

Canadian Churchman

Toronto, June 1st, 1916.

The Christian Year

Whitsunday.

Do we "believe in the Holy Ghost"? We believe in Him certainly as a historical power. Like some mountain-born stream, swollen by the springtime's melting snow, till its gathering waters sweep in irresistible, but fertilizing, might across the thirsty plain—so we believe, in the misty ages of the past, a Divine Energy in majestic onrush fell upon the souls of men. The hard places were melted before the gracious attack; the wilderness blossomed as the rose. The effects of the Spirit's presence were manifest to all eyes.

But do we believe in the Holy Ghost to-day? Do we not act, at least, as though we imagined that the mighty River of Life had shrunk, parched by the drought of centuries, till it struggled feebly through a few insignificant runnels? For by many, perhaps by the majority of Church people, the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit are largely ignored. By some, any insistence on the supreme necessity of a Spirit-filled life would be considered to border upon an unbalanced fanaticism.

Several causes have brought this vital doctrine into neglect. As contributing to this result, (besides the opposition of the natural heart, which receiveth not the things of the Spirit, and the engrossing cares and pleasures of the world), we may mark two erroneous tendencies of thought among Christian men. On the one hand, owing to the vagaries and narrow outlook of certain undisciplined religious people, who speak much of the Spirit and claim an almost infallible authority for uninstructed interpretations of Scripture, and especially of Prophecy, there is a general shrinking from what seems so often to lead to the unattractive, the visionary, and the abnormal. An enthusiastic obscurantism, remote from the facts of life and the march of knowledge, is a by no means alluring advertisement. If the religion of the Spirit means this, then, with reverence be it said, men do not want it. On the other hand, a mechanical theory of the transmission of sacramental grace has tended to make men feel that they need not trouble excessively about what has been automatically done for them.—If Baptism invariably regenerates, if Confirmation always conveys the fuller measure of the Spirit, if Communion inevitably maintains the gift—then, to some minds, religion has become easy. The Church guarantees what is necessary, while the life may be lived both in the world and of it.

It is instructive to notice that the Collect for Whitsunday expressly warns us against the former of these erroneous conceptions, and the Gospel for Whitsunday against the latter; while Collect, Epistle, Gospel and Lessons each give their own wondrous glimpse into the varied riches of the treasury of the Spirit of God. How dishonouring to Him to dream for a moment that He could be associated with the obscurantist and the unbalanced. It is by Him alone that we may hope to have "a right judgment in all things." It is He Who will guide us into all truth. What a travesty to suppose that He is bestowed inevitably by the mechanical act of a priest! He comes to dwell in the receptive heart, made receptive by obedience. "Keep My commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter."

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Editorial Notes

Dr. Grenfell's Message from the Front.

Dr. Grenfell, of Labrador fame, has been visiting a number of cities in Eastern Canada. He has recently returned from the battle-front, where he has been assisting in a medical capacity, and he has been giving some of his impressions of the situation. It is needless to say that the people at home feel very much in the dark and are most anxious to get all the information they can. Much that one reads is merely conjecture and must be taken with a grain of salt. It is impossible for the War authorities to tell the people at home exactly how matters stand, and the vast majority of the latter realize this fact and are waiting with a patience that is truly commendable. We feel that while many mistakes have been made, some of which could have been avoided, on the whole things are going well with the Allies. Dr. Grenfell illustrated the feeling of the men at the front by the statement of a Canadian soldier, who said that they had the enemy well beaten, and the only thing he was sorry for was that he could not leap over the trenches and tell the other fellow that he was beaten. The difficulty, though, is that the other fellow does not yet believe that he is beaten. The Germans, Dr. Grenfell says, have been divided into two classes. Those in authority know that they cannot win, but hope to prolong the war long enough to exhaust the Allies and get the best possible terms of peace. The soldiers at the Front, on the other hand, think they have won the fight, and wonder what the soldiers of the Allies are doing fooling about in the trenches.

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The Atmosphere of the Trenches.

Dr. Grenfell admitted quite frankly that there is a good deal of conflict in reports that come from the Front regarding spiritual conditions among the men. He did not hesitate, however, to say that there are certain forces at work there that tend to lift the men up. He emphasized particularly the atmosphere of unselfishness and the spirit of cheerful self-sacrifice. This he illustrated by the case of a soldier, who, in the act of throwing a bomb, struck the bank behind him with his hand. The bomb fell in the trench beside him, and, acting on the impulse of self-preservation, he leaped over the bank. Remembering, however, his companions in the trench, he at first shouted to them to run, but, realizing that they could not escape in time, he leaped into the trench again and throwing himself upon the bomb was blown to pieces. It is the spirit that led Christ to Calvary, and whether men give utterance to their thoughts or not, there can be no doubt that they are better men for the time being. "For every man that falls," he said, "two new men are made."

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For the Time Being.

We stated above that the unselfish atmosphere in which the men at the Front are living tends to make them better men *for the time being*. Whether this good effect will be permanent or not depends in the main upon the atmosphere into which the men come when they return. Dr. Grenfell contrasted, and rightly so, this spirit of self-sacrifice at the Front with the spirit of "have and get" that prevails to so great an extent at home. Many

of the men will come back, and the question that those of us at home must face is, What is going to be the effect on them of this home-coming? Shall we sit down and do nothing, taking it for granted that men who have served in the army will necessarily be wild and reckless? Are the recollections that these men have of religious conditions at home such as to make them long to get back to them again? The Church in the Motherland has confessed that it has to too great an extent lost its grip on the men, and it is making an effort to better the conditions. What is the Church in Canada doing? It is childish to say that conditions here are all right and that no special effort is needed. As Mr. E. A. Burroughs points out in that splendid little book, "The Fight for the Future": "We demand and expect the Divine blessing on our cause, because the actions of Germany are immoral; but we take no steps to see whether our own morality is such as to deserve it—whether alliance with us would be a credit to God, or the victory of our arms a gain to His Kingdom." We are more concerned about the adjustment of financial conditions that will follow the war than we are about the spiritual and moral adjustment that must come. The question that comes, and comes, and still again it comes to many a mind is, "Do we deserve to win?" Our cause deserves it, but do we as individuals deserve it?

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A Strong Leader.

Like all other strong men, the leader of the British Parliament has been criticized on all hands, and if one were to judge by some of the charges made against him we might very easily conclude that he is the wrong man for the position. He doubtless has faults, else he would not be human, but the way in which he steps into a breach at a critical moment inspires confidence, and leaves no doubt regarding the real worth of the man. Twice during the past few years he has taken the Empire by surprise. The Irish situation is without doubt one of the most difficult that any man has ever been called upon to face. It is not a thing of mushroom growth, but there are feelings of bitterness and suspicion that have existed for years. It is a situation where it would be a calamity, especially at the present time, to have a hesitating or tactless man occupying the post of Prime Minister. The shooting of Skeffington under some men might very easily be a torch to set the whole of Ireland on fire. On the other hand, the regrettable events of the past few weeks have driven the vast majority of the Irish people closer together, and the prospect of finding a solution for the Home Rule difficulty seems brighter than for many months past. It is to be hoped, therefore, that Mr. Asquith will receive the whole-hearted support of every loyal British subject.

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Is it supposable that God has permitted personal intercourse between man and man to be such a potent instrument in the building up of character, and yet has made all intercourse with Himself impossible? If the spirit of man can, through the power of influence and sympathy, bless and uplift the spirit of his fellowman, much more, a thousand-fold more, shall God Who, be it remembered, is a Spirit also, aid by intercourse and influence the creature spirit whom He permits to call himself His child.—W. R. Huntingdon.

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