

"the temple of the Holy Ghost." But power exerted by the preacher or teacher short of this, although it may secure the crowded and interested congregation, or the attentive learner, can only be significant of spiritual failure. The Divine Spirit alone can convince of sin, or reveal Christ as a Saviour to the eye of faith.

It is, I think, to be more than feared that this fundamental consideration is to a very great extent a "forgotten truth." Archbishop Tait, in a sermon preached in Scotland, alluding to the want of life in the theology of the age, said:—

"They might go even now to places where a sort of lifeless theology was the food offered to dying souls. They might find whole districts where, in the daily teaching which was to guide men's souls, there was little prominence given to Christ, His death and living power, His sacrifice and intercession, and where the work of the Holy Spirit in changing and guiding the heart was little mentioned. The Gospel without these things was a Gospel in disguise, a Gospel with the Gospel omitted from it, a Gospel which had no power to pass out of the region of the head into the heart. This dead system was ever strangely turning up, sometimes allying itself with a supposed exaggerated reverence for the outward forms of religion, but more usually found where men had contracted their creed to the very narrowest limits, and taught a Christian morality indeed, but without any of those helps which enabled us to live Christian lives."

A minister of long and varied experience made the remark to me the other day, that so generally is the office and work of the Holy Spirit ignored, that many congregations might justly complain:—"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." I have listened to many sermons on the love of the Father, and the love of the Son, but never one on "the love of the Spirit." Yet is not this "the dispensation of the Spirit," and does not the "power" of the Gospel depend upon the Spirit's influence?

As the expression of deep and growing convictions, I would venture to say that I believe the special and urgent need of the Church of Christ at this (as at every) time, is an earnest soul-penetrating sense of the absolute necessity of the Divine influence of the Holy Spirit for the right teaching of Christian truth and the right doing of Christian work, whether in or out of the pulpit, and of the Holy Spirit's blessing to make that truth and work effectual to spiritual ends.

With special reference to the Mission and Revival Services now so generally held in our parishes, and the promotion of piety in the Home (and let it never be forgotten the spiritual "Church" ought to exist both in the Sanctuary and the Home), I do not think too much attention can possibly be called to this vital element of religious teaching. What Christian heart will not respond to a few words of pastoral testimony which I extract from an unpublished letter written by the devoted William Pennefather:—

"We are hoping that very much prayer may ascend to God for the fresh anointing of the Holy Ghost. Surely it is *this* which is our great want. We have many faithful preachers, and many earnest labourers, and various instrumentalities for the benefit of those around us; but the 'fresh oil' from the sanctuary is too often lacking. 'O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God!'

"When God makes Himself manifest in creation what a sense there is of fresh power! How vigour and vitality appear as spring-time comes on! Do not we want a springtime in the Church of Christ? Alas! alas! there are so many dead leaves of old phrases in prayer, and of old ceremonies in worship, that we can scarce find the living presence of the Divine Comforter.

"May God give us more of His own blessed anointing, and work for Him will not then be a toil."

#### THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—Rom. 8: 16.

The general course of thought which I wish to leave with you may be summed up thus: Our cry "Father" is the Witness that we are Sons. That cry is not simply ours, but it is the voice of God's Spirit. The Divine Witness in our spirits is subject to the ordinary influences which affect our spirits.

Let us take these three thoughts, and dwell on them for a little while.

I. OUR CRY "FATHER" IS THE WITNESS THAT WE ARE SONS.

Mark the terms of the passage: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." It is not so much a revelation made to my spirit, considered as the recipient of the testimony, as a revelation made in or with my spirit considered as co-operating in the testimony. It is not that my spirit says one thing, bears witness that I am a child of God; and that the Spirit of God comes in by a distinguishable process, with a separate evidence, to say Amen to my persuasion; but it is that there is one testimony which has a conjoint origin—the origin from the Spirit of God as true source, and the origin from my own soul as the recipient and co-operant in that testimony. From the teaching of this passage or from any of the language which Scripture uses with regard to the inner witness, it is not to be inferred that there shall rise up in a Christian's heart, from some origin consciously beyond the sphere of his own nature, a voice with which he has nothing to do; which at once, by its own character, by something peculiar and distinguishable about it, by something strange in its nature, or out of the ordinary course of human thinking, shall certify itself to be not *his* voice at all, but *God's* voice. That is not the direction in which you are to look for the witness of God's Spirit. It is evidence borne, indeed, by the Spirit of God; but it is evidence borne not only to our spirit, but through it, *with* it. The testimony is one—the testimony of a man's own emotion, and own conviction, and own desire—the cry, Abba, Father! So far, then, as the form of the evidence goes, you are not to look for it in anything ecstatic, arbitrary, parted off from your own experience by a broad line of demarcation; but you are to look into the experience which at first sight you would claim most exclusively for your own, and to try and find out whether there be not working with your soul, working through it, working beneath it, distinct from it but not distinguishable from it by anything but its consequences and its fruitfulness—a deeper voice than yours—a "still small voice," no whirlwind, nor fire, nor earthquake—but the voice of God speaking in secret, taking the voice and tones of your own heart and your own consciousness, and saying to you, Thou art my child, inasmuch as, operated by my grace, and mine inspiration alone—there rises, tremblingly but truly, in thine own soul the cry, Abba, Father.

So much, then, for the *form* of this evidence—my own conviction. Then with regard to the *substance* of it: conviction of what? The text itself does not tell us what is the evidence which the Spirit bears, and by reason of which we have a right to conclude that we are the children of God. The previous verse tells us. I have partially anticipated what I have to say on that point, but it will bear a little further expansion. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "The Spirit itself," by this means of our cry, Abba, Father, "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The substance, then, of the conviction which is lodged in the human spirit by the testimony of the Spirit of God is not primarily directed to our relations or feelings to God, but to a far grander thing than that—to God's feelings and relation to us. Now I want you to think for one moment, before I pass on, how entirely different the whole aspect of this witness of the Spirit of which Christian men speak so much, and sometimes with so little understanding, becomes according as you regard it mistakenly as being the direct testimony to you that you are a child of God, or rightly as being the direct testimony to you that God is your Father. The things seem to be the same, but they are not. In the one case, the false case, the mistaken interpretation, we are left to this, that a man has no deeper certainty of his condition, no better foundation for his hope, than what is to be drawn from the presence or absence of certain emotions within his own heart. In the other case, we are admitted into this "wide place," that all which is our own is second and not first, and that the true basis of all our confidence lies not in the thought of what we are and feel to God, but in the thought of what God is and feels to us. And instead, therefore,

of being left to labour for ourselves, painfully to search amongst the dust and rubbish of our own hearts; we are taught to sweep away all that crumbled, rotten surface, and to go down to the living rock that lies beneath it; we are taught to say, in the words of the book of Isaiah, "Doubtless thou art our Father—we are all an unclean thing; our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away;" there is nothing stable in us; our own resolutions, they are swept away like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, by the first gust of temptation;—but what of that? "*In those is continuance, and we shall be saved!*" Ah, brethren! expand this thought of the conviction that God is my Father, as being the basis of all my confidence that I am His child, into its widest and grandest form; and it leads us up to the blessed old conviction, I am nothing, my holiness is nothing, my resolutions are nothing, my faith is nothing, my energies are nothing; I stand stripped, and barren, and naked of everything, and I fling myself out of myself into the merciful arms of my Father in heaven! There is all the difference in the world between searching for evidence of my sonship, and seeking to get the conviction of God's fatherhood. The one is an endless, profitless, self-tormenting task; the other is the light and liberty, the glorious liberty, of the children of God.

And so the *substance* of the Spirit's evidence is the direct conviction based on the revelation of God's infinite love and fatherhood in Christ the Son, that God is *my* Father; from which direct conviction I come to the conclusion, the inference, the second thought, Then I may trust that I am his son. But why? Because of anything in me? No: because of Him. The very emblem of fatherhood and sonship might teach us that *that* depends upon the Father's will and the Father's heart. The Spirit's testimony has for *form* my own conviction: and for *substance* my humble cry, "Oh Thou, my Father in heaven!" Brethren, is not that a far truer and nobler kind of thing to preach than saying, Look into your own heart for strange, extraordinary, distinguishable signs which shall mark you out as God's child—and which are proved to be His Spirit's, because they are separated from the ordinary human consciousness? Is it not far more blessed for us, and more honouring to Him who works the sign, when we say, that it is to be found in no out-of-rule miraculous evidence, but in the natural (which is in reality supernatural) working of His Spirit in the heart which is its recipient, breeding there the conviction that God is my Father? And oh, if I am speaking to any to whom that text, with all its light and glory, has seemed to lift them up into an atmosphere too rare and a height too lofty for their heavy wings and unused feet, if I am speaking to a Christian man to whom this word has been like the cherubim and flaming sword, bright and beautiful, but threatening and repellent when it speaks of a Spirit that bears witness with our spirit—I ask you simply to take the passage for yourself, and carefully and patiently examine it, and see if it be not true what I have been saying, that your trembling conviction—sister and akin as it is to your deepest distrust and sharpest sense of sin and unworthiness—that your trembling conviction of a love mightier than your own, everlasting and all faithful, is indeed the selectest sign that God can give you that you *are* His child. Oh, brethren and sisters! be confident; for it is not false confidence: be confident if up from the depth of that dark well of your own sinful heart there rises sometimes, through all the bitter waters, unpolluted and separate, a sweet conviction, forcing itself upward, that God hath love in his heart, and God is *my* Father. Be confident "the Spirit itself beareth witness with your spirit."

And now, secondly, THAT CRY IS NOT SIMPLY OURS, BUT IT IS THE VOICE OF GOD'S SPIRIT. Our own convictions *are* ours because they are God's. Our own souls possess these emotions of love and tender desire going out to God—our own spirits possess them; but our own spirits did not originate them. They are ours by property; they are His by source. The spirit of a Christian man has no good thought in it, no true thought, no perception of the grace of God's Gospel, no holy desire, no pure resolution, which is not stamped with the sign of a higher origin, and is not the witness of God's Spirit in his spirit. The passage before us tells us that the sense of fatherhood which is in the Christian's heart, and becomes his cry, comes from God's Spirit. This passage, and that in the Epistle to the Galatians which is almost parallel, put this truth very forcibly, when taken in connexion. "Ye have received," says the text before us, "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The variation in the Epistle to the Galatians is this: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying (the Spirit crying), Abba, Father." So in the one text, the cry is regarded as the voice of the believing heart; and in the other the same cry is