

REVIVALS OF RELIGION.

An account of a Revival of Religion in Newington, the second parish in Wethersfield, Conn.

To the Editor of the Christian Spectator.

SIR,

There has recently been a more extensive awakening among the people of my charge, than I had ever expected to see. I had preached almost sixteen years as plainly, I thought, as solemnly, as boldly as I could, without producing any noticeable effect. It is probable that previous to this, there had never been any special revival in this place, which began to be settled about one hundred years ago.

In the summer of 1820 an uncommon emotion was felt. There was *a sound in the top of the mulberry trees*, and although the indication was not distinctly understood at the time; yet the result has proved that God had then actually gone forth. A number of serious persons were under distressing apprehensions of ruin as coming on this place, and they cried unto the Lord for help. Several women of the

the Church privately instituted a weekly concert in the closet, to implore the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. A few sinners were uneasy, and yet without very definite impressions; and there was no awakening of a decisive character, until three or four months after this period.

This religious concern may be retraced to Wethersfield, and thence to New-Haven, where the present series of revivals appears to have commenced in the summer of 1820. In Wethersfield the work appeared with some distinctness in October; and in November it began to be spoken of abroad; but there was no visible effect in this place. I thought it would be a local Work, as revivals in this vicinity had generally been in former times; and did not suppose that any measures were to be taken for extending it among our people; but it is of great benefit that neighbouring ministers and people visit frequently a place favoured with the energy of the Spirit of God. The people heard with awe of what God was doing in the first parish in this town; some persons went over to their meetings; and were distressed at the thought of this place being still passed by. Above all other means, what raised the general attention, was the coming of Rev. Asahel Nettleton on the last of December 1820, as unexpectedly as a messenger from heaven, apparently commissioned from the Almighty Head of the Church, and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. Next morning he preached on being ashamed of Christ. This fixed a listening ear. In the afternoon he dwelt upon the causes of alarm to awakened sinners. In the evening the assembly was crowded, and the attention profound. His text was—*Behold I stand at the door and knock*. The discourse was closed with surprising effect by repeating the hymn; “Behold a stranger at the door.” When prayer was ended, while the people were standing, he made a very close application of the subject to their hearts, in a short address which was very silently and solemnly heard. He requested them to retire without making a noise. “I love to talk to you, you are so still. It looks as though the spirit of God was here. Go away as still as possible. Do not talk by the way, lest you forget your own hearts. Do not ask how you like the preacher; hut retire to your closets bow before

God; and give yourselves to him this night.” After the benediction, he inquired of many persons individually, “Have you made your peace with God? Do you calculate to attend to this subject? Many promised they would try to make their peace with God immediately—that they would repent that night—and a permanent impression was made. From this the flame spread over the parish; the current of feeling was turned; the people gathered around their minister with peculiar attachment; meetings were crowded and solemn; the things of eternity filled the people with awe. The work of God seemed to be in almost every house;—all the people were ready to hear; sinners would bear the most pointed individual application; and I spent many months almost entirely in religious visits, by neighbourhoods, and from house to house. Mr. N. continued his visits from the last of December to the first of April, with a beneficial influence which it is hoped will be felt in the world of glory.

“Friday Jan. 26, 1821, was observed by the Church as a special fast, in which they were joined by almost the whole congregation. It was a solemn season—and as we hope a day of new life to some souls. In the evening at sunset, a meeting for enquirers was held at my house under the direction and management of Mr. Nettleton, while I met the church at another house for prayer. In the mean time a great congregation had assembled at the meeting house; many from the neighbouring parishes; and there Mr. N. discoursed with great effect upon the story of the woman that washed the Saviour’s feet with her tears, Luke, viii, 37th verse, to the end of the chapter.

At this time experimental religion had become the great theme of reflection and conversation, and it seemed as though all my people were *pressing into the kingdom of heaven*. The cares of this life appeared to be burdensome; while the great inquiry was passing round, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* The solemnities of eternity absorbed every other concern. Numbers were every week embracing the hope that they had *passed from death unto life*.

We have had almost every kind of meetings which are employed in such seasons of religious attention—fre-

quent meetings for preaching and exhortation—district prayer meetings—an intermediate prayer meetings on the Sabbath-meetings for enquirers—church meetings—morning meetings—religious visits—and they have been well attended. The sabbath is, no doubt, of all seasons the best for every religious purpose; but God does eminently grant his blessing upon other seasons too. No extra meeting has been found more powerful in promoting the revival than the meeting for enquirers, which was attended by nearly all the awakened, from the man of seventy-five down to children, and it was regarded as the seat of divine operations. They came as sinners under condemnation, and just ready to sink into the abyss of perdition. Every individual was spoken to on his own case; and appropriate prayers and addresses were employed. The profession which such a meeting implies, the association of thoughts which it occasions, and the great subject in hand, do give peculiar and decided advantages to the meeting for enquiry. At the time of this meeting, the members of the church uniformly held a season of prayer.

A solemn and interesting fact connected with this work of seriousness is the searching of some professors of religion. No persons were in deeper distress of soul than these; and their anxiety continued long. The hopes of many were found tottering, and of some actually abandoned. Oh, it is a tremendous time when a church member of twenty or thirty years standing, finds himself a false professor. *Sinners in Zion are afraid; tearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* Professors in such a state find other work than idly looking on as mere spectators of the revival, standing securely on the shore and clapping their hands to see others brought in; they feel themselves to be sinking in the deep waters. It is no favourable thing to see professors, at such a time, full of glee, busy in proclaiming a revival. A true work of grace needs no proclamation. Is there not reason to believe that revivals are often checked in this way? If when a little seriousness appears in a few individuals in a place, it is immediately noised abroad, and perhaps printed, that a great work is going on, is it not

overrating the attention, and tempting christians to cease their mourning, to lift up their eyes to see what is not to be seen, to say—ah, we have found it, henceforth we may rejoice and be satisfied. I have heard many such introductions and confident predictions, where the result proved to be feeble. Such a course not only exposes religion to reproach among the enemies of revivals; but prevents the very thing which it was designed to promote.

Perhaps it may not be proper to say that the members of the church in this place are generally awake, for doubtless there is much wanting still, and they have no occasion to bless themselves. It is a very pleasant thing to see professors deeply humble; for where they are not so, we cannot expect there will be an extensive impression; but where *judgment begins at the house of God*, the work will be genuine.

Stillness always marked our meetings. Great is the difference between a congregation under awakening, and one where there is general stupidity. It is one great part of the Holy Spirit's work to produce attention. Of Lydia it is said—*whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul*. When the people in an assembly are uneasy and rustling, it is manifest that they are not deeply interested in the exercises; for where the mind is intensely fixed, the members of the body are put to rest, and trifling things are disregarded. In such a state every word is caught with eagerness; the expressions of scripture, and the sentiments of a discourse or prayer, seem to be more full of meaning and sink with greater weight into the soul. There is a realizing sense that God is present, and that we ought to be filled with awe at his infinite majesty. When the people go out of the house of worship; a solemnity rests upon their countenances, and fills their hearts; and they feel the impropriety of entering directly into trifling or common conversation. How afflicting it is to hear them, when walking to a place of worship, or when standing about the house, talking upon every topic that occurs; and immediately after the exercises, to see their countenances brighten, to hear talking and laughing, as though nothing of God or eternity had been beard. How much is the Holy Spirit grieved by idle chat after a sermon and solemn prayers.

The characteristics of the work may be thus stated. There were some instances of deep distress; but none of that overwhelming kind, in which the subjects faint, or fall to the ground, or are unable to leave their seats. In some cases convictions were long continued, in others the heart was speedily bowed. Some after long distress rose almost imperceptibly to a faint hope; in others the hope was bright and satisfying; no instances of extravagant joy, occurred though several were much elevated. In convictions the subjects were much affected with their guiltiness before God, as well as with fears of everlasting destruction. When the sinner was humbled he acknowledged his great depravity, his desert of eternal condemnation, and his entire dependence on sovereign grace for acceptance in the sight of God; and was pleased with the idea of unconditional submission to the will and glory of God. One prominent feature in the converts was a fear of self-deception. Much was said on the danger of false hopes, which probably had an influence to check flights of joy; for they were much and anxiously inquiring how far the adversary might possibly beguile. Christ appeared very precious to those that believed. The following language might describe the condition of one thus hopefully renewed. *'Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? To me belongeth shame and confusion of face. I feel that my carnal mind is enmity against God, that in me there dwelleth no good thing. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Christ is the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely. Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee. Search me O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* How is it possible that I could have neglected Christ, and lived in sin, to this time, with the Bible in my hand! I see that I deserve nothing but ruin; and if God had left me to my wicked choice, I should have hated him forever. O the wonders of divine grace in recovering a lost sinner.'

The effects of the revival are most pleasant. A spirit of prayer prevails, and particular attention to family religion.

With many persons the riches of this world have lost their charms.

Great concern is manifested for the salvation of souls that are still careless, and continual cries to God are made for them. There is a special solicitude that the privileges and comforts of the Gospel may be given to Jews and Gentiles through the world. There is an increasing spirit of liberality in contributing for the cause of missions. The church is more animated in union and brotherly love. The members appear resolved to be more engaged in heavenly things, more watchful and prayerful in walking with God. The church prayer-meeting which has been attended weekly now more than a year, seems to excite a growing interest, and affords we trust a participation of that pleasure which the primitive disciples enjoyed on the evening of the sabbath, when Christ stood in the midst of them and said, Peace be unto you. In short they seem resolved to live as the heirs of heaven. Their maxim is, Never decline.

On the whole, it has been a serious and delightful season. Many souls, we hope, have been truly brought home to Christ; but also many we fear have quenched the Holy Spirit, and taken up their portion in this world: still prayer is made without ceasing for them. During Mr. N.'s stay with us, this place was a common centre of divine entertainment, in comparison with which all the pleasures of this world are faint and feeble. The multitudes who flocked in from neighbouring congregations appeared to feel themselves richly repaid for their pains; and some of them carried home the spirit, where it spread and operated powerfully until the region appeared like the garden of God.

Since the commencement of this religious attention 68 persons have been received into the Church. There is a considerable number also who are believed to be the subjects of grace; but are afraid to make a public profession, and there is a number of minds still deeply distressed, that entertain no hope. The number of people in this parish is about 600. Before the revival, 64 were members of the Church, making the whole number 132. Supposing all these to be christians, what an amount of happiness will they receive. We are filled with wonder at the greatness of the work; but some of these are probably deceived; and how distressing the thought of hundreds still in their

sins, who must perish forever, unless they should be born again. We need revival upon revival; and we would continue to pray that all the people may praise the lord; and that all the earth may be filled with the glory of Christ. Yours &c.

<\t>JOAB BRACE.

April 25, 1822.