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VII

'SIGNS AND WONDERS'

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from Heaven: and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?... And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. — Acts ix. 3, 4, 8, 9.

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth): how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. — 2 Cor, xii. 2–4.

All my life I have been interested in what are sometimes spoken of as bodily manifestations, though I have had a considerable degree of misgiving. From my earliest years of responsible work for God I have approached all such manifestations, if not with a hostile mind, certainly with a mind deliberately cautious. I have always felt that anything claiming to be of the supernatural must have credentials which placed its genuineness beyond cavil. Nevertheless, I have this feeling also—and with regard to The Army I have it particularly — that there is a place for these outward demonstrations which have undoubtedly been witnessed by us, and the like of which are recorded in various periods of religious history.

The first instances of manifestation to which I was introduced were seen in the extraordinary breaking down of ungodly persons in the presence of the Spirit of God. I have seen men in our Meetings, who were raving and blaspheming when the service began, suddenly broken down as though some physical power had laid them prostrate on the floor, and after a time of silence, weeping, and penitence, they were confessing their sins and imploring the mercy of God. In



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many such cases the whole of their subsequent lives was changed, and no question could arise in the minds of any of those who knew them as to the reality of the experience.

One of the earliest instances of this which I met with was not in connexion with Army work at all. As a young lad I visited Cardiff from time to time and stayed with our friends Mr. and Mrs. Billups. During one of these visits Robert Aitken, vicar of Pendeen, in Cornwall, and father of Canon Hay Aitken, was conducting a 'mission' in St. John's Church there.

The mission was very successful. Night after night the churches were crowded, and many scores of persons crowded together at the Communion rail and were afterwards met in a schoolroom by Mr. Aitken, who exhorted them as penitents. Lad as I was, I was detailed by Mr. Aitken, who had known my father, to look after some lads of my own age, and I became somewhat intimate with the inner work of the mission. It was there also that I became acquainted with one of the most delightful men who has ever crossed my path. This was Mr. (later Canon) Howells, a Welshman, one of the saints of God, so intimate with spiritual things and so gentle and lovable in his whole personality as to be a brother of all the Church of Christ.

In the course of this mission some opposition and ridicule developed in the town, and Mr. Aitken was specially attacked for certain remarks he had made in a sermon on retribution, and it was indeed a tremendous sermon. I was walking up the street one day when I saw Mr. Aitken approaching. A number of men, on seeing him, flocked to the door of a public-house and jeered at him as he passed, one of them offering a pot of liquor. Mr. Aitken turned sharply round on this poor fellow, and said to him in his deep voice, but with extreme tenderness, 'Oh, my lammie! how will you bear the fires of Hell?' At those words the man instantly dropped on the pavement. He fell like a piece of wood, apparently losing all consciousness for the moment. One or two people assisted him, Mr. Aitken looking on, and presently there on the sidewalk he came to himself and sought the mercy of God, afterwards, as I learned, becoming an earnest Christian man.

Later on, in Meetings of The Army, we had far more wonderful scenes of this nature. During an 'All-Night of Prayer', for example, there would be a certain movement apparent among the



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people, and sometimes when prayer was being offered, and at other times during the singing or the address of a particular speaker, here and there among the audience people would be observed to fall to the ground. At times they appeared to fall with great violence, yet I have never known of anyone being really hurt. On some occasions there would be perhaps in a meeting of several hundreds of people only half a dozen such manifestations, although I have known as many as fifty or sixty in one gathering. Sometimes the younger people were in the majority, but at other times those thus influenced were mainly from the older portions of the audience.

One case is recorded in my journal of January 16, 1878, of a meeting following our half-yearly Council of War at Whitechapel, when nearly all our evangelists were present:

At night Corbridge led a Hallelujah Meeting till 10 o'clock. Then we commenced an All-Night of Prayer. Two hundred and fifty people were present till 1 a.m.; two hundred or so after. A tremendous time. From the very first Jehovah was passing by, searching, softening, and subduing every heart. The power of the Holy Ghost fell on Robinson' and prostrated him. He nearly fainted twice. The brother of the Blandys entered into full liberty, and then he shouted, wept, clapped his hands, danced, amid a scene of the most glorious and heavenly enthusiasm. Others meanwhile were lying prostrate on the floor, some of them groaning aloud for perfect deliverance. I spoke twice in the course of the night; so did Corbridge. He did well. . . . It was a blessed night.

In many cases these manifestations occurred among those who had resisted the light breaking in on their lives. In some cases they had resisted the call to surrender themselves to some particular service or self-denial, or to abandon some doubtful thing. Not infrequently persons who seemed most unlikely to be the subjects of these special influences — some of whom had indeed openly said, "I will take care that nothing of this kind ever happens to me' — had been over. come. Others, again, would be sincere seekers after higher things; perhaps in some of these last cases there was a predisposition to yield easily to the influence of the hour. I always looked upon such — although it seems almost a contradiction to say so — as the least satisfactory. All the same, judged by their subsequent experience, they often proved to have been most graciously and wonderfully blessed.



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My own course, and the course adopted by most of our leaders in the presence of these influences, was, while never opposing or deprecating them, to take care to have the subjects of them immediately, or at any rate as soon as it was possible, removed from the public gathering. They were usually taken to adjoining rooms, the men separate from the women, and quietly laid down. Wherever possible, especially in the early days when we were less accustomed to what afterwards became more ordinary, we had a doctor within call lest some ill effects should follow these experiences; perhaps also sometimes with a view to confirming their genuineness.

This rapid removal from the open meeting was a wise thing. It effectually prevented any vain or neurotic persons from drawing attention to themselves. But it is important to remember that we very seldom had any cases that were not entirely sincere. Although we had various doctors in attendance at different times and in different localities, the number of cases in which it was the medical opinion that there was something 'put on' was exceedingly small, whether among women or men; so small, in fact, as to be almost negligible.

What happened afterwards? Well, the great majority of those who were unsaved sought the pardon of God and lived new lives, and the fact that their new lives dated from so extraordinary a beginning no doubt helped their faith.

With regard to those who were already our own people or were Christian people visiting our meetings, the aftereffects, of course, varied. In the majority of such cases an immediate desire was manifest to give themselves wholly to the will of God.

I must have heard hundreds of testimonies to the wonderful help received during or in consequence of these visitations. They were testimonies from people about whose absolute sincerity there could be no reasonable question, and of whose increased devotion in the cause of God there was abundant evidence. The explanation of these prostrations is difficult to frame. May it not be that, so far as the merely physical is concerned, certain Divine influences coming upon a crowd of people are specially attracted by those who might be described as spiritual



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conductors, and that such persons, being overweighted as it were on the side of the physical, lose their balance and fall down?

In a certain number of cases we had remarkable descriptions of visions or revelations occurring during the period of unconsciousness. These were, however, relatively few in number, for though I heard of many who had been conscious of remarkable things, they did not, as a rule, seem anxious to say much about them. There was a kind of restraint upon them. The impression they gave was akin to that expressed by the Apostle when he spoke of having been caught up into the third heaven, and being uncertain whether he was in the body or out of the body; being, that is, in some rapture or ecstasy which left him afterwards undecided as to where he was—and of hearing unspeakable words not again to be uttered.

Nevertheless, some striking descriptions were given. I cannot say that such recitals, with here and there an exception, impressed me deeply, and for this reason. There was nearly always an element in them which sounded unnatural. Still, some of them were truly most remarkable, and to the ordinary mind most moving, and often produced great effects in the telling.

One of these exceptions just referred to was the case of a woman named Bamford, an Officer who came from Nottingham. After a visitation of this kind which came upon her during an 'All Night of Prayer,' in which she was nearly five hours unconscious, and during which her countenance was most evidently brightened, she gave a pic of something she had seen, relating chiefly to the felicity of the redeemed. It made a profound impression upon my own heart, and I believe it afterwards helped her win hundreds of souls for God, for she constantly referred to it in her work as an Officer. She died some years later with a glorious record of soul-winning behind her. In some of her Corps her name is still as 'ointment poured forth.'

There was also a similar instance of a man. He was undoubtedly an extraordinary person, in the sense that he always seemed to be living on the verge of considerable elation, so that he had to be scrutinized carefully. He had several visitations. In fact, he seemed a favourable 'subject, and when he came back to earth, so to speak, he had something wonderful to relate, not perhaps wonderful in the sense of profundity or originality, but wonderful for the intensity with which it



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had evidently gripped his own soul. For instance, he spoke on one occasion — I think it was at Hammersmith Town Hall — on a picture he had seen of himself at the Final Judgment, and how in this tremendous ordeal he had only barely escaped the censure of the Judge because of the negligence of his life and character. I shall never forget how it affected a town-hall audience, three parts of whom were men who did not believe in this sort of thing, and at first regarded the speaker with a certain pitying amusement. Yet he took hold even of these scoffers in a way which gave them to think. He made them feel that at least his eyes had seen the thing described. He was a Lovable fellow, became an Officer afterwards, and killed himself with work for others,

Instances of levitation also took place in our services, and well authenticated stories came before me from time to time. Of these, however, I do not write now, except to say that I cannot doubt that everything about them was open and true. Nor can I dwell at any length upon equally well authenticated instances of Divine healing. The Army has ever had in its ranks in various parts of the world a number of people unquestionably possessed of some kind of gift of healing. If extravagances have gathered round the subject in some quarters, they ought not to be permitted to obscure the central fact, which is that the healing of the sick by special immediate Divine interposition, in answer to prayer and faith, has undoubtedly occurred.

Surely there is nothing surprising in this. On the contrary, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise. For we have not merely recognized that the healing of the sick by the power of God has from the beginning been associated with the office of prophets, priests, teachers, and apostles, but it has always seemed to us in perfect harmony with the views and experience of The Army itself that God should heal the sick after this fashion. Not only has nothing to the contrary ever been taught amongst us, but far and near we have insisted upon the fact that God does raise up the sick in answer to our prayers; and numerous instances, as I have said, of this healing ministry have occurred throughout our history.

All these manifestations of the unusual have been experienced also in the work of The Army in other lands. Perhaps one of the least likely countries for such phenomena is Holland; yet there they have occurred, especially in connexion with the work for the thoughtless and the unsaved. Men have fallen on their faces as though stricken by some unseen Hand, and have cried aloud



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for the mercy of God. In Switzerland also similar wonders have been witnessed, and in some of the Scandinavian countries, where indeed we have had trouble owing to manifestations called the 'Gift of Tongues.

We have to be suspicious of any voices or gifts which make men indisposed to bear the Cross or to seek the Salvation of others; and although some of our own people have received what is spoken of as a gift of tongues, we have almost invariably found that one of the consequences has been a disposition to withdraw from hard work for the blessing of others and from fearless testimony to the Saviour. I recognize the dangers which attend the whole subject, and while I believe that these things, as I have witnessed the are Divine in their origin, I do not forget that in some instances they may have been mixed with what is the very reverse.

In the United States, in the earlier days, we had a record of somewhat similar experiences, except that there they generally took the form of extreme joy. One of the peculiarities of the prostrations and trances and the like in Europe has been the great solemnity which has nearly always marked their occurrence, no matter whether they concerned those who were outside or inside The Army. But in the United States it was rather the other way about. In these demonstrations of the Spirit, the reality of which no one would challenge who knew what had really happened, there was an accompaniment of overpowering joy, exhibited in singing, and sometimes in a disposition to dance, or to remain for a long period in a kind of ecstasy. The practical effects, however — and it is by their practical effects that all these things must be judged — were very much the same there as elsewhere.