

THE HISTORY OF REVIVALS.

BY REV. DR. BURNS, MONTREAL.

DISCOURSE DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD OF MONTREAL IN KNOX CHURCH, ON TUESDAY EVE., FIFTH MAY, 1874, AND PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL REQUEST OF THE SYNOD.

Acts iii. 19: "When the times of Refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

This forms part of Peter's pungent address to the wondering multitude that thronged him and John in Solomon's Porch after the cure of the cripple by the Beautiful Gate. Times of refreshing are seasons of revival in the Church when God who is rich in mercy quickens the dead in sin, not by a few at a time scattered here and there through the Death Valley, but in exceeding great armies; when the ark of refuge is sought, not by units or tens, but by "flocks of men" arresting general attention and exciting the enquiry, "Who are those that fly as a cloud and as doves to their windows?" Times of refreshing are the rich, full vintage not the "glonning of grapes"; the abundant harvest, not the few straggling sheaves "the plenteous rain," not as when a drop from Heaven fell. Times of Refreshing are the Church's spring time, succeeding the gloomy winter of inactivity and discount and death; of coldness and hardness and arrested vegetation. The winding sheet of snow melts away. The icy chains are dissolved. Motionless forms are roused from the stupor which spiritual numbness induces into the varied activities of the Christian life. Zion's ships that had long been locked in their Arctic prison houses get released and with sails all set and wooing the wind that bloweth where it listeth, carry on a new blessed commerce with the skies. The Church becomes the scene of energetic labour, of earnest purpose, of fervent prayer, each member realizing personal responsibility. Instead of staying all the day idle, anxiously asking, "Lord what wouldst thou have me to do?" there is all the difference that obtains between our harbour, and wharves as they were a few weeks since and the scene of bustling activity that begins to present itself now.

During a time of refreshing a genial warmth prevades the Church. Its atmosphere before foggy and frigid, and at times emitting the miasma of decay, becomes clear and balmy, and laden with fragrant odours. The bare branches are clothed with verdure. The fields are spread with their carpet of "living green." Opening buds and blossoms supplant the dead leaves that yet linger in the lap of spring. The vernal showers descend. The winter is past—the flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing of birds is come. With such "times of refreshing the Church has from the beginning been blessed. It is our purpose at this time to attempt a cursory resume of their history. It is our hearts desire and prayer that even such a rapid and imperfect review as our present limits can admit of, may induce us to ask—for our land and Church, "Hast thou not a blessing for us? Bless us even us, O our Father?" Revivals are of ancient date. Away back in the dim distance of the antediluvian age, when corruption was rank and the curse impended, it is written of the times of Seth and Enos, "Then began men to call on the name of the Lord," an oasis in a desert, a gleam amid the gloom, a "time of refreshing" following and preceding times of recreancy and declension. From Noah to Abraham the pathway of history, like that from Jerusalem to Jericho is "desert" relieved only at occasional intervals by tiny patches of moral verdure.

And so it was largely during the five centuries from Abraham to Joshua. We find "the Church in the house" among the post-diluvian Patriarchs the Church sitting solitary as a widow in Egypt. "The Church in the Wilderness" thereafter, with stray rays shooting through the cloud-rifts, but nothing worthy of the name of a time of refreshing till towards the close of Joshua's firm, yet kindly rule. There was everything in the circumstances and surroundings of the vast throng that gathered round their venerable chief at Shechem to produce deep emotion. The sea of upturned faces sparkles and surges as over it is waved the Hand that had led them from victory to victory, and landed them in "safe dwellings and quiet resting places." The spirit of God moved on their faces. There is a great calm, amid whose solemn stillness rise the notes of Joshua's familiar voice, as in a Valedictory of peculiar pathos and power, he takes a retrospect of their History and presses on them the duties of the hour. With such a background as theirs and such a prospect as his how "forcible" are these "right words" "Now, therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord." As the trees of the forest, under the tempest's sweep, the multitude sways and fro under the power of his farewell appeal. Stirred to their heart's depths, they exclaim with one voice, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." The faithful man holds them to their word, following up his melting appeal in these stirring terms. "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen the Lord to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses. The Lord our God we will serve and His voice we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and set them a covenant and an ordinance in Shechem. Declension follows after a while, and for three centuries, during the fifteen Judges, the true religion languishes. The latter part of Samuel's administration when they are rebuked severely for disowning a Divine, and deifying a human King, witnesses "a little reviving in their bondage." Few and far between were the times of refreshing under the Kings, many of whom, specially among the revolting tribes, God "gave in His anger," because they would not have Him to govern them. The reign of David and Solomon witnessed stirrings

of the popular mind but they were connected chiefly with public celebrations. Their own private inconsistencies together with pressure of public business, and wars and rumours of wars stood as serious barriers in the way of any general revival work. Ase's reign witnessed "great joy" at Jerusalem, when along the Damascus road and over Olivet, and through the Joppa Gap, and up the Hill of Zion, multitudes of men women and children trooped to the holy convocations. Times of refreshing followed at intervals under the reigns Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, and during the history of Elijah and kindred men of God—when high days were kept, and solemn covenant engagements were renewed.

Repeatedly have we such testimonies as thus, "They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul." And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn. And sought Him with their whole desire and He was found of them." One of the most remarkable of these Old Testament "times of refreshing" was under amiable and devoted Edward Sixth of his day—the young King Josiah. Early piety in him turned out eminent piety. The great Revival in Josiah's day began on this wise. The law of the Lord which had been stowed away amid the rubbish of the temple, was found by Hilkiah the High Priest. Read in the young King's hearing by Shaphan, the scribe, it produces on his mind a very deep impression—"Humble and of a contrite spirit, he trembles at God's Word." Realizing the wrath of God abiding upon them and that the vials might be emptied any moment, he at once has a mass meeting convened. The King himself becomes a Scripture reader. "He read in their ears all the words of the Book of the Covenant which was found in the House of the Lord. The intense emotion awakened in his own breast is transmitted to theirs.

The Bible-readings then as now are owned of God. The tears and prayers of prince and people mingle, then they renew the Covenant. "The King stood by a Pillar and made a Covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all their heart and with all their soul to perform the words of this Covenant that were written in this Book, and all the people stood to the Covenant."

A great National Reformation followed, headed by the King, in which the entire land was thoroughly cleared of all the abominations of idolatry terminating in the holding of a Passover, the like of which had scarcely every been seen. During a portion of the 70 years of the captivity, through the labours of men of the Ezekiel and Daniel type, a work of grace seems to have started amongst the exiles making many of them willing to abandon the comforts these years had gathered round them and to brave the perils and privations of the Wilderness, on the return journey. "Now for a little space (says Ezra) grace hath been showed from the Lord our God to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place—that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." The scene after the return when the great crowd gather round the wooden pulpit, and Ezra reads and explains the Book of the Law, recalls the excitement and enthusiasm of the Josiah revival. Bible-reading and exposition again are blessed. The 500 years that follow till the fullness of time witnessed "Lights and shadows," the darkness deepening as the dawn approached.

The time of John the Baptist standing standing midway between the old and the new dispensations was a "time of refreshing." The Pioneer of Christ was a great Revival Preacher on whose lips crowds hung. Publicans, Soldiers, Pharisees, Sadducees alike anxiously asked what shall we do? and though led by him under the frowning shadow of Sinai, many of them were afterwards brought to Calvary—the Law becoming a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ in whose tenderness its terrors were taken away. Though, as if to magnify the office of the Spirit and show the ministrations of the Spirit to be rather glorious, the three years and a half of Christ's personal Ministry seemed less fruitful than as many hours at Pentecost, yet was His coming emphatically "The Time of Reformation." "The fullness of the time.

In a peculiar manner did the Apostolic Age witness "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." As a consequence, the conversions were numerous and sudden. The second of the Acts tells of 3,000 as Peter preached; the 4th chap., of 5,000 men under the preaching of Peter and John. In the 6th chapter at the setting apart of the Deacons we are informed that "the Word of the Lord increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the Priests were obedient to the Faith." The 8th chapter describes "persecution's sifting fan scattering the good seed." The Disciples "went everywhere preaching the word." And again at chap. xi, "they which were scattered abroad upon the persecutions that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." The net these fishers of men let down on the "right side of the ship" was rewarded with "marvellous draughts." That entire era was "a time of refreshing" during which were displayed in most beautiful accord the two main elements which enter into a Revival, the adding in large numbers to the Church of saved ones and the development and growth of spiritual life in those who are saved.

The Age of the Fathers had also its "times of refreshing." Many the younger at the beginning of the 2nd century tells of multitudes even in distant Bithynia who met to sing hymns and worship Christ as a God." Tertullian writing to the Roman Emperor in the 3rd century says: "Though we are strangers of no long standing, yet we have filled all places of your dominions, cities, islands, corporations, councils, armies, tribes, the senate, the palace, the

courts of judicature. The more we are moved down—the more we spring up again. The blood of the Christians is seed." The golden zenith of Chryseostom wrought marvels at Antioch in the fourth century. We read of "the poor watching from midnight until dawn, not yielding to sleep by night, nor shrinking from want by day."

Around the pulpit of Gregory of Nazianzum at Constantinople in the same century, the crowds clustered like bees, and he tells us of what was better than the frequent hard-clapping that greeted the great pulpit orator of Antioch, of "the silent meditation of those who would fain concern the inward struggles of their souls." Columba and the Cuckles of the sixth century, Claude with Turin disciples of the 9th; the poor merchants of Lyons, The Waldenses and Lollards, the Hussites and Wycliffites of succeeding centuries were the Revivalists of the Middle Ages.

And what was the great Protestant Reformation itself but a "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." We are apt to look at it too much in its doctrinal ecclesiastical and social aspects, merely as the exploding of dogmas, the abolition of mumery, the removal of ritualistic rubbish. The Reformation broke in upon the stagnation of that dead Sea on whose banks the world for centuries had slumbered. It was a revival of the Faith once delivered to the Saints, the blessed birth time of many precious souls. The Lord gave the Word that Word of God which superstition bound great was the company of them that published it. As the result of its publication through preaching and printing in many lands it had free course and was glorified through that and the succeeding age.

Luther in Germany, Calvin in France, Zwingle and Farel in Switzerland, Knox and Melville in Scotland, Wycliffe and Latimer in England, were revival preachers of the highest type. Never was there so wide spread a concern about religion; never were there so many conversions; the published correspondence of the Reformers and particularly of Martin Luther and John Calvin, shows that a large part of their time was employed in giving counsel to inquiring souls.

Reaching the 17th century we find in 1623 a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God accompanying the labors of Robert Blair, "of a majestic yet amiable countenance" a Scottish exile who became the father of Presbyterianism in the sister Island. "The Lord was pleased (remarks a cotemporary, John Livingstone) by His Word, to work such a change that I do not think there were more lively and experienced Christians any where than were at this time in Ireland." "The blessed work of conversion (says Blair) which was of several years' continuance, spread beyond the bounds of Down and Antrim, to the skirts of neighbouring counties about the same time, and by some of the same instruments so signally owned in Ulster, a time of refreshing came to the West of Scotland.

John Welsh the heroic son-in-law of Knox was so blessed at Ayr, that the modest author of "Oh mother dear Jerusalem" David Dickson declared "the gleanings of Ayr in Mr. Welsh's time were far above the vintage of Irvine in his own" but others tell of sometimes a hundred waiting to converse with Dickson at the manse of Stowarton after the weekly lecture on market day, and of the revival spreading from house to house for many miles along the valley. The Kirk of Shotts in Lanarkshire had a wonderful time of refreshing in 1630 on the Sacrament Moaday through Livingstone, who tried to run away from the service but was brought back by the rushing text "was I ever a barren wilderness?" 500 were converted. This great revival was afterwards described "as the sowing of a seed through Clydesdale, so as many of the most eminent Christians in that country could date either their conversion or some remarkable confirmation from it whose effects were far enacting and permanent.

The 1638 Assembly at Glasgow, the era of the 2nd Reformation inaugurated a blessed "time of refreshing, 1666 the Plague year in London when the grim rider on the pale horse was at almost every door, was a time of refreshing. The largest Churches were crammed. Richard Baxter tells us "that through the blessing of God, abundance were converted from their carelessness, impenitency and youthful lusts and vanities, and religion took such a hold on many hearts as could never afterwards be loosened."

The following century in 1784 Northampton Mass. enjoyed that great "time of refreshing" with which the name of Jonathan Edwards will be over associated. Sermons severe in their logic and calm and clear in their doctrinal statement the Spirit accompanied with prodigious power. "It was the beginning of a work that spread to regions beyond whose sparks flew even across the ocean to kindle like fire in father land. Four years previously, and in 1780 and within the classic halls of Oxford Methodism found its cradle, but it was not till 1788, that John Wesley reading Edwards narrative, exclaimed: "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes." Contemporaneous yet distinct, two great Revival movements progress on both sides of the ocean. Very different were the English from the American Revivalists, but though there were "diversities of operations (then as now) it was the same Spirit. Of this era one of the most singular "times of refreshing" occurred in 1742 at Cambuslang near Glasgow. Ninety heads of families applied for a weekly Lecture. Prayer meetings were multiplied, 50 anxious enquirers sought the Pastors—Mr. McCulloch's study in one day. Before Mr. George Whitefield's arrival, within 12 weeks 800 gave evidence of conversion. At the first communion after, 24 ministers, 8,000 communicants and between thirty and forty thousand people were present. The fruits of the Cambuslang revival remain to this day.

Towards the close of the last and the early part of the present century times of refreshing have been enjoyed in various parts of the Old Country and of this Continent. In 1794 through Wales under Charles of Bala; in 1798 at Monlin, under

the Rev. Alexander Stewart, in 1812 at Arran, under the Rev. Mr. McBride, and in 1824 at Lewis, under Rev. Roderick McLeod. Thus when, through French infidelity, the enemy came in like a flood did the Spirit of the Lord lift up a standard against him.

More recent "times of refreshing" range themselves into three groups—the first from 1836 to 1840; the second, from 1857 to 1860; and the third, the blessed season which is being enjoyed by so many now. From 1826 to 1832, God poured out His Spirit on the Colleges and Seminaries of America, and during those and succeeding years were witnessed the triumphs of Nettleton and Finney. In 1839, as the fruit of her reviving evangelism, and the fore-runner of that disruption which was itself the practical proof of a revived religious state, many parts of Scotland enjoyed "times of refreshing" through the apostolic labours of Wm. C. Burns, and Robert Murray McChyne, and a bright galaxy of holy ones like-minded. In January 1836 a few earnest Christians in New York, commenced praying for a "time of refreshing." "Scores of richly laden vessels (said one of the suppliants) are now lying in the river, a few miles below our city, anxiously waiting to reach our wharves, why this delay? Because the channel is closed by the ice. Thus (he added) it is, with the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Not only is He willing, but He is waiting to bestow them upon us, why does He not bestow them, Alas! Prayer is indeed the appointed channel through which the blessing flows, but the channel is not open by which for God to communicate or for us to receive it. It is because we restrain prayer (there was the ice) that the things which remain are ready to die." Of this conviction the last great American revival was the fruit.

On the 28th of September of the following year at the very time the whole country was reeling with the shock of a great commercial earthquake (the financial crisis of 1857) the Fulton Street Prayer meeting, was started with a view to clear away the spiritual ice which was more than ever blocking up the channel. It began with one earnest humble man, who had to wait half an hour ere another joined him. "At half past 12, the step of a solitary individual was heard on the stairs. Shortly after, another and another; then another, until six made up the whole company. We had a good meeting. The Lord was with us to bless us"—adds the simpleminded founder of that now celebrated prayer meeting, whose "holy one" gone out through all the earth, and it's words to the end of the world." Soon the place became too strait for them; the little one became a thousand. Theatres were crowded. In largest halls no standing room could be found. Streets were blocked up. In New York and Brooklyn alone 150 such meetings were held. The wires of this spiritual telegraph, along which messages went daily up, were spread over the entire land. The wonderful answers that came; the 10,000 converts in these cities alone, multiplied many times over throughout the Union—with practical fruits, various and blessed—are the recorded attestations to the "power of prayer." The year following was Ireland's "year of grace." A mustard seed at first, it also rapidly generated, till it filled the land. The fruit appeared in many new congregations formed, in additions of from 100 to 800, to those previously organized, in meetings for prayer multiplied; Sabbath schools never before so prosperous, family religion never so well attended to, religious liberality unusually developed, Bibles and wholesome literature circulated freely, immorality and vice diminished, religious agencies multiplied, and the whole tone of the country's piety improved, "so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

It is Scotland now which is being especially blessed with a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. That favored land felt only in a partial and limited measure the influence of the American and Irish revivals of the 2nd period. The wave influence went "by the way of the sea." It swept portions of her coast—certain fishing villages being wrought upon; here and there the snoken masses partly too, but the cities were not stirred. As over a century and a quarter ago, when Canbuslang felt the thrill from Northampton, the blessing has come to our loved fatherland through an American channel. Strangely enough, Mr. Moody is from the very State that Edwards adorned. But how different the impressive, outspoken American man of business from that prince of logicians and first of philosophical divines. In nothing can they be compared, in everything contrasted. Yet He who is wonderful in counsel, and whose prerogative it is to make the weak things confound the mighty, has made this American lad, with the five barley loaves and the two small fishes, the instrument of feeding thousands; or, like the lamb of barley bread that tumbled into the camp of Midian, bringing defeat to the enemy, and victory to the Lord's host. The work is attested by the most competent judges as the most wonderful ever witnessed in Scotland since the Reformation. Her cultured Capital, where are congregated her ablest scholars and divines, a city that abhors sensationalism, and where mere clap trap would at once be frowned down, has been stirred to its depths, more widely and deeply than when Whitefield wielded the witchery of his marvellous eloquence. Yet this man, of no culture or extraordinary ability, fills the largest halls and churches in Edinburgh, and holds eager thousands—the lofty and lowly—the rude and the refined, spell bound for hours. For months in succession, three, four, five times a day, he has spoken on one day even seven times to 15,000—and it is always the same old, old story of Jesus and His love. Peers of the realm, judges, advocates, professors; rub shoulders with the outscouring of all things pouring in from the sums of Cowgate. The "sweet hour of prayer" daily gathers multitudes. The Corn Exchange is packed to suffocation with 8,000 men admitted by ticket, and standing all the time—700 of whom repair thereafter to a second meeting, where nigh 8,000 rise for prayer. At the noon meetings the last week of the year

might, be seen fishermen from the Fife coast with their wives, and strangers from all the towns round about. Ministers of the highest repute for learning and piety give their endorsement. Infidelity looks abashed at a moment when its pretensions were being haunted most insultingly.

The proponents of "the Prayer Gauge" have got their defiant challenge taken up, and their blended weakness and wickedness rebuked in a way they did not count on. These literary and scientific Goliaths have found their David. "I thank Thee O Father," &c.

It is ground for fervent gratitude, fathers and brethren, that to some portions of our beloved Church have been granted "times of refreshing." Even within the limits of our own Synod tokens for good have not been withheld. At least the little cloud has come out upon our sky. May it be the herald and harbinger of "showers of blessings." To this end let us get up into the high mountain—unto the seven times of the Prophet's servant. If we wait patiently on the Lord, He will incline unto us and hear our cry. In contrast to the Gadarenes who besought Christ to depart out of their coast, we are told immediately afterwards of the residents on the other side of the Lake, that they "gladly received Him, for they were all waiting for Him." In this attitude of anxious anticipation was the Primitive Church on her knees, for days in succession. Forty days after their Master's resurrection, they see Him rise from the green sward of Olivet. That Thursday night finds them holding prayer meeting in an Upper Room—a few feeble men and women. Friday, Saturday, Sabbath, they are still there, but no sign from heaven! Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday pass, but where is the promise of His coming? It is now Thursday again—a whole week since their friend left them. Has His promise failed for evermore? Said He not unto us, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence?" Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but they will not give way to this heart sickness. Eight days are not many. They are but "a few" after all. To the sure word of promise they cleave with the purpose of heart. "Wait we for?" Our hope is in Thee, O Lord. The vision tarry, we shall wait for it. It surely come. Thus do they continue in prayer and supplication with the women. They that before could not watch with him one hour, wait for Him day after day, day after day. But why this delay, when the whole world had to be conquered for their King, and they were to be its conquerors. Had He not said, "Ye shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Should not their active witness bearing begin at once—when the wave of their influence had to widen its concentric circles till it broke on the remotest shores of our world? No! With them as with their fathers by the sea. The command, "Stand still," must precede the marching orders, "Go forward."

"Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high"—must be attended to, before they are in a fit position to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. They received power after that the Holy Ghost had come upon them. Thus, out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant. The triumphs of Apostolic times attest the "power of the Holy Ghost," and we can have such "times of refreshing reproduced only with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven."

We need the baptism of fire. In that fire is the hiding of our power. Unless is mere machinery furnaces, boilers, water, fuel, to propel that mighty vessel over the ocean, but the central fire does it. The fire of God's Spirit is the great motive power of the Church. In vain are cannon, powder, and balls set down in front of you, frowning fortress, but let a spark be brought into contact with them, and inactive and harmless though they look in themselves, they get an explosive power that makes the mightiest Malakoff crumble. Our weapons, not carnal, are powerless in themselves, but they become mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Nor let us forget how best we may be filled with the Spirit, and be endued with this power. We must "come out from the world and be separate." Chemistry tells us (to use an old familiar figure) that the jar can best be charged with electricity, which is raised above the ground, and placed on a crystal stand. And we can best be filled with the electric currents from on high, and emit sparks of influence to all who touch us, when, though in the world, we are not of the world. Let us remember too that part of the Apocalyptic vision, which represents the seven lamps which are the seven spirits of God, as, "before the Throne and round about it." This must be our position if we are to receive the Spirit, not of fear, but of power. Before the Throne, round about the Throne, acting as the "Lord's remembrances," "proving Him now"—giving Him no rest." Thus let us wait and work, and wait and wait, and to our own souls and our several churches there will come as to others before and now "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Get the up into the high mountain then. Be on against the mulberry grove, and when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then thou shalt best thyself; for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines." 11 Sam. v. 24.

The sound even now breaks on our ears. Let us besite ourselves, and if we can do nothing else, let the good news from the father country set each soul amongst us in the attitude of earnest expectancy, stimulating us to say to our soul, "my soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him; and to say unto God, our Kneel, in whom all our springs reside, and from whom all our supplies must flow. Will thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

Lord, I hear of showers of blessing Thou art scattering, fall and freeze: Showers the thirsty land refreshing. Let some dropping fall on me.

(Continued on third page.)