

The Gospel Rests on Facts

(A transcript of lectures delivered before a group of church appointees in Chicago, during December, 1945.)

By Apostle Arthur A. Oakman

EVERY great philosophy has its rise in objective happenings authentically accredited by competent witnesses. The reality of facts thus experienced gives rise to thought which in turn interprets the experience. Further, as meaning is conveyed to those so interpreting, they, too, experience the reality which gives rise to the philosophy.

The religion of Jesus Christ is no exception. It is grounded in certain facts which were experienced by men and women who testified of their experience and left their record for the sole purpose of expressing what the facts meant to them.

Christianity rests upon what God has done for man. I shall propose in this first lecture to select four basic facts or series of facts which should provide the pillar and ground of our ministerial witness, thus:

1. The fact of a unique literature in Hebraic history:
2. The fact of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:
3. The fact of apostasy from the society founded by Jesus Christ: and
4. The fact of restoration, both as it sought to correct the abuses fostered by apostasy and as it sought to extend logically and to develop the life and ministry of Christ.

I.—THE FACT OF A UNIQUE LITERATURE IN HEBRAIC HISTORY

Whether the Old Testament is in the main creditable history, and whether it can all be trusted from the historian's point of view as reliable, may be open to question. It would appear that what we have in the Pentateuch is a collection of myths and legends concerning the creation as they were corrected and

refined by the spirit of inspiration. This statement should not cause us concern, for some concepts are best expressed in imagery, symbolism, and figurative language. Primitive races embodied their culture in myths which were handed down orally from father to son, and it would not do violence to our understanding of divine revelation if we affirmed that there was present in the consciousness of Moses certain of these myths and legends. They may have been derived from Egypt. But whether they were or not, they were refined and corrected through his contact with Divinity.

Whether all the Psalms were written by David, whether there were one or two Isaiahs, whether the Book Daniel was written before or after the captivity, does not make any difference to the fact that this literature existed many years before the coming of Christ in substantially the same form as we have it now. Further, this literature contains a certain type of utterance known to us as prophetic. The relation of man to the world and to his fellows is progressively revealed and refined under the inspiration of a long succession of outstanding spokesmen. Again, this literature contains certain propositions about God, about man, and about the ideal coming kingdom which was to be enshrined in Israel as a nation. As one examines these propositions, he must credit to the Jews an exceedingly simple yet lofty conception of one righteous God, the God of the whole earth. The idea of Jehovah may have been mixed earlier with superstition borrowed from Egypt, and the earlier prophets, and the sons of the prophets, may have been guilty of regarding Jehovah as one of a

number of rival gods. But under the guidance of the great prophets, these misconceptions were dissipated, and the conception is clearly brought forth that Jehovah is God of all existence, that there are no local restrictions to his jurisdiction, there is no rival God or co-existent matter which might serve as the root of evil. He is the absolute creator of all visible and invisible entities, of things material and things spiritual. There is no dualism in their conception, no antagonism between spirits and bodies.

The prophets also say that Jehovah is righteous and demands righteousness from his worshipers. No costly sacrifice, no magical apparatus will cause him to deviate from his righteous judgment on sin. But while he slays the soul that sins, he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He loves too much to be vindictive.

The supremacy and righteousness of Jehovah have their inevitable corollary in the fact that his ideal for mankind will eventually triumph. This ideal is a kingdom of righteousness enshrined in Israel, the nation. It is erroneous to say that the idea of the kingdom of God, which seems first to appear in the Scriptures, means merely the sovereignty of God. It means his sovereignty *as it is finally to be realized* in righteous Israel, the nation; and through Israel in all the world. This rule of God in Israel is to center in the New Jerusalem.

This brief summary of the contents of the prophetic faith is but a sketch. But it cannot be denied that this conception was a fact and that it centered in the minds of those who were responsible for giv-

ing us the literature. It is further to be observed that these principles and this prophecy of the kingdom seem to point to a divine superintendence in and over history. It reveals purpose slowly taught to men and even more slowly apprehended and incorporated into their lives.

II—THE FACT OF JESUS CHRIST

The historicity and trustworthiness of the New Testament. We may freely take for granted the fact that Jesus Christ actually lived as a person on earth in form like as we are and in nature comparable to our own. But there have been some who thought he was a ghost and that his body was not subject to the laws of gravity. This view grew out of the idea that matter was essentially impure, a view which was refuted by the prophets of Israel. Those who thus believed denied, of course, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascent into heaven. Already in the days of the first apostles the conviction of the absolute holiness of Christ had given rise to speculation along this line, and so John feels constrained to write, "Every spirit." John's conviction of the humanity of Jesus is confirmed by the vast majority of competent historians even though they may not agree with John's interpretation of Christ's person. The historian's confirmation may be fairly summed up in the language of H. G. Wells. "All four Gospels agree in giving us a picture of a very definite personality. One is obliged to say 'Here was a man. This could not have been invented.'"

One may, I think, accept this statement and say Jesus was a historical figure. But in order to gain a hold on his life and to understand his teaching, we must of necessity inquire as to whether those documents which tell of him are authentic. Can they be trusted? Are they on a par with any other

biographical effort? Can the testators be creditable and competent witnesses? We need not ask for verbal innerancy nor need we believe that every word in the Gospels was dictated by the Holy Ghost. But we ought to be reasonably sure that they are veracious in their main parts, and to be sure of this we will have to briefly summarize the evidence.

The Gospels

The main facts about the life of Jesus are recorded in four brief biographies, incorporated in the New Testament as the books or testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These accounts are honest attempts by plain men to give us a true picture of his doings and sayings. They are not supposed to be history textbooks. They are portraits—thumbnail sketches if you like—written by a group of devoted followers. They should be read precisely as any other biography is read, and their subject should be made to leave his own impression upon us.

Many people are skeptical of the New Testament. Some are honestly so, since the discovery of the reign of law seems to discredit the miraculous. The Gospels are full of miracles. But if we have any scruples on this subject, let us lay them aside for a moment. We have to give credence to well-authenticated testimony or evidence, however improbable it may seem. If we can be reasonably certain that the records are true, then we must respect what they say. And, it must not be forgotten that the teachings of Jesus Christ are as miraculous as his doings. We cannot ask for verbal infallibility, and we shall not be too concerned about minor discrepancies. All we ask for is a fairly concise and sane record, and that is just what we have.

Mark. Mark, who is the earliest writer, made up his account from the preaching of Peter. This is very evident as we see the note of *action* which runs through his narrative. Peter was a man of action.

and so the words *straightway* and *immediately* are much to the fore. For a number of years Mark was Peter's traveling companion, and doubtless recorded his narrative from Peter's fund of knowledge as the ministry of the word went forward, and he sought authority for his doctrine by reciting, in public address and private intercourse, the deeds of the Savior.

Luke, who also wrote the Book of Acts, was more careful of the order of his chronicle. He made strenuous attempts to "set forth in order" those things "which we had amongst us," because he had a "perfect understanding" of them (Luke 1:1-3). He doubtless had access to what John Mark and others had written. His testimony is a cultured effort. A deep sense of sympathy for the sick and infirm runs through it, and the constant reference to the "company of women" (24:22) and also to certain individual women, suggests one source from which the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) drew his facts. Scholars have discerned that both Luke and the writer of the first Gospel had access to another document known as "Q" (the first letter of the German word *Quelle* meaning the "source.") In this fundamental literature were some of the sayings of Jesus and the historical settings for them.

Matthew's account is different from Luke's in some respects. For instance, the record of the birth of Jesus is, in Matthew's testimony, evidently from the side of Joseph, while in Luke's it is unquestionably from the side of Mary. The two chronologies represent two attempts to reconstruct a genealogy, showing how Jesus was of the lineage indicated in Old Testament prophecy. Matthew seems to be more of an editor, and arranges the "logia" (sayings) of Jesus from various documents at his disposal, supplementing these with memories of his own.

John's testimony is different altogether from the other three. It

is more of a philosophy of Christ to interpret the life and ministry of our Lord which will portray him more acceptably to the mind of the Greek and that of the churches in Asia over which John had supervision. His view is not contradicted by the others, but it is not emphasized to the same extent by them. He tries also to supply some incidents which the others omit. For instance, there are no parables in John's record; but there is the story of the woman at the well, some miracles (notably the raising of Lazarus) and other happenings which are not included in the Synoptics. John also wrote much later. After a rich and full ministry in contact with Greek as well as Jew, mature in love for his fellows, we suppose that John undertook to reveal the *light*, the *life*, and the *love* of our Lord.

How infinitely poorer we, and the generations before us, would have been had we and they not received these four testimonies!

Their Authenticity

The early church expected the immediate return of Christ in person to rule and reign in glory. It probably never occurred to them, therefore, until a long time had passed, to write their experience of Jesus. Only when time forced them to admit they had misjudged the timing of his prophecies concerning his second advent did they undertake to make the Master live in the written word for their posterity. Thus, perhaps, many incidents are lost to us. Those that remain, however, bear the unmistakable stamp of truth.

Evidence. Whoever wrote the Gospels must have had an intimate knowledge of the details of temple life at Jerusalem. In A. D. 70 this was obliterated, and the temple itself destroyed along with the whole cultus of the Jews. Anyone coming an appreciable time after this event could never have faithfully reproduced, recaptured, and recorded the atmosphere prevailing there in Jesus' day. But in the New

Testament there is no uncertainty. It is all reproduced in detail. This means that there is more reason for supposing the Gospels were written by the people living *before* A. D. 70 than after. Again, never once does Luke either in his testimony or in Acts make any mistake about naming the local and provincial officials in the Roman Empire. He speaks of the *rulers of the synagogue* and *first men* of Antioch in Pisidia; the *Priest of Zeus* at Lystra; the *lictors* and *jailer* of Philippi; the *politarchs* of Thessalonica, and others.

Adolph Harnack (b. 1851) the greatest of all scholars of early church history, sums up the position with reference to the trustworthiness of the Gospels, and the New Testament generally, with these words written in 1897:

There was a time, and the general public is still at that date, when it was considered necessary to hold the most ancient Christian literature, including the New Testament, as a tissue of deception and falsehood. That time has now passed. For Science it was an episode in which she learned much, and after which she has much to forget. The results of my investigations go in a reactionary sense far beyond what one might call the moderate position in the criticism of today. The most ancient literature of the Church is, on all chief points, and in the majority of details, *veracious and worthy of belief*, from the point of view of literary history.

We can depend upon the Gospels, then, as supplying us with a sure hold upon the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. They testify of him.

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

References to the life of Jesus, other than those recorded in the New Testament are very scanty. There are two statements, however, which suffice to show Jesus actually lived. Tacitus, writing A. D. 115-117, tells about the origin of "Christianity" as coming from Christ, who was sent to execution under Tiberius; "but in spite of this," he says, "the execrable superstition [Christianity] repressed for the moment, broke out again, not only in Judea,

the home of this plague, but also in Rome."

Josephus, the Jewish historian, gives some account of John the Baptist and Herod's reason for beheading him. He also mentions that James, the "brother of Jesus who is called Christ" was put to death by the high priest. In the text there is also a paragraph about Christ himself. But scholars believe this an interpolation by some later Christian. But whether it is or not, we have ample evidence that Josephus knew something about him. He may have been silent for reasons which would make the Romans favorable to the Jews. This is scanty evidence indeed; but it is not surprising, for, as Platnauer says, no Roman historian, from Tacitus to the scandalmongers of the fourth century, ever wrote imperially. "Their outlook was confined strictly within the walls of Rome." They did not care to know much of the provinces. It was in one of the provinces that Jesus organized and equipped his movement.

Thus we may be sure that the documents *attending* the life and ministry of Jesus Christ are trustworthy—and that he actually lived. We turn now to a very brief examination of his teaching.

(To be Continued.)

Night Clubs

If the men and women who pour out of the country's night clubs after 11 o'clock in the evening were compelled to submit to a blood test, there is small doubt that at least half of them would be found unfit to drive motor vehicles. Nevertheless, they take their places behind the steering wheel and immediately become a menace to the lives and property of all other citizens.

Why is the right of a night club to make money by selling an irritant, depressant, narcotic drink superior to your right and the right of your wife and other loved ones to live?

—*The Clip Sheet*, Methodist Board of Temperance.

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(Continued from last week.)

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HIS TEACHING

At first Jesus made a wonderful impression upon his contemporaries. He evoked enthusiastic faith because of the miraculous healing power which radiated from him. But this early faith was not deep enough for his purpose. He made few real disciples in spite of the multitudes which followed him.

Against him were the wealthy and powerful Sadducean high priestly family at Jerusalem and the Herodians in Galilee, because he openly denounced pride and selfish power and the acquisition and use of wealth which fostered these impulses. The Pharisees also had a quarrel, since Christ refused to countenance ritualism which did not minister to equality of opportunity for all. But perhaps, even more than the opposition of the classes, it is important to observe that Jesus persistently refused either to use force himself or to countenance its use by his disciples in the interest of furthering his religious ideals; and so that there were also set against him all the patriots or fervent nationalists, who, since the rebellion of the Maccabees, had looked for deliverance by a militant Messiah who would call the nation to arms. They would have come by force and made him King. But his kingship was not of that kind. Jesus turned his back on the zealots. He taught by precept and by example the absolute supremacy of the love of God. He was a virtuous philosopher, an eloquent teacher. As such alone he might have passed a tranquil life. But he persistently claimed to be a King—a King indeed, who would neither hold court nor lead an army, a King who would not use force to compel obedience to his mandate and who persisted in homely poverty to interpret the Mosaic Law. The

Jews could abide a philosopher. They could abide a king—but they refused to endure a king in the garb of a philosopher, and they sent him to his death.

We tend here perhaps to digress a little from the teaching of Christ and touch upon some of the forces and powers making the history which eddied around him. But the two are really inseparable, and we are here concerned to point out that Jesus taught a dynamic which impelled men out of their sense of obligation to serve him and that he based his kingship on this, rather than use force in the construction and extension of his society. The third temptation rightfully belongs at the beginning of his ministry, for in it the kingdoms of this world were presented to him, no doubt, and had he used his miraculous power to compel allegiance he could have sat in Caesar's seat. But turning from the spectacle, he set his mighty powers within the supremely intelligent limits of a mighty restraint which had regard to the needs of mankind. Again, while the common people heard him gladly, and while they followed him for the "loaves and fishes," so engrossed were they in getting a livelihood, that they had neither the time nor the inclination to respond to the deeper moral claim his teaching consistently presented.

The teaching of Jesus was set in the context of the nature of God. "God," he said, "is your Father." As such he loves each equally, and while he will not tolerate sin or take an obstinate soul into fellowship with him, he will do his utmost for his sons. Thus the teaching of Jesus is based upon the fatherhood of God, and the right of all men to fellowship with him and with each other upon terms laid down in the

gospel. We have, in the Sermon on the Mount, the law of the kingdom of God. We have not the time here to analyze its constituent elements, except to say that the great dynamic, love, is taken from the realm of the emotions and placed in the will. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even unto them." The inevitable result of such teaching would be, of course, equality of opportunity for all, and the unity of spirit and purpose which such equality presupposes. Christ takes the family as the archetype of kingdom relations, and uses this as an analogy to explain the kingdom spirit. Nothing is so abhorrent to God as that which keeps men one from the other. Distinction ought to be made between respectable sins and disreputable sins. Jesus assumed the publicans and harlots of ready forgiveness upon their repentance; but the respectable sins, practiced by those "who needed not a physician" he saw as insurmountable obstacles to his kingdom. Pride, avarice, the pursuit of worldly gain, the "holier than thou" attitude, the spirit which impels men to "lord it" over their fellows, he denounces. Humility of spirit, faith, diligence in keeping the commandments, stewardship of temporal possessions, he indicates are the characteristics which will restore the true glory to Israel.

SUMMARY OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

"Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Christ who was to come, set himself to proclaim the promised kingdom of God and to organize the community of those who believed in him to be the New Israel. It was to be a community—in the world but not of it—based on the fullest recog-

dition of brotherhood under the fatherhood of God, to the exclusion of any selfish claim for a privileged position, and on the acknowledgment in every single soul of an equal and infinite worth. At the same time Jesus wholly refused to take men into his community as he found them. The moral claim he made on men for absolute self-surrender was extreme. The community which was to be the kingdom of God on earth was to constitute a sort of spiritual aristocracy—but one open to all men without regard to position or special qualification, and without regard to their past, on the sole condition of surrender to God and faith in his word. So the new community, the true Israel, was to go out into the world—poor and defenseless but triumphant and joyful—in happy fellowship, divine and human. It was thus quite right of Seeley to declare that the keynote of the teaching of Jesus was 'the enthusiasm of humanity'—of humanity, that is, or it ought to be and may be."—Charles Gore.

THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

There can be no reasonable doubt that Jesus lived, was killed, and buried in a stone chamber. There can be no reasonable doubt that he rose again and burst the fetters which held him. There is general agreement as to the main facts among the four biographies in the New Testament. Any language used in connection with the resurrection of our Lord, which gives the impression that his physical body did not come forth from the tomb is fundamentally false and misleading. It was attested to by ordinary, matter-of-fact men and women. They were not mystic, neither were they idealists. They were drawn from the ordinary folk who formed the backbone of stable society.

Let us lay aside for a moment any attempt at scientific or philosophical explanation as to the nature of matter and spirit. Let us forego the temptation to visualize the possibil-

ity that the life of the Master so transformed the elements of common clay from which the physical body is composed, as to enable those elements to be transmuted into spiritual realms. Let us think merely about the tremendous impact which the fact of the resurrection made upon the disciples, and upon the church. We see them at the death of Christ, weak, cowardly, and vacillating, as we are all naturally tempted to be in the face of this great mystery. Let us view them upon the resurrection morning. First, the incredulity when the story of the women was told them. Then the rising hope mingled with apprehension. Finally, the exaltation conveyed in the certain irrefutable evidence which Jesus himself supplied by his appearance unto them. The whole scene was changed from death to life. For the early Christians one argument alone sufficed, "Christ is risen." This was their salutation when they met. This was their never-ending source of peculiar joy. It was the spring from which the cleansing river of Christ's ethic flowed to irrigate and beautify the arid wastes of the Roman dictatorship. The completeness of the belief held by the disciples in the resurrection of their Lord is shown, furthermore, by the fact that nowhere in the subsequent history are we told that they looked back to the days of the personal ministry of Jesus as if he were then more truly present with them.

It is said that a young critic of the church once asked a French bishop how he could start a new religion which would give life and power to the French nation. The bishop replied "Preach your gospel, get yourself killed for doing it, and then three days after rise from the dead."

The whole religion of Jesus, its ethic, and its ideal, implies the resurrection fact, even though institutionalism has marred his visage through the years. To the disciples of Jesus his words are much more than propositions about life. His words transcend the maxims of philosophy. To a believer and a disciple

the words of Jesus have the power to awaken his own likeness which is imprisoned under the gross, misshapen image of God which the sinner has made of himself. Perhaps we ought to say this more simply. All of us are impressed with the image of divinity in our creation. And as part of that equipment, we have latent possibilities for godliness which are crushed by our sinning. It is to these latent possibilities that the words of Jesus fasten themselves. And so Christ becomes the conscience of all true believers. This is what happened to his early disciples. Christ echoed to them their own highest aspirations, to which they had hitherto been blinded, and which their sinning had debarred them from achieving. His words had a certain haunting authority, which would neither let them go nor yet leave them content. The gospel of the kingdom of God which he preached, they recognized as the ideal state for which they were made. When, therefore, Jesus was crucified, all the hopes and longings which he had stimulated in them for righteousness, for peace, and the glory of the kingdom died within them. So Peter said, "I go a fishing." And he fished and caught nothing until he again heard the words of Christ upon the seashore after fruitless toil in the darkness. The disciples also on the road to Emmaus with bitter disappointment told the inquiring stranger, "We had hoped it should have been he who would have redeemed Israel." The crucifixion of Jesus was a tragedy for them.

But behold their extraordinary enlightenment when they were sure that death could not hold him. Let us try to reconstruct their thinking. We shall do it imperfectly, but perhaps it will be good for us. What they thought was, "An extraordinary man, our friend. He stirred in us the sublime longing for nobler things. He was taken by his enemies, wicked men, and foully done to death. But he is with us again. He is risen. And because he lives now, he has power over death. Be-

cause he has power over death, he need not have died except it was to show us that, by living his way, we have no need to fear death. If he has died to show us this, how much he must have loved us." The wonder and the glory of this astounding identification of love and immortality never left the apostles. It saturated all they did. They felt a yearning, an insatiable longing, to tell all sinners, how they themselves had been redeemed, and how the love of God was the great fundamental dynamic which undergirded his kingdom. So much did this conception of love and immortality coalesce in their thinking that John could truthfully say, "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

THE FACT OF APOSTASY

MORALS

The great strength of the early Christian church lay in its moral appeal. There was, in those days of the church, strength in being clean. This moral code was a direct result of the teaching of Christ and of his apostles and a fruit of the Spirit which accompanied their ministry. So it continued for more than two hundred years. The penitential discipline of the church was maintained and a high standard was required of the novitiate. But after the Edict of Constantine (A. D. 314) a change began to take place. Before that time it was dangerous to be a Christian. Subsequently it became dangerous to be anything else. Eusebius, a bishop and an ardent supporter of Constantine, laments at the "unspeakable hypocrisy" of those making spurious professions of the Christian name in order to curry favor with the emperor. Other prominent church officials complain in similar language, and it is evident that soon after the Constantinian Edict, the public penitential discipline of the church utterly disintegrated.

It is not without great significance in this connection, that the Monastic movement began and gained great

headway during this period. This movement was, at root, a protest against the worldliness of the church. It was a magnificent protest, but not without serious limitations. Large numbers of people renounced all that was enjoyable in life in order to pursue quietly and without distraction, that union with God which they conceived as blessedness. Benedict (6th century) it was who gave direction and character to this movement, by publishing his famous rule, which enjoined strict obedience to God, communistic holding of temporal possessions, and hard labor with strict frugality. It made a tremendous impression upon a wild world, when these simple monks with no weapon but the awe which they inspired among the wicked, lived their lives and did their service to God in their appointed places. Unfortunately it was conceived that the true life could only be lived on a basis of celibacy, and one must suppose that this conception grew out of certain Gnostic tendencies which affirmed sin had its roots in the material world and in the flesh. The high moral plane on which the monks lived in those earlier times, coupled with their deprecation of the whole function of sex, led to a dual standard of morality which was certainly at variance with the teachings of Christ.

Gradually the emphasis shifted in the Christian world from the life to be lived toward a certain doctrine to be believed. Confession became corrupt. Theological dispute took the place of righteous living. The officials of the church shifted their attention from the relations existing in society among members to the intellectual questions raised by apostate bishops.

USE OF FORCE

Again it appears more and more, as time goes on, that the church became almost a department of state. Compulsion was used in matters of doctrine, belief, and practice. Spiritual liberty and self-government were taken away. When the emperors

sought to bring unity in the church, they were permitted to use imprisonment and banishment as instruments to put down unorthodoxy. When the church appeared about to pass under the theological domination of one who believed Christ was a creature, and was not fully God, (I refer to Arius) it was the conversion of Clovis and the Franks to the orthodox view that saved it. And there is no question but that the Bishop of Rome encouraged Clovis to use the sword to further the orthodox theology. The "Barbarians," says Stanley, "were baptized in platoons." When Constantine accepted Christianity (at the battle of Saxa Ruba in A. D. 311) it was on the basis, as Hobhouse says, that the Christian God is the "god who giveth victory in battle." Two centuries later when Clovis joined the church, it was on the same basis. A bishop informed him "Your faith is our triumph: every battle you fight is a victory for us."

What could be more removed from the Spirit of Him who would rather go to the cross than force men to give him their allegiance? Almost the last admonition to a member of the twelve before his crucifixion was, "put up thy sword" and before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my disciples fight" that is, use force. In Clovis, as indeed in the spirit that accompanied Constantine the Great, we already have the prophecy of the crusades. If any proof were needed of apostasy, we have it right here. Christ consistently refused to employ force as an instrument for the propagation of the gospel. He even refused to use his miraculous powers to awe and crush the minds of men. Those who were claiming to follow him a half a millenium later certainly were not of his Spirit.

If we need any authentic confirmation of the position here taken, we have only to turn to Lord Acton, one of the outstanding historians of all time. He says, when writing to Lady Blennerhasset, who is a Catholic

THE RESTORATION

10. Settlements of Ray and Caldwell Counties

By Evan A. Fry

THE SAINTS who had sought new homes in Jackson County, Missouri, camped in a drizzling rain and sleet on the banks of the Missouri River north of Independence, awaiting the ferry which would take them across the river to Clay County. They had been driven out of their homes at the beginning of the winter, without time to save their crops, or, in some instances, even to collect their belongings. The lands they had cleared, the homes they had built, the livestock they had raised, were either destroyed or appropriated by the mob which had expelled them from their lawful habitation.

Slowly and sadly these exiles crossed the river by ferry, and found a sympathetic, if not always a warm reception, among the citizens of Clay County. It was too late in the season to plant any crops; most of the Saints were too poor and im-

historian:

"The accomplices of the Old Man of the Mountains (the classic assassins of history) picked off individual victims, but the Papacy contrived to murder and massacre on the largest, and also on the most cruel and inhuman scale. They were not only wholesale assassins, but they made the principle of assassination a law of the Christian Church and a condition of salvation" (selection from the correspondence of the First Lord Acton, 1917, Volume I, page 55).

It can truthfully be said, as Dean Milman comments, in his *History of Latin Christianity*, that, "Rome . . . so secularized her own spiritual supremacy as to confound altogether the priest and the politician, to degrade absolutely and almost irrevocably the kingdom of Christ into a kingdom of this world."

(To be Continued.)

poverished by their misfortunes to pay their way; consequently many of them survived the winter only by reason of the outright charity of the people of Liberty and Clay Counties. During the winter they started their long-continued, and quite unsuccessful efforts to obtain some redress for their wrongs, a peaceful enjoyment of their homes, and their rights as American citizens.

Their first step was to retain a Liberty firm of lawyers to represent them in trying to regain their rights. This firm was composed of Wood, Reese, Doniphan, and Atchison. There is a special significance in the fact that this firm was willing to undertake such a case without a cash retainer, and that its two leading lawyers, Atchison and Doniphan, were both Kentuckians and confirmed Democrats, sympathetic to the southern opinion on the slavery issue. Nevertheless, they loved justice, and were willing to risk their own popularity and their chances of being paid, to see that men of another political faith got what justice it was in their power to give.

There followed a long period of legal sparring, delay, and fumbling, which produced very little in the way of results. First, Attorney Doniphan went to consult Attorney General R. W. Wells about the case, and from him received the advice that the "Mormons" should proceed to organize themselves into companies of state militia, and apply for an issue of state arms. Then, acting in their legal capacity as state militia, they could go back to Jackson County, establish order, and take possession once more of their property and homes. This advice coincided with Doniphan's personal wishes in the matter, for, being of proud, southern blood, he deemed the compromising and conciliatory attitude of the Saints to verge on the cowardly. Reluctantly, his clients

followed this advice and organized themselves, but wisely refrained from demanding an issue of state arms, lest it arouse the excitement and apprehension of their enemies. Instead, they pinned their hopes on the recovery of the fifty odd muskets and guns which had been illegally taken from them on the preceding November 5 by Colonel Thomas Pitcher.

Circuit Judge Thomas Ryland, to whom the Saints had also appealed, expressed his willingness to hold a court of inquiry into the happenings of that first week in November. In this he had the approval of Governor Dunklin, who had written to the Saints expressing his approval of their military organization, questioning the legality of the previous seizure of their arms, and stating that it was not only their right, but their duty to possess and bear arms in protection of their lives and property.

On February 24, 1834, the Liberty militia, known as the Liberty Blues, accompanied certain witnesses from among the Saints, as they ferried back across the river to give evidence in the case "The State of Missouri vs. Colonel Thomas Pitcher." The militia was sent for the purpose of giving protection to the witnesses, and they performed this function without reproach. But in Independence, at the place of the trial, a mob formed and so intimidated the judge that he sent word to the Liberty Blues that their presence was no longer needed or desired. Whereupon they turned and marched back for the ferry and home; and since it was manifestly unsafe for the witnesses to remain without them, they continued in their company back to Liberty and Clay Counties. No court was held that day—nor was any opportunity ever given for these witnesses to be heard.

Resolved to leave no avenue of possible redress unexplored, the Saints, through their representatives, appealed to the President of the United States, who of course had no jurisdiction in what was legally a state affair. On April 20, Governor

The Gospel Rests on Facts

(A transcript of lectures delivered before a group of church appointees in Chicago, during December, 1945. Continued from last week, this is the last installment.)

DOCTRINE

Enough, perhaps has been said upon this point. But there is also the question of the corruption of doctrine. The Roman Catholic position is that the church is the repository of truth, and the Christ equipped it with such powers as to make it infallible, when he said, "Upon this rock." According to this view, he made the church, for all time, absolutely uncorruptible. Further, there was a deposit of tradition, unknown to the laity, which admitted of development, and every doctrine subsequently defined and recorded was incipient from the days of the apostles. Cardinal Newman stated this position thus: "Every Catholic holds, that the Christian dogmas were in the church from the time of the Apostles; that they were ever in their substance what they are now; that they existed before the formulas were publicly adopted, in which as time went on they were defined and recorded."

Thus the doctrines of papal infallibility—which certainly restrains conscience and crushes free inquiry—Immaculate Conception—purgatory and transubstantiation were all promulgated as developments of what was forever in the deposit of Christian tradition. False credentials were forged to prove the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. We do not have time, of course, and neither does the scope of these lectures admit of the right to investigate and refute these doctrines. We are simply pointing out that new elements were unquestionably introduced in the doctrinal field which served to substantiate the Roman practice. Of these, Charles Gore says:

There was demonstrably nothing implicit in that tradition to the effect that the primacy of Peter among the apostles

was inherited by divine right by the Bishop of Rome—still less that he was endowed with monarchical authority or infallibility. Such a doctrine was there neither in terms nor "in substance." The Greek-speaking Church neither recognized this as tradition nor ever came to acknowledge it as a legitimate claim. Nor does Scripture suggest it. This is as certain as history can make it. So, again, there was no tradition about a purgatory in the intermediate state and really nothing in Scripture about it. Again, though the Church always believed that the bread and wine in the eucharist became the body and blood of Christ in some real sense, there was nothing in Scripture or tradition to suggest that the substance of bread and wine ceased to exist by the consecration of the elements, and on the other hand, there was a strong tradition in the contrary sense. Finally, there was nothing even remotely suggesting that Mary was immaculately conceived. Accordingly it is a certain conclusion that, if all that the Church has the right to do is to make explicit in language what has always been substantially present in the tradition from the days of the apostles, the Roman dogma concerning transubstantiation, and the dogma affirming purgatory under anathema, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the dogma concerning the Bishop of Rome, are as dogmas certainly illegitimate.

INEQUALITY

One more point is to be observed as touching the fact of apostasy. Every creditable historian states that in the church of the early middle ages abject poverty existed alongside lavish wealth. Ignorance and superstition constituted the fertile ground in which oppression of mind and persecution of body grew and flourished. In theory the Church of Rome held that it was the kingdom of God on earth. In actual practice, it denied its claims by the ungodly conditions which followed its rule. Even when the conscience of men was aroused sufficiently, and when the rediscovery of ancient cul-

By Apostle Arthur A. Oakman

tures in the Renaissance and the voyage of Columbus opened to men the New World and precipitated the Reformation, the church, or I might say, the churches, were content to go about upon the industrial battlefield with an ambulance cart, and a signally inefficient ambulance cart and nally inefficient ambulance cart at that, and try to pick up the wounded. It did absolutely nothing to reform the spirit in which business was done. Business and religion had nothing to do one with the other. Thus in the field of social relations the church lost the spirit of the Master. And, we have only to point to the two great wars to see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Nephi, "that the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots."

I have not attempted here to fix dates, times, or seasons. In the last generation this was attempted by Elder McGregor and by others. Whatever merit such approach may have, it has never appealed to me as convincing. What does seem to be irrefutable is that men who came into the church, and who gradually gained control of its machinery so far departed from the Spirit of the Master in ways clearly pointed out in the foregoing, as to make absolutely necessary a fresh revelation from heaven—a restoration. In doctrine, in practice, in authority and in the results of their endeavor, the Roman Catholic Church has, beyond all shadow of historical doubt, passed into the night of degradation and is now undergoing and awaiting the further inevitable judgments which apostasy always brings.

THE FACTS OF THE RESTORATION

We come now to the last phase of our brief survey.

There are two ways in which the

life and ideals of great leaders may be perpetuated. One is by the creation of literature in which such ideals may be embodied—the written word; and the other is through the formulation of a society which shall be equipped to carry forward lives and their purposes. We have seen that ancient Israel produced a living literature, and that the kingdom ideal, which this literature enunciated, was to be embodied in the nation, as the elect through whom Jehovah was to bless other peoples. So far as we know Jesus only wrote once, and that writing was in the sand; it was washed away by the first tide thereafter. But Christ did found a society, by training special witnesses of his name, into whose very nature he wrote his own testament, by engaging and stating certain definite ordinances—baptism and the Eucharist, and by equipping his followers with a divine spirit which was to be the harbinger of the new life to come, and conformity to the demands of which was to ensure the right kind of perpetuation of his ideals and of his purposes. After all, revelation, as we have seen, is much more than word. It is not lawful to utter the inner secrets of the sanctuary, even though one might be exalted through his personal righteousness to receive the secrets. And so Jesus trusted to the provisions which he himself made, which were gathered up in the great prayer, “I pray for those that thou hast given me out of the world, Father, that they might be *one*, that the world may know that thou hast sent me.”

But, as we have already seen, later generations were not true to the demands of the spirit, and they altered the ordinances, and substituted in the place of the divine order of the church, an approximation of the Roman Empire, both its form and its spirit.

And so, when the arbitrament of time revealed the inadequacies of what men had done and so soon as the movement of history made possible the restoration of man's agency, God moved again to commit to

Not Alone

We do no thing alone—but by another's help we rise.
Another's prayers bring strength to help us through.
Another's "You can do it!" gives us power beyond our own
To do a thing that's good or great or true.

—Louise Wrigley.

earth what had been removed, or what had departed from the ken of mankind. What facts do we have to support the great claims of this church? The answer is twofold. The production of a sacred literature, which, based upon the principle of the renewed operation of Christ's Spirit among men, is not yet complete, and secondly, the approximation by men in these last days of the forms and ordinances of the divine society, which divine society is to be the organ of Christ's Spirit to reveal his testimony to men, as formerly the nation of Israel was to be the custodian of the divine ideal of society so many years ago. Indeed, the church of these last days is designated as "Israel, mine elect . . ."

Let us turn then, to the literature first. I was talking some years ago to the Honorable James R. Wilkinson, now Consul-General in Dakar. Our conversation drifted to a discussion of the mission of Joseph Smith, and he said in effect, "You know, Oakman, many explanations have been given of the origin of the *Book of Mormon*; but none explain it so fully as the one given by Joseph Smith himself. The scope and breadth of that work, together with the historical perspective it enshrines, are beyond the ordinary intelligence." These are not his exact words, but the import of what he said is in them. I think we may take for granted that many of the theories such as that which grew up around the Solomon Spaulding Romance are now rejected by all competent historians. And as we turn from the speculations rife outside the church, and listen again to the

testimony of the witnesses we are assured within our souls, that here, as in the testimony of Christ's resurrection, we are in the presence of reality.

I ought to read this testimony to you.

THE TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety, that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes, nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

Oliver Cowdery
David Whitmer
Martin Harris

AND ALSO THE TESTIMONY OF EIGHT WITNESSES

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator of this work, has shewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle

with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shewn unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety, that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen; and we lie not, God bearing witness of it.

Christian Whitmer
Jacob Whitmer
Peter Whitmer, Jr.
John Whitmer
Hiram Page
Joseph Smith, Sen.
Hyrum Smith
Samuel H. Smith

"We have seen the plates."

"We have seen the engravings which are upon the plates."

"We declare—with words of soberness—that an angel of God came down from heaven."

"We have seen and hefted."

I like that word *hefted*. Here is Webster on the word:

1. The act or effort of heaving . . .
2. Weight, ponderousness . . .
3. The greater part, or bulk of anything . . .
4. To PROVE or TRY THE WEIGHT OF, by raising.

To get the meaning of that fully, we should have to illustrate. These men handled the plates, and *hefted* them—that is—they "proved" or "tried" them by "heaving them up and down." They wanted to be sure of the reality. I think we may accept their testimony as fact that the plates existed, were in the possession of Smith. As to the divinity of the record, and the exactitude of the translation, we shall have to go to the *Book of Mormon* itself. The miraculous events recorded here may give *presumptive* evidence of the validity of the claims of Smith—but the only final proof is in the testimony of the Spirit which is embodied in the literature itself, and flows, as we can by experience prove,

to all those who approach it with an open mind. The fact of the *Book of Mormon* is a base or a cornerstone on which our edifice is erected. I do not care to go into the various Scriptural proofs, the archaeological evidence, and the internal prophetic validity of the book. I am here concerned alone to point out that the very fact of its existence is of first magnitude in the presentation of our message; and we have, in fact, suffered lamentably because of our neglect of it in our ministrations abroad.

Secondly, there was organized, upon the sixth of April, 1830, a church. Already two men had testified to the restoration of divine authority to perform the ordinance of baptism again, and nine people had, presumably from the historical evidence, come under this covenant. The law of the State of New York required that there be six in number, and so this number was assembled upon the stated day. Already fourteen or fifteen documents had come from the pen of Smith claiming to be inspirational in import, and thus we see, another body of literature was in process of gestation. This later became known as the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which is the body of doctrine and covenants and the discipline of the church.

This book is peculiarly the property of the church, and its emergence presupposes church organization. It is at once the guide to the expansion of the church, and the property of the church. The organization which produced this literature has been called into existence to bring forth the kingdom of God. The principles which are outlined in the *Doctrine and Covenants* are essentially those which were presented by the early prophets of Israel, and here they are explained, broadened, and interpreted into modern language. The fact of the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the fact of the church which has produced it are facts upon which the gospel is based; in addition to this, there is the testimony of a great company of people who live in the

light and work for the coming kingdom.

In another peculiar sense, the Holy Scriptures have been re-evaluated in the light of the spirit and inspiration, and the Reorganized Church has this version as an added testimony of the divinity of its calling. One great fact about this book should be observed as attesting to the inspiration which was responsible for its coming forth. Up until the late 1860's, the book "Song of Solomon" in the authorized edition of the Old Testament was regarded as sacred literature and was interpreted as being an allegorical statement of Christ's love for his church. This book was entirely omitted from Joseph Smith's Inspired Version. It was omitted in a day when the evaluation which I have just stated widely prevailed. Since 1860 scholars have been to work on the foundational literature of Israel in relation to the historical background, and they have come to the conclusion that the Song of Solomon represented nothing more than a sentimental love letter written by Solomon to some illegitimate love in the northern part of his kingdom. This may, of course, only be a straw in the wind, but it is a substantial one and it does indicate which way the wind blew.

We shall do well to take our stand as preachers and as ministers upon the facts which can be authentically substantiated in history, and preach our gospel, testifying of these facts, and the reasonable inference which can be drawn from them and which can be carried forward prophetically, to confirm the hope of those who come under the sound of our voices.

The gospel rests on facts.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the concluding installment of the present article. It will be followed by another article in the series, which will be entitled, "The Nature of Revelation." L. J. L.)

Misery is so little appertaining to our nature, and happiness so much so, that we in the same degree of illusion only lament over that which has pained us, but leave unnoticed that which has rejoiced us.—Richter.