

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A SERMON DELIVERED IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH, MONTREAL, BY THE
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"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

These words point directly, for their fulfilment, to those marvellous manifestations of Divine power which made the Pentecost renowned in the history of the Church of God. There had been certain limited operations of the Holy Spirit under former dispensations; but, these were so partial, when compared with the promised fulness of the future, that He was spoken of as not yet come. By the utterances of the Prophets, on this subject, the brightest expectations unfolded before the ancient Church. She was taught to expect that the Spirit would descend upon her in mightier copiousness and power, and, that she might confidently rely upon His quickening and cleansing agency for success in her work of gathering humanity within her enlightened pale. Isaiah promised Him under the metaphor of water that should "be poured from on high," by whose influences "the wilderness shall be a fruitful field." Ezekiel spoke of Him as the great life-giver,—"I shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live." Joel promised His universal diffusion,—"I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." And Zechariah predicted Him as the effective source of penitential sorrow,—"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn . . . and shall be in bitterness." On these assurances and prospects the Church had to live and toil for ages,—the voice of promise sank into the deep silence of centuries. Anon, it burst forth again; the "voice of one crying in the wilderness," rang amid the populations of Judea,—"I indeed, baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." And lastly, came the Master Himself, promising the Holy Ghost, in language more forcible and clear than any patriarch, prophet, or teacher, that had preceded Him.

Among the last utterances which fell from His lips, as He mounted the ascending cloud, were some words of direction to the disciples,—"But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." They returned to the city with joy, and went to an upper chamber to await this promised power. In all probability it was the same room as that in which they had eaten the Paschal Supper, before the crucifixion; if so, it would be crowded with memories both grand and solemn. With the eleven, there were other followers of the ascended Christ—some one hundred and twenty in all. How deeply they would be stirred by the exciting prospects, and what questions would tremble upon their lips! "When would this promised gift descend?" "What would the Holy Ghost be like?" "In what manner would He come?" "What would be their experiences under His influence?" "What effect would His coming have upon the unbelieving Jews?" They could not answer one of these questions; but, they did that which was better—they obeyed their Lord and waited; they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Day after day passed, but the Spirit came not; they looked, but no cloud told them that the heavenly gale was near. "Not many days hence,"—ten days have already passed since their Lord ascended; but still they tarry, with minds unwearied and with faith unshaken. The eleventh morning now dawns; the splitting clouds make way for the light, and suddenly a strange sound is heard. That sound roars like the rushing of a mighty wind—like some tremendous tornado threatening to tear up the very foundations of the city. What that sound is they know not; they look out through the windows, but, to their amazement, the half sleeping city is silent and tranquil. Now, they discover that the sound does not come sweeping over the hills and plains of Judea, as the wind would do, but downward, as from heaven. Then, as each one lifts his head, he sees a thousand lines of brightness, resembling sheets of flame, cloven into tongues, pointing from the skies, and crowning one hundred and twenty heads with fire. What mean those sounds of mighty

breathing and those riven sheets of flame? That noise is not wind—those streaks of supernatural splendour are not fire—Peter has the secret; but it is too great and important for him to keep, and so he makes it public property. Listen to him, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh.'" This was just what they had waited for so long, and had prayed for so much, the grand power promised them in our text, the miraculous power by which they should heal the sick, and raise the dead—the Divine afflatus, which should enable them to proclaim the wondrous works of God to all nations and tongues.

Our text is full of these thoughts, let us look at some of them. All of them are of sublime importance to the Church of Christ, and to the world at large, but time will only permit us to note some of the most salient ones. Consider first.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A "COMFORTER."

This exegesis is opposed by many of the learned, chiefly because it is not warranted by classical usage. The original word is *Paraclete*, and may be translated *Monitor*, *Advocate*, or *Comforter*. Each of these has its champions, and each is supported by no mean arguments. The twenty-sixth verse seems to require that we adopt the word "*Monitor*." "But the Comforter-Monitor, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." But I am not so satisfied with the word *advocate*. I grant you, that it has the support of classical usage; I grant you also, that the circumstances of the disciples at this time may be favourable to it; but, it seems to me that the import of the word is decisively against its adoption in our text. Strictly, it means one who appears before a judge to vindicate, or defend, or to plead the cause of an absent client. This is the meaning which we attach to it in 1 John ii. 1, where Christ, our Paracletos, is designated "an advocate with the Father." That is, He appeals on our behalf in the high court of heaven, and pleads our cause before the eternal Father. But an advocate, in this sense, does not harmonize with the construction of the text. Here, our Paraclete is not to be absent from us, but to "abide with" us "forever." There is a beautiful propriety in the thought that Christ is our "advocate with the Father;" but this propriety is destroyed by the suggestion that the Holy Spirit discharges the same office within us.

But, it seems to me, that the word "Comforter," would be more agreeable to the scope of the passage before us, than either monitor or advocate. We do not claim that it exhausts the meaning of the original word; but it certainly conveys its meaning in part. The disciples were never in greater need of comfort than they were at this time. Their Master had just startled them with the distinct announcement that His departure from their midst would take place in a few hours, and, because of these things, "sorrow" had "filled their heart." He knew their feelings; He knew the pungency of their grief and the bitterness of their disappointment. He, therefore, looked upon them with a heart full of tenderness and pity; He felt for them more than a dying father would feel for the children who were about to become orphans in a friendless world. And He sought to comfort them in their sorrows—"It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you." "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." A few more hours, and He would be gone—He only came to stay a short time—but the "Comforter," would "abide forever." How appropriate the words! and, how marked and beautiful the antithesis! The disciples had found comfort in the presence of their Master, and when, by His death they should be bereft of His presence, the Holy Ghost should supply His place. He had only come to them on a short visit, but the "Comforter," should stay with them "forever."

And this "Comforter" is the property of the whole Church, to the end of time. Each living disciple of our Lord may claim a share in the Spirit's consolations. Brethren, Heaven's dealings with us are frequently mysterious, and, sometimes, they appear to be hard and cruel, too. The reason is, that our vision is too limited and weak to penetrate the deep things of God. But, true faith, in God and His word, teaches, that when we are bereft of those things which we

highly prize, the loss is intended to make room for greater blessings. The husband, wife, or child, to whom you so fondly cling, absorbed the affections which rightly belong to God. He, therefore, tore the idol from your heart, and left you bleeding and desolate. Then it was, that you were prepared to prize more highly the "other Comforter"—the Holy Ghost. Again, in times of health and vigour, you were so wrapped up in the interests of this busy life, so bent on amassing wealth, or winning fame, that you forgot God as the Giver of every "good and perfect gift." It became expedient, therefore, that a blast should prostrate you, and, that you should be driven to the private chamber, where affliction would afford you an opportunity for meditation and prayer. It was better for you to lose your health, than to run the danger of losing your soul. That was God's plan of emptying you of sordid passions, and of preparing you for spiritual blessings. In parting with earthly comforts, the path is cleared for loftier and more enduring joys,—a Divine "Comforter" within the heart, as an earnest of the "fulness of joy," and those "pleasures that are for evermore." How precious is a comforter amid this pilgrimage of bereavement and sorrow! The friend who clings to me in the day of gloom and trial, who whispers into my ear words of sympathy, encouragement and hope—is my comforter, my angel of light. He comes to cheer the heart harassed by misfortune, and to lift the load from the spirit that is crushed by grief. Such is this promised gift,—the "Comforter" from the Father.

True comfort does not consist of outward possessions, but of inward thoughts; it is not an external, but an internal property; it is not material, but spiritual, in its nature; it is not derived from the world around, but is a sublime pleasure imparted by the Holy Ghost. Hence, it transcends all earthly bliss as far as the full blaze of the sun transcends the faint twinkle of the distant stars. The Christian, full of the Holy Ghost, though as poor as Lazarus with his rags and scanty fare, is happier than the monarch in his wealth and sumptuousness if he is destitute of the Spirit's help. The Holy Ghost creates gladness within, and, on this account he is called the "Comforter." In the hottest furnace of affliction, in the day of bitterest grief, and in the darkest chamber of death, He is near to solace, to encourage and strengthen. He enabled the martyrs to triumph in the torturing flame, and He helps the dying father to resignedly commit his children to the fostering care of God. And he will be with us as long as we need a "Comforter;" His presence will be to us as the pillar of fire, to cast a Divine splendour over life's dark pathway, and go before us till we cross the chilling streams of Jordan.

Again, He is promised to the Church, as

THE "SPIRIT OF TRUTH."

This represents Him as one who leads, or guides into truth, as well as the Author of truth itself. Now, when we remember that it was by the agency of a lie that error obtained a footing in the world, we shall recognize the propriety of this designation. The woman believed a lie, and, in doing so, disbelieved and disobeyed God. From the Fall downwards, the world has been overrun with lies. A lying spirit, the "Father of lies," has breathed his soul breath upon the fairest scenes, blighting and blasting all that was once pure and harmonious. A lie, then, was the foundation of all the miseries, the superstitions and desolations which now curse mankind; and these multiplied disorders will only be rectified and corrected, in proportion as Truth gains the ascendancy. When, therefore, Christ announced the Holy Ghost as the "Spirit of Truth," He predicted a golden age,—a dispensation which must finally issue in the exile of all evil, and the enthronement of all that is good.

But what kind of truth is the Spirit sent to teach? Certainly not the facts of science—not metaphysics, or mathematics; not the mysteries of the elements, or the motions of the planets. His primary mission is to unfold the great scheme of human redemption, and to illuminate the human mind with its glorious facts. In other words, He came to open men's eyes, to unstop men's ears, to subdue men's consciences, and to lead men into the way of salvation. It was He who pricked the "three thousand" to the heart on the day of Pentecost; and it was by His influences that the "Lord added daily to the Church such as should be—*or were*—saved." "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God,