

measure of spiritual enlightenment as enabled them to recognize Him as soon as He appeared, even though His appearance must have been strangely out of harmony with their preconceived notions of Him. They had, moreover, the courage of their convictions, such a measure of self-abnegation and devotion to what they believed to be right and true, as led them to voluntarily share the obloquy which was heaped upon Him, and the danger which threatened Him, and which increased at every step taken by Him during His public life.

What progress these people must have made in the religious life during the three or four years that they were brought into close, personal, daily contact with their Divine Master! What progress we know, as a matter of fact, they made during these years of unique privilege, during which they daily heard the words of Jesus, witnessed His example and shared His spirit. What a discipline, what a training was that through which they had passed. If they had not been converted, in our sense of that term, if they had not been spiritually quickened and renewed at the time that they first became His followers, one of two things must have inevitably taken place, either they would have become the subjects of this divine change, or else scandalized and discouraged by the deep spirituality which masked His unique and marvellous character, the strange, unearthly sentiments which ever and anon fell from His lips, and the opposition and obloquy which He was constantly bringing upon Himself by putting Himself in direct conflict with the passions and prejudices of the people, they would have gone back and followed no more with Him.

We do see now and again, no doubt, enough of the old Jewish character and spirit in them to perceive that, with all the privileges which they had enjoyed, they had not got entirely free from the low and comparatively worldly notions of the Kingdom of God which were peculiar to their time; but, after all, the more closely we study the character of these people, taking into account the spirit of the age in which they lived and the circumstances in which they were placed, the more will we, probably, be impressed with their moral excellence and even their saintly character. On them their risen Lord had breathed, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and I cannot believe that this act was altogether symbolical. I think it beyond question that there was a real communication of spiritual influence and power which accompanied that act, although very likely it was prophetic, too, pointing forward to the larger gift which was to be bestowed upon them after His personal presence had been withdrawn from them.