

Religious Revivals in the Light of their History.

ONCE again a mighty cry is ascending to God from the hearts of millions of people for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit upon the world. The Great War, which commenced as a moral crusade, ended in a moral débâcle. The splendid idealism which inspired the earliest recruits, gradually passed, and gave way to a sordid materialism which expressed itself in a hundred unpleasant ways. At the height of the crisis men and women flocked to the churches and, in the agony of their hearts, prayed for the safety of their boys exposed to the horrors of warfare, and for the protection of the home land. The danger once passed, they returned to the common ways of life, abandoned themselves to profiteering and to pleasure, and revealed to all the reality of their prayers in time of need by now openly abandoning all pretence of worship. A severe social and moral reaction has followed the strain of the war. Europe is plunged into misery and confusion. America, which was foolishly supposed to have "profited" by the war, is faced with a difficult economic situation. Britain, with a million and a half of unemployed, enters upon what may prove to be the greatest social and economic crisis in her history. The outlook for the world is anything but a happy one. The severity of the international situation is driving devout men and women, in increasing numbers, to their knees. They are feeling that the only hope of the world lies in a return to God. Politicians and diplomats are helpless and often hopeless. They can only touch the externals of things; and what the world needs, supremely, is a change of heart. So long as the world remains in its present temper, cherishing hatreds, bitternesses, misunderstandings, and content to live on a low material level, there can be for it neither peace, prosperity, nor progress. The change of heart must come first and foremost. And nothing can effect this change but a revival of religion. The prayer for revival, therefore, is a true one—a cry *de profundis*: an expression, not of sentiment, but of serious and sound thought. And that such a cry is being heard once more is a matter for profound thanksgiving.

It is a sign that the dark night is passing, and that the dawn of a new day is breaking.

But the word "revival" is a dangerous word to play with. Its history is not altogether a happy one. It has been associated as much with fatal religious orgies as with sound religious awakenings. Hence it is that many earnest people are genuinely afraid of it and of what it is supposed to stand for. Nothing can be more important, therefore, than to study the history of these great movements which are generally known as "revivals": to discover what produced them, by what laws they are governed, to what results they lead, and how they are related to the great movements of human history. In this way, and in this way alone, we shall be able to understand some of the pitfalls to be avoided, and also where lies the main highroad along which genuine revivals appear. There are many things we should like to discuss in the present paper, but for considerations of space it will be necessary to exercise a vigorous economy and to confine ourselves to certain outstanding features of the subject.

We have to distinguish, at the outset, between those sporadic movements which are known as "Missions," and which depend, often enough, upon the personal magnetism of some outstanding man; and a genuine "revival" which results in the raising of the spiritual temperature of an entire people. There has been no great revival in Britain, as a whole, since the seventies, when Messieurs Moody and Sankey visited these shores and became the centre of an undoubted wholesome religious awakening. We are, even now, too near to that time to appreciate fully all that it meant to religious life in Great Britain. The revival in Wales in the year 1905 was a national movement, largely confined to the principality. Undoubtedly it quickened the national spirit, and resulted in an addition to the Churches of a vast number of persons. It ought not to be overlooked, however, that in many places a serious reaction followed the awakening, while the leader of the Revival has, since that time, dropped entirely out of public life, being placed *hors de combat* by reason of the terrific strain imposed upon him. Many attempts were made to extend the Welsh Revival to England, but they were a signal failure. Mention of the Welsh Revival inevitably recalls the remarkable

phenomena which accompanied it, and this in turn raises the whole question of the relation between pathology and spiritual quickening. I do not purpose to discuss this matter now, although it is a proper thing to discuss in the consideration of the main theme. It may suffice to say that physical phenomena, while frequently appearing in revivals, are not really bound up with them inextricably. There is reason to believe that they will become less frequent. Those who knew Cornwall forty or fifty years ago cannot fail to be impressed with the amazing difference between the revivals of that time and those of to-day. And going still farther back, to the great movement in 1859, the contrast is even greater. The wild scenes of those times are not likely to be repeated, save amongst an exceptionally emotional people. And yet it is almost impossible to conceive of a genuine religious revival apart from some great intensity of feeling. A revival can never be wholly an affair of mere intellectual conviction, or of mental repentance: it is bound to carry the whole man with it and under pressure the emotions demand an appropriate outlet. In the light of history we ought to profit considerably by the accumulated experience of the past along this line, avoiding the excesses of the past, and wisely guiding the emotional elements in the new awakening. When a passion for religion sweeps over an entire people, it expresses itself in deep sorrow for sin, in repentance or change of mind, in amendment of life, and then in an abundant joy as the sense of the new life in Christ is realized. But the passion, which is at once creative and contagious, must be kept, like a fire, within due bounds, or the warmth of the fire may be counterbalanced by the ashes which remain when the flames, bursting all barriers, have accomplished their devouring work. A contagion of religion may sweep a people entirely off its feet and silence all reason.

In addition to the necessity of guarding well the emotional side of a revival movement, careful attention must be paid to the theological side of it. It is a serious thing to preach truths out of focus in order to produce a certain effect. History shows that when this has been done, the reaction is always terrible. The classic case of the revival in Northampton, New England, under Jonathan Edwards, offers a stern warning in this direction. His famous

sermon on "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" produced a terrific effect. In sheer terror people rose from their seats and clung to the pillars and pews of the church, fearful lest they should immediately drop into the hell which Edwards had so vividly described. Let us see what happened as the result. In the year 1734-5 over three hundred persons were added to the Church. In the following year the number of converts was co-extensive with the adult population of the town. Apparently all had been swept in. But the reaction was terrible. There were many cases of mental and nervous disorders, suicides and immorality. In 1744 Edwards wrote: "There has been a vast alteration in two years. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many grows cold. Multitudes have back-slidden, and sinners have become desperately hardened." From 1744 to 1748 the Church was spiritually dead. The crowning tragedy came in 1748, when Edwards' own converts ejected him from the pastorate of the Church, and sent him into the wilderness. Professor Davenport says that for fifty years afterwards religion in New England touched low water mark. A case like this is by no means rare, and its meaning ought not to be lost upon us. There was no such reaction after Moody's first great visit to Britain in 1873-1875. Moody was sane in his teaching and in his methods. He proclaimed the love of God: that was the chief burden of his message. When he spoke of retribution he did so in such a way as to make it clear that his heart was deeply moved. And Moody never indulged in those shocking pictures of hell which have no warrant either in scripture or in reason.

But when every allowance has been made for considerations such as these, we have to return to our starting point, and face the fundamental fact that revivals of religion are an integral part of religious progress, and as such they have a high apologetic value. When the psychologist and the pathologist have uttered their last word and explained everything, when the fires of the Welsh Revival burst out. And just as Rationalism, at the end of the war, was preparing its dance at last played out and the funeral obsequies are about to begin," then the fires of revival begin to break forth anew. Mr. Robert Blatchford had scarcely concluded his diatribe against Christianity, which, according to him, only awaited its interment,

when the fires of the Welsh Revival burst out. And just as Rationalism, at the end of the war, was preparing its dance around the corpse of Christianity, lo! the East Anglian Revival commenced. As I write, the *Daily Chronicle* is publishing a column daily dealing with the remarkable flocking to the churches in every part of the country. Every time rationalism misses fire. The one thing it fails to understand is human nature. Auguste Sabatier was right: "Humanity is incurably religious," and men who fail to realize this fact understand neither human nature nor the plain lessons of history. If in human nature there is nothing capable of responding to God, then the story of revivals is a hopeless enigma. It is a series of effects without an adequate cause. But when once it is understood that man is made for God, and that he is disquieted until he repose in Him, then all becomes plain. For revivals are an effort to readjust life to the Divine Personal Standard from which it has departed. They betoken the bottom cry of the soul for the living God. Hence they become a method of real progress. It is unquestionable, also, that they follow a very definite law. Those who imagine that revivals are capricious movements, or that they can be generated at will by persons who set certain machinery in motion are grievously astray. They only occur when the conditions are ripe. The law appears to be rigorous. History shows invariably that the order of a revival is something like this: the tide of spiritual energy begins to ebb; men grow slack; a lethargy steals over the soul and plunges it into slumber; faith, hope, and charity fail; the lowered vitality predisposes the spirit to various maladies; doubt, denial, quarrels, misunderstandings, greed, social dissensions, and wars. At last the soul awakens and becomes aware of its sickness. Then it cries for the physician. Prayer is revived. Men seek God, not only singly, *but in social groups*. They recognize once more their solidarity, and seek a boon, not simply for the individual, but for the society to which they belong. For a revival is essentially a social thing. At its height individuals seem to count for little. A common life and a common joy flood the community, and all together share the blessing. This is the reason why a genuine revival is accompanied or followed by a clearing up of social disorders. A return to God means a

return to one's neighbour. One means of expressing this is song. Hence every revival is accompanied by a new hymnology which voices the common life and creates a new bond of human interest. And the revival which is now upon us—yea, which has already commenced—will reproduce all these elements. We shall discover once more that the return to the Father means a return to our true home.

It is here that history comes to our aid, and reveals to us, under various forms, the working out of the principles we have already enumerated. To history, then, let us go.

In Hebrew national life there were many religious revivals. The Church and the nation being one, it followed that a revival of religion always took on national characteristics, while every national progressive movement was the result of a religious awakening. The Book of Judges gives us a cycle of stories of this kind, while the great movements under Ezra and Nehemiah, Hezekiah and Elijah, are conspicuous examples. In every case the story tells us of a departure from the living God and of an abandonment to idolatry—generally of a revolting character. The complete meaning of these stories cannot be grasped unless we understand in some measure what that idolatry involved. Unfortunately the story cannot be told: it is too disgusting. It will be sufficient to say, in the most general way that the idolatrous rites to which Israel, again and again, fell victims, involved a mental, moral, and sexual degradation to which, thank God, we have no parallel to-day in civilization. But licentious religious orgies can never be confined to altar and temple: they transmit a poison to the social organism which results in horrible cruelty, infanticide, injustice, oppression, social upheaval, and wars. The moral life of a community cannot be separated from its social life: the purity or corruptness of the one rapidly passes to the other. Space will not permit of a detailed examination of the various Bible stories of revivals in Israel, but the careful readers will find in every case, without exception, that the prelude to a revival was a state of religious and moral decadence in the nation as a whole, and that the revival itself became the means of lifting the nation out of the morass and setting it upon a new way of progress. It was often a shallow thing, and the effect of it rapidly passed away. None the less, it was clear

evidence that a revival of religion possessed a moral dynamic which accomplished immense results. Had the volatile Jew been less sensual, less capricious, less scheming, and had he given himself with all his heart to a persistent and steady obedience to the will of God, his history might have been very different from what it has been.

Our greater concern, however, is with revivals within Christianity: they belong to that order of which we are part. In these we shall find repeated the main characteristics of the Jewish revivals, with a *plus* which is distinctly Christian, and to which the Jew was, of course, a stranger. Nothing like a complete account of these can be given. Our business will be to select certain great epochal movements and to discover if we can their secret and their message for ourselves. Both Romanism and Protestantism have a history of revivals. In the Church of Rome nearly every forward movement has centred in one or other of the religious orders—the Benedictines come first, since it was through St. Benedict that the monastic life was really organized. (We may except the hermits, the fathers of the desert, the pillar saints, and others of that order: they do not represent construction so much as escape.) Then follow the Cistercians, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, and the Redemptorists. In each case the founding of the Order coincided with a Catholic revival and a forward movement on the part of the "Church." In the Reformed Churches we may enumerate the national revivals under Huss, Luther, Calvin, and Knox. In the Anglican Church the movement under Wesley and the Oxford Revival—although it is only by courtesy that we connect the two. Wesley was compelled to be a "dissenter," if ever a man was, in the interests of Christianity. The leaders of the Anglican Church of his day did their best to choke him. They can hardly claim him now. Other revivals were local rather than national, and usually gathered around a few virile and outstanding personalities, such as Spurgeon, Moody, Finney, Edwards, Nettleton, Mills, Chapman, and others. We will pass over the local revivals and concentrate upon those which undoubtedly influenced national life and inaugurated a new epoch.

It will be well to begin with the twelfth century, and with the Cistercians. The story is finely told by Green in his

Short History of the English People, but it will be well to supplement it from such sources as are indicated in the article "Cistercians" in the *Catholic Encyclopædia*. Green, of course, sees the movement from the outside; the Cistercians tell the story from within. In the year that Henry I. of England died, there commenced the golden age of that great religious order. In eight years it wielded a marvellous sway in France and England. The entry into it of the famous SAINT BERNARD gave it not only a world renown, but a spiritual uplift which caused it to become the means of a marvellous quickening of English piety, and of converting more than one vale of worm-wood into a *Clairvaux*. The Cistercian revival came at a moment when the fate of England hung in the balance. It was but seventy years since the gross William of Normandy came with what M. Thierry calls "the scum of Europe"—a choice selection of bandits and blackguards, to conquer England. A second generation since the event was nearing its end, and the nation was bitter. Its lands had been plundered and given to the Norman barons. Worse still, the high offices in the Church had been given to the detested foreigner. Bishops and the higher clergy were Frenchmen, while the parish priests were Saxons who, in many cases, could not speak the tongue of their superiors. A gulf was thus created between the people and their spiritual leaders. All the elements of revolution were present, and that of a bloody kind. But the coming of the Cistercians with their fresh vision of piety saved the situation. The people rallied to their call. A tremor seized the entire populace. Men and women repaired to the woods and dales to pour out their souls in prayer and song. It was a people's revival and not one of ecclesiastics. The time was not ripe for the translation of the new spirit into social acts. It could only take one form in that age. Churches and convents sprang up everywhere. The nation became a Church. Hatreds and animosities were swept away in the flood of the revival. The Norman kings and their successors owed their thrones to religion, whether they knew it or not. The Cistercian revival helped to weld together into a nation a people that was torn asunder.

The scene now shifts. Forty years after the Cistercian movement in France and England reached, for the time, its zenith, there was born in Umbria a little boy who was destined

to carry still further the work of progress. It was in 1182 that FRANCIS OF ASSISI first saw the light. The sequence of dates will not be overlooked. In this regard it is made abundantly clear that the life of the Church is in reality one, and that progress is continuous in the body of Christ as a whole. The revival under Saint Francis, and later, under Saint Dominic, is only seen in its true proportions and splendour when its historic setting is understood. The thirteenth century was one of the most glorious ages of the Church and the world. They who speak and write so facilely about the "dark ages" should be set to the study of history. The thirteenth century was brilliant. It witnessed a marvellous revival of art, commerce, education, and liberty. It produced Dante in Italy and Roger Bacon in England. It was the age of many a *Magna Charta*, although we English confine the term to the event at Runnymede in the second decade of the century. Commerce and industry flourished. Venice—queen of all republics—was at the top of its splendour. France and Milan were hives of workmen. Gothic—solemn, religious gothic—began to appear; the cathedrals of Amiens, Chartres, Notre Dame de Paris, Rheims, belong to this period, of which Ruskin says it has not only never been excelled, it has never even been approached since. Education had become a passion. The universities of Bologna, Padua, and Paris came into being. Schools sprang up everywhere, and students carrying the lightest of kits, travelled from country to country to perfect their education. Such was the secular setting of the revival which swept over the Catholic world, and renewed its life under the leadership of the twin friars. But it was the revival that gave the impetus to that progress which marked the century. At the end of the twelfth century the Church had again lost its hold of the people. The cupidity of the Catholic hierarchy and the tyranny of the Pope set the people against the Church, and they rose against it. To change the figure, the people were as sheep without a shepherd—left to themselves to wander as they would. Then came Saint Francis into the highways and hedges. He gathered around him an ever-growing company of brothers, and went forth into the common ways of life, engaging, as Thomas of Spoleto says, 'in the ways of ordinary conversation' and teaching the people simple songs of the Christian life.

Italy was transformed. But England also felt the repercussion of the movement. The Franciscans came over to our country and commenced their work amongst the common people. They went to live in the slums amongst the disinherited. They became one with their humble brethren. In this they may be said to have been the Salvation Army of the day, with this difference, that their work was not apart from, but a part of, the work of the Church. The Franciscans alone, however, could not have met the need of the time. A strong intellectual element was needed in the revival to satisfy the thirst for knowledge that was everywhere revealing itself. This element was supplied by the Dominicans, whose rise was almost simultaneous with that of the Franciscans. St. Francis aimed at men's hearts and won them. St. Dominic aimed at their intellects and conquered them. While the Franciscans took the gospel into the streets and public places, the Dominicans went to the universities and directed education. Oxford owes more than it can ever tell to the Dominicans of the thirteenth century. The revival was therefore both intellectual and emotional, and it is not too much to say that it changed the life of the age, and religion became the dominant factor of life, but it translated itself into social and national as well as into pious forms. Both the orders built innumerable convents and churches, but they also supplied the spiritual energy which resulted in the final break up of the feudal system, the establishment of Parliamentary government in England, the fuller freedom of the common people, and the laying of the first foundations of modern science.

My space is well-nigh exhausted, and here I am only at the beginning of the story. The rest must perforce be hurried over. A study of the time of WYCLIF shows that the revival was preceded by a period of degradation and unrest which boded ill for the nation, but which was transformed by the revival into a period of greater liberty and prosperity. It was only day-dawn, truly, but it was a real dawn of a better time.

So also was it with Germany under the revival known to us as the Reformation, and to Catholics as the "Great Apostasy"—so differently do men view things. The Reformation was followed by the thirty years war, but it released

Europe from bondage and gave freedom of thought to the world. The German Bible is an abiding fruit, and Luther's translation fixed the German language in its finest form.

The Puritan revival led to the fall of despotism in England, and to the founding of New England. The Quaker revival made the revolution of 1688. But these tempting phases of the theme I cannot even touch. I must hasten to the revival of the eighteenth century under WHITEFIELD and WESLEY. How few people apparently realize what was the and these were available only for the children of the rich. Education had fallen to a deplorable level. The "common people," consequently, were in a state of degradation. It is doubtful whether England had ever been quite so low, morally, as it was in the first third of the eighteenth century. Green gives us a picture of the period that is appalling. Every sixth shop in London was a drinking saloon, where was advertised that men might get "drunk for one penny, dead drunk for twopence, with straw provided." Cruelty was rife. Men were hanged for a mere trifle. Life was cheap and beer was plentiful. Religion was a negligible quantity. Absentee bishops and sporting parsons who utterly neglected their duties were common. In society everyone laughed when the topic of religion was introduced. So bad was the situation that the godly Bishop of St. Asaph wrote a pamphlet declaring that the great apostasy had commenced, and the crack of doom was near at hand. Then, to employ the phrase of Lacordaire in another connection, "Jesus Christ glanced at His wounded hands and side," and of that look the Evangelical Revival was born. There is no need to attempt to retell that great story. The only thing demanded of us here and now is to point out that, as Green says, the Evangelical Revival saved England from a Revolution like that which was preparing in France, and also prepared the way for a new order of social life of which both the excellencies and also, alas! the attendant evils, remain with us until the present time.

The main purpose of this brief study is to show that revivals of religion have always been the main factor in spiritual and social progress. They are as the inrolling ocean after a period of ebb tide, and upon the rising waters every barque worth floating may ride in the power of a new uplift.

Will history yet repeat itself? So far the tide has been no exception: why should we imagine that the first exception is now to be made? The end of an epoch has undoubtedly come. The beginning of another is at hand. A new order in the life of man is overdue. If it is to be a true order it must be supported upon a spiritual basis—otherwise it cannot endure. And already the signs are present that a new revival of religion is upon us. It may centre in some great pulpit, or it may be a spontaneous movement. We must leave that to God. But it will yet come upon us in all its power and become the dynamic of the new order and the glory of the new age. Taught by history, it is the bounden duty of all Christians to prepare the way of the Lord by a new personal consecration to the cause of the Kingdom, that when the new revival breaks it may find us ready to pass into such new ways as the providence of God and the need of man shall indicate. And we must not be too critical of new methods or of new expressions of a heightened piety. The new life will create its own forms, and these will be adapted to the time in which we live. The substance of the old evangelical message will be re-emphasized, but it is inevitable that there should be a special emphasis upon that phase of truth which meets the deep need of the present hour. Every revival thus far has set in relief some forgotten or obscured Christian truth, and we can hardly be in doubt as to what truth needs emphasis in the present social upheaval. Let us welcome it when we hear it. Some emotion there must be if the work be genuine. Truth as dynamic means movement, and what is emotion but the beginning of movement? Truth static changes nothing: it is only when truth is translated by means of emotion into action that it becomes effective. The history of revivals shows us, consistently, recovered great Christian truths capturing men's minds and bearing them onward upon a tide of feeling into new ways of life and progress. And it would seem that in the providence of God we have arrived at another of those decisive hours in human history when a fresh Pentecost is due, and when once more we shall hear the wonderful works of God in a new tongue and behold anew a quickening of human brotherhood as the result of the experience of a fresh fellowship with God.

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