

The Action of the Holy Spirit on the World.¹

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IN addressing oneself to deal with the Action of the Holy Spirit upon the World—by which I desire to be understood as meaning human life and society at large—the first feeling of which one is conscious is the hardihood of such an undertaking in face of the fearful war now devastating Europe, and not Europe only, but also parts of Asia and Africa and the Southern Seas.

It is a strange collocation of ideas—the Holy and Blessed Spirit of God, the Spirit of Peace and Love, on the one hand ; and bloody War, sword, fire, and red ruin, on the other. It is a contrast the like of which cannot be named, so far as this world goes. Yet it is there ; we cannot escape it. Nothing can be gained by attempting to ignore it.

Let us dwell upon it in thought just for an instant. God and War ! War and the Holy Ghost ! “What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity ? or what communion hath light with darkness ?”

Yet it was for the world that hatched the monstrous egg of war that God gave His Only-begotten Son. “*Sic Deus dilexit mundum.*”

Some five years ago I published some thoughts about the Holy Spirit.² In the endeavour to treat the subject comprehensively, a chapter was devoted to the Holy Spirit in the History of the Church and of the World. Starting from the fact that revelation was bestowed progressively, the section goes on to show that it has also been progressively interpreted and progressively applied to human life, by the working of the Holy Spirit, and that progress has been achieved, so far as it

¹ A paper read before the Annual Common Conference of the Diocesan and Ruridecanal Honorary Secretaries of the Central Society of Sacred Study for the Diocese of Chichester, held at Hove on November 5.

² “The Mission and Ministration of the Holy Spirit.” T. and T. Clark, 1909.

has been achieved, by conflict and trial. It proceeds to remark that the action of the Spirit has not been confined wholly to the Church or to Christian times, and illustrates this statement by the development of mankind's intellectual powers and advance in art, science, and literature. I ventured to ascribe the work of the great creative architects, the great inventors, and even the great military leaders, of the past, to the gifts of the Spirit of God. The word "gifts" was used advisedly, as it seemed important to distinguish these from grace, which implies moral and spiritual goodness. The chapter continues to the effect that it is in the Christian Church that the energy of the Holy Spirit is most perfectly exhibited, and that by means of the Church the Holy Spirit has powerfully influenced human society in such directions as a more enlightened legislation, improved international relations, the overthrow of slavery, the humane treatment of the infirm, the sick, the poor, and the criminal, as well as the greater consideration bestowed on women and children. The point I was seeking to establish was that these gains, although immediately resulting from the efforts of Christian men, were mediately the effects of the working of the Spirit of God.

There was one other feature of modern civilized life that I adduced. I do not know that I could adduce it now. It was the mitigation by consent of the horrors of warfare.

These remarks, with similar views expressed by other writers, have been criticized by the able author of a later work on the Holy Spirit, who does not concur in this line of thought.¹ His words are: "Although most modern writers on the subject of the Holy Spirit speak of the Spirit as related to the world of mankind, nothing is more striking than the simple fact that not a single passage can be discovered in the New Testament which refers to the direct action of the Spirit on the world. On the contrary, St. Paul says quite plainly that 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for

¹ "The Holy Spirit of God," by W. H. Griffith Thomas, D.D. Longmans, 1911.

they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. ii. 14). Even those who favour the view of the Holy Spirit's action on the world fail to adduce definite New Testament evidence for their contention."¹ Again he says : " It seems clear, therefore, that we make a serious mistake in enlarging our conception of the Holy Spirit so as to make Him directly responsible for all the strivings of conscience in the heathen world. There is indeed a moral work going on throughout the human race, and this assuredly comes from God ; but it is better to connect it with the general work of the Logos than with the specific work of the Holy Spirit. Let it be said once again—and surely there must be some meaning in it—that not a single trace can be found in the New Testament to connect the Holy Spirit with the general preparatory work and influence of God in the world."

Having duly considered these criticisms, I am still unable to abandon my position.

For, in the first place, I cannot see any point in the contention that the moral work admittedly going on throughout mankind, which the author acknowledges assuredly to come from God, should be ascribed to the Logos rather than to the Holy Spirit. There is something strange-sounding, to say the least, in the divorcement of the work of the Logos from that of the Holy Spirit. The Logos is Christ. He is in heaven. The Holy Spirit is on earth. The work of Christ in heaven is operated on earth by the Holy Spirit. The author quoted would certainly acknowledge this in regard to the Church. Why, then, should we say that Christ works on the Church by His Spirit, but on the world by His own direct operation without the Spirit? The idea is strange and unconvincing, and I cannot see any basis for it in the Holy Scriptures or in Christian philosophy. I therefore can find no reason for separating the

¹ 'Humphries, "The Holy Spirit in Faith and Experience," p. 199; Denio, "The Supreme Leader," p. 120; Wood, "The Spirit of God in Biblical Literature," p. 268; Walker, "The Holy Spirit," p. 23; Downer, "The Mission and Ministration of the Holy Spirit," p. 325; Bruce, "St. Paul's Conception of Christianity," p. 257; E. H. Johnson, "The Holy Spirit," p. 213; Curtis, "The Christian Faith," p. 351; Moule, "Veni Creator," p. 46; Hobart, "Our Silent Partner," ch. i.'

work of the Spirit from that of the Logos, though I hold that the effect of the action of the Spirit on the world is on a lower plane than that on the Church and in the heart of the individual Christian.

Furthermore, the case of Bezalel and Oholiab shows that the Spirit is the originator of the genius of the artificer. The words are very striking: "I have filled him"—that is Bezalel—"with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. xxxi. 3-5).

And if the Spirit of God inspires art, then He also inspires science, oratory, literature, and the rest. Why not?

That the Spirit of God has also stirred men to warlike achievements is distinctly stated in Judges vi. 34: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (or, to adopt the Hebrew idiom, "clothed itself with" him); "and he blew a trumpet"; that is, for military operations against Midian and Amalek in the Valley of Jezreel. For Israel was distinctly charged with the duty to smite certain nations.

Very similar is the case of Amasai. "Then the Spirit came upon" (or "clothed") "Amasai, who was chief of the thirty, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse" (1 Chron. xii. 18). It is clear that David recognized the military character of this operation of the Spirit, for he made Amasai and his Benjamite companions "captains of the band."

This brings us within sight of the question of the day. May we think of the Holy Spirit in terms of war? It is an awful question. We all know with what warnings our Lord has surrounded the great subject of His Spirit, and on what a perilous voyage we embark when we set sail upon the sea of inquiry concerning Him. I can only pray: "Spirit of Truth, do Thou Thyself keep me from error. Teach me to speak aright." In humility of mind, in teachableness, and in dependence on His help, we seek, however, to go forward.

Well, then, we cannot and dare not think that the Holy Spirit of God can, of Himself and apart from special circumstances, stir men up to slay and destroy one another. This would be to deny His consistency with the character symbolized by the Dove of Peace. If all people would follow His promptings, the ideal of the Christian Church would be realized, because love would reign unchallenged. "See how these Christians love one another" would expand into "See how mankind love one another." This is one side of the truth, the best and highest side.

Now let us look at another side. Our Lord said (St. Matt. x. 34): "Think not that I come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." How is this? Chiefly because one man takes up his cross and follows after Christ, and another, for that very reason, smites him. The one, humbly and peaceably, follows his Master; the other comes against him with a sword. Then, is the Christian to withstand him? This is a difficult question, a question of casuistry, which I will not attempt to solve by any rule of universal application. It must depend on circumstances. On the whole, the Scripture replies "No." "I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (St. Matt. v. 39). "Why not rather take wrong?" (1 Cor. vi. 7) was the question asked by St. Paul of the litigious Corinthians. Non-resistance, then, is the general course to be followed by the individual.

Yet even the individual Christian may find himself in circumstances where to abstain from the use of force would be cowardice, as, for example, if he saw his wife or child suffering violence. In such a case, the Spirit of God would not move him to passivity, but to courageous resistance.

The same principle holds good for the Church under persecution. As a rule, she is to endure it. But it is assumed that the forces of the world are stronger than those of the Church. What should we do in a case where the forces of the Church are stronger than—or, let us say, equal to—those of the world? Might we not feel that we should use our strength to prevent

evil from being done, though not to injure the would-be persecutor?

But when we come to national and civil life, the principle of non-resistance to violence does not appear to hold. The "higher power," or "ruler," "beareth not the sword in vain." He uses it as "a minister of God," as St. Paul says (Rom. xiii. 4), against the unruly member of the State. The case contemplated is that of an internal enemy of the community. Is the ruler, then, not justified in employing the sword against an external enemy? We cannot but think that he is, provided the cause of the community be a just one. Then that is WAR. War is it, and this is its justification. In fulfilling the office of a Minister for War, the civil ruler is still "a minister of God."

Here is the difference, speaking generally, between the Church and civil society. But a short while ago we were looking on at preparations in Ireland for civil war. One part of the community was determined to impose conditions upon another part, to which the latter entertained invincible repugnance, to which it held conscientious opposition, as well as fear, and which it was equally determined to resist and prevent, even to the last drop of its blood. We looked on at this, most of us, with sympathy, and did not consider armed resistance, under such conditions, to be wrong.

But, at the very same time, a no less iniquitous attempt was being made to rend the Church asunder and to seize its property. The wrong in the case of the Church in Wales we held to be just as great as in the case of Ulster. But in the case of the Church no one proposed armed resistance. There was no drilling in the streets of Cardiff, no importation of rifles into Wales. Why was there this difference? I can only explain it on the ground that it is recognized that the Church is to suffer persecution as a part of her heritage, which does not apply equally to civil society.

But civil society cannot make just war, war which we may believe that God would approve, merely at its own will. It must have cause that is both just and sufficient. This may be found, doubtless, in a war of defence against aggression, or one

undertaken in behalf of another nation unjustly attacked, especially when responsibility has previously been undertaken, or been implicitly incurred. It cannot be found in a war of aggression, or one for national self-aggrandizement. We may believe that God will be with us to defend the right; that His Spirit will clothe us when we seek to protect our hearths and our families; that He will bestow upon us the *ἀρεαί*, the Divine gifts of courage, endurance, steadfastness, perseverance, when we step between the down-trodden and the oppressor, between the slave-raider and the helpless African, or when we interpose a protecting arm to shield a nation, sister to ourselves, against unprovoked assault. We cannot look for the clothing of the Spirit when we undertake an enterprise in which conquest is an end in itself, or our only aim is the acquisition of territory, rightly held by others, and at their expense.

It is at this point that we come sharply up against the teaching of Nietzsche and the present ideals of the German nation. It is here that we part company with Treitschke, with Bernhardt, with von Hollweg, and with Wilhelm. The present situation has been brought about by a singular combination, or conspiracy, of perverse ethics, philosophy of history, military science, political theory, and personal ambition. Germany has drunk the potion mixed for her by Nietzsche: "Ye say it is the good cause which sanctifieth even war; I say unto you, it is the good war which sanctifieth every cause."¹

If, then, the philosophy, the lessons of the past, the view of war, the political theory and ambitions, are false, then to act upon them is unrighteousness; and that is to incur the loss of God's favour and the withdrawal of the aid of His Spirit. We English people, on the other hand, believe that our cause is good, and consequently do not fear to rely upon the certainty that the Spirit of God is what animates and inspires us in the struggle in which we are engaged. This is altogether apart from the ultimate trend of the war, for although, with such a

¹ Mr. Barker, in his pamphlet, "Nietzsche and Treitschke," Oxford Press, remarks: "This passage is inscribed on the title-page of Bernhardt's 'Deutschland und der nächste Krieg.'"

cause, defeat is hardly thinkable, yet the blessing of God does not always show itself in the guise of immediate outward success. It is a lesson which the philosopher has well learned and well taught, that sometimes the truest victory is only gained when we are stricken to our knees, that sometimes the blinding storm that snaps the mast and rends the sails is better than the sunny gleam and the fair, smooth sea, and that God is never so much with us as when we are forced to cry, "My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?"

"Creep into thy narrow bed,
 Creep, and let no more be said!
 Vain thy onset, all stands fast.
 Thou thyself must break at last.
 * * * * *
 They out-talked thee, hiss'd thee, tore thee!
 Better men fared thus before thee;
 Fired their ringing shot and pass'd,
 Hotly charged and sank at last.

 Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
 Let the victors, when they come,
 When the forts of folly fall,
 Find thy body by the wall."

I do not think that this is a foreshadowing of the event before us. We trust that our victory will be not only a moral one, but a material one also, and material, that it may be moral in the larger sense. I mean that by conquering our adversary by land and air and sea, we may conquer him also by conviction; and by greatness of soul, by disinterestedness, by moderation in victory, and by goodwill, we may win him to a better attitude and a better life, to be more blest within his own borders and juster in his external relations, that so in his disappointment he may recognize God's appointment, and through defeat climb ultimately to success.

There is another truth that should be recalled. It is the purifying action of war upon society. When peace brings in plenty; and plenty, luxury; and luxury, sloth; and sloth, vice; and vice, vileness—then War is one of the Four Winds sent by God to blow away the pestilential miasmata. The storm itself is terrible, but it clears the atmosphere, and then the sun shines

out upon a cleansed earth. It is a work of the Spirit upon society, not in the form which He loves best, the still, small voice that speaks in the heart. There are times when man's ear is deaf to that call, and at such times the Lord is in the fire, and the earthquake, and the great and strong wind.

Explain it how you will. The wonderful temperance movement in Russia is the most striking contemporary instance. It arose directly from the war, and it lies very near the root of the military successes now being achieved by that extraordinary nation. We hear with admiration that the deficiency of output in the mines by reason of the call to arms has been largely redressed by the fact that the remaining workers can do twenty-five per cent. more work than formerly, owing to the might of temperance.

And we, too, though we still have many lessons, and perhaps severe lessons, before us, have to be thankful that the bill of crime has, owing to the war, been reduced to its lowest figures. It is the purifying influence of war, God's scourge, if you will, but a scourge that chastens to heal.

The reign of thoughtless pleasure is over. Tango-dancing is heard of no more. Even field games, golf and football, have passed to the rear, where they belong. The clamorous women, whose insensate outrages on post-offices and churches symbolized the foolishness of their cause, have now fallen into their true and proper place as the earnest workers and tender nurses of the sick and wounded. The labour associations have ceased to threaten the community with disorganization. The greed of gain is checked. The threat of civil strife is hushed. Political partisans have dropped their petty ineptitudes. The spirit of goodwill and helpfulness amongst us leads the way. Surely these are great results. They can, without irreverence, be ascribed to the working of the Spirit of God in the community. I do not say that people are becoming saints, though I hope that many are. But the community is lifted to a higher level, and one that it could not have reached without the aid of God—of God the Spirit. But the lever that He has used to elevate us is War.

It is written in the great classic passage of the New Testament on the fruits of faith, the passage which we so recently read on All Saints' Day, "Who, through faith . . . turned to flight the armies of the aliens." We seem to see the chosen people of Jehovah going forth to war, at the commandment of God, against the invader and the oppressor. We hear them say: "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But Thou hast saved us from our adversaries, and hast put them to shame that hate us." The spirit of faith has been given to them by the Holy Spirit. "And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set liers in wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten" (2 Chron. xx. 22).

Is it not the same still? Christ came that He might abolish oppression and do away with strife. But the work is not yet done. While oppression lasts, it must be met with resistance. The spirit of faith is still being granted to the men of France and the heroes of Belgium. It is still stirring in the British Navy and Army. We look, and not in vain, for the help of God. But we look for it not that victory may be an end in itself, but as a means to peace and to the day of righteousness, when the higher work of the Spirit, His work of grace, may supersede His lower operations which are now requisite, and the Prince of Peace shall break the bow and burn the chariots in the fire.

Meanwhile we have need of patience, that *ὑπομονή* which is wrought by *θλίψις*, and which in its turn works out *δοκιμή*. It will come to us as the war goes on. It is a gift of the Spirit—nay, more than a *gift*, it is a *fruit* of the Spirit. It is classed with *δικαιοσύνη*, with *εὐσέβεια*, with *πίστις*, with *ἀγάπη*, with *πραῦπάθεια*, which Timothy was to pursue in order that he might win them; and three of these five are included in the ninefold fruit of the Spirit which St. Paul commends to the Galatae, and against which, he says, no law can lie.

When, therefore, the dark days come to us, if they should come, when the experience of the old Psalmist is beginning to

be ours, and we say, "Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" then "*ἐν τῇ ὑπομονῇ ὑμῶν κτήσεσθε τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν.*" Then let tribulation work patience, that patience may work experience too.

"Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

"If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

"And not by eastern windows solely,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright."

The land is bright! Yes, because it is God's and God is its sun, though clouds oft obscure His light. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." "All souls are Mine." "We are His people and the sheep of His pasture." To Britain, France, and Belgium; to Russia, Serbia, and Japan; yes, to deceived Austria, to unhappy Turkey, and even to guilty Germany, He says: "My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." "God hath not cast away His people." We cannot understand His ways, but He has told us somewhat of His ends. It was said of sinful Israel, it may be said of the sinful nations of to-day: "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all."

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" . . . "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."