

A. J. GORDON

One of the most famous Spirit-filled ministers of modern times was Dr. Adoniram Judson Gordon. His deeply spiritual books, especially "The Ministry of the Spirit," have been a means of deepening the faith and experience of many of the Lord's children.

Gordon was born in New Hampshire, April 13, 1836 His parents were devout Christians of the Old School Baptist type. Adoniram was a "thoughtless, somewhat indifferent, unresponsive lad" until about fifteen years of age. There were twelve children in the family, and his life, like that of the others, was little out of the ordinary. He helped his father in the little wooden mill owned by him, and worked on the farm.

At about fifteen years of age Adoniram became interested in the salvation of his soul. His conviction of sin became very deep until finally it was almost unendurable. He spent a whole night in such anguish of soul that his father was obliged to sit up with him until daybreak. "Calm as the sunshine which flooded the hills the next day was the boy spirit which had found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," says his son, in the biography of his father.

Soon after his conversion to Christ he was baptized and received into the church. Before his conversion he cared but little for books. Study was a very unpleasant task to him. But after his conversion new desires and ambitions took possession of him and he applied himself diligently to his studies. Soon after his sixteenth year he openly confessed to the church his desire and determination to prepare for the ministry. An old deacon remarked to someone, "Judson is a good boy, and would make a good minister if he only had energy." Little did he foresee the life of incessant toil and consecrated energy awaiting the seemingly sluggish lad.

Young Gordon was sent to a preparatory school, and worked during all his spare hours to help pay his tuition and other expenses. He was very anxious to master the Greek language, so that he would better understand the New Testament. In 1856 he went to Brown University. He took but medium rank as a scholar, but his reading was extensive. In 1860 he entered the Newton Theological Seminary. The Civil War then broke out, and he was fired with a desire to go to the front with many of his comrades. But, strong abolitionists as they were, his parents were so thoroughly opposed to his going that he finally gave up the purpose.

Before leaving the seminary he preached a number of times in surrounding villages. In 1863 he graduated, and accepted a call to become pastor of the little church at Jamaica Plain, near Boston. He was six years at this little church on the suburbs of Boston. The church prospered and increased in numbers under his ministry, and the people were loathe to part with him when he received a call from an important church in Boston, in 1867. He declined the new call over and over again, but the Boston church would take no denial. He wrote out a letter of acceptance, but tore it up again. At last the pressure became so great that, in 1869, he accepted the pastorate of the Clarendon Street Baptist Church, in Boston, the church where he was destined to become famous.

Boston was full of skepticism and unbelief, and Clarendon Street Church was in a very sluggish spiritual condition when Gordon became the pastor. It was a very wealthy and exclusive church, and there was

but little room for the poor in it. "A line of substantial merchants and bankers ran up and down the ends of the most desirable pews."

Dr. Gordon remained pastor of Clarendon Street Church for more than a quarter of a century. By persevering in preaching the plain unvarnished truths of the gospel he at last saw the church completely transformed. It became one of the most spiritual and aggressive churches.

The great secret of Dr. Gordon's wonderful success in the ministry was doubtless in his own personal experience of the baptism and anointing of the Holy Spirit, which he seems to have received at one of Mr. Moody's conferences at Northfield some time after he began his ministry at the Clarendon Street Church. The deepening of his spiritual experience seems to have been brought about through two great agencies — the prayers and labors of the famous Uncle John Vassar, and the great meetings which Mr. Moody held in Boston close to Dr. Gordon's church, in 1877. Of Uncle John Vassar, Gordon wrote: "Far beyond any man whom I ever knew, was it true of him that his citizenship was in heaven, and so filled was he with the glory and power of the heavenly life that to many he seemed like a foreigner speaking an unknown tongue. I have never been so humbled and quickened by contact with any living man as with him. Hundreds of Christians, while sorrowing that they shall see his face no more for the present, will bless God as long as they live for the inspiration which they received from his devoted life." Ernest B. Gordon, son of Dr. Gordon, says, concerning Uncle John Vassar : " For five successive years, off and on, ' Uncle John ' labored with the Clarendon Street Church in his peculiar work of 'spiritual census-taking' going through the streets of proud, cultivated, self-righteous Boston, ringing every door-bell, and confronting every household with the great question of the new birth. He was wont to describe himself as 'only a shepherd dog, ready to run after the lost sheep and bring them back to the Shepherd,' and ever refused the honors and emoluments of the ministry. He would literally travail in prayer for the unconverted. 'The nights which he spent at my home,' writes Gordon, 'were nights of prayer and pleading for my congregation and my ministry'. Again and again would I hear him rising in the midnight hours to plead with God for the unsaved, till I had frequently 'to admonish him that he must not lose his sleep.' And so he wrought and prayed and instructed the young minister, meekly teachable before such a master of spiritual things, in those hard-learned and rarely acquired secrets which open the way to the heart of sinful humanity.

"The inspiration this faithful man brought with him accrued principally to the pastor of Clarendon Street. The influence of Mr. Moody's meetings in 1877 affected both pastor and people. Indeed, this year was the turning-point, the climacteric which, after seven years of lethargic religious life, opened a new period of spiritual health. When the revival meetings were finished, Gordon realized that the crest of the hill had been passed, and that the crisis in the struggle for a spiritual church was over.

"These meetings which were organized and carried on by Mr. Moody with all the executive ability and religious fervor for which he is distinguished, were held in a large tabernacle — a great 'tent,' indeed, of brick and spruce timber, with nothing about it to attract but the gospel of Christ preached therein. This building stood within three hundred feet of the Clarendon Street Church, which was used from the beginning for overflow and 'inquiry' meetings. The tabernacle was thronged night after night by audiences of from five to seven thousand. People of all ranks and conditions attended. Excursion trains brought in thousands from all parts of New England. Seventy thousand families in Boston were personally visited. Great noon prayer-meetings were held daily in Tremont Temple by business men. Meetings were organized for young men, for boys, for women, for the intemperate — in short, for all classes in the community that were ready to help or be helped.

"And at the center of all these operations stood the Clarendon Street Church, like a cemetery temporarily occupied by troops in battle. What a shattering and over-whelming of weather-stained moss-grown traditions followed! What experiences of grace, what widening vistas of God's power, what instruction in personal religion, resulted from these six months of revival! A window was built into the religious life of the church, letting in floods of light. The true purpose of a church's existence began to be emphasized. Drunkards and outcasts were daily reclaimed, and brought into fellowship. Christian evidences of the best sort, evidences which had to do with the potency of a saving Christ, were multiplied to affluence, strengthening the faith of believers. The duty and opportunity of all in the work of the inquiry room were asserted. A great education in methods of practical religious work resulted."

It seems to have been in 1882, during the first of Mr. Moody's Northfield conventions, that Gordon received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We quote the following account from the biography written by his son.

"The letters which follow touch closely upon Northfield, and illustrate from Dr. Gordon's personal experience the doctrine of 'endowment for service,' which he preached with so much power at the conferences.

" 'Dr . Gordon' writes Mr. George C. Needham, 'unlike some Christians, believed there was something always beyond. This he ever sought to attain. Fifteen years ago, during the first Northfield convention, he was desirous to secure what he yet needed as a saint and servant of Christ. Toward the close of those memorable ten days, spent more in prayer than in preaching, my beloved friend joined me in a midnight hour of great heart-searching and infilling of the Spirit. He read with peculiar tenderness our Lord's intercessory prayer of John XVII. The union of the believer with Christ and the Father, as taught by our Lord in that chapter, called out fervent exclamations, while with deep pathos he continued reading. During united prayer which followed the holy man poured out his soul with a freedom and unction indescribable. I never heard him boast of any spiritual attainment reached during the midnight hour. Soul experiences were to him very sacred, and not to be rehearsed on every ordinary occasion. But I have no doubt he received then a divine touch which further ennobled his personal life and made his ministry of ever-increasing spirituality and of ever-widening breadth of sympathy. "

Immediately after the conference referred to above, Dr. Gordon went to Seabright, New Jersey, to preach one Sunday. The following is from a letter of one who heard him preach at this sea-'side resort: "I remember his once coming from Northfield after the August Conference. He seemed filled with the Spirit; he could not talk commonplaces. He said he had had a great blessing. He went to his room, and came out shortly after and said he was going down to the fisher village, and asked the way. He did not come back until we were at dinner that hot afternoon. He had visited the beer and liquor saloons and prayed with the men there, and had been among the shanties. I know more than one family saved that day."

Dr. Gordon's Spirit-filled life and deeply spiritual books have had a powerful influence for good throughout the world and his memory has the sweet savor of a saintly life. He was one of the most prominent leaders and speakers in Mr. Moody's great Northfield Conventions, and one year Mr. Moody left the Convention entirely in his charge. Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, speaking concerning Gordon's addresses at these conventions, says: "He taught with authority, but it was with a derived and deputed authority. Among all the renowned speakers at the Northfield Conference, he was facile princeps ; and the address he gave there last summer on the Holy Spirit has been pronounced by competent judges the most complete ever given, even from that platform of great teachers."

In his "Ministry of the Spirit", which is perhaps his greatest work, Dr. Gordon presents the work of the Holy Spirit in a three-fold aspect, — sealing, filling, and anointing. The sealing is accompanied with assurance, the filling with power, and the anointing with knowledge. In his well known book on "The Ministry of Healing," Dr. Gordon opposes the so-called "Christian Science," which had its headquarters in Boston, the city where his church was located ; but he advocated the power of the Lord to heal disease or to keep His children well without the use of medicines. Dr. Gordon was also a firm believer in the pre-millennial coming of Christ. He preached much on these deeper spiritual themes in the many conventions visited by him. His services were in great demand in religious gatherings throughout the country, and great multitudes eagerly listened to his sermons. His missionary training school in Boston also became a great factor for the spread of the gospel. His church became so spiritual and energetic that it undertook many different forms of Christian work, including the missionary training institute, a mission to the Jews, a mission to the Chinese, a mission to the colored people, an industrial home, rescue work for fallen women, and evangelistic work on the wharves, in hospitals, in street car stables, and in weak churches. From ten to twenty missionaries and evangelists were also working in connection with Clarendon Street Church. Often the church was crowded to the doors with eager listeners. Even Jews and Chinamen were often brought to Christ in the meetings.

Dr. Gordon felt that he could not consistently denounce theatre going if he allowed the house of prayer to be turned into a play-house. He sometimes quoted a returned missionary as saying: "For the honor of Christ I pray that the heathen may never learn how the American Christians raise money for missions." No questionable forms of raising money were ever resorted to in his church. He sought to follow the Scriptures implicitly and would not allow the use of leavened, or fermented, wine or bread in the communion.

The "Life of David Brainerd," the consecrated missionary, had a wonderful influence in deepening the spiritual life of Gordon. He declared that he had never received such spiritual help from any other book of human origin. He used to visit the graves of Eliot, Brainerd, and Edwards, and there received fresh inspiration to devote his life fully to the service of God.

On the morning of Feb. 2, 1895, Dr Gordon, with "Victory" as the last clearly audible word on his lips, fell asleep in Jesus, so far as the mortal body was concerned; but his spirit is doubtless with the "great cloud of witnesses" mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. His life will continue to exert a hallowed influence in this world.