

Study 20: The Witness of the Works of the Living Christ

FIRST DAY: THE GOSPEL IS STILL THE LIVING WORD OF GOD

1. There has been a constant reproduction of Christian character down to the present, as appears not only from the moral tone of the Western world, but in the spiritual heroes, who in almost unbroken line have succeeded not unworthily the great personalities of the apostolic age—Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, St. Francis, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Edwards, and the leaders of the modern missionary enterprise are a proof of the unceasing creative power of the gospel.

2. More pervasive, though less tangible, has been the influence of the gospel manifested by the fruitfulness of average lives in Christian graces, and by the choice characters hidden away in those quiet homes, which give the nations their strength, and from which their great men come. Justice, purity, kindliness, the basal virtues of Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon life, flourish in the godly households of our Western world. (See Lecky, "European Morals," II., 100.)

3. Consider the ideals and heroes of these countries. The Teutonic race of to-day has been largely moulded by Luther's Bible, and Luther is, in spite of many other influences, the real father of the Protestant German people. Of England there is no truer ideal than Alfred the King, who loved to serve his people and give them the enlightenment of the gospel. Any nation is blessed which has such a figure in the background of its history. English literature, excelled by none in the elevation of its tone, is most truly national in those writers who are inspired by the principles of the gospel. Equally true is this of America, for the noblest and most distinctive portions of her literature are not only, like that of England, saturated with the Bible, but are creations of the sturdiest Puritan life, while her greatest heroes are sprung from religious soil. The like holds true of the Huguenots of France, perhaps the noblest specimens of Western manhood.

4. Further, the gospel has kept its hold upon the growing mind and thought of the world. "It has fed the conscience and refined the affections" of men whose philosophic or scientific theories may have often seemed at first to conflict with it. But as truth has advanced the essence of the gospel has remained untouched, some dogmas of theology merely having suffered change. Men of the highest philosophic and scientific attainments remain as in the past humble believers in Christ.

5. Now "a universal and continuous assent to any proposition is *prima facie* a strong presumption in favor of its truth. . . . The regulative ideas of reason are in fact the strongest forces in the world, and their power is nowhere more clearly traceable than in the spiritual history of humanity. As regards conscience there can be no doubt that as man rises in the scale of being it becomes clearer and stronger, rules more effectively the whole mind and conduct, and gradually vanquishes the views of God, and of God's relations to mankind which grieve and offend it" (Flint's "Apostolicism"). But we find the gospel to be still the strongest moral force among the virile nations of the world, and Christian thought adapting itself securely without loss of its essence to changing intellectual conditions. Is not this a strong evidence that it is still the *living* word of God?