

THE THEOLOGY OF GENERAL GORDON.

No student or expositor of the Bible can fail to be interested in this subject. Few have studied the Bible as General Gordon did, few have applied it so resolutely and with such mighty results to life. It would be unfair to consider his theology without taking his life as a commentary. I feel, therefore, that I must begin with a personal sketch, and I shall have to refer to this as explaining some of the peculiar views he taught and maintained. No one who knew the General would misunderstand the strong statements found in his writings, but the ordinary reader must often wonder, and perhaps call him mystical and visionary. Many of the criticisms recently made would have been withdrawn, or modified, by a knowledge of how completely he lived the faith he professed.

Towards the end of the summer of 1868 I was appointed to the charge of the Presbyterian Church at Gravesend, and through the good offices of Gordon among others, was recognized as Chaplain to the Presbyterian troops at Gravesend and Milton Barracks, New Tavern Fort, and Tilbury. I remember my first interview as vividly as if it happened yesterday.

When he entered, I was for the moment disappointed. I had heard and read much of "Chinese Gordon," and had formed in my own mind an ideal of the man who had done such wonders. To me that march of the "ever victorious army" is only to be paralleled by the march of the "Ten Thousand" Greeks under Cyrus the Younger; and the character of Xenophon is in many respects wonderfully like that of Gordon. But in the very quiet and unassuming man, with a manner that seemed almost nervous, I could trace nothing of my ideal. In a very few minutes, however, I began to know him; and during the three years of our intercourse I grew to appreciate the power of the man. He

was hardly above the middle height, with black curly hair, black moustache, and features that, in repose, presented nothing striking. But the eye! dark blue, keen, and piercing; it was the eye of one born to command. I do not wonder that with such a look he commanded willing and perfect obedience. How it changed, too! When speaking of some of his favourite texts, it would be filled with a soft beauty that transfigured the face. Then, even more than the eye, was that wonderful smile that sometimes lit up the countenance. It was sweet beyond description, and when accompanied by the merry twinkle of the eye in his times of humour, it was clearly the secret of his power over men. But he could be angry, too, as I well know, with a righteous indignation. I saw him again in church on Sunday, and on the Monday I had the first of many Monday talks over the sermon of the previous day. He was never connected with any section of professing Christians, but he was a regular attendant and an occasional communicant at my church.

I have two books which he gave me, and one of these I especially prize. It is Hall's *Christ Mystical*, and was Gordon's own copy, marked in many places with pencil on the margin, and in others with the leaves turned down at particular passages. It bears his signature (which, by the way, is wonderfully little altered in later years) and underneath the words, "Read prayerfully." Here are two (out of many) passages, and I select them as typical: "It is our faith that must raise our thoughts to a due estimation of our greatness, and must show us how highly we are descended, how loyally we are allied, how gloriously estated." "Know that this is a real, true, essential union whereby the person of the believer is indissolubly united to the glorious person of the Son of God. Know that this union is not more mystical, than certain, that in natural unions there may be more evidence, there cannot be more truth." Much of Gordon's belief in the indwelling of God, which

was the pole-star of his faith and gave him so much happiness and peace, can be traced (next to the Bible) to this remarkable little book.

The other book is Hill's *Deep Things of God*; which he gave me on the 4th May, 1869.

To sum up in a sentence, I never knew a man who lived so near to God. He literally looked not at the seen, but the unseen, and "endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

It will easily be seen that such a man would never have a theology exact and homogeneous in all its details. He took a few great truths of Scripture and made them part of his very being.

These truths were :—

I. The Indwelling of God. Long before I knew him, he had adopted this great doctrine as the central truth of religion, and testified to the abiding peace it brought to his soul. "It would have been a great blessing to me if some one had told me early in my wilderness journey to seek the realization of the Holy Ghost's presence in me, and leave the rest." This was his favourite topic, and I think it possessed him. I have heard him say to one of the big boys in his class, "You know you have God dwelling in you." From any one but Gordon such a statement would have sounded strange, and indeed I have heard some at Gravesend question his teaching. It will be noticed how constantly this truth comes out in his *Reflections in Palestine*. "However we may explain away the term, St. John (vi. 56) states this indwelling in those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, and (vi. 53) states as clearly that except we do so, there is no life in us. Therefore it would seem clear that this eating implies Christ's indwelling."¹ Those acquainted with Gordon's thoughts would quite understand the allusions to the "eating" in his letters from Khar-

¹ *Reflections in Palestine*, p. 51.

toum to Prebendary Barnes, but without such knowledge the statements seem strange, if not mystical. It is the key to his theology, and without the key one cannot wonder that so many critics have called him visionary and unpractical. Judged by the results in the ragged school lads at Gravesend, it was a most practical theology, though no doubt the personal influence of the man was quite as powerful as his teaching.

II. Faith, the result of the Indwelling of God. Gordon held that we receive the Holy Spirit as the gift of God, and that He awakes in us the faith that works out our salvation. "There can be no faith where the Holy Ghost is not indwelling." "Faith is the direct effect of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost." On this point Gordon was very decided. He had no patience with the ordinary arguments for the conversion of unbelievers, and it certainly was startling to hear him say, "No argument is wanting; just realize that God's Spirit is in you." I can testify to the marvellous effect of such teaching on many in Gravesend. He would say to any one who came to him with doubt or difficulty, "Do you know that the Holy Ghost is living in you? Realize that, and all the rest will follow as a sequence." "The nourishing of this truth in daily life is all that is needed" (he would add) "and God feeds us by His holy Scriptures." It will be seen that he rests absolutely on that grand doctrine (as he called it) of the Indwelling of God. In his case it gave joy and peace.

III. An absolute trust in Providence. "Everything," he would say, "is from God, and of God." He held that *all* things are ordained to happen, and must happen. For himself he was only an instrument in God's hand, and his life absolutely at the disposal of his Creator. Hence his courage. Why should he fear? Death could only bring him closer to his God. With many men such a faith would have led to fatalism, but Gordon was no slothful fatalist. He was

one of the most indefatigable workers I ever knew. Up early every morning his first hour was given to prayer and reading. No one dare disturb him there. At light he began his work at the Forts, and often was in Thames mud till two o'clock. The afternoon and evening were devoted to visiting the infirmary, workhouse, or the sick and infirm. Society as such he avoided. He was wonderfully cheerful and bright. "I believe in our active employment in future life, and like the thought."

IV. Union with Christ. This was his constant theme. "Union with Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, is the Alpha and Omega of all life, and this view commends itself to our reason. The outcome of this union is a fruit, and if we seek and nourish the union, the fruits of the Holy Ghost cannot but follow as sequences." His three favourite books were, A Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, Hill's *Deep Things of God* and Hall's *Christ Mystical*. From the first such a passage as "Where is true peace and glory? Is it not in me?" was a favourite quotation of the General's. Hill's *Deep Things* he often mentioned to me as a book to be read and studied constantly. The opening sentence of the book he often used: "How long might one live with some persons who are looked upon as very good Christians, and not know whether they had any souls or not!" No one could be with Gordon for an hour without knowing of the Master he served and the zeal of the servant.

Though Gordon himself thought his belief in the Indwelling of God the most important factor in his creed, I am inclined to think that his view of the Union of Christ and believers had most influence in moulding his character and conduct. In the little copy of Hall's *Christ Mystical*, which he gave me, marked by himself in every chapter, one can see the favourite topics selected. There was undoubtedly a vein of mysticism in the man, and such passages as these he marks with approval. "O Saviour, Thou art more mine

than my body is mine. My sense feels that present, but so that I must lose it ; my faith sees and feels Thee so present with me, that I shall never be parted from Thee." "Our bodily feet move in our secular ways ; our spiritual walk with God in all the ways of His commandments." It is interesting to see how this doctrine grew with his years. In 1868 he held it firmly ; in 1883 it pervades every thought, and is to be noticed in almost every page of his *Reflections*. "We are members of Christ's body mystical, existent ere the worlds were made, yet fashioned in time." "To me the fact that my soul is so united to my body that I know not which is my body and which my soul, is a proof of the oneness of Christ with our souls, neither step being visible as a definite step, while each is a step."

But I feel as I write these things how feebly cold words convey an idea of the man. I look back on the little intercourse I had with him as very fruitful to my own spiritual life. I hope that the marvellous interest awakened in him during the last year may help many to a higher life of faith and duty. Such men neither live in vain nor die prematurely. They rest from their labours, but their example lives to animate others from generation to generation, and from age to age.

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RECENT FOREIGN LITERATURE ON THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE contributions to New Testament literature which have been recently made by the scholars of France, Germany, and Holland have not been so remarkable as in some previous years. They have been richer in exegesis than in other departments, and richer in the exposition of the Epistles than in that of the historical books. In the Gospels there is nothing to notice that can be reckoned of first-rate importance. The Synoptical problem, however, has been once more grappled with. In a treatise of moderate