

## APPALLING INDIFFERENCE

By Rev. F. A. Daw

The appalling indifference of the masses to religion"—this phrase and similar ones I have heard spoken and seen in print very frequently of late. So much so, it has stuck in my mind and I have been moved to consider and meditate.

The fact of this indifference we cannot deny. It faces us everywhere we go. It seems to be one of the "signs of the times" and "the spirit of the age." Recently-published statistics indicate that there are possibly on the North American continent one hundred million people who have no vital religious experience. One large Protestant denomination reports over a period of ten years the loss of over 800,000 Sunday-school scholars, 17,000 teachers and 6,000 schools. When you stop to think over things like this, the word "appalling" seems the right word to use.

But I wonder if all the trouble is with the "masses" and none with the religion to which they are so appallingly indifferent. I remember that the New Testament speaks of a type of religion which compels attention; of a Christ who in the days of His flesh "could not be hid." The people of Jerusalem cried out, "Who is this?" as He approached, and about two months afterward, in the same city, His disciples caused the people to cry out, "What meaneth this?" I read of the people being "amazed and confounded"; many were "pricked in their hearts"; some were made exceedingly glad, and others were exceedingly mad—all because of religion.

I read on and find phrases like this: "The people with one consent gave heed unto the things that were spoken": "There was great joy in that city;" "Multitudes, both men and women, turned to the Lord;" and "The word of the Lord grew and multiplied."

In one place "came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God;" in another the whole city was "set on an uproar" because "these that had turned the world upside down have come hither also;" and in another, great public bonfires of books of curious arts testified to genuine repentance and reformation of life, "so mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed."

Yes, there were mobs and riots and imprisonments and cruel mockings and stonings, but at least there was something else besides "appalling indifference."

All this, we had to admit in our thinking, occurred several centuries ago in the dawn of the Christian era. The history of the church, however, records the repetition of these things down through the years, not once nor twice.

A little more than two hundred years ago the British Isles were moved mightily by the Methodist revivals of religion, until great numbers of people in all walks of life were shaken out of indifference and were compelled to give attention to religion.

Less than one hundred years ago the northern states of the United States were swept with a concern over religion which, we are told, brought a million souls into the kingdom of God. In the city of Rochester, New York, in the days of Charles G. Finney, ten thousand people were converted during the course of one campaign. To such an extent were the people concerned in those days that it was not an uncommon thing, we are informed, for whole issues of the daily papers to be given over to reports of the revival.

Then there was a type of religion which broke out in the little principality of Wales, until tens of thousands of people, embracing almost the entire population, made religion their principal concern and pursuit until theatres, saloons and even commercialized sports and such like went completely out of business for lack of patrons, so fervent was the interest in religion. These are but a few of the many instances which might be mentioned.

In fact, in all our investigation we did not come across a single instance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, either in ancient or modern times, that did not banish indifference, compel attention and issue in revival.

Perhaps our modern, easy-going, worldly-wise, cautious, spineless, unctious religion is as much responsible for the "appalling indifference" as is the "masses." Perhaps now, in the midst of the twentieth century since Christ—perhaps even now a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the church would change this awful indifference to tremendous concern.

## A HOLINESS PASTOR

John Fletcher stands eminent among the preachers of all time. While he was identified with the early Wesleyan movement his ministry was such that he identified himself with the whole of Christendom. Some men never rise above denominational lines, while others, whose lives are like the flood-tide of a great river, sweeping beyond traditional denominational boundaries, for the spiritual enrichment of a multitude in the larger world sphere of Christian brotherhood. Such was the life of John William Fletcher who, for twenty-five years, was the preacher on the Madeley circuit in England.

No fair evaluation can be given of the life of John Fletcher, of whom Southey said, "No church has ever possessed a more apostolic minister," without taking into account his experience, teaching, and preaching of sanctification, as a definite work of grace attainable subsequent to regeneration. Fletcher designated this experience as "dead unto sin." In a personal testimony he says, "Yes, I rejoice to declare it, and to be a witness to the glory of his grace, that I am dead unto sin, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, who is my Lord and King!"

Fletcher discovered that the experience of holiness must be proclaimed if it is to be retained. In his testimony concerning retaining the experience, he says, "I received this blessing four or five times before; but I lost it by not observing the order of God; who has told us, 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' But the enemy offered his bait under various colors, to keep me from a publication of what God has wrought."

While John Fletcher was a collegian, having gained distinction as a student in the University of Geneva, he constantly held that to be "filled with the Holy Ghost" was a more indispensable qualification for the Christian ministry than any classical learning. He believed in classical learning, for he served for a time as President of a ministerial train-

ing college at Trevecca, Wales, in connection with his pastorate at Madeley.

Joseph Benson, a contemporary official of the college at Trevecca, tells of Fletcher's ministry at the college in leading members of the faculty and of the student body into the upper room experience, "After speaking awhile in the school he used frequently to say, 'As many of you as are athirst for this fulness of the Spirit, follow me into my room.' On this, many of us have instantly followed him, and there continued for two or three hours, wrestling like Jacob for the blessing, praying one after another, until we could bear to kneel no longer."

Fletcher's life was an example of the holiness he preached. One single example of the attainment and exemplification of holiness in the whole of church history, is sufficient to answer all of the criticism that has ever been offered against the attainment of holiness in this life.

Rev. Thomas Reader, an ardent Calvinist, was so angered after reading one of Fletcher's books on holiness, that he made a long journey to Madeley to protest the author's radical views. Fletcher greeted this critical visitor at the door with these words: "Come in, come in, thou blessed of the Lord. Am I so honored as to receive a visit from so esteemed a servant of my Master? Let us have a little prayer while refreshments are getting ready." Mr. Reader was so nonplussed at such a reception during his three-day stay at the vicarage, that his indignation vanished to the point where he did not even broach his criticism, and returned saying that he "never enjoyed three days of such spiritual and profitable intercourse in all his life."

Fletcher carried on a prodigious amount of work as preacher, teacher, writer, and shepherd of the flock of God. He widened the borders of his parish to include a number of preaching points. At the age of thirty-one he rejected a much more lucrative parish with far less work, for the Madeley circuit. It was as difficult a parish as might be found in all England. His bold and uncompromising denunciation of sin, and his faithful, watchful care as a pastor, and his close walk with God, caused men to speak of him as the man who "had one foot in heaven."

John Wesley named Fletcher as his successor, but Fletcher preceded him in death. At the funeral sermon of his friend Wesley said: "Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourscore years; but one equal to him I have not known; one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblameable a man in every respect I have not found either in England or America. Nor do I expect to find another such on this this side of eternity." Pentecostal Herald

Circumstances do not change God's will. Pray for courage to face the truth always. The idealism of Jesus never is out of style. God's way of growing big men is to give them big jobs. "Wealthy laymen" might be a more appropriate title than "leading laymen." Did you ever telegraph your pastor that you could not attend church service?