

trouble. Consequently we can understand, on the one hand, how the anointing of the sick with oil by Apostolic command would simply be a natural eastern mode of conveying to the sufferer a sense of comfort, and a sentiment of good cheer, and on the other hand is no more to be adopted as a practice by us than is the eastern mode of salutation by bowing the body almost to the earth, and pronouncing a solemn benediction of "Peace." If we grasp the hand, and speak words of hope and joy over the bed of sickness we practically do what these ancient Christians did when they anointed the sick with oil. It is the spirit of the deed not the form we are to take up. We have need to get rid of that Judaic temper which makes us servile imitators of the manners and customs of an ancient race. Religion is a life that must work outwards through the natural surroundings of our own position in modern society,—not a something that necessitates the putting on of an outward garb altogether alien to our natural habit.

*The healing of the sick in primitive times, in answer to prayer, must not be taken as necessarily a type of what we are always to look for in answer to our prayers.*

I think we have no real ground for surprise if, in those days of the founding of Christianity, in an unbelieving and persecuting age, God was pleased to comfort His people and fortify His truth by exercising miraculous power in answer to the cry of the faithful. The era of merciful miracles introduced by our Saviour naturally embraced a portion of the Apostolic age. But surely we are not to marvel if we, under our circumstances of an established Christianity, are not to take the words of James as always applying in their strict literal sense to us. Let us eschew the dangerous habit of seizing hold of all words in the New Testament and applying them with all the literalness of their original application, to our modern position in the church and service of Christ. These and many other passages are beautiful and rich in significance, and cheering to our faith, if we regard them in their special adaptation to a struggling church that needed still for its encouragement and support the exercise of the supernatural power of God, in answer to the pleading of faithful hearts.

*But there is here the general truth, that the fervent prayer of holy men does avail to bring blessings on the sick in all times.*

The elders of the Church in those times might pray over the sick, under special circumstances, with the conviction that health would be restored. I say "special circumstances"; for I ween such holy men would not, in every instance, feel moved to pray for restoration; but whenever the Holy Spirit moved them to pray for such a result they were warranted to regard the spiritual yearning as a sign that they might pray with the deepest conviction of having their request granted. And I can make room in my intelligence and heart for the belief that, even now, a Christian man may be so inspired by the Holy Ghost to pray for the recovery of a sick person as to take that conscious inspiration as a warrant for the exercise of faith, in the certainty of his prayer being literally answered. God has not left our nature entirely to our motive promptings. But even where we are not conscious of such a controlling power over the shape of our petitions, we know that if it be the divine will that the object of our solicitude should recover, our prayers on his behalf will avail in the order of events to bring that to pass. And though when saying "Thy will be done," we see that recovery of health does not take place,—we may yet be assured that our prayers will bring upon the sick a more than equivalent blessing in spiritual comfort for dying hours, and immortal strength beyond the grave.

The prayer of faith does avail within the sphere determined by the Providence of God at any given time. We are to be guided in our interpretation of that Providence by attention, in the quietude of holy hearts, to the leading of the Spirit.

*Finally there is instruction here for the guidance of the sick and their relatives. "Let him call for the elders of the Church." It is clearly the duty of the Church to care for its sick. It is equally the duty of the sick and their friends to let the elders of the church know that their services are required. A plainer direction*