

## "TRY THE SPIRITS."

BY REV. CHAS. DUFF, M.A.

There are false, as well as true spirits in the world, evil as well as good spirits, those which maim and destroy men as well as those which edify and save them. As human beings, there is given us the dread alternative of manifesting the "Spirit of God," or the spirit of the evil one. The spark within that raises us above the brute may flash forth the lurid fires of the pit or the light of Him in whom is no darkness at all; may link us with devils in their purposes of desolation and death, or with God in the tenderness of His mercy to redeem and save. The truth is no mere figure of speech; we speak in our daily lives and actions of heaven or hell. We scorch those with whom we come in contact with the flames of malice and wickedness, or we refresh them with Christian hope and love. Let us not hide from ourselves the fullest sense of it. Our homes, our communities, our churches, are affected by one or the other of these classes of influences. There is a spirit in our words; in their tones of utterance, accents, arrangement, and even absence. There is a spirit in our looks, in the eye, perched upon the very muscles of our faces, preceding our every movement as the figure head of the ship that first cuts every opposing billow. It leads every business speculation, every private and public scheme. "O, is it the Spirit of God," or the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience? You cannot tell! Yes, there are points when heaven and hell seem to some minds to meet, seem to come so near to each other that you cannot separate them or draw the line of demarcation between them. There are places, I admit, where they even seem to overlap; where heaven's faithfulness appears harsh and cruel, and hell's accommodations of men tender us the mercies of God. But all the greater need of trying the spirits.

How, then, are we to know the Spirit of God in men? The Apostle John says, by the confession (conviction and declaration) that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," "that He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." Not the mere fact of the incarnation: "God with us" in the person of the Son of Mary. "Christ is come in the flesh" was the means of God's spirit being poured out upon all flesh universally, as the sunshine and the rain. The confession that "Christ is come in the flesh," or "the Spirit of God" in a man, is the confession then, of a divine yearning and effort, and his personal sympathy with it, for the indwelling of Christ in "all flesh"; for the changing of "false prophets" into true ones, and for the restoration of the divine image in all men. Tender, Christ-like longing for this end fitly betokens the presence of God's spirit in men.

"The Spirit of God" is characterized by the conviction and declaration that "Christ is come in the flesh," that He is taking possession of human hearts. "I in them," "Christ liveth in me." "The Church which is His body." Yes, Christ is reigning not only in individual human hearts, but in collections of them, in assemblies, or churches of such. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," yet not only "in me" but also *in my brother*. "not I," says also my brother, "but Christ liveth in me." "Christ liveth in me" is the fact common to both and most prominent in each. Self lowered and Christ exalted in individual life and in Christian assemblies, is the Spirit of God by whom alone we are baptized into the one body of Jesus, leading the world also to believe that "Christ is come in the flesh."

## NEW FAITH AND NEW CREEDS.

Doubtless, a change of faiths is taking place, at least a re-examination of faiths. This is recognized alike by those who regret it and those who rejoice in it. In Scotland, the United Presbyterians, by a Declaration, give their old creed a new meaning. In France, whole communities, until recently Roman Catholic, openly adopt a Protestant faith, at least a cardinal doctrine of Protestantism—individual independence. In England, the Congregationalists discuss the question whether the true basis of Christian union is not a wholly undefined spiritual sympathy. In this country, in the Presbyterian Church, the old Confes-

sion remains unchanged simply because no attempt is made to compel a literal acquiescence in it; the Baptists find a Professor in one of their leading seminaries infected with the new scholarship, and "accept his resignation;" and the more conservative Congregationalists propose to provide for the loosening bonds of the old formulas by making a new catechism for the Sunday-schools and a new creed for the pulpits. The whole country listens with "laughter and applause" to the rhetorical assaults of Robert Ingersoll on Christian faith, discusses in higher circles the very axioms of theology—the existence of God, the immortality of the soul; is not shocked or startled to hear so accepted a teacher as Huxley declare that talking about God is worse than sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, a mere endless logomachy, and that nothing can be proved or disproved respecting the distinct existence or the durability of the soul; and it even patiently and quietly hears Mr. Frothingham, who a few years back was counted a Christian minister, declare of Christianity that it is despotism, the enemy of the human mind, the foe of republican institutions, the chief barrier of rational civilization.

No wonder that at such a time men begin a re-examination of their creeds and doctrinal formulas, not to check freedom of thought, but to keep it within certain limits in the Church of Christ. No wonder that by rebuilding the shattered Confessions, by enforcing such as are already built, or by giving to a hitherto powerless hierarchy new power to enforce them, they aim to give the Church strength, even at the hazard of reducing its numbers. This is a natural resource, but is a mistaken one.

The remedy for the present threatened decay of faith is not a more stalwart creed or a more unflinching acceptance of it, but a profounder spiritual life. The way to cultivate a correct philosophy respecting human sinfulness is not to formulate a new definition or enforce the old one, but to develop a profounder consciousness of sin and a more genuine penitence for it. The way to develop a sounder Christology in the Church is not to define, anew or in new phraseology, the character and work of Christ, but to give such presentation of Him that human hearts shall hold fast to Him with a more reverential love. Hanna and Farrar and Geikie are laying, broad and deep, the foundations of a new Christology. Renan has proved in France the most effectual combatant of Voltairism. The way to correct looseness of opinion respecting the authority of the Bible is not to formulate anew a doctrine of inspiration, but to use what is unquestioned in it—to inspire a new and divine life akin to that of David, Isaiah, Paul, Christ. The work of the ministry to-day is not to defend their creeds, not to remodel them, but to develop in men that experience out of which creeds grow. The time has not yet come for a new creed. Minds are not settled, and they cannot be settled by a Council—National or Vatican.

Christ's example is in this, as in everything, well worth study. He, too, lived at a time of transition. Pharisaism had lost its hold on the common people. It was divided into as many sects as it had independent thinkers. The old creeds and rules had lost or were losing their vitality; they were like girdled trees, that have lost their leaf but are not yet rotted at the root. The Sadducees, the materialists of the age, were priests and even high priests. There was ritual without worship, there were creeds without faith. Christ made no attempt to revive the old creeds. He made no attempt to formulate a new one. He used truth; he did not phrase and fashion it into symbols. He spoke directly to the inner life of the people. He did not tell them what they must believe about depravity, but He brought them to Him from the lowest ranks with tears of repentance for their sins. He did not discuss the inspiration of the Bible, whose inspired authority the Sadducees repudiated, whose every letter the Pharisees revered with a fetish worship, but He used it freely and habitually. He did not argue the existence of a God or the immortality of the soul; but He spoke to immortal souls, and all that was immortal in them responded to His words; and He spoke of God as one that knew Him by personal presence, by vital and habitual communion. Not till His

teaching had grown into human experience, through four centuries, was it formulated into the Apostles' Creed. He anchored men's faith on the eternal and indefinable verities, and left them to frame their own opinions out of their faiths at their leisure.

The time of heart-hunger, of wistful, restless discontent, when old formulas cease to satisfy and new ones are yet unformed, is the very time of all others to preach to the heart what the heart most needs to know—God, sin, redemption. What the Church needs is, not a new creed, but new faith; and until a new faith is given to it a new creed would be worse than useless. The vintage has not yet come to the point where bottles, old or new, are needed. What the Church now needs is new wine.—*Christian Union*.

## RULES FOR MAKING A PRAYER-MEETING DULL.

1. Never think of it unless someone mentions it; never pray for it.
2. When anyone speaks of it, say that you think it stupid, ill-conducted, and shamefully cold.
3. If the plan of suggesting a subject in advance be pursued, say that it makes the meeting heartless and formal—if not, call it rambling and useless.
4. Never attend on stormy nights; it might encourage the faithful ones.
5. Never leave any business or amusement for the meeting—you can't have time for everything.
6. When you do go, if you wish to speak, always say the same things—people might forget.
7. Speak slowly, in a droning voice, as if you were going to sleep.
8. Always begin by lamenting the coldness of the Church and the wickedness of the world.
9. Next, scold at the church-members who are not there—it is pleasant for those who are.
10. Close by a desponding remark respecting your own spiritual state.
11. Tell your pastor, as you go out, that you are distressed because the meeting is so low and dead.
12. Suggest to the brother who walks your way that it would be well to give it up, as it cannot be of any use.

By carefully following these rules any and every prayer-meeting will seem dull to you.—*S. S. Times*.

## WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

What is your life? An inspired writer says: "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." It flies away as a dream, and cannot be found. Our life is wind. It moves swifter than a weaver's shuttle. It is as a tale that is told. It is swifter than a post. Hume says, "While we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone."

Short as life is, we strangely desire each period of it abbreviated. The child longs to be full grown. The youth at school wishes for the day when he will assume the duties of manhood. The man of business lives in hope of the time when he shall retire. It is marvellous how men waste their present moments. I have heard of a fool lighting his cigar with a bank-note of some value. The same man committed greater unwisdom than that—he wasted the precious minutes of a whole summer in doing nothing but iniquity.

Short as life is, it is the seed-time for eternity. Whatsoever a man sows here, he shall be reaping to all eternity. If he sows the wind, he shall reap the whirlwind. If he sows to the flesh, he shall reap corruption. If he sows in righteousness, he shall reap in mercy. If he sows to the Spirit, he shall reap life everlasting. This life is the day of grace, the season of mercy, when enduring riches may be secured. Many have seized the moments as they passed, and become immensely rich in faith, in good works, in bright hopes, and in a blessed inheritance beyond the skies.

Most men's lives are full of toil and care. Many are full of sorrow and disappointment. But, thanks be to God, all men's lives abound in opportunities of gaining and of getting good. Nor ought any to object to the divine arrangement, which fills up a great part of life with duties and responsibilities.