

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE TONGUES MOVEMENT

by **G. H. Lang**

(An Historical Survey and its Lessons - circa 1950)

INTRODUCTION

This work, by G. H. Lang (NOT G.D. Lang) is very useful and interesting. Not only does it give priceless first-hand information about the Azuza Street Revival and the early "tongues movement" but it exposes the manifestations and doctrinal errors that were appearing even then.

CHAPTER 1

To be truly helpful, history must be as full and as accurate as is possible. It was in part to further this end, as regards the history of the Brethren, that I wrote my life of A. N. Groves, and the papers "Inquire of the Former Age" that appeared in the first three issues of *The Disciple*. To the same end I here put on record some little known facts connected with the modern Movement associated with speaking with tongues. I write with no initial prejudice against this Movement, even as I had none against the former, but would contribute facts not given in any account of the Movement known to me, as well as reflections formed when reading its own literature.

In 1913 I issued a book entitled *The Modern Gift of Tongues: Whence is it?* A reviewer wrote at the time that "highly controversial, the spirit of love is never absent from these pages." I desire that this present book may win like praise.

My principal sources of information are these:

My own contact with the Movement and its literature go back to 1909, that is, to within three years of its commencement in Los Angeles, California, in 1906

By the kindness of a friend in the U.S.A. I have read *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God*, by C. W. Conn, being the official history of what arrogates to itself the title "The Church of God." It was issued in March 1955 at Cleveland, Tennessee.

With Signs Following: the Story of the Pentecostal Revival in the Twentieth Century, by S. H. Frodsham; Springfield, U.S.A., 1941. This writer was one of the earliest members of the Movement, in Bournemouth, England.

The Pentecostal Movement: a Short History and an interpretation for British Readers, by Donald Gee; Luton, Bedfordshire, England, 1941.

How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles. As it was in the Beginning, by Frank Bartleman. By the kindness of the same American Friend I have been able to read this rare and striking book. It is the best authority upon the first beginnings in Los Angeles, being by one who had a leading part in preparation for the outbreak, who described it from personal experience, and who wrote his account as early as April 1925, using notes made at the time.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit, a Personal Testimony, by William Booth-Clibborn. First edition, 1929; third edition, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., 1944. This is of value as narrating the writer's "baptism" as early as November 1908 in London

I have consulted letters and smaller works found among my papers gathered in those early years. In addition, and of great importance, are:

A set of 140 issues of the leading early magazine of the Movement, entitled *Confidence*. It was published by Rev. Alexander A. Boddy, of All Saints Church, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, where in 1907 the Movement commenced in England. The first number is dated April 1908: it was issued monthly till the end of 1916, then bi-monthly, then quarterly, and the last number I have is dated 1926. Mr. Boddy travelled in many lands visiting centres of the Movement; Christians from many countries visited Sunderland; and as a result reports and letters reached him from all over the earth. Conference addresses were published, articles explaining the Movement were included, and his magazine became the chief early organ of the Movement for the English-speaking world. To go through this collection is to gain a comprehensive view of the whole Movement and knowledge of its chief leaders in many lands.

In the first days of the Movement I was struck by the way its literature came to me from many quarters quite unsought. It was partly this that impelled me to write the book before mentioned. It seems noteworthy that when in 1955 I began to ponder the Movement there should reach me in quick succession items 2, 5, 6 and 7, full of information now very difficult to obtain.

It will be observed that I have not used literature antagonistic to the Movement. Indeed, to keep my mind free from its influence I have not looked at what I have of such, and it is thirty or more years since I read it. The Movement is considered here as recorded by its own leading representatives.

A personal and esteemed friend of many years a pastor in the Movement, inquired why I spoke of them as the "Tongues" Movement instead of using their chosen title "Pentecostal"? I replied that were I to do so I should concede the very point I doubt.

Why do I have this doubt? Speaking with tongues is certainly Pentecostal, nor do I question that the Spirit of God can grant this power today. I reject the theory that this and other such gifts were not intended to be permanent in this age. On the contrary, the greatest gifts are to be desired earnestly, especially the power to prophesy and lesser gifts such as speaking with tongues, are not forbidden (1 Cor 12: 31; 14: 39). Moreover, these brethren declare the true faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, redemption by His atoning blood is preached, there is most commendable zeal in spreading the gospel, which is owned by God to the conversion of sinners. I am privileged with the individual fellowship and cooperation of not a few ministers in the Movement. Why then, should one have doubts about it as a whole, and sometimes utter a friendly caution?

In my own case the answer, and the reasons for now writing upon the subject, will be best served by narrating some characteristic features of the Movement in its earlier period. My experience of it goes back to those days. Having no objection to the exercise of supernatural gifts, I did not look at the matter with prejudice or initial disfavour. But facts are stubborn and would not let me regard the Movement with complacency. Facts learned later have confirmed that earlier attitude.

I am aware that the picture here drawn of those early years may disquiet and distress some true children of God who, from lack of information, have felt confident that there was then nothing less than an irruption of the Spirit of God to awaken and quicken a sleeping church. It requires spiritual stamina to be able to look with a quiet and honest mind upon what disturbs cherished opinions. Such as, by the Spirit, have moral strength to do this will find that this book is not designed to withdraw them from the realm of things supernatural, but rather to enable them to discern more accurately between the divine and the human, the heavenly and the earthly, the workings of the Spirit of truth and the counter-workings of the great Liar and Deceiver.

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8: 36); free to move safely in that higher region of the kingdom of God which Pentecost opened to all believers but with which many children of God have no acquaintance, but in the search for which many honest seekers have been misled into a neighbouring realm of the supernatural where counterfeits beguile and disasters overwhelm.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHURCH OF GOD COMMUNITY

This extensive and highly organized Community had its rise in 1886, twenty years prior to the outburst at Los Angeles. It commenced in Tennessee, U.S.A., among a scattered farming people in rough country. They were mostly illiterate, with few books, yet in general were religious, though largely without the power of godliness. To read of the violent lawless deeds perpetrated with no restraint by authority, is a revelation of the backward moral and social conditions in country regions of the U.S.A. only seventy years ago. *[Editor's note: This book was written around 1950???.]*

A Baptist pastor became distressed in soul about the spiritual deadness prevailing. He devoted himself to prayer and study of the Bible. A few joined him. In 1886 these saw that no general awakening of the Churches was to be expected, so nine persons formed themselves into a Christian Union, with the laudable but in part Scripturally unwarranted objective "to restore primitive Christianity and bring about the Union of all denominations" (p 7). (*)

It is obvious that this latter hope was at variance with the plain and, united forecast of the Word of God that the course of Christianity would be persistent declension culminating in final apostasy, so that "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18: 8). It is necessary to our present inquiry to note that this earnest group were from the start deficient in Bible teaching and therefore in power of discernment in things spiritual.

In spite of fierce opposition their influence extended and their numbers increased. The few early evangelists were earnest and moving speakers. Their chief theme was personal holiness; but they did not teach, but plainly rejected, present assurance of eternal life, and therefore, though there were conversions of openly evil men, and others gained some

experience of holiness, they did not bring these into a deep and solid state of heart. In consequence there was much spiritual emotionalism, and the historian tells that

"the people felt a strange exaltation that intermittently overflowed in weeping and shouting. Their emotional expression frequently became even more demonstrative, for many danced in spiritual ecstasy or trance (p.20)... leaping shouting and other manifestations were much in evidence '(130)...shouting, dancing, talking in tongues, and praising God ...'(148)."

This last sentence refers to public occasions even when walking to meetings. We need not wonder that with emotion so high further uncontrolled ecstatic developments followed:

"For ten years the Spirit of God had been preparing the hearts of the people for something extraordinary . . . in ecstasy they spoke in languages unknown to those who heard the utterances regardless of the place, time, or circumstances contingent to the experience, one manifestation was uniform in all : they spoke in tongues, or languages, unknown to those who listened in wonder and hope" (24).

Examining the Scriptures, they concluded that what was taking place was a renewal of Pentecost, Caesarea, and Ephesus. *"While the meetings were in progress, one after another fell under the power of God, and soon quite a number were speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance"*(25)

Both the subjects of these experiences and the historian took for granted that this was a genuine working of the Spirit of God. But is it wise to take this for granted? Twenty years later, in 1906, while these exalted ecstasies were still in progress, the similar events in Los Angeles commenced. The leading pastor of the older Movement invited a preacher who had been "baptized" at Los Angeles to visit him. The pastor had himself long been seeking the "baptism" and this is his description of how it came.

"On Sunday morning, January 12 [1908], while he [the visitor] was preaching, a peculiar sensation took hold of me, and almost unconsciously I slipped off my chair in a heap on the rostrum at Brother Cashwell's feet. As I lay there great joy flooded my soul." He wrote further that "he spoke in about ten languages unknown to him" (p.85).

Paul spoke with tongues more than others but declared, *"howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue"* (1 Cor. 14:19). In the case before us there had been no interpretation. It was rather a case of ten thousand words in tongues and not even five spoken with the understanding.

This was rectified in one instance on August 25th of that year. *"The service was pregnant with the Divine Presence, and the altar was filled with sixty-five or seventy souls. This young Christian, completely overcome, started to the altar but fell weakly under the passion of his soul into the sawdust aisle."*

He was carried to the "altar" and

"...within a short time, the humble seeker was baptized in the Holy Ghost and began to speak in tongues. A quiet, retiring, unobtrusive personality before, he was now exuberant, overflowing, vocal. Under the spell of the Spirit, he arose from the altar where he had lain prostrate. Then how wonderfully the Spirit wafted him across the platform and up and down the aisles, during which time he preached powerfully and eloquently in other tongues . . ." He "remained in this state of ecstasy for several hours." "Mexicans present testified that he spoke Spanish during his discoursing" (89, 90).

The next day he went six miles to his father's farm and "sat on the front porch steps and endeavoured to tell them of the exhilaration and tranquillity he felt in his heart . . . He was immediately overcome with ecstasy and fell back across the steps, where he lay speaking forth the praises of God in an unknown tongue, interpreting the messages under the afflatus of the Spirit" (91).

In addition to such demonstrations there were healings of the sick, singing in tongues, and, what seems a unique feature, persons who were not musical, playing well on piano or organ. A woman rose in a meeting and moved toward the piano. Her husband, knowing she could not play, shut the piano to avoid a fiasco. But she, though walking among the seats with her eyes tightly closed, reached the piano safely, opened it and played musically.

It will suffice to give one more scene from those early days, in the year 1914. It concerns one of the most renowned and

effective of the evangelists of that Church.

"The meetings were so emotionally pitched and the booming voice of the evangelist so sincere that people often fell into the sawdust as he invited them to the altar. He stalked the aisles pointing his finger at sinners and commanding them to seek God, many of whom fell screaming in either fear or ecstasy as they started toward the altar" (26).

Does this describe Jesus preaching on the hillsides of Galilee or in the Temple courts? Did Paul "stalk the aisles" in the synagogues or the temple on Mars Hill and make people "scream" with fear?

It is to be borne in mind that the scenes and features here given are not culled from attacks by hostile critics, and are not false and regrettable extravagancies of which sober-minded leaders of that Church now feel ashamed. They are recorded by the official historian of the Church, who selected them after fifty years as being the very features he, and his Supreme Council who highly commend his book, wish to offer as accurately exhibiting the proper character of their Movement.

Let the reader put together what is thus commended to him as workings of the blessed Holy Spirit of God. Walking about a hall and playing a piano with one's eyes shut: public weeping, shouting, dancing, leaping, lying in a heap on the rostrum before the congregation: falling backward across steps, constant speaking in tongues often simultaneously, tongues which usually no one understood and which mostly were not interpreted. Both these last two items are activities expressly forbidden in public (I Cor 14: 27- 28). Let the reader watch an estimable young Christian man, seeking the baptism," moving toward the "altar" (known elsewhere as the "penitent form"), suddenly becoming exhausted and collapsing in the sawdust of the aisle, carried helpless to the front, lying there prostrate, and then suddenly "wafted across the platform and up and down the aisles" preaching in tongues. Let him further study the vigorous, vociferous evangelist, using his powerful voice as he strode up and down among the audience, frightening some until they screamed.

Let the serious Christian with a fair knowledge of his New Testament, try to fit such extravagancies into the public gatherings of *The Acts of the Apostles* or make them to harmonize with the sobriety and order demanded in I Cor. 14. Dull, lifeless routine in Divine worship is indeed unscriptural: the Spirit of life will infuse heavenly life and vigour into gatherings where He has true liberty, bringing fervour of spirit and spontaneity of utterance, but if it is He who produces such unrestrained excesses as are above reviewed. then have we read our New Testament to little purpose.

CHAPTER 3

"HOW PENTECOST CAME TO LOS ANGELES"

Frank Bartleman, writer of the book with the above title, is the most engaging personality we have met in our study of the events before us. He was a man of God beyond many, devoted to Christ and His cause, an evangelist most eager to see sinners saved, and ready for every sacrifice. His prayer-life was intense, even intemperate, accompanied by fasting to excess, to the serious depletion of health.

He was a servant ready to trust his Master. Though unsupported by any Church or Society it was his fixed rule never to mention to man his temporal needs, or to hint at financial questions, even when penniless and without food for his family. His wife was heartily with him in this and accepted privation when God tested their faith, as He always tests it, and they rejoiced together in the marked deliverances with which faith is rewarded.

In 1910 and 1911 he travelled for eleven months, visiting seventeen countries between England and Japan, returning via the Pacific. He writes:

I did not carry a single dollar with me from Los Angeles. My family trusted God fully and were better cared for than they had ever been while I was with them. I returned with about one dollar in my pocket. My wife had fifty dollars in bank. "Faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it." (p.142) . . . In a wonderful way the Lord preserved me from sickness. [Happily it was not yet the time when Governments insist on poisoning travellers with powerful drugs which can do as much damage as the diseases they prevent.]. I passed through cholera, plague, and smallpox districts and exposure, and through fever sections at the most deadly time of the year. But the Lord preserved me. I came home weighing ten pounds heavier than I had weighed for years. My family had been kept in fair health during my absence, and with plenty for their temporal needs. I never asked for a penny nor a collection. All was given me voluntarily. I only received fifty dollars from America after leaving her shores. In Palestine, India, and China, help came from the most unexpected and unlikely sources. God proved He could provide abroad as well as at home. I reached China with only ten dollars. No money came from America to me there.

The writer does not show whether he knew that eighty years before A. N. Groves had set the modern example of serving the Lord on this, the apostolic plan, or whether he had heard of George Muller of Bristol. Certainly he did not know that

at the very same period (1910, 1911) the present writer was on a tour of over two years in India, Burma, Egypt, Tunisia, and Switzerland, similarly waiting upon God alone for money and having the like experience of testings and miraculous supplies. This life of practical trust in God is not to be attributed to the Movement, for Bartleman was walking this path before the latter commenced.

Bartleman's testimony is commended to the attention of many today who profess to follow the same path but who really have one eye on some organization or fund. Such send reports to magazines, or issue circular letters to keep themselves before friends, which circulars often of late bear the names of the writer's wife, and of Susan, John, Mary, and the baby. It will be healthy for the soul and good for their work when days come in which magazines, lists of workers, and circulars are no more available. Workers will then discover whether they are spiritually as far advanced as the saint of the former dispensation who wrote: "My soul waiteth only upon God: From Him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock My soul, wait thou only upon God, For my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock" (Ps. 62 :1-6). The evil in view is, of course, not new. Spurgeon somewhere said that some evangelists could not kill a mouse but that they must announce the feat in the Gospel Magazine: whereas Samson killed a lion and said nothing about it!

Living thus, this dear brother Bartleman was free from bondage to man and control by his brethren. He could learn more of the mind of Christ and could practice what he learned. One very important thing that he saw was that control by man of gatherings of Christians, and the imposing of human order, are denial of the right of the Spirit of God and restrain His gracious activity in the saints. He felt that the formal ordering of public worship was a severe and constant hindrance to such a working of the Spirit as he longed and prayed to see. And he presently learned of the ceasing of the 1904-5 revival in Wales when ministerial control was reinforced, and shortly he saw the blight of human rule and order quench the Movement in Los Angeles.

In the earliest days of that Movement there were no arranged speakers or pre-announcing of subjects, and the singing was equally spontaneous. Old well-known hymns were used from memory. A fresh feature that developed was "heavenly singing," without words or else in tongues. Of this he says, "they finally began to despise this 'gift' when the human spirit asserted itself again. They drove it out by hymnbooks, and selected songs by leaders. It was like murdering the Spirit, and most painful to some of us, but the tide was too strong against us." And then he adds these pungent remarks: "Hymnbooks today [1925] are largely a commercial proposition, and we would not lose much without most of them. The old tunes, even, are violated by change, and new styles must be gotten out every season, for added profit. There is very little real spirit of worship in them. They move the toes, but not the hearts of men" (57).

Bartleman's narrative begins with his arrival at Los Angeles on December 22, 1904. On April 8, 1905, he heard F. B. Meyer describe the then awakening in Wales. This stirred him deeply. He commenced to distribute accounts of it by S. B. Shaw and Campbell Morgan. These helped to stir desire and expectancy in many hearts. He and Evan Roberts exchanged some letters. In measure the Los Angeles Movement arose out of the movement in Wales, the more so in that a Los Angeles pastor named Smale had visited Wales and had returned with some quickening.

There being in the Churches and Missions but little spiritual liberty, a few earnest people met for prayer in a cottage, 214 Bonnie Brae Street, Los Angeles. On April 9, 1906, a member spoke in tongues. On Sunday morning, April 15, at the New Testament Church, Burbank Hall, a coloured sister spoke in tongues. When these things were noised abroad, the crowds came together. The meetings were removed to 312 Azusa Street. This had been a Methodist Church but was now a lumber store. Enough space was cleared of dirt and debris to lay planks on top of empty nail kegs, to seat possibly thirty persons. They were arranged in a square facing one another.

Intense excitement arose, augmented by some temporary concern in souls caused by the mighty earthquake which began on April 19, through which some ten thousand people were killed. The building was soon packed, tongues were frequent, the "heavenly choir" was heard often, men and women flocked in dozens to the "altar," meetings went on continuously, almost round the clock. "Some one might be speaking. Suddenly the Spirit would fall upon the congregation. God himself would give the altar call. Men would fall all over the house, like the slain in battle, or rush for the altar en masse, to seek God" (60).

The supernatural force concentrated in this humble building was so intense as to surcharge the immediate neighbourhood, so that persons approaching would fall under its grip while still a block or two away. Others who had come to the city to investigate were "baptized" where they were lodging. They had come from all parts of the earth and returned to their spheres so charged with the energy operating that through their testimonies and appeals similar scenes were re-enacted. Before long the Movement became world-wide. Its leaders were very confident that it would cover the earth and continue until the coming of the Lord.

Those who participated were possessed by an unquestioning conviction that the power acting was that of the Holy Spirit of God. This assurance breathes instinctively in the hundreds of testimonies published in the magazine "Confidence." The uniformity of description of the experiences is striking, acceptance of the Divine source of it is invariable, and might

easily overwhelm the incautious reader into acquiescence, as it did so many thousands of readers and beholders.

And yet? When a cautious inquirer, even though well-disposed to the supernatural and ready to accept its manifestations, ponders many details as given by participants and believers in them, questions will clamour for answer.

The literature reveals an almost childlike innocence in the acceptance of the view that the experiences were given by God. None seem to have at all doubted this. It was just taken for granted. They had sought earnestly for revival, and surely here it was! Would God give stones to those who had asked for bread? But the majority in those early days seem not to have heeded the exhortation of Paul that his readers, as wise men, were to judge what even he, the apostle, said (1 Cor. 10:15). Apparently they were not warned by John's explicit statement that many false prophets were clamouring to be heard and therefore every spirit must be tested (1 John 4:1). Later in the Movement a few leaders gave such warnings, but not it would seem to much purpose.

This habit of mind is dangerous, for it makes easy the work of deceiving spirits and false prophets. There were leaders, of whom Bartleman was one, who recognized that evil spirits might counterfeit the work of the Holy Spirit; but have not read that any one of them scrutinized his own "baptism" and tongues, or doubted the Divine origin of this exercise or of the healings of the body that took place.

A line of truth was pressed to an extreme and furthered the tendency not to exercise the judgment as to these experiences. Bartleman describes the occasion when first he spoke in an unknown tongue, and says:

I was truly "sealed in the forehead." ceasing from the works of my own natural mind fully . . . My mind, the last fortress of men to yield, was taken possession of by the Spirit . . . My mind had always been very active . . . Nothing hinders faith and the operation of the Spirit so much as the self-assertiveness of the human spirit, the wisdom, strength and self-sufficiency of the human mind. This must all be crucified, and here is where the fight comes in (72).

There is here a point of importance, even that the inner man of the heart must be brought into subjection to the Spirit of God : but that the powers of the human mind "must all be crucified" simply puts the man off his proper defence, so as to accept whatever is urged by an extraneous power, whatever that power may be.

It was to the same effect that an Archdeacon, speaking of his "baptism," said

"If I might add a word of caution from experience, it would be to use the greatest care to keep one's head out of the way. It is not by way of one's head so much as by way of one's heart that the Holy Ghost loves to enter." (Confidence, Dec. 1908, 13).

Here again is an element of truth. It is certain that with too many believers it is principally a mental knowledge that is gained while the affections remain little moved toward Christ. Yet an experience that is mainly emotional, the feelings stirred though intelligence be meagre, will leave open the door to false emotionalism and to the mind being misled by false ideas.

Speakers in that period laid much stress on Rom.6:6 "*Your old man was crucified with Him.*" It was well urged that the anointing of the Spirit could not be put upon the old sinful nature but only upon Christ developed in the believer. Mrs. Boddy was urgent in pressing this truth. But the psychology was faulty. The term "the old man" points to the moral nature, which is incurably corrupt and must be held in death, so that the resurrection of Christ may animate the Christian by faith. But this moral nature is not the intellect, the mind, as a faculty, but the false perverting influence that blinds the mind. This moral nature must die with Christ by faith, and the mind be thus liberated and renewed ; but this does not mean that the intellect itself, as a faculty, must die and cease to operate, so putting the judgment into abeyance on matters spiritual.

When it is a question of testimony to ordinary events there may be little need to test the competency of the speaker; but when a man talks upon one of the more recondite facts and problems of some science it is necessary to learn that he is competent to speak upon the subject. Even so it is needful to consider whether those who testify to supernatural events are reliable as witnesses. In the present case a particular feature is noticeable. The literature before me gives photographs of quite a number of men and women connected with the Movement in the early years. They divide into two main classes : those whose eyes have the dreamy far-away look of the gentle, sentimental nature, and those whose eyes glitter, are restless, intense. Only few faces show a normal, placid, controlled spirit. Neither of the two former classes can be relied upon to form a sober, tested judgment upon exciting experiences. One who knew Mr. A. A. Boddy as a preacher in those early days has described to me his preaching as "emotional." His photo confirms this. One who knew the leader in India of that time, named Moorhead, tells me he was "erratic." The judgement of such is usually hasty, as we shall shortly

have occasion to see.

At the time of the Los Angeles manifestations Frank Bartleman was aged thirty-four. His photo shows a sweet, intense nature of the first type mentioned, that of a man likely to be too easily moved and carried away. An instance can be given. It concerns a Mr and Mrs A. G. Garr. He says:

I preached at Fifth Street Mission, where the "Burning Bush" had gotten control . . . They were going wild (6) . . . The Burning Bush" had spoiled the spirit of the saints greatly in San Diego. It had made them harsh and hard. There was little love, but much strife and contention (31)... [Later] Brother and Sister Garr closed "the Burning Bush" hall, came to Azuza, received the "baptism," and were soon on the way to India to spread the fire (54);

and in February 1911 he wrote warmly of them in China, whither they had gone on from India. Here is a rapid change of judgment about these friends. Before they went to Azuza their work was "going wild," making saints "harsh and hard," "breeding strife and contention," but when they had fallen under the Azuza spell they are at once commended and encouraged. Now the "Good Report," the Los Angeles organ of the Movement, in its issue for June 1913, gave a large portrait of these friends. Mrs. Garr has a sweet, pensive face of the first type described, but her husband's expression is fierce, aggressive, bellicose, with no trace of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, though he was supposed to have received so recently a special baptism in the Spirit of Christ. There will be occasion later to learn that Bartleman's estimate of him showed a defect in judgment and that the spirit that made people harsh and hard was still dominant in him.

This same lack of balance can be seen in another feature of this excellent man. He was liable to violent illnesses, dangerous and painful, associated with chronic neurasthenia, the result of excessive efforts. His children had attacks of convulsions and other conditions inherited from their neurotic father. He frequently mentions these factors, and of every sickness he declares that it was the devil trying to kill him and them. This was unfair to the devil for all neurasthenics are liable to such attacks without Satanic action. It belongs to the condition. But not only was his reasoning and judgment at fault - as might naturally follow from his mind having been "crucified" - but regularly he says that prayer was made and that the Lord delivered him or the children. Yet the steady recurrence and intensifying of the attacks makes clear that there was nothing more than that cessation of the violence of the pains known with severe neuralgic spasms, with no plain indications of distinct Divine healing action. That the Lord supported the spirit of His dear servant under the strain would certainly be the case, but that is not direct healing of the body.

But his failure of judgment as to his own case and that of his children. on the part of so godly a brother and so prominent a leader, naturally raises the question as to whether the same feature obtained in many other cases of sickness and healing of those days. The point is of importance, because the records in "Confidence" indicate that after a few years the matter of "tongues" lost its early prominence and that of "healings" came to the front. The most remarkable instance is that of one Smith Wigglesworth. "Confidence" gives many reports about him and by him, and, if only half the cases of healing be accepted, he came not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles as a healer.

It is by no means suggested that there were no genuine instances of Divine healing. There may have been many, for where faith presented itself to the Lord He, of course, would respond. Only it must be remembered that though Peter healed very many sick folk, and even raised the dead (and several alleged raisings of the dead are given in "Confidence"), that did not imply the Lord's endorsement of all that Peter said and did, such as his rebuke of Christ (Matt. 16) or his lapse at Antioch (Gal 2 11-18) Neither would abundance of cases of the sick being healed prove of itself that accompanying "tongues" and "prophesyings" were of God. Healings take place among sundry false cults such, for example, as Christian Science.

Our present question is whether with many healers and many healed there may have been the same deficiency of knowledge and the like defect of judgment as with Frank Bartleman, and much have been ranked as Divine healing without being really such. Just as Bartleman saw an attack of the devil in every attack of sickness, so it seems did Smith Wigglesworth regard all sickness as directly from the devil and he would curse the demon and command him to depart. It seems scarcely of Christ that his messenger should curse any one, even a demon. The exhortation to the Christian is "Bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12 :14), and though one could not bless a demon, neither should one curse him (Jude 9. Zech. 3 :1, 2). But in many cases, especially of neurotic types, such daring, dramatic action would be a likely way to startle, arouse, and benefit the sufferer. It would have been of value had some competent person examined some of the more striking instances and formed an opinion upon this aspect. Lapse of time now precludes this or learning as to the permanence of the cures.

In 1955 a dear man well in middle life, who was for thirty years a "pastor" in the Movement and is still a firm adherent narrated to me at length his own remarkable healing by the Lord (as he believed) when he was a young man. He was taken with violent abdominal pain, but determined that he would trust the Lord only for healing. The doctor called by his

parents he sent away, and for six terrible weeks he struggled on, claiming healing and deliverance on the ground of the Blood of Christ. Abatement came at length, he vomited some black clots, and gradually regained strength. So little did he know of sickness that he had all along supposed it was appendicitis, until I told him that the appendix was on the other side of the body. There is I suppose, little doubt that it was a gastric ulcer, which took a natural course and reached a natural end, nor was there any sign whatever of supernatural intervention. Yet all these years the dear man in his innocence had regarded and narrated this as a gracious instance of Divine healing. And many cases are on record in which recovery was more or less slow and seemingly natural. We do well to give God thanks when we pull through and recover health, but to proclaim these as instances of direct Divine action argues that lack of knowledge and judgment here before us.

But seeing that in such physical matters the judgment of good Christians could either err or be in abeyance, may it not have been so as regards the more difficult and distinctly spiritual matters they shared? We have quoted Bartleman's account of how at Azusa the Spirit would fall suddenly and men would drop to the ground all over the house, or rush in crowds to the front, till the place was like a forest of fallen trees. Many would talk in tongues together, though this is plainly contrary to Scripture. Curious things are described.

Brother Seymour [a coloured brother, a godly man] was recognized as the nominal leader in charge . . . Brother Seymour generally sat behind two empty shoe boxes, one on top of the other. He usually kept his head inside of the top one during the meetings, in prayer (58).

A singular spectacle this the leader with his head hidden in a box while the fire of excitement blazed and roared around him.

We wanted God. When we first reached the meeting we avoided as much as possible human contact and greeting. We wanted to meet God first. We got our head under some bench in the corner in prayer, and met men only in the Spirit, knowing them "after the flesh" no more (59).

Here again are excellencies and eccentricities. To come to meet God, to avoid merely human contacts - good indeed but why get one's head under a bench? Why hide one's head in a box?

Another feature provokes inquiry.

We had a "tarrying" room upstairs, for those especially seeking God for the "baptism," though many got it in the main assembly room also. In fact they often got it in their seats in those days. On the wall of the tarrying room was hung a placard with the words, No talking above a whisper." We knew nothing of jazzing them through at that time (55) Our so called tarrying and prayer rooms today [1925] are but a shadow of the former ones, too often a place to blow off steam in human enthusiasm, or become mentally intoxicated supposedly from the Holy Ghost. Many of them are a kind of lethal chamber with very little of the pure Spirit of God (81)

Thus there were two apartments, greatly in contrast. One retired and quiet, where God could be sought in stillness the other marked by crowds, excitement, movement, noise. Which of these was according to God? Apparently it made little difference, for people were "baptized" in both some finding the gift by quiet seeking, others while sitting in the public and restless meeting.

Here is another strange scene from the public meeting.

Brother Ansell Post, a Baptist preacher, was sitting on a chair the middle of the floor one evening in the meeting. Suddenly the Spirit fell upon him. He sprang from his chair began to praise God in a loud voice in "tongues," and ran all over the place, hugging all the brethren he could get hold of. He was filled with divine love. He later went to Egypt as a missionary (61).

That some spirit urged the dear man seems certain but it is hard to believe that the Spirit of God, who commands and produces decency and order in public, provoked a preacher to rush about the assembly, shouting in a strange tongue that edified no one, and seizing and hugging the men folk. But Bartleman had no doubt it was the Holy Spirit, which suggests a judgment faulty and unreliable.

Again:

At the New Testament Church a young lady of refinement was prostrate on the floor for hours, while at

times the most heavenly singing would issue from her lips . . . All over the house men and women were weeping. A preacher was flat on his face on the floor, crying out. " Pentecost has fully come" (61).

It is safe to say that if at Pentecost of old any Oriental young woman had been stretched on the floor for hours in the presence of men, and singing, it would have been impossible to convince people that the Spirit of the Holy One (of Israel) was the cause of this.

Or again, of another centre in Los Angeles in the same opening year, 1906, we read:

The atmosphere at Eighth and Maple was for a time even deeper than at "Azusa." God came so wonderfully near us, the very atmosphere of heaven seemed to surround us. Such a divine "weight of glory" was upon us we could only lie on our faces. For a long time we could hardly remain seated even. All would be on their faces on the floor, sometimes during the whole service. I was seldom able to keep from lying full length on the floor on my face. There was a little raise of about a foot, for a platform, when we moved into the church. On this I generally lay, while God ran the meetings (69).

Once more, in 1908 in Indianapolis:

At one meeting when I was through the slain of the Lord lay all over the floor. I looked for the preachers behind me and they lay stretched out on the floor too. One of them had his feet tangled up in a chair, so I knew they had gone down under the power of God. I stepped over near the piano, among the people. My body began to rock under the power of God and I fell over on to the piano and lay there. It was a cyclonic manifestation of the power of God (122).

These scenes from the first days, when the power acting was working most energetically and pervading the Movement, were given by this chief and godly leader as displaying what characterized those days and proved to him that Pentecost had been renewed and the ever-blessed Spirit had fallen afresh. The reader must judge for himself whether this is sufficiently proved by a preacher lying on the platform before the audience with "his feet tangled up in a chair" and by another "falling over on to the piano and lying there." Is there any parallel to such scenes in the Acts of the Apostles?

This good man makes prominent another feature concerning himself, which has a lesson and a warning. It refers to his health, already mentioned.

[1904] My nerves had been worn threadbare from years of previous pioneer mission work . . . My back was my weak spot (10) . . . I have always worked harder than my natural strength reasonably allowed (13). [1905] My life was by this time literally swallowed up in prayer. I was praying day and night (18) . . . We prayed for a spirit of revival for Pasadena until the burden became well-nigh unbearable. I cried out like a woman in birth pangs (19)... I had an awful attack of neuralgia of the stomach. I felt I would die. I fasted and prayed a whole day and night and the Lord delivered. (26)...[brother Boehmer, a gardener] spent several hours in prayer... We often spent whole nights together in prayer during those days. It seemed a great privilege to spend a whole night with the Lord. He drew so near. We never seemed to get weary on such occasions (33) The spirit of prayer came more and more heavily upon us . . . I would lie on my bed in the daytime and roll and groan under the burden. I fasted much, not caring for food when burdened. At one time I was in soul travail for nearly twenty four hours without intermission. It nearly used me up. Prayer literally consumed me. I would groan all night in my sleep (35) I had a blessed weeping burden for a number of days. I had such a burden one night I could not sleep (40). I spent another all night of prayer with Brother Boehmer. My nerves were getting very worn from constant conflict in prayer with the powers of darkness (42). [1907] I then began to stay at home more to rest and recuperate. I had written much, attended meetings constantly, besides going through the terrific siege of prayer both before and after the outpouring, so that my my nerves were completely exhausted. I could hardly contemplate the writing of an ordinary postcard without mental agony at this time . . . I can sympathize with Evan Robert's nervous breakdown after the revival in Wales (92).

Readers of my pamphlets "Praying is Working" and "Prayer Focused and Fighting" will be aware that the Lord taught me something of the need and power of prayer conflict. I have experienced the strain and the blessed effects of prayer, and of some fasting. But is it of God, is it a necessity in the world of spirits, that servants of Christ should disable themselves from the wars of the Lord by such extreme and sustained pressure as induces nervous exhaustion and mental collapse? The histories of the Bible offer no instance of it. The closing letters of Paul and Peter and John show no brain fag, but are as vigorous as their early writing and preaching, and they were old men. But the above pathetic extracts are from a man only thirty-four to thirty-six years of age. The first photo in his book shows eyes already with signs of weariness, and his portrait of only nineteen years later gives a man of only fifty three years yet prematurely aged, gaunt and grey, with knitted brow and strained eyes. One can respect the zeal and revere the devotion, but question the wisdom, or want of

wisdom.

And in all spheres such early exhaustion is seen in servants of Christ, with often premature death and consequent weakening of the armies of the Lord.

And for the purpose of our present inquiry it is to be pondered that a brain thus wearied means a reduced power of reflection and discernment, with a proportionate liability to unrecognized adverse influence by the powers of darkness. So devoted a disciple as Simon Peter had not the least notion that it was from Satan there had come a false idea. Skillfully mingled with a genuine desire for his Master's welfare (Matt 16: 22, 23). Simon was not a worn-out man: much more will the exhausted disciple be open to such harmful influence.

This leads to the observation that in the Movement before us there was plainly **a deep mixture of what was of God and what was not of Him**. Many who joined early in the Movement and received the "baptism" were already serious and instructed Christians. They held firmly the great truths of the faith, loved Christ, sought to bring sinners to Him, looked for His return. The entrance into their hearts and lives of the fresh elements the "baptism" brought did not affect this earlier stock of knowledge and experience, and when the new stimulus came these believers went forth and still preached salvation by the atoning blood, sanctification by the Spirit and much else that was godly and helpful.

Nor need one doubt that some sincere longers after God's fullness were met by Him in grace, irrespective of what in the meetings was not of Him, and there received a fullness of Holy Spirit not known before. Also it is quite believable that the truly expectant found healing of the body. All this would call forth praise to His holy name. Whatever features can be paralleled in the New Testament should be received gratefully. But when it is urged that these features prove that the "tongues", "prophecies", "ecstasies", "visions", were of God, then must be kept in mind the mixed condition above indicated. And these startling additional experiences must be tested, lest anything false has commingled with the truth. This necessary scrutiny was too much neglected, and, moreover some had become disqualified for exercising it by causes above suggested. (**)

A Movement cannot be tested by those features which it has in common with other Christians or bodies of Christians but only by the features peculiar to itself. Adherence to true doctrine, love, for Christ, zeal in spreading the gospel, and similar conditions were not first generated in this Movement; they are found in equal vigour where no supernatural gifts have been claimed, and cannot therefore be a guarantee that the latter are from God. It may not be so. This examination of the first days of the Movement raises grave doubts as to this with regard to the Movement as a whole, which doubt is confirmed when details are examined.

One further matter deserves special mention because it provides a test in some other vital questions. From the very first, and throughout all the early years, there was persistent assertion that the second advent of Christ was just at hand. From 1911 to 1917 there was given on the first page of "Confidence" a brief summary of doctrines believed, which included "the soon-coming of the Lord." This imminency was emphasized in addresses, reports, and letters, so that few pages of that magazine are without such a statement.

This erroneous expectation has been entertained by very many outside the Movement, but the difference is that these believers generally set forth the view as no more than their opinion of the meaning of Scripture, whereas in the Movement it was announced as a Divine communication. In "tongues," interpretations, prophecies, and visions it was iterated and reiterated, as, for example, when in a vision of Christ He was reported to have said He was coming soon and they were to tell people this.

It is evident that the Lord never made this mis-statement. Fifty years have passed and He is not here. It follows that the visions, tongues, and prophecies which contained these unfounded statements were either not inspired at all, but were entirely the utterances of the natural mind, or else they were inspired by lying spirits.

Many of the utterances were quite precise, as that the Lord will come "this year." or within two years, or that this may be the last winter before He comes. Few speaking from their own mind would be thus daring; it suggests an outside foreign source or impulse, but this source could not have been the Spirit of truth. This false prediction was so constant, so emphatic, so universal as to constitute a major feature of the whole Movement from its start, which forces serious doubt as to the energy animating it.

Quite apart from this Movement there is something startling, almost sinister, in the way this false hope has seized vast numbers of truly godly persons. It has been fostered by the equally unwarranted assertion that the apostles and the early church expected the Lord to return at any time so ought we not to cherish the same hope? Yet it is abundantly clear that the first generation of Christians knew that Christ would not return in their day certainly not till after Peter should have grown old and died (John 21:18-23). The Lord had specifically warned the apostles against this very idea, saying. "Take

heed that no one lead you astray . . . for the end is not yet, not immediately" (Matt. 24 : 3-6; Luke 21: 7-9). And Paul distinctly contemplated that false spirits and even forged letters would seek to make Christians think that the day of the Lord was already come (11 Thes. 2:1-4).

The indulging of this false hope, ever disproved from generation to generation, has served to bring into disrepute the whole theme of the second Advent, which has served well the scheme of the powers of darkness. It is regrettable that the Movement here in view served their ends in this particular. It raises the whole question of the origin of the supernatural element in the Movement, seeing that the error was inculcated by persistent utterances alleged to have been given by supernatural agency. If the power was supernatural, then it was evil otherwise the utterances were not supernatural as was claimed, and then the Movement from its beginning largely loses its supernatural character as regards its two most distinctive features of tongues and prophecies.

Yet without some supernatural agency it will be hard to account for much that undoubtedly took place as recorded by this evidently honest witness, Frank Bartleman. His book bears the impress of complete sincerity, and he was esteemed by the contemporary actors in these events, as is shown by several cordial references to him in "Confidence."

[Next](#)

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 2: (*) All the page references in this chapter are to Conn: "Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God".)

(**) One singular feature of those earlier years was that Mrs. Boddy who is reported to have healed many, herself failed to be healed of a chronic and painful disease.