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Britain's Need at this Time

Within a short time the British nation must go to the polls to elect a new Government. As parties vie with one another in order to obtain the election of their own candidates, and as generous promises are profusely made on all hands, people can be at a nonplus as to whom they should trust and to whom they should give their vote. There is a cynical maxim abroad that a nation gets the Government it deserves. If this were to be the criterion then woe to Britain. As a nation which has backslidden from its God, what could it expect in such a case but a Government like itself — a Government that would cast off the fear of God and enact laws, even more depraved and vile than those already on the Statute Book of the land? As a result the nation would sink further into the morass of godlessness and sensuality; and violence and oppression would become even more than at present, the order of the day.

We have only to remember how it was in the earth before the flood to see a situation which resembles very closely the present state of the world and of our nation. We are told that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Again we are told that "God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." The flood followed this sad state of affairs and all mankind except Noah and his household perished. The Lord has promised that He will not again destroy man from the earth in this way, but He has not promised that He will not pour out the vials of His wrath in fire from heaven, as He did on Sodom and Gomorrah. "Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" was His threatening against Israel and that threatening was carried into effect when repentance did not follow the warning.

What is Britain's need in such an hour, when the nation is on the brink of solemn judgments? Will the application of one or other of the economic theories propounded by the leaders of the parties seeking to govern the country prove sufficient to save the country from disaster? It will need more than this to rescue a nation that is on a perilous slippery slope. There must be a return to God — the true God — whom the nation has forsaken. There must be a turning to Him in repentance and with confession of sin. But how is this to be effected? Only through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the nation. Other remedies must utterly fail. Man cannot save himself, neither can a backslidden nation recover itself, but by the Spirit poured out from on High. This is what Britain needs at this critical hour in its history. What an unspeakable blessing it would be if true repentance was granted to our nation from the Queen on the Throne to the lowest in the land! Is there encouragement to a nation to turn? Yes, the Lord says: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

But what of the election looming and the need to elect persons to govern the nation? What kind of men does the nation need to govern it at such a time as this? It needs godly men — men in whose hearts is the fear of God. Too long has the nation been ruled by ungodly men — men in whose heart there is no fear of God. But where in a godless nation are such to be found? Though the nation has sunk so low there are still those scattered throughout the nation who love God's blessed Name and who desire the advancement of His Kingdom. We are also to remember that there is nothing impossible with God. He can raise up godly statesmen by the power of His grace. He can bring those who are at present His sworn enemies to bow before Him and give heart allegiance to Him, as He did with Saul of Tarsus. He can cause a nation to be born in a day. Let us not set limits to the God of Jacob, but let us believe in His power to save and deliver. Let us look to Him in faith as the mighty God of Jacob and plead with him to appear on our behalf and save us from our enemies.

When he raises up such men, what will they be like? "They will be mighty men of valour, men valiant for the truth in the earth. They will oppose evil in all its forms. They will not call good evil and darkness light. They will be strong and do exploits. And what of the nation that is favoured with such godly rulers? They will call that nation the nation which the Lord has blessed. It will be a nation mighty upon the earth, a nation that will not do iniquity. Then will men see the truth of God's Word that "righteousness alone exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people".

Sermon

By Rev. Neil Cameron

Preached at Edinburgh, on 20th November, 1916.

(Taken down by a Hearer).

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?” — Psalm 85: 6.

In meditating upon these words for a short time, we shall consider three things in particular at present. We shall notice, first, the condition in which those who here prayed felt themselves to be in at the time, when they prayed, “Wilt thou not revive us again?” In the second place, they were conscious of the great fact that it is God alone who can revive His own Church as well as individuals. It is not the work of man, it is the work of God. And we shall notice, in the third and last place, a certain effect which they expected would follow this reviving, and the effect was “that thy people may rejoice in thee.” They cannot rejoice while they are dead and disconsolate.

Now, we are to consider, first, a few things in connection with the condition in which those who first offered this prayer found themselves in at the time, and it was a condition that needed reviving. They were conscious that they were dead, and that they needed reviving. You will notice that he uses the word here “again,” and that means that God did revive the Church in the past, but that they had now as much need of being revived, of having the work repeated, as they had at any time in the past.

Seeing that this was so, we shall notice a few things concerning the way in which the Church of God, the visible Church in the world, comes to be in such a condition as that she feels herself dead, and in need of reviving. The first thing we have to notice in connection with that is this:— God did many a time revive His cause in the world by quickening sinners, and by bringing them to repentance. But this is a thing that we ought always to remember, that, although God would have mercy upon one generation and bring many out of them, quickening them and imparting grace to them, yet the children of these men would just be as needful of being revived as their fathers. Grace does not run in the blood. We often felt the force of the statements that we find continually recurring in the Book of Judges. We find there that when God raised a Judge to judge Israel, there was a great reviving, and that continued generally for forty years. It struck *us* as being very wonderful that forty years was repeating itself so often in the history of the Jews during the time of the Judges, until we begin to consider what really was the meaning of this period of forty years,

recorded again and again, and we then saw that this was the reason, that, though God did reveal Himself to the generation among whom He raised the Judge, and though they were converted (and those who were not converted continued in the order of worship and other things which God commanded), many of their children who were raised up were ignorant and blind, and went away immediately from God. That is true down through history — that the children of godly parents, if not converted or revived themselves, will be as ignorant of God and of their own everlasting concerns as the heathen are, notwithstanding that God's book is in their hands.

We shall notice, in the second place, that, notwithstanding men forsake, God, they always maintain a form of religion. It is not at all the way of man to cease to hold a form of religion in the world, but it will be a dead form, and there are several reasons concurring to bring about this. The first thing I desire to notice in connection with it is that, when men are raised up to become ministers in the Church who were never revived, who were never converted themselves, they lead the people immediately to something that they can do themselves, to depend for eternity upon their own works, and if not upon their own works, they set before them a mercy in God which never delivered a sinner; "for the natural man," however educated he may be, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Any one who wishes to look back into past history will notice this, that it was an unconverted ministry that brought death almost in every instance upon the Church of God. Conversions cease, that is, true conversions, cease in the congregations where such men preach. They may be able to preach more eloquently than those who are taught of God, but not one sinner will ever be quickened or converted under the preaching of an unconverted man, however eloquent he may be, and, even however sound he may be; he brings death upon the congregation and upon individuals. It is not only that an unconverted ministry brings death upon the congregation by preaching to them a way of salvation which is not God's way, and holding forth that men will go to heaven by their own good works — and, indeed, they would require to have better works than they have — holding out that God is merciful, but they have no place in their doctrine for the atonement. They see no great need for the obedience and suffering and death of the Son of God in order to make atonement for the sins of men; and they see no need of the quickening work and convincing and converting work of the Holy Ghost, and this brings death upon a people.

But the third thing I desire to notice in this connection is, that such

men will not continue long until they begin to depart publicly from the great doctrines of God's truth. That can be proved in the history of the Bible. It can be proved also in profane history that, when the Church was filled with men who did not know for themselves the value, the exceedingly great value, of the atonement made upon Calvary's cross for poor, lost, perishing sinners, and the exceedingly great need that men had of being quickened by the Spirit of God — as none can quicken "the dead" but God — men went to heresies, and the history of the Church discovers that such heresies brought death, not upon one congregation only, but some heresies in the past (such as the Pelagian heresy, and others), brought death upon the whole of the Churches in the known world. Men were realising then that conversions ceased, and that men were dead and formal in their worship immediately after forsaking the great doctrine of man's total depravity and lost condition as a sinner by the Fall, so that heresy brings extraordinary death upon men. They become dead to eternal things, dead to their own concerns as lost sinners, dead as to their need of having a saving interest in Christ, and, as I shall have to notice afterwards, none can deliver from this death but God himself.

We shall notice, in the fourth place, under this head, how the death that reigns in this country came to reign in it. If you will look into it, you will find that it just came exactly as we have been showing. A whole host of ministers were raised up who did not realise the value of God's word, and who never realised in their own experience the infinite need of the atonement and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, who never realised in their own experience their need of the Spirit of Grace and Supplications to quicken and to change man's nature, and to cause sinners to repent and believe in Christ. Men rose who looked upon these things as antiquated doctrines, and who were quite prepared to drink in their fill of the rationalism of Germany. The ministry of this country, we say, drank their fill of the rationalism of Germany. They began to preach that there were many things in the Bible which were not right; that there were many things in it which were even immoral, the Book which God claims as His Own Book, and the Book of which Christ said, "until the heavens and earth pass away, not one jot or title shall pass away from the law until all be fulfilled." Now, the effect of that was in this country — first, a demand to cast out of the Creed what these men did not realise as necessary. There was not to be a word in it about man's total depravity, there was not to be a word in it about election, there was not to be a word in it about a particular atonement or about the application of the redemption purchased by Christ by the Holy Ghost to the souls of sinners whom

God purposed to save. These, and other doctrines also, were thrown entirely out of the Creed of the *Free Church* about twenty-four years ago.* I ask any man, however dead we were twenty-four years ago, I ask that man to look upon Scotland, and see whether we are not more dead now than we were then. The effect of it has been that the most of the people of this country — I mean just now, Scotland — have been converted to infidelity. Some of them go the length of boasting that they are atheists. The half of the people of this country never darken the door of a church. The cause of the whole thing was that men, ignorant of God and His Church, of themselves as sinners, and of the great doctrines of the grace of God, destroyed the Creed of the Church and taught lies to the people. The Spirit of God never acknowledges anything but truth. Men have made efforts again and again to have revivals, being conscious of the fact that their congregations were gone to the four winds, and that they would require now to have a revival. Instead of looking to heaven and praying to God in the name of Christ to send His Holy Spirit to revive and change men, they looked to America. It is from there that we are expecting, as a country, to get something to revive us! If men are not more dead after these Americans go away than they were before they came, they are certainly not more living to the things of eternity and their everlasting concerns. If there be any in Scotland today who see how things have gone back in this country to death and darkness, it is time, my friends, that we should begin to pray with the Church of old, "Wilt thou not revive us again?" Otherwise we are undone. Men may like to go on in the pleasures of sin, men may enjoy these, but God tells us that the end of these things is death, death eternal, and anyone who has any idea of what it is to be a sinner, and a sinner's need of being saved, must realise that, in our day, the most are dead and going to a lost eternity. But, before I leave this, I must mention one thing, and it is that we do not believe that God, my friends, will forsake his own people, however few they may be, and however antiquated they may be looked upon, who will cling to God's truth and to His way of salvation, by the gospel of His grace. Certainly, in the midst of death, He will give them a reviving.

Let us notice, in the second place, how they are conscious that they could not revive themselves, but had full confidence that God could revive them. Just like the leper that came to Christ and said to Him, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and He answered, "I will, be thou clean." You will see that the question that is asked here — "Wilt thou not revive us?" — means that they believed that He had the power, but could not

* By the Declaratory Act of 1892.

say what His will was as regards the day in which the Psalm was written, and the same thing is true now. None who knows God savingly can have the least doubt in his or her mind but that God is able to quicken the dead — to revive not only one soul, but to revive millions of them at a time — in a moment, if that be His will, but what His will is is a thing that men do not know. He reveals a great deal of His will. We know a great deal that certainly will be accomplished, but what He is going to do with the present generation is a thing that no one can say; but you can go the length of praying with the Church, “Wilt thou not revive us?”

Now, I desire to notice two or three things in connection with this second head, and the first thing is this — that God did revive His own cause, His own Church, in days when things were very low in the past, and He did it also when men did not expect it. You find in one place that when God revived His Church, those who lived at that time described their experience passing through this great work, as “men that dreamed.”

“When Sion’s bondage God turned back,
We were like men that dreamed.”

They could hardly believe that what they were seeing with their eyes was actually a fact, when God began the work mightily by His Word and Spirit in the souls of men.

I desire, in connection with this, to instance three or four cases in which this happened.

I desire to go back just now to the time of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Things were very low then. If you read the beginning of the prophecy of Isaiah you will see how dark things looked — how really low things were — for He calls the people there, “Sodom and Gomorrah,” and their rulers, “rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah.” He declares their sins were red as scarlet, and crimson, just as if you were depicting the condition of this country at the present time. Our rulers are not better than the people; our sins are as scarlet, yea, as crimson, but he invites us to come and reason with Him. About four years after the seven tribes on the west of Jordan — called Israel in those days — were taken away captive by the King of Assyria, Hezekiah and his princes resolved to hold the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem, and that messengers should be sent through the land of Israel to invite those who were left of these tribes to come to that feast. You find that those who went were mocked by the people, but notwithstanding that most of the people mocked these messengers, there were a few out of these tribes who humbled themselves and came, and that shows that it was pride that caused the rest not to come. And when the seven days of the feast were finished, such was the experience of these men and

women of God's infinite love and pity towards them, that they could not separate, but began to plead that they should have other seven days. When these were over they went and broke down all the idolatry — the idols and the idol-worship — in the land of Judah, and went on till they reached Dan. That was God's work. You will notice that it was just through the means that God revives men, just by the means — the word preached and read, the sacraments administered (we do not mean by that that the Sacrament of the Supper is a converting ordinance at all) — and you find that this reviving which He gave to the Church in the days of Hezekiah continued for a considerable time.

Again, how low things were in the visible Church when our Lord Jesus Christ was upon the earth! He had to describe the professors of that day — those who were the most strict — as hypocrites over and over again. That is how God Himself, when He appeared in the world in human nature, had to describe the Church, and you may depend upon it that it was not bigotry nor narrowness that caused Him to do it, but because ruth demanded it. He described them as having taken away the key of knowledge, as having not entered themselves into the kingdom of heaven, and as having prevented those who would enter into it. In the Day of Pentecost God revived His Church by the doctrines of grace. Peter charged the people with the very sins which they had committed, and the Spirit of God made those charges that the Apostle levelled against his audience as pricks in their consciences. He convinced them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and we read that three thousand were added to the Church in one day of such as should be saved. That was decidedly not the work of man; it was God's work — God the Holy Ghost making use of the word of truth, for He will never use any other instrument but His own sword. And that reviving which began in Jerusalem went over the whole Roman Empire, even within twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, and the Gospel He sent went to the ends of the earth, because God's Spirit accompanied the word and made it effectual unto salvation to the souls of poor, lost, perishing sinners.

I desire to notice, again, a third instance. See you how dead, exceedingly dead — perhaps I would not be wrong in saying that in the history of time, since the beginning of time, perhaps even in the days of Noah, things were not lower than they were before the Reformation broke out in Europe. It is set before us in the Book of Revelation as a time in which the witnesses were dead on the streets of the city, and the people rejoiced because these witnesses, who tormented them who lived on the earth — that is, who told them that their sins, if continued in, would bring them

down lower than the grave, to weeping and gnashing of teeth — had now ceased; and they sent presents to one another in their rejoicing. But after a dark, long night the witness became alive, when the breath of the Holy Ghost breathed into men; and we had the first effects of it in this country itself. John Wycliffe was about the first who raised his voice against the iniquities of the Church of Rome. You have John Huss immediately after. You have also Jerome of Prague. You have, one hundred years later, Luther, whom God quickened by His Word and Spirit in a cell down in the basement of a monastery in Germany, and made him realise that he was a sinner, that God was angry with him, and that he would be lost for ever unless he received forgiveness of sins. He went through all the inventions of the Church of Rome, and that conscientiously, trying to see if he could attain to peace of conscience — to forgiveness of sins — but he never could attain to it. He was only getting worse and worse, when the Scripture came to him three times: “The just shall live by faith.” But Luther did not know God’s voice, like Samuel. But the third time it came he was just in the very act of trying to obtain eternal life by his own merits. It was by faith upon Christ that he was saved. Now, when Luther received Christ as He was offered to him in the Gospel as his own Saviour, and without any merit of his own, he rested upon Christ alone for Salvation. Faith, my friends, is just like an empty hand. It is not a thing that brings anything to God, but it comes empty, needful, to receive from God what it needs, and that is forgiveness through the blood of Christ for all sins — past, present, and future. Now, when God raised this man and when he saw how many millions were going to eternity dead in trespasses and sins, deceived by the Church of Rome, by the Papacy, he immediately began to preach to his fellowmen that there was no merit in man’s works, but that the whole foundation of man’s salvation was Christ, the Son of God, in the glory of His person, and in the glory of His offices as the Prophet and the Priest and the King of the Church, and that in the glory of the merit of His blood He washed away the sins of the guiltiest sinner who would come to Him. There was a reviving of God’s Church. Men and women were rising up, day after day, who were throwing away from them their idols and their superstition and their works of darkness, and they showed in their life and conversation in the world that they were living men — living for eternity and not for time only. This reviving took place also in our own country.

But before I leave this second head I desire to point out this, my friends, that if you look at this country today, are we not in need of reviving as much as ever we were in our past history? Are we not perishing — going

to a lost eternity — pleased with ourselves, having plenty to flatter us to our ruin, calling out, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace? Are men not sinning against God on Sabbath-days and weekdays, refusing to give the place to the Son of God which the Father gave Him, and from which no creature can dislodge Him; refusing to give the place to the Holy Ghost, whom the Father and the Son gave to be the Comforter of the Church? It was He who was to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. It was He who was to glorify Christ by taking of the things that are His and revealing them to lost men. Since we have taken the work of the Spirit into our own hands what death has come over us! Although we should speak with tongues even as angels, if God’s Spirit will not make use of that, it is nothing better than sounding brass. It may please the ears at the time, but it is from God the increase must come. Even although Paul himself should plant and although Apollos should water, it is God, my friends, that must give the increase. While we are looking for the increase anywhere else than from God, from Jesus Christ, who is exalted a Prince and a Saviour at the right hand of God, and who is there at this moment for his purpose, that He might give repentance to Israel and remission of sins, we shall remain dead. We have much reason, much cause, why we should in our day pray this prayer over again from the bottom of our hearts, “Wilt thou not revive us again?”

But, as time will not allow me to enlarge, we shall notice now, in the third place, a few things as to the effect in the hearts of those who would see and also realise such a work as this — God reviving His people, reviving the dead, converting sinners and turning them from the ways in which destroyers go into the way of truth and salvation. He says “that thy people may rejoice in thee.”

Now, I desire to notice in connection with this three or four things, and the first thing is this:— Our text brings God Himself before us as the great object of the rejoicing of His people (not excluding at all other things), but it is a fact that true godliness rejoices in God Himself, as you find the Virgin Mary saying when she went to see her cousin Elizabeth. She said her soul was rejoicing in God her Saviour. They who have God — the three Persons — for time and for eternity, have ample cause why they should rejoice, for it matters very little to those who have God as their own God whether it should be death or life, as neither of these things can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, consequently the Church cannot rejoice in God, except He revives them. And I may mention, in connection with this, that it is not only that death that came upon all men by the Fall, but a deeper death, I fear, than the

ordinary. All by nature are dead in trespasses and sins, but there seems to be times in which men are more dead in their minds, as if they could not think at all about things that are spiritual, things that are eternal; as if they had become so materialistic in their minds that they cannot think of anything but this present life and the things of the world. Well, at such times as these, when men live and spend their time providing for the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, it is a common thing that the people of God themselves become more dead; and, if you look at the professors of our own day and compare them with those who professed religion, say, forty years ago, what do you see? At that time men and women would warn sinners seriously, advise them, bring them to a private corner, and speak seriously to them; rebuke them for Sabbath desecration, and other sins. And we remember well when boys, if playing on God's day, would run away as fast as they could if they saw one of God's people coming the way, but how are they now? They laugh in your face. Well, a part of that effect is just what I mentioned already. How it is lying like mountains of brass upon the souls of those who are dead in trespasses and sins! But there is a part of this deadness lying upon the souls of God's own people, and, if we are not deceived, some are conscious of being dead, more dead than they believe those who fear God ought to be, so dead that they will be sometimes questioning if they have been revived at all. So you see that they have a cause why they should pray for reviving for themselves, and for the true Church. How much do we need to pray, "Wilt thou not revive us?" and, if He will do that, men then could rejoice in Him; for it is the living that praise Him in that day.

The first cause of rejoicing, as I said already, is God Himself, what He is in His own Being, a God of infinite love, infinite mercy, infinite pity towards lost men; while, at the same time, He is a holy and just, and an eternal God. When those who are revived can behold the glory of the Lord in the Bible, as a man looking at a friend's face in glass, they begin to rejoice in Him, for what He is in Himself and what He is to them as their own God, their portion for time and for eternity.

I desire to notice another reason why they rejoice in Him. We are told that He knows well who are His, whether men know them or not. They rejoice in His salvation, not only in Himself. I remember reading in Dr Owen's writings about times of trial, when men would be put to the test, as to whether they would follow Christ and forsake all. He said that no man or woman, for any opinion or knowledge he or she might have of Christ, could follow Him and part with things they had seen or handled, who had only a notional knowledge; but those who behold His glory, the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father, who were enabled to receive Him as their own Saviour. He said that neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, could ever separate these from Christ. Now they rejoice in His salvation at a time when He revives His Church, and when their own faith is revived and strengthened, and when they can say "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." They can rejoice that day in their portion, they can rejoice in what He is; but, when they look upon perishing sinners in the world, they would have to fold their hands and conclude they were all lost but for what they know of God's salvation. How suitable it is for perishing men, and how God is able to make the most careless sinner begin to seek with all his or her heart God in Christ as their own portion. They rejoice in this, and what a cause of rejoicing they have. When they look upon their own families, or congregations, should they be ministers, they could have nothing but mournings, were it not that they know that God is able to revive and bring to life again the dead souls of men, and that He is able to make a people willing in a day of His power, and that He is able to cause men to forsake the ways of sin, and of the world.

If you have the grace of God in your heart, when you look at your son or your daughter without grace, you cannot rejoice in anything that they can do, and you cannot rejoice in anything that they possess, but in this one thing, that God is merciful, and that, for Christ's sake, He may, to His glory, save your son or daughter. If we know anything at all, when we look at immortal souls we have no other cause of rejoicing in the world but this — that we know assuredly that God can quicken the dead and that He is just when He justifies the ungodly; that He invites sinners to come to Him to receive life, to come with an empty hand and stretch it forth to receive eternal life in the gift of God through Jesus Christ, without money and without price, and that is a cause of rejoicing.

But I desire to notice one other thing, before I stop, as a cause why God's people rejoice in Him, and especially at times when He revives His Church again and revives themselves. There is such a thing as enjoyment in the things of God. If you never could say that you found any joy in God's house, and if you be dead in trespasses and sins, it is more than probable that you never felt anything in God's house but the coldest house that ever you were in. The flesh can get something in the picture-house, in the theatre, at the dance, at the vain song, but the flesh can get nothing in God's house unless you bring the song and the play into it. If you do this you can get something for carnal men and women to enjoy, but a spiritual worship is tastelessness itself, a weariness to the carnal mind, but

it is not so to those who are revived. David could testify by his own experience that he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of his God than dwell in the tents of iniquity, and that was the name he gave to the house in which he dwelt himself, for he says, "The Lord is a sun and a shield, and he will give grace and he will give glory, and he will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly." He was revived in his very heart in God's house and in the means of grace in private. He says, "It is good for me to draw near unto God." How is it with you? Well, my friends, God can make His own people rejoice in drawing nigh unto Him in secret, in their own secret closet, and He may make them rejoice in the public means. They said before, "Master, it is good for us to be here." It is called a feast of fat things; not at all, my friends, of inferior things, but of the best, of wine on the lees, well refined, and this is the wine of God's infinite mercy and pity towards perishing men. He is offering this to sinners who will accept of Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel. That has many a time caused men to rejoice in Him, and to rejoice in Him more than the world could rejoice when their corn and wine did abound.

But I must not be detaining you. But would to God, my friends, that He would answer this prayer again to our beloved country; that He would revive us again, and you would see if that were to take place, how the people of this country would turn their back immediately upon all their own inventions; how they would cast away their idols to the moles and the bats, and how they would devote themselves with their whole heart to worship God according to His own Word, and that, in one day, would make union in Scotland which men could not break down, but nothing else will do it. No; men may make unions merely for policy's sake; putting things together which cannot be joined. When God begins this work He can warm men's hearts by His Spirit, by His love, and He can unite men in their hearts to one another in such a way that the power of Satan and of men cannot separate them. That is a union which we would, with all our heart, pray for, a union in the love of God, in the love of Christ; a union in the Holy Ghost, a union in the Word of God, in every syllable of it. We would pray for it, rejoice at seeing it, and, if we are not deceived altogether, would like to see it tomorrow. But other efforts by dead men to put two pieces of cold iron together will be as unavailing as anything man ever tried, for it is impossible, my friends, to join men unless there be love in the union, and love makes an honourable union, and a lasting union, and a profitable union. May the Lord bless anything consistent with His Word!

Letter on Revivals

By Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D.

This letter, which is taken from the life of Dr. Archibald Alexander, was addressed to Dr. Sprague, who published a work on Revivals in 1832:—

Princeton, March 9, 1832.

Reverend and Dear Sir — In compliance with your request, I send you a few thoughts on revivals. I am gratified to learn that you are about to publish some lectures on this interesting subject. I hope they will be extensively useful; and if you should judge that anything which I may write would subserve a valuable purpose, you are at liberty to make use of this letter as you may think best.

1. A revival or religious excitement may exist and be very powerful, and affect many minds when the producing cause is not the Spirit of God, and when the truth of God is not the means of the awakening. This we must believe, unless we adopt the opinion that the Holy Spirit accompanies error by his operations as well as truth, which would be blasphemous. Religious excitement has been common among Pagans, Mohammedans, heretics, and Papists. And in our time there have been great religious excitements among those who reject the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel as, for example, among the Christ-ians, who are Unitarians, and the Newlights or Schismatics of the West, and the Campbellites, who deny the proper divinity of our Lord and the Scriptural doctrine of atonement. The whole religion of the Shakers also consists in enthusiastic excitement. Hence it is evident that revivals ought to be distinguished into such as are genuine and such as are spurious. And the distinction should depend on the doctrines inculcated, on the measures adopted, and the fruits produced. "Beloved," says the Apostle John, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."

2. Again a revival or religious excitement may take place when a few persons only are under the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, but when many are affected by sympathy and by the application of extraordinary means of awakening the feelings. I have seen a powerful religious impression pervade a large congregation at once, so that very few remained unaffected, and most expressed their feelings by the strongest signs, and yet, as it afterwards appeared, very few of them became permanently serious. Besides when the Spirit operates savingly on some; there is reason to think that his common operations are experienced by many. The minds of the people generally become more serious and tender, and many are deeply convinced of the necessity of religion, and engage earnestly in prayer and

in attendance on other means of grace. Now, while so many are affected, yet few may be truly converted, and no human wisdom is adequate to discern between those who are savingly wrought upon and those who are only the subjects of the common operations of the Holy Spirit. The tree which is covered with blossoms often produces little fruit. The wind which agitates the whole forest may tear up but few trees by the roots. Thus there may be great and promising appearances, and yet very little fruit. Temporary believers may use the same language, and exhibit to others precisely the same appearance as true converts. This consideration should be sufficient to prevent the practice lately introduced of admitting persons to the communion of the Church at the very meeting at which they are first awakened. There may be cases in which well instructed persons of good character may be received to the Lord's table as soon as they profess a hope of acceptance with God, but these should be considered exceptions to the general rule. Often the impressions produced at a public meeting, when strong excitements are applied to awaken the feelings, are as evanescent as the morning cloud or early dew. Many who eventually become truly pious entertain for a while hopes which they afterwards are convinced to be unfounded; and to pronounce such persons converted at once, and hurry their admission to the Lord's table, would be the most effectual method of preventing their saving conversion. There may be an error on the other side of too long a delay and of discouraging real believers from approaching the table of their Lord; but the error is on the safe side. As to apostolical precedent, it is just as strong for a community of goods: and after all, there is no undoubted case of any convert being immediately received to the Lord's Supper. They were baptised immediately on their profession, but this in our view is a different thing; for we admit infants to baptism, but not to the other sacrament. And the fact is that in every part of the world the plan of placing young converts in the class of catechumens to be instructed even prior to their Christian baptism was adopted. God often leaves His servants to find out by experience what is most expedient, and does not teach everything by inspiration as in the case of Moses in judging the people of Israel. And if experience has uttered her monitory voice clearly on any point I think she has in regard to this; and I have no doubt that future experience will fully corroborate the lessons of the past.

3. A real work of the Spirit may be mingled with much enthusiasm and disorder; but its beauty will be marred and its progress retarded by every such spurious mixture. Thus, also individuals who are the subjects of special grace may for a while be carried away with erroneous notions and

extravagant feelings. We must not, therefore, condemn all as deluded souls who manifest some signs of enthusiasm. But under the same revival or general excitement, while some are renewed and engrafted into Christ, others may be entirely under the influence of error, spiritual pride, and delusion. When the Son of Man sows good seed in His field will not the enemy be busy in sowing tares? And, doubtless, it often happens that by the rashness, fanaticism, and extravagance of a few persons, especially if they be leaders, an ill report may be brought up against a work in which the Spirit of God has been powerfully operating. The opinion that it is dangerous to oppose fanaticism lest we hinder the work of God is most unfounded. We cannot more effectually promote genuine revivals than by detecting and suppressing fanaticism, which is their counterfeit, and injures their reputation among intelligent men more than all other causes.

4. Often, also, there may be much error mingled with the evangelical truth which is preached in times of revival, and while God blesses His own truth to the conversion of men, the baleful effects of the error which accompanies it will be sure to be manifest. It may be compared to the case where some poisonous ingredient is mingled with wholesome food. I might here, perhaps, refer to some section of our own Church where the truth is not clearly inculcated; and it might be shown that there is danger of error on both extremes. But I choose rather to refer to those Churches which we all think to be erroneous in certain points. No denomination among us has had more frequent or extensive revivals than the Methodists, and we have no doubt that multitudes have been truly converted under their ministry; but the effect of their errors is manifest to an impartial observer. The same remark holds good respecting the Cumberland Presbyterians, who greatly resemble the Methodists in their doctrines and mode of promoting and conducting revivals. And, as an example from the opposite extreme, I would mention that portion of the Baptist Church which is tinctured with Antinomianism. They have revivals also, but their mode of treating the subjects is widely different from that of the sects last mentioned.

5. But I come now to speak of genuine revivals, where the gospel is preached in its purity, and where the people have been well instructed in the doctrines of Christianity. In a revival, it makes the greatest difference in the world whether the people have been carefully taught by catechising, or are ignorant of the Bible. In some cases revivals are so remarkably pure that nothing occurs with which any pious man can find fault. There is not only no wildness or extravagance, but very little strong commotion of the animal feelings. The Word of God distils upon the mind like the

gentle rain, and the Holy Spirit comes down like the dew, diffusing a blessed influence on all around. Such a revival affords the most beautiful sight ever seen upon earth. Its aspects gives us a lively idea of what will be the general state of things in *the latterday glory*, and some faint image of the heavenly state. The impression in the minds of the people in such a work is the exact counterpart of the truth, just as the impression on the wax corresponds to the seal. In such revivals there is great solemnity and silence. The convictions of sin are deep and humbling; the justice of God in the condemnation of the sinner is felt and acknowledged; every other refuge but Christ is abandoned; the heart at first is made to feel its impenetrable hardness; when least expected, it dissolves under a grateful sense of God's goodness and Christ's love; light breaks in upon the soul, either by a gradual dawning or by a sudden flash; Christ is revealed through the Gospel, and a firm and joyful confidence of salvation through Him is produced; a benevolent, forgiving, meek, humble, contrite spirit predominates; the love of God is shed abroad; and with some, joy unspeakable and full of glory fills the soul. A spirit of devotion is enkindled. The Word of God becomes exceedingly precious. Prayer is the exercise in which the soul seems to be in its proper element, because by it God is approached, His presence felt, and His beauty seen; and the new-born soul lives by breathing after the knowledge of God, after communion with God, and after conformity to His will. There also springs up in the soul an inextinguishable desire to promote the glory of God, and to bring all men to the knowledge of the truth, and by that means to the possession of eternal life. The sincere language of the heart is, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" That God may send upon His Church many such revivals is my daily prayer; and many such have been experienced in our country, and I trust are still going forward in our Church.

6. But it has often occurred to me — and I have heard the same sentiment from some of the most judicious and pious men I have known — that there must be a state of the Church preferable to these temporary excitements, which are too often followed by a deplorable state of declension and disgraceful apathy and inactivity. Why not aim at having a continuous lively state of piety, and an unceasing progress in the conversion of the impenitent, without these dreadful seasons of deadness and indifference? Why may we not hope for such a state of increasing prosperity in the Church that *revivals* shall be no longer needed, or, if you prefer the expression, when there should be a *perpetual revival*? Richard Baxter's congregation seems for many years to have approximated to what is here supposed, and perhaps that of John Brown of Haddington and

Mr Romaine of London. And in this country I have known a very few congregations in which a lively state of piety was kept up from year to year.

7. We cannot, however, limit the Holy One, nor prescribe modes of operation for the Spirit of God. His dispensations are inscrutable, and it is our duty to submit to His wisdom and His will, and to go on steadily in the performance of our own duty. If He, the Sovereign, chooses to water His Church by occasional showers, rather than with the perpetual dew of His grace, and this more at one period and in one continent, than at other times and places, we should rejoice and be grateful for the rich effusions of His Spirit in any form and manner, and should endeavour to avail ourselves of these precious seasons for the conversion of sinners and the edification of the body of Christ. In the natural world the cold and barren winter regularly succeeds the genial and growing seasons of spring and summer, and there may be an analogy to this vicissitude in the spiritual world. One thing we are taught, that believers stand in need of seasons of severe trial, that they may be purified, as the precious metals are purged from their dross in the heated furnace. Paul says, "For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest."

8. As genuine revivals are favourable to truth and orthodoxy, so spurious excitements furnish one of the most effectual vehicles for error and heresy. The Church is not always benefited by what are termed revivals; but sometimes the effects of such commotions are followed by a desolation which resembles the track of the tornado. I have never seen so great insensibility in any people as in those who have been the subjects of violent religious excitement; and I have never seen any sinners so bold and reckless in their impiety as those who had once been loud professors, and foremost in the time of revival. If I had time I might illustrate this remark by a reference to the great revival of the West, which commenced about the close of the year 1800, in the south of Kentucky; and by which the Presbyterian Church in that region was for so many years broken and distracted and prostrated — but I must forbear. When people are much excited, their caution and sober judgment are diminished; and when preachers are ardently zealous in revivals, serious people do not suspect them of holding errors, or of entertaining the design of subverting the truth. It is also a fact that the teachers of false doctrine do sometimes artfully associate their errors with revivals, and by continually insinuating or openly declaring that revivals take place only in connection with their new theology, they succeed in persuading those who have more zeal than knowledge that all who oppose their errors are the enemies of revivals. This artifice has often been played with much effect; and they have

sometimes gone so far as to deny the genuineness of great revivals which occurred under the ministry of those holding opinions different from their own, or who neglected to bring into operation all the newly-invented apparatus of revivals.

You may perhaps expect me to say something on what are called *new measures*; as I am out of the way of witnessing the actual operation of these means, I will not venture on a discussion which is both delicate and difficult further than to mention some general results, which, from a retrospect of many facts, I have adopted in regard to revivals of religion. On each of these I might largely expatiate, but my prescribed limits forbid it.

All means and measures which produce a high degree of excitement, in a great commotion of the passions, should be avoided, because religion does not consist in these violent emotions, nor is it promoted by them, and when they subside a wretched state of deadness is sure to succeed.

The subject of religious impressions ought not to be brought much into public notice. It ought not to be forgotten that "the heart is deceitful above all things," and that strong excitement does not prevent the risings of pride and vain glory. Many become hypocrites when they find themselves the objects of much attention, and affect feelings which are not real, and where is humility and sincerity? Such measures turn away the attention from the distinct contemplation of these subjects which ought to occupy the mind.

On this account I prefer having the anxious addressed and instructed as they sit undistinguished in their seats rather than calling them out to particular pews, denominated *anxious seats*; and if the pastor can visit the awakened at their houses, it would be better than to appoint meetings expressly for them. But as this cannot be done when the number is great these meetings may be necessary; but instead of attempting to converse with each individual let the preacher address suitable instruction and advice to all at once; and if any are in great trouble and difficulty let them come to the minister's house, or send for him to visit them.

All measures which have a tendency to diminish the solemnity of divine worship, or to lessen our reverence for God and divine things are evidently wrong; and this is uniformly the effect of excessive excitement. Fanaticism often blazes with a glaring flame, and agitates assemblies as with a hurricane or earthquake; but God is not in the fire, or the wind, or the earthquake; His presence is more commonly with the still small voice. There is no sounder characteristic of genuine devotion than reverence. When this is banished, the fire may burn fiercely, but it is unhallowed fire.

Fanaticism, however much it may assume the garb and language of piety, is its opposite; for while the latter is mild and sweet, and disinterested, and respectful, and affectionate, the former is proud, arrogant, censorious, selfish, carnal and when opposed, malignant.

The premature and injudicious publication of revivals is now a great evil. There is often in these accounts a *cant* which greatly disgusts sensible men: there is an exaggeration which confounds those who know the facts; and it cannot but injure the people concerning whom the narrative treats. But I must desist.

I am, respectfully and affectionately yours, A.A.

Divine Guidance

by Rev. John Newton

Answer to the Question, In what manner are we to expect the Lord's promised Guidance to influence our Judgments, and direct our Steps in the Path of Duty?

Dear Sir, It is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose, he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet, and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have his warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scripture cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but it may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honour of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some persons, when two or more things have been in view, and they

could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to cast lots: taking it for granted, that after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture, and indeed right reason, assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by Divine appointment; but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the lands of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again; namely, the choice of an apostle, who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless *He* had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time. Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our requests known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honouring him, and to savour more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful: a sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the heathens, who knew not the Bible, used some of their favourite books in the same way; and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions; which give rise to the well-known expression of the *Sortes Virgilianæ*. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way, as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. Can

the opening upon 2 Sam. 7: 3, when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Matt. 15: 28, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters big with important consequences have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of Scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them: or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and disquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than the former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise, as humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant; and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils and gross delusions; and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs, by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favoured with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet, without other corroborating evidence, I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not *always* easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful: and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at every thing that may seem to favour our darling scheme; and the Lord, for the

detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy, (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves,) may answer us according to our idols: see Ezek. 14: 3,4. Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus I may have a friend in a distant country, I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him; and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more, A remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but, though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct, or expectations, upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some persons, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way; yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned, is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God service, while acting in contradiction to his express commands. I have known others infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and when at length disappointed Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offences against the gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of.

But how then may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, he guides and directs his people, by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand

and to love the Scriptures. The word of God is not to be used as a lottery; nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper places, have no determinate import; but it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. They who study the Scriptures, in a humble dependence upon Divine teaching, are convinced of their own weakness, are taught to make a true estimate of every thing around them, are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God, discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The word of God dwells richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture, in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds. And they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which is the great object they have in view.

In particular cases, the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concernments are in his hands; they are willing to follow whither and when he leads; but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient: because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition; and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations. He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death.

I am, &c

“There is not a step a Christian takes toward heaven but the world, the flesh, or the devil disputes it with him.” — *White*.

The Eleventh Hour

by Rev. Walter Scott

Christ saves to the uttermost. He is able to do so. Such is the merit and efficacy of His sacrifice. Such is His power as a priest upon His throne. Thus, He goes out early in the morning to hire labourers into His vineyard. About the third hour He says to others, "Go ye also into the vineyard." Again, about the sixth and ninth hour He does likewise: "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gain-saying people" (Rom. 10: 21). At the closing of the day He finds others standing idle. He says even to them, "Go ye also into the vineyard," although the day is far spent, for already it is "about the eleventh hour." Yet it is still day, and He says, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9: 4). "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7: 25). Scripture has its encouragements to early piety; yet salvation is of grace, and of grace so abounding that, late in the day as a sinner may feel it to be, he may not despair if then he makes haste and delays not to keep His commandments (Psalms 119: 60). How alarmingly near to the final reckoning is the eleventh hour; yet, with the judgment almost upon them, there are those — alas, how many! — still "standing idle". The day of grace expiring! The last sermons; the last invitations; the last warnings, reaching the sinner! O glorious grace that says even then, "Go ye also into the vineyard!"

Of such precious and solemn truth, the writer has had occasion to feel the reality. In the course of his ministry on the Clarence River, N.S.W., no deathbed scene more remained with him than that of a young man in his congregation — James McPhee, Clarenza — at the eleventh hour, as it seemed, delivered from going down into the pit. Now some ten years ago, at the very moment of attaining to full manhood (on 7th June, 1902), this bright youth was suddenly brought to face death. Pneumonia was the malady which so fatally seized him. He had been a church-goer, but hitherto a stranger to grace. And now, so terrible was the destruction which wasted at noon-day of that young man's career, that, once seized, there was but the step of a few days between him and eternity. "Behold, I come as a thief" (Rev. 16: 15).

On the previous Sabbath, as the writer well remembers, his eye had been specially directed towards him whilst preaching from Hebrews 4: 16: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." During the sermon he

even felt led to direct the message to him in particular. It was at the end of the same week that God's hand came so irresistibly upon him. To the stricken one himself, as he said, it immediately presaged death. Of that he felt so satisfied that he could not go up to the bed, which he apprehended would be his deathbed, without seeking first to be brought to peace with God. With the deadly disease already upon him, but with consciousness yet undisturbed, he fell on his knees and prayed as never before for the mercy that he needed through Jesus Christ. He recognised himself a lost sinner, needing salvation, and that his time was short; and he wrestled in prayer. This was his own account to the writer. Nor did he rise till, as he indicated, he was made willing to die, trusting in Christ as his Saviour.

To that exercise, to which he had felt impelled as on the verge of eternity — to what then passed between his soul and God, as so strangely brought to his knees with such trouble upon him — must be traced the hope that he had in his death. To it we seemed pointed, under God, for the change which then became manifest. For, once laid down, great was the struggle between life and death. By and by delirium set in; yet there were bright intermissions in which the state of his mind found wonderful expression. To these the reader is pointed for his dying testimony. Free access to the sick chamber was allowed to interested friends and companions. To such, as well as to his minister, he addressed himself from time to time. He spoke not only as a dying man, but out of the abundance of his heart, and in such manner as had never been his wont. He acknowledged the vain life he had lived — only desiring life prolonged that he might live differently. He professed his faith in Christ and his trust in Him in view of death, which he recognised as very near. Prostrated as he was, he, without scruple, went to work in the vineyard. It was the eleventh hour, but he was as one doing with his might what his hand found to do. Thus while consciousness lasted he exhorted those around him. He warned his youthful companions, gathered at his bedside, to forsake their way and turn to the Lord — pointing them to his own case in connection with the danger of delay and the awfulness, as he said, of entering eternity unprepared. It was with affecting solemnity that he bade comrade-lads who came into his room to flee from their sins to the Saviour, not knowing in what hour the Lord would come. Those whom he thus charged were taken aback — so great was the change. Nor had they witnessed the like before. One or two, on getting outside, attempted to jeer, saying, "Oh, he's turned preacher!" — so completely nonplussed were they by their unexpected experience. Ah, have not men even, and rulers, derided in circumstances unspeakably more solemn? The writer, on his part, felt the

moving effect of the scene witnessed, and of the appeals of that young man in the very grip of death. Not only did he plead with those at his bedside to take warning by his case, and to repent without delay and turn to God; but he testified again, to his deepest sorrow, that he had lived as he had done — without God. He had seen his error, and it made him agonize in death over his near acquaintances — beseeching them to come to the Saviour in the day of opportunity.

Thus did he spend his remaining strength while the hand of death was paralysing him, and life was fast ebbing. The persuasion of its being his last illness remained with him despite the fact that everything was being done medically at the instance of grief-stricken relatives to arrest the disease — such grief meantime, however, only intensifying, by the life of one of the parents (the pious mother) being equally threatened. He had no resentment at his condition. He was not afraid to die, he said: he was trusting in Christ. Yet, he exclaimed, if he had his life to live over again, it would be to live very differently. Anxious to use his latest breath seeking the salvation of his associates, he expressed regret when disabled. During his ravings he was troubled lest his repentance was not genuine. His thoughts, even in delirium, were all of his soul, as now entering the great eternity. And thus it was that his spirit returned to God who gave it.

Reader, have you considered your latter end and how near it may be? It is a solemn thing to see one die. In this case, it was not the wasted, emaciated frame, the effect of age or lingering disease. It was the strong youth, in his 21st year, suddenly arrested in his life's course. The powerful arm was there, apparently unchanged: yet was life ebbing from it. Under the delirium, it seemed, for the moment, stronger than ever; again, it lay motionless, powerless. Soon the cheeks became sunken and hollow; the eyes glazed and vacant; the features sharp. There were the death throes. The earthly house of this tabernacle — how quickly it was dissolving! Yet the heart remained strong, and still life lingered, but all unconscious. Life pulsated; but there was neither voice, nor any to answer. A few days had sufficed to bring this strong, active youth to the dust of death. Reader, "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4: 12).

The outward man here was perishing, but what of the soul? A conflict was being waged greater than that with flesh and blood. Realities unseen were here involved. Had the spark of grace been kindled in that soul? Was the prey being taken from the mighty? Was the inward man being renewed? Eternity will reveal it.

To the writer looking on, nothing could be more solemn and affecting than that last struggle. Here was one of his flock to whom, as a hearer

in the pew, his eye had been directed so recently; now alas, in the very jaws of death, yet testifying that, in the brief interval, he had come boldly to the throne of grace, and had obtained mercy, and was finding grace to help in his time of need. "And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zech. 3: 2).

Book Review

THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT by George Smeaton. Banner of Truth Trust, £9.95.

This sequel to the author's "Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement," recently reviewed by us, is written with the same devout spirit and dignified style becoming such a serious subject. Expectedly, however, it is distinguished by a more academic strain reflecting the natural difference existing between the gospels and the Epistles. Hence there is required a deeper concentration as the author penetrates into the proper grammatical sense of the words themselves in order to refute such as would make an argument from context sufficient to control the usage of language.

In the earlier part of the book the reader may feel that he is being kept in the porch while the author takes a comprehensive view of his subject before entering in detail to the individual epistles, but any patience thus called for is well rewarded, when the reader realises that the purpose of this is to manifest that the apostles were not prejudiced by their age, as the Rationalists maintain. Further, by this means, the author demonstrates how much the influence of atonement is felt where it may not be expressly mentioned but is interwoven into the very texture of the epistles.

All along he keeps before the mind of the reader the juridical view of the atonement — a view derided by modernists who stress communion with God irrespective of righteousness, maintaining the propriety of looking at the juridical act extended from time to time to every believer arising from the fact that sin is not forgiven before it is committed. In stressing the need for a righteousness before man could have communion with God, however, the author was perhaps overemphasising the matter in calling the righteousness of Christ procured for man to be 'human' and not 'divine.'

The leading opponents of the biblical doctrine of atonement receive their answer as the author manifests their arguments to be 'all sorry evasions of biblical ideas.' Not only so, but he makes clear that the objective reality

of divine wrath on the supposition of sin is an axiom in Natural Theology as well as in the Theology of Revelation.

It seems to us an unhappy expression the author uses in reference to the Son of God taking our nature when he comments, 'He took our nature as a workman takes a tool or instrument to accomplish a certain end.' (p160). This does not take away anything from the author's spiritual understanding, nor weaken his arguments to show that Christ's satisfaction is perfectly identical with that which men should themselves have suffered and concluding that the theory of unconditional pardon is 'the great untruth of the Modern Theology.'

An Appendix to the book on the History of the Atonement is most enlightening and refreshing as the author quotes freely from the pages of the fathers. The book is worthy of perusal and is calculated with the Lord's blessing to lead to clearer views of the subject.

A.E.W. MacDonald

Mission News

In recent letters we hear that there is a severe shortage of water in Bulawayo. Government plans are afoot to divert water from the Zambezi, which indicates the seriousness of the situation.

In Matabeleland South, where the Rev. Z. Mazvabo has his work, the situation is even more serious. Ninety per cent of the people are said to be on the point of starvation owing to the continuing effect of the drought, and 7000 cattle have died. In an emergency of this kind the Government usually comes to the assistance of the people. However, whatever the Government may do, there is bound to be much suffering among young families and among the old. A National Day of Prayer for Rain was held on 9th February of this year.

At Mbuma there were several showers of very heavy rain earlier in the year and their two bore-holes keep them well supplied. Dr Hak is now back after her short holiday in Holland. Miss Margaret MacAskill has also returned. She has mentioned in a letter that it is proposed to put certain simple books into Sindebele for young people, such as the well known 'Mary Jones and her Bible,' 'Miracles of Jesus,' by B. A. Ramsbottom, and the Mother's Catechism. The last named was put into Sindebele by the late Rev. John Tallach many years ago. The new translation is being rendered by Melusi Mpofu, Assistant Head in the John Tallach School, and son of the late Rev. Alfred Mpofu.

To continue with the Rev. Z. Mazvabo's recorded description of his first days at New Canaan:—

“The memory of that first Sabbath under a tree in New Canaan is still fresh in my mind. One of the four women never returned. Perhaps the Pslam singing did not appeal to her. Mike’s mother has since departed this life, we hope to be with the Lord which is far better. The other two women have continued with us and are now members in full communion. When speaking to one of our office-bearers recently, I said to him, “you must have been aware of that first service we held under the tree. Where were you on that occasion?” He bent his head and was silent. After a minute’s pause he said, ‘I was at a beer-drink.’ That is how it still is with many whose behaviour and way of life have not been affected by the presence of the Gospel in their midst. May the Lord give them repentance of heart, that they may be enlightened and enabled to see that the way in which they go leads to everlasting death.

Next Sabbath Mike’s father offered us a hut in which to gather, and we continued there for a few Sabbaths. The people continued to come but not regularly. When the round hut became too small for us we went into Mike’s house, and some of the people sat on the verandah. Mike’s parents were very kind to us. His mother was a very kind lady.

Late in 1982 we had our first commemoration of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Rev. A. B. Ndebele and the late Rev. B. B. Dube were the ministers. We all stayed in Mike’s home. As if that were not enough Mike’s father offered to kill an ox for the people. A few words about Mike’s father. He has been very helpful in everything we wanted to do, and very kind, but he refuses to attend the services. Like Hobab of old while very helpful to the Children of Israel he did not wish to continue with them on their journey to the Promised Land.

I would desire the prayers of the Lord’s people for our people in New Canaan.”

During the month of February a young doctor from Oxford, Dr Mercer, gave some assistance in the Mbuma Hospital. He is a friend of Tim Ramsbottom who helped in the hospital two years ago. J.N.

Notes and Comments

Royal Patron of Chester Cathedral’s Celebrations

The Prince of Wales has accepted an invitation to be the Royal Patron of Chester Cathedral’s nine hundredth anniversary celebrations, according to a report in Chester Cathedral Chronicle. The Prince is also to attend the Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication in the Cathedral on June 20 1992. The report states that the nine hundredth anniversary of the foun-

dation of the Benedictine Abbey on the site of the present Cathedral will be a year of thanksgiving to God for nine centuries of ceaseless Christian worship and service there. It is to be an entirely ecumenical year and Romanist and Anglican leaders are expected to attend the June 20 service. Cardinal Basil Hume, the R.C. Archbishop of Westminster is to preach. To the ecumenists it is as though the Reformation had never been. Ecumenical worship now so approximates Roman Catholic worship as to allow Romanist leaders to play a full part in such services. It is sad to think that it is this ecumenical type of service that the heir to the throne so often attends. If he understood the gospel of God's grace he would not refer to nine nine centuries of spiritual life at the Benedictine Abbey and Chester Cathedral.

The Home Secretary and the Sikh Temple

While in Scotland recently the Home Secretary visited a Sikh temple. He put on traditional headgear and a garland of flowers for the visit. Politicians, no doubt, must be all things to all men, and especially when they wish to obtain votes for their party. It would be their wisdom, however, to keep as far away as possible from the false religions which are now raising their ugly head throughout the nation. It is sad that in many cases more respect is shown for the false creeds that have invaded the land than for Christianity. How dishonouring this is to the living and true God.

Church Notes

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Northern: At Dingwall on 7th April at 2 p.m.

Skye: At Portree on 14th April at 11 a.m.

Australia and New Zealand: At Gisborne on 23rd October at 2.30 p.m.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo on 9th June at 2 p.m.

Shieltaig and Applecross Congregation

The Kirk Session decided that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be dispensed at Shieltaig on the 2nd Sabbath of June (as before) and at Applecross on the 2nd Sabbath of September, once yearly at each place, and that the weekly Prayer Meeting be at Shieltaig on Mondays at 7 p.m. and at Applecross on Thursdays at 7 p.m.

D. MacCuish, Session Clerk

Political Parties and the Sabbath

The Sabbath Observance Committee has written to the main political parties asking them, in view of the forthcoming General Election, to supply

details of what their policies on Sabbath issues are likely to be. In particular, we stated to each of the Parties, "One particular problem we see in this area is the pressure that can be put on employees to work against their conscience on the Lord's Day. Especially in today's difficult employment situation, employees' freedom of conscience requires protection."

The Conservative Party indicated their intention to seek agreement between interested parties on a Bill to replace the current Shops Act in England and Wales (which is now so flagrantly being broken by most of the main supermarket and DIY chains). Such a Bill cannot be expected to improve the present situation, and it seems an impossible goal to seek agreement between bodies who support Sabbath observance and those whose only desire is to make money from the Sabbath.

The Labour Party, similarly, propose "a conference of the various interest groups in order to arrive at a consensus on the way the Shops Act should be amended". They also stated, "We believe it is vital for those who work in the industry not to be discriminated against and, accordingly, our proposals will give emphasis to employment protection".

The Scottish National Party state that they do not vote on purely English issues, and any future Shops Act is unlikely to apply to Scotland. They go on to refer to their belief "in a constitutional guarantee of freedom of conscience and freedom of worship for all citizens, as well as the right to pursue one's own religious and philosophical convictions."

The Liberal Democrats acknowledged our letter but have not, after more than three months, replied further.

It should be noted that this is but one moral issue out of many, and also that individual candidates may have their own views on the subject.

K.D.M.

Acknowledgment of Donations

The Treasurers of the following Congregations wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Bonar Bridge: A Lairg Friend £10, where most needed.

Dumbarton: Mrs McC. £3; Glasgow Friend £20; both for Congr. Fds.

Edinburgh: N.M. £20; Mrs S., Back £5; Mrs M., Stornoway £10 for Sust. Fd.; Friend, Stornoway £40; Miss W. S., Wick £50; all per Rev. D. B. M.

Kames: M.D. £20 for General Fund; Legacy bequeathed under the Will of the late Benjamin D. MacLauchlan £300 per Messrs Corrigan, Ritchie and McLean, Solicitors, Dunoon.

Kyle of Lochalsh: Miss S., Wick £50 for Kyle Congr. Fd.; Anon., £10 for Comm. Exps. (envelope in plate), for Door Coll. £8.

Oban: A Friend, Inverness £20 for Congr. Fd.

Portree: Anon., £4 for Bus. Fd (envelope in plate); J.M. £10; Friend £12, both for Congr. Purposes, both per F.M.; Mrs D. N. £20 for Door Coll.; Friend £10 for Sust. Fd., both per S.Y.M.; Anon., £14 for Comm. Exps (envelope in plate).

Shieldaig: Anon., Inverness £25 for Congr. Fds; Anon., £10; Anon., £5, both for Sust. Fd.