

“TO THE WORK! TO THE WORK!”

CHAPTER I.

TAKE YE AWAY THE STONE

In the gospel by John we read that at the tomb of Lazarus our Lord said to His disciples, “Take ye away the stone.” Before the act of raising Lazarus could be performed, the disciples had their part to do. Christ could have removed the stone with a word. It would have been very easy for Him to have commanded it to roll away, and it would have obeyed His voice, as the dead Lazarus did when He called him back to life. But the Lord would have His children learn this lesson: that they have something to do towards raising the spiritually dead. The disciples had not only to take away the stone, but after Christ had raised Lazarus they had to “loose and let him go.”

It is a question if any man on the face of the earth has ever been converted, without God using some human instrument, in some way. God could easily convert men without us; but that is not His way.

The stone I want to speak about to-day, that must be rolled away before any great work of God can be

brought about, is the miserable stone of prejudice. Many people have a great prejudice against revivals; they hate the very word. I am sorry to say that this feeling is not confined to ungodly or careless people; there are not a few Christians who seem to cherish a strong dislike both to the word "Revival" and to the thing itself.

What does "Revival" mean? It simply means a recalling from obscurity—a finding some hidden treasure and bringing it back to the light. I think every one of us must acknowledge that we are living in a time of need. I doubt if there is a family in the world that has not some relative whom they would like to see brought into the fold of God, and who needs salvation.

Men are anxious for a revival in business. I am told that there is a widespread and general stagnation in business. People are very anxious that there should be a revival of trade this winter. There a great revival in politics just now. In all departments of life you find that men are very anxious for a revival in the things that concern them most.

If this is legitimate—and I do not say but it is perfectly right in its place—should not every child of God be praying for and desiring a revival of godliness in the world at the present time. Do we not need a revival of downright honesty, of truthfulness, of uprightness, and of temperance? Are there not many who have become alienated from the Church of God and from the house of the Lord, who are forming an attachment to the saloon? Are not our sons being drawn away by hundreds and thousands, so that while you

often find the churches empty, the liquor shops are crowded every Sabbath afternoon and evening. I am sure the saloon-keepers are glad if they can have a revival in their business; they do not object to sell more whisky and beer. Then surely every true Christian ought to desire that men who are in danger of perishing eternally should be saved and rescued.

Some people seem to think that “Revivals” are a modern invention—that they have only been known within the last few years. But they are nothing new. If there is not Scriptural authority for revivals, then I cannot understand my Bible.

For the first 2,000 years of the world’s history they had no revival that we know of; probably, if they had, there would have been no Flood. The first real awakening, of which we read in the Old Testament, was when Moses was sent down to Egypt to bring his brethren out of the house of bondage. When Moses went down to Goshen, there must have been a great commotion there; many things were done out of the usual order. When three millions of Hebrews were put behind the Blood of the Slain Lamb, that was nothing but God reviving His work among them.

Under Joshua there was a great revival; and again under the Judges. God was constantly reviving the Jewish nation in those olden times. Samuel brought the people to Mizpah, and told them to put away their strange gods. Then the Israelites went out and defeated the Philistines, so that they never came back in his day. Dr. Bonar says it may be that David and Jonathan were converted under that revival in the time of Samuel.

What was it but a great revival in the days of Elijah? The people had turned away to idolatry, and the prophet summoned them to Mount Carmel. As the multitude stood there on the mountain, God answered by fire; the people fell on their faces and cried, "The Lord, He is the God." That was the nation turning back to God. No doubt there were men talking against the work, and saying it would not last. That is the cry of many to-day, and has been the cry for 4,000 years. Some old Carmelite very probably said in the days of Elijah: "This will not be permanent." So there are not a few in these days shaking their wise heads and saying the work will not last.

When we come to New Testament times, we have the wonderful revival under John the Baptist. Was there ever a man who accomplished so much in a few months, except the Master Himself? The preaching of John was like the breath of spring after a long and dreary winter. For 400 long years there had been no prophet, and darkness had settled down on the nation. John's advent was like the flashing of a brilliant meteor that heralded the coming day. It was not in the temple or in any synagogue that he preached, but on the banks of the Jordan. Men, women, and children flocked to hear him. Almost any one can get an audience in a crowded city, but this was away out in the desert. No doubt there was great excitement. I suppose the towns and villages were nearly depopulated, as they flocked out to hear the preaching of John.

People are so afraid of excitement. When I went over to England in 1867, I was asked to go and preach at the Derby race-course. I saw more excitement

there in one day than I have seen at all the religious meetings I ever attended in my life put together. And yet I heard no one complaining of too much excitement. I heard of a minister, not long ago, who was present at a public dance till after five o'clock in the morning. The next Sabbath he preached against the excitement of revivals—the late hours, and so on. Very consistent kind of reasoning, was it not ?

Then look at Pentecost. The apostles preached, and you know what the result was. I suppose the worldly men of that day said it would all die away. Although they brought about the martyrdom of Stephen and of James, other men rose up to take possession of the field. From the very place where Stephen was slain, Saul took up the work, and it has been going on ever since.

There are many professed Christians who are all the time finding fault and criticising. They criticise the preaching, or the singing. The prayers will be either too long or too short, too loud, or not loud enough. They will find fault with the reading of the Word of God, or will say it was not the right portion. They will criticise the preacher. “I do not like his style,” they say. If you doubt what I say, listen to the people as they go out of a revival meeting, or any other religious gathering.

“What did you think of the preacher ?” says one. “Well, I must confess I was disappointed. I did not like his manner. He was not graceful in his actions.” Another will say : “He was not logical ; I like logic.” Or another : “He did not preach enough about repentance.” If a preacher does not go over every

doctrine in every sermon people begin to find fault. They say : "There was too much repentance, and no Gospel ; or, it was all Gospel, and no repentance." "He spoke a great deal about justification, but he said nothing about sanctification." So if a man does not go right through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, in one sermon, they at once proceed to criticise and find fault.

"The fact is," says some one of this class, "the man did not touch my heart at all." Some one else will say, "He was all heart and no head. I like a man to preach to my intellect." Or, "He appeals too much to the will ; he does not give enough prominence to the doctrine of election." Or, again, "There is no backbone in his preaching ; he does not lay sufficient stress on doctrine." Or, "He is not eloquent;" and so on, and so on.

You may find hundreds of such fault-finders among professed Christians ; but all their criticism will not lead one solitary soul to Christ. I never preached a sermon yet that I could not pick to pieces and find fault with. I feel that Jesus Christ ought to have a far better representative than I am. But I have lived long enough to discover that there is nothing perfect in this world. If you are to wait until you can find a perfect preacher, or perfect meetings, I am afraid you will have to wait till the millenium arrives. What we want is to be looking right up to Him. Let us get done with fault-finding. When I hear people talk in the way I have described, I say to them, "Come and do better yourself. Step up here and try what you can do." My friends, it is so easy to find fault ; it takes neither brains nor heart.

Some years ago, a pastor of a little Church in a small town became exceedingly discouraged, and brooded over his trials to such an extent that he became an inveterate grumbler. He found fault with his brethren because he imagined they did not treat him well. A brother minister was invited to assist him a few days in a special service. At the close of the Sabbath morning service our unhappy brother invited the minister to his house to dinner. While they were waiting alone in the parlor, he began his doleful story by saying : “ My brother, you have no idea of my troubles ; and one of the greatest is, my brethren in the Church treat me very badly.” The other propounded the following questions :

“ Did they ever spit in your face ? ”

“ No ; they haven’t come to that.”

“ Did they ever smite you ? ” “ No.”

“ Did they ever crown you with thorns ? ”

This last question he could not answer, but bowed his head thoughtfully. His brother replied : “ Your Master and mine was thus treated, and all His disciples fled and left Him in the hands of the wicked. Yet He opened not His mouth.” The effect of this conversation was wonderful. Both ministers bowed in prayer and earnestly sought to possess the mind which was in Christ Jesus. During the ten days’ meetings the discontented pastor became *wonderfully changed*. He labored and prayed with his friend, and many souls were brought to Christ. Some weeks after, a deacon of the church wrote and said : “ Your late visit and conversation with our pastor have had a wonderful influence for good. We never hear him complain

now, and he labors more prayerfully and zealously." Another charge brought against revivals is that they are out of the regular order of things. Well, there is no doubt about that. But that does not prove that they are wrong. Eldad and Medad were out of the regular succession. Joshua wanted Moses to rebuke them. Instead of that he said: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets." Elijah and Elisha did not belong to the regular school of prophets, yet they exercised a mighty influence for good in their day. John the Baptist was not in the regular line. He got his theological training out in the desert. Jesus Christ Himself was out of the recognized order. When Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah, he said to him: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

As we read the history of the past few centuries we find that God has frequently taken up those who were, so to speak, out of the regular line. Martin Luther had to break through the regular order of things in his day before he brought about the mighty Reformation. There are now some sixty millions of people who adhere to the Lutheran Church. Wesley and Whitefield were not exactly in the regular line, but see what a mighty work they accomplished!

My friends, when God works many things will be done "out of the regular order." It seems to me that will be a good thing. There are a few who cannot be reached, apparently, through the regular channels, who will come to meetings like these out of the usual routine. We have got our churches, it is true, but we want to make an effort to reach the outlying masses

who will not go to them. Many will come in to these meetings simply because they are to be held only for a few days. And so, if they are to come at all, they must come to a decision about it quickly. Others come out of idle curiosity, or a desire to know what is going on. And often at the first meeting something that is spoken or that is sung will touch them. They have come under the sound of the Gospel ; probably they will become real Christians and useful members of society. You will sometimes hear people say, " We have our churches ; if men will not come to them, let them keep out." That was not the spirit of the Master. When our Civil War broke out we had a very small standing army. Government asked for volunteers to enlist. Several hundreds of thousands of men came forward and joined the ranks of the regular army. There was plenty for every man to do. These volunteers were not so well trained and drilled as the older soldiers, but we could use the irregulars as well as the regulars. Many of the former soon became efficient soldiers, and these volunteers did great service in the cause of the nation. If the outlying masses of the people are to be reached we must have the regulars and the irregulars both.

I remember hearing of a Sunday-school in our country where the teacher had got into ruts. A young man was placed in charge as Superintendent, and he wanted to re-arrange the seats. Some of the older members said the seats had been in their present position for so many years, that they could not be moved ! There is a good deal of that kind of spirit nowadays. It seems to me that if one method is not successful we ought to give it up and try some other plan that may be more

likely to succeed. If the people will not come to the regular "means of grace," let us adopt some means that will reach them and win them.

Do not let us be finding fault because things are not done exactly as they have been done in the past, and as we think they ought to be done. I am sick and tired of those who are constantly complaining. Let us pay no heed to them, but let us go forward with the work that God has given us to do.

Another very serious charge is brought against revivals. They say the work will not last. As I have said there were doubtless many at the day of Pentecost who said that. And when Stephen was stoned to death, James beheaded, and finally all the apostles put to death, no doubt they said that Pentecost was a stupendous failure. But was it a failure? Are not the fruits of that revival at Pentecost to be seen even in our time?

In the sight of the world the mission of John the Baptist may have been thought to be a failure when he was beheaded by the command of Herod. But it was not a failure in the sight of heaven. The influence of this wilderness prophet is felt in the Church of God to-day. The world thought Christ's life was a failure as He hung on the Cross and expired. But in the sight of God it was altogether different. God made the wrath of men to praise Him.

I have little sympathy with those pastors who, when God is reviving the Churches, begin to preach against revivals. There is not a denomination in Christendom to-day that has not sprung out of a revival. The Roman Catholics and the Episcopalians both claim to be apostolic in their origin; if they are, they sprang out of

the revival at Pentecost. The Methodist body rose out of revivals under John Wesley and George Whitefield. Did not the Lutheran Church come from the great awakening that swept through Germany in the days of Luther? Was not Scotland stirred up through the preaching of John Knox? Where did the Quakers come from if not from the work of God under George Fox? Yet people are so afraid if the regular routine of things is going to be disturbed. Let us pray that God may raise up many who will be used by Him for the reviving of His Church in our day. I think the time has come when we need it.

I remember we went into one place where one of the ministers found that his Church was opposed to his taking part in the meetings. He was told that if he identified himself with the movement he would alienate some of his congregation. He took the Church record and found that four-fifths of the members of the Church had been converted in times of revival, among others the Superintendent of the Sabbath-school, all the officers of the Church, and nearly every active member. The minister went into the Church the following Sabbath and preached a sermon on revivals, reminding them of what had taken place in the history of the congregation. You will find that many who talk against revivals have themselves been converted in such a time.

Not long ago a very able minister preached a sermon against these awakenings; he did not believe in them. Some of his people searched the Church records to see how many during the previous twelve years had been added to the membership on profession of their faith; they found that not a single soul had joined the Church

all these years on profession of faith. No wonder the minister of a Church like that preached against revivals!

My experience has been that those who are converted in a time of special religious interest make even stronger Christians than those who were brought into the Church at ordinary times. One young convert helps another, and they get a better start in the Christian life when there are a good many together.

People say the converts will not hold out. Well, they did not all hold out under the preaching of Jesus Christ. "Many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." Paul mourned over the fact that some of those who made profession were walking as the enemies of the Cross of Christ. The Master taught in His wonderful parable that there are various kinds of hearers—those represented by the wayside hearers, the stony ground hearers, the thorny ground hearers, and the good ground hearers; they will remain to the end of time. I have a fruit tree at my home, and every year it has so many blossoms that if they should all produce apples the tree would break down. Nintenths, perhaps, of the blossoms will fall off, and yet I have a large number of apples.

So there are many who make a profession of Christianity who fall away. It may be that those who seemed to promise the fairest turn out the worst, and those who did not promise so well turn out best in the end. God must prepare the ground and He must give the increase. I have often said that if I had to convict men of sin I would have given up the work long ago. That is the work of the Holy Ghost. What we have to do is to scatter the good seed of the Word, and

expect that God will bless it to the saving of men's souls.

Of course we cannot expect much help from those who are all the time talking against revivals. I believe many young disciples are chilled through by those who condemn these special efforts. If the professed converts sometimes do not hold out, it is not always their own fault.

I was preaching in a certain city some time ago, and a minister said to me: "I hope this work will not turn out like the revival here five years ago. I took one hundred converts into the Church, and, with the exception of one or two, I do not know where they are today." This was discouraging. I mentioned it to another minister in the same city, and I said I would rather give up the work, and go back to business, if the work was not going to last. He said to me: "I took in one hundred converts at the same time, and I can lay my hand on ninety-eight out of the hundred. For five years I have watched them, and only two have fallen away." Then he asked me if his brother minister had told me what took place in his Church after they brought in those young converts. Some of them thought they ought to have a better Church, and they got divided among themselves; so nearly all the members left the Church. If anyone will but engage heartily in this work they will have enough to encourage them.

It is very easy for men to talk against a work like this. But we generally find that such people not only do nothing at all themselves, but they know nothing about that which they are criticising. Surely it is hardly fair to condemn a work that we have not been

at the trouble to become personally acquainted with. If, instead of sitting on the platform and simply looking on or criticising, such persons would get down among the people and talk to them about their souls, they would soon find out whether the work was real or not.

I remember hearing of a man who returned from a residence in India. He was out at dinner one day with some friends, and he was asked about Missions; he said he had never seen a native convert all the time he was in India. A missionary who was present did not reply directly to the statement, but he quietly asked the sceptical Englishman if he had seen any tigers in India. The man rubbed his hands, as if the recollection gave him a good deal of pleasure, and said: "Tigers! Yes, I should think so. I have shot a good many of them." Said the missionary, "Well, I was in India for a number of years and never saw a tiger." The fact was that the one had been looking for converts and the other for tigers, and they both found what they looked for.

If we look for converts we shall find them; there is no doubt about that. But the truth is that in almost every case those who talk against revivals know nothing whatever about it from personal contact and experience. Do you suppose that the young converts are going round to your house and knock at the door to tell you they have been converted? If you wish to find out the truth *you* must go among them in their homes and talk to them.

I hope no one will be afraid of the Inquiry Room. At one of the places where I worked once I found a

good many people who hated the very word “Inquiry Room.” But I contend that it is a perfectly reasonable thing. When a boy is at school and cannot solve some problem in algebra, he asks help of some one who knows it. Here is the great problem of eternal life that has to be solved by each of us. Why should we not ask those who are more experienced than ourselves to help us if they can. If we have any difficulty we cannot overcome, probably we shall find some Godly man or woman who had the same difficulty twenty years ago; they will be glad to help us, and tell us how they were enabled to surmount it. Do not be afraid therefore to let them help you.

I believe there is not a living soul who has a spiritual difficulty but there is some promise in the Word of God to meet that difficulty. But if you keep your feelings and your troubles all locked up, how are you to be helped? I might stand here and preach to you right on for thirty days and not touch your particular difficulty. But twenty minutes’ private conversation may clear away all your doubts and troubles.

There was a lady who worked in the Inquiry Room when we were in the south of London nine years ago. I saw her again a short time ago, and she told me that she had a list of thirty-five cases of those with whom she conversed, and who she thought were truly converted. She has written letters to them and sent them little gifts at Christmas, and she said to me that so far as she could judge not a single one of the thirty-five had wandered away. She has placed her life alongside of theirs all these years, and she has been able to be a blessing to them.

If we had a thousand such persons, by the help of God we should see signs and wonders. There is no class of people, however hopeless or degraded, but can be reached, only we must lay ourselves out to reach them. Many Christians are asleep; we want to arouse them, so that they shall take a personal interest in those who are living in carelessness and sin. Let us lay aside all our prejudices. If God is working it matters little whether or not the work is done in the exact way that we would like to see it done, or in the way we have seen it done in the past.

Let there be one united cry going up to God, that He will revive His work in our midst. Let the work of revival begin with us who are Christians. Let us remove all the hindrances that come from ourselves. Then, by the help of the Spirit, we shall be able to reach these non-church goers, and multitudes will be brought into the kingdom of God.