

## What May Help the Reviving of the Church.

REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D., PH.D., GALT, ONT.

*For the Review*

AT the outset let this be admitted, that the Church as organized by Christ, with its pastor, and elders, and confessors of Christ before men, and the Word of God in its hand, and the Spirit of God indwelling in its heart, is equipped for the work to which it is called in the world. It needs no more to fit it for service. Its furnishing is complete. All that is now required is that it should carry into effect the Will of the Lord, moving as one entire whole in the path of duty, and suffered nothing to hold it back. Were it doing this, it would gain as it went on, a greatly accelerated momentum, till it carried everything before it. But not doing this, it slows up till it stands still, and becomes as dangerous as a derelict upon the high seas. A dead, lifeless Church is a deceptive, and therefore a destructive agency. It professes to be going heavenward, when it is not; to be doing the Will of Christ, when it is not; to be in a state of grace, when it is not; to be saved, when that is far from clear to any eye of man.

It will be readily admitted that it is with souls as it is with bodies, they may be alive while they seem to be utterly lifeless. They have within them a vital spark while that gives no visible manifestation. Their life runs so low that it is not discernible as life at all. They need reviving to take even a respectable position among the moral forces of the land. And let us never forget, that they ought to be mighty spiritual forces. And the congregations of which they are component parts, grander and mightier forces still. But what may contribute to this end? Many things! It was found in the time of Robert M. McCheyne that the reading of the records of God's manifested power, had a very reviving effect. In the paper entitled, "Evidence on Revivals," which embodies the answer given to the queries sent down by the Presbytery of Aberdeen to the Session of St. Peter's, Dundee, McCheyne says "In addition to the services of the Sabbath, in the summer of 1837 a meeting was opened in the Church on Thursday evenings for prayer, exposition of the Scriptures, reading accounts of Missions, Revivals of Religion etc. Sabbath Schools were formed, prayer meetings were encouraged and two weekly classes for young men and women were instituted with a very large attendance. These means were accompanied with an evident blessing from on high in many instances."

The account of "Revivals of Religion" that he chiefly read was Robe's "Narrative of the Revival of Religion at Kilsyth, Cambuslang and other places in 1745." In Ulster in 1859 the same course was pursued. This is from Gibson's "Year of Grace." It is worthy of notice that the Revival of Religion, and the reasonableness of expecting such a dispensation, were not unfrequently dwelt on in the stated ministrations of the Sanctuary. Extracts were read from the existing memorials of the work of God in Wales, under Daniel Rowland; in America, under Jonathan Edwards and Tennants; and in Scotland, under the many eminent ministers who were similarly honored in other ways. The idea of a great revival accordingly took hold of many in the congregation, and many prayers were offered in public and in private that it might be realized in its vitality and power."

The preparation effected in this way lifts up the mind to expect great things from God, in that it discovers what has been done in days gone by. How much now is there to read in this line? There are, President Edwards "Narrative of Surprising Conversions" and "Thoughts on the Revival in New England, 1740," and "The distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God." Rev. James Robe's Narrative of the Revival of Religion at Kilsyth, Cambuslang and other places in 1742. Rev. Wm. Gibson's "Year of Grace." "A history of the Ulster Revival of 1859." "Revival and Revival Work" by Rev. John McPherson. And

the lives of Whitfield, Finney, Tennant, and Nettleton. These will add fuel to the fire of evangelical fervour.

All these will suggest many means that may be employed to awaken desire. Such as, extra efforts on the part of God's people. Their arousing themselves to self-examination, to prayer, to labor. The wonderful sermon of Livingstone at the Kirk of Shotts which was blessed to five hundred souls that day, was not really the sermon he premeditated, but what was suggested by the oncoming shower of rain, given to him of God in answer to the prayer of the company of believing souls that had pleaded with God the whole of the preceding night. They took hold of God and He could not deny Himself. Prayer always precedes revival. It is when Zion travaileth that she brings forth children. God's Spirit moves men to concern, and to the diligent use of means. Then, the people of God will be glad to hear tidings of blessing elsewhere. Indeed, news of good being done elsewhere stimulates men to thought deep, real, earnest thought. And without thought nothing can be done. The touching cry of God is "My people doth not consider." And His repeated appeal is, "Consider your ways." To shake the minds of men loose from their heedlessness and indifference is to do much in the way of preparation. To call them to repentance is to do more; to inspire them with desire and longing is to accomplish even more; and to be instrumental in keeping them intensely active, is by the grace of God to do most of all.

There are three books that may contribute largely to this result, if they be used prayerfully with true desire to embody their teaching. The first is the New Testament, especially these two parts of it; the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles. The second is "The Reformed Pastor; or the Duty of Personal Labors for the souls of men" by the Rev. Richard Baxter. This is a spiritual Leyden jar, touch it and you get a shock that arouses you to look at things differently. It is also an Eschol vine filled with fruit for the one who will pluck it. Here are a few sentences; "If ye be indeed Christians, the glory of God will be dearer to you than your lives." "None but the converted do make God their chief end." "Beleive it, brethren, God is no respecter of persons; he saveth not men for their coats or callings; a holy calling will not save an unholy man." "He must not be a babe in knowledge that will teach men all those mysterious things which are to be known in order to salvation." God can render useful His own ordinances, otherwise He would never have appointed them." "I have observed that God seldom blesseth any man's work so much as his whose heart is set upon the success of it."

"A sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners" "I see a disputing zeal is more natural than a holy, obedient, practising zeal" "God will bless His own ordinances to do good, or else He would not have appointed them." "Every Christian is obliged to do all he can for the salvation of sinners, but every minister is doubly obliged, because he is separated to the Gospel of Christ, and is to give up himself wholly to that work." This book is a tonic, just what our lax times need.

The third book is one conceived in the Spirit of Baxter's Reformed Pastor, viz "An earnest ministry the want of the Times" by John Angel James of Birmingham, England. All who read it will be greatly helped to realize the momentous issues that depend on their being in downright earnest in their life for God. We are too slack and loose jointed in our religious character. A little of the steel that stiffened the bones of our forefathers would not come amiss to us. Hence sound, doctrinal preaching is always a prime means of revival. Preaching that is not afraid of touching the questions of sin, sacrifice, heaven, hell—that deals fearlessly with man's total failure and God's complete remedy—that insists strongly on the grace of God. He humbles man who exalts God, and in man's humiliation lies all his hope of being saved, for then God can lift him up.