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The Spirit of God.[1]

By Principal W. M. Macgregor, D.D., Trinity College, Glasgow.

We have embarked upon a task too great for any resources of our own, so it is imperative that we should consider the higher aids which are at our disposal. In doing so we have to make the humbling confession that it is easy to speak of the Holy Spirit, with orthodox fervour and with no conscious insincerity, without ever bringing the subject into contact with the realities of life; in this, as in lesser matters, we readily tend to pay ourselves with words. I still remember, after more than fifty years, a sermon from a famous Scottish preacher on the text, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,' in which, with sumptuous and moving eloquence, he presented a version of his own of the mediaeval scheme of world history in three ages. First was the age of the Father, stretching over two thousand years, when men could live with God only as slaves and were moved by fear: on this there followed another period of two thousand years—the age of the Son, when men could live as God's sons, walking by faith, though it might be groping and impeded: then came a third age—of the Spirit, when men had risen to be friends of God and were moved by love alone: and finally, the world's week of seven thousand years would be rounded and completed by the glorious Sabbath of the millennium. The spacious argument moved on always among sublimities, carrying the hearers with it by its wealth of lovely words and poetic imaginations; but when the magic had passed and they left the building, they came to earth with a thud, for the world which met their eyes showed little trace of an age of the Spirit. The idea was noble, and in individual lives such stages can be marked; but as applied to history it was not truth but an orgy of resounding words. It was a *somnium volentis*—the dream of one who wished it so, and such rhetorical or sentimental extravagances we cannot afford in a matter so vital as the Spirit's help to our infirmities.

1. As we are concerned with what is practical—with the wide region of powers and effects, any mere dogmatic or speculative construction can be of little avail, and as an introduction to the realities which concern us, I would take our Lord's own phrase in Jn 14^{16}, 'ἄλλον Παράκλητον—another, a second Paraclete,' in which the noun has commonly withdrawn attention from the adjective. Παράκλητος, as we know, means simply 'one called in to help' on any occasion, and since a second Paraclete is promised, we must understand that Jesus Himself was the first. Now the Gospels are full of stories of the manifold appeals addressed to Him—the unspoken need of the hungry crowd, the clamour of blind Bartimæus, the despairing cry of the disciples in the squall, the plea of the thief on the Cross: 'they cried, and the Lord heard, and delivered them out of their distresses.' These appeals were as wide and various as human life, and they were always answered, for prayer is a proved reality; and what was guaranteed by Jesus was that this ministry of Divine assistance, which they had known in Him, would be carried on and carried farther when He was no longer on earth. There is nothing rhetorical or flimsy in the promise, nothing even obscure, for the ministry of this Second Paraclete was to be a continuation of the activity of the Incarnate, it was to be God's help in action, secured to those who ask for it.

On a vastly humbler level, the same suggestion of simplicity and reality is found in the much criticised phrase of Matthew Arnold—that the Holy Spirit is 'The Muse of Righteousness,' to whom, as to a Power above ourselves, appeal must be made if we are to attain any heights of character. The phrase was resented by many pious people, partly for its pagan sound and partly because the invocation of the Muse by the poets was so often a mere decorative flourish of words. As custom required, a minor poet would call upon the Muse for assistance, though his main reliance was on his own deftness and felicity of phrase; but the greatest men never erred in this way. Plato declares that 'if any one without the divine madness is confident that by art alone he can become a sufficient poet he will have no success; and the poetry of the merely sensible man passes out of sight in comparison with the work of the truly inspired.' Milton in his early days, whilst admitting the need of 'industrious and select reading and steady observation and insight,' sets first amongst a poet's requirements 'devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases.' It is in this majestic sense that, in his *Paradise Lost*, he invokes 'the Heavenly Muse,' confessing thus that the best of his power must come from above, and that mere

[1] An address to a conference of ministers.

dexterity or learning or industry would never raise him to where he fain would be. And it is at this that Arnold hints in his phrase—'the Muse of Righteousness': a life exalted and consistent is taken as a supernatural achievement, dependent on Divine assistance. As Dante puts it, 'You taught me how man makes himself eternal': 'not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.'

2. My second point is that this gift is available from the very beginning of faith, that believing and this receiving are coincident. It is disastrous in the Church of to-day that what is called 'the gift of the Spirit' is commonly regarded as an additional adornment in life, to which the saintly may aspire, but for which the average Christian need not look. This is contrary to all Paul's teaching, and the error of it is exposed even in the form of Paul's question (Ac 19^2), 'Did ye receive the Holy Spirit *when* ye believed?' (not '*since* ye believed,' as in our Authorized Version). The answer which he got from that worshipping group in Ephesus—'We did not so much as hear that the Holy Spirit is given,' is not different from that which would be given in most of our congregations, where decent people would shyly view it as presumptuous for them to pretend to have received the Spirit; 'that is for the saints to claim, and not for such as we are.' When Paul addressed the 'saints' in Rome or Corinth or Ephesus he meant the whole community, every one of whom he took as pledged to God and open to God's influence, whereas by 'the saints' we mean either the ostentatiously pious or the two or three really beautiful souls in a congregation. In either case it speaks of some kind of distinction, whilst with Paul it meant inclusion, for the worse and the better alike were regarded, even by themselves, as dedicated to God. To the Corinthians, in spite of their ugly faults, he says (1 Co 12^{13})—'We all were drenched (or saturated) with the one Spirit'; twice over he reminds the Ephesians (1^{13} 4^{30}) that they had received the Spirit as a seal, marking them as inalienably God's possession. He speaks of this gift of the Spirit to the ordinary Christian as 'the first-fruits' (Ro 8^{23}), or the earnest or pledge (2 Co 1^{22} 5^5, Eph 1^{14}), that is, as something initial, granted to men as the awakener and the assurance of hope. And this is also the force of Paul's blunt question at Ephesus, 'Did ye receive when ye believed?'—for faith and the Spirit arrive together. The gift of the Spirit is not a distinction which may afterwards be attained, but as soon as the bars of self-will are withdrawn, the Spirit at once comes in; and this should be clear to any one who considers what God is and what faith is.

For God is not a vast, unmoving sublimity to which, as to the top of Everest, some daring soul may some day fight his way; as Jesus showed Him to us, He is a besetting Presence, ever about us like the atmosphere, or like the invading tide which travels on to far inland by every creek and estuary. 'We love,' says John, 'because he loved first.' 'He is found of those who sought not for him.' And if God be such, what of faith? That noble tract of English origin—'The Shorter Catechism'—defines faith in Jesus Christ as 'a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation'; so faith, it would seem, is receptivity and reliance. A teacher of a very different school—William Law—describes faith as 'a will and a hunger towards God': whilst God comes seeking us with His gifts, faith turns hungrily towards Him. Dr. Hort's noble description is that faith is 'a vision and an allegiance'—a sight of what God is, as Jesus revealed Him, followed by an immediate and entire submission. God is ever seeking, and faith is receptivity; so when faith begins, this divine invasion of the Spirit begins also.

This suggestion that the Spirit is granted from the first and is intended for everybody is thrust upon us when comparison is made of the two forms in which a saying of Jesus is reported by Matthew and Luke (Mt 7^{11}, Lk 11^{13}). Matthew reports it thus: 'If you, with all your faults, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give ἀγαθὰ—good things to those who ask Him?' This vague ἀγαθὰ is in Luke replaced by Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον, for God sends not merely good things, but that which is unsurpassable—the Lord and Giver of life. This difference may be explained either on the supposition that Jesus uttered the saying on different occasions and in altered forms, or that Luke's richer and more definite reading is an explanatory note, based on the experience of the Church after nearly fifty years. If, on the one hand, we attribute Luke's form to the Lord Himself, we have from Him a direct encouragement to regard the Spirit as one of the elementary necessities of life; it is set by Him on the same level not as luxuries reserved for the favoured and the few, but as the barest rudiments of diet in any peasant's hut by the Lake—bread or an egg or a fish. If, on the other hand, we attribute it to the discernment of the Church, which had been daily receiving from the Father this supreme of benefits, we have its confident witness that this gift is within the reach of every one who will simply ask for it. If we have not, as James says, it is because we ask not. God is besetting every life, and faith is recep-

tivity, so when the bars are withdrawn this Divine invasion at once sets in.

3. The nearness of misunderstandings in this matter appears in the bare fact that, both in the Old Testament and in the New, it was less worthy notions of the Spirit which first took hold and which were slow to depart. In the early phases of thought in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is asserted as accounting for whatever was abnormal or even unusual: Samson's outbursts of dæmonic force (Jg 14^{19} 15^{14}) were when 'The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him': the skill required for embroidering Aaron's High Priestly garments (Ex 28^{3}), or for carving the ornaments of the Tabernacle (Ex 31^{6}), was so extraordinary as to seem divine, which is an interesting conception but one which is clearly childish and imperfect. These early notions were subject to one or other of three criticisms. (α) Since the Spirit was not yet clearly conceived as the Holy Spirit, the gifts had no necessary relation to character; (β) the gifts were narrowly individual, confined to the privileged; (γ) as in Samson's case (and in Saul's, 1 S 10^{6}) the visitations were spasmodic and short-lived.

In such conceptions it was impossible for the Church of God to rest, and it is instructive to note how all these three defects or limitations were outgrown, even within the range of the Old Testament. The ethical came to its rights, and when God's King is described as anointed with the Spirit of the Lord (Is 11^{2}), the gifts conferred are all of this kind, and childish things like those in the Samson stories have entirely disappeared. The prayer, 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me' (Ps 51^{11}), is prepared for and interpreted by the other (v.^{10}), 'Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew in me a steadfast spirit.' So in Ps 143^{10} the prayer appears, 'Teach me to do thy will, let thy good Spirit lead me on an even road.'

But such a gift to character tends to be permanent: it does not find expression, as in Samson's frantic energy, merely in bursts and spasms. Thus in Isaiah (59^{21}) we find the promise given: 'My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed from henceforth and for ever.' This is to be an enduring benefit. Of an earlier age it is instructive to note the contrast between the convulsive visitations of prophetic gift in the elders (Nu 11^{25}) and what is affirmed of Moses (Nu 12^{8}), 'With him will I speak mouth to mouth, manifestly and not in dark speeches, and the very form of the Lord shall he behold'; for this promise of continuous intimacy is like an anticipation of Jeremiah's assurance of the New Covenant when the Law will be written on men's hearts and they shall all know God as He is (Jer $31^{32.33}$). In the same passage, judgment is passed upon the narrower notions of the Spirit as reserved for a few privileged persons: 'No man shall teach his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least unto the greatest of them.' So in the famous apocalyptic verses in Jl $2^{28.29}$, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and upon servants and handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.' The primitive notion, no doubt, had been just, that the Spirit of God brings to men a fulness of energy which lifts them above themselves and brings impossible achievements within their reach; it was defective only in its applications. But the Jewish Church outgrew those early misunderstandings, and was led to recognize the Spirit as coming not only to a selected few and in extraordinary conditions, but as a power homely, persistent, universal.

The same lesson had to be learned afresh in the New Testament Church, and again and again throughout the Christian history it has been like to be forgotten. What first catches the eye in some of the Apostolic writings is the number of visitations, spasmodic and extraordinary, which they record. In the Primitive Church it would be easy to suppose that τὰ πνευματικὰ—the spiritual gifts were tongues and prophesyings and miracles, and nothing else. These, as Paul shows, were eagerly coveted, and the Corinthian Church meetings tended to lapse into sheer confusion through indulgence in this kind of self-display. Like Edward Irving in a later day, Paul was curiously reverent of these manifestations, but he sought to keep them in their place. He was unwilling that the Thessalonian elders, true to the military tradition of Macedonia, should simply stamp them out (1 Th 5^{19-21}), but he could not recognize them as marks of peculiar sanctity or divine favour. In these spectacular gifts all the faults which we noted in early Old Testament thought were present: they had no necessary connexion with character, they were confined to selected and susceptible individuals, and they came and went in bursts of emotion. So Paul resolutely declares that the homely gifts of the parish worker and the administrator (1 Co 12^{28}) might be every bit as divine as they, and he adds that love exceeds them all. In Gal $5^{22.23}$, when he attempts a catalogue of 'the fruits of the Spirit,' these showy, childish things are not even mentioned. What interested Paul as he grew older is such a visitation of the Divine Spirit as transforms and sustains

men's lives, not consisting in emotional outbursts, and not restricted to a favoured few, but freely offered to all who will admit it.

4. But if we accept the apostolic teaching that the gift of the Spirit is meant to be initial, arriving as soon as faith begins, we cannot but concern ourselves with the obstructions to its coming. 'Ye have not because ye ask not,' says James; and it is lamentable to observe how, with the most explicit declarations of a universal intention on our lips, we so often treat these as an idle tune of words. We baptize a babe in the name of the Father of all, of the Son who gave Himself for all, of the Spirit offered and assured to all; yet, unless we degrade the ordinance into a mere magical rite, we may scarcely think of what has thus been promised to the child. The gift is his, if he will put out his hand to take it. As often as we pronounce the Apostolic Benediction we ask for every one present that he may have a 'participation, a share in the Holy Spirit,' but do we seriously look for it? Is expectation not hampered in us by the rooted assumption that the Spirit is only for the few? The prime necessity both for the coming and the mastery of the Spirit in these lives of ours is an increased simplicity of faith, for when in any way the entrances to our souls are blocked this Kingly Visitant—the Lord and Giver of life—is kept outside. We are hampered by our mean expectations, by consideration of what we have done before or of what others do, and thus we are afraid to let ourselves go. Even our self-esteem becomes a hindrance; as it was shrewdly said of a young parson, 'I think he might have been a revivalist if he had not been a gentleman,' and in every congregation many people are stricken with a similar paralysis. And meanwhile the Spirit which yearns over them, and would fain lift them above any promise of their nature, is left outside. In one of his most vivid passages Faber employs the image of a breakdown upon the railway when the track is obstructed, and a little army of men, by the light of flares, have to labour desperately right through the night to clear the road; so must you, he demands, at any cost prepare the way of the Lord. And Whittier says of the result in us:

> And so the shadows fall apart,
> And so the west-winds play:
> And all the windows of my heart
> I open to the day.

Necessarily, in this field of experience, there is much which lies beyond our control, for, as Jesus said, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth.' In one of his letters, Samuel Rutherford writes: 'The sea is out, and I cannot by requesting it cause it to flow again, only I wait upon the bank and shoreside until the Lord send a full sea'; but only a few weeks later he is able to report: 'He hath broken in upon the poor prisoner's soul like the swelling of Jordan. I am bank and brim full, with a high springtide of consolation.' These two conditions are familiar to the devout, and they are closely related to each other, for it is those who wait for God, as Rutherford did—'upon the bank and shoreside,' expecting and eagerly desiring His visitation—who will most certainly find their hopes rewarded. We are not all built on the same pattern, and in some of us those quick reversions of feeling—the ebb and the flowing springtide—are wholly unknown; of this we must not make too much. According to the laws of the nature which God has created in each, we must open the way for His coming; for in Luke's Gospel the encouragement is offered to every one: 'If you, with all your faults, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?'

The Beatitude of Security.

By Principal W. F. Lofthouse, D.D., Birmingham.

'Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters' (Is 32^{20}).—There was never a time when men desired peace as they desire it to-day. It may be true that the whole world is drifting towards war. It may be true that we ought to talk, as they talk, we are told, on the Continent, not of what may happen *if* war comes, but of what will happen *when* war comes. But it is something that mankind should at last recognize, what the Bible has been teaching it for centuries, that without peace life is tragedy and chaos. Perhaps it is a sterner teaching that has been needed. The truth is that