

The Centenary of Faith Healing

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THIS spring just 100 years ago a movement began which has become amazingly important for the whole Church and the influence of which is still increasing more and more. In this country, Moore Hickson started this movement in 1882. But not very many are aware that 40 years previously a German pastor had been led by God to renew this gift of healing in the name of Jesus. It is not too much to say that at this date a new chapter of Church history began. One of the most strange things is that Mr. Hickson himself did not apparently know anything about his great predecessor Blumhardt. I have, however, found some references to Blumhardt's work in Britain. Firstly, a Swiss friend reported about Blumhardt at a meeting in Belfast in 1859. Secondly, in 1881 Rev. W. Guest wrote a booklet entitled *Pastor Blumhardt and his Work* in which he used Zuendel's biography. In the same year Rev. W. E. Boardman mentions Blumhardt in his booklet *The Lord that Healeth*. Thirdly, Blumhardt's brother wrote an introduction to Guest's booklet. This brother was trained in Basle and became a missionary in Abyssinia. Later he worked for an English Mission in India, and finally lived as a minister in Tonbridge.

It was therefore J. C. Blumhardt, pastor of the little village of Moettlingen in the Black Forest of Germany, to whom God first entrusted this gift of healing.

Moettlingen was privileged to have for a century the uninterrupted ministry of godly men.

The first of them is said to have prayed again and again for blessed successors. In Wuerttembergia, to which this part of the Black Forest belongs, rationalism was partly overcome by

a living pietism led by men such as Bengel, Oettinger, etc. Blumhardt himself was brought up in an evangelical family, reading the Bible from his earliest childhood. However, he wrote later of those days. "I was struck with the great difference between the Christians of the Scripture and those of our day. How much the Lord and the Apostles say about the Holy Spirit! But I could not find Him living in our Church in the same way as they record. In fact, I could not find the gifts of the Holy Spirit possessed by the early Christians at all. Even in good devotional books I found something missing which the Scriptures contain; above all I did not find the words of the Bible verified in the lives of the Christians. . . . In my younger days I was longing for the fullness of the Holy Spirit which I could not find either in the doctrine or in the articles of the Church. I was longing to have the Holy Spirit within me, and I felt a poverty which should not exist after 1800 years of witness to Christ and His Apostles. I thought all Christians must be conscious of this same lack." He was "hungry for reality" and reality came into his life. His influence upon his congregation was strong from the beginning. A group of pietists who had kept away began to attend his services—They realized that he "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

It was in the spring of 1840 that a pious girl in his parish showed very strange signs of devil possession. Although she prayed in her conscious life, suddenly evil spirits cried out from her against her will and she could not help it. For a long time Blumhardt was very perplexed, for not having had any experience in this realm he did not know how to help. Once the doctor, who came from another place asked: "Is there no clergyman in this village who can pray? I can do nothing." This and other suggestions moved Blumhardt to pray continuously what God's will was and what He wanted him to do. As a result he and a small circle of friends joined in a prayer fellowship. Blumhardt received the conviction that he should not cease praying for the girl and should lay hands on her in the name of Christ, being Conqueror over all demons to-day just as much as 1800 years ago. He described his first step in this unknown country as follows: "A kind of groaning caught me, suddenly it came upon me from above without my own thinking. I leapt forward with firm steps, took her stiffly cramped hands, and calling her name with

a loud voice, said in her ear, although she was unconscious: 'Clasp your hands and pray "Lord Jesus, help me."' We have seen long enough what the devil can do, now we will see what the Lord can do.' Immediately the girl awoke, spoke the words he had told her, and became quite normal. Although this was not the last step in the struggle which continued for several years, it was the turning point in Blumhardt's life. He said later: "At this time the Saviour stood at the door and knocked. I opened the door and He said: 'I will enter with all the power of grace which My Father has given Me. I will enter your heart to prepare for My full coming. When I knocked before nobody heard My voice. You were all too busy with your political and theological quarrels.'"

But meanwhile Blumhardt was tested for a long time, during which even most of his friends warned him not to go further on. One demon having been driven out, a "legion" of others came back and tortured the girl and her whole family. The more they felt the coming decision, the more they fought against Christ. Once when Blumhardt called the name of Jesus the voice cried "That name I cannot hear nor bear." More than once the poor girl tried to commit suicide, but on two occasions, lightning, sent at the right moment, prevented her. We cannot here give fuller details. Some things which happened were so dreadful that even Blumhardt's friend and biographer did not publish them.

It was Christmas 1843 when the famous last scene in this strange warfare took place. The girl's sister suddenly shouted for 15 or 20 minutes with a voice so that most of the village heard it. "Jesus is victor, Jesus is victor." After that not only was the family freed once and for all from devil possession, but also from all bodily diseases (e.g. a shortened foot, and other things). From then onwards the family became Blumhardt's most fruitful helpers.

This cry "Jesus is victor, Jesus is victor" became the motto and watchword of the German movement of Spiritual Healing. What does it signify? Let Zuendel answer: "Blumhardt experienced the powerful interference of the living Christ exactly the same way as he had read of it in the Bible when a child. He realized that as much of Divine redemption comes into a man's life as there is a believing desire for it. To his friends who had warned him not to

continue in this way he wrote: "You think that the supposition that there is a Saviour should not be taken too strictly. This is exactly the point. Is it an exaggeration or not, to believe the words of Christ, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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.'"

Some days after the victory he wrote to his best friend, and antecessor Chr. Barth: "I dared to go on, for how could God fail to fulfil that for which I had cried daily for years according to His word. Whether I believed rightly or not, the day of judgment will make clear; and the Lord's mercy will justify me, as He did justify me." We can imagine what happened after the victorious conclusion of this struggle. Blumhardt wrote; "Everything concerning illness in my parish began to be changed. Seldom did a medical man appear; the people preferred to pray. Certain diseases, especially amongst new-born children, seemed entirely to cease; and the general state of health became better and better."

We refrain here, as Blumhardt did during all his life, to quote healed cases, though we could give an enormous number. Jesus Himself knew why he forbid those who were healed to say anything to men about His healing. The mystery and the blessing of it could be destroyed. Blumhardt used to say speaking to friends, "You know, *this* is not Moettlingen." But what else was Moettlingen? Not the struggle with the evil spirits but the result of it, namely, the revival. Blumhardt built his great hope for the whole Church on this revival.

It began in this way: A week after the healing of the devil possessed girl a man of very loose and deceitful character came to Blumhardt to confess his sins. After having found forgiveness he went back a changed man, and brought others to the minister. After that there was no break in this movement of penitence, although Blumhardt did not press anybody in the least, but simply went on praying and preaching. He wrote: "The impression which his forgiveness made upon me and upon this man, I never can forget. It was an inexpressible joy that beamed out of the face of the man. I seemed to be drawn into quite a new and unknown sphere in which holy spiritual powers were working. I could not

explain it and did not try to do so, but I went on in a simple and cautious way; and other sinners followed to ask for forgiveness."

He realized that the connection between the struggle and the revival was not small but very close indeed. As he wrote, "The latter is won by the former in the fullest sense. It was by the struggle and the victory that the satanical powers were broken so that they cannot do more for the present. Penitence is not made by man, but has its origin in God. It is the Gospel that works penitence. What is flowing out of my own penitence is working penitence in others. Even if I preach the pure Gospel, but it does not come out of my own penitence, it is like a bubble of soap working against the walls of a fortification."

Zuendel took part in this revival which began in Moettlingen, and describes it as follows: "The Kingdom of Heaven would conquer the earth with the same glory as was revealed in the Apostle's time, but is covered with a veil. Yet now in our days this veil seemed to be lifted slightly and a beam of the glory of Christ's Kingdom seemed to have shined as through a break in the clouds."

What distinguished Blumhardt from nearly all contemporary Christians can best be explained in his own words, "Why should all Christian life always remain so poor? Why do even believers, seeing a revival, say that only very little of it will remain? Why such unbelief? Why should we not experience something quite new?—Yes, we must, and we shall, when we have a new outpouring of the Spirit. So I lay the burden upon you to pray for it; and then we shall see great things happening both here and far off."

As his hopes grew higher for great things, he himself became more humble. The revival went on to Bad Boll and all who saw him there in his splendid new home realized his simplicity and humility amidst all the miracles. These were happening every day afresh, and attracted people from all continents, poor as well as rich. "The miracle," he wrote, "of the constant presence of the Lord Jesus was the usual, so that this miracle became the natural, and we did not make much fuss about it." Is this not the real view of the New Testament?

With regard to the question of Spiritual Healing it caused the same revolution of thought as that which the New Testa-

ment always causes but which is often forgotten for many centuries. It was the simple truth that illness is not the natural but the unnatural because it is the result of sin. Not necessarily, of course, the sins of the sick man, but the sin of all mankind, and that the works of God should be made manifest. Blumhardt was the first man for centuries to realize that Christendom is wrong to acquiesce in disease and suffering. It may be right for the sufferer himself, for all things work together for good to them that love God ; but that certainly does not mean that the other Christians in the world may be unbelieving and lazy.

Thus Blumhardt says : " If any one tells me that some evil comes from God with such and such a purpose, but that faith is the remedy : if that person is too lazy to pray with faith, such an absence of faith is sin. It is to be noted that laziness is the cause of a great deal of unbelief. We would rather run 40 miles to be cured in some profane way, than faithfully bend the knee and pray with fervor. It is much easier to resign to God's will than to push away the bars which stop God's help."

Blumhardt realized too that we usually are not honest in this respect. For although we do not dare to ask for God's help yet we do run to the doctor or even to the magician. But how could the medical man replace with his art what those who carry on the Gospel ought to know and do? Blumhardt is here thinking especially of mental diseases, but not entirely. He acknowledges the work of doctors who though mostly not believers in Christ, worked more faithfully than Christians who were content to say to the suffering people, " Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled . . . notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful."

Blumhardt was convinced that the gift of Spiritual Healing which the Lord gave to the Apostles and to the Church, never would have been lost if the Church had not lost her full faith. And is it not true the living body of Christ should have the gifts which the early Church had? If not, something must be wrong with the Church. It is not an excuse to say that the gifts have changed in the course of history and that the Holy Spirit has sent other " gifts " instead, e.g. the " gift " of monasteries or the " gift " of science or the " gift " of missionary work, etc. As long

as diseases are a reality (and not imaginary only as the so-called "Christian Science" falsely teaches to this day). and we need it, we need the gift of healing, not as a gift of nature but as a gift of the Holy Spirit to help sufferers through Christ's love and to show the world, as Blumhardt said, "The devil has done much, but the Saviour can do more."

Although the New Testament seems to imply that this gift is granted only to certain members of the Church, Blumhardt, as well as the English healers (e.g. Hickson, Maillard, R. Spread), have said otherwise. The following is typical, "I have always taught that no person has any special gift of healing which may not be the possession of others : and I have emphatically disclaimed any special gifts of my own. I have confidently affirmed that all Christians can be channels or instruments of Divine healing, since all can pray and become transmitters of the love of God" (J. Maillard).

There are still many questions unsolved which we cannot even touch here, e.g. how far can doctors and clergy cooperate in Spiritual healing work ? or whether or not any limitations exist for Spiritual healing ? To the latter I would be inclined to answer, "Not any more than there was limitation to the Lord and His disciples." However, the main thing and the most important question is not theoretical, but practical. Are we prepared to become immersed to the same degree with the Holy Spirit as a man like Blumhardt, living 100 years ago, attained ? Do we really believe that all is possible with God ? If we believe this, as all great Spiritual Healers have and do ; then there is no need in the world to-day, which could not be met and healed by faith. Spiritual healing by Christ's disciples is a testimony to the fact that Christ is living and that He is coming again. It is proof that He will be on earth as He is in heaven.