

Spiritual Healing.

The Charismatic Ministry.

(Communicated.)

Healing by the laying on of hands with prayer is no new thing. It has not been initiated in our day and generation. This movement which we see steadily growing among us is a Revival—a Revival of that which was once commonly and normally practised in the Church during the first four or five centuries by those to whom the power to do so was given. This power was first given by our Blessed Lord Himself to his Apostles, and afterwards to certain persons in the Church, of which they were the foundation, through the Holy Spirit outpoured upon the whole body of the Church.

It is sometimes stated that the true gift of healing is a natural gift, or a mere human endowment, but we have only to consider for a moment its origin to see that this is a complete contradiction of what is affirmed of it in the Gospels and Epistles. Passing from the facts related in the first three Gospels which relate to the first bestowal of this gift or power (St. Matt. x. 1, St. Mark. iii. 14, St. Luke. ix. 1), let us consider St. Paul's very clear teaching as to its nature. "Now of spiritual gifts, brethren," he says in the beginning of chapter xii. of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, "I would not have you ignorant," and he goes on to enumerate the spiritual gifts, which he describes as "manifestations of the Spirit," which were commonly exercised by those who possessed them in the Church at that time. In this enumeration we find the gifts of healing, of prophecy, of the working of miracles, of faith etc; and throughout the chapter it is clearly implied that these gifts are not found in any and every individual, but in those only to whom God wills to entrust them for the carrying on of His work on earth. The Rev. Percy Dearmer in his, "Body and Soul" remarks with regard to this chapter: "The passage contains one more definite principle of the greatest practical value to us. St. Paul regards it as self-evident that these charismata of healing are not possessed by all alike. . . . St. Paul did not regard the gift of healing as only the exercise of the power of prayer and holiness. . . . (he) knows that above this is a wonderful gift which is not possessed by all."

There are frequent references to the gift of healing (the power of exorcism being included in it) in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. As the late Bishop Lyttleton says, in his "Miracles in Religion." "There is in the second and third centuries a consensus of evidence as to the miraculous gifts of healing and exorcism. . . . we find. . . . declarations by Christian teachers of saintly character, that they themselves had seen miracles of healing and exorcism. . . . There is a continuous series of such assertions from the second to the fifth centuries." Like the Apostles, the Fathers regarded this power as a purely spiritual gift, conferred only upon certain persons as the following words, occurring in a prayer addressed to Christ in one of the earliest Church writings, plainly show:-

"O Christ, who didst sanctify us bestowing on us the power of the Spirit; who art the Healer of every sickness and every suffering; who didst give the gift of healing to those who were accounted worthy by Thee. . . ."

We may, therefore, be very certain that the gift of healing which God has thus bestowed upon the Church for a definite purpose is no "chance appearance"; those who possess it cannot be said to "happen to be gifted"; Christ's redemptive work, on whatever plane it may be performed, is certainly not carried on by "chance."

In the Apostolic Church, as in that of the succeeding ages, the "spiritual gifts," enumerated by St. Paul, were known as charismata, or free gifts of the Holy Spirit; they were thus distinguished from the gift conveyed in the ordination of presbyters (or priests) and bishops, in which, as we know, the authority is given to dispense the Sacraments generally—the authority by which the Sacraments are made effectual and valid as far as the office of the priest is concerned. During some centuries there existed, side by side with the ordained ministry, a regular charismatic ministry, the members of which exercised their several gifts in the Church of God, working in harmony with the official ministry. To each belonged their proper work of ministering, and as far as it is possible to conclude from the several writers who refer to it, neither imagined their province to be encroached upon by the other. Of course, it might, and frequently did,

happen that charismatic powers were found in members of the ordained ministry, but it is quite clearly brought out in Apostolic and Patristic writings on this subject that such powers were not inherent in the priesthood or conveyed in ordination. If otherwise the word charisma, used to signify a "free gift" of the Spirit, would have no meaning. In a striking passage on the charismatic ministry in his book "The Ministry of Grace," Bishop Wordsworth remarks that "it remains in the background as a possibility which may emerge at any time into activity. . . . and, indeed," he adds "in one form or another it is constantly emerging."

We come now to the difference between the gift of healing bestowed by the Holy Spirit and a certain natural or physical healing power generally known as "human" or "animal" magnetism. The two can be clearly known and distinguished by their fruits. The person possessing human magnetism in a high degree may heal some diseases and sicknesses on the physical plane, but not beyond; his natural power cannot reach to the cause of the disease when it lies deep in the spiritual nature of the sufferer; neither can he do anything whatever to help those who are possessed by evil spirits. Those who have the gift of healing, however, bring the sufferer to Christ, and the healing power of Christ, flowing through the channel of their being, can reach the very source and origin of the trouble which is manifested in the body of the sick person. Thus the healing is effected in whatever part of the nature of the sufferer it is needed. The power of casting out evil spirits may be taken as a sign that the true gift of healing is present.

Undoubtedly spiritual blessings belong by right to the gift of healing, because God Himself is the source whence these blessings flow. Most strongly do we desire to lay all possible stress on this spiritual aspect, for it is just the spiritual character which differentiates it and marks it off from any other means of healing whatever, be it mental or physical. We desire to lay all possible stress upon the fact that our Lord came to save the whole nature of man; and also that healing through the Divine spiritual gift is the way in which, as He Himself has shown us, He wills to effect that part of the redemption which relates to man's physical nature.