

SPURIOUS OR GENUINE REVIVALS —WHICH?

Most of the churches are now trying to promote a revival. Some must have something or die. Others are under no necessity of a revival to keep up their outward organization; but having a name to live, they are dead. Every church not now zealous and active, whatever its moral virtues may be, needs a revival, that it may grow in grace and save souls. There are cordials which nourish, and poisons which begin by stimulating but end by killing. So there are revivals which renew the strength of the church, and there are revivals which depress and deaden. Which do you prefer? All would say, "Give us a genuine revival or none." For all that, many have spurious revivals, and get just what they seek. Some churches can't tell what is the matter. They say, "How is it we have a revival every year, and yet we are weaker than we were ten years ago?"

Spurious revivals are not altogether alike, but they resemble each other in most respects. There is first a dead church. The leading members are absorbed in business. If a few are devout and spiritual men, the majority are not so. They may be liberal or parsimonious, but they have but little time for religious work. What meetings they attend are "official." The young people are fully occupied with fairs, sociables, unions, and reading circles, or given up to dancing and party-going. In cities, they often add opera and theatres.

A general spirit of good humor prevails. The prayer-meetings are usually slimly attended and very dull. Sometimes they are well attended, but the singing, prayers by the aged members, and long talks by the pastor, are the main elements. Class-meetings are defunct or dying. The Sunday-school may or may not be flourishing. In such a church there may be large or small contributions, the members may be close, or they may have so much means that mere surplus-giving may make, in the aggregate, a large sum. Various inconsistencies are common. Discipline has been neglected for years. So long as a member is either popular personally or wholly unknown, anything which will not make a public scandal is winked at. If the minister suggests the necessity of discipline, the answer is: "We don't want any trouble; we have not had any for years."

This is the situation; this is a good preparation for a spurious revival. It depends

largely on the minister now whether they will have no revival, a spurious revival, or a genuine revival. If he is a well-meaning, consistent man, but not much stirred up, there will be no revival; if he is spiritually roused they will have none, or it will be genuine as far as it goes, whether it be great or small. But if the minister simply feels that there must be a stir, and additions must be had—if his moral nature be not moved to its depths, or if he be superficial in his make-up or experience, a spurious revival will be kindled. Perhaps they may get an evangelist, perhaps not. A good evangelist working in such a soil as this might produce a spurious revival. It is not always just to blame the evangelist. "Some good seed fell by the wayside, some in stony places." But all evangelists are not good or wise. Perhaps there will be no evangelist, but the minister will go on. The young people have not been trained in true religion; having thought that at any time they wish they can "join the church," and having seen many others do it without any great change, and being susceptible and emotional, they are easily operated on. No hymns on human depravity or guilt are in order now, but smooth, sweet hymns to lively tunes—"Show pity, Lord," "Alas, and did my Saviour bleed!" "Vain man, thy fond pursuits forbear." Even "Depth of mercy, can there be," will hardly do. Pathetic stories must be told, and told well; just after the story the song must come in very sweetly, indeed. Rising for prayers or coming forward must be made easy, nothing said about "counting the cost." They must all be assured that it is not "hard to rise," "others have done it," "we are all your friends." The cross being put entirely out of sight, then they are to be told to take it up. Soon the ice is broken and a wave of excitement, quite pleasurable and akin to good humor, is rippling through the community. The seekers may be asked if they do not feel better. If the question be put with the upward inflection, many will say, "Yes." If any one says "No," or "I can't see that I do," he is sure to be asked if he does not feel "a little better." If the answer be "Yes," the Doxology, perhaps, may be sung. No reference to past history, no examination into the moral state, no careful questioning about habits, no instruction as to things to be renounced, nor no confession and restitution to be made. The name is taken, with the notice "Be present next Sunday; I will take you on probation." "What class would you like to