

THE REVIVAL OF MIRACULOUS POWERS IN THE CHURCH

by Baptist W. Noel

Noel's examination of claims regarding the revival of miraculous spiritual gifts in the church, evaluating the evidence for and against the continuation of apostolic signs and wonders in the post-apostolic era.

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Published in 1831 as a response to The Christian Dispensation Miraculous by Thomas Boys, this is a very able work with strong points on many fronts, not least of which is the candor and humility with which his opponent is generally treated. For a detailed analysis of Noel's cessationist apologetic, both strengths and weaknesses, you may want to reference, when available, my article on the correspondence between Boys and Noel which will be forthcoming.

Chapters Remarks on the Revival of Miraculous Powers in the Church REMARKS ON THE REVIVAL OF MIRACULOUS POWERS IN THE CHURCH. BY THE HON. AND REV. BAPTIST W. NOEL, M.A.

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It is a fact generally admitted, that miraculous powers have for many ages been withdrawn from the church. Supernatural answers to prayer have indeed been expected, and some such have been recorded, which it would be found very hard either to disprove or to explain away. These, however, were the immediate and sovereign work of God; and in this respect totally distinct from the effect of a gift to be habitually exercised by men. When miraculous powers were in the church, men habitually spoke with new tongues, cured the sick, cast out devils, and wrought wonders. They were habitually agents, under God, to accomplish effects beyond the ordinary course of nature. But for many ages miracles, if wrought at all, have been wrought immediately by God: and that not systematically, but in insulated cases; not by promise, but in a sovereign way, beyond promise. Men have not, as in the primitive church, received the power to work them: nor could it be certainly known before-hand that they would be wrought; for God might answer prayer without them, as well as by their aid; or the thing asked might be withheld, as injurious to the person asking it. Whether God ever works miracles now, in answer to prayer, is not the question I wish to examine; nor does that seem to me of much importance to determine. The promises are very large: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you:" "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." The believer who receives these in simple faith will feel sure that God will, in answer to prayer, give to him at all times the best blessings, in the best way. What

is really best in temporal matters he cannot certainly say; he will therefore leave it to God. If a miracle be necessary to accomplish what is best for him, it will assuredly be done; if it be not necessary, and the best result can take place without it, why should it be desired? To expect with certainty any temporal event to take place in answer to prayer, though by natural means, is presumptuous, because it is to assume a knowledge that such event is certainly good for us, which is not revealed. On the other hand, to expect such event to take place, though by a miracle if with absolute submission to God, and with confession that we may be mistaken in our expectation, because we know not whether the event may be for our good or not will do us little mischief: on that question, therefore, a believer in a right state of mind cannot greatly err.

Let it be admitted, then, that some supernatural answers to prayer have been known in all ages: still few can doubt that miraculous powers have been withdrawn. No such powers with the exception, perhaps, of the power to eject devils, in which there is obviously wide room for imagination have, as I believe, been claimed in the church since the second century. If ever such a claim has been preferred, it has only been by persons sunk in abject superstition, as was the case with the miracle workers of the eighth century; or by those who had purposes to serve by the imposture, and whose cases need not now be considered, because sufficiently explained by the prophecy that the coming of the man of sin should be with lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

How, then, shall we account for this generally admitted fact, that miraculous powers have long since ceased? Have they been lost through the unbelief of the church, and are they to be recovered by the revival of faith? Or were they withdrawn by their Sovereign Author, not penally, nor in any way as the effect of sin, but because He saw it to be best for His church, however persecuted, to be without them? And is it, therefore, presumptuous to expect their restoration, till a new revelation warrants the expectation, or the actual exercise of them demonstrates them to be restored? Your candid attention is requested to the following remarks, which will, I trust, prove sufficient to help you to what appears to me a right decision on this subject.

If the supernatural gifts of God's Holy Spirit have been lost through unbelief, they ought to have been retained by the exercise of faith. But faith is not a blind persuasion, however strong, built on no evidence, and of which no rational account can be given. Such a persuasion God has never made it our duty to acquire; nor does he ever produce it in the mind. All Christian faith is the hearty acceptance of some declaration of God (Romans 10:17): and that particular act of faith by which we receive any blessing from God must be founded on some promise; otherwise the sober confidence of the believer can never be distinguished from the wild presumption of the enthusiast. The strongest faith cannot go further than to be fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform (Romans 4:21). Is there, then, any promise to the believer that he shall receive miraculous powers, by faith on which he may and ought to work miracles? It is maintained that there are several, and we are directed to Psalms 68:18; to Joel 2:28-29; to Isaiah 8:18; to Mark 16:17-18; Revelation 7:2-3; and 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; which are said to be so plain as to render it the proof of a criminal unbelief that we do not enter at once on the exercise of supernatural gifts. But these texts require examination.

1. The words in Psalms 118:1-29 are these: "Thou hast ascended on high: thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them" (compare Ephesians 4:8). Our right to the gifts is sometimes deduced from the last

clause of the verse, "That the Lord God might dwell among them;" which some would translate, "For an habitation of Jah-Elohim;" on which new translation I will make only one remark. The words are not "for an habitation," as though the rebellious were to be the habitation, but "for the inhabiting" of the Lord, i.e. "that the Lord may inhabit;" this being the consequence of the gifts: which is, I think, precisely the sense of our translation; for the words to "dwell in" his people and to "dwell among" them, express in fact the same thing. I therefore prefer our old translation; but do not contend against the statement that God is here said to dwell within his people. But if God dwells within his church, it is said, then He must be "heard in his manifold wisdom, and seen in his various actings, by this church, which is his body, possessing the gift of healing, the discernment of spirits, the gift of tongues," &c. &c. But God may as certainly dwell within his church, and within each of his servants, without miraculous displays of power as with them; and, unless the most blessed promises are to be rudely snatched from believers in general, He certainly does. Our Lord promised that the Comforter should abide with his disciples for ever (John 14:16): has He for more than sixteen hundred years retired from them? Our Lord promised also, that He, with his Father, God, would come and abide with each one of his disciples who loved him (John 14:23): have all believers, who for sixteen hundred years have laid no claim to miraculous powers, been destitute of love to Him? or, though they loved Him, has he left the promise unfulfilled? Neither part of the alternative can be true; and therefore God may dwell in his church, according to Psalm lxxviii., without communicating to it any supernatural gifts.

Perhaps our right to look for the gifts may be preferably derived from the expression "Thou hast received gifts for men:" for why should the term "men" be limited to mean some believers in the primitive church; or the term "gifts," which often means the supernatural gifts, be taken here to mean grace? .

Let it be remembered, that supernatural gifts were neither the proofs of conversion, nor the means of it (Matthew 7:22-23); and, therefore, any unconverted persons, to whom such gifts were communicated, might continue unconverted. If, then, such gifts are here exclusively intended, they are promised to the rebellious, continuing rebellious, as much as to real believers; and if the passage proves that such gifts belong in all ages to real Christians, it proves them to belong in all ages to nominal Christians too. Indeed, as we have no more right to limit the word "men" to mean the nominal Christians of all periods, than to limit it to mean the nominal Christians of anyone particular period; if the first limitation is disallowed, the promise must extend to all men, in all times; which cannot be intended. And that such gifts were not exclusively intended, is plain from St. Paul's expressions in Ephesians 4:7-8 : "Unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ: wherefore," &c. (compare Romans 5:18-19); whence it appears that the gifts of grace were those principally intended. I do not deny that all other gifts communicated in fact by our blessed Lord such as inspiration, the tongues of fire, the power to drink poisons unharmed, &c. may be included; but I deny that their continuance forms so essential a part of the promise that it cannot be said to be still accomplishing in the continuance of the gifts of grace. No argument to the contrary can be drawn from the words which follow, Ephesians 4:11-13: "He gave some apostles, and some prophets for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come unto a perfect man." For if the prophetic office, and by inference all other supernatural gifts, are here promised to the church till it reach its entire perfection; then is the apostolic office also, not in some of its functions, but (on precisely the same reasoning) in all of them, promised to continue

too. But who can seriously think that this office is continued? Where is the man who can now, as the Apostles once did, convey the Spirit authoritatively by imposition of hands; or could (except as supported by plain texts of Scripture, which would extend the privilege to all private Christians also) venture to address to the church such language as the following: "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37); "If any man obey not our word, note that man, and have no company with him" (2 Thessalonians 3:14)? But if the Apostolic office and power have ceased, then all other offices and powers which have accomplished their objects may have ceased also; leaving behind them in full exercise those higher gifts of grace by which the church has in all ages been edified. How, then, has this declaration in vers. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13, been fulfilled? Obviously just as it would have been had those offices lasted. They were given to edify the church till it come to its perfection. Now whether this effect takes place by the present influence of offices long since ceased, or by the present influence of offices still continuing, the effect is the same, and the terms of the declaration would be equally satisfied by either method of fulfilment.

2. The second passage alleged is Isaiah 8:18: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion." "Signs and wonders," it has been said, always mean, in the New Testament, supernatural acts: if therefore the Lord Jesus Christ and his people are to be for signs and wonders, it must be by the performance of supernatural acts: and since the term children is used without any limitation, therefore all the children whom God gives to Christ are by supernatural gifts to be signs and wonders. But have all the children in fact wrought miracles? For as the declaration is unconditional, that the children are for signs and wonders, if all believers are meant, and they are to be for signs and wonders by working miracles, then all believers, in all times, have actually wrought miracles. The contrary fact, therefore, refutes this supposition, by shewing plainly, either that all believers are not meant, or that they are for signs and wonders for some other reason than that they can work miracles. The unconditional declaration limits the interpretation to those who have in fact fulfilled the prophecy. If believers are to be signs and wonders by working miracles, then those only can be meant who have wrought them; and if all believers are to be signs and wonders, then they must be signs and wonders in some other way. This they may be, agreeably to the use of the terms in Scripture; for in Scripture any thing, natural or; supernatural, is a sign, which serves strongly to mark the providence or power of God; and that is a "wonder," which, while it marks the providence of God, is at the same time strange and astonishing. Thus the Sabbath-day, though its celebration involved no miracle, was called a "sign between God and his people Israel" (Exodus 31:13-17): thus the celebration of the Passover, which commemorated indeed a supernatural event, but was itself a natural action, was also called "a sign" (Exodus 13:9): and thus also the death of the two sons of Eli, which, though violent, was not miraculous, was called "a sign." Again, when the Prophet Ezekiel by command of God broke through the wall of his house, and by the breach removed with his own hands his household furniture publicly, to shew that in the same way, and before long, the citizens would be compelled with their own hands to carry into captivity their possessions; he was, by reason of the singularity of the action, "a wonder" to the city (Ezekiel 12:6). When, on the death of his wife, he, by command of God, abstained from all expressions of grief, to shew that in the same manner they should be soon reduced to a state in which they would be too much occupied with their own misery to weep for the death of others; again, through the significance and singularity of his behaviour; was he "a wonder" to them from

God (Ezekiel 24:16-17). Again, when Isaiah for three years went barefoot, to represent that the Egyptians should walk barefoot as captives to the place of their exile, he was "a sign and a wonder upon Egypt" (Isaiah 20:3). And, again, those political convulsions which are predicted in Joel 2:30, and Acts 2:19, though natural events, are termed "signs and wonders." Exactly, then, in the same way in which Ezekiel and Isaiah were signs and wonders, when they performed natural actions which were strange and significant of impending judgments; so are all believers for signs and wonders, by the transformation of their characters, the singularity of their course, and their success against all opposition. The passage, therefore, contains no prediction of the continuance of miraculous powers in the church. The words "in Israel" seem further to shew that their continuance is not here predicted: for if by Israel he meant the spiritual Israel, or the whole body of true believers, they are much more signs and wonders to each other by the effects of his grace than they could be by exercise of the gifts; and if the natural Israel be meant, the prophecy must be limited to that period during which the church of Christ could be properly said to be in Israel, or while Israel was still a people and the church of Christ was small.

3. A third passage alleged is Joel 2:28-29 : "It shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit."

We have Inspired authority for asserting that this prophecy received at least a partial fulfilment in the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16): but it is sometimes imagined, that, the terms having no express reference to the first age of the church of Christ, must be supposed to extend to a more distant time, and require us to expect to see those effects wrought in all flesh which we have seen among the early Christians; in other words, that all believers should have miraculous powers, to the end of time. But if believers in general ought to expect miraculous powers because the terms here employed are general, then all believers should always have expected the gifts here mentioned, because the terms are universal: every single Christian, male and female, should have looked for the gift of prophecy, and not to look for it would be to disbelieve. But, in 1 Corinthians 12:11, 1 Corinthians 12:29, St. Paul argues that it would be as absurd for all to expect the gift of prophecy, as it would be to expect that all the members of the natural body should have the powers of any one member; and, consequently, that no believers had the right to expect, that gift except those to whom God saw fit to impart it.

Further, the prophecy is absolute: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," without any restriction of the meaning to those among them who should exercise peculiar faith. If, therefore, those terms mean all believers; all believers, in all ages, must have prophesied, contrary to the facts in the primitive church (1 Corinthians 12:29), and against general experience. The latter clauses of the prophecy must therefore be limited to some believers; and if they may be limited to mean some in all ages, they may with equal reason be limited to mean some in one age only, for the words admit of the second limitation as easily as of the first. The first clause, however, contains a wider prediction; for the words "all flesh" must eventually comprehend the great mass of the population of the world; and if by the effusion of the Holy Ghost the communication of supernatural gifts is always intended, then miraculous powers must be expected to the end of the world. But the gift of the Holy Spirit does not always include the gift of miracles. It is said of John the Baptist, that "he did no miracle" (John 10:41); and yet he was filled with the Holy Ghost from

his earliest infancy (Luke 1:15). St. Paul also declares, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Romans 8:9): all believers, therefore, though without supernatural gifts, have the gift of the Spirit. The one is therefore perfectly separable from the other. The following texts shew plainly that the gift of the Spirit is often spoken of without reference to supernatural gifts: Matthew 7:22-23, Matthew 10:4-8; with John 3:5-6, John 14:17; Acts 5:32; Acts 11:24; Romans 5:5, Romans 8:1-16; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:30; Php 1:19-20; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 4:14; 1 John 4:13.

Besides, I must remark of this clause also, that it is unconditional; and that, therefore, whatever was intended by it must take effect, uninfluenced by any disturbing causes whatever. The imagined unbelief of the church can no more restrict its fulfilment, than it can defeat it altogether. "All flesh," therefore, cannot mean all persons in all times, since the day of Pentecost; and if it means, as it really does, that eventually the world in general will receive the Holy Spirit, the time of that blessed result must be left to the sovereign pleasure of God. We may from this passage pray for its arrival in our day, but we may not from this passage expect it.

4. The fourth passage alleged is Mark 16:17-18 : "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

What right, it may be asked, has anyone to limit terms so general? If these signs are to follow "them that believe," is he not a bold expositor who will say that, except in one brief period of the history of the church, they shall not follow them that believe? I answer, First, that, if all believers were intended, we may expect to find proof that all actually in the primitive church received these gifts; whereas there is proof of the contrary. When St. Paul met at Ephesus some devout persons, whom he thought to be baptized Christians, he asked them whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed (Acts 19:2); evidently meaning by "the Holy Ghost" what is meant in several other places, viz. the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. But if it had been the universal privilege of believers to receive it, they must have received it, and his question would have been superfluous: it was therefore not a universal privilege. We read in Acts 8:1-40. when the sorcerer Simon saw that the gifts were communicated by the Apostles, Peter and John, to the converts of Samaria, he begged to purchase from them the power of communicating it too. Now Simon was among the professed converts, and in all probability received with them the gifts (Acts 8:12-13, Acts 8:17). Certainly, if, as is generally contended, the faith of miracles was necessary to receive the gift, the converts there must have been instructed in the nature of the communication; and, if the privilege was universal, must have learned it to be so: Simon would therefore know it to be universal among professed Christians, and unknown among professed Infidels: it could not be communicated to Infidels, and from Christians it could not be withheld. If he, therefore, should acquire the power he sought, he could only communicate the gifts to those who would receive them without his aid: what selfish use could be made of such a power? and why should he pay money for it? The gifts were, therefore, not universal? Further, there is reason to believe, as I shall afterwards shew, that they were never communicated except, as in the instance just cited, by imposition of the hands of an Apostle: if so, it is not to be supposed that the Apostles could lay their hands on all the believers gathered into the church of Christ throughout the civilized and savage world (see Colossians 1:6, Colossians 1:23). And this further shews that the gifts were not

universal. Then the terms, "them that believe," must mean some of them; and if the terms may be limited at all, why may they not be limited in time, as well as in extent? why may not their application be restricted to the believers of the first age, as well as to some among the believers of all ages?

Secondly: Other texts, which contain terms as general as these, must necessarily be restricted in their meaning. In the expression, "Thou hast received gifts for men" (Psalms 68:1-35), the word "men" must, as we have seen, mean some men. In the words of Isaiah 1:8-18, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me," &c., the "children" must mean some of the children, unless the "signs and wonders" do not mean supernatural acts. And the prophecy in Joel 2:28, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," must mean that some of them shall. When John the Baptist said of our blessed Saviour to those around him, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Matthew 3:11), he certainly meant some of them, not all. And when our Lord himself said, in a manner more emphatically general than any of these texts, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father" (John 14:12); he must have meant some believers, not all; for very few, surely, have in any sense done greater things than to raise the dead, to make a few loaves feed five thousand men, to read men's thoughts, and convert hundreds of sinners to God. But, if all these passages must be restricted in their meaning, why should we hesitate to restrict the application of that also which is now under examination?

Thirdly: They who would not allow this natural and necessary restriction are obliged to resort to another restriction of it far more unwarrantable than that which they forbid. For if the words do not mean some among believers, they must mean all that have the faith of miracles: but the vast majority of true Christians, for more than sixteen centuries, have been without this kind of faith: if these words mean, therefore, the expectants of the gifts, they exclude the vast majority of true believers for many centuries. What, then, is gained by the new limitation in point of numbers? And in the principle of limitation it is much more objectionable; for I have shewn that several passages justify the kind of limitation for which I argue, but I doubt whether any passage can be adduced in which the words "them that believe," or any words equivalent to them, are made to express a kind of faith not possessed by the vast majority of real believers. How can they, who make this new limitation without Scriptural warrant, blame those who contend for another limitation plainly warranted by Scripture? But the new limitation is more extraordinary still; for, according to it, the words do not even include all expectants of the gifts. Many are now said to believe in, and expect the communication of the gifts, who themselves remain destitute of them. These, therefore, are not included among "them that believe," and the terms must be limited further, in their present application, to those two or three persons who maintain that they have themselves received the gifts. These two or three persons, then, are the believers, and all others are without faith. Even though expectants of gifts, they have not faith as a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:20); for if they had it, even in its least beginnings, they would work the most splendid miracles. On their hypothesis the conclusion is inevitable. If the promise is to all that believe, then even the lowest degree of faith in the promise would ensure its fulfilment: all those in whom it is not fulfilled have not, then, the smallest degree of faith. And which, I may ask, are the more criminal, on the supposition that their view is right? They who have no faith in what they see to be a promise made to them; or those who cannot exercise the same faith because they cannot find, after diligent

investigation with prayer, that there is any promise to warrant it? This consideration may check the forwardness of some to accuse their brethren as unbelievers.

Fourthly: The gifts are said to be signs, by which God was pleased to confirm the word (ver. 20). Though they could not instruct in the spiritual nature of the Gospel, they could demonstrate its Divine origin. That purpose is answered as effectually, to every inquirer not obstinately prejudiced against the Gospel, by the signs once granted, as it would be by their perpetual recurrence; and, their chief use having thus ceased, we may easily believe that they were intended to cease also. On these grounds I cannot but retain the conviction that some among professed Christians in the first age of the church, and not the expectants of the gifts in all ages, were here intended. So, among the Reformers, thought Calvin, Bucer, Peter Martyr, and others, whose opinions I quote the rather because their authority has been too hastily used in support of the opposite view.

Calvin on this passage writes thus: "We are not to refer to individuals this gift (of miracles) bestowed upon believers; for we know that the gifts were variously distributed, so that the power of miracles belonged only to a few The possession of the power by a few, was sufficient to testify the glory and Deity of Christ Although Christ has not expressed whether he meant the gift to be temporary or perpetual, it is more probable that it was to be temporary Certainly, we see that the working of miracles ceased not long after; or, at least, that the instances were so rare as to justify the conclusion that they were not to be common to all ages."

P. Martyr. "Whence their argument fails who say, that because we find in Mark that certain signs were to follow them that believe, which do not take place among us, we must acknowledge that the church of our day is without faith. They are deceived. Miracles were like the trumpets and heralds by which the Gospel was recommended; for as the Law of Moses received authority by means of various miracles wrought at Sinai and throughout the wilderness, which ceased after the people entered the land of promise, so miracles have ceased now also, since the Gospel is diffused through the world. The promise, then, in Mark did not relate to all times." (Comment on 1 Corinthians 12:1-31)

Bucer. "Both this text (John 14:12) and Mark 16:17 are to be understood, not of any believers, but of those in the Apostolic age." (Comment on John 14:12.)

Pellicano "In the beginning of the church miracles were necessary, that their faith might be confirmed and nourished; but, the faith of the church being confirmed, they are no longer necessary." (Comment on Mark 16:17.)

5. Another passage cited is Revelation 7:1-4; on which I will only remark, that graces may seal men as servants of God, but gifts cannot (Matthew 7:22-23): therefore supernatural gifts cannot be the seal here intended.

6. Lastly: 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is also sometimes adduced; but, as I have heard no proof attempted that it does not relate to the ending of the gifts with the life of the gifted person, which is the natural meaning, or that it does refer to their duration in the church, I need not consider this passage as even seeming to support the expectation of the gifts.

None of these passages, then, sustain an expectation that miraculous powers will revive in the church; and, until some stronger reasons than these afford can be adduced in favour of the

expectation, I am entitled to consider it as an expectation unfounded in Scripture, and therefore not faith; the general consent of Christians, for many ages, not to expect them, cannot be stigmatized as unbelief; nor can they have been lost to the church through the want of a faith which we are not warranted to exercise.

While there are no texts which confirm the expectation of the gifts, there are several considerations which forbid it.

1. They were generally granted by imposition of the hands of the Apostles. We read of only two instances in which they were granted in any other way one, when the Apostles themselves received them; and the second, when the first Gentile converts received them. The first case cannot be considered as a deviation from the rule; and for the second case, which was a deviation, there was the manifest reason, that by that mode the scruples, which made St. Peter doubt whether Gentiles ought to be baptized while non-conformists to the Jewish ritual, were effectually removed; and not his only, but those of the Jewish Christians in general. With this exception, the accounts which we have, lead us to believe that they were generally communicated by the Apostles. Nor can we understand, except on this supposition, why Simon, in Acts viii., should have tried to purchase from the Apostles the power of communicating them. For if believers generally received them without the intervention of others, why should he seek the power at all? And if others beside the Apostles had the power, who were they upon whom this distinction was conferred; and why was Philip, though an eminent believer, and the instrument of conversion to the Samaritans, unable to exercise it? If the power of communicating the gift was confined to the Apostles in the first age, to whom has it been transmitted? The apostolic office having ceased, we should suppose that their peculiar powers have ceased too; or, at least, we have no right to expect the revival of their powers, till we see some person rise who shall prove his claim to be their successor by communicating the gifts, as they did, to all around him.

2. The gifts were granted to professed Christians indiscriminately (Matthew 7:22; Matthew 10:4, Matthew 10:8; 1 Corinthians 13:1-2; Galatians 3:2-4, with Galatians 4:11, Galatians 4:20; Revelation 6:4-6). Not only did real Christians in a low state of grace receive them, but nominal Christians, who had never experienced conversion, received them; and yet they have been withheld for centuries from the most eminent servants of God. At different times there have been great revivals of religion in the church of Christ, and in several of them the truth has been confessed before an evil world, in circumstances of greater difficulty and peril than those which attended the first promulgation of the Gospel: yet in none of them have the most advanced Christians (though some may have expected miracles to be wrought in certain cases, in answer to prayer) ever expected the gift of miracles. The Waldenses, when they held up the solitary torch of Divine truth which gleamed upon the midnight darkness of the middle ages; never claimed for their calumniated doctrines the sanction of new miracles. Wickliffe and his Lollards wrought none; Huss and his Bohemians were equally prudent. We have already seen that among the Reformers of the sixteenth century, Calvin, Bucer, Peter Martyr, and Conrad Pellican, expected them not: to these I may add Beza, Musculus, Bullinger, and Luther: nor do I believe that the name of a single Reformer of eminence, either in this country or on the continent, can be adduced as holding a contrary belief. Although the concurrence of sentiment in later times is admitted, and therefore needs no proof, it is too remarkable to be passed over in silence; for among the Puritans in this country, and among the Christians of the United States in the middle of the last century, not to

mention more modern instances, have been persons of as great eminence for spiritual discernment and practical holiness as any persons since the first age of the church. All these have agreed that it would be enthusiastic to expect the gifts. Nor was that expectation universally cherished; if it was cherished at all, in earlier and more ,superstitious times, except by some Roman-Catholic traffickers in wonders. St. Chrysostom, in his twenty-third Homily on St. John, as quoted by the historian Fuller, has these words: Kai gar nu?n eisi zetou?ntej kai legontes dia ti mh kai nu?n shmeia; ei gar postos ei? w[j ei?nai xrh kai fileij ton Xriston w[j filei?n dei? Ou xrei?an exeij shmeiwn, tauta gar toij apistoij didotai: "Now also are there those who seek and say, "Why are not miracles done now also? If you are a believer, as you ought to be, and love Christ as you ought to love him, you have no need of miracles; for miracles are given to unbelievers." And Augustine ranked the miracles of his age under two heads: 1. Figmenta mendacium hominum, "Forgeries of lying men;" 2. Portenta fallacium spirituum, "Prodigies of deceitful devils."

Thus, in all ages, men eminent for faith and zeal, for holiness, and submission to the will of God; men who with lowly and contrite hearts loved Christ and abided in him; with whom, therefore, God has peculiarly promised to dwell (Isaiah 57:15, John 14:23, John 15:4), and with whom God has peculiarly dwelt; have failed to receive these gifts, which are now thought chiefly, if not exclusively, to mark his indwelling. Was it a punishment for their low state of grace? No; for their spiritual attainments were remarkable. Was it a punishment for their disbelief in the perpetual communication of the gifts? It is difficult to imagine this; for they received from God all his best blessings: particularly they received from him that charity, compared with which the highest gifts are pronounced, upon unquestionable authority, to be nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-13); and through the graces of faith and love they received such manifestations of his glorious excellence as transformed them into his likeness (John 14:22; Ephesians 3:16-19; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Yet it is said, they were punished for their unbelief by the loss of the gifts! That is, God gave them, in his love, what was inestimably great, and penally withdrew from them what was comparatively insignificant; He rewarded their faith with every blessing which could most benefit themselves, and yet punished their unbelief with the loss of that which, if useful at all, would be beneficial chiefly to others! And how can this general unbelief be accounted for? Is there any other truth respecting which Christians have erred with such a strange consent? Usually, on obscure truths, there is much debate: here, all, without one misgiving, rush consentaneously into error. And why? On other points, which the natural mind is much more indisposed to receive, their faith was triumphantly strong; why was it here only so weak? On other points God granted to them great spiritual discernment: why were they left on this point in such obscurity? They were diligent students of Scripture; they drew their views of truth directly from the fountains of Inspiration; they meditated profoundly; they had much simplicity of dependence on the teaching of God; they earnestly prayed for his guidance. In other truths they were guided by Him; and here, with most marvellous unanimity, with most undoubting unbelief, they erred if indeed they erred But it is impossible to believe it. If a few excellent persons in our days have imagined themselves to have discovered that the universal church has been for some centuries in error I hope I shall not be thought arrogant if I consider still the universal church to be in this matter right, and them to be, though honestly, in the wrong.

3. The gifts were granted to effect some useful object on each occasion of their exercise (1 Corinthians 12:7); so that to exercise them without some useful object directly in view, would have

been improper (1 Corinthians 14:26). If St. Paul had spoken in an assembly of the Corinthian church some barbarous language unknown to the Corinthians, he would have exercised indeed a Divine gift, but he would have done them no good, because they were already familiar with the gift (1 Corinthians 14:6): five intelligible words, therefore, would be more useful to them than ten thousand unknown (1 Corinthians 14:19); and from this unprofitable exhibition of power, it was therefore right to abstain. Prophecy was for the edification of the church; tongues and miracles were chiefly to confirm the Divine origin of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 14:22): they were, therefore, to be wrought with a view to this end. If the gift of miracles were therefore to be granted again to the church, in the same way as at first, and for the same ends, it would be granted to all professed Christians indiscriminately, with a view to confirm the truth of the Gospel among infidels. Unless we would give unbridled licence to the wildest imagination, we cannot expect the gift to be returned in any other way, or for any other ends. For if we may expect a new rule, and new ends, why may we not expect new gifts? And if, on the contrary, the revelation of the nature of the gifts should restrain us from expecting new gifts, the revelation of the method and end of their communication should restrain us from expecting the same gifts by a new method and a new end. The revelation in both cases, is the exposition of the will of God.

If, according to this rule, the gift of miracles should again be bestowed on professed Christians indiscriminately, what ends would be answered by it? i. "It would solace suffering." But this alone would not be a sufficient end to call it into exercise: otherwise Trophimus would not have languished at Miletum sick (2 Timothy 4:20); and Epaphroditus would have been miraculously cured (Php 2:27). "they would solace suffering:" but if this be a sufficient cause of expectation, we might, on the same ground, expect poverty to be miraculously changed into abundance, sin at once to vanish from the world, and men to be instantaneously immortal; for suffering is caused by poverty, sin, and death, as surely as by sickness. We know, likewise, that in some instances believers have suffered much on other accounts than unbelief. As the sufferings of our Divine Master were strictly vicarious, so there was something vicarious in the sufferings of Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists. What was fitting in their cases, on other grounds than then unbelief, may be also fitting, on other grounds, in all the cases of suffering believers now: God may see it to be best, for many reasons, that their pain should continue; or he may relieve it when he will without a miracle.

ii. "The gift of miracles would guard men against the modern miracles of Popery." They guard men sufficiently against themselves; and few causes more tend to swell the tide of disgust which is strongly setting in through Europe against that Antichristian church, than its attempts to dupe its silly votaries by pretending to work miracles. The world is too old for such tricks, and they only hasten the final overthrow of the system which is obliged to seek their support. Besides, as the Reformers often argued in their day, the doctrines of the Bible being already established with the sanction of miracles, new doctrines are not to be tried by miracles, but by the Bible; and if any persons, leaving the only authorized standard of doctrine, will ask for new signs in confirmation of a true doctrine which they deny, they only deserve, as Piscator remarked, the rebuke which our Lord gave to the unbelievers of his day: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall be no sign given unto it." if they will, in contempt of Scripture, maintain, by the sanction of pretended miracles, a doctrine which is false, it is just that God should suffer them to be deluded; and, so far from having reason to believe that God will rescue them from error by new

miracles, we have a sure prediction, by Scripture, that God shall send them strong delusion, to believe a lie, "that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12) iii. "The gifts would check infidelity." Perhaps they would; but have we reason to believe it will be thus checked? The remarks in the last paragraph would, for the most part, apply equally here. When our Lord, in Luke xvi., represents the rich man in torment as anxiously desiring that his family, still on earth, might be rescued from a fate like his by a miraculous interposition, the reply of Abraham, which our Lord has sanctioned by his use of it, encourages no such expectation: "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them: if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Again: when He referred the unbelieving Jews, who sought from him some signal and irresistible demonstration of his Messiahship, to the typical deliverance of the prophet Jonah from the belly of the whale, long since accomplished, and then purposely abstained from giving incontrovertible publicity to his resurrection, in which the type found its antitype, he encouraged no such expectation. And when we read of the heathen till the time of St. Paul (who, like our modern infidels, did not like to retain God in their knowledge), not that He increased the evidence of His being and perfections till they were compelled to believe both, but that he "gave them over to a reprobate mind," &c. (Rom. 6:28): this encourages no such expectation. In fact, it is contradicted by the general method which God has been pleased to adopt: He has always given enough evidence of truth to guide sincere inquirers to the knowledge of it; he has never given enough to reduce all cavillers to silence: "Dieu a tellement tempé ré la lumiere et les ombres dans sa parole, que ceux qui sont humbles et dociles n'y trouvent que verité et consolation, et que ceux qui sont indociles et presomptueux n'y trouvent qu'erreur et incredulité ." The word of God, supported as its claims on our attention are by the Apostolic miracles, is sufficient to hush all the objections of the sceptic; and if he can resist its authority we cannot expect that God will reward his obstinacy with any further means: "Quiconque cherche le scandale jusque dans la parole de Dieu, merite de l'y trouver pour sa perte." Besides, let it never be forgotten, that, if miraculous gifts would do something to convert infidels to Christianity, an increase of piety in the church, though without miracles, would do much more. If ever the world is to believe that Jesus was sent of God, it will be when his disciples shall be made "perfect in one" (John 17:20-23). To which blessed consummation, much more safely than to the attainment of miraculous powers, may we direct our thoughts, our efforts, and our prayers. iv. "The gift of miracles would lead to this increase of piety in the church" It did nothing of the sort in the church of Corinth, which came behind no other church in gifts, but lamentably failed in grace. Indeed, it was not intended for this end. A sign, to confirm the Divine origin of the Gospel (Mark 16:17), it called the world's attention to the Gospel; but could do no more: for the most splendid miracles were witnessed and wrought habitually by those who had no spiritual discernment whatever. How, then, could it edify the professing church now?

First, what good would it do to the careless and the worldly? If granted as it was granted in the primitive church (the only supposition we are at liberty to make), it would only confirm them in their neglect of religion. For what inference would they derive from observing that the most eminent Christians, and those whose barren orthodoxy is attached to evil tempers and a fruitless life, might equally exercise the gift? Why, that both are equally acceptable to God? And what spiritual benefit would a real Christian derive from it? Would it manifest to him more of the character of God? or would it more sensibly impress his mind with the Divine presence? or humble him before his

Maker? or make him a more submissive instrument of his will? Then, indeed, it were to be longed for. But I am utterly at a loss to conceive how it should tend to produce one of these effects, with any thing like the force which belongs to those enlightening, sanctifying, and consoling influences of the Holy Spirit, which the church has always enjoyed in proportion to its faith. Could God be nearer to anyone than he is, when he is present to teach, to guide, to govern, to animate, to console, to protect? Truth being the appointed instrument of our sanctification, could an operation which gives no spiritual insight into Divine truth, be of so sanctifying a tendency as one which does give it? or could a gift, which a believer would share in common with the world, so impress his mind with the holiness or love of God as an influence upon his heart, of which the unconverted can have no experience? If it be said that God is an agent in the one case within the man; so is he in the other. If it be said that he acts in one case by the agency of man, but in the other by man as his organ; and so gives in the second case a more awful demonstration of his presence than in the first; I deny the statement. In both cases man has been the agent. How, else, were the spirits of the prophets subject to the Prophets? How, else, was faith requisite to the accomplishment of a miracle? The afflatus upon the organ could not be subject to the organ, nor could the organ be required to exercise faith. Indeed, the distinction is imaginary; for no instance can be adduced in which the Holy Spirit has acted within a human being in any other way than to enable him to act. He has never become the soul of the mortal body, but has ever moulded and subjected the human soul to his own will. "Dari denique et mitti, Spiritus Sanctus dicitur," writes the Reformer Beza: "non quod ad ipsius essentiam attinet ut phanatici somniant, sed ipsius in nobis effectorum et donorum specialium respectu, quae et ipsa propterea Spiritus, id est, dona divinitus inspirata et indita dicuntur." With respect, therefore, both to the supernatural gifts and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, men are both recipients and agents.

Herein grace and gifts do not differ, but in other respects the difference between them is great. It may best be illustrated by that which we see to subsist between grace and natural gifts. Gifts, though without grace, may win much applause in the church, and therefore tend to delude one who is no Christian at all into the idea that he is an eminent Christian; but grace shews us to ourselves. Gifts, therefore, tend to elate the possessor; and they have no countertendency: "knowledge puffeth up" (1 Corinthians 8:1): but grace, though a believer may be proud even of it, has a prevailing tendency to make him humble. From this fundamental difference are several others derived. Gifts, because they elate, tend to separate a gifted person from other Christians, because he is more distinguished when he stands alone, or as the head of a separate party; but grace makes Christians of one soul. Gifts, because they elate us, are apt to make us jealous of rivals, or envious against superiors; and thus, fretting our spirit, they make us disdainful, bitter, and censorious: but grace leads us in honour to prefer one another. Gifts, whilst they elate, frequently make men forget their need of our Saviour's intercession and the Holy Spirit's aid; but grace continually reminds them of both. Gifted persons are tempted to undervalue grace without gifts; but grace makes us supremely value grace. Gifts, therefore, tend to make us our own idols; but grace to subject us entirely to God. Now, that which is, through our corruption, the general tendency of gifts, is their tendency in proportion to their splendour and rarity; for the other evils which they generate come chiefly from this, that they elate the possessor: but the more splendid and rare the more they would elate; and, consequently, the higher the miraculous power went the more it would have the tendency. St. Paul, therefore, that it might be counteracted, was obliged to suffer from a keen thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7), without which even he, eminent as he

was in grace, would have been elated. How much more so, then, with the same powers, would ordinary Christians be injured, or those who are no Christians at all? To all this it may be objected, that St. Paul urges the Corinthians to covet these gifts, even with earnestness. Undoubtedly, while the great use of them in the church and in the world was every where apparent, they were to be desired, as are all other means of doing good; and if the use could be certainly shewn, they ought to be desired now: but since their use has passed, the ground on which they were to be desired by the Corinthians is removed. St. Paul might lawfully prize those Divine gifts which, through his own remaining corruption, were still a snare to him, because through them he could say, to those who questioned his apostleship, "Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds:" but if his office had been merely to recal their attention to the anciently revealed law of Moses, as ours is to fix attention on the Gospel, long since revealed, those ensnaring powers would have been no longer desirable. The ends, then, for which the gift of miracles was originally bestowed, having been answered, no new ends may lawfully be invented to warrant our expectation of its revival; and those which are alleged would not be answered by the only mode of communication which has been hitherto adopted, or may be expected. On this ground, therefore, as well as all the rest, it is improper to expect it; and to be without that expectation is not to exhibit any degree of unbelief.

Why, then, has the gift been withdrawn? If the unbelief of the church has not been the cause, what has? St. Paul has furnished us with the true and satisfactory answer, 1 Corinthians 12:11: "All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." No primitive Christian had any promise of this particular gift to him: all he could do was, in view of its usefulness, to desire it: God the Holy Spirit, as Sovereign granted it, or as Sovereign denied it. Some believers received power, others received it not: none had any right to expect it till it was bestowed; and for a believer to have accused himself of unbelief only because he had it not, would have marked criminal oversight of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, by whom it was not promised to any exercise of faith. What He then granted or withheld from individuals, as Sovereign, he has since, as Sovereign, withheld from the church. He was the best judge of the ends of the gift; and by His actual decision in the matter He has taught us that no good end would be answered by its continuance. He has withdrawn it as Sovereign, and because He saw it was best for the church it should be withdrawn. Doubtless He would again communicate it, if he saw it was needful; but He is the best judge of the necessity, not we. The expectation derived from the supposed approaching advent of our blessed Lord in person, cannot be entertained by those who believe, as I do, that the passages alleged in proof of an immediate bodily manifestation of our Lord on earth lead to the contrary conclusion: that he will not return till the end of the world, after his long spiritual reign, and after the last rebellion of his foes. Nor should they who do look for a bodily advent near at hand expect miraculous gifts till he really is come, because at his first advent they did not precede his coming, but were its consequences.

Nothing, therefore, in the history of the gift, or in the promises of Scripture, or in the circumstances of the church, lead us to expect it. What has been stigmatized as unbelief in this matter, is the exercise of a sound judgment: what is often termed faith, is properly enthusiasm, because it is an expectation contrary to the tenor of Scripture. And if in any case, without such an explicit revelation from God as cannot by any possibility be resolved into fancy, a person, who had wrought up his mind to the expectation of effecting a miraculous cure, should excite another to expect with

certainty miraculous relief, both would be enthusiastic. And if the one should ask the other, as was lately asked, "Do you believe that unbelief alone hinders you from being cured?" and the sufferer should acknowledge that belief; both the question and acknowledgment would display an ignorance of the sovereignty which God has always exercised in this matter, and an expectation which; being against the evidence of Scripture, must be esteemed presumption: and whatever cure followed might illustrate the wonderful power of the imagination, but would be no miracle of faith.

Yet I am far from denying the possibility of miracles; nor would I pretend to assert that they will not be again wrought. God may see fit again to bestow the gift; and should it be restored, I should feel no reluctance to welcome the proof of it. All I contend for is, that, till we have a new special revelation to that effect, or the gift is shewn by plain evidence to be in fact restored, we have no ground to expect its restoration. I am aware that some consider recent events in Scotland as manifesting, if not the restoration of the gift of miracles, at least the revival of the gift of tongues; but several considerations convinced me from the beginning that those pious persons were under delusion.

(1). God has never yet set the seal of miracles to error: else where is the value of them as the seal of truth? But, unless I am misinformed, and misunderstand their writings, these pious persons have embraced the unscriptural notion that all men, even though they believe not in Christ, are so pardoned that sin is no more imputed to them than to the believer; that their guilt is done away through Christ, just in the same sense that his is; and that the only difference between them and him is, that he has become through faith really righteous, while they remain through unbelief essentially depraved.

(2). The foreign tongues spoken in the primitive church were always intelligible to the speakers, as far as we know (1 Corinthians 14:4, 1 Corinthians 14:16-17); but the sounds uttered by these persons are intelligible to none. Now, we are to expect the revival of the same gifts, and not the communication of new ones.

(3). The gifts of the Spirit were given in the primitive church for direct and specific uses; but, these are of no direct use.

(4). Tongues were given as a sign to unbelievers, not for them that believe (1 Corinthians 14:22); but these have so little proof of their being miraculous that unbelievers are much more likely to be alienated from Christianity, than convinced by them.

(5). God has laid down an express rule, that none should use the gift of tongues in the church except there were an interpreter present (1 Corinthians 14:28); but here there is said to be the gift of tongues without interpretation. Whatever evil there was at any time in using an unknown tongue without interpretation, there is now; whatever reason called forth the rule once, requires it now; and yet this gift cannot be exercised except in violation of that rule. Can we believe that God will communicate a supernatural gift in such a way that it must lie wholly dormant and useless, unless it be exercised against a rule which he Himself has commanded his church to observe?

All that has happened, therefore, among these pious persons, so far from justifying an expectation of the gifts, only proves how completely even the most pious persons may be deluded by an enthusiastic excitement. I am very far from the disposition to hold them up to scorn, feeling more

sympathy with an honest though hurtful enthusiasm, than I can with a sour and supercilious orthodoxy. Essential truths I believe them to hold they love our Lord Jesus Christ and while I heartily wish them reclaimed to sobriety, I can affectionately say, as taught by the Apostle, "Grace be with them all." Never let us forget, my dear reader, that if the aberrations of Enthusiasm are bad, the deficiencies of Worldliness are much worse. And although I have thought it right to set before you the evidence which has convinced me that it would be enthusiastic now to expect miraculous powers from the Holy Spirit, I should leave more than half my present duty undone if I did not endeavour to leave upon your mind a serious impression of what we may, and must, not only expect, but daily strive to obtain from Him. Our Lord has promised that the Holy Spirit shall abide with his church for ever (John 14:16, John 17:17-20; Acts 2:39; Romans 8:9). By Him God dwells among his people, (John 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:16). They are his temple, which he fills with his Holy Spirit, as he once filled the holy of holies with the brightness, which was the material emblem of his presence. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces of sin all who are truly convinced of it (John 16:8). He guides into all truth, by enlightening the mind, and by rendering the heart impressible (John 16:13; Ephesians 1:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:6). Particularly he makes Christ known, setting all his grace and glory before the mind (John 14:21, John 16:14). The principles and views originally imparted by Him, are by Him also strengthened; not merely by a favouring providence, but by his immediate operation upon the soul (Ephesians 3:16; Galatians 6:18). To Him we must ascribe our faith in all its actings; from its first feeble beginnings, when almost suppressed by doubts, to that triumphant exercise of it by which the believer is made more than conqueror in all the trials of life (Gal. 6:22; Ephesians 2:8). When we pray aright, it is He who has taught us to pray (Jude 1:20; Romans 8:26); when we act aright, it is He who guides and animates us to our duty (Romans 8:14): by Him alone we overcome sin (Romans 8:13): all the graces and good affections of the soul are His immediate gift (Galatians 5:22); and He is the chief author of all our consolation and joy (John 14:16-18). To what degrees, then, of spiritual understanding, grace, and consolation may each believer expect, under His guidance, to attain?

1. On the ground of unworthiness there can be no limit set to our expectations, because they depend on the merit of Christ, who has purchased the Holy Spirit for us. If spiritual aid were to be limited by our desert, we could have none. If we obtain any, it is through his desert, not our own. When it is granted to us at his intercession, it is granted to Him, not us to his merit, not ours. It is therefore limited, not by our merit, but His; and since His merit is infinite, the blessings granted to him for us might be infinite too, did nothing else prevent. No degrees of spiritual influence can be beyond what Christ has deserved to receive on our behalf; and on this ground, therefore, our expectations can receive no limitation.

2. Again: if we measure them by the goodness of God no limit can be set to them. For he must delight in blessing his creatures, as far as he can do it justly, in proportion to his benevolence. Now he can bless believers justly with grace, because he grants it to the merit of Christ, and he can do this justly to an infinite degree, because Christ's merit is infinite: therefore justice does not hinder the highest exercises of God's benevolence to us: and since that benevolence is infinite, if nothing else prevented, our blessings might be infinite also.

3. Again, if we measure our expectation by the power of the Holy Spirit, that likewise is infinite. He can form his creatures, at his pleasure, to any degrees of intelligence, holy love, and joy. In this view, therefore, our expectations can have no limit.

4. It is equally impossible to set any limit to them if they are to be measured by the nature of Divine Truth, which is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit communicates his grace. He always enlightens, sanctifies, and consoles by impressing on the mind some revealed truth, not otherwise (John 17:17); and to expect his influence in any other way would be enthusiastic, because without warrant of Scripture. But who can tell the extent of revealed truth? What is told us of God's glorious perfections, which are revealed in Scripture? Why, that they are "above all blessing and praise." What is the limit to the love of Christ? "It passes knowledge." What are the riches of his grace? "Unsearchable." What is the joy believers have in Christ? It is "Unspeakable;" and so must its cause be. In short, the perfections of God, the grace of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the ways of Providence, the blessedness of the heavenly world, and other truths connected with these, form subjects of thought which are boundless, and therefore may be endless sources of sanctification.

5. Again: if we measure our hopes by the capacity of man to receive spiritual knowledge and grace—which is obviously bounded, and perhaps, as compared with the capacity of some of God's creatures, is very much circumscribed indeed still there is no limit which we can set to expectation, because we cannot say to what extent our capacity may enlarge. A fine intellect, be it remembered, is by no means necessary to high views of the great sanctifying truths of the Gospel. "They are revealed to babes;" so that a very small share of sense will enable a person, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to understand them nearly as well as they would be understood by the most intelligent: for they are discovered more by the heart than by the understanding (2 Corinthians 4:6); and the vigour of the affections depends not on the force of the intellect. As each believer, whatever may be his force of intellect or its weakness, meditates on the love and goodness of God as seen in the work of Christ, it perpetually enlarges on his view; and still as it enlarges calls forth new emotions of wonder, joy, and gratitude. And where must this end? What believer can say that he knows of the grace of God in the Gospel all that he can know? or that he loves God as much as he can love? On the contrary, each new discovery which the heart makes prepares the way for more; each additional degree of gratitude is but a new instrument of further improvement, So that, if we judge of our expectations by our capacity of grace, we must again determine that we cannot set a limit to them.

6. Nor, again, does the experience of God's people allow us to set any limit. Sickness, indeed, and the decay of age, may altogether suspend, or much interrupt, the exercise of the faculties; so that eminent believers, unable to fix their minds in thought, have had no power left them but to rest, with the feebleness almost of infancy, on the goodness of God in Christ: and for such physical infirmities we must prepare: but while the exercise of the faculties have been allowed, how continually have God's servants increased in knowledge and in grace, even to the end? Theirs has been truly the progress of the morning, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. To mention but a few instances: how decidedly progressive was the grace granted to Professor Halyburton and President Edwards, to the Missionary Brainerd, to Alleine, to Janeway, to Fletcher, and, in more modern times, to that excellent minister of Christ, Dr. Payson of New England. To all these, high as their attainments were, death alone brought the termination of their progress in grace; nor can anyone say how much further each might have advanced, had they been ordained to continue longer upon earth.

7. Lastly: if our best consideration of the subject sets no limit to our hopes, does the language of Scripture limit them? On the contrary, for the most eminent saints, in the purest churches, in the best age of the church, did St. Paul entreat the Lord that their love "might abound yet more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment," (Php 1:9 see Matthew 22:39; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). He exhorted them, though already distinguished "for the work of faith and labour of love," yet to abound in it more and more (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:1). Exactly in the same tone did St. Peter teach all believers, including the most advanced in that age of peculiar grace; when many, through faith in Christ, rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory; still to grow in grace and in spiritual knowledge (1 Peter 1:8; 2 Peter 3:18). And if, according to St. Paul, the believer who gazes at the glory of God reflected in the Gospel (as the sun in a mirror), is gradually changed into a resemblance of its brightness, from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18); and if, when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, through the internal influence of the Holy Spirit the believer may know so much of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, as to be filled with all the fulness of God; and if God is able to effect this to a degree "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think," according to the power that worketh in us, "and not by any strange and unheard of exercise of power (Ephesians 3:14-21); then no one can, without sinfully limiting the Holy One of Israel" (Psalms 78:41), limit his own expectations of grace. Enlarge, then, your expectations, Christian reader, till they are worthy of the promises which God has given. Ask from him, and have, the highest degrees of humility, contrition, holiness, gratitude, joy, and devotedness. Expect them, for Christ's sake, and not your own; as given to his intercession, and not for your worthy conduct. Expect them directly from God the Spirit, not from your own efforts; yet in proportion to your efforts, and not without them.

Study, therefore, Divine truth much, and meditate on it deeply; apply your heart to understanding; cry after knowledge; lift up your voice for understanding; seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures, "then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:2-5). Be much in prayer; be diligent in common duties; grieve not the Holy Spirit by known sin, particularly by conformity to the world, by luxurious self indulgence, sloth, covetousness, and angry contention with other Christians; dread the indulgence of a fierce, censorious zeal; mortify the natural love of disputation; and you may expect to receive from the God of all grace such enlarged communications of knowledge, grace, and consolation, as shall leave you a spirit of adoring lowliness, utterly unwilling to spend a moment in vain regret for the loss of miraculous gifts, or in any other regret, except that you cannot, even while here below, emulate the redeemed in a better world, by giving utterance to praises and thanksgivings as fervent and as uninterrupted as theirs.

FINIS.

FOOTNOTES:

See Mosheim's Church History.

Morning Watch, No. VIII. p. 857.

1. The Waldenses. In the year 1547 the Archbishop of Turin, among other charges against the Vaudois, brought the following: "Ils disent que les miracles qui se font en l'Eglise Romaine ne sont point veritables, sous ombre qu'ils n'en font point." (Leger. Histoire des Eglises Vaudoises, liv. i. p.

121).

2. Huss. "Nunc Ecclesia non indiget miraculis.....Sed haec necessaria in exordio ecclesiae fuerunt, ut enim ad fidem cresceret, miraculis fuerat nutrienda, quia etiam et nos cum arbusta plantamus tam diu eis aquam fundimus, quousque in terra ea convaluisse videamus; at si semel radicem fixerint, irrigatio cessabit.....Evangelium audivimus, evangelio consentimus, per evangelium in Christum credimus, nulla vidimus signa, nulla exigimus." (Huss: de Sanguine Christi).

Beza. See his Homilies on the Passion of Christ.

Bullinger. See his Commentary on Matthew 10:1, at large.

Luther was accused, by Maimbourg and others, of attempting in vain to cast out a devil. The true narrative is preserved by Seckendorf. "Puellam octodecim annorum ad Lutherum adduxerant quam obsessam a daemone esse aiebant.....inde Lutherus populum affatus est, monuitque, miraculis expellendi daemones hoc tempore locum non esse, neque plantatam jam ecclesiam opus illis habere, ritum quoque pontificium non esse sequendum, sed orationibus potius contra hunc spiritum utendum.....Deo etiam tempus et modum poni non debere, quo daemones ejicere vellet, ita enim Deum tentari; sed continuendas esse preces, et horam, quam Deus liberationi destinaverit, patienter expectandam." (Seckendorf: Historia Lutheranismi, lib. iii. p. 633.)

Musculus. "Divino itaque consilio factum est ut non miracula, sed Evangelii praedicatio duraret in orbe alioqui si in miraculis esset Electorum fides, male nobiscum ageretur ante quorum tempora miracula.....jam diu cessarunt. Usus eorum erat ut doctrina apostolorum confirmaretur." (Musculus on John 6:69.)

1. St. Augustine, in the 4th century. "Modo caro caeca non aperit oculos miraculo Domini, at cor caecum aperit oculos sermoni Domini. Modo non surgit mortale cadaver, resurgit anima quae mortua jacebat in vivo cadavere. Modo aures corporis surdae non aperiuntur, sed quam multi habent aures clausas cordis, quae tamen (verbo Dei penetrante) patescunt." (Augustine, cited by Huss in his Commentary on 1st Epistle to the Corinthians.)

Augustine certainly believed that miracles occasionally took place in his day, but not in virtue of the promises in Mark xvi. and elsewhere, nor by the communication of supernatural gifts to men, for he prefaces his narrative of miracles, in his work on the Church of God, thus: "Cur, inquiunt, nunc illa miracula quae praedicatis facta esse, non fiunt. Possem quidem dicere necessaria fuisse prius quam crederet mundus, ad hoc, ut crederet mundus.....etiam nunc fiunt miracula in ejus nomine, sive per sacramenta ejus, sive per orationes, vel memorias sanctorum ejus." (Augustine: de Civitate Dei.)

2. St. Isidore, in the 5th century. "Quod nunc ecclesia Dei miracula non facit quae sub Apostolis fiebat causa est, quia tunc oportebat mundum miraculis credere, nunc vero credentem oportet bonis operibus cornescere." (St. Isidore, cited by Huss in his Defence of Wickliff.) See also Du Pin, "Bibliothé que des Auteurs Ecclesiastiques," tom. iv. p.3, &c.

Fuller's Church History, p. 330.

Beza on John 14:16

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