

THE FORUM

Theme  
SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

BY C. H. FINN

(Written for Observer by Request)

One of the best examples of the symbolical and parabolic nature of Biblical language is found in the Divine commission, which reads: "Go ye into all the World and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my NAME shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." (Mark XVI-16).

The occasion of this remarkable command was that the crucified and risen Savior appeared to His Disciples and announced His withdrawal from their natural presence, and He bade them to continue the great work which He began in the World. It is quite remarkable that many clergy men of the orthodox faith should claim and rely upon this commandment as their absolute authority for their ministry, while invariably discrediting that part which is the veritable evidence of the Divinity of their work: the signs which the true believers must possess and exhibit upon their actual conversion to the Christian faith. Yet the promise that these signs must be possessed by the believers as the testimony of their living faith is so interwoven in the command itself that they are inseparable; that without these plenary powers—all preaching is in vain.

If it be conceded that these signs were confined to apostolic ministrations, then the Divine commission was limited, transitory and ceased with the passing of the Disciples to whom personally delivered. This view would conclude apostolic succession, hence, "all the World" ceased with "the ancient days". But, if, on the other hand, the commandment was and is continuous, and "all the World" extends to the end of time and embraces the entire human family, past, present, and prospective, then, the same evidence of a valid conversion to a saving faith and practice must have been actually perpetuated, so as to embrace the living present.

In connection with this important subject these questions naturally arise: Where is the testimony that the promise of Jesus has been kept? Does the history of the militant church furnish it? Can Christian men and women cast out devils? Can their belief give power to speak with new tongues? Can they take up serpents without harm? And would anyone be willing to drink any deadly poison to show the sincerity and power of his faith? The conclusion is inevitable that believers in the Divine gospel have never been able to accomplish these things—LITERALLY. Faith hath no power to charm a serpent, and poison will kill, literally, a sincere Christian as surely as a pesky infidel. It is true that a few isolated cases are quoted in which some of these things seem to have been done, yet they do not fulfill the promise, which is not limited to time or place. Observe the positiveness of the scriptural language and the universality of the application—SHALL.

The reader is therefore forced to the conclusion that one of three things must be true: either the promise has not been kept; or Christians have not really believed in the Gospel; or, the nature of the promise has not been, and is, not understood. For, it is not possible that the Lord should fail to keep His promise; it is equally true that multitudes have a living faith in the Gospel; and, the conclusion is inevitable that the promise has been and still is misunderstood. Hence, this article insists in argument that the intention of the Divine Master that these signs as natural signs should not and do not follow the belief of the true convert.

But, the promise in question, it will be observed, is a good illustration of the difficulty which even theologians have always found in the interpretation of the Bible, literally, as any book of human composition is interpreted; as well as a bright example of the richness, force, beauty and personal application of the most enigmatical passages, when the great truth that the Lord's words are spirit; that they are spoken from a Divine and Spiritual point of view; that they were addressed by the Divine Master to man as a spiritual being, and that all that is natural and temporary is merely the rough vessel which contains their real meaning—an arcanum of heavenly doctrine and revelations.

The trouble is that ecclesiastics too often assume the same view of these Divine sayings as did the Jews of the Scriptures, when Christ said to them: "Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." They interpreted these words literally and naturally, when they replied with surprise and contempt: "Can this man give his flesh to eat?" But the Master said "in explanation" of His hard saying: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Hence they do not refer to things in a natural way and light.

It must be conceded, therefore, that a knowledge of the true nature of the

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