

## THE USES AND PERILS OF REVIVAL AGENCIES.

Bishop Potter, of New York, preached recently in St. Bartholomew's Church a striking sermon, in which he discussed the good and evil aspects of revival system. His topic was 'Revival Agencies: Their Uses and Perils.' The sermon was delivered in the interests of the Parochial Missions Society, of which he is president; the other officers are the Rev. Charles F. Canedy, secretary; the Rev. E. H. Cleveland, assistant secretary; and Samuel A. Blatchford, treasurer. Under this society there is one general missionary, the Rev. G. A. Carstensen, of Brooklyn, and about forty assistant missionaries. Its object is the 'Promoting of parochial missions in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States,' and its aims are, "First—To establish a bureau of information and a depot of literature on the subject of parochial missions; second—To assist rectors of parishes in obtaining fit men to conduct missions, and to give counsel and aid in the work of preparation; third—To form a staff of mission preachers." Any clergyman or lay communicant of the Church in sympathy with the object of the society may be enrolled as a member. The report, read at the annual meeting, held in Calvary Church in December, shows that much good has been accomplished in many churches by the missions conducted by the society.

Bishop Potter, the son of the Bishop of Pennsylvania and the nephew of the Bishop of New York was born in Schoenectady, N. Y., on May 25, 1835. He was graduated from the Protestant Episcopal Seminary of Virginia, and became rector of Christ's Church, Greensburg, Penn., in 1857. Two years later he was called to St. John's Church in Troy, and in 1866 he became assistant minister at Trinity Church in Boston, where he remained for two years, when he was invited to the rectorship of Grace Church, New York. In 1883 he was elected Assistant Bishop of New York, and on the death of his uncle, Bishop Horatio Potter, he became Bishop of the diocese. The presidency of Kenyon College and several flattering offers from prominent churches he declined while he was a rector. Among the books which he has published are 'Sisterhoods and Deaconesses,' 'At Home and Abroad,' 'Gates of the East,' 'A Winter in Egypt and Syria,' 'Sermons of the City,' 'Thirty Years Renewed,' 'Our Threefold Victory,' 'The Church and the Children,' 'The Religion for Today,' 'The Young Men's Christian Associations and Their Work.'

### JOHN THE BAPTIST AN EVANGELIST.

The text which Dr. Potter selected as the basis of the sermon was: "In those days came John the Baptist crying Repent ye . . . And the soldiers . . . demanded of him saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be contented with your wages."—(St. Matthew iii, 1, 2, and St. Luke iii, 14) The sermon was as follows:

This is the anniversary, and we are gathered this evening in the interests of the Parochial Mission Society. It will clear the air a little if I explain its title and define its aims. It is not "parochial" in the sense of being connected with any parish. It is not a missionary organization in the sense of supporting a body of missionaries; and it is not a society in the sense of having any other than the most informal and elementary organization.

But it represents those, in the Anglican communion and in our own, who recognize the necessity of at least occasionally supplementing the ordinary agencies and ministries of the Church with others which, going only and always with the consent, and on the invitation of

those who are engaged with its care, into any parish where they may be so bidden, bring to it a fresh voice, direct appeals, frequent services, personal contact, informal meetings for prayer and inquiry and such other quickening methods as experience and observation have tested and vindicated. In other words, obnoxious as the term may be to some, I know none better to describe the work of which we have come here to-night to hear than to call it a revival agency.

As such, one can easily understand the surprise, if not disapproval, which it will awaken in many minds, especially in this land, in our own day, and in our own branch of the Church Catholic.

For in this land revival agencies in the domain of religion are no new things. It would be impossible intelligently to write the religious history of the United States without taking into account that feature of it for which revivalism stands. Not in one sect or communion alone, but in almost all, its methods have obtained and its results have been strenuously sought. Among some bodies of Christians its work is that which is chiefly valued and most largely counted upon for growth or enlargement, and it is not too much to say that, for considerably more than a century, and in some of most numerous religious bodies, all other agencies, so far as their aggressive work is concerned, are considered as of but secondary and insignificant value.

### CONSPICUOUS TRAITS OF REVIVALISM.

An agency which has been thus employed and esteemed for more than an hundred years has made a record for itself, and may now, at any rate, be dispassionately and impartially judged. And we need have no hesitation in saying, however estimable are the aims and spirit of those who have employed it, that the result of such judgment on the part of a vast and constantly increasing body of devout and thoughtful people, both within and without those communions, in which it has been employed, is that, on the whole, and as it has hitherto existed among us, what is known as the revival system is, both in many of its characteristics and its results, largely vicious and evil. It has exalted emotionalism at the expense of deliberation in choice and conscientious purpose in action. It has appealed to the feelings rather than to the judgment, and has swayed the passions more than the reason. It has a mad at producing a spasm rather than a conviction, and it has too often accepted mere physical excitement in the place of reformation of character. Oftener than otherwise it has been heated and noisy, rather than serious and chastened, and its effects have been very frequently doubted or distrusted unless they illustrated themselves in extravagance of speech, and vehemence of that "bodily exercise" which the Apostles yet declareth "profiteth nothing."

These have been among its conspicuous notes or traits. Its results have been no less marked. The inevitable reaction which follows any unusual excitement of the emotions, has been followed in its turn, in what is to be feared is the vast majority of cases, by a profound apathy not only of religious sentiment, but of the personal conscience; and, to-day, whole regions of country are commonly alleged to bear witness in their complete indifference to both the moral and the spiritual, or devotional, elements of religion to the desolating effects of the revival system.

At such a moment it may well be asked, What does the Church want with an agency so unwholesome, with methods so thorough discredited? Certainly, if this is all of it, it may well want to have nothing whatever to do with it. But, at this point, the question is certainly not an improper one: "Is this all of it?" what is the revival system, not as it has sometimes been travestied and perverted, but as Christian history describes it and defines it?

For our purpose, one illustration, by way of answer to that question, is as good as an hun-

dred; and so I take that one which is presented in the verses which I have read as a text. There can be no doubt as to the estimate put by Christ Himself upon the ministry of John the Baptist, and there can be as little concerning the general character of that ministry. It departed in every particular from the ordinary and orderly ministries of the time. Judged by our standards, or by those then prevailing, it was distinctly sensational. It aimed to arouse, to alarm, to denounce, to scourge. And its effects were in accordance with its aims. If we should describe them in the phraseology of our time, we should say that there was in that part of Syria where John the Baptist preached a great religious awakening, and it would be to misrepresent the whole situation, as the New Testament has preserved the story of it, if we did not go on to say that the greatest religious movement which the world has ever seen turned as its first hinge upon the same religious awakening.

There have been repetitions of it, all the way along. Whether it is Peter the Hermit or Francis of Assisi, or Savonarola, or John Huss, or John Wesley, the thing is too familiar to be ignored or wholly disesteemed; and no effort to distinguish between great national or ecclesiastical movements, occurring at long intervals, and an agency to be employed in connection with the ordinary on going of parish life, though such a distinction is one which we are bound to recognize, can dismiss from our rightful consideration such agencies as we are here to-night to plan for. In one sense the case of a parish, and the case of a Church or a Nation are widely different; but in another they are identical. The same slumbrous torpor, the same deadness to spiritual truths, the same triumph of the spirit of worldliness over the spirit of Christ exist in one as in the other. It is, after all, only a question of extent or degree; and the exigencies of parochial life in particular communities often make that necessary in some single congregation which, under other circumstances, may be widely if not universally necessary.

### THE AIMS OF THE MISSIONS SOCIETY.

But, what is it that is necessary? or, in other words, what is it that such an association as this aims to do? As it is profoundly insensible of the evil features and often more evil accessories of the modern system of revivalism, it ought hardly to be necessary to say that it does not propose to borrow or revive these. As it is equally sensible of what I may call the distinctive traditions of this Church—traditions, let me say, which, however ridiculed or travestied, have been, as I profoundly believe, a large element of her strength and glory, and which no intelligent man will disesteem—traditions which bind her to reverence, to ritual order, to the resolute restraint of the vagaries of individualism in worship, to the systematic teaching of the young, and to the whole scheme of Christian nurture as the true ideal of the Church's life and growth—as, I say, this society is equally sensible of the Church traditions in regard to all these things, it is not here, I need hardly say, to scout or undervalue them. But it is here to recognize the fact that that very order and system which are typically and pre-eminently represented in what we call the sequence of the Christian, as distinguished from the secular year, itself presents to us conspicuous features which stand substantially for just what we stand for. In other words, Advent and Lent, whatever else they mean, mean pre-eminently that the ordinary crust of an ordinary life must be broken up, once and again, by that which forces itself in upon it with calls that are sharp, personal and searching, by hymns and litanies, by Scriptures and sermons, which deal with sin, and spiritual insensibility and an alienated and a sense-loving life.

(To be continued.)