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The "Church Standard"

16 SPRING STREET, SYDNEY, N.S.W.
For the Church in Australasia

12s. 6d. per annum, 6s. 6d. half yearly and 3s. 3d. quarterly

Carrington Press, 25 Bligh St. nr Hunter-st

Spiritual Healing

By the Bishop of Goulburn.

(A member of the Lambeth Conference Committee.)

Reprinted from the "Church Standard" of August 12, 1921.
(4th EDITION)

1. What is meant by spiritual healing? For the purposes of this article it is to be understood to mean not merely the healing of the soul, nor again merely the healing of the body, but the healing of body and soul through the spirit primarily, whether or not mental or physical processes of healing are associated with the spiritual. In this sense spiritual healing is the climax of an ascending scale of movements concerned with the relation between mind and body. Both psychological and medical science have proved and partly explained the fact that the mind has a wonderful power to harm or to heal the body. It is this fact which constitutes the element of truth in Christian Science, and accounts for the undoubted changes effected in the health and character of many Christian Scientists. What Christians and scientists resent and reject is the extraordinary theory of life which Christian Science offers to the world as the last word in Christianity and Science. That theory "is neither Christian nor scientific but pantheistic and illogical. Both Science and Christianity in their different spheres working by their distinctive laws, can and do produce by mental and spiritual means more certain results, because they make a less indiscriminate claim." There we may leave Christian Science. Our concern in this article is to explain the difference between mental healing and spiritual healing.

Here a word of caution is needed. We cannot fix hard and fast lines between different processes of healing, physical, mental and spiritual; the relations between body, soul (mind) and spirit are too intricate and close for strict separation. Nor must we use the term "spiritual healing" in such a way as to seem to disparage physical and mental methods of healing. God is the source of all healing, both of body and of soul; and all healing powers and instruments, methods and processes both physical and mental, may be spiritualised by a sense of divine vocation and devout exercise, or may be important factors in a case of healing in which the predominant factor is the spiritual element. Happily the various movements within the Church in the direction of spiritual healing are quite emphatic in their recognition of the ultimately divine character of medical methods and in their desire to work themselves on scientific lines and in loyal fellowship with the efforts of medical science. None the less it is important to understand the distinctive character of what is called spiritual healing. There is a clear difference between spiritual and mental healing. The latter is strictly speaking a branch of medical science. No doubt it has been practised and malpractised by quacks and amateurs, honest and otherwise. But the general public, so familiar with the vague and promiscuous idea of "faith-healing," is scarcely conscious of the remarkable development of psychotherapy, to give mental healing its technical title. Under this branch of medical science come the methods known as hypnotism and treatment by suggestion, and in particular the method known as psycho-analysis, which briefly means the tracing, disentangling, redirecting, and so transforming of the primitive racial instincts, such as fear, sex, self-assertion, which are at work secretly in the sub-conscious self and are often responsible for various symptoms of physical and mental disorder. Vivid glimpses of psycho-therapeutic treatment and achievement in cases of neurasthenia and shell-shock are to be found in Fleet-Surgeon Hadfield's paper on "the psychology of power in the volume of essays, entitled "The Spirit."

What then is the difference between mental and spiritual healing? A committee of Canadian bishops in 1920 expressed the opinion that "mental healing depends upon the presence of the gift of healing in the healer, whereas in spiritual healing

the personality of the agent is of no account, the healing power proceeding from God in answer to simple humble faith and dependence upon Him." This distinction seems to me contrary in part to the facts of the case. Doctors working on psychotherapeutic lines make no claim to the possession of a gift or to the exercise of a power. On the other hand, Mr. Hickson, while insisting that sufferers shall not think of him, but of Christ, speaks of "those whom God has called to be channels of His healing power" as being conscious of a force within them which may be transmitted to others with curative effect." The true distinction seems to me to lie in two directions: (1) Mental healing is subjective in its aim. The suggestions of the agent are directed towards arousing or reinforcing the mental and moral forces of the patient's nature to assert their supremacy over the disorder. Spiritual healing is objective in its aim. The agent aims at helping the patient to realise the actual presence of Christ waiting to heal soul and body. (2) The two methods differ in the point at which they are applied. Human nature is practically triple—physical psychical and spiritual—body, soul (mind), and spirit. Mental healing virtually ignores the spiritual, and aims at reinforcing the psychical or mental with a view to its controlling and restoring the physical. Spiritual healing aims primarily at awakening the spiritual to realise itself as the point of contact with the purpose and power of God, and so to fulfil its own function of controlling, restoring and transforming both the psychical and the physical. Mr. Hickson is right in insisting that "all the work of healing that is done on the physical and mental planes, unless a spiritual force be brought into it, is limited to those planes by the universal law that nothing can rise above its source." (3) There is a third difference. Mr. Hickson points out that mental healing demands some power of conscious co-operation on the part of the patient, and cannot affect the cases most in need of healing, in which the "personality itself is affected, the mind deranged, the will paralysed, and the mental faculties debased." Spiritual healing has in some such cases created the very power to co-operate. In biblical language, Christ's healing power has "worked in them both to will and to do."

III. What are the methods of spiritual healing? First and always, the prayer of faith. There may be one or more outward means, or none. The Canadian bishops had submitted to them cases of healing in answer respectively to prayer

with anointing, prayer with the laying on of hands, prayer with both anointing and laying on of hands, prayer with Holy Communion, and prayer alone. But these spiritual methods may be combined with medical. The Bishop of Assam, whose evidence at the Lambeth Conference was so arresting, anointed an old lady of 86 for cancer of the breast in 1919 at Singapore. From that day a discharge began which reduced the cancer steadily. The doctor, who had been giving X-ray treatment discontinued it and watched results. At last the growth became so small that he was able to remove it. The old lady went through the operation splendidly, and is now continuing her fifty years' work of teaching in a Chinese mission school.

The greatest experiment yet made in the new movement is the "Christian Healing Mission" of Mr. J. M. Hickson, an Anglican layman (Australian by birth) who, after doing good work on a smaller scale in London, undertook a long series of missions in America with the increasingly strong approval and definite sanction of the American bishops and clergy. He held some ninety missions, gave numerous addresses to clergy, to theological students, and to congregations on the healing ministry of the Church as the sacramental realisation of the healing Presence of Christ in the Church. The services for healing were crowded. Clergy, sisterhoods, nurses, ambulance men, all lent a hand in ordering the work, and in some places the police lined the aisles and helped to marshall the sick. First came the stretcher cases, then the children (mostly victims of infantile paralysis) were carried to the step. Then, sometimes for hours, came the long procession of the sick and lame. After Mr. Hickman had prayed and laid his hands upon each sufferer, a bishop or priest gave his blessing, the congregation meanwhile singing a hymn from time to time, but mostly praying silently, and endeavouring to realise for themselves and others the presence of the healing Christ.

All religions met in these Anglican churches at the mission services. Twelve hundred Mexicans, mostly Roman Catholics, came on a pilgrimage to seek healing. Jews came to "the man who was so near God"; members of the Greek Church knelt, repeating their Kyrie Eleison; and people who had wandered away from the Christian faith to Christian Science and New Thought, came back once more to their Church." We are reminded of the truth put so tersely by Mrs. Horace Porter, "By the New Thought we are trained to inde-

pendent employment of a Power; by old Old Faith we are trained to absolute dependence on a person." On his way to India Mr. Hickson held some of his services in the Coptic churches with the sanction and blessing of the Patriarch. In India the healing mission has appealed not only to Christians, but to Hindu and Mohammedan alike. One bishop was asked by a letter from some twenty Hindus in a large town hundreds of miles away from a recent mission to arrange for their town to have a mission, too.

Four impressions of these missions may be left to tell their own tale. (1) A Canadian professor went to a mission full of theories of psychotherapy, but found that they failed to explain what he saw, and came to the conclusion that it was indeed the working of Christ Himself. "If you speak," he said, "with anyone who was there, they do not speak of Mr. Hickson; his presence in the Cathedral is almost forgotten, but they all speak of that wonderful, over-powering consciousness of the presence of God in the midst of the great throng." (2) Bishop Rhinelander, in his address to the diocese of Pennsylvania in May, 1920, said:—

Mr. Hickson stakes everything on two great truths in combination—the living power of Christ in the Church, and the efficacy of penitence to provide a sure entrance for that power in human life. He insists that all the healing done is spiritual healing, the direct immediate action of the Holy Spirit on us as spiritual beings. The curing of physical disorders and diseases is secondary, not primary. . . . a sign, as in our Lord's days on earth, of the spiritual recreation and renewal which has taken place. . . . The sick find the surest and deepest reality of cure not in the relief of bodily infirmity and pain, but in the knowledge of forgiveness. This servant of God has brought to many a new sense of our Lord's real and living presence in the Church. He has brought us back to the very heart of our religion, and shown us the secret of the power which makes possible what were else utterly impossible.

(3) Bishop Vincent, of S. Ohio, wrote to Mr. Hickson:—

You are doing a good work in bringing us all back to a fresh realisation of the healing ministry of religion, and in placing that ministry just where Jesus planned it, viz., not in the special gifts of the healer, but in the power of the patient's own faith and prayer, and in the symbolic laying on of hands, all in entire submission to God's will embodied in His laws, natural as well as spiritual. . . . The great thing in such work as ours is to keep the emphasis right, as I think you try to do, viz., first on spiritual healing. Otherwise, with over-emphasis on the mere physical healing, there is danger of reaction from faith and religion in those not physically helped.

(4) One more testimony, this time from India. A C.M.S. missionary writes:—

The predominant conviction everywhere appears to have been: Christ the Lord has been in our midst; Jesus of Nazareth has been passing by present to heal and save as of old. He has wrought instant and wonderful cures in the case of some; He has set many more on the pathway of gradual restoration to full health and activity. And in healing men's bodies. He has made Himself known as the living Saviour of their souls; as of old, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," has accompanied, or actually preceded His "Rise up and walk."

IV. What is the Church going to do with this fact of spiritual healing? There are various associations in England at work in this movement. The Guild of Health is "an interdenominational society designed to promote a deeper interest in the relation between the spiritual life and bodily health." The Guild of S. Raphael is a guild of Anglican communicants, working for the revival of the ministry of healing by sacrament and intercession on definite lines of spiritual discipline. Both guilds submitted their literature to the Lambeth Conference, and joined with other similar societies in a weighty appeal for an authoritative lead to be given to the Church. The Conference had also the report of the Canadian bishops. The Committee of Conference recommended (a) the recognition and regulation by national and provincial churches of the ministry and gifts of healing; (b) the appointment of a committee by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the general guidance of the Church, to report upon the whole question, and to suggest a revision of the office for the visitation of the sick and the provision of new forms of service for use on behalf of the sick. The Conference resolved to ask for such a committee, but refrained from any decision for or against the recognition and regulation of healing ministries. This omission has disappointed the advocates of immediate recognition, but probably the postponement was wise. There are dangers to be avoided. The findings of the special committee, which has now been appointed, will be sent at once to the different churches of the Anglican communion, and the delay will be compensated by the advantage of acting upon the judgment of a select body of competent and representative minds. Recognition will be surer, and regulation wiser in the light of the verdict of their knowledge and experience. We can afford to wait for a little longer for the sorely-needed new office for the visitation of the sick, to replace the present office, which dwells upon the spiritual discipline of suffering in union with Christ to the almost entire exclusion of all thought of the healing ministry of the living Christ. Two things meanwhile can be done without delay. The first is the formation of circles of intercessors, such as those which Mr. Hickson founds under the title of Healing Prayer Circles. We have not yet tried what can be done for the sick and suffering of our parishes by assigning them to the care of a few faithful souls who will pray daily for them in pri-

vate, and once a week together in church. The second is the provision of such teaching and training for our congregations as will awaken the corporate faith of the Church and unlock its latent capacity to co-operate with the Lord who is waiting to heal, but cannot heal, because of our unbelief. Limited faith on our part means limited power on His part. Such teaching will require a fresh study of prayer and of the Gospel story. But it will result in fresh inspiration for many a jaded ministry. At present "we are working at half-power." The release of the full power of Christ would mean life from the dead for the whole Church.

May I add the following notes by way of supplement to my article in this issue?—

(1) Information and leaflets with regard to the Guild of Health may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Guild of Health, 6, York Buildings, Adelphi, London, W.C. 2. Its magazine is the Guild of Health Quarterly, 2/4 a year, post free. For the Guild of S. Raphael write to the Hon. Secretary, 27c Branhams Gardens, London, S.W. 5. For the Christian Healing Mission write to the General Secretary, 130 Sutherland Avenue, Maida Vale, London, 9. The magazine of the movement, "The Healer," 7½d., post free, monthly, may be obtained from the same address; also papers about the Healer Prayer Circle Union.

(2) My knowledge of these movements, apart from their literature, is derived partly from the Warden of the Guild of S. Raphael, Canon Roseveare, Vicar of Lewisham, one of my commissaries, and partly from Mr. Hickson himself, who was a fellow-passenger on the Orontes from Port Said to Colombo, on his way from Egypt to India. I was associated with him in a wonderful case of healing on board. He laid hands with prayer upon a Scottish churchwoman paralysed in the lower limbs by nervous breakdown and travelling as a helpless and seemingly hopeless invalid with her family to see soldier sons in India. At Mr. Hickson's request I drew up a short form of prayer, in the middle of which he laid his hands upon the invalid with prayers of his own, after which I gave her a bishop's blessing with the laying on of hands also. I cannot describe the impressiveness of his ministry—it was instinct with the sense of the healing presence of our Lord. An hour later, or less, the invalid walked unaided up on to the deck. I have heard from her since in India; her recovery has proved lasting. For another impression of Mr. Hickson see the Bishop of Willochra's article on "The Gift of Healing" in the August A.B.M. Review.

(3) I understood from Mr. Hickson that he was hoping to visit Australia in 1923. In view of that possibility, it is important that Australian church people should learn all that they can about the movement which he represents. I think I ought to add that I was myself at first inclined to share the doubts felt by various churchmen with regard to some aspects of Mr. Hickson's mission in England and America. That preliminary hesitation may add weight to what I have written in this issue.

LEWIS GOULBURN.