

Editorial

IN his *Reminiscences of the Revival of '59* Dr. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh commented, "There is a divine mystery about revivals. God's sovereignty is in them". That verdict is abundantly borne out in Edwin Orr's recently published account* of the remarkable religious awakening which, beginning in the United States in the year 1858, swept the whole of the British Isles and added (so it is computed) over a million converts to the Protestant churches. In reading this carefully documented record of the Revival one is compelled to recognise the element of the divine sovereignty. It is impossible on purely human grounds to account for the astonishing movement of the Holy Spirit, which was in many points akin to the eighteenth century revival under Wesley and Whitefield. Of course, the whole movement was born in *prayer*; and yet the extraordinary spirit of prayer which was manifested was itself a mark of the Spirit's activity. In these days, when it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade Christian people to meet together for the purpose of prayer, it is quite astonishing to read of the prayer meetings which sprang up almost spontaneously in all sorts of places and which were attended by literally hundreds (sometimes by thousands) of people. Thus when in January, 1860, Dr. Eugene Stock, of the Church Missionary Society, visited a large hall in Islington he recorded that "at 9 o'clock on a bitterly cold morning, that hall was packed for nothing but simple prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit". At that time there were at least two hundred united prayer meetings in London alone.

This phenomenon of the prayer meetings was one of the most striking features of the nineteenth century awakening. And perhaps this is the outstanding lesson of the '59 Revival for the Church of our own day. It may be regarded as certain that the spiritual quickening which we so sorely need in this mid-twentieth century will not come until the Holy Spirit again creates a real and deep spirit of prayer among the people of God. There will be no revival of any kind until there is first a revival of prayer within the Church. For, as Dr. Orr remarks, "The effect of united prayer upon Christians of all denominations is always the same. Towards God their hearts are stirred with love which must find expression in worship; towards other Christians their hearts are filled with love which finds expression in a Christian unity transcending the artificial boundaries of race, people, class, and creed; towards the outsiders their hearts are filled with love which sets out immediately, like the Good Shepherd, to bring the Lost Sheep into the fold".

This spirit of prayer was accompanied by a spirit of *evangelism*—and evangelism of so intensive a character that new methods were brought into use in order to reach the unchurched masses. Not only was there a revival of open air preaching, as in Wesley's day, but special services were held in theatres—a fact which not unnaturally shocked certain

* *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain.* By J. Edwin Orr (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 17/6).

staid, straight-laced Victorians, particularly the members of the newly formed English Church Union. The *Church Review* lamented that the "evil" of the theatre services would remain "in the lowered estimate of the dignity and solemnity of the Most High"! The Evangelicals, however, were by no means daunted. When Howels of Long Acre Chapel was rebuked by a bishop for preaching in unconsecrated places, he replied: "My Lord, I do not preach in unconsecrated places. When our Lord Jesus Christ descended from heaven, He consecrated to Himself every space!" Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to these services, thronging the theatres to capacity, with multitudes turned away.

A third feature of the Revival was the spirit of *unity*, which cut across denominational boundaries and brought together all sections of the Christian Church with the exception of the Roman Catholics and the Unitarians. Among members of the Evangelical Churches differences did not cease to exist, but they did cease to count. Calvinists and Arminians, Churchmen and Dissenters, prayed and worked together in the happiest harmony, thus convincingly demonstrating that Evangelical unity can exist without Evangelical uniformity. The Church of England not only took a prominent share in the work of the Revival, but also gained considerably as a result. Dr. Orr estimates that the number of Anglican converts could scarcely have been less than a quarter of a million. Among those who were influenced by the Revival in their undergraduate days were Handley Moule, later Bishop of Durham, and F. J. Chavasse, later Bishop of Liverpool.

The 1859 Revival was the opening phase of a period of fifty years of church expansion. Moreover, through the various religious and philanthropic agencies which were brought into being in the years that immediately followed, we are still feeling the impact of that remarkable visitation of the Spirit. Since, in comparison with the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, so little has been written about this nineteenth century awakening, we cannot but be grateful to Dr. Orr for his researches and for the light he has thrown on this neglected aspect of modern Evangelical history.

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Arrangements have now been completed with the Seminary Bookstore of the Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Va., to serve as our mailing agent for THE CHURCHMAN in the U.S.A. The annual subscription in the U.S.A. will be one dollar, post free. We are most grateful to the Rev. Dr. Robert D. Kevin for his kind co-operation in this matter, and we hope that as a result the circulation of the journal in the United States will be facilitated and increased.