal of perfect manhood. Now this is in Scripture set before us as an example, therefore it is imitable; and better still, it is set forth as the ordained pattern to which the believer is to be conformed are God's great work is done. To have a high ideal, to be assured that we can reach it, and to have a capable Helper, who will enable us to reach it,—this is to have a grand assistance towards a life of virtue. Faith in this Exemplar, who is also our Saviour, must minister strength in our life-battle. To aspire to such a perfect character, as the salvation which we most desire, is to be already saved in principle. It is a great comfort to be fired with an ambition to be like Jesus. Salvation from hell to heaven every selfish wretch may wish for; but to be saved from selfishness into the image of Christ is that which only the renewed in heart are pining for, and by that pining their salvation is assured.

53. Faith in the Principles of Christ's Life

It is observable that the self-denial of our Lord Jesus, which was complete and entire beyond all suspicion, proved to be for him the way to that pre-eminence of glory which he now enjoys. He is above all things because he stooped to the lowest and meanest state. It is his honour that he laid aside his glory, and bowed to the greatest shame and scorn. His glory in the hearts of his redeemed is this, that he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and even died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. No secondary motive deteriorated the compassionate self-sacrifice of Jesus; yet the abnegation of himself has turned to his boundless exaltation. Faith perceives this, and knowing that in this case one rule holds good for the Leader and the follower, it accepts all manner of service however menial, and consents with alacrity to a thorough self-emptying. To lose one's life for truth's sake and love's sake is according to Biblical philosophy to save it. The complete sinking of self is the surest road to glory and immortality.

Herein is the soul prepared or all ill-weathers, and rescued from a passion which is of all things else the most weakening to the force of virtue.

54. Jesus newer doubts The limping of the leader is the lameness of the follower. It is a grand advantage to the life of faith that we follow Jesus who never doubted. In the whole story of his life, from his childhood to his death, there is no trace of doubting. All other men, the best, the firmest, the most learned, the most godly, have had their times of questioning, their dark hours of mistrust; but Jesus is never uncertain, never even hesitates. Knowing the Father, being wholly conformed to him, seeking only his glory, confiding fully in the eternal power, he never gropes in darkness, but goes serenely forward in a calm, unclouded light. In the hour of his enemies' triumph, and of his own passion, he is "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," but never mistrustful, or dubious. In his mind there never lurked the slightest fear as to the ultimate success of his great enterprise, even though all his disciples forsook him and fled. To the soldier in battle, the confidence of his captain is worth many battalions. Looking up into the calmly resolute and expectant face of the commander-in-chief, the waverer grows steadfast, and even the most confident is further reassured. If the Christ had doubted, the common Christian might have despaired; but since he who bore the brunt of the battle never staggered, it is not ours to question. Had doubt been meritorious or useful, Jesus would not have been without it; had it been a sinless infirmity of manhood, Jesus would have suffered it; and had it been a process needful for growth and development, the Firstborn would have become a partaker in it with the rest of the family. Seeing that Jesus did not doubt, we feel no reverence for scepticism; we judge that it is not necessary to a perfect humanity, and we conclude that the less we have to do with it the better. Say you not so, good comrade?

55. Faith and its early Misgivings Our chronic condition of unbelief ends with our full confidence in God as he is revealed; but fits of it are apt to come upon us unawares; are they not the epilepsies of the mind? Belief in the Great Unseen is not natural to the animal part of us, which still craves something for the eyes by way of sign and wonder. It is a common thing for young believers to be weak upon their feet. The strangeness and greatness of his spiritual discoveries may cause this feeling in the spiritual youth; his memory of past sin, and his sense of present weakness, may also awe him into trembling. But let him hold on with a death-grip to his faith in God, and the darkness will pass from over his soul. Experience will also come to his aid; he will find it easier to trust as belief becomes a habit, and one day he will reach to that triumphant faith of afflicted Job, when he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

56. Faith must be kept clear of Mixture

There is a tendency among those who are aiming at a noble life to mix up their faith in God with other matters. Anxious to enjoy every aid to faith, they are apt to buttress the Rock of Ages with timber from their own forests. This will prove to be a great source of confusion. If we trust God at all we must trust him altogether. The Highest Power includes every other, and therefore the notion of adding an auxiliary to the living God is as absurd as it is insulting. Do I trust in God to save me from sin in his own promised way? Then I am to believe that he will accomplish his promise whether I feel better or worse. If it be God who is believed, he cannot alter or falter, and therefore he should receive the same credit at one time as at another. True, we may have seriously declined, but the stress lies upon the faithfulness of God, and until that can be impugned,

wherefore should we doubt? Conceive that the purpose is to be achieved by two forces, and then our confidence in one may well vary with the condition of the other: but if the design be in the hands of One Power alone, then a diminution of confidence cannot be justified, unless the One Power manifests signs of decay. Faith in God must be unadulterated. Even holy anxiety and watchfulness must not be allowed to shift the ground of our trust. We must lean hard, and lean wholly upon Him who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, and whose office it is to save his people from their sins.

57. The Believer a Missionary

He who has believed in Jesus for himself will be hopeful for his fellows. This hopefulness is a great assistance in doing good. Many have failed to save others because they had no faith in the possibility of saving them. A genuine Christian despairs of no man since he has found grace himself. The Word which had power with his own mind may well enough influence others: hence he would attempt to convert the Pope or the Grand Turk if he had the opportunity; and, failing these, he sets to work upon the first who offer themselves. A living faith is a propagating faith. If thou hast no concern for the soul of thy neighbour, it is time that thou hadst a fear as to thine own soul.

58. Faith must not ferment into Fancy

God is to be trusted for what he is, and not for what he is not. We may confidently expect him to act according to his nature, but never contrary to it. To dream that God will do this and that because we wish that he would, is not faith but fanaticism. Faith can only stand upon truth. We may be sure that God will so act as to honour his own justice, mercy, wisdom, power—in a word, so as to be himself. Beyond all doubt, he will fulfil his promises; and when faith grasps a promise, she is on sure ground. To believe that God will give us what he has never promised to give, is mere dreaming. Faith without a promise implied or revealed is folly. Yea, though our trust should cry itself hoarse in prayer, it would be none the less a vain dotard if it had no word of God to warrant it. Happily, the promises and unveilings of Scripture are ample for every real emergency; but when unrestrained credence catches at every whim of its own crazy imagination, and thinks to see it realized, the disappointment is not to be wondered at. It is ours to believe the sure things of God's revelation, but we are not to waste a grain of precious reliance upon anything outside of that circle.

59. Advanced Thought

We none of us as yet know all that God may cause us to learn from his Word. We have waded into the shallows of that great sea; but oh, the depths! We are to grow in heavenly knowledge. Possibly one generation may advance upon another in such knowledge. But some growths are suspicious, especially such as weaken faith. It is certain that from the apostolic period to the dark ages, if the church advanced at all it was in a backward direction. Religious thought made progress in a wretched fashion away from truth for several centuries. It is more than possible that modern thought is starting on another such progressive period.

Those who are infatuated with novelties may make a dogma out of a certain divine's statement that "More light is yet to break from the Word"; but we, without denying it, take leave to question the common interpretation of the prophecy. If it be meant that apostles, confessors, and martyrs

did not know the meaning of God's revelation; that holy men of former years were ignoramuses compared with our present professors; and that Puritans and the like are all to be discarded because new lamps have eclipsed the old light—then we believe the statement to be one great, broad, pestilent lie. God has not left these nineteen centuries without his grace. He has not tantalized the ages with a Bible which can only be opened up by a succession of Germans with big pipes. We have measured the boasters who are the apostles of "modern thought," and we are slow to admit that the truth of the gospel was purposely involved in obscurity that their vast intellects might in due time develop it. Under their management our churches are famishing, and religion is falling into contempt; and yet we must daily wait at the posts of their doors, while their changeful oracles reveal to us the progressive theology.

Bah! We shall go on feeding men with the bread of heaven, while these pretenders are proving that sawdust is the true stuffing for the human doll.

60. Faith must be for every Day

God is one. God's works and ways are one. His laws for earth are in the same statute-book as those for heaven. The natural as God made it is not in conflict with the spiritual. The line between things secular and sacred is imaginary and mischievous. We believe God for time as well as for eternity, for earth as well as for heaven, for the body as well as for the soul. Far be it from any honest man to confine his faith in God to certain mysterious and impalpable concerns, and doubt him when it comes to his immediate business, and the trials of every-day life. "We are taught by our Great Master to pray to the heavenly Father, "Thy kingdom come;" and the same prayer includes the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." To confide to heaven the greater cares, and leave the less to unbelief, would be as unwise as to commit the door of the house to a watchman, but expressly to exempt an open window from his oversight. What is little? What is trifling? There exists no such thing to a wise man anxious to be always right. No, we must have a present, house-keeping, shop-keeping, table-furnishing faith; for if our mainstay be only available on great occasions, we may be utterly undone by the ills to which it is inapplicable. "The just shall live by faith." Faith is not a go-to-meeting coat for us; but an every-day suit. Comprehensive, universal, and constant in operation, it is a principle which those always require who are perpetually in danger, constantly in need. As the cherubic sword turned every way to keep the gate of Eden, so does faith guard the soul from the advance of enemies, let them come from what point of the compass they may.

Clues #61-70

Clues of the Maze: Honest Faith - #61-70

61. Faith works

Sincere faith belongs not to the tribe of lazzaroni. To leave all things to come as they may, and attempt nothing, is rather the accompaniment of despair than of confidence. Convinced of the fertility of the soil, the farmer sows it; assured of victory, the soldier fights for it; confiding in his good ship, the mariner puts to sea. We cannot believe in God, who works evermore, and then work no more. Faith never reckons it to be advantageous to rust in inglorious rest. No, faith in matters of common life bores the Alps, unites the seas, invades the unknown, and braves the perilous; and when that same principle exercises itself upon God and all his purifying forces, it wrestles with habits, conquers passions, rises to self-abnegation, and makes a man a hero. When we believe best we accomplish most. Like the valve which regulates the quantity of steam which may be employed, faith by its decline or advance lessens or increases the spiritual force which is admitted to the soul from its God; and thus it becomes a matter of highest moment not only that we have faith, but that we have it more abundantly. The rule of the Kingdom is, "According to thy faith be it unto thee."

62. Faith waits

Unbelief in the heart must see in every instance an effect following a cause, or else she doubts the cause: faith is in no such hurry. In Nature the more precious operations are slow: the process which produces mushrooms in a night is admirable, but there are nobler things than fungi, and these are not with us so suddenly. To produce a certain condition the preceding phenomena may appear to be the reverse of likely: a June garden, all enwrought with many-coloured flowers, must be preceded by the clouded weeping skies of April and the fitful changes of May. What then? Faith accepts the immutability of God's nature and promise as her solace and security against the perpetual changes of outward things; and looking behind the shifting scenery of the visible, she is not perplexed by adverse appearances. God worketh as he pleases. He explains not his methods, but bids us believe his promises. The most noxious elements may appear to be cast into the alembic, and the smoke of a furnace may arise in the process, but the highest good is distilled in due time. At no moment in the forming of things would doubt be satisfied with them, for its criticisms are those of ignorance; but the believing man refrains from judging unfinished work. His eye is prophetic, and he sees the good which is to be in the end, and therefore plucks no apple till it is ripe. Hurry and worry, fret and sweat, are for short-sighted passion; but rest and quiet, force and prudence, are with strong confidence.

63. Faith sings

Faith's life is song. She marches to battle with a psalm. She suffers with a hymn upon her lips. She glorifies God in the fires. She passes out of the world to the music of the Te Deum, and not to the dolorous notes of a dirge. She thrusts out the wailers and lamenters from the chamber of her

departed, and enters the room, having none with her but the Lord, who is the Resurrection and the Life. Does Doubt compose sonnets, or chant Hosannahs? Can she even write a requiem? Hers are all what the Poet calls "bitter notes." Let her go and howl by the Dead Sea over Sodom and Gomorrah!

64. Faith makes very much of Prayer The believing man resorts to God at all times that he may keep up his fellowship with the divine mind. Prayer is not a soliloquy, but a dialogue; not an introspection, but a looking towards the hills, whence cometh our help. There is a relief in unburdening the mind to a sympathetic friend, and faith feels this abundantly; but there is more than this in prayer. "When an obedient activity has gone to the full length of its line, and yet the needful thing is not reached, then the hand of God is trusted in to go beyond us, just as before it was relied upon to go with us. Faith has no desire to have its own will when that will is not in accordance with the mind of God; for such a desire would at bottom be the impulse of an unbelief which did not rely upon God's judgment as our best guide. Faith knows that God's will is the highest good, and that anything which is beneficial to us will be granted to our petitions. All things are ours already by love's gift, and prayer is the cheque by which we draw upon our own banking account with God. Thus the 65. Faith enjoys the eternal Harmonies

Trust in the Great Father suggests and fosters delight in all his works. We are out of gear with the universe till we are at peace with God, and then all the creatures enter into a league of amity with us and we with them. At home in our Father's house everything communes with us of his glory. Shrines grow needless, for the whole creation is the temple of the Lord, and nothing is any longer common or unclean. Mountains and hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field do clap their hands. It was no wonder that a great saint called the birds his "sisters," for we seem akin to all that comes of our Maker's hand. Instead of being loose stones cast out as useless, we are built into the fabric of the divine Architect, and are in accord with all the worlds. No one takes a more intense delight in Nature than the intelligent friend of God. He is the world's Interpreter and Voice, and its inmost secret is laid bare to him. "Nature to him is but a name for an effect whose cause is God." He perceives God everywhere, even the God of Gethsemane and the cross.

"One spirit—His, Who wore the platted thorns with "bleeding brows, Rules universal nature." The scientist talks of "Natural laws" and the theologian descants upon the Decalogue; but to the believer all laws are in one statute-book, and he honours all for the King's sake. He sees no holiness within walls superior to that which is outside of them; every place to him is hallowed, for God is there. The rain is holy water, the mountain tarn a baptistery, the flight of birds a sacred procession, the harvest a sacrament, the thunder a hymn, the lightning a sermon. Faith floods the universe with Deity by revealing that unbounded Presence which is evermore its life, its bliss.

66. A Stay-by In times of spiritual conflict, when the truth of the gospel has been called in question, we have known a believing man take his stand at night under the starry vault of heaven, and looking up, he has cried, "My God, I feel an intense love to thee, thy ways, thy laws, thy service! For thou art infinitely good and glorious." Then has he concluded that the gospel, which has brought him into a state of unbounded affection for God, must be true. Unconsciously the mind judges as if it saw an identity between truth and right. This instinct is true. That which makes a man pure must have truth in it; that which denies him is a lie.

67. A Further Help

Going to his chamber, the tempted one has bowed his knee, and prayed out of a full heart for all mankind, heartily desiring their welfare, and asking for grace personally to promote it. He has put in a special petition for the forgiveness of all those who without cause have done him wrong. He has pleaded against selfishness and every unloving thought. Rising from his knees, he has another weapon at hand against doubt; for the faith, which has led him into this condition of pure, heartfelt love must be the truth. Though this may be no syllogism, and the logic of it may not be acceptable to other men, yet we affirm that to the man himself it is good evidence, and in many ways better than any verbal argument. Love and truth agree in one, and the one works into the hands of the other. Truth begets love, and hatred is born of falsehood.

68. True, and as great as true

If the things which our faith receives be indeed facts, they are tremendously true, and demand from us life at its utmost stretch. Revelation deals not with trifles. Let men take heed how they behave themselves amid eternal verities.

Furthermore, the believer rejoices that these things are also gloriously true. His is an inheritance of inconceivable magnificence. The truths which surround the life of faith are worthy of immortals; yea, worthy of God himself. Let us walk according to our high vocation. Oh, for ardours fit for the temple of the Infinite, wherein we minister this day!

69. Faith and the End The Lord Jesus has promised to come again, and faith clings to this promise. Sometimes she hopes that it may be so soon fulfilled that death may be avoided; but times and seasons are of small consequence with her, since all the blessings of the Second Advent will be hers one way or another.

If the Lord should come speedily, so that we do not see death, we shall be changed; and if he delay, so that we die, we shall be raised incorruptible. In any case we shall be for ever with him. Wherefore whether we sleep or wake is a matter about which we endure no travail of heart. The believer saith, "If I live, Christ will be with me; If I die, I shall be with Christ." How slight the difference!

70. Finally

We have never met with an instance in which a dying man has repented of his faith in God, or of the life which has grown out of it. Death-beds have in myriads of instances been clouded with regrets, but no one has ever bemoaned his too early, or too complete, or too protracted confidence in God. What no man has regretted let all men pursue.

Fathers and grandsires have passed this way before us, and have entreated us to follow them: they loved us too well to have implored us to trust in Jesus if he had proved to them a vain confidence. Their dying testimony commands our reverent obedience.

Thus, then, let time and eternity bring what they may, we commit ourselves unto God as unto a faithful creator. To whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

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