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## The Gospel of Power.<sup>1</sup>

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### POWER.

CHRISTIANITY is essentially a religion of power. The New Testament bears ample evidence of it. Power is present like the freshness of the morning, power throbs and surges like the energy of the springtime, in all its pages. By the power divine sin is conquered, darkness dispelled, and the inward man renewed day by day. And it is all traced back to that great and notable day of the Lord, that day of days in the spiritual history of mankind, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the waiting disciples of Jesus, and conviction burned and glowed within their hearts, and Simon Peter, not timid now nor fearful, stood up with the eleven and spoke that bold resounding sentence which is the veritable foundation-rock of the Christian Church: *Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

In the power of the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus Christ still upbuilds the Church. Still does He redeem, enlighten, and renew; still is He a fountain of life within, welling up in refreshing, fertilizing streams. The energy of Pentecost is not exhausted, the gifts of Pentecost are poured out freely.

I am sure many of you who have been attending these meetings could testify to the truth of this. You could say, as you look back upon the experience of the week, 'There, and there, and there, I felt the unseen world upon me, and power from on high touched and uplifted my soul.' And you could further testify, that though the gift is poured out freely, it takes hearts of faith to receive it. For it is no external and mechanical relation, the relation between the life of God and the soul of man. It is inward, vital, and in a sense mystical, and unless we learn, like the disciples of old, to wait upon God in faith, in the spirit of trust and self-surrender, we have no right to be expectant of His heavenly gifts.

Think what an enrichment of character and life

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at a Convention for the Strengthening of the Religious Life held in Aberdeen in September 1919.

came to the disciples as they waited for the promise of the Spirit. The Peter of Pentecost was a very different man from the Peter of the Passover, so strong and self-possessed now, so clear-sighted as to the things of God and His Kingdom; and the other disciples, who forsook Jesus at Gethsemane and fled,—in a few short weeks they are found rejoicing to be beaten and imprisoned for His sake, and to be counted worthy of shame and death.

And what different men and women we might become, if only we could draw nearer to God in Jesus Christ and open our hearts to receive His gifts. Our lives would be lifted out of their narrowness and meanness, and would reveal a new and more spacious quality. We should learn to venture unhesitatingly upon broad expanses of duty, we should be freemen in the high realms of truth, we should sound the depths of generous feeling, unafraid to love, and to suffer too, for love's sake.

Wherefore yield yourselves, O men and women, to the Spirit of the living Christ; yield yourselves to Him in faith and humble trust, and He shall accomplish His own most gracious work upon you.

### SERVICE.

So far I have tried to say that to-day, as in the early days of the Church, Christianity is essentially and fundamentally a religion of power; the power, namely, of the Holy Spirit, bestowed on them that faithfully wait. That power, I have also tried to say, we must appropriate in fuller measure if our lives are to be ennobled and enriched, and in the unknown future days to enter into larger places. Which leads me now to say that spiritual power is not an end in itself: the gospel of power issues in the life of service.

*For their sakes I sanctify, or better, I consecrate myself,*—there in one pregnant sentence is the secret of our Lord's life; and it should remind us, if in these days reminder were needed, that spiritual power, the power that comes of consecration, is—as Phillips Brooks once said—not a luxury but a force, to be applied therefore and utilized. The vision on the mount prepares for duty in the plain, and in the sombre valleys. The fellowship of the

upper room gives strength for the carrying of the Cross, yea, even on to Calvary. And the Cross remains indeed the true symbol of our Christian religion,—the Cross of service and sacrifice, and not the mountain-top or the upper room.

There are some who deprecate the new emphasis laid upon the idea of service in the doctrine of the Christian life. Their sympathies are with the traditional individualism, according to which a man's chief business is to keep and save his own soul. I should be the last to minimize the idea of a personal salvation, but yet I rejoice that the idea of social salvation is at length coming to its own. In no previous age have the needs and problems of the social world been so keenly felt and so earnestly faced; and in no previous age, unless perhaps the apostolic age, has Christianity been drawn so strongly, with so strong a magnetism, towards the pole of humanity and social service. The true salvation of the individual is more and more recognized as not apart from the salvation of society. The more a man merges his life in the life and well-being of others, he receives it back again the richer, fuller, and nobler. In doing good he becomes good. In renouncing he comes to himself, in sacrificing he realizes himself. In saving others he saves himself. It is part of the grand truth of the social nature of personality; a truth which modern knowledge has enriched and enlarged, but whose essential significance was understood long ago by One who said, *He that loseth his life shall find it.*

#### WITNESS.

There is one word associated in the New Testament with power in the light of which I would set the duty and obligation of Christian service. It is the word *witness*. The gospel of power carries with it the obligation of witness; more specifically, of bearing witness unto Christ.

You know how faithfully the apostles and their successors fulfilled that obligation. In a few centuries the gospel was preached in all the western world; before the symbol of the Cross every other symbol disappeared, and in the sovereignty of meekness the Galilean reigned. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

What the Church most needs to-day is a great apostolic succession of spiritually minded men and women, endued with power from on high, who

shall carry forward the blessed world-renewing work of the Holy Spirit. A great apostolic succession, I have said; but need it be so very great? If but a score of the men and women in this church to-night could only catch the apostolic fervour, and set it forth in the works that follow, their influence would speedily tell for Christ on this whole community.

But it should be noticed, there are many ways in which we may be witnesses unto Christ, besides the ways of preaching and teaching, and there is one way which has been effective since the beginning. It is the way of the incarnation, of the Word made flesh, of the Word manifest in the beauty of holiness, in loveliness of perfect deeds. You and I may by God's grace practise that way every day of our life.

Undoubtedly we do need in our community and nation such a faithful confession of Christ before men. There are multitudes among us who are to all appearance untouched by the thought of God and the idea of religion. It is not so much the disintegration of this and that doctrinal belief one deplures, the declension of this and that form and habit of worship; it is the loosening of moral faith itself, the languishing of that moral emotion—be it the fear or love of God—which is the highest preservative of character and the deepest inspiration of conduct. Is it not a great and searching utterance: 'No heart is pure that is not passionate, no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic'?

It will be said that in these great years through which we have been passing there has been a finding of God anew, whether among those who watched and worked at home, or among those who stood so manfully between us and destruction. And no doubt it has been so in many individual instances. None the less I would say, if we are to purge our national life of the things that weaken, enervate, and demoralize it; if we are to make our national life a true reflex and worthy counterpart of the moral idealism, the gallantry and self-devotion, displayed by our sons and brothers in the grim fighting-line,—then what we should pray and labour for most of all is a great revival, wide and deep, of the knowledge of God in the land, a mighty resistless insurging of the Spirit of God into our hearts in Pentecostal power, and into the hearts of this people.

Here it is that the proper function of our Churches comes clearly to view. It is to bear

witness through Christ to the presence and reality of God in our human life, and so to preserve and increase the knowledge of God in the land. A great and noble work surely. A truly patriotic work. A work that should appeal in particular to generous-minded youth. And it is our work, yours and mine, as we are members of the Church of Christ.

The Church exists for the world's sake. It is the elect of God, but its election is an election to service. By its witness the world is to be saved. And the Church includes within its proper sphere, as has been well and truly said, 'not worship, clergy, doctrine, and charity alone, but the whole troubled world of modern life, its conflicts of classes, its dissensions of industry, its problems of politics, its sins of property.'

Is the Church to be sufficient for these things? Or is it to be content to stand aside as humanity marches by, seeing its own 'insignia,' as some one puts it—of brotherhood, social justice, and the like—displayed on alien banners? Truly these are days of testing for the Church of Christ. And may I at the close of this Convention appeal to

you who have named the name of Christ, and are sworn soldiers and servants of the Cross, to you who are here assembled together in that unity of the Spirit which is strength,—may I appeal to you with all the earnestness I know, to keep the flag of true religion flying in this momentous hour, to be living witnesses in this dear land of ours for God and His righteousness, for justice, mercy, and fair brotherhood, for all that is true, pure, lovely, and of good report; so fulfilling your part in lifting the national life into higher strength and stability, into true security;—yet not forgetful ever of the wider obligation resting upon us. For we are consecrated, are we not?, to a world-wide cause. The whole wide world is the field of Christian service.

If humanity is to be saved for any religion at all, saved from materialism, selfishness, and sceptical indifference, in Christianity, and in Christianity alone, lies—as I believe—its one true hope. Only let the Christian Church be faithful to Christ and the sign of His Cross, and in the power of His living Spirit it shall go forth, as in the early days, conquering and to conquer.

## Literature.

### BOTHA.

MR. HAROLD SPENDER has added a chapter to his biography of *General Botha* (Constable; 10s. 6d. net), and has issued it in a second edition. For now General Botha is dead, and the chapter that has been written is the last.

What a man! What an inspiration and example to all men! What a hero for boys! His life was without the reproach of men. His enemies found nothing but errors in judgment. And history has proved his judgment right. Surely it is one of the most manifest providences that had Botha ready to receive the gift of responsible government when Campbell-Bannerman was called to power in order to give it.

The new chapter is the most marvellous of all. What a task fell to this man, and with what a nobility of mind, also with what a simplicity of faith in God, did he give himself to it and finish it.

### THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS.

Professor G. F. Moore of Harvard has at last issued the second volume of his important work on the *History of Religions*. The first volume, covering all except the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, was published in 1913. Seven years is perhaps not too long in which to prepare and produce a volume on these three religions, a volume which by its own excellence will lift its head above the vast quantity of writing on every one of them. Here then is the volume, one of the volumes of the 'International Theological Library,' a volume of five hundred and fifty pages, beautifully printed on excellent paper, and published by Messrs. T. & T. Clark at the surprisingly moderate price of fourteen shillings.

How does Professor Moore understand his task? 'The historian of religion,' he says, 'has to do more than exhibit the facts impartially and in just