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"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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Select Sermon.

The Great Revival.

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WHEN the heroes of old prepared for the fight, they put on their armour; but when God prepares for battle, he makes "bare his arm." Man has to look two ways—to his own defence, as well as to the offence of his enemy; God hath but one direction in which to cast his eye—the overthrow of his foeman; and he disregards all measures of defence, and scorns all armour. He makes bare his arm in the sight of all the people. When men would do their work in earnest, too, they sometimes strip themselves, like that warrior of old, who, when he went to battle with the Turks, would never fight them except with the bare arm. "Such things as they," said he, "I need not fear; they have more reason to fear my bare arm than I their scimitar." Men feel that they are prepared for a work when they cast away their cumbrous garments. And so the prophet represents the Lord as laying aside for awhile the garments of his dignity, and making bare his arm, that he may do his work in earnest, and accomplish his purpose for the establishment of his Church.

Now, leaving the figure, which is a very great one, I would remind you that its meaning is fully carried out, whenever God is pleased to send a great revival of religion. My heart is glad within me this day, for I am the bearer of good tidings. My soul has been made exceedingly full of happiness, by the tidings of a great revival of religion throughout the United States. Some hundred years, or more, ago, it pleased the Lord to send one of the most marvellous religious awakenings that was ever known;—the whole of the United States seemed shaken from end to end with enthusiasm for hearing the Word of God; and now, after the lapse of a century, the like has occurred again. The monetary pressure has at length departed; but it has left behind it the wreck of many mighty fortunes. Many men, who were once princes, have now become beggars, and in America, more than in England, men have learned the instability of all human things. The minds of men, thus weaned from the earth by terrible and unexpected panic, seem prepared to receive tidings from a better land, and to turn their exertions in a heavenly direction. You will be told by any one who is conversant with the present state of America, that wherever you go there are the most remarkable signs that religion is progressing with majestic strides. The great revival, as it is now called, has become the common market talk of merchants; it is the theme of every newspaper; even the secular press remarks it, for it has become so astonishing that all ranks and classes of men seem to have been affected by it. Apparently without any cause whatever, fear has taken hold of the hearts of men; a thrill seems to be shot through every breast at once; and it is affirmed by men of good repute, that there are, at this time, towns in New England where you could not, even if you searched, find one solitary unconverted person. So marvellous—I had almost said so miraculous—has been the sudden and instantaneous spread of religion throughout the great empire, that it is scarcely possible for us to believe the half of it, even though it should be told us. Now, as you are aware, I have at all times been peculiarly jealous and suspicious of revivals. Whenever I see a man who is called a revivalist, I always set him down for a cipher. I would scorn the faking of such a title as that to myself. If God pleases to make use of a man for the promoting of a revival, well and good; but for any man to assume the title and office of a revivalist, and go about the country, believing that wherever he goes he is the vessel of mercy appointed to convey a revival of religion, is, I think, an assumption far too arrogant for any man who has the slightest degree of modesty. And again, there are a large number of revivals, which occur every now and then in our towns, and sometimes in our city,

which I believe to be spurious and worthless. I have heard of the people crowding in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening, to hear some noted revivalist, and under his preaching some have screamed, have shrieked, have fallen down on the floor, have rolled themselves in convulsions, and afterwards, when he has set a form for penitents, employing one or two decoy ducks to run out from the rest and make a confession of sin, hundreds have come forward, impressed by that one sermon, and declared they were, there and then, turned from the error of their ways; and it was only last week I saw a record of a certain place, in our own country, giving an account, that on such a day, under the preaching of the Rev. Mr. So-and-so, seventeen persons were thoroughly sanctified, twenty-eight were convinced of sin, and twenty-nine received the blessing of justification. Then comes the next day, so many more; the following day, so many more; and afterwards they are all cast up together, making a grand total of some hundreds, who have been blessed during three services, under the ministry of Mr. So-and-so. All that I call farce! There may be something very good in it; but the outside looks to me to be so rotten, that I should scarcely trust myself to think that the good within comes to any very great amount. When people go to work to calculate so exactly by arithmetic, it always strikes me they have mistaken what they are at. We may easily say so many were added to the church on a certain occasion, but to take a separate census of the convinced, the justified, and the sanctified, is absurd. You will, therefore, be surprised at finding me speaking of revival; but you will, perhaps, not be quite so surprised when I endeavour to explain what I mean by an earnest and intense desire, which I feel in my heart, that God would be pleased to send throughout this country a revival like that which has just commenced in America, and which, we trust, will long continue there.

First, then, THE CAUSE OF A TRUE REVIVAL. The mere worldly man does not understand a revival: he cannot make it out. Why is it, that a sudden fit of godliness, as he would call it, a kind of sacred epidemic, should seize upon a mass of people all at once? What can be the cause of it? It frequently occurs in the absence of all great evangelists; it cannot be traced to any particular means. There have been no special agencies used in order to bring it about—no machinery supplied, no societies established; and yet it has come, just like a heavenly hurricane, sweeping everything before it. It has rushed across the land, and of it men have said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth; and we hear the sound thereof, but we cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth." What is, then, the cause? Our answer is, If a revival be true and real, it is caused by the Holy Spirit, and by him alone.

But while this is the only actual cause, yet there are instrumental causes; and the main instrumental cause of a great revival must be the bold, faithful, fearless preaching of the truth as it is in Jesus. But added to this, there must be the earnest prayers of the church. All in vain the most indefatigable ministry, unless the church waters the seed sown with her abundant tears. Every revival has been commenced and attended by a large amount of prayer. In the city of New York at the present moment there is not, I believe, one single hour of the day wherein Christians are not gathered together for prayer. One church opens its doors from five o'clock till six, for prayer; another church opens from six to seven, and summons its praying men to offer the sacrifice of supplication. Six o'clock is past, and men are gone to their labour. Another class find it then convenient—such as those, perhaps, who go to business at eight or nine—and from seven to eight there is another prayer meeting. From eight to nine there is another, in another part of the city; and what is most marvellous, at high noon, from twelve to one, in the midst of the city of New York, there is held a prayer meeting in a large room, which is crammed to the doors every day, with hundreds standing outside. This

prayer meeting is made up of merchants of the city, who can spare a quarter of an hour to go in and say a word of prayer, and then leave again; and then a fresh company comes in to fill up the ranks, so that it is supposed that many hundreds assemble in that one place for prayer during the appointed hour. This is the explanation of the revival. If this were done in London—if we for once would outvie old Rome, who kept her monks in her sanctuaries always at prayer, both by night and by day,—if we together could keep up one golden chain of prayer, link after link of holy brotherhood being joined together in supplication, then might we expect an abundant outpouring of the Divine Spirit from the Lord our God. The Holy Spirit, as the actual agent—the Word preached, and the prayers of the people, as the instruments—and we have thus explained the cause of a true revival of religion.

But now, WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF A REVIVAL OF RELIGION? Why, the consequences are everything that our hearts could desire for the church's good. When the revival of religion comes into a nation, the minister begins to be warmed. It is said that in America the most sleepy preachers have begun to wake up; they have warmed themselves at the general fire, and men who could not preach without notes, and could not preach with them to any purpose at all, have found it in their hearts to speak right out, and speak with all their might to the people. When there comes a revival, the minister all of a sudden finds that the usual forms and conventionalities of the pulpit are not exactly suitable to the times. He breaks through one hedge; then he finds himself in an awkward position, and he has to break through another. He finds himself perhaps on a Sunday morning, though a Doctor of Divinity, actually telling an anecdote—lowering the dignity of the pulpit by actually using a simile or metaphor—sometimes perhaps accidentally making his people smile, and, what is also a great sin in these solid theologians, now and then dropping a tear. He does not exactly know how it is, but the people catch up his words. "I must have something good for them," he says. He just burns that old lot of sermons; or he puts them away altogether, and gets some new ones, or gets none at all, but just gets his text, and begins to cry, "Men and brethren, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." The old deacons say, "What is the matter with our minister?" The old ladies, who have heard him for many years, and slept in the front of the gallery so regularly, begin to rouse, and say, "I wonder what has happened to him; how can it be? Why he preaches like a man on fire. The tear runs over at his eye; his soul is full of love for souls." They cannot make it out; they have often said he was dull and dreary and drowsy. How is it all this changed? Why, it is the revival. The revival has touched the minister; the sun, shining so brightly, has melted some of the snow on the mountain top, and it is running down in fertilizing streams, to bless the valleys; and the people down below are refreshed by the ministrations of the man of God, who has awakened himself up from his sleep, and finds himself, like another Elijah, made strong for forty days of labour. Well, then, directly after that the revival begins to touch the people at large. The congregation was once numbered by the empty seats, rather than by the full ones. But on a sudden—the minister does not understand it—he finds the people coming to hear him. He never was popular, never hoped to be. All at once he wakes up and finds himself famous, so far as a large congregation can make him so. There are the people, and how they listen! They are all awake, all in earnest; they lean their heads forward, they put their hands to their ears. His voice is feeble; they try to help him; they are doing anything so that they may hear the Word of Life. And then the members of the church open their eyes and see the chapel full, and they say, "How has this come about? We ought to pray." A prayer-meeting is summoned. There had been five or six in the vestry; now

there are five or six hundred, and they turn into the chapel. And oh! how they pray! That old stager, who used to pray for twenty minutes, finds it now convenient to confine himself to five; and that good old man, who always used to repeat the same form of prayer when he stood up, and talked about the horse that rushed into the battle, and the oil from vessel to vessel, and all that, leaves all these at home, and just prays, "O Lord, save sinners, for Jesus Christ's sake." And there are sobs and groans heard in the prayer meetings. It is evident that not one, but all, are praying; the whole mass seems moved to supplication. How is this again? Why, it is just the effect of the revival, for when the revival truly comes, the minister and the congregation and the church will receive good by it.

But it does not end here. The members of the church grow more solemn, more serious. Family duties are better attended to; the home circle is brought under better culture. Those who could not spare time for family prayer, find they can do so now; those who had no opportunity for teaching their children, now dare not go a day without doing it; for they hear that there are children converted in the Sunday school. There are twice as many in the Sunday school now as there used to be; and, what is wonderful, the little children meet together to pray; their little hearts are touched, and many of them show signs of a work of grace begun; and fathers and mothers think they must try what they can do for their families: if God is blessing little children, why should he not bless theirs?

And then, when you see the members of the church going up to the house of God, you mark with what a steady and sober air they go. Perhaps they talk on the way, but they talk of Jesus; and if they whisper together at the gates of the sanctuary, it is no longer idle gossip; it is no remark about, "How do you like the preacher? What did you think of him? Did you notice So-and-so?" Oh, no! "I pray the Lord that he might bless the word of his servant, that he might send an unction from on high, that the dying flame may be kindled, and that where there is life, it may be promoted and strengthened, and receive fresh vigour." This is their whole conversation.

And then comes the great result. There is an inquirers' meeting held: the good brother who presides over it is astonished; he never saw so many coming in his life before. "Why," says he, "there is a hundred at least come to confess what the Lord has done for their souls! Here are fifty come all at once to say that under such a sermon they were brought to the knowledge of the truth. Who hath begotten me these? How hath it come about? How can it be? Is not the Lord a great God that hath wrought such a work as this?" And then the converts who are thus brought into the church, if the revival continues, are very earnest ones. You never saw such a people. The outsiders call them fanatics. It is a blessed fanaticism. Others say, they are nothing but enthusiasts. It is a heavenly enthusiasm. Everything that is done is done with such spirit! If they sing, it is like the crashing thunder; if they pray, it is like the swift, sharp flash of lightning, lighting up the darkness of the cold-hearted, and making them for a moment feel that there is something in prayer. When the minister preaches he preaches like a Boanerges, and when the church is gathered together, it is with a hearty good will. When they give, they give with enlarged liberality; when they visit the sick, they do it with gentleness, meekness, and love. Everything is done with a single eye to God's glory; not to men, but by the power of God. Oh, that we might see such a revival as this!

But, blessed be God, it does not end here. The revival of the church then touches the rest of society. Men, who do not come forward and profess religion, are more punctual in attending the means of grace. Men that used to swear, give it up; they find it is not suitable for the times. Men that profaned the Sabbath, and that despised