

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING THE GREEN OF FAR-AWAY FIELDS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The old proverb says, Far-away fields are always green. Quite often there is more green in the looker than in the field.

A fairly sensible man will always make proper allowance for the distance. If poetically inclined he will think of that over-worked line which says:—

DISTANCE LENDS ENCHANTMENT TO THE VIEW.

and resolutely refuse to let the view enchant him too much.

A restless young man often sees a great deal of green in far-away fields. The town or city he lives in seems slow and stupid. His situation is entirely beneath his abilities. His surroundings are unworthy of a youth of his ambition and attainments. He looks at some business field a thousand miles away and concludes that if he were just there he would be a wealthy, prosperous man in a year or two. He goes, but when the novelty of the new place wears off, he finds that the new field is not half as green as it looked. There are difficulties there as well as at home. Perhaps the disappointment acts as a spur to his industry and ambition, and, ashamed to go back, he makes a determined and persistent effort to succeed and succeeds. Possibly the discovery that the green was mainly in his own eye paralyzes him, and he sends home for money to bring him back to the old field. Both of these things have happened "many a time and oft," as Shakespeare would say.

Some ministers have great capacity for seeing the green in distant fields. Indeed, it is to be feared that a few display more industry in hunting up green fields than in preaching or in pastoral visitation. It is so easy to magnify the difficulties of a present pastorate and to minify the drawbacks of a congregation a thousand miles away. When the new field has been secured, and the induction is over and the work has to be tackled and a hundred and one things are discovered that could not be seen at a distance, the new pastor often feels a sort of sinking sensation under the third button of his vest, and he wonders whether after all he should have moved. The faces and voices of old friends follow him as he moves around among strangers, and in his secret heart he knows that his new field is not half as green as it looked. Happy, thrice happy, is the pastor who gets such a start in his new field that he has no doubt duty called him there.

For seeing green in a distant field commend us to a congregation that wants to call a "distinguished man from a distance." The most powerful instrument ever brought to bear on a germ is weakness itself compared with the naked eye of a congregation that feels it necessary to send out of the country for a pastor. The funny part of the business is that very soon after the distinguished man comes, he looks and acts just like other men who didn't come from any great distance. "Sound him," and he does not sound any better than an average Knox man. "Weigh him," and he is no heavier than a good graduate of Queen's. "Conjure" with him, and he conjures no better than a Montreal College man.

Another funny part of the business is that the man who vociferates about "Canada for the Canadians;" who shouts until he is hoarse about the "old flag;" who is so sensitive about his loyalty that he would hardly trust himself to eat American beans or sell barley to a New York grain dealer; the man who is so haunted with the dread of annexation that he cannot sleep at night, and who coolly informs you that it would please him mightily to see a political Unionist strung up to every lamp post—that man will send over to the other side for a pastor just as quickly as any political Unionist would do. He is a tremendously loyal man, of course, but he is quite willing to have a dyed-in-the-wool Republican teach his children their duty to their Queen.

Taking the Presbyterian ministers of the United States as a whole they are a magnificent body of men. In certain lines they stand easily first. One can quite understand why they should feel proud of their great church and their great country, but it is not so easy to understand a Canadian who vociferates about Canada on the hustings and belittles Canada at the congregational meeting. At which of these places does the man mean what he says?

The green of far-away fields explains why some Canadian Theological students talk slightly about Canadian Colleges and sigh for Princeton or Edinburgh or Germany. Now it may be a good thing for a student to take an extra session or a post-graduate course in a college other than his own. To meet the students of other colleges and hear lectures from other professors ought to be of some advantage to almost any student, but there is a good deal of green in the distant college field as well as in any other. There is grim humour in having a young man "blow" about Princeton, or Union, or Edinburgh, or Germany and then hearing him read a little essay in the pulpit that has not as much good matter in it as might be found in an average Highlandman's grace before meat.

The green of far-away fields accounts in part for the exodus. A certain proportion of the million Canadians now said to be in the United States, no doubt went there because they could

see the drawbacks around home quite distinctly, but distance prevented them from seeing all the difficulties of the far west. Many of them have done well, but so have many who remained in their own country. It would be interesting to know just how many Canadians in the States would willingly admit that the field over there is not quite as green as it looked.

Ecclesiastical fields often seem much greener than they are. Many a man has shouted that he would "leave the church," and then bounded over the fence into other ecclesiastical pastures, only to find that new pasture was not quite as good as the old. At all events that is how it generally is when a man leaves Presbyterian pasture.

REVIVAL.

BY REV. WILLIAM ROSS.

The following address was given by the Rev. William Ross at the Presbyterian Alliance meeting, Toronto:—

Revival is our greatest and most pressing need. To obtain it for ourselves, our congregations and for the world ought to be one of the supreme objects of this Alliance meeting. We have had many able and important papers on subjects of great interest, but this is the greatest of all interests. The disciples waited upon their risen Lord in prayer for ten days before the Pentecostal blessing, and it would be certainly a miracle of grace were we to experience a revival in fifteen minutes. We need not so much to talk about the subject as to experience the power of the Holy Ghost so that each of us shall carry into our homes and congregations a present and lasting blessing. There are three considerations of the utmost weight which demand our earnest attention. 1st: Revival is the greatest and most pressing need of the individual believer, of the Church of God and of the world. 2nd: Revival has enabled the Church to reach the highest point in Christian character and the highest landmark in attainment and Christian effort. 3rd: Revival—habitual and unceasing is the teaching of God's Word, the lesson of experience and the pledge of the world's subjugation to Christ. In closing it might be desirable to consider some objections that are made to such times of refreshing from the presence of God, but time will not admit of that.

I.

Revival is the greatest and most pressing need of the believer and of the Church. By Revival, we mean that healthful condition of Christian life and experience which enables the individual believer and the Church, in the power of the Holy Ghost, to meet the claims of God, the opportunities in Providence and the needs of the Church and the world. It need scarcely be said that this is not the normal condition of the believer or of the Church. The experience of the Psalmist is only too familiar to us: "My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken me according to Thy word," or that of the apostle when he said: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" In the Christian life there seems to be three distinct experiences: a time of declension, a season of conscious burdening and an experience of conscious power when one can say: "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." Between conscious declension and conscious power there is a great variety of experience and throughout it all the yearning of the soul is for revival and personal experience of the presence and power of God. There are those who can understand Horace Bonar as he sings these minor notes:

Return to me, my oft-forgotten God,
My Spirit's true though long forsaken rest,
Undo these bars, re-enter Thine abode
In Thee and in Thy life alone would I be blest.

Remould this inner man in every part,
Reknit these broken ties, resume Thy sway,
Take as Thy throne and altar this poor heart,
Oh teach me how to live, Oh help me to obey.

In our own experience as ministers and Christian workers, have we not known of many who had made a hopeful start in the Christian life, and yet after awhile their life instead of being constantly aggressive became dwarfed and the life was shrivelled, if not withered. Dr. McDonald, of Ferintosh, whom the Lord so signally blessed in Scotland upwards of a half a century ago, and to whom the Lord gave such multitudes of souls, had often to deal with young believers and to warn them in regard to the future of their life. He used to put the question to them thus: "Why is it that so many who make a hopeful profession at the beginning seem so quickly to fail?" and he answered the question by saying: "It was because they started business without capital." By this he meant that the indwelling of the Holy Ghost as the spirit of power for a pure life and devoted service was not personally and specially asked for and obtained as a conscious possession: hence the failure. Whether we look at the condition of the believer from within or regarding his environment, we are constrained to acknowledge that in the majority of instances the one need of the soul is spiritual power. Job cried, "Oh, that it were with me as in months past when the candle of the Lord shone upon me." The apostle in writing to the Hebrews complained that he was under the necessity of nursing babes who ought by that time to have been teachers, and we know how Paul with singular earnestness and force was anxious to forget the things that were behind and to press forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in

Christ Jesus. As we look over the Church of God are we not conscious that the men and women to whom the Word of the Lord comes now, and who are capable of saying "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" are comparatively few. Among the mass of Christians is there not a keen sensitiveness in regard to personal needs and even to the enjoyments of the world and the power of the flesh, and is there not a corresponding dulness in regard to the authority of His word and the working of His spirit. Take the Church as a whole, and is she not to a large extent like the man with the withered arm? It is a paralyzed hand that is steward of the inexhaustible resources of the kingdom; the wealth is there but there is a lack of spiritual power; it is not availing for the present and pressing needs of the moment. The Church is too often like the beggar sitting at the beautiful gate of the temple and constantly asking alms, instead of standing up in the power of the risen Lord and then walking and working and praising God. Have there not been individual men whose lifetime of service has been characterized not only by frequent revival but by almost unceasing experience of spiritual power and spiritual results? How many of us to-day can honestly speak of such an experience? Opportunities occur in God's providence, and they pass by unimproved; we are either living in the past or in the future, but the present we know not how to turn to the best account. We say: "There are yet four months and then cometh harvest," but He says: "The fields are already white unto the harvest." Where is the Church to be found that has fairly grappled with and been successful in winning the hundreds of thousands in our great cities that are still unevangelized? Are not the teeming masses pouring into America week by week (notwithstanding gigantic efforts to meet their claims) still practically untouched, and do we not rest our hopes of the future in the effort to teach and save the children in the Sunday school? Is not the picture of the Church presented so often in quotation: "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?" Is not this rather a devout imagination than a present reality in the face of the gigantic evils that oppress the spiritual life and deaden our surroundings everywhere? The drink traffic, the opium traffic, the gambling spirit, the constant breaking up of sacred and social ties; all proclaim our powerlessness—they are still rampant in every quarter of the globe. We rejoice in what has been done for foreign missions and the marvellous blessing that has followed feeble effort, but we are still constrained to acknowledge that, while the harvest is great, the labourers are few. We are constrained to ask: Is the Church then called to a vain task when her Lord commands her: "Go ye into all the world and disciple all nations, preach the Gospel to every creature"? Or is it that she has been trusting too much to her learning and reason and organization and temporal resources, and too forgetful of the one spiritual power that can alone make her strong to subjugate the world? This leads us to the consideration of the next point.

II.

What has revival done for the believer, for the Church and for the world? It has given us our men of noblest Christian character and enabled the Church to reach the highest landmark in attainment and Christian effort. As the highest mountain peaks are the upheaval of subterranean fires that have shaken the foundations of the earth, so the most notable men in the record of the Church are themselves frequently the fruit of revival. Saul of Tarsus, like a piece of moist peat hissing out its moisture on the glowing embers, is set on fire in the Pentecostal revival. Luther, Melancthon, Knox and others were kindled into flame in the outpouring of the spirit at the Reformation. Some men have borne personal testimony to this. Dr. Charles P. McIlvaine says of himself. "Whatsoever I possess of religion began in a revival: the most precious, steadfast and vigorous fruits of my ministry have been the fruits of revival." It is not too much to say that the most of the men who entered the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland and who were specially owned of God in His work before the revival of 1860, were themselves the product of the great Scottish revival that moved over the land in successful waves for a period of forty years, from 1811. Is it not also the case with the great mass of the men who form the living ministry of America, and who were themselves the outcome of the continuous revival in the colleges at the close of the last century and the beginning of this? and what is true of the ministry is true also of the membership in Europe, as well as on the American continent. From 1815 to 1840 we are told that the spirit was poured out on from 400 to 500 churches and congregations annually on an average. During some of these years we rejoice to learn that from 40,000 to 50,000 were added by profession in a single twelve-month to the membership of the Christian Church. The Presbyterian Church of Wales is herself the fruit of revival in a membership that dominates the principality; she has had an almost unceasing revival for 150 years. It is said that one man in the principality, and he by no means a man of intellectual power, was instrumental in the revival of 1860 of adding 10,000 to the spiritual life of the Church. The same wave of blessing brought at least as many into the Church in Ireland, and those who remember the same blessed time in Scotland know that the spiritual harvest was universal over the land. Such seasons, though they have been too often intermittent and partial, have nevertheless enabled the Church to reach her highest landmark in Christian effort. Shortly after the Disruption, a site was refused for the congregation at Strontian, in the west Highlands: not an inch of land could be had