Some Thoughts on the Psychology of Revivals.

I BELIEVE in revivals for the same reason that John Foster believed in Apostolic miracles—they are bells to call people to church. The chasm between organized religion and the democracy is deeper trenched than ever, and a new generation is growing up which, in the words of one of their number, has no use for us. The problem is how to reach these aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. By love and devotion—the service of the men and women surrounding us whether they attend our services or not. That is the normal way. By making our Sunday schools effective. That is the strategic method. By making our rusty bells peal forth once more, and manifest the unmistakable acts of the Holy Ghost. That is the demonstrative and spectacular way. What struck me most about the Welsh revival of 1904 was the irresistible appeal it made to the confirmed outsider. He is not without his religious hunger, and he will come back again when he sees that the church means business and God Himself is in the camp.

Revivals have no doubt unpalatable features. I cannot recall a single mission or revival which has not provoked both the angel and agnostic in my nature. The sun that wooes the flowers multiplies the weeds—the summer that shapes and hues the roses stiffens and sharpens the thorns. But weeds can be eradicated, and thorns can be avoided, while the roses can be gathered and enjoyed. It is not difficult to disentangle the true from the false in any of these great movements. Take the choicest revival in history—the Franciscan upheaval. There are several things in the Umbrian revival to which all the readers will take exception. But no one can object to the glorious sense of God which filled the valleys, awed the villages and gladdened the hearts of ordinary men and women. St. Francis went about telling merchant and toiler, peasant and prince that the great God loved them, that all men were to give up hatred and strife and to love and help one another, that the Kingdom of God, the brotherhood of the Great King, was actually come. There was no pressure or strain or hysterics, but the Umbrian peasants spontaneously swayed like

a field of growing corn in the wind and sunshine of divine grace. And this is the one common characteristic of all genuine revivals—the realization of the Kingdom of God as already come—the acceptance of the rule of God as an accomplished fact, and the vivid perception of His Spirit as actually at work in the lives of men. Just as at a general election politics dominates and absorbs the thoughts and activities of men, so during a revival religion becomes the be all and end all of the church and its environment. Men seek first of all the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and religion becomes enthroned in its sovereign place.

I readily admit that there is one thing better than a revival, and that is a church that needs no revival. I sympathize with the men that are distrustful of all such movements, and some of them are the best spiritual craftsmen I know. I know the extravagances that are bound to come. Not will only the saints be glad, but the cranks will be boisterous. Not only will there be ethical but magical results. But the winter of our discontent is so bleak that I would welcome the summer, and risk its weeds—welcome Pentecost and risk its tongues.

The dangers which the psychologists indicate are common to all human activities and enterprises—are there to be conquered, to be controlled and directed, are benefits when harnessed, and are only perils when brooking no restraint.

There is first of all the excess of emotionalism, and every wholesome Christian hates the strain and tension of many of our revival meetings. But all have to admit that emotion is the mill stream that turns the wheel which grinds the corn. It is only dangerous when it inundates the valley instead of concentrating on the wheel-clappers. It is e-motion, a movement from thought to action. It is the outcome of some kind of an idea, and the impulse to some kind of activity. The important thing is that the producing thought should be true and not false, wholesome, and not unhealthy, definite, and not vague, elevated and not grotesque, cogent and not intoxicating. Provided the generating idea is divine, the danger is not to feel too much but to feel too little. What preacher is there who has not felt if he could only do justice to his theme he would stir both himself and his congregation out of their arid placidity. When some Unitarian ministers ridiculed the Ulster revival in the the presence of Dr. Martineau because strong men fell down as dead in the services, that bold spiritual thinker replied, "Gentlemen, if we were to realize the presence and majesty of God we would fall prostrate, too." It is more emotion that we want, provided it is of the right sort. Equally important is that this engendered emotion should be directed into ethical and practical channels. On no aspect of revivals are certain

psychologists more withering in their criticism than on the artificial methods of the enquiry-room of urging converts to express their decisions in petty and artificial actions often dissociated from the ideal and the spiritual. The answer of course is that a genuine revival creates life, and has no need of enquiry rooms. These latter are associated with missions where forced methods are accommodated to scant and reluctant life. There is nothing to be feared from spiritual emotion, howsoever intense and ecstatic. Both Poulain and Scaramelli, the Catholic experts, acknowledge its prevalence, pointing out that the Roman order prevents it from public expression. If it is obstructed it produces morbidity. If it is allowed to evaporate, it produces reaction, but if is shunted into practical channels it fertilizes life and beautifies society. The showers of blessing fell on Wales twenty years ago, but the religious leaders mismanaged the trenches. There is need to-day of a dynamic potent enough to change the world—and this is the love of God produced by the preaching of the sublimest truths of the evangel and skilfully directed to the most practical of uses. The second objection is the fear of hypnotism. Granted that almost all the revivalists would have made good mesmerists, and that many of them use the methods of the craft without knowing it, yet there is nothing wrong about suggestion. It is the way whereby most ideas and projects come into the minds of men. It is the mother's method—hence her love. It is the author's method—hence his style; it is the politician's method—hence his oratory; it is the salesman's method—hence his persuasiveness and tact. Suggestion is right, it is weak and passive suggestibility that is wrong. It is the preacher's duty to put the truth as persuasively as possible, but it is the hearer's duty to receive it with all his mind and strength as well as with all his heart and soul. Take heed how ye hear, is the Master's warning. The Holy Spirit does not overwhelm, but convinces, and says, "Son of man, stand on thy feet." Let us admit that there are few people in our congregations who have a firm grip on their own personalities, and that the more suggestible they are the more readily do they troop into our enquiry rooms. Women are said to be more suggestible than men, and it is certainly true that women find it easier to become Christians in public meetings and men through "a quiet think" away from the crowds. But there are two facts that must not be forgotten. The best results of a revival are not seen in the enquiry room. The best type of convert is the one who goes quietly away to think it out. Spurgeon's strong disinclination for an after meeting, and his plan of inviting the impressed to come and see him during the following week, proved him a doctor of souls as well as a winner of men. He

had great powers of suggestion, but he demanded reflection from his hearers as well. The second fact is decisive. If the majority of us, as it is alleged, are easily suggestible, it is better that we should be recipients of good rather than bad suggestions, for the one demoralizes and enslaves, while the other liberates, and imparts independence and virility. By giving way to temptation we grow more suggestible, but by surrendering to Christ we receive the truth that makes us free. The gospel supplies the suggestion that cures unbalanced suggestibility.

The third objection is the riot of the herd-instincts. For a few years group psychology has been the fashion, but there are already signs of a welcome reaction. Not that it does not contain much that is true, but that it does not contain all the truth. A man, to begin with, is an individual, and a crowd can never be more than an aggregate of individuals, so the true group psychosis is that which enriches the individual by giving to his concrete experience a universal meaning and purpose. Personally I would prefer to follow the example of my Lord, and convince men and women one by one, and it is noteworthy how sparingly He used group psychology. His disciples, however, profited by it on the day of Pentecost, and men can be induced to do in a crowd what they are reluctant to do in individual seclusion. If the company is low, they will debase and demean themselves, but if the company is choice they will outsoar their normal selves. They cry *Hosanna* among the followers of the Lord, and *Crucify Him* among the priests. When it is maintained that a crowd is always worse than the individuals that compose it—that it is destructive rather than constructive—that it can say "No" far more effectively than it can cry "Yes," we reply that a revival surrounds the unconverted with praying people, and places him in the best spiritual atmosphere, and further that this if conclusive tells as much against the church as against missions. The herd instinct is after all divinely implanted, and is intended to help and not to hinder. It is not wrong to huddle together when winter winds are bitter, or to use sympathy to grow character, or to use the crowd to help the individual. Only his personality must not be outraged, his individuality must be enriched rather than overborne, and his purposes must be harmonized rather than merged or swamped. The fear is that next day he will shiver in his own loneliness, and feel that he has made a fool of himself. If there has been any undue pressure exerted he will revolt against the outrage, and recoil into unbelief. If, however, the gregarious influence has given him vision and won him into consenting harmony, he will strive to maintain normally the heights he has reached abnormally. The trellis work rears the rose, increases its

beauty, and spreads its fragrance, and the herd instinct, which is strong and vigorous, can be rightly used to train the spiritual instincts which are comparatively weak and ineffective.

But to draw this article to a close. A revival is a spiritual summertide. In winter we have light, but in summer light and warmth. It is light and love—light first and foremost, and the light distributing and controlling the warmth. If we could do the barest justice to the everlasting gospel emotion, suggestibility and crowd psychology would drop into their proper places. He that expresses a great thought, says Emerson, releases an earthquake. And our problem is to find the liberating and energizing thought. Every great revival in the past has come from a surprising discovery of a new or a vivid realization of an old truth. I believe the present truth to be the Immanence of God—the omnipresence of the Divine Love—or the abiding Presence of Jesus Christ, which I take to be its human and intelligible expression. This at the present time is more of a philosophy than a theology, and more of a theology than a religion. The prevalent conception of God even among intelligent Christians is a supreme Being enthroned in a distant heaven, primarily concerned about the world to come. The divine omnipresence has to be Christianized, put in the terms and the Person and the sacrifice of Jesus, for I am driven to the conclusion that the human mind can only give its devotion to a human personality. Theories and attributes are poor preaching stuff. "He preached unto him Jesus." Closely allied to this is the doctrine of prayer as one of the aspects of the divine omnipresence. God answers the prayers which He Himself has inspired. Intercession is in reality the divine using the human—Calvary reproducing its spirit in the solicitude and sacrifice of the priesthood of believers. Two years ago I should have written revive the old prayer-meetings, to-day I write change them from top to bottom and learn the tremendous significance of New Testament intercession. Then true social service is the divine immanence at work, shaping the Kingdom of Heaven. Christians are now awake to this, but they are no more than decent Jews seeking the justification and rectification of the the world by laws and schemes and organizations. But salvation comes through grace by faith. What is needed is a new spirit, and the spirit comes not by Old Testament but by New Testament methods. Sir John Ervine in a recent lecture declared there was no modern drama, neither could there be any drama worthy of the name until we regained our faith. And this applies with equal pertinence to politics, economics and citizenship. Just as we claim personal salvation by faith and work it out in fear and trembling, so also must we claim

social redemption by grace through faith, and work it out with reverence and courage. We have to use the poet's words to hang to the skirts of divine immanence and thereby outstrip Martin Luther by making social salvation by faith the mark of a standing or falling church. Because I believe the good must be ultimately the rational, my only hope of a revival is in the great revolutionary truth of the Immanence of God expressing itself as the energy of love and intercession in the individual Christian and as the spirit of brotherhood in all the activities and relationships of society.

THOMAS PHILLIPS.

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10-711. George Kelley, Elder of Portsmouth General Baptist church. A sermon preach'd before an Assembly of Messengers, Elders, and Brethren, at the meeting-house in Dunning's-Alley in Bishopsgate-Street, London, on Wednesday the 23d. of May, 1711. Threepence.

12-759. Reprint of this circular letter to the Irish Association, by Samuel Fry of Horsleydown in 1761.

58-776. Daniel Noble and Joseph Brown. The letter of the Messengers, Elders, and Representatives of the several churches met at the General Assembly held in Barbican, London, on Wednesday, May the 29th, 1776. With minutes of the meetings. Twelve pages.

58-786. A declaration of the deacons and members belonging to the General Baptist churches, in East Kent, relative to their pastors and ministers. Canterbury, January 12. Seven pages.

63-789. Sampson Kingsford. A short address to professors of religion. Canterbury. Twelve pages.