

INTRODUCTION

The great object of this book is to describe, in their own words so far as possible, the deepest spiritual experiences of the most famous Christians of all ages and climes. The author has spent much of his time for years in the greatest libraries of Europe and America, searching the whole range of Christian literature to glean from it the most spiritual and helpful Christian experiences. He believes that this book contains the very cream of the Christian literature of all ages, and trusts that it will be the means of leading many into "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:29).

Although these pages contain an account of the most important facts in the lives of the most famous Spirit-filled children of God, it would be impossible, in a book of this kind, to describe the deeper experiences of all the famous Spirit-filled Christians. In the early Christian church, and in almost every denomination of Christians, there have been many whose consecrated lives and spiritual experiences have made them a blessing to multitudes. The deeper experiences of famous living Christians would fill another volume of this kind. Much more might be said concerning the deeper Christian experiences of the saints of the early Christian church than has been said in these pages. Volumes might be written concerning the famous and pious mystics of the middle ages, such as Erigena, Abelard, St. Bernard, Hildegarde, Bonaventura, Tauler, Eckhart, St. Brigitta, Catherine of Siena, Gerson, St. Theresa, Amdt, St. Frances de Sales, Jacob Bohme, Gerhard, Molinos, and hosts of others. The Beghards of the Netherlands, the Alombrados, or IUuminati, of Spain, the Quietists and Pietists of Europe and Russia in Asia, and the persecuted Jansenists and Port Royalists of France, had many members eminent for their piety and spiritual power whose experiences are omitted in this volume. Among the most eminent of the Port Royalists were Amauld, Pascal, Nicole, Tillemont, and Racine. In modern times, since the Protestant Reformation, there have been hosts of famous Spirit-filled Christians whose experiences could not well be included in this book. Among these may be mentioned Robert Barclay, Susannah Wesley, Charles Wesley, Hester Ann Rogers, Elizabeth Fry, Howell Harris, Upham, Bishop Francis Asbury, James Caughey, Mrs. Catherine Booth, Kimball, Alfred Cookman, Inskip, Major Whittle, and many others, including most of the great evangelists, missionaries, and hymn-writers. But, from the great multitude available, the author has selected and described the experiences of those who were spiritual stars of the first magnitude, and who were pre-eminent for their piety and spiritual power.

Although the deeper spiritual experiences of Christians of many different ages, climes, and denominations are given in this book, it will be found that there is a wonderful harmony in the experiences related. The persons described, whether Bible characters or others, relate their deeper experiences in very different terms; but the deeper Christian experience described is always the same. It is the baptism, or filling, or gift, of the Holy Spirit, and the experience resulting from being "filled with the Spirit." The Methodist may describe this deeper Christian experience as "entire sanctification," "holiness," or "perfect love." The Baptist may call it the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," or the "filling of the Spirit." The Presbyterian may call it the "life of faith" or the "rest of faith," or the "full assurance of faith." The Congregationalist may call it "entire consecration." The Quaker may call it "living in the Spirit," or "walking in the Spirit," or "over-coming power." The old Roman Catholic and Greek Church writers may term it "death to the self-life," or "pure love." All these are Scriptural terms, or ideas, and all refer to a Spirit-filled Christian experience; just as Hannah Whithall Smith, in her "Christian Secret of a Happy Life," and William Arthur, in his "Tongue of Fire," describe one and the same experience, although one views the experience from the human side and the other from the Divine; one showing

man's privilege and the other God's power. Again, the Calvinist may describe his deeper Christian experience in terms which accord with his theological views, while the Arminian uses terms which accord with his theological views; just as a person looking at the Niagara Falls from the Canadian side would describe them in very different terms from a person looking at them from the American side, although the falls would remain the same. Theories differ according to the different standpoints or ways of looking at things. So long as men have different degrees of light they are bound to differ in theory. "Now we see through a glass, darkly," says the Apostle, "but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13: 12). That all men should agree in theory with regard to the deeper things of God's Word is hardly to be expected when they differ so much in theory with regard to the "first principles," and so long as they hold different theories with regard to politics and every other question. But as there is a practical agreement among evangelical Christians with regard to the way of salvation, so there is a practical agreement among those who believe in a deeper Christian experience than conversion. All agree that Christians may be "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5: 18); that we may "have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10 : 10) ; that we may be "rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17); that we can be "more than conquerors, through him that loved us" (Romans 8: 37) ; that if we bring all the tithes into His storehouse, the Lord will open us the windows of heaven, and pour us out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Malachi 3: 10) ; that we may have "peace as a river," and "righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18); that we may have "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8); and so on. In a court of law the testimony of witnesses would be rejected if they all gave the same evidence, and gave it in the same words and manner. It would prove that there had been collusion among the witnesses. But if each witness gave his evidence in his own words and manner, and yet the testimony of the witnesses agreed as to the essential facts, the evidence would be regarded as of the most convincing character. So when Christians of so many different centuries and countries relate their deeper Christian experiences in their own manner and language, and yet all agree as to the essential facts, it is overwhelming evidence in favor of the fact that such a deep Christian experience may really be attained.

There are several different theories with regard to the work accomplished by the baptism, or filling, of the Holy Spirit. Many hold the Wesleyan theory that when a person is filled with the Spirit, "inbred," or "original," sin is rooted out, or destroyed. Others believe that "inbred," or "original," sin remains in the person who is filled with the Spirit; but that it is kept under, or suppressed, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Others believe with Finney, the great Spirit-filled theologian and prince of evangelists, that there is no such thing as "inbred sin," or "original sin," but that all temptations come through the natural desires, and that sin consists of following the desires of the flesh instead of following the Spirit. They believe that the Spirit-filled person has greater power than others to crucify, or keep under, the natural desires, so as not to be led astray by them.

There are also differences of theory with regard to whether or not Spirit-filled Christians live in sin, and as to whether or not they are perfect and holy. The difference of opinion as to whether or not a Christian can live without sin is generally caused by the different views men have of what sin is. It is only Christians who regard faults, mistakes, temptations, lack of knowledge, and so on, as sin, who believe that the Christian cannot live without sin. Most people agree that God's children can and do live without committing presumptuous sins. So there is far more agreement with regard to the question of living without sin than is generally supposed. In like manner, it is the different views that people hold with regard to what perfection is, and what holiness is, which cause them to differ as to whether or not a Christian can be perfect or holy; although the corruption of their own hearts may often lead them to oppose the doctrine of holiness or Christian perfection, and in some cases to be more afraid of holiness than of hell. Those who believe that God does not require or expect divine or angelic perfection in

human beings, but that He only requires us to be perfect as human beings, are of the opinion that we can be perfect, or holy, in this life. They believe that all the moral law can or does require is that we should love God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul, and not with the strength or intelligence of angels; and they believe that if the Christian loves God and his neighbor in that way, he is perfect, or holy, in the sight of God. They think that as the teacher regards the little child in the first grade at school as perfect if it does what is required of pupils in the first standard, so God regards us as perfect if we do what could reasonably be expected of us as human beings. On the other hand, many people regard the moral law as a fixed standard requiring in human beings all that is found in God and in angels. It is no wonder that those who hold that view of the requirements of the moral law are opposed to the doctrine of holiness, or Christian perfection. No one could be holy or perfect if the moral law required divine or angelic perfection in human beings. No reasonable person claims to be without faults and temptations.

Again, there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within people when they are converted, justified, or forgiven. Some believe that the Holy Spirit dwells within every child of God, but that He comes in greater measure to those who are "filled with the Spirit." Others believe that to talk about getting "more and more of the Spirit" is not only using unscriptural language, but that it is treating the Holy Spirit as an influence instead of as a person. They believe that the Holy Spirit is only with the justified, forgiven, or regenerated person, but that He dwells within those who are "filled with the Spirit." In proof of this they cite Christ's promise, "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you " (John 14: 17), and such passages as Acts 8: 16, and 19: 2, where believers are described as not having received the Holy Ghost. However theories may differ, it is certain that in the early Christian church it was customary to lay hands on believers, and to pray for them that they might receive "the gift of the Holy Ghost," although the gift of the Spirit was sometimes given without the laying on of hands. This early Christian custom is mentioned in Hebrews 6 : 2 as one of the "first principles " of Christianity, and it is frequently referred to by the early Christian writers. A relic of the custom has been handed down from apostolic times in Greek and other Eastern churches, and in the Roman Catholic Church in the West, in the ceremony known as Confirmation, which is also observed in the Church of England, the Lutheran, and some other Protestant churches. Although the rite of Confirmation may now be a mere form in the majority of cases, it is unquestionably a relic of the early Christian custom of imposing hands and praying that converts might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Calvin, Dr. John Owen, and other great commentators acknowledge this fact in their commentaries on Hebrews 6:2. Chrysostom and other early commentators support this fact.

In the preparation of this book the author is greatly indebted for information, and often for the manner of expressing it, to writers too numerous to mention. He is especially indebted to the biographers of the famous Christians whose experiences are described. The condensed nature of the book has made it impossible for him to acknowledge all the sources of his information, and he has not attempted to do so.

That this account of how God has done for others exceeding abundantly above all that they asked or thought (Ephesians 3:20) may be the means of leading others to "hunger and thirst after righteousness," so that they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth (human) knowledge, that they may be filled with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3: 18, 19), is the prayer of

The Author.

