

CHAPTER XII.

PRAYER AND REVIVALS.

REVIVALS are born of prayer. The prayers of Elijah wrought a reformation in Israel, and prevented a perpetual going away into idolatry. Mourning over the prevailing declension, and seeing that nothing short of severe judgments would save the guilty nation, he prayed that it might not rain ; and God shut up the heavens for the space of three years and six months. When the people relented and were properly humbled, he prayed again, and the awful calamity was turned back.

At a later day, the prayers of the good King Hezekiah were the means of reclaiming the nation from the brink of destruction. The monstrous impieties of his father Ahaz, had culminated in cutting to pieces the sacred utensils of the house of God, and shutting up its doors ; while idol shrines were built in every city of Judah. These Hezekiah destroyed. And then he opened the house of God, and had the priests reconsecrated, and assembled all Israel, and they held a fourteen days' meeting, and separated themselves from their sins. Thus the Lord "hearkened unto Hezekiah, and healed the people."

Coming to the Pentecostal refreshing, we find it preceded by more than a week's special and earnest supplications to God for the promised Spirit.

There is also a volume of meaning in that proposal of the apostles to the first Christians, when they called them to the choice of deacons. "But we will give ourselves to *prayer* and to the ministry of the word." Prayer, they doubtless meant, in the high and holy sense of the word. They sought strength for their work, and wisdom rightly to divide the word of truth to every man, and holy love to give fervency, fidelity, and power to their ministrations.

The first ministers, therefore, were eminently men of prayer; they lived at the footstool of the throne of grace. Of the apostle James it is said that after his death his knees were found to be callous, like a camel's knees, from his much kneeling. The patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers, were the mighty men that they were *because* they had callous knees.

Gregory of Nazianzen speaks for the early Christians, in his exclamation touching the defeat of the emperor's wicked schemes: "How many myriads and squadrons of men were there whom we, by our simple praying, and God willing, discomfited."

"From our closet to the church: from our knees to the pulpit," was the motto of several of the Reformers.

John Knox was a man so famous for his power in prayer that bloody Queen Mary used to say she feared

his prayers more than all the armies of Europe. And events showed that she had reason to do it. He often was in such an agony for the deliverance of his country that he could not sleep. He had a place in his garden where he used to go to pray. One night he and several friends were praying together, and as they prayed, Knox spoke and said that deliverance had come. He could not tell what had happened, but he felt that something had taken place, for God had heard their prayers. The next news they had was that Mary was dead.

Here is an example of how John Knox prayed : “ O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die ! ” Then a pause of hushed stillness ; when again the petition broke forth : “ O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die ! ” Once more all was voiceless ; when, with a yet intenser pathos, the thrice-repeated intercession struggled forth : “ O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die ! ” And God gave him Scotland, a land and church of noble Christian loyalty to Christ and his crown.

Luther would sometimes pray with such humble boldness, as to lead him to lay down a promise before God, and say, “ Now Lord, there is thy word ; if thou dost not keep it I will never believe thee again ! ” A spy upon Luther followed him to a hotel, and slept in a room adjacent to that of the Reformer. He told his employer next day that Luther prayed nearly all night, and that he could never conquer a man who prayed like that.

On a certain occasion, a messenger was sent to Luther to inform him that Melancthon was dying.

He at once hastened to his sick-bed, and found him presenting the usual premonitory symptoms of death. He mournfully bent over him; and sobbing, gave utterance to a sorrowful exclamation. It roused Melancthon from his stupor; he looked into the face of Luther, and said, "O Luther, is this you? Why don't you let me depart in peace?" "We can't spare you yet, Philip," was the reply. And turning round, he threw himself upon his knees, and wrestled with God for his recovery for upwards of an hour. He went from his knees to the bed, and took his friend by the hand. Again, he said, "Dear Luther, why don't you let me depart in peace?" "No, no, Philip, we cannot spare you yet from the field of labor," was the reply. He then ordered some soup, and when pressed to take it, he declined, saying again: "Dear Luther, why will you not let me go home, and be at rest?" "We cannot spare you yet, Philip," was the reply. He then added: "Philip, take this soup, or I will excommunicate you!" He took the soup, and soon commenced to grow better; and finally regained his wonted health, and labored for years afterwards in the cause of the Reformation. When Luther returned home he said to his wife, "God gave me back my brother Melancthon in direct answer to prayer."

The good John Welsh, of Ayr, Scotland, whose harvests of souls were so great, from the beginning of his ministry to its close, reckoned the day ill-spent if he staid less than seven or eight hours before the throne in fervent prayer. On going to rest he used

to lay a plaid above his bedclothes, so that when he arose to his night-prayers he might cover himself with it. Sometimes he would retire to the church, which was at a little distance from the town, and "not find it an irksome solitude to pass the whole night there in prayer."

Mr. Bruce, about the time of Welsh's removal to Ayr, commenced his ministry in Edinburgh. Kirkton describes the power of his preaching in the following words: "He made always an earthquake under his hearers, and rarely preached but to a weeping auditory." A little incident lets us at once into the secret of Bruce's power and pathos in the pulpit. At Larbot, where he frequently preached, he used after the first service to retire to a chamber near the church. Some noblemen having once come far to hear him, became impatient from his delay in returning to church, and sent the bell-man to hearken at his door if there were any appearance of his coming. The bell-man returned and said, "I think he will not come out this day, at all; for I hear him always saying to another, that he cannot go except the other go with him; and I don't hear the other answer him a word."

In other places in this book we have referred to the wonderful revival in Shotts, (Scotland) in 1630. We recur to it for the purpose of showing the relation which *prayer* had to it. The circumstance that several of the then persecuted ministers would take a part in the solemn services having become generally known, a vast concourse of godly persons

assembled on this occasion from all quarters of the country, and *several days were spent in social prayer*, preparatory to the service. In the evening, instead of retiring to rest, the multitude divided themselves into little bands, *and spent the whole night in supplication and praise*. The Monday was consecrated to thanksgiving, a practice not then common, and proved the great day of the feast. After much entreaty, John Livingston, chaplain to the Countess of Wigtown, a young man and not ordained, agreed to preach. He *had spent the night in prayer and conference*—but as the hour of assembling approached, his heart quailed at the thought of addressing so many aged and experienced saints, and he actually fled from the duty he had undertaken. But just as the kirk of Shotts was vanishing from his view, these words, “Was I ever a barren wilderness or a land of darkness?” were borne in upon his mind with such force as compelled him to return to the work. He took for his text Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25, 26— and discoursed with power for about two hours. Five hundred conversions were believed to have occurred under that one sermon, thus prefaced by prayer.

Of Richard Baxter it has been said that he stained his study-walls with praying breath; and after becoming thus anointed with the unction of the Holy Ghost, he sent a river of living water over Kidderminster.

Whitfield once thus prayed, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul.” After much closet-pleading

“ he once went to the devil’s fair and took more than a thousand souls out of the paw of the lion in a single day.”

In reading the marvels wrought by Whitfield, the Wesleys, and their co-workers, we do not sufficiently appreciate the straits to which they were driven, and how utterly they were thrown back on the Almighty, and made to take hold upon his strength. Denied the pulpits, and discarded by all except “ the common people,” their souls caught new zeal and devotion from new extremities and new trials. Wesley describes a scene which reminds us of the preparatory Pentecostal baptism by which the apostles were “ endued with power from on high,” for their mission. He says, January 1, 1739, that Messrs. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitfield, and his brother Charles were present with him at a love-feast in Fetter-lane, with about sixty of their brethren. About *three in the morning*, as they were *continuing instant in prayer*, the power of God came mightily upon them, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as they had recovered a little from the awe and amazement which the presence of the divine Majesty had inspired, they broke out with one voice, “ We praise thee, O God ; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.” Whitfield exclaims : “ It was a Pentecostal season, indeed.” And he adds, respecting these “ Society meetings,” that “ sometimes *whole nights were spent in prayer*. Often have we been filled as with new wine, and often have I seen them over-

whelmed with the Divine Presence, and cry out, 'Will God, indeed, dwell with men upon earth? How dreadful is this place! This is no other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven!'"

Edwards' powerful sermon at Enfield is remarked upon in the next previous chapter of this work. Bishop Simpson once asked the writer for an opinion as to the secret of that sermon's astonishing effect upon the audience. The same question has often been asked. Upon a careful analysis, it is not difficult to point out several elements of the highest effectiveness. But back of this there was a mighty agency, discoverable in the fact that some Christians in the vicinity had become alarmed lest while God was blessing other places, he should in anger pass them by; and so *they met on the evening preceding the preaching of that sermon, and spent the whole night in agonizing prayer.*

And Edwards himself reveals the same source of power in those days, when he says, "The spirit of those that have been in distress for the souls of others, so far as I can discern, seems not to be different from that of the apostle who travailed for souls, and was ready to wish himself accursed from Christ for them: and that of the Psalmist in saying, 'Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law.'"

Prayers like these would be expected to produce astonishing results.

The connection between prayer and the more modern revivals is equally apparent. About 1795,

a *quarterly concert* of prayer began to be observed by some churches in Connecticut and New Jersey. At a later period, a *family concert* of prayer was adopted somewhat extensively, and attended weekly, from September to March, on Saturday evening, the hour after sunsetting; and from March to September, on Sabbath evening, the hour before sunsetting. And later still, was observed a *sacramental concert*, which returned with the regular seasons of preparation for the Lord's Supper; and the *female prayer-meetings*, which are now so common, and which have been attended with most important results to the church. These meetings for prayer, in the forms above mentioned, were adapted to inspire Christians with that spirit which Mr. Mills so often enjoined, "*Let us live looking upwards.*"

Drs. Griffin, of N. J., Spring, of N. Y., and Hyde, of Massachusetts, about this time narrative the power of prayer in connection with revivals.

Dr. Lyman Beecher thus writes from Connecticut: "One day, old Deacon Miller, a holy man, sent for me. He was sick in bed. 'I am glad to see you,' he said. 'I know how you feel. You must not be discouraged. I lie on my bed at night and pray for you. I've been praying for all in the village. I begin at one end, and go into the next house, and then into the next, till I have gone round; and then I have not prayed enough, so I begin and go round again.' I went home expecting; and word was sent from the Springs that the Lord had come down on the previous Sunday, and that a meeting was ap-

pointed for Tuesday evening, and that I must not disappoint them. Then I went to the Northwest, and the Lord was there ; then to Ammigansett, and the Lord was there ; and the flood was rolling all around. Oh what a time that was ! There were a hundred converts, nearly, who most of them stood fast."

It is well known that many of the most successful evangelists, since the time of Whitfield and the Wesleys, have been noted for their prayerfulness. One says of Nettleton that he was eminently a man of *prayer*. Entering the pulpit, or the inquiring meeting, one could witness a holy calm, and indescribable, almost unearthly solemnity and earnestness of manner, which gave evidence of his having come directly from the "mount of communion." Jabez Swan, and Jacob Knapp, and others, will recur to many minds as examples of power *in prayer*

Rev. Dr. Steele, (of Boston) says of Mr. Earle :
 " His philosophy of conversion is exactly that of Dr. Durbin. No soul is ever converted except as some believer has painfully travailed in birth for that soul. Hence, there will be simultaneous conversions when many Christians are pleading with God in pain and distress of soul. The church is the bride of Christ and the mother of his children. Hence Christians are exhorted to wrestle with God till they are bowed to the dust with a burden for the salvation of lost men. They are told, even though they talk much of "the higher life," and "rest in Jesus," that there is a radical defect in their piety if they are content with easy prayers and with the delicious

ecstasies of divine love, and are not in tears and pain of heart, pulling souls out of the fire. And Mr. Earle himself lives in keeping with that which he enjoins upon others."

We mention several other specific cases showing how revivals originate in prayer. An aged saint once came to his pastor at night and said, "We are about to have a revival." He was asked why he knew so. His answer was, "I went into the stable, to take care of my cattle two hours ago, and there the Lord has kept me in prayer until just now. And I feel that we are going to be revived." It was the commencement of a revival. Says a pastor, "an aged man, venerated for piety, once came to my study. Though poor in this world, he was rich in faith. In prayer he seemed to converse with God. "I have called to say to you, my dear pastor," said he, "that the Lord is in the midst of us, and we shall all soon see the effect of his presence." I had observed a marked solemnity in the congregation, but nothing more. I asked the venerable man why he felt so. His reply was as follows: "Since twelve o'clock last night the Spirit of God has been so upon me that I have been unable to do anything but pray, and to rejoice in the prospect of a blessed refreshing from the presence of the Lord." And that was the commencement of the first revival in my present field of labor; a field which has been very often watered with the rain and dew of heaven."

Mr. Finney says, "I once knew a minister who had a revival fourteen winters in succession. I did

not know how to account for it till I saw one of his members get up in a prayer meeting and make a confession. 'Brethren,' said he, 'I have been long in the habit of praying every Saturday night till after midnight, for the descent of the Holy Ghost among us. And now, brethren, (and he began to weep) I confess that I have neglected it for two or three weeks.' The secret was out. That minister had a praying church."

A minister once stated that in a certain town there had been no revival for many years, and the church was nearly run out, and desolation reigned unbroken. There lived in a retired part of the town, an aged man, a blacksmith by trade, and of so stammering a tongue that it was painful to hear him speak. On one Friday, as he was at work in his shop, his mind became greatly exercised about the state of the church, and of the impenitent. His agony became so great that he was induced to lay by his work, lock the shop door, and spend the afternoon in prayer. He prevailed, and on the Sabbath called on the minister, and desired him to appoint a conference meeting. After some hesitation the minister consented, observing, however, that he feared but few would attend. He appointed it at a large private house. When the evening came, more assembled than could be accommodated in the house. All was silent for a time, until one man broke out in tears, and said, if any one could pray he begged him to pray for *him*. Another followed, and another, and still another, until it was found that persons

from every quarter of the town, were under deep conviction. And what was remarkable, they all dated their conviction at the hour when the old man was praying in his shop. A powerful revival followed. Thus this old stammering man prevailed, and, as a prince, had power with God.

A pious sick man in the western part of New York used to pray for the preachers and churches of his acquaintance daily, at set hours. In his diary were found entries like this, "To-day I have been enabled to offer the prayer of faith for a revival in such a church." So through the list. It is said that each church was soon enjoying a revival, and nearly in the order of time named in the diary.

A revival often springs up without any apparent cause. But if inquiry were duly made, among perhaps the obscure members of the church, it would be found that some man or woman or child had been agonizing for that revival, and was expecting it. A writer in one of the religious journals gives the following fact: "A brother in the ministry, whose parish was some ten miles from mine, once called on me and gave me an account of a remarkable revival among his people. Scores had been converted, and many were awakened. Having detailed facts and incidents full of interest, he added, "What is most singular is, the work is wholly unaccountable." He had himself felt no unusual solicitude, nor been moved to special fervor in prayer or preaching; nor did he know that any member of his church had been specially quickened. All at once this

cloud overhung his people, and the rain began to descend. "I have seen," said he, "many revivals, but never one like this, preceded by no sign. It is," he added, "an unaccountable revival." The work continued and increased till more than a hundred were added to the church. From time to time I saw him, and heard of the progress of the work. Months passed away; the revival had ceased; the converts had been baptized; and that pastor called on me again. "I have found," said he, "the secret of the revival." "Ah," said I, full of curiosity; "what is it?" "There is," he replied, "a sister in my church who has been for years an invalid, confined to her bed. She lives several miles from the village, and the other day I rode out to see her. As I sat by her bed-side, she said, 'You have had a precious revival.' 'We have,' I answered. 'I knew it was coming,' said she." And then she proceeded to give her pastor an account of the burden that had been upon her heart for weeks, and of the manner in which her soul had gone forth in prayer for the unconverted, in midnight hours; and before the interview closed, the pastor felt that the unaccountable revival was accounted for.

The vital relation between prayer and revivals has often been illustrated in our institutions of learning. We have elsewhere spoken of colleges and seminaries as connected with revivals. An instance is here appended of the earnest prayers amid which such institutions were founded. It is also worthy of record as an example of the power of prayer. We

find the fact stated in the life of Dr. Nathaniel Kendrick, as connected with the early struggles of the institution at Hamilton, N. Y., now Madison University. The Board meetings were not so much seasons for the dry discussion of business as of *prayer*, inasmuch as from their great extremity they were driven to ask counsel of God, and implore deliverance from embarrassment through his interposition. At one meeting of the Board, which probably occurred in 1826, most of the time was spent in earnest prayer and strong crying to God for direction. The Board felt the need of a suitable edifice to accommodate the growing school; and besides, it was in a great measure destitute of funds to aid those whom they had received as beneficiaries. At the meeting now referred to, the only vote passed was one appointing a day of fasting and prayer some weeks from that session. It was a dark hour, but just the darkness that precedes the cheerful light of day. For those prayers were taking effect. They disturbed the sleep of Mr. Nicholas Brown, of Providence, R. I., and he dreamed nightly about Hamilton. And so he came to his pastor, Dr. Gano, and said, 'They are in *trouble at Hamilton*, I think; for I can't sleep nights; my dreams about them disturb me; do you know their condition?' Upon being told that he was ignorant of their exact condition, Mr. Brown said, you must go and see; and upon this Dr. Gano made the journey to Hamilton, at Mr. Brown's expense; and finding out their great strait, and reporting it to Mr. Brown, he at once sent them \$1000,

which relieved their perplexity. Thus much for Hamilton. We mention some other cases.

Mary Lyon had faith enough to found Holyoke Seminary; and she followed it with prayer enough to secure a special revival of religion in it every year of her life. The secret of those wonderful revivals was never understood till after her death; when they were found, in almost every instance, to have been preceded by special seasons of persevering secret prayer.

In the year 1823, chiefly as the result of extensive correspondence, the last Thursday of February in each year was agreed upon "as the day for special supplication that God would pour from on high his Spirit upon our Colleges and Seminaries of learning." And what have been some of the results? In the years 1824 and 1825 revivals were experienced in five different Colleges; in 1826, in six Colleges; in 1831, in nineteen, resulting in the conversion of more than three hundred and fifty students. In one of the Colleges it is stated that a revival commenced on the very day of the Concert. In 1835, not less than eighteen revivals were reported by different Colleges, and some one hundred and fifty or two hundred hopeful conversions. Fourteen Colleges, a few years since, experienced revivals commencing just subsequent to the last Thursday of February, and it is particularly observable that those reported occur *usually* about this time. It has been estimated that fifteen hundred students were converted during the first fifteen years subse-

quent to the observance of the Concert of prayer for Colleges and Seminaries of learning.

The *Week of Prayer*, with the beginning of every year, in which the churches throughout Christendom now quite generally unite, also furnishes most striking exemplifications of the revival results of prayer. Nothing is more obvious than the marked increase of religious interest following this world-wide concert of prayer.

The revival of 1857-8 originated and progressed, to a most remarkable extent, through the instrumentality of prayer. It was, eminently, a revival of prayer. This was perhaps the leading characteristic. It was repeatedly noticed that assemblies were more interested in the prayers than the addresses. They came together, not to hear learned, elegant, or eloquent appeals, but to unite in prayer. The great attraction was prayer. *The great business was intercession.*

We have thus noticed some few points of obvious connection between prayer and revivals; and are prepared to endorse the words of one who says, "I very much doubt whether, if we could see the connection between prayer and the glorious revivals that have blessed this land, we should find *one* that was not definitely prayed for by some earnest wrestlers, or wrestler, at the throne of grace."

The conclusion is patent and important. *If there are to be more revivals there must be more prayer.* Writing of the revival of 1857 and 8, Dr. J. W. Alexander says, the lesson which it should teach

us is the duty of being instant in supplication for the larger and more glorious effusion of the Holy Spirit. Acting on this, we shall behold new marvels of love." And he adds that we must pray as we have never yet prayed. "Our want of success is due to our coldness of desire and niggardliness of request. If we were but under a deep and solemn impression of the divine power, bounty, and faithfulness, how should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight!"

We need yet to learn, for all we talk so much about it, the power there is in prayer. God indeed purposed the prevalence of revivals, but it is also his purpose to bestow these manifold blessings upon the condition of his being "inquired of" to do it for us. Prayer, thus, is of the nature of cause and effect. It enters into the plan and structure of the universe. The remark of some one is not too strong, that God would as soon give rain without the clouds or the electric fluid, as revivals without the prayers of his people. To dispense with either the material or the moral instrumentality, were alike to sever the established order of sequences, and violate the ordinances of heaven.

What a privilege is here placed in the hands of believers! And what a responsibility! How awful our guilt if this power of prayer be slighted and neglected! What *right* have we to leave unappropriated and unapplied, a power which God has appointed for the salvation of men, and which heaven and earth now wait to see us put forth for the world's re-

demption? What "inhumanity to man," and what want of sympathy with Christ, are chargeable upon us if we fail to offer the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous in such manner and measure as God requires!

From this time forth, then, let us more than ever "give ourselves to prayer." Let us learn over again, with the teachableness of little children, what is *believing* prayer, and *persevering* prayer, and *importunate* prayer, and *united* prayer, and *consistent* prayer.

Dr. Backus, former President of Hamilton College, when on his death-bed, was told that he could not live to exceed half an hour. "Is that so?" said the great and good man, "then take me out of my bed, and place me upon my knees, and let me spend that time in calling on God for the salvation of the world!" His request was complied with, and his last breath was spent in praying for the conversion of his fellow-men. He died upon his knees. This is the earnest, heart-absorbing spirit of prayer that the church needs to have. And why should not all Christians feel the same interest in a great gathering in of souls as was felt by this dying saint? Where there is *such* praying, a benediction is on the way.

"O LORD, REVIVE THY WORK!"