

the Church can do some things which the world cannot bring about. The world is waiting for the vicarious service of a Church under the Cross”.

So we return to the wonderful balance of Romans viii. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sonship : He assures us of our rights and privileges in relation to the Father : He enables us to utter with confidence and hope the sacred words, ‘ Our Father ’. At the same time the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of vicarious sacrifice : He teaches us of our duties and responsibilities in relation to the world : He gathers us up into the travail by which the created order is being redeemed unto the glorious liberty of the children of God : He enables us to intercede—and when words fail He still makes our requests known unto God. Such is the earnest of the Spirit. But “ if the earnest,” cries Irenaeus, “ drawing human nature into itself, already makes it say ‘ Abba, Father ’, what will the whole grace of the Spirit do, which men will then receive from God? It will make us like God, and perfect us according to the Father’s will ; for it will make man after the image and likeness of God ”.

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## Christian Healing—A Consideration

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**T**HE title should be noted. There were many possible alternatives but mostly ambiguous ones. There is a general agreement that ‘ Christian ’ is that which derives from Christ and that healing is the process which leads to cure or restoration. Christian healing, then, may be said to be healing which in its source, its means and its end is entirely Christian. Other popular expressions are often used intentionally in this good sense but by no means invariably—hence the confusion. ‘ Faith healing ’ leaves open the question, ‘ Faith in whom? ’ Very often it need suggest little more than confidence in the human ‘ healer ’. ‘ Spiritual healing ’ is better, but the word ‘ spiritual ’ is vague and in the sphere of healing can so easily become an equivalent for ‘ spiritualist ’, for spiritualist circles are responsible for a good deal of healing to-day. Again, it could so easily imply that the healing is confined to the spirit—but Jesus healed bodies and minds as well ; or that the means of healing are purely spiritual—but Jesus used spittle, possibly analysis, and certainly the ritual law. ‘ Divine healing ’ avoids these difficulties but is not very specific. Could not all healing be said to be divine in that its ultimate fount is God, just as all truth is similarly divine? The doctor’s skill, in so far as it is scientific, is from God-given knowledge ; medicine is extracted from the earth God made.

But terminology is not our only difficulty. This subject is a happy

hunting-ground for cranks of all sorts. It attracts the credulous and the sceptic alike. It is often dismissed in sheer ignorance or discussed with deep prejudice. Those for whom it means much are sometimes those for whom it means too much—like “the Second Coming”, though the clientele is usually different. There is a tendency for some who talk about it to talk of little else, as if it exhausted the content of the Gospel. And yet despite all this it remains a challenge. Many of us would feel that it is among the special things which “the Spirit saith unto the Churches” to-day.

## I

People encounter the challenge in different ways. For several, especially among the clergy, it comes in the pastoral ministry when one is faced with the startling fact of some foul disease getting a grip of a young Christian life, threatening to destroy a formerly healthy body and bring sorrow and tragedy into a happy home. What can the minister do? Must he leave it all to the doctor? He feels quite rightly that he has a contribution to make. At least he can pray. But can he do more than pray? What about the things Jesus did and told His disciples to do? Will they work to-day? Does not the New Testament say something about laying hands on the sick and anointing them with oil? Many a clergyman so exercised and challenged has then taken the plunge and begun something quite new in his ministry—Christian healing.

Others find the challenge hits them theologically. They start with the New Testament. They find that Jesus was continually up against disease and sickness and that He does not say the things which for us have become conventional. He does not sympathize; He heals. He does not regard sickness as God's ‘fatherly correction’ or ‘visitation’ or ‘sent’, whether ‘to try your patience for the example of others’ or to ‘amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father’—all this being the language of the 1662 Order for the Visitation of the Sick. Jesus deals with disease and gets rid of it when given the chance; He does not discuss it or moralize. Nor does He ascribe it to God. He quite explicitly ascribes it to Satan (Luke xiii. 16). It is hardly logical to regard both God and the devil as the author of illness. And if it is really believed that we suffer pain by the will of God, what right have we, as dutiful and obedient Christians, to take drugs or medicine or even send for the doctor to get rid of what God has sent for our benefit? Often those who in theory regard illness as a possible ‘good’ in practice do not act as if they do.

In the New Testament we find that our Lord's mission is to overthrow the devil and all his works. These works include sin, allowed by God because of His creatures' freedom but not caused or prompted by God. They also apparently include sickness, allowed by God in His ordering of the universe, like sin inevitable if His creatures do not obey His laws (i.e., the laws of their own being), but certainly not sent by God. God does not contradict Himself. He sent His Son into the world to banish the things which spoiled the world and stunted human life and development. It was this which authenticated His mission.

“ Art thou he that should come, or look we for another ? ” asked the Baptist in his uncertainty. The answer was to be found not in Messianic words but in Messianic deeds. “ Tell John the things which ye do hear and see : the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them.” The Messianic ministry is first seen as a healing ministry. This healing is not merely to confer benefits upon mankind—that is only one level. It is to overthrow the evil one. In the Gospels Jesus is seen to be dealing with “ the demonic ”, as Tillich calls it, “ one of the forgotten concepts of the New Testament, which, in spite of its tremendous importance for Jesus and the apostles, has become obsolete in modern theology ”. The demonic stands for that “ structure of evil ” which lies “ beyond the moral power of good will ” and produces social and individual tragedy. Christ’s mission is a battle. The ‘rehearsal’ missions of the twelve and of the seventy were largely devoted to healing. They meant, however, that the battle was on. The seventy returned, thrilled to find that “ even the devils are subject unto us in thy name ”, and astonished to hear the Lord’s reply, “ I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven ” (Luke x. 17f.). The same pictorial language elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Rev. xii. 8, 9) describes the Atonement. To heal is to dislodge the devil from his foothold in human life. Healing must always be part of the Church’s mission, for it was part of our Lord’s. The Church as the Messianic community is called to continue the Messianic ministry. That is why healing is in its programme.

An interesting comment on the work of healing comes from those who are investigating the beliefs of primitive peoples. Where the methods of modern science are little known it appears that healing powers are expected to reside in the good rather than the clever. Here is an extract from the letter of an ordained missionary working in India which is one illustration of this. “ It has surprised us how many come with illnesses themselves, or with children, and often we are called into a house as we walk along the roads. We explained that we were not doctors nor nurses, and then it began to dawn on us that they were bringing the sick to us because we are ‘ religious ’ people. It has given us much to think about—and to repent of—that these Hindu friends appear to have a greater belief in the power of prayer in face of sickness than we ourselves have. Do we really trust the latest sulphur drug and medical experts—however great are God’s gifts given in them and to them—more than we trust the power of Christ to heal ? After all, it was His power over illness and unclean spirits which was the proof of the Kingdom’s having come ”. In New Testament days the common people had the same expectation when Jesus or His disciples came among them. They did not have to seek out the sick or advertise their healing powers. The Kingdom of God was operative in their lives wherever they went, and the presence of the Kingdom, to which men can never be wholly insensitive, made them bring their sick into the streets. The powers of the new age were at work, rousing the neighbourhood, demonstrating the truth of the Good News from God.

## II

There is a special quality about this Christian healing. It is not content with half measures. The whole Gospel has to be offered to the whole man and carried into the whole world. Men must go in for the full treatment. The sick of the palsy finds his sins dealt with as well as his physical handicap—he gets more than he asks for. The man born blind receives his sight but he also receives a new faith by which to live. The demoniac is restored to his right mind and is given a new occupation—he becomes a witness. The New Testament does not regard a man as healed if he has merely got rid of a pain. Healing means entering into full salvation, great and free and now. It is a salvation which is only available and can only be enjoyed within the Christian community, the Church. The healed become disciples. They need the life of sacramental fellowship. Baptism once for all is followed by the Eucharist again and again. The first experience of forgiveness by Christ is the beginning of an experience of continued forgiveness, for the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*. The first healing likewise is not the final one but only the beginning of the healing process which St. Paul prays for the Thessalonians: “the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”. We are saved; yet we still need to be saved. We are forgiven; yet we still need to be forgiven. We are healed; yet we still need healing. We have entered into the life of wholeness, but we are not yet whole any more than we are perfect. Eschatology must not be forgotten in the context of healing. It sometimes is. ‘Healers’ are not people who are already whole; they are simply those who know that in Christ and in His Body, the Church, healing is to be found because they are finding it themselves.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the various methods of Christian healing. They are prayer, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and Holy Communion. There are plenty of reliable and helpful books on the practical and pastoral side of this ministry and a short bibliography is appended. It is, however, our purpose to attempt the removing of some of the doubts and prejudices which litter the approach to this subject. The chief objection usually comes from preconceived and curious notions about the will of God. Some Christians seem to be agnostics when considering the will of God. They do not always remember that God has revealed Himself fully and completely in Christ. We cannot look at Christ and pretend we do not know the will of God on certain great issues. It is the will of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. God’s will is a good will; its purpose is governed by love. From a study of the New Testament some things become clear about the will of God.

1. The will of God includes the healing of the sick. Sickness comes from the world’s inherited store of evil. Christ came to destroy evil, and one of the ways in which He did this was to heal the sick. Of course Christ did not heal *every* sick person in Palestine—the incarnation limited God. Nor did He forgive *every* sinner in Palestine. But He made it perfectly plain that He wanted every sinner to be

forgiven, and He died to make forgiveness available to all. Similarly by His ministry He made it perfectly plain that He wanted the sick to be made whole, and when He met the sick He did in fact heal them. He never refused on the grounds that pain or disease were God's will for a particular person. Nor did the apostles. If the Gospel stories have any meaning for us at all, surely we are entitled to believe from them that Christ both wants to make us whole and is able to do so.

2. The will of God is by no means always done. Probably it is very seldom done. This is how we are to regard failures. But God cannot be said to have "changed His mind" because His will is not done. God has limited Himself by conditions over which He has given us control. St. Mark vi. 5, 6 suggests that even Jesus failed in His healing ministry at Nazareth "because of their unbelief". His will had not changed. It simply was not done because of other factors. When I sin, I go against God's will. If I steal my neighbour's umbrella he is hardly justified in assuming it to be God's will that his umbrella should be stolen. If a man is driving dangerously under the influence of drink and kills a little child, the bereaved parents will not be honouring the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ if in their distress they regard the accident as the will of God. Certainly the omnipotent God can cause His will to triumph; He can do His will through our sins and in spite of our sins, through our diseases and in spite of our diseases; but the ultimate assurance we have of the victory of God's will is no reason for being fatalistic and ascribing everything that happens to God's will, disease any more than sin.

### III

Sometimes people complain that some sick one was not healed, even though he was loved and prayed for and received all that the Church's ministry of healing could offer. 'What is the use of Christian healing?' they say; 'it did not work'. But we pray also for those we love who are not Christians that they may come to put their faith in Christ. We do not always see the answer to that prayer on this side. Yet faith reminds us that it was not useless to pray, and the Cross of Christ assures us that God's will remains the same—that they should be saved. So with the ministry of healing. Some will not believe because all are not healed at once. Others cannot help believing because so many are healed eventually. They do not doubt the power of medicine and surgery; they certainly do not wish to by-pass the doctor whom they recognize as fulfilling a true vocation; it is just that they know that God can take over where the doctor gives up, and that behind most physical symptoms there are spiritual causes in the sacred realm of personality which science cannot touch. They also believe that our Lord's commands are to be taken seriously and obeyed and that to heal the sick is no less binding in a scientific age than to preach the Gospel in all the world.

The objection is sometimes heard that the logical conclusion of the ministry of healing is that Christians would never die. To this it may be said first that the truths of the New Testament do not have their conclusions in logic but in obedience, which is the logic of the spiritual world. But further, not all the ways of dying can be said to

be God's will. What about the Harrow railway disaster, the *Thetis*, a young mother dying of polio in three days, an old man taking ten years to die of cancer? There are more questions than answers here, and the answers themselves are not easy. But in the case of a world which "lieth in the evil one" we must be careful not to put too many things down to the will of God. As in so many other problems, the spiritual wisdom of P. T. Forsyth comes to our help. He is writing about prayer, not healing, and suggests that "God's education has a lower stage for us and a higher. He has a lower will and a higher, a prior and a posterior. And the purpose of the lower will is that it be resisted and struggled through to the higher. By God's will (let us say) you are born in a home where your father's earnings are a few shillings a week. . . . Is it God's will that you acquiesce in that and never strive out of it? It is God's will that you are there. Is it God's will that you should not resist being there? Nay, it may be His will that you should wisely resist it, and surmount His lower, His initial will, which is there for the purpose. . . . It is His will that you resist His will". He goes on to point out that both disease and death fall within God's permissive will, but they are to be wrestled with and overcome. In Christ they are already overcome. It is the Church's job to keep saying this to the suffering world. But as with her Lord, words are accompanied by deeds: the community of faith already tastes the powers of the new age, and to that age the mighty works of Christ, the signs, still bear witness. Among those signs now, as in the apostolic age, are the miracles of healing. The Gospel leads us to believe that if there were more obedience to our Lord's commands about healing and more faith in His will and power to heal there would be more mighty works and the Word would indeed be confirmed by "the signs that followed".

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