

1 "The Ventures of Faith"  
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3 St. John Henry Newman  
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5 "They say unto Him, We are able." Matt. xx. 22.

6 THESE words of the holy Apostles James and John were in reply to a very solemn  
7 question addressed to them by their Divine Master. They coveted, with a noble  
8 ambition, though as yet unpractised in the highest wisdom, untaught in the holiest  
9 truth,—they coveted to sit beside Him on His Throne of Glory. They would be content  
10 with nothing short of that special gift which He had come to grant to His elect, which He  
11 shortly after died to purchase for them, and which He offers to us. They ask the gift of  
12 eternal life; and He in answer told them, not that they should have it (though for them it  
13 was really reserved), but He reminded them what *they must venture for it*; "Are ye able  
14 to drink of the cup that I shall drink of and to be baptized with the baptism that I am  
15 baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able." Here then a great lesson is impressed  
16 upon us, that our duty as Christians lies in this, in making ventures for eternal life  
17 without the absolute certainty of success.

18 Success and reward everlasting they will have, who persevere unto the end. Doubt we  
19 cannot, that the ventures of all Christ's servants must be returned to them at the Last  
20 Day with abundant increase. This is a true saying,—He returns far more than we lend to  
21 Him, and without fail. But I am speaking of individuals, of ourselves one by one. No one  
22 among us knows for certain that he himself will persevere; yet every one among us, to  
23 give himself even a chance of success at all, must make a venture. As regards  
24 individuals, then, it is quite true, that all of us must for certain make ventures for heaven,  
25 yet without the certainty of success through them. This, indeed, is the very meaning of  
26 the word "venture;" for that is a strange venture which has nothing in it of fear, risk,  
27 danger, anxiety, uncertainty. Yes; so it certainly is; and in this consists the excellence  
28 and nobleness of *faith*; this is the very reason why *faith* is singled out from other graces,  
29 and honoured as the especial means of our justification, because its presence implies  
30 that we have the heart to make a venture.

31 St. Paul sufficiently sets this before us in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the  
32 Hebrews, which opens with a definition of faith, and after that, gives us examples of it,  
33 as if to guard against any possibility of mistake. After quoting the text, "the just shall live  
34 by faith," and thereby showing clearly that he is speaking of what he treats in his Epistle  
35 to the Romans as *justifying* faith, he continues, "Now faith is the substance," that is, the  
36 realizing, "of things hoped for, the evidence," that is, the ground of proof, "of things not  
37 seen." It is in its very essence the making present what is unseen; the acting upon the  
38 mere prospect of it, as if it really were possessed; the venturing upon it, the staking  
39 present ease, happiness, or other good, upon the chance of the future. And hence in  
40 another epistle he says pointedly, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all  
41 men most miserable." [1 Cor. xv. 19.] If the dead are not raised, we have indeed made a  
42 most signal miscalculation in the choice of life, and are altogether at fault. And what is

43 true of the main doctrine itself, is true also of our individual interest in it. This he shows  
44 us in his Epistle to the Hebrews, by the instance of the Ancient Saints, who thus risked  
45 their present happiness on the chance of future. Abraham "went out, not knowing  
46 whither he went." He and the rest died "not having received the promises, but having  
47 seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed  
48 that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Such was the faith of the Patriarchs:  
49 and in the text the youthful Apostles, with an untaught but generous simplicity, lay claim  
50 to the same. Little as they knew what they said in its fulness, yet their words were any  
51 how expressive of their hidden hearts, prophetic of their future conduct. They say unto  
52 Him, "We are able." They pledge themselves as if unawares, and are caught by One  
53 mightier than they, and, as it were, craftily made captive. But, in truth, their unsuspecting  
54 pledge was, after all, heartily made, though they knew not what they promised; and so  
55 was accepted. "Are ye able to drink of My cup, and be baptized with My baptism? They  
56 say unto Him, We are able." He in answer, without promising them heaven, graciously  
57 said, "Ye *shall* drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am  
58 baptized with."

59 Our Lord appears to act after the same manner towards St. Peter: He accepted his  
60 office of service, yet warned him how little he himself understood it. The zealous Apostle  
61 wished to follow his Lord at once: but He answered, "Whither I go thou canst not follow  
62 Me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards." [John xiii. 36.] At another time, He  
63 claimed the promise already made to Him; He said, "Follow thou Me;" and at the same  
64 time explained it, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst  
65 thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt  
66 stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou  
67 wouldest not." [John xxi. 18-22.]

68 Such were the ventures made in faith, and in uncertainty, by Apostles. Our Saviour, in a  
69 passage of St. Luke's Gospel, binds upon us all the necessity of deliberately doing the  
70 like,—"*Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the*  
71 *cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation,*  
72 *and is not able to finish it, all that behold it, begin to mock him, saying, This man began*  
73 *to build, and is not able to finish.*" And then He presently adds, "So likewise, whosoever  
74 he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple:" [Luke xiv. 28-  
75 33.] thus warning us of the full sacrifice we must make. We give up our all to Him; and  
76 He is to claim this or that, or grant us somewhat of it for a season, according to His  
77 good pleasure. On the other hand, the case of the rich young man, who went away  
78 sorrowful, when our Lord bade him give up his all and follow Him, is an instance of one  
79 who had *not* faith to make the venture of this world for the next, upon His word.

80 If then faith be the essence of a Christian life, and if it be what I have now described, it  
81 follows that our duty lies in risking upon Christ's word what we have, for what we have  
82 not; and doing so in a noble, generous way, not indeed rashly or lightly, still without  
83 knowing accurately what we are doing, not knowing either what we give up, nor again  
84 what we shall gain; uncertain about our reward, uncertain about our extent of sacrifice,  
85 in all respects leaning, waiting upon Him, trusting in Him to fulfil His promise, trusting in

86 Him to enable us to fulfil our own vows, and so in all respects proceeding without  
87 carefulness or anxiety about the future.

88 Now I dare say that what I have said as yet seems plain and unexceptionable to most of  
89 those who hear me; yet surely, when I proceed to draw the practical inference which  
90 immediately follows, there are those who in their secret hearts, if not in open avowal,  
91 will draw back. Men allow us Ministers of Christ to proceed in our preaching, while we  
92 confine ourselves to general truths, until they see that they themselves are implicated in  
93 them, and have to act upon them; and then they suddenly come to a stand; they collect  
94 themselves and draw back, and say, "They do not see *this*—or do not admit *that*"—and  
95 though they are quite unable to say *why* that should not follow from what they already  
96 allow, which we show *must* follow, still they persist in saying, that they do not see that it  
97 does follow; and they look about for excuses, and they say we carry things too far, and  
98 that we are extravagant, and that we ought to limit and modify what we say, that we do  
99 not take into account times, and seasons, and the like. This is what they pretend; and  
100 well has it been said, "where there is a will there is a way;" for there is no truth, however  
101 overpoweringly clear, but men may escape from it by shutting their eyes; there is no  
102 duty, however urgent, but they may find ten thousand good reasons against it, in their  
103 own case. And they are sure to say we carry things too far, when we carry them home  
104 to themselves.

105 This sad infirmity of men, called Christians, is exemplified in the subject immediately  
106 before us. Who does not at once admit that faith consists in venturing on Christ's word  
107 without seeing? Yet in spite of this, may it not be seriously questioned, whether men in  
108 general, even those of the better sort, venture any thing upon His truth at all?

109 Consider for an instant. Let every one who hears me ask himself the question, what  
110 stake has *he* in the truth of Christ's promise? How would he be a whit the worse off,  
111 supposing (which is impossible), but, supposing it to fail? We know what it is to have a  
112 stake in any venture of this world. We venture our property in plans which promise a  
113 return; in plans which we trust, which we have faith in. What have we ventured for  
114 Christ? What have we given to Him on a belief of His promise? The Apostle said, that  
115 he and his brethren would be of all men most miserable, if the dead were not raised.  
116 Can we in any degree apply this to ourselves? We think, perhaps, at present, we have  
117 some hope of heaven; well, *this* we should lose of course; but after all, how should we  
118 be worse off as to our *present* condition? A trader, who has embarked some property in  
119 a speculation which fails, not only loses his prospect of gain, but somewhat of his own,  
120 which he ventured with the *hope* of the gain. This is the question, What  
121 have we ventured? I really fear, when we come to examine, it will be found that there is  
122 nothing we resolve, nothing we do, nothing we do not do, nothing we avoid, nothing we  
123 choose, nothing we give up, nothing we pursue, which we should not resolve, and do,  
124 and not do, and avoid, and choose, and give up, and pursue, if Christ had not died, and  
125 heaven were not promised us. I really fear that most men called Christians, whatever  
126 they may profess, whatever they may think they feel, whatever warmth and illumination  
127 and love they may claim as their own, yet would go on almost as they do, neither much  
128 better nor much worse, if they believed Christianity to be a fable. When young, they

129 indulge their lusts, or at least pursue the world's vanities; as time goes on, they get into  
130 a fair way of business, or other mode of making money; then they marry and settle; and  
131 their interest coinciding with their duty, they seem to be, and think themselves,  
132 respectable and religious men; they grow attached to things as they are; they begin to  
133 have a zeal against vice and error; and they follow after peace with all men. Such  
134 conduct indeed, as far as it goes, is right and praiseworthy. Only I say, it has not  
135 necessarily any thing to do with religion at all; there is nothing in it which is any proof of  
136 the presence of religious principle in those who adopt it; there is nothing they would not  
137 do still, though they had nothing to gain from it, except what they gain from it now: they  
138 do gain something now, they do gratify their present wishes, they are quiet and orderly,  
139 because it is their interest and taste to be so; but they *venture* nothing, they risk, they  
140 sacrifice, they abandon nothing on the faith of Christ's word.

141 For instance: St. Barnabas had a property in Cyprus; he gave it up for the poor of  
142 Christ. Here is an intelligible sacrifice. He did something he would not have done,  
143 unless the Gospel were true. It is plain, if the Gospel turned out a fable (which God  
144 forbid), but if so, he would have taken his line most unskilfully; he would be in a great  
145 mistake, and would have suffered a loss. He would be like a merchant whose vessels  
146 were wrecked, or whose correspondents had failed. Man has confidence in man, he  
147 trusts to the credit of his neighbour; but Christians do not risk largely upon their  
148 Saviour's word; and this is the one thing they have to do. Christ tells us Himself, "Make  
149 to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may  
150 receive you into everlasting habitations;" [Luke xvi. 9.] *i.e.* buy an interest in the next  
151 world with that wealth which this world uses unrighteously; feed the hungry, clothe the  
152 naked, relieve the sick, and it shall turn to "bags that wax not old, a treasure in the  
153 heavens that faileth not." [Luke xii. 33.] Thus almsdeeds, I say, are an  
154 intelligible *venture* and an evidence of faith.

155 So again the man who, when his prospects in the world are good, gives up the promise  
156 of wealth or of eminence, in order to be nearer Christ, to have a place in His temple, to  
157 have more opportunity for prayer and praise, he makes a sacrifice.

158 Or he who, from a noble striving after perfection, puts off the desire of worldly comforts,  
159 and is, like Daniel or St. Paul, in much labour and business, yet with a solitary heart, he  
160 too ventures something upon the certainty of the world to come.

161 Or he who, after falling into sin, repents in deed as well as in word; puts some yoke  
162 upon his shoulder; subjects himself to punishment; is severe upon his flesh; denies  
163 himself innocent pleasures; or puts himself to public shame,—he too shows that his  
164 faith is the realizing of things hoped for, the warrant of things not seen.

165 Or again: he who only gets himself to pray against those things which the many seek  
166 after, and to embrace what the heart naturally shrinks from; he who, when God's will  
167 seems to tend towards worldly ill, while he deprecates it, yet prevails on himself to say  
168 heartily, "Thy will be done;" he, even, is not without his sacrifice. Or he who, being in  
169 prospect of wealth, honestly prays God that he may never be rich; or he who is in

170 prospect of station, and earnestly prays that he may never have it; or he who has  
171 friends or kindred, and acquiesces with an entire heart in their removal while it is yet  
172 doubtful, who can say, "Take them away, if it be Thy will, to Thee I give them up, to  
173 Thee I commit them," who is willing to be taken at his word; he too risks somewhat, and  
174 is accepted.

175 Such a one is taken at his word, while he understands not, perhaps, what he says; but  
176 he is accepted, as meaning somewhat, and risking much. Generous hearts, like James  
177 and John, or Peter, often speak largely and confidently beforehand of what they will do  
178 for Christ, not insincerely, yet ignorantly; and for their sincerity's sake they are taken at  
179 their word as a reward, though they have yet to learn how serious that word is. "They  
180 say unto Him, We are able;"—and the vow is recorded in heaven. This is the case of all  
181 of us at many seasons. First, at Confirmation; when we promise what was promised for  
182 us at Baptism, yet without being able to understand how much we promise, but rather  
183 trusting to God gradually to reveal it, and to give us strength according to our day. So  
184 again they who enter Holy Orders promise they know not what, engage themselves they  
185 know not how deeply, debar themselves of the world's ways they know not how  
186 intimately, find perchance they must cut off from them the right hand, sacrifice the  
187 desire of their eyes and the stirring of their hearts at the foot of the Cross, while they  
188 thought, in their simplicity, they were but choosing the quiet easy life of "plain men  
189 dwelling in tents." And so again, in various ways, the circumstances of the times cause  
190 men at certain seasons to take this path or that, for religion's sake. They know not  
191 whither they are being carried; they see not the end of their course; they know no more  
192 than this, that it is right to do what they are now doing; and they hear a whisper within  
193 them, which assures them, as it did the two holy brothers, that whatever their present  
194 conduct involves in time to come, they shall, through God's grace, be equal to it. Those  
195 blessed Apostles said, "We are able;" and in truth they were enabled to do and suffer as  
196 they had said. St. James was given strength to be steadfast unto death, the death of  
197 martyrdom; being slain with the sword in Jerusalem. St. John, his brother, had still more  
198 to bear, dying last of the Apostles, as St. James first. He had to hear bereavement, first,  
199 of his brother, then of the other Apostles. He had to bear a length of years in loneliness,  
200 exile, and weakness. He had to experience the dreariness of being solitary, when those  
201 whom he loved had been summoned away. He had to live in his own thoughts, without  
202 familiar friend, with those only about him who belonged to a younger generation. Of him  
203 were demanded by his gracious Lord, as pledges of his faith, all his eye loved and his  
204 heart held converse with. He was as a man moving his goods into a far country, who at  
205 intervals and by portions sends them before him, till his present abode is well-nigh  
206 unfurnished. He sent forward his friends on their journey, while he stayed himself  
207 behind, that there might be those in heaven to have thoughts of him, to look out for him,  
208 and receive him when his Lord should call. He sent before him, also, other still more  
209 voluntary pledges and ventures of his faith,—a self-denying walk, a zealous  
210 maintenance of the truth, fasting and prayers, labours of love, a virgin life, buffetings  
211 from the heathen, persecution, and banishment. Well might so great a Saint say, at the  
212 end of his days "Come, Lord Jesus!" as those who are weary of the night, and wait for  
213 the morning. All his thoughts, all his contemplations, desires, and hopes, were stored in  
214 the invisible world; and death, when it came, brought back to him the sight of what he

215 had worshipped, what he had loved, what he had held intercourse with, in years long  
216 past away. Then, when again brought into the presence of what he had lost, how would  
217 remembrance revive, and familiar thoughts long buried come to life! Who shall dare to  
218 describe the blessedness of those who find all their pledges safe returned to them, all  
219 their ventures abundantly and beyond measure satisfied?

220 Alas! that we, my brethren, have not more of this high and unearthly spirit! How is it that  
221 we are so contented with things as they are,—that we are so willing to be let alone, and  
222 to enjoy this life,—that we make such excuses, if any one presses on us the necessity  
223 of something higher, the duty of bearing the Cross, if we would earn the Crown, of the  
224 Lord Jesus Christ?

225 I repeat it; what are our ventures and risks upon the truth of His word? for He says  
226 expressly, "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or  
227 mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold,  
228 and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall  
229 be first." [Matt. xix. 29, 30.]