

The Emotional and Dogmatic in the Religious Revivals of These Maritime Provinces in the 19th Century.

The most noticeable results of these revivals was the changed lives of the converts. The only explanation offered by the promoters was that by the direct power of the Holy Spirit these converts had experienced the "new birth"—that they were converted and had just now entered upon the true Christian life. As in its beginning all life is infantile, the spiritual life in our churches at the commencement of the nineteenth century in these provinces may best be described as child life. Its success was conditioned on growth.

These revivals were quite exact copies of "the Great Reformation" of the eighteenth century in the New England colonies. Previous to this period the intellectual, the aesthetic and the legal had been cultivated in the churches. The military and political ideas were nailed to the ecclesiastical. The union of church and state was complete. Spiritual life found limited opportunity for growth. It had only the back seat in the church. The common people had but scant fare in religion or politics. An oligarchy sat in the uppermost seat. Under the ministrations of Edwards, Whitfield, the Tennants and their coadjutors the spiritual came to the fore, and in a most marvelous way asserted its supremacy. Its ability to control in matters ecclesiastical was an astonishment both to the rulers and the ruled in the Commonwealth.

The whole trend of this reform was to uplift the common people and to put them in power—to magnify the individual—to minimize the influence of the cultured official people. The birthright to free citizenship as well as to the heavenly inheritance was claimed, by those who had experienced the birth from above. The authority of a cultured but unconverted clergy in ecclesiastical affairs was shattered. Free thought and the right and duty of individual choice strode forth with kingly mien. The influence of this change of affairs may be seen in several directions. Those heretofore in authority were offended, and took as an insult the displacement effected. In their ignorance of the force at work, they despised and rejected alike the workers and their methods. To them the uneducated common people who knew not the law were accursed. All their ideals of Christ's kingdom were put at fault. The history of the Nazarene was in a measure repeated. In vain were appeals to reason—in vain ridicule and persecution—"the fanatical craze" gained momentum, covering wider territory, gathering multiplied adherents day by day. The peace of families and churches and societies was broken up. Instead, there were conflicts, alienations, plottings, heated discussions, persecutions, depressions.

And what part are the converts' found acting in these changed relations? The most prominent leaders in this great reform were of the regular clergy of whom Jonathan Edwards and Geo. Whitfield may be regarded as representatives. But ere the reform—which made its converts chiefly of the common people—had proceeded far there came into prominence men of far more than ordinary natural ability—"born leaders"—whose hearts the Lord had touched and called into the ministry. Doubtless there were among these converts, with aspirations for leadership, many of the Simon of Samaria type. As the years went by all these are seen to play their several parts in the work. Fragments of this condition of religious thought and effort migrated to these maritime provinces with our ancestors, and continued to repeat themselves in our history. Revivals of this character were common in this country in the last decade of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th. In these times our Baptist churches had their origin here. Deeply are the religious ideals of those times stamped on the Baptist heart. Sincere is the longing of many of our older members for a repetition of those old time "pentecostal seasons." Mingled with these fervent desires is the pessimistic doubt of the genuineness of the modern religious experiences and evangelic methods. Some of the most prominent and potential forces of by gone days are conspicuous by their absence in our modern revivals.

Because of these facts in our history, and the perplexities confronting present workers in our churches, it may be well for us—so far as we can—to ascertain the forces at play in the past, and the conditions of their potency, not failing to keep in mind the fact that there are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all.

On the surface of this history two forces put up a bold appearance.

1. The preacher and the converts, and all who labored in anyway in the work were in the grasp of intense emotions. The greatest encouragement the preacher knew, and the best proof of his commission in the regular apostolical succession was voiced in his own and the tears of his audience. In the absence of these he doubted his call to preach. He was as one forsaken of God. In this many of the people were in agreement with him. To claim the promise of success he must "go forth weeping." Emotions of joy and sorrow were among the chief essentials in the religion of the "New Lights." Conviction of sin—fear of its consequences—hatred of its character—and the positive assurance of pardon stirred their emotions to their very depths—"Slain by the law,"—"Redeemed by the Grace of

God" was to these people the harmony of Christian experience and Bible doctrine. These things they believed with all their heart, of this they shouted in loudest voice, and wept for joy. In the absence of the emotions they were "dark in their minds, and full of doubts and fears." So the emotional was kept in vigorous exercise and growth by these alternations of joy and sorrows.

Under these conditions it might well be expected that religious feelings should take control and become the gauge of spiritual life in the churches, the test question, at the door of the Church, to all who asked admittance, was what have you experienced? and, how I feel was the law of duty in the church.

2. Intimately and most naturally associated, as we have noted—with the emotional was the "eloquimatic." The positive conviction and the positive assertion of things spiritual was demanded and all prevailing among the people—the claim to Divine revelation by the direct teachings of the Holy Spirit, which was set up and taught, could only be voiced dogmatically. (And who shall say that in the realm of the spiritual these utterances of these converts were not as valid and philosophical as the ex-cathedra of a spiritually dead church and ministry?)

So it was that men and women and children, without other equipment than was born of this new life, stood up in the assemblies to declare the great things of the Kingdom: Marvelously effective for good were these efforts.

The simple story of Saving Grace and the love of God in the heart—the great and imminent danger of the sinner without the consciousness of pardon—the unfeigned and agonizing solicitude of the convert for the salvation of unsaved friends, the positive declaration of their own deliverance from sin and hell, together with the melting, loving pleadings with the unsaved to repent, wrought wondrous changes for the better in the lives of multitudes.

These testimonies of the common and unofficial people, were justified by their fruitage. They savored of Apostolic times—they believed; they spake; they knew. Perhaps the forcefulness of dogmatism was never better illustrated than in this piece of history. Its potent influence here mentioned was evidently due to its association with spiritual truth, according to the Divine plan. This combination was a grand success.

But it is wisdom in us to conclude that in this combination we have the entirety of the divine plan for the propagation of the gospel among men, in all conditions to the end of time? Or that our fathers had the only way, or the best way of expressing religious emotions and convictions; or if theirs was the only and best way for them it is the only and best way for us?

Nor should it be thought that we have not neither do we need to have religious excitements in modern revivals, because our feelings are under more complete control, and find expressions in a more quiet way. Strong emotions are rampant in the spiritual life. Just how they are expressed is of minor importance.

In all ecclesiastical history there may not be found an exact parallel of the times we have now under review. And why, with constantly changing conditions of things should we expect all the religious manifestations of other days in the present day?

Shall we pray and sigh for an old time revival when the Master has evidently something better in store for us? Because God made good use of illiteracy in the past is it always to be relied upon for success? Has He no place in his plans for sanctified, cultured talents, even such as were not always available for Baptists one hundred years ago? May not the Holy Spirit appear more fully to the reason of the present generation of sinners—as He did to Saul the cultured—with the "Why persecutest thou me?"

Should not a public profession of faith in Christ be made to-day with a wider intelligence of its blessings and responsibilities, and with more abiding emotions than heretofore? Otherwise the reputation of our pastors must suffer. Several facts in our history suggests these thoughts.

1. Many well educated people were converted in these old revivals and they have, as a class, constituted the most influential and useful members of the Baptist family.

2. From the days of our beginnings in these provinces our pastors and best members have been laboring to correct the many erroneous doctrines, and the practices growing out of them, which have found entertainment in our churches from the days of the New Lights; and which in too many instances still claim squatter's rights among us. As an instance of this fact it is known that the Emotionalism of the early revivals scarcely reached the pockets of the converts. The present demand is for the exercise of world-wide scriptural benevolence, which shall capture all religious emotions and command our entire ability to give. And as the emotional can have but stunted growth in ignorance—where it may be loud in its expression but limited in its conceptions—the revival of religion that will meet present demands must be born of a knowledge of the things of Christ's kingdom, which our past could not provide.

In these first revivals evangelical religion had its birth in our land. It then spake as a child, it felt as a child, it thought as a child; but the evangelism of to-day is called upon to put away childish things.

Then, the usefulness of the members of our churches is conditioned on their growth. Let us not attempt to reverse this order of things by taking our people back to

those old beginnings; an act so much like attempting to take our grown-up children back to childhood.

On the other hand it may be suggested that it is not well for us to despise the day of small things. Only as we replace with better things can we afford to remove the emotional and dogmatic from a leading place in our evangelistic methods.

The smith heats the metal ere he attempts to weld or fashion it. God melts the heart ere He moulds it to godlikeness. A religion without intense emotions is not the religion of the Bible. A spiritual life without sensibilities and sensations is a misnomer.

And while the dogmatism of the not widely informed, as it voices error, may perplex the pastor and be a source of trouble in the church, yet its mischievous influence in religion may be far more than outweighed by much that is now passing as gospel in the circles of the learned.

The unlearned taught of God by direct revelation have in every age stood among the leaders in reforms and the realm of spiritual truths. Their fallibilities have never been more marked than has the conceited foolishness of the school men. We can always in things spiritual afford to trust the "we know" of the common people, who have been "born from above" against the "we guess" or the "we know" of the spiritually dead post-graduates in ecclesiastical orders.

Literary finish and rhetorical flourish is frequently made to cloak limping logic and false exegesis, and spiritual ignorance. By a cultured and pseudo religious sleight of hand—the sentimental is put in the place of the evangelical—the learned man in the place of the God-man.

Who shall say that the gospel of the Son of God, given to the world, with the personal emotions and convictions which a belief of it begets, has not done more for the uplifting of humanity than all other agencies known?

Among the realities of life, the primary emotions of hope, fear and love are still, as they ever have been dynamic forces in the world. "Men feel before they think." "Emotion precedes and outlasts argument." The power of religion dwells not in the heart by argument but by inspiration. The all-conquering power of Christianity is its spirit. "The scientific method has liberated us, but it can never feed us. The noblest intellect is that which is shot through and through with passion. We all live more in what we want to be than in what we are." And the common people crave the note of certainty.

Baptist churches originated in revivals of religion; they can only endure as the evangelical spirit abides in them, and is voiced by them.

J. H. SAUNDERS.

Letter From India.

To the readers of MESSENGER AND VISITOR:—Various incidents and phases of life in India have been presented so often to the readers of this paper that I suppose it is not easy to write of anything that will be really new. It is probable that others have written about the Hill stations of India but as I have spent some weeks at one of them I thought I should like to add my word of appreciation.

The short time I have been in the country and the exceptional privileges I have enjoyed in the Plains makes it impossible that I should appreciate the Hills as much as those less favored. Still one can often see a value for others in something which yields little value to himself.

When we left Vizianagram the last of March the compound was as destitute of verdure as a city thoroughfare. The blazing sun day after day had made the ground so hard that it is well nigh impossible to drive a stake in it. The leaves of the trees, in fact everything, was coated in dust. The wells were dry and the water for all purposes was brought long distances.

On the way to Madras a gentleman who had been in the country twenty years said that in all that time he had never felt the heat so much as on that day.

When we reached Coonoor our Hill station we put on our overcoats. As we rode along our eyes were gladdened by the luxuriant vegetation of many shades. At places the air was saturated with the perfume of roses of which there are many varieties both wild and cultivated. The great Calla Lillies looked up at us with a welcome we were glad to accept, while best of all, we heard the music of the brooks as they hurried down the hillside, I had seen nothing like it before in India.

Miss Orlebar is an English lady who has turned aside from missionary work to some extent that she may minister to missionaries. She has a number of Hill station "homes" and a devoted band of helpers. The home at Coonoor is named "Brooklands." Probably there were no missionaries there during the season and as many as 50 at one time. There were representatives from many societies and from all parts of India. Several deeply spiritual men had charge of the religious services and every effort was made to develop the highest religious life. In this way Miss Orlebar exerts a wide influence over the missionaries of India.

The morning prayers, the evening worship, the Bible readings, the general prayer-meetings and the little groups that meet for prayer in the wards, the personal conversations and the continual contact and fellowship with so many of God's chosen workmen. How much it must mean to the missionary who has been alone at his station, scarce