

FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL



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GLEANINGS FROM A REVIVAL FIELD.

BY MRS. SARA A. UNDERWOOD.

Editor FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL:

I am stopping for a few days in Springfield, Mass., where we are just over a four weeks season of Moody and Sankey, and there is in consequence a decidedly religious tone pervading all grades of society. In the cars or on the street, the talk runs chiefly on religious topics. Just now while the revival fever is at its height, there is a wonderful accord of sentiment among the various orthodox churches, and for the time being all such minor differences as to immersion or sprinkling, open or close communion, a literal or figurative hell, etc., are kept carefully in the back ground, and only those subjects discussed in regard to which all orthodox churches are agreed. Moody having gone, it is now time to divide the spoils and each church is making haste to gather up the fragments of the revival feast by hurrying into church-membership as many converts as they can secure for that purpose. The other evening I dropped into a Baptist meeting where this process was taking place. About ten young converts, only two of whom were males, none of them over twenty apparently, and the youngest eleven years old, were present and made open confession of their faith preparatory to being baptised and received into full membership. One by one each of these stood up and related his or her "experience," an experience that was wonderfully alike in all of the cases, i. e., that on a certain day or evening, the date of which was given, while attending the Moody meetings some friend asked them if they didn't want to be a Christian, and they

replied that they did. Then they were prayed for and with, or prayed for themselves; after a day or two they thought God had forgiven their sins, and found that "they had never before known what true happiness was, and had been happy ever since." There was a general indefiniteness in these confessions which was remedied however by the adroit questioning by the pastor, to which the answers needed only a "No, Sir," or "Yes, Sir," in reply, to make them appear to make just such statements as he chose to have them make.

But I was sorry to see full grown men and women acquiesce and perfectly satisfied with this underhanded method of increasing their church membership by entrapping in this way these young and guileless minds who with earnest desire to do right which all normal minds feel, and who know no other method of expression to that desire save by joining some church, and binding themselves to believe certain tenets and dogmas of the morals of which they are incapable, from immaturity of judgment, to decide. But though not a good, it is a politic thing for those who wish their church membership increased to do, for being thus early pledged they are pretty sure to remain in the church for life, since whatever convictions may hereafter come to them as to the falsity of what they profess to believe, there will be very few of them who will have the moral courage to publicly avow their disaffection in view of the mental martyrdom which would in such case be theirs. They are now entangled, as some of them will one day find, in worse meshes than those of Tennyson's weird "Lady of Shalott."

All the churches are well filled now; even the Universalists have caught the revival fever. I attended one of their nightly meetings in order to find out how they managed such matters. I found that their plan consists mainly of an appeal to the affections. Just before "inviting them forward for prayers" the minister requested the fine solo singer (one of which a-la-Saukey is always present at all meetings) to sing an affecting piece called "Waiting and Watching," descriptive of the longings of the human heart to meet in another world the loved and lost. A dear friend who has lost all her little ones by death, told me that after the singing of this song by Saukey, she cried all night