

The Gift of Healing in the Life of George Fox

Essay by Edmund Goerke

Note: The late Edmund Goerke was a Primitive Friend from New Jersey. This 1964 essay is published here at the request of Derrick Faux, who published the essay as a booklet in 1972, and with the permission of the original publisher, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.

DURING the age of Cromwell in England there was a great stirring in the north when the vision of the Disciple Church arose among a seeking people. Edward Burrough, one of the first that was gathered into the Life of the Prophets and Apostles, wrote:

Whilst waiting upon the Lord in silence, as we often did for many hours together, with our hearts toward Him, being stayed in the light of Christ from all fleshy motions and desires, we often received the pouring down of His Spirit upon us, and our hearts were made glad, and our tongues loosened, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues, as the Lord gave us utterance, and His Spirit led us, which was poured upon sons and daughters. Thereby things unutterable were made manifest, and the glory of the Father was revealed. Then we began to sing praises to the Lord God Almighty, and to the Lamb, who had redeemed us to God, and brought us out of bondage of the world, and put an end to sin and death . . . and mighty and wonderful things hath the Lord wrought for us, and by us, by His own out-stretched arm . . . Being prepared of the Lord, and having received power from on high, we went forth as commanded of the Lord . . . We sounded the word of the Lord, and did not spare; and caused the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the heart that was hardened to be awakened; and the dread of the Lord went before us and behind us, and took hold of our enemies.¹

One of the great figures of this period was George Fox (1624-1690). At the age of nineteen he began his ministry and for nearly forty-five years his labours were in gathering people to Jesus Christ. During his lifetime he visited Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Germany, the West Indies and some of the British Colonies in North America. He requested that after his death his own *Journal* should be printed along with his *Doctrinals*, *Epistles* and *Book of Miracles*.² All but the latter were published and, except for a catalogue of the miracles, this piece has never been found by modern scholars. However from his other works, and Journals of other Friends, many of these divine healings and revelations can be reconstructed. In all there are about one hundred and seventy of them.³

There can be no doubt that spiritual healings did manifest themselves in a remarkable way through George Fox and others in ways very similar to those found in the Acts. Wherever they came they sounded the Day of the Lord, that Christ has come to teach His people Himself.⁴ Their labour was not to form another sect or denomination or to reform those that were established through a revival of pietism, but to call out and gather all to Him who baptizes with the Holy Ghost and fire and forms His own righteous community.⁵ By 1690, the Friends, or Quakers as they were sometimes called, were as large as the largest of all the non-conformist groups in Great Britain.⁶ There was also the possibility that the British Colonies in North America might move in this direction as large segments of the country from North Carolina to New England were inhabited by these people.

The same one day as another

It is not the purpose of this short essay to go into all these divine revelations, and it was never their belief that Faith in Christ always manifested itself with such supernatural cures. It has been stated that neither George Fox, his companions, nor his successors in such occurrences however true; and have ever laid great stress on such occurrences however true; and have avoided insisting upon them as proof of their ministry. And although Friends did acknowledge such instances of the marvellous extension of divine regard to be consistent with Scripture and sound reason, they concluded it to be proper in these latter ages of the church to receive them simply as collateral assurances, that the Lord's power is the same in one day as another, rather than the essential evidences or as requisite fruits of true faith.⁷

The true Church of Christ and those that are called into it, is a supernatural event, and its inner life is a mystery to the world.

There are some examples of those who professed to be led by the Spirit who were deluded and acting under another power, and those so-called healings were but counterfeit.⁸ Such acts caused difficulty in that those obviously deluded persons were held up by the adversaries of the Friends as fruits of their ministry. Strong action was usually taken in repudiating such pretensions.⁹ However there are many references throughout this period of the blind receiving sight, the deaf hearing, the dumb speaking, the lame walking and the poor receiving the Gospel,¹⁰ as well as other acts of Divine Providence, but the following few examples from the many recorded will suffice to show from their own words the actual "miracle" or cure.

The laying on of hands

One of the most explicit and detailed explanations of spiritual healing happened to John Banks (1638-1710). He was born in the County of Cumberland in England. Early in his life he became a follower of Christ and soon after this he entered into the ministry and continued faithful until his death. He was a man of many gifts and for testimony he bore, he suffered much, spending many years in prison. He wrote in his *Journal*:

About this time [1677], a pain struck into my shoulder, which gradually fell down into my arm and hand, so that the use thereof I was wholly deprived of; and not only so, but the pain greatly increased both day and night and for three months I could neither put my clothes on or off myself, and my arm and hand began to wither, so that I did seek to some physicians for cure, but no cure could I get by any of them; until at last as I was asleep upon my bed in the night time, I saw in a vision I was with dear George Fox; and I thought I said unto him, "George, my faith is such, that if thou seest it thy way to lay thy hand upon my shoulder, my arm and hand shall be whole throughout." Which remained with me after I awaked, two days and nights (that the thing was a true vision) and that I must go to George Fox until at last through much exercise of mind, as a near and great trial of my faith, I was made willing to go to him; he being then at Swarthmore, in Lancashire, where there was a meeting of Friends, being on the first day of the week. And some time after the meeting, I called him aside into the hall, and gave him a relation of my concern as aforesaid, showing him my arm and my hand; and in a little time, we walked together silent, he turned about and looked upon me, lifting up his hand, and laid it upon my shoulder, and said, "The Lord strengthen thee both within and without." And so we parted, and I went to Thomas Lower's of Marsh Grange that night; and when I was sat down to supper in his house, immediately, before I was aware, my hand was lifted up to do its office, which it could not for so long as aforesaid; which struck me into great admiration, and my heart was broke into true tenderness before the Lord, and the next day I went home, with my hand and arm restored to former use and strength, without any pain. And the next time that George Fox and I met he readily said, "John, thou mended, thou mended;" I answered, "Yes, very well in a little time."

"Well," said he, "give God the glory."¹¹

Another remarkable event occurred in 1672 while George Fox was in America visiting Friends in New Jersey:

And so we came to Shrewsbury . . . and we had men's and women's meeting . . . which will be of great service in keeping the Gospel Order and Government of Christ Jesus, the increase of which has no end . . . and there a friend (John Jay) that was with me went to try a horse and got on his back and the horse ran and cast him on his head and broke his neck as they call it, and the people took him up dead and carried him a good way and laid him on a tree, and I came to him and felt on him and saw that he was dead, and as I was pitying his family and him, for he was one that was to pass through the woods to Maryland that Land Journey; and I took him by the hair of the head, and his head turned like a cloth it was so loose, and I threw away my stick and gloves and took his head in both my hands, and set my knees against the tree; and raised his head and I did perceive it was not broken out that ways, and I put my hand under his chin, and behind his head, and raised his head 2 or 3 times with all my strength and brought it in, and I did perceive his neck began to be stiff, and then he began to rattle, and after to breathe, and the people were amazed, and I bid them have a good heart, and carry him into the house, and then they set him by the fire, and I bid them get him some warm thing and get him to bed; and after he had been in the house awhile he began to speak and did not know where he had been: and the next day we passed and he with us pretty well, about 16 miles to a meeting at Middletown.¹²

In 1672 while visiting in the Carolinas, George Fox related:

And many people of the world did receive us gladly and they came to us at one Nathaniel Batts, formerly governor of Roanoke, who goeth by the name of Captain Batts; who hath been a rude desperate man. He came to us and said that a captain told him that in Cumberland, George Fox bid one of his friends to go to a woman that had been sick a long time, and all the physicians had left her, and could not heal her. And George Fox bid his friend to lay his hands upon her and pray for her, and that George Fox's friend did go to the woman, and did as he bade him, and the woman was healed at that time. And thus Captain Batts told me, and spread it up and down the country among the people. And he asked of it, and I said many things had been done by the power of Christ.¹³

While In Maryland the same year he wrote:

And on the 27th day we passed by water 20 miles to a meeting very large, some hundreds of the world and an establishing meeting it was . . . And after the meeting was done, one a judge's wife that side of the country, he is one of the assembly, she being at the meeting desired me to go down with her to her house, for her husband was sick and not like to live, and it was 3 miles. And it being after the meeting I was hot, but got a horse and went with her. And he was finally raised up, and after came to our meetings, and then I came 3 miles back to the house and the man being much refreshed when I left him.¹⁴

And again In Maryland the following year he wrote:

And there was a woman at Enemessy which had been many years in trouble and would sometimes sit moping near two months together and hardly speaking nor mind anything. So I was moved to go to her and tell her that salvation was come to her house, and did speak other words to her and for her. And that hour she mended and passed up and down with us to meetings and is well, blessed be the Lord.¹⁵

The power of the Lord

In 1649 a further incident occurred as following:

At Twycross in Leicestershire (England) I [George Fox] was moved to go to see a great man that was sick, and after I had spoke to him in his bed, and the power of the Lord entered him, that he was loving and tender. And I left him and came down among the family in the house and spake a few words to the people that they should fear the Lord and repent and prize their time and the like words. And there came one of his servants with a naked sword and ran at me ere I was aware of him and set it to my side, and there held it, and I looked up at him in his face and said to him, "Alack for thee, it's no more to me than a straw," and then he went away in a rage, with threatening words, and I passed away. And the power of the Lord came over all, and his master mended according to my belief that I had seen before, and he turned this man away that had run at me with the sword.¹⁶

A cure of a crooked, scabbed boy took place in 1653:

As I came out of Cumberland one time I came to Hawkshead and lighted at a Friend's house, and there was young Margaret Fell with me and William Caton. And it being a very cold season we lighted and the lass made us a fire, her master and dame being gone to the market. And there was a boy lying in the cradle which they rocked, about eleven years old, and he was grown almost double and I cast my eye upon the boy, and seeing he was dirty I bid the lass wash his face and his hands and get him up and bring him unto me. So she brought him to me and I bid her take and wash him again for she had not washed him clean. Then I was moved of the Lord God to lay my hands upon him and speak to him, and so bid the lass take him again and put on his clothes and after we passed away. And sometime after I called at the house and I met his mother but did not light. "O stay," says she, "and have a meeting at our house for all the country is convinced by the great miracle that was done by thee upon my son. For we had carried him to Wells and the Bath and all the doctors had given him over. For his grandfather and father feared he would have died and their name have gone out, having but that son. But presently after you were gone," says she, "we came home and found our son playing in the streets." Therefore, said she, all the country would come to hear if I would come back and have

a meeting there. And this was about three years after that she told me, and he was grown to he a straight full youth then; and so the Lord have the praise.¹⁷

Widely known cure

One of the most widely known cures by George Fox was with a Baptist woman in 1655 who was dying:

And we was at a place called Baldock and I said to them, "Is there nothing in this town, no profession?" And they told me there was some Baptists and a Baptist woman. And John Rush went alongst with me to visit her and when we came there was a many people in the house that was tender about her. And they told me she was not a woman for this world and if I had anything to comfort her concerning the world to come I might. So I was moved of the Lord God to speak to her and the Lord raised her up and she was well to the astonishment of the town and country.¹⁸

Another cure of George Fox is mentioned in the year 1683:

And on the 25th day of the 1st month, 1683, James Claypoole was mighty sick of the stone that he could neither lie nor stand. He was in such extremity that he cried out like a woman in travail. And I went to him and spoke to him and was moved to lay my hand upon him and desired the Lord to rebuke his infirmity. And as I laid my hands upon him the Lord's power went through him. And his wife had faith and was sensible of the thing. And he presently went off asleep and presently after his stone came forth like dirt and so then he was pretty well. Formerly he used to lie a month or two weeks of the stone, as he said, but the Lord's power in his time soon gave him ease, that he came the next day 25 miles in a coach with me.¹⁹

There are many more examples of miraculous cures recorded in the writings of George Fox and others, and the following two are typical of the many ones we know of, the first taking place in 1659 and the second in 1653:

His mother had a dead palsey and had little use of one side and she often did fall down and then could not help herself, and had been so many years. And George Fox came to see her, and at night she fell down, and he was moved to take her by the hand, and it immediately left her, and she arose and could go about her business.²⁰

And in Bishopric whilst I was there they brought a woman tied behind a man that could neither eat nor speak and had been so a great while. And they brought her into the house to me at Anthony Pearson's. And I was moved of the Lord God to speak to her, that she ate and spake and was well, and got up behind her husband without any help and went away well.²¹

A glorious revelation

A most tender and yet remarkable event took place in 1683, and although a cure is not demonstrated, a more glorious revelation is shown. At the death of his mother several years before this incident, George Fox had a similar revelation.²² Such occurrences were not uncommon with other Friends.²³

And on the second day of the night [George Fox] hearing that Margaret Rouse's child was sick I went to see it and as I stood by it considering its condition I felt the Lord's power to go through it, and the words was, "The Lord's power was come to raise it up or fetch it away." And so I came away fresh in the Lord's power and was satisfied in myself. And the next day her mother came to the town and desired me to go and see it with her, and through her tenderness I went though I was satisfied in myself. And so I saw the child was full of the power of the Lord and it rested upon it and rested in it. And at night it died. And after the spirit of the child appeared to me and there was a mighty substance of a glorious life in that child and I bid her mother be content, for it was well, and it was well that she had such an innocent offering for the Lord. And she was finely settled and contented through the will of the Lord.²⁴

There probably were attempts in spiritual healing which did not have an immediate effect. One example which disturbed very much the persons involved, indicated that such results were unusual. What finally happened on the attempted cure is not known, but in a letter of Francis Howgill (1618-1669) to George Fox in 1654, the following information can be gleaned:

Edward Burrough and I were moved to go to a Friend's house in the City who had received the Truth, and her daughter, and a little boy about fifteen years of age being lame of the leg. As I was sitting in the house I looked upon him, and I was struck to the heart and Edward Burrough also not speaking to one the other at all about two hours but waited and our burden was grievous. And the power of the Lord came upon me at last, in great fear and trembling, yet I believed, and was moved to arise up and take the boy by the hand and to say, "In the name and power of God, that raised Jesus from the dead, rise, stand up and walk," "If thou believe thou art made whole". The boy stood up, but as he should have gone, he failed and sat down again. And then Edward Burrough and I was troubled, and yet the Lord doth evidence to me still it was His Word. But because of the heathen I am pressed down.²⁵

Jesus Christ lifted up

Healings have continued down through the centuries wherever and whenever the Spirit of the Lord God is received in power and Jesus Christ lifted up. It is enough to give one example from the 18th century as recorded in the Journal of Isaac Martin (1758-1828), a Quaker minister from Rahway, New Jersey. This might be an example of the casual way the Friends relate such cures and an example of the caution and understatement so characteristic of Friends in general.²⁶

From Horsham (in 1794) with my beloved Friend Jonathan Kirkbride, I went to Richland monthly meeting; also visited a Friend who had been so affected in his mind as to decline conversation, for about four months. The Lord opened to me his state and condition and showed me that he was under a strong temptation and delusion, which I was enabled clearly to point out to him, in the authority of Truth, as we were collected with his family in the evening. After which I was constrained to kneel down and supplicate the Most High, as also to ascribe praises to His great and glorious name. The poor Friend was strengthened, and before bed-time entered into innocent conversation with us. He also went with me, very acceptable, about a week, and attended divers meetings. After which we parted in near affection.

But above all these healings stands the Great Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, pouring out His love and life to all that receive Him, to all that obey Him, and to all that are baptized into His sufferings and resurrection, and are drawn into His kingdom being purified in His blood. The outpouring of His Spirit in apostles' days²⁷ and again in the 17th century when His living presence was so gloriously felt,²⁸ is the same now in the 20th century, to those that have eyes to see and ears to hear. They will understand the love and the spirit behind the words of William Dewsbury (1621-1668) when he first experienced the power of the Lord who is as a consuming fire and a fuller's soap:

My God hath yet put in my heart to bear a testimony in His name and blessed truth, and I can never forget the day of His great power and blessed appearance when he first sent me to preach the everlasting gospel and proclaim the day of the Lord to all people. And also He confirmed the same by signs and wonders, and particularly by a lame woman who went on crutches, where I with my dear brethren George Fox and Richard Farnsworth were cast. And as I cried mightily unto the Lord in secret that He would signally manifest Himself at that time amongst us and give witness to His power and presence with us, Richard Farnsworth in the name of the Lord took her by the hand, and George Fox after spoke in the power of God and bid her stand up, and she did and immediately walked straight, having no need of crutches any more.²⁹

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