

A Revival in the Seventies.

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In 1875 there was a great awakening in the village of Norwich, N. Y., the story of which may be helpful to the anxious pastor of this generation.

Meetings were held by the First Baptist church during the week of prayer, they continued without intermission every evening, including Saturdays, for three months. The pastor baptized eleven consecutive Sabbaths, and finally gave the hand of fellowship on the first Sunday in May to one hundred converts, thirty-five of whom were young men. The results were healthy and abiding. Such an event is rare, and may therefore be studied with profit.

1 Although the town of Norwich, including the village, contained only 7,000 population, the field was confessedly large. The church numbered 600 members. It had about 300 families, and the morning congregation frequently numbered 500. Nearly all the farmers within a radius of five miles attended the Baptist church. Sixty teams, bringing from two to five persons, often drove in on pleasant Sundays. Their numbers were not very much diminished by rain or snow. There was an unusually large number of young people, many of whom were graduates of the academy, and some of colleges. Most of these farmers were of New England descent, and were prosperous and intelligent. They had for years listened to the preaching of Jabiz Swan, Lyman Wright, R. A. Patterson, and J. D. Pope, and were thoroughly imbued with evangelistic fervor.

Notwithstanding the comparatively great strength of the church, however, there had been no revival for a long time. The parsonage was shabby. The lecture rooms were antiquated. The prayer-meetings were very small, and missionary contributions were in proportion.

But when the sound of battle was heard, the people awoke as out of a deep sleep. They expended \$4,000 on the parsonage and the Sunday school rooms, and quadrupled the prayer-meeting attendance at once.

2. The pastor had no assistance except that which the people gave. It is doubtful if he even thought of an evangelist. Every evening for three months the lecture rooms were crowded. The sermons were short, plain, and entirely devoid of any sensational features, and yet night after night the merry ring of sleigh-bells could be heard on every road leading to the village. Nothing could keep the people at home. Certainly the divine Spirit was moving mightily among them. A large number were converted who joined other communions. One night 167 converts and inquirers were counted.

3. For eighteen months before the refreshing came the pastor steadily preached, if such an adjective claim is permissible, an old fashioned gospel. The main features of the preaching were: (a) Men are lost by nature and dead to all spirit life; (b) They are saved by grace only. The method of reconciliation was their acceptance of the substitute God had provided in his Son. The vicarious atonement, represented by the blood of Jesus, was constantly emphasized. The people were often heard singing, "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "Jesus Died and Paid it All," and other tender, cross-inspired hymns. There was never a suggestion that any part of the Bible was untrue. Such a thought never clouded the atmosphere.

4. There had been for over a year a very remarkable Saturday afternoon monthly covenant meeting, preparatory to the Lord's Supper. So far as the writer knows, it was the only large meeting of the kind in the State. The average attendance was 150. Farmers and villagers left their work, and came with an enthusiasm and regularity most interesting. Nearly every one took some part. There were a score of brethren and sisters who spoke and prayed with apostolic fervor and quiet intelligence. This meeting, since abandoned, was in full swing previous to the great revival, and continued with marvelous power for many years. It was in itself the inauguration and sustentation of a mighty refreshing from the presence of God and his angels. Wave after wave of revival spirit broke over the church for ten years, fed and moved by the deep sub-rock spring, as the Jordan is fed and moved by the bubbling spring at Banias. Great sacrifices were necessary to sustain such a meeting. The tithes were brought in, the blessings were poured out. This gathering had no effect on the next Sunday morning congregation, except to increase the attendance and deepen the attention.

Any church willing to establish and earnestly sustain such a meeting now, would certainly reap a similar harvest.

5. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, in a place like Norwich, there was very little of a frivolous nature to absorb the attention of Christian people. There were few lectures, concerts, oyster suppers or theatres. There were no card parties. Clubs were unknown. Social functions had no name. It seemed to be the especial function of the father, when his work was done, to go home and stay there. So, when the meetings began there was nothing to side-track the attention. There was not even a convention. Indeed, conventions had not then begun to spread themselves like Western grasshoppers all over

the Lord's pasture, eating up nearly every green thing. A man, therefore, bent on stirring his people to holy endeavor, and willing himself to forsake the lecture field and the lodge room for God's work, had some show of success.

6. There was another factor in the work, preliminary to it, which must not be overlooked. The third week of the assembling opened with an all-day service for fasting and prayer. The importance and call to such action was emphasized by the pastor in a sermon the Sunday before. It was, as all such gatherings always are, a season memorable for its quiet dignity, sweet peace and heart-searching and heart-swelling power. While a mother was praying for her wayward son, he came in unannounced and uninvited, and gave himself to God. Baptist churches will never re-enter the realm of spiritual power until they re-enter upon such days as these, when, humbling themselves before God, they wait for the sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry trees.

7. After this all-day meeting, a plan for visiting every family in the society was proposed. A call was made one Sunday morning for volunteers. Fifty persons finally went out, two by two, to read and pray in every house. The work was done, though there was a foot of snow on the ground. Usually the visitors knelt with the family. In one instance, well remembered, a man hitherto ungodly broke into a flood of tears, prayed for himself and confessed his Saviour when he arose.

8. The method of conducting the exercises was very simple. There was no choir. The singing was led by Albert Nathan, of saluted memory. The sermon was brief and exegetical. There was usually a season of prayer and testimony. Then an opportunity was given for raising of hands, rising, kneeling and speaking in token of a desire to accept Christ. Afterwards, there was always an inquiry meeting in adjoining rooms, where good advice was given, with Bible texts, and then all knelt in prayer. As the congregation dispersed copies of Newman Hall's "Come to Jesus" and the tract, "The Voice of God on Baptism," was freely scattered.

Such are some of the details of a refreshing about which the people still talk, the salient angles of which are indelibly marked on some of our minds, and the lessons of which the thoughtful still ponder.

The question naturally arises, Can such a result be expected in this age? The answer is in the affirmative. God has never withdrawn his Spirit. That Spirit, he declares, is not given by measure. There is a "set time to favor Zion," but that time is any time when his people are willing to comply with the conditions antecedent to a descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. Permit me to add a few suggestions, out of the treasury of a long and varied experience.

1. Though all the clearly appointed Biblical preparations for a great revival should now be faithfully set in motion, it must be admitted that the difficulties are greater than they were twenty-five or forty years ago. There is much more now to fascinate and finally absorb the attention. Conventions, clubs, lectures, Chautauques, society, books, magazines, newspapers, philanthropies, suppers, "et id omne genus," swarm like locusts. We are in a kind of fog. It is difficult to settle the minds of the passengers until the fog lifts. Even young people flock to conventions like the doves in front of St. Mark's. The people have been led to doubt the Word of God. The discussions among the scholars and preachers have filtered down among the laity. The church is still staid and progressive, but much of its virility has been weakened by the polemics of errantry and inerrantry. Great union conventions, gathering like Peter's sheet of every kind, have led the people to believe that certain forms of rationalism are just as good and considerably sweeter than certain forms of Calvinism. If an orthodox pastor exchanges with a Universalist minister, nothing is said. This generation is broad and catholic. We have not deepened in proportion to our widening. The yacht needs ballast as well as sail. We have exchanged fasting for feasting. We are playing at religion, and not travelling in spirit. For these and other reasons, the most earnest pastor will find it exceedingly difficult to do his best work, according to his best inspirations—more difficult than the ministers did half a century ago.

2. It ought also to be said, that for a quarter of a century the trend of spiritual force has been turned in the direction of doing rather than of being, of activity rather than doctrine. We have been trying to carry the "cup of water," and have not given so much attention to saving souls. A covenant of works rather than faith has possessed the church. Missions, institutional churches, young men's and young women's Christian associations and other philanthropies have engaged and riveted our attention. We have been paying rather than praying. In a measure this is a healthy sign. It may be time now to return to the more important work of redeeming the lost.

What we do must always be the evidence of what we are; it can never be the condition itself. The churches and their teachers must be careful to distinguish between states and results. To do good to all men as we have opportunity, is the effect of "Christ in us the hope of glory," but neither for ourselves nor others is Christ.

3. There is also a word of encouragement to workers

in limited fields. Of the 943 churches in New York State, 700 have less than 200 members. Of the whole number of churches 450, or about one-half, have less than 100 members. A church with only 100 or even fewer members cannot expect a morning congregation of over fifty people. In such circumstances as these, the earnest pastor's soul will be greatly tried. He must not expect a numerically great harvest. But let him remember that wheat is wheat. A garden needs as deep plowing and as much care as a farm. A diamond is worth more than a perch of stone. There is no coarseness greater than the display of numbers. Usually the greater the number and display, the more offensive is the coarseness. In the zoological gardens of all the world it has been noted that the largest crowds are around the monkey cage.

When Thomas Englen went to his pulpit one Sabbath morning, his congregation was very small. But in that hour a boy was converted who became the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century. One Spurgeon may be worth a thousand ordinary men. Usually the greater the numbers the smaller the average of mind worth.

4. Patience is necessary. All genuine revivals of religion are forever by long-continued, earnest preaching of the blood-stained, fundamental truths of God's Word. A course of sermons on the poets of the church or the hymns of the poets will not save souls. If you think you are ordained a lecturer, then take the platform. The world is challenged to show a real revival of religion, with souls born again, when the preacher proclaims the life theory of the atonement. The preaching of a dying Christ will alone save a dying world. The atonement is vicarious, not vital. Let us beware of an emasculated theology. Preach the blood week after week for many weeks, it may be, and then listen for "the sound of the going in the mulberry tops." If you hear, go forth to battle. Call some good man to your assistance, if you choose, "but go forth to battle." But you will find that you and your church must travel in soul before children are born. You need to convince your people that you mean what you say, and that what you say is true.

A final word. We ought to make a distinction between a revival and an addition. The first is a growth from within, the second is an ell built on to the house. The one is spiritual, the other in a measure artificial. A revival is life again. Sometimes men are saved and added to the church, when the church itself is not moved. A Pentecost begins with the church. It is true enough that no soul of man can be saved without the divine Spirit. But the Spirit may sometimes bless the preaching of the Word by a faithful minister or evangelist, when the church as a body is not stirred in the least. Such work must sometimes be done. But there cannot be any great or abiding work in a local church, which does not begin in the church itself. Leaders, therefore, ought to seek the revival of the church itself; their converts will come into a warm spiritual atmosphere. Indeed, if the church is what she ought to be, men will be saved as the natural result of a right condition.

All of these suggestions are more or less emphasized by the great refreshing in Norwich in 1875.—Examiner.

Indian Work.

Readers of MESSENGER AND VISITOR who have not forgotten Mrs. Lee's letter of a month ago about Indian Missions in Manitoba, will perhaps be interested to hear more about that work.

John Sanderson, our half-bred missionary at Fairford, writing to me on the last day of the Old Year, says that the people seem to enjoy all the services of the church more and more. At their prayer meeting on Christmas evening forty-three were present, and at the close of the meeting a new man came to ask what was meant by "being saved" for though he had been a churchman since he could remember, yet he had never thought anything in particular about his need of being saved from sin. The interview must have been very like that of Nicodemus with our Saviour, and I know that Christ's representative (and also our representative) would do his duty faithfully as he has always done.

Will not our people in the Maritime Provinces join with those in Manitoba in asking God to bless the feeble efforts we are making in that lonely northland to give the gospel to our red brothers? It would seem as if God has called the people who are known as Baptists into this work in a most unmistakable way. We have native Christians of splendid abilities as evangelists, who find keenest enjoyment in preaching the Word, and under wise guidance can be used to accomplish great things, if God's people will shoulder the burden of the work, and keep it presented daily at our Father's throne.

At present we are working on Reserves where the Church of England also has missions, not because our people wanted to, but because there was no way out of the responsibility placed on the struggling Baptist churches of the North West; and there are large numbers of Indians in 'the church' who are in the same spiritual condition as the man who kept Brother Sanderson so long in earnest conversation Christmas night.