PERILS OF THE AGE.—7.

TESTS
FOR THE
SUPERNATURAL

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NINTH THOUSAND.

London:

Price 1d. each.
10 copies, post free, 10/6d.
50 copies, post free, 5/-
100 copies, post free, 1/-

1921.
Tests For The Supernatural.

THE Church to-day is confronted with an inrush of the supernatural. Tremendous spiritual movements are rising in every part of the world; at any moment the individual disciple may be confronted by the miraculous. Consequently it is impossible to avoid a grave dilemma. If we assume that all that is superhuman is Divine, or at least good, we risk falling into the embrace of Antichrist (2 Thess. ii. 9); if, on the other hand, we dismiss the supernatural as necessarily evil, we risk condemning as Satanic true miracles of God, if such should occur. Involved as we are, whether we will or no, in the last conflicts between Heaven and Hell, the discovery of a criterion that will discriminate Divine from Satanic miracle becomes obviously of supreme importance.

Moreover it is certain that grace alone is no sufficient criterion. In spite of acknowledged piety, sincerity and prayer, God has not prevented believers from falling into
gross errors in the realm of doctrine: why then should we expect, on the ground of an identical piety, sincerity and prayer, that He should make error on miraculous gifts impossible? For if this expectation is true, as Dean Goode acutely observes, "it at once unchristianizes all but those who receive the gifts." For if God will not allow any real Christian to be deceived in such a matter, then it follows, that if these are really 'the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit,' those who do not receive them cannot be real Christians." The Scripture nowhere presents holiness of life or sincerity of heart as substitutes for verbal and explicit tests, or as, in themselves, tests of the supernatural at all.

For history has demonstrated the peril. Probably no child of God has ever harboured a seducing spirit without having first submitted it to some test; yet the wayside of history is strewn with the wreckage of supernatural seduction. Again and again disciples have vainly relied upon that which is no test—their standing, their holiness, their experience, their invocations of the Blood, etc.—instead of on the only God-given criterion, the application of that part of the Word of God which relates to a visitor from the unseen. Spirit after spirit has slipped past the imagined tests put by them whom they have subdued with the most monstrous claims.

1 Modern Claims to the Gifts of the Spirit, p. 250.

This was the downfall of the Montanist. "I am neither an angel nor an ambassador," said the spirit which deceived Montanus, the founder of Montanism, "but I am the Lord God the Father am present." This was the downfall of the Irvingite. "Nothing can discriminate," said Edward Irving, "between spirits, but the honest and good heart, which discerneth between good and evil." "No one," says Mr. Baxter, an Irvingite prophet, after being delivered from the delusion, "ever tried the spirit in me." This was the downfall of the Spiritualist.

To Mr. Stainton Moses, an ex-clergyman, his familiar, with whom he consorted for over thirty years, said:—"We have preached to you a nobler gospel, revealing a diviner God than you had previously conceived;" and Dr. Monck, a famous medium, was once a Baptist minister on whom a spirit fell in supernatural power while he was preaching. This was the downfall of the Mormon. "I am Jesus Christ," said the spirit who wrote the Book of Mormon, "even the Father and the Son." This was the downfall of Prince of the Agapemone, once an ardent and devoted evangelical clergyman. He asserted at last, under the direction of his controlling spirit whom he mistook for the Holy

1 Dean Goode's Modern Claims to the Gifts of the Spirit, p. 109.
2 Mrs. Oliphant's Life of Edward Irving, p. 483.
3 Narrative of Facts, p. 131.
4 Spirit Teachings, p. 207.
Nor do we find ourselves possessed of any infallible discriminating power within us. One fact alone is sufficient to disprove decisively any inherent power of discernment in a disciple. Among the nine miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost appears the gift of "discernments of spirits" (1 Cor. xii. 10): that is to say, even the miraculously gifted of the apostolic Church could not infallibly discriminate one spirit from another unless possessed of this special gift; much less therefore can we, devoid, as we are, of all miracle and inspiration. In direct, inspired safeguards of Scripture (if such there be) can be our only possible safety: and to doubt, or disregard, or deny such Divine safeguards, once discovered, while resting on our own powers to unmask man's most subtle foe, is to fling away the sword and to fight with the scabbard. For the Holy Spirit can fall on a wicked man—as Balaam; and a wicked spirit can fall on a holy man—for the Prophets, gifted with discernment of spirits, were commanded to sit alongside and discriminate (1. Cor. xiv. 29).

Now it is true that there are two general tests, both doctrinal (Gal. i. 8; 2 John 7), and a third that involves both creed and life (Matt. vii. 15-20): these tests, applied at leisure, are often sufficient to unmask a demon. But a sudden encounter with a spirit requires a more immediate and decisive test, and this is supremely supplied in 1 John iv. 1-3. Here is our final safeguard.
The importance of this inspired test it is impossible to exaggerate. The Word of God here makes itself responsible for the result: if evasion or deception by demons be possible, not only will a spirit's answer prove to be no criterion, but the whole passage becomes a rotten fence on the edge of a precipice, which (for leaning on) is more dangerous than none. It is an infallible criterion. But several conditions, implied in the context, need to be most carefully observed. (1) Scripture affords no ground, so far as I am aware, for supposing the test to be efficacious in unconverted hands. The test, like the invocation of our Lord's name (Mark ix. 39), is not a magical spell which any one may use (Acts xix. 13-16), but a solemn charge entrusted to the people of God to safeguard the flock of God. (2) It is a test for the spirit, not the prophet; therefore it is never to be applied unless the miraculous is obviously present; and the spirit must be compelled to answer—not the prophet. We are dealing with a subtle and unscrupulous foe. (3) The spontaneous doctrinal system of a spirit (as in Acts xvi. 17) is no criterion; a seducing spirit can

mitting to test that which may prove to be the Holy Spirit Himself: nevertheless the passage commands it; and actually shows us the Spirit after He has thus been tested: "hereby [after the applied test] know ye the Spirit of God."
be as orthodox in general profession as a human hypocrite: only a confession in response to this direct challenge can elicit his real origin. John does not say,—Believe all spirits—as though miraculous communications from God are now impossible; but—"Believe not every spirit," for a spirit, either good or bad, may manifest himself at any moment.

Moreover the test is found to work. Supernatural tongues broke out, eighty years ago, in a clergyman's family in Gloucestershire; a superhuman utterance, through a child of seven, ruled the house as with the voice of God. Suspicion at last arose in the clergyman, visiting among you, and then insisted on "yes" or "no" to the question, "Did Jesus Christ come in the flesh?" (3) If the answer is in the affirmative, how did you successfully isolate him so as to be sure yourself, and to be able to assure others, that it was the spirit who answered and not the person in possession of whom he was at the moment? Without these questions put—questions never yet, among modern spirit sects, satisfactorily answered—whomever consents to enter the unseen enters blindfold, the sport of powers he knows not whom. Or again, if yourself 'gifted,' have the words 'Jesus is Lord'—these words, and none other (1 Cor. xii, 3)—ever been spoken through you by the supernatural utterance, in conditions which make it certain that it spoke and not you? No authenticated case of response to these tests, with public references and proofs, has yet been given to the Church of Christ; no prima facie case even; nothing beyond what has occurred in pseudo-Spiritism all down the ages—unverified rumours.

man's mind, and the curate suggested to the rector the application of the test. "Try not the spirits!" the boy immediately cried, "try not the spirits!" Solemnly the spirit, whose protest was wisely disregarded, was asked if Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, and as promptly denied it; and on the clergyman silencing it, the spirit departed, and never returned. Another concrete case may be given. Some years ago, in Norwich, a young man informed a godly man known to me in a Spiritualistic séance he had got into communication with his grandmother. "Your grandmother, whom I knew so well, was a lovely character and a holy woman," the old man answered: "my counsel is that you go back and ask her, Did Jesus Christ come in the flesh?" A few days after the young man,uttererely horrified, returned, saying—"The spirit's immediate answer was 'No,' followed by a torrent of blasphemy; it is a spirit from hell!" I may add my own experience. Some twenty years ago, in conjunction with one now an Anglican Canon, and another a China Inland Missionary, several undergraduates applied the test in my own rooms at Cambridge. "Are you willing," the spirit was asked, when it had become certain that a spirit was present, and after it had been wholly isolated, "to communicate with us on the incarnation of Jesus Christ?" An emphatic "Yes" was the reply. "Did Jesus Christ come in the flesh?" The response was a still more
emphatic "No!" The thrill of that awful discovery will never leave my memory. Thus a babe in Christ can no more be deceived by an honest application of the tests than the maturist saint; because the revealing power is lodged, not in the degree of sanctification of the inquirer, but in the infallibility of the Word; "beloved"—of whatever age, or maturity, or circumstance—"prove the spirits." The second supreme test for the supernatural appears on the threshold of Paul's treatise on miraculous gifts. (I append some obvious inferences in brackets.)

1. Most modern critics decide in favour of the sense, "inspired men."—Goet. Verse 3 also so decides it; moreover, the tests given will not apply to every case of spiritual gift, some of which were gifts of action, as healing; but only to gifts of inspired word." (Govett.)

2. "Chased by a scourge of evil demons."—Justin.

3. "Paul says here "Jesus," and not Christ. His concern is with the historical person who lived on earth under the name of Jesus. It is with Him that all true inspiration is bound up: it is from Him that all carnal or diabolical inspiration turns away. The Ophite Gnostics used to ask those who entered their churches to curse Jesus."—Goet. The absence of the 'Lord' before 'Jesus,' so conspicuous a mark in the 'Tongues' literature, and (I believe) invariable in their 'inspired' utterances, is most significant. "The One who has used me"—so runs a letter of one 'tongue-gifted' known to me—"I consciously and willingly responding to his usage, revealed to me Jesus; and, glory be to Jesus! as I think of Jesus now, the Son of God Who came in the flesh, the Spirit speaks loudly within me in the tongue, praising Jesus, Son of God Who came in the flesh." Here is a person writing under the power of a spirit; yet, though our Lord is frequently referred to, it is never as Lord; and the praise given to the Lord by the spirit-being is wholly distinct from the confession required, but not forthcoming, in answer to a direct challenge.

4. But, in Divine cases, partially only: that is, while the Holy Ghost was responsible for the content, the prophet was responsible for the occasion and duration of his utterance: for "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." (1 Cor.
control into that of the controlling spirit: no man, therefore—for this is God's revelation—so long as a supernatural power is operating through him, controlling his organs of utterance, can say, "Jesus is accursed," if it be a good spirit; nor can he say, "Jesus is Lord," if it be an evil spirit. Once again it is the spirit tested, not the man. But a practical problem, surpassingly important, remains. What shall we do if the supernatural comes to us in a form which cannot be so tested? as in some "tongue," which may be careful never to respond in our own language? "The test of 1 John iv.," a speaker in tongues writes to me, "could never be applied to me; as when the supernatural power is upon me, the utterances are always in an unknown tongue; and this is a constant experience." A heart devoted to the Word of God can have but one answer. No Christian has any right to harbour the supernatural, or a spirit from another world, unless and until it has solemnly and successfully passed these tests of God. The critical peril is here. A seducing spirit comes in a guise that cannot be tested, and so wins over the recipient to accept this arrangement, and to make the enormous and awful

assumption that the spirit is the Holy Ghost. But the Spirit Himself gave the tests; He will therefore not resent their reverent application: that they should be applied is His own command: when He comes—or a good spirit or angel suffered by Him—He will point to His own tests: therefore a spirit which evades them is from the Pit. An untested spirit must be shunned and banned at all costs.

"It is of the last importance," in the words of Mr. G. H. Pember, "that the full meaning of this declaration [1 Cor. xii. 1–3] should be understood by the believers of our days. For again diabolical manifestations are multiplying among us, and that with a subtlety sufficient to deceive any one who neglects to apply the prescribed tests." The failure, or obstinate refusal, to use the tests carefully and solemnly can itself be nothing else than a machination, a malign spell, of the Prince of Darkness. The refusal to do so appears as early as in the first half of the Second Century. "And every prophet who speaks in the Spirit," says the Didache, "ye shall not try nor test; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven." Exactly so, eighteen hundred years after, Mrs. Woodworth-Bter says:—"It is an unpardonable sin to knowingly attribute any of the mighty works of the Holy Ghost to the devil. There has never been a time since the early churches when there was so much danger of
people committing the unpardonable sin as there is
to-day since the Pentecostal fire has girdled the earth." 11
To confound the miracles of God, wrought through
human agency in any age or nation, with miracles of
Satan would be a tragedy indeed; but to imagine that
this is the sin which hath never forgiveness is wholly
erroneous, and (used as Mrs. Woodworth Eeter uses it)
a spiritual coercion of the worst kind. For it is
attributing to Satan our Lord's miracles, and His alone,
evidenced by the sinless character and the perfect life,
which is the unpardonable blasphemy: "because they
said, He hath an unclean spirit" (Mark iii. 30). There
is no proof (so far as I am aware) that the unpardonable
blasphemy has ever been committed since our Lord
exposed it on the lips of the Pharisees.

"I praise God," says a leader of the Tongues movement
in England, "that the 'indwelling Spirit' does not need
isolating and questioning to elicit that fact [that Jesus
Christ is come in the flesh]." It is an ominous refusal.
"We state the grave fact," says a collective utterance
of German pastors (1908), "that in the late [Tongues']
movement in Cassel and other places, well-known
Christians have got a gift of prophecy and tongues that
was not from the Holy Ghost. We must say that we
missed in a highly deplorable measure the trying of the

**Footnotes:**

1 Signs and Wonders, p. 138.