

Some Lessons of the Revival

by A. T. Pierson

A transcribed sermon from the Keswick convention of 1905



Five weeks have been spent in the personal study and investigation of the great revival movement in Wales, being providentially called to speak to the converts in the revival centres, in hopes to lead them to a deeper experience and knowledge of Christ; and that investigation has left the profound conviction that the Holy Spirit is speaking to the Churches with tremendous emphasis, and that God's injunction is that sevenfold command in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of the Revelation: "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches." I desire that not one word of mine may interrupt this voice of the Spirit to the Churches.

First of all, I am impressed with the fact that the Holy Spirit is showing to us the *sovereignty of His operations*. Nothing is more marvellous about the work in Wales, than the fact that the Holy Spirit has divided to every man severally as He will. This Divine wind has blown where it listed, and we have heard the sound thereof, but could not tell whence it came, nor whither it went. He has been choosing the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, that no flesh might glory in His presence. The *times* and the *ways* in which He has wrought, and the *methods* He has followed, and the personal *instruments* He has chosen, have all been unique. He has passed by those whom

men would have selected, and He has taken as the prominent leader in this movement a collier student yet in his very youth, and having no qualities that, to the eye of man, would have fitted him for this great service, yet singularly filled with the Holy Ghost and qualified by Him for this leadership; most of all, remarkable in his humility, in his own obedience to the Spirit, and in his insistence upon obedience to the Spirit on the part of others in all his operations in the assemblies.

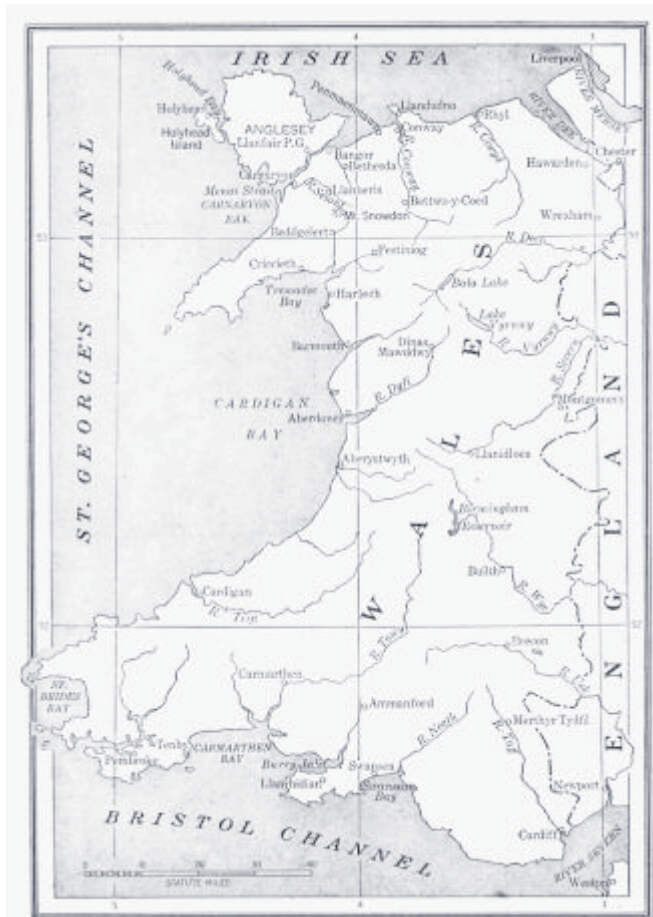
Again, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us and reminding us that He is the *Presiding Officer* in every assembly of the saints. The ships, though they be great, are moved by a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth; and it is quite time that we had our hands off the helm of the Church of God, and remembered the Divine Pilot, the Governor of the ship—the Holy Ghost, in the assemblies of the saints. Our notions of propriety, how oftentimes they interfere with His conceptions! What is disorder to us is often sublime order to Him. How He scorns our rigid and frigid programmes, and tramples them in the dust when He mightily moves! How marvellous are all His ways of working! How singular is the authority that He exhibits and manifests where He has full control, where we are willing that He should control in everything; where we are willing that He should set us aside, if to set us aside will glorify Him more than to use us as we had expected and purposed. I would not dare to speak here with the conviction I have of His presidency in this assembly, if I were not willing to break down in



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your presence, and like Peter, never get through with my purposed address, if He might be honoured more by such failure than by apparent success. Let us be ready to fall that He may evermore be honoured. Let Him occupy the chair, whoever formally presides; and let us look past the human chairman, to the invisible presiding Presence that makes this place the house of God—dreadful because of such Presence, yet sublimely privileged because of such Presence.

The Holy Spirit has been teaching us that marvellous lesson that Dr. Cynddylan Jones so beautifully describes: He says that the Holy Spirit has been teaching us the difference between “human mechanics and Divine dynamics.” He has been teaching us the source of all true power. We are too apt to forget that power is only in God, and not in us. We have taken that old heathen maxim, “Magna est veritas, et proeualebit” (great is the truth, and it will prevail); but it is not absolutely true. Truth is great, but truth does not prevail; it is not prevailing in the earth today. Error prevails rather. Truth itself is not the source of power, apart from the Spirit of Truth. Even the truth of the Gospel does not actually convict and convert without the Holy Ghost. We may preach the truth for forty years and not make a convert, if the Holy Ghost is not behind the truth we preach. Let us remember, therefore, that it is not truth alone, but *truth plus the Holy Ghost*, by which the world is to be brought to Christ. The Welsh revival has taught us this lesson—that our power is not found in *eloquent sermons*. There are some sermons so eloquent that



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has seen whole villages transformed by the power of the Spirit of God. And God is teaching us that He can take the simplest testimony of a converted soul that can scarcely speak “five words with the understanding,” and make it more mighty for the progress of His Kingdom than five thousand words spoken with our university training and fine delivery, with our polished rhetoric and worldly eloquence. God forbid that I should say a word against preaching of the best character; but I tell you, beloved, that as long as our dependence is upon the intellectual, we shall never wield the mighty power of the spiritual.

I have often thought that some of the addresses delivered from this platform are too fine for the Holy Ghost

there is no spiritual power in them—sermons very finished, but they do not penetrate; there is plenty of learning and logic, but no love; the sword is not keen at the edge, or burning at the point; the blade is polished, but it has no thrust to the very vitals, to the very joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. God has shown us, not only that even the truth itself without the thrust of the Spirit is unsuccessful, but that where the Holy Ghost really does work, there is a heavenly dynamic working that changes human lives, that brings men out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that breaks up habits of drink and takes away the appetite for drink; that brings men out from the power of lust—that most imperious of all the appetites that control sinful man. He alone delivers them from the baser passions, and makes them servants of Almighty God. Wales

to use as He would like to use them. There is too much of the tendency, on the part of many of us, to exploit ourselves, to depend upon that which is merely intellectual and rhetorical and scholarly, instead of falling back forevermore in helplessness upon the Almighty arm.

Then, the Holy Ghost has been teaching us that, if we want His blessing, we must devoutly *honour His inspired Word*. I thank God, for that pointed and powerful utterance, condensed into a few words, just heard from my fellow helper in the truth, Mr. Moore. I have noticed this fact—and I do not hesitate to say what I think, thus standing in the view of eternity—that not one solitary church in which the modern notions of the “Higher Criticism” are regnant, has had any revival of religion in this country or in America. They stand frigidly, rigidly locked up under the frost; while other churches enjoy the tropical sunshine of summer. And it is a remarkable thing that when the Holy Ghost, in these latter days, would revive the fire of Pentecost, He has taken that part of the British dominions which is comparatively untouched by the Rationalistic Criticism of this century. It is a remarkable thing, and I think I can see the philosophy of God in it. For the Holy Ghost not only *honours His own inspired Word*, but He *depends upon the Word*, and upon the acceptance of it as the inspired Word of God.

Even when Paul was speaking to Agrippa, he challenged his confidence in the prophets, saying “I know that thou believest”; and, before Felix, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. If

with the double armour of unbelief and *disbelief*, and how difficult it becomes to make an impression for God, when they turn aside the sharp arrows of His Word, by lack of confidence even in its inspiration, authority, and infallibility. I have had a man come to me during this last period of preaching in London, and say to me: “I was greatly impressed by your sermon tonight, but, then, look at what other preachers have said.” I read the other day, as coming from such a man as Dean Fremantle, that there is no authentic proof of Christ’s miraculous incarnation or of His miraculous resurrection. Men come to us saying “What shall I believe?” The report of such sentiments appear in the newspapers, and men take up these insinuations of doubt on the part of God’s own people, and use them to turn off the arrows of truth from their own souls. God cannot honour a community, a church, or a minister where such questions about the inspiration of His Word and such doubtful views are promulgated in the hearing of the people.

The Holy Ghost has also been laying mighty emphasis upon *the power of believing prayer*. This whole Welsh revival began in prayer, in the hearts of some men who have prayed, not for a year or eighteen months, but for as much as eleven and thirteen years, for a revival in Wales and for a baptism of the Spirit in their own lives; and this spirit of prayer has been the grand secret of the *extension* of the work. You know how this work has been carried into other districts, hitherto unaffected, by the most simple methods, on the part of little companies of



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those men had had access to some modern works on the “Higher Criticism,” Agrippa might have said: “It is all very well to appeal to the prophets, but we have long since concluded that they did not prophesy of Christ at all”; and Felix might have said: “Your reasoning is well enough, but we have long learned that sin is only a fall forward, a part of the process of evolution, and that there is no judgment to come.” Men meet the Word of God, as it is preached, not only with the shield of *unbelief*, but

believers who went to the extremities of the villages, and began to hold house-to-house meetings, moving toward the centre; and by the time the centre was reached God’s power was exhibited afresh in the new locality.

Then the Holy Spirit has been teaching us that we have to *get hindrances out of His way*. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Gather ye out the stones.” Evan Roberts, in his message to the churches, has given a fourfold motto or rule for guid-

ance, which shows spiritual insight: First, every *sinful* thing must be put away. Then every *doubtful* indulgence must be sacrificed for the sake of holiness. Third, there must be prompt *obedience* to the voice of the Holy Ghost. And, then, last of all, there must be *public confession of Christ* before all men.

Those have been the four mottos of this great revival work—everything sinful put away, everything doubtful surrendered, the Holy Spirit obeyed, and confession of Christ publicly made. In almost every case, the work has begun in the removal of obstacles in the mind and heart of the pastor himself. The “priest” of the Lord has prostrated himself “between the porch and the altar,” and has besought God for a renewal of spiritual power in his own heart and life; and

then he has gone forth to secure, under God, another state of things in his church and congregation. So promptly has the Spirit begun to work when favourable conditions have been secured, that oftentimes *immediate reviving* has resulted, so that in the very assembly itself which had met under conditions unfavourable to the Spirit, whenever there has been rectification, then and there the blessing has begun, even in the conversion of souls, though not a word had been directly addressed to the ungodly. Comp. 1 Cor. xiv, 23-25: When an unbeliever, coming into the assembly, is convinced of all, judged of all, and the secrets of his heart are made manifest, he is constrained to worship God, &c.

All through Professor Finney’s ministry he insisted upon this “*getting right with God*”; and it was from him that Dr. Torrey obtained the motto.

A friend of mine, a pastor, after preaching on parental fidelity, made a public confession of his own sin in this respect; his wife rose in the pew to join him in such confession; and at once the spirit of confession took hold of the entire congregation, and a revival began then and there.

Another case of a similar character occurred in the west of New York. A minister had been bewailing the

awful failure of his ministry. He had been comparatively dead and formal, preaching intellectual sermons without dependence upon the Holy Ghost. He made public confession, saying: “Here I empty myself of all my self-sufficiency, and I pray God to bestow His blessing upon my church and congregation.” One of the elders stood up, and said: “I sympathize with you; but there will be no revival in this church while I and brother S__ do not speak to each other.” These men had not spoken to each other for three years; but he stepped across the aisle and shook



One of the elders stood up, and said: “I sympathize with you; but there will be no revival in this church while I and brother S__ do not speak to each other.” These men had not spoken to each other for three years; but he stepped across the aisle and shook hands with the other. Before that assembly dispersed, a mighty work of God had begun...

hands with the other. Another man stood up in his pew, and said: “There will never be a revival while we say smooth things to our minister before his face, and evil things behind his back, as I have been doing.” A third stood up, and said: “There will never be a revival here while my wife and I do not live in peace,” and then he kissed her before them all. Before that assembly dispersed, a mighty work of God had begun which extended for scores of miles in every direction. Over and over again, similar scenes have been witnessed in the principality of Wales. People have come together, without any thought of a special work by God; wrongs between them and God, and between one and the other, have been confessed; and when these things have been rectified on the spot, the Holy Ghost has marvellously wrought; and without one word having been spoken to the unconverted, they have been brought to Christ, then and there, by the new atmosphere created in the assembly of God’s saints.

I am profoundly convinced that there should be an after-meeting tonight, and that it should take the form of personal confession; and I here begin this confession, from this platform, by saying that God has shown me today, what has been comparatively hidden from my eyes hitherto, that I have been unduly emphasizing personal

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comfort in my service for Him, and selfish ease, and other things that should not enter at all into the question. I should not come here and speak tonight until I had first emptied myself before God, of all personal care for my own comfort and ease in the service of God, for the future. I believe that such after-meeting should not be deferred to the end of the convention, but that we should hasten to get right with God.

Need of Widespread Confession

There is a need of widespread confession from this platform and in this assembly, of things which have hindered the power of the Holy Ghost. Nothing do I crave more than to see this whole congregation bowed down before God in sobs, tears and profound penitence, that the Holy Ghost might, tonight, begin His mighty work among us, in this convention of 1905.

Whatever address I have to give this week, have been suggested to me by this marvellous work of God in Wales. There is much that I have left out of this address, because the time does not allow, of which I purpose specially to speak at other addresses appointed to me to make, particularly of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, a theme upon which I have only touched tonight.

One word in conclusion—the Holy Spirit has been distinctly saying to us that it is quite a possibility for us to be in the midst of great Divine manifestations that has not been paralleled, perhaps, since Pentecost, and *not to know the time of our visitation*. “The stork in heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgement of the Lord.” “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, because thou knowest not the day of thy visitation.” I have seen in Wales, side by side, two churches, one ablaze with the Holy Ghost power, the other like a frigid Artic iceberg. It is possible for you and for me to live in the midst of revival, and yet not know the time of God's visitation. I have noticed, in the course of a long ministry, that men and women who have passed through powerful revivals of religion, unsaved, are very unlikely ever

to be converted. I remember one man, who died a few weeks ago, a member of the congregation to which I ministered for years. In the midst of a revival that brought hundreds of souls into various churches, he stood unsaved and unaffected.

I pleaded with him, and I have his letter among the relics of my ministry, in which he says: “Discharge yourself of all responsibility for me; you have done your duty.” He died, having passed the age of seventy years: and he never had, as far as I know, any moving of God upon his soul after that time. In a church near which I lived, a minister said, on one occasion, when a revival was passing through the other churches: “I don't want any revival in this church”; and that church has never had a revival unto this day. Dr. Gordon told of a church in New England which went down so low that the building was sold to a coloured congregation at a nominal figure. It was the more remarkable because a large number of converted coloured people had besought this church to admit them to membership, years before, but had been refused, simply because they were black—and the building passed over to be the property of these very people who had been refused admission to membership, thirty years before.

Let me now gather up the lessons God has been teaching us on this great revival.

1. The sovereignty of the Spirit's operations.
2. His supremacy in the Christian assembly.
3. Our absolute dependence upon Him for all Spiritual power.
4. The honour He puts upon the inspired Word.
5. The use He makes of believing and united prayer.
6. The necessity of putting away all hindrances to His working.
7. The immediateness of blessing when conditions are favourable.
8. The danger of missing the time of His visitations.

Let us come at once into the right attitude before God. Let there be such prostration of soul before Him that it shall be possible for God now and here to begin to bless us. Let wrongs be righted, pride and self-sufficiency be put away, and every hindrance removed. God waits to bless—how willing are we to be blessed? □