This preaching which is so valuable is also, however, very costly. It involves hard work and painstaking toil. We cannot teach others the meaning of a text unless we have grappled with it until it yields its meaning and discloses its treasure. We cannot apply it helpfully without meditating unhurriedly on its implications for men's daily needs. We cannot exhort people to respond to its challenge unless we are burning with its fire ourselves. We cannot teach or apply or exhort at all unless we are humble and open-minded ourselves. We need to have elastic minds, which never harden into a rigid system, but are always ready to absorb new truths from the Word. He who would be a teacher of others must remain a learner himself. In a word, we must pray. We must pray for increasing light on the holy text, for deeper understanding of its practical implications, and for grace to apply it to our own hearts, until the light breaks and the fire burns and we cannot hold our peace.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALING

IN THE ACTS AND THE EPISTLES

By Canon MARCUS L. LOANE
Principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney

THE active ministry of the Son of God may be summed up in a few words: He came 'to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick' (Lk. ix. 2). And the remarkable features in His work of healing set it out as unique. It stands alone, above and apart from all possible parallels in human experience; it was part of His essential distinction as the God-Man. But we find that there were also certain miraculous healings in the apostolic age of the Acts, and some of the case-histories, preserved by a physician belonging to the Hippocratic school of medicine, may seem hardly less wonderful than those in the life of Christ Himself. But the apostles who wrought miracles could not do so apart from the power of His Name, and even in detail there seems to have been a conscious imitation of Christ as the unique Master of such healing. This is clearly illustrated in the contrast between our Lord's words to the man sick of the palsy and the words of Simon Peter to the paralytic. The Lord Jesus spoke with simple authority: 'Arise, and walk' (Mt. ix. 5). Peter had to amplify the stark simplicity of those words: 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk' (Acts iii. 6). But while powers of healing in Christ's Name were given to men such as Peter and Paul in certain emergencies, they were never so dominant an element in their life and work as in the case of the Son of Man. Acts of healing were at all times subordinate to the proclamation of the gospel; sometimes they seem to have been in suspense altogether. Timothy was not healed from the infirmity which hampered his labours; there was no miraculous intervention in the case of Epaphroditus when he lay at the point of death. We are therefore compelled to ask ourselves whether the powers of healing known to the apostles were meant to form a part of the permanent heritage of the Church, or whether they were just a temporary phase which was meant to pass away. Were such powers of healing, for example, like the wind and fire on the day of Pentecost? They came as signs of the descent of the Holy Ghost. The signs have passed away, but the inner reality of a Spirit-filled life remains. So we would claim that such acts of healing have passed away; they were temporary, and charismatic, and unique. But the kingdom of which they were signs has come to remain.

Meanwhile pain and disease are only one aspect of the tremendous suffering which makes the whole world kin. And the voice of Scripture could not be more direct in its constant declaration that the fact of suffering has its own place in the providence of God. It is meant to soften and subdue, to chasten and refine, to make men humble and to teach them to lean on the arm of One who is Almighty. Suffering may at times be the most delicate instrument which God can use for the discipline or development of Christian character. We can bless God for suffering when it pleases God to bless suffering to us. 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth' (Heb. xii. 6). But for this, faith is needful, and submission is needful, and the help of a heavenly arm, and the hope of a heavenly home: and the comfort of all these is assured to us through our union with Christ. 'No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby' (Heb. xii. 11). That phrase, 'nevertheless afterward', is of special value for the Christian for whom God may appoint some special burden of suffering. God had only one Son who knew no sin, and none at all who are without pain and sorrow. Moreover, suffering which is for His Name's sake leads the Christian disciple to tread the path to which St. Paul refers in one sublime aspiration: 'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings' (Phil. iii. 10). And the character of such suffering may be in the form of pain or persecution, hardship, disease, or death: for the man who succumbs to fever or fatigue, who wastes away from privation or exposure, or who dies from disease while on active service, is as much a casualty of war as the man who falls at the height of battle. He helps to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ (Col. i. 24); it is part of the cross which he is called to bear after Jesus (Lk. xxiii. 26). Therefore it must be plainly stated that God will not heal all pain, or disease, or sorrow, or suffering, any more than He will finally overcome death until 'the day of redemption' (Eph. iv. 30).

THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING

We can arrive at a better understanding of the problem if we bear in mind the moral aspect of the pains of humanity. Men want relief from ills of the body for two simple reasons: they cause pain and weakness, and they end in death and darkness. But it is the constant teaching of the Scriptures that illness and disease are the direct entail of sin, just as pain and death are. Pain and death may have been realities in the animal creation even before the story of the human race began; but that does not alter the fact that sin was the real stalk from which they stemmed. The problem of evil is much older than the fact of man's fall, and in some dark mysterious way the sources of pain and death are wrapped up with this wider moral problem. As far as the human race is concerned, Scripture speaks with final authority: 'By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin' (Rom. v. 12). Theology knows no reason quite so profound as this when it seeks to explain why the Son of God was made flesh, and dwelt on earth, and died for us: it was so that 'through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil' (Heb. ii. 14). Until that great purpose has been fully achieved, the whole earth is pictured as groaning in torment. As long as there is sin in the world, there will be sorrow and suffering as well. The whole world of nature cries out to be redeemed from the blight of man's sin: it needs to be restored to its pristine life and freedom (Rom. viii. 22, 23). But that final freedom from pain, and that

total conquest of death, are still future; they are to form part of the new heavens and the new earth when the former things have passed away. For that is the only kingdom from which sin, and all the results of sin, will be for ever banished. 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither . . . shall there be any more pain' (Rev. xxi. 4).

SEARCHING FOR RELEASE

But this does not mean that Christians ought to wish for pain and suffering; neither on the other hand does it mean that it is wrong to wish for relief, to seek for healing. St. Paul was vexed by a thorn in the flesh, something which had all the elements of severest suffering: it brought chronic pain and discomfort, and made him feel like a man who has to endure the agonies of impalement. It was a grave limitation of his activities as a servant of God, for it seemed to frustrate his designs and to impede his movements. And it exposed him to social handicaps which caused him acute distress, for it made men describe him as weak and contemptible. It was so dark a thing that he changed the figure of speech, and spoke of it as an 'angel of Satan' sent to buffet him. He felt as though it had come from the pit; as though he could not carry on unless it were removed. It drove him to his knees, and he besought the Lord thrice for healing. But God did not remove the thorn: He gave grace to bear it (2 Cor. xii. 9). This longing for lawful relief may be traced in Christ's prayer in the Garden. 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt' (Mt. xxvi. 39). There were in that cup all the dregs of grief and pain — mortal, mental, moral; and the natural reaction of His pure and perfect Manhood was to shrink from such an ordeal. Human pain was hallowed for us by His experience. And it cannot be wrong to ask for relief, to seek for healing. But the supreme desire in His own heart was that the will of God should be fulfilled: 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt!' The cup of pain was but a small thing when compared with thus doing the will of God; for ought not the Christ to suffer these things, and then to enter into His Glory? It was true to human nature to shirk the cup of pain; it was true to divine Being to grasp the will of God. 'Thy will be done!' That was no mere passive resignation to a fate He could not avoid; it was wholehearted acceptance of the divine purpose in that cup of sorrow. Gethsemane proves that the will of God is the *summum bonum.*

MAY WE EXPECT MIRACLES?

Thus we conclude that the healing ministry of Christ Himself was for ever unique: a sign of that kingdom in which pain and disease and death will be no more. But have we the right to expect that the miraculous healings which were wrought in Christ's Name in the apostolic age should still be wrought in our midst today? We are compelled to examine the Epistles to learn how far or in what way healing should form part of our own Christian heritage. And an immediate surprise confronts us at this point: there is almost complete silence on the subject in the rest of the New Testament. There are various lists of ministries, but functions of healing are only once mentioned in such a list. This is such an abrupt contrast to the multiple reference to the works of healing in the Gospels and in the Acts that we are forced to ask why the material is so astonishingly meagre. Paul does refer to 'gifts of healing' three times in one chapter in his catalogue of the ministries known to Corinth (1 Cor. xii. 9, 28, 30). But the only other possible reference to a ministry of healing is in James: 'Is any sick among

you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick' (Jas. v. 14, 15).

These scant statements deal with healing within the Church itself, whereas healings in the Gospels and the Acts were always signs to the world at large. There was not a single statement which would suggest that the apostolic signs to the world at large were to form part of the Christian ministry, and the statements in James and in 1 Cor. xii are the only scriptural precedent for the exercise of a ministry of healing in the household of faith today. That is why our answer to the question whether we have any right to expect a present-day repetition of the miraculous healings of the apostolic age must be 'No'. There is nothing which would suggest that a Christian ministry can call into play the creative energies of a higher order so as to bring about change of structure in the anatomy or to produce new cells where the original cells have been destroyed. There is not a word to imply that we can repeat such acts of healing so as to restore the withered hand, to revive the lifeless body, and to do it in an act of immediate, spontaneous, self-evident and absolute recovery.

THE PATTERN FOR TODAY

We are therefore forced to conclude that the words of James are the only pattern for a sober approach to the work of spiritual healing within the Church today. What they have to offer us is a clear direction for a ministry in which the prayer of faith will lie behind the use of means. James refers to three distinct features, laying on of hands, anointing with oil and intercession. There is, of course, no special virtue in the laying on of hands or in the application of oil. The touch of hands does not transmit the grace of healing any more than it can transmit the grace of orders; the use of oil does not convey the gift of physical well-being any more than it can convey the gift of spiritual understanding. There is nothing automatic in the imposition of hands, nothing mechanical in the application of oil; the real value of these things lies in their nature as sacramental signs. We may compare them with what is written about the Risen Christ: 'He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Breath' (Jn. xx. 22). The act of breathing on them was no more than an outward sign of the divine Breath they were to receive. So the laying on of hands or the use of oil is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality, a sign of the faith that lays hold on God in prayer. The touch of hands and use of oil are no more than signs: the one vital factor in this Christian ministry is thus the prayer of faith.

Let it be clear that the healing ministry of which James speaks is absolutely distinct from the healing ministry of Christ. It is within the Church, for the body of Christ; it is not on the stage of the world, nor a sign of the kingdom. It is in no sense a repetition of the unique, of the miraculous, of that which was above the powers and skills of medicine; it is a work of prayer and faith within the ranks of true Christian fellowship, and it is always subject to the will of God. Such a Christian ministry has never disappeared from the experience of humble believers. It is still the simple basis of all healing activities in the Body of Christ today. No one ever over-valued the power of Christ when He was here on earth; neither can we over-value the prayer of faith now that He is at God's right hand on high. What is needed is a clear and thoughtful application of this prayer of faith to the life situation in which we find ourselves. Shall we not then find that the faith which draws near in the press of life, but which trembles to do more than just touch the hem of His garment, can still experience powers of healing beyond what we perhaps even ask or think?