



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

# Centenary Souvenir

Commemorative of the Completion  
of a Century

By the

**First Presbyterian Church**

of Dayton, Ohio

Containing an Account of the Proceedings and  
the Addresses delivered during  
the Celebration

December 10, 11, and 12, 1899



Dayton, Ohio  
United Brethren Publishing House  
1900

## PRESBYTERIANISM AND REVIVALS OF RELIGION.

BY THE REV. PROF. J. ROSS STEVENSON, D.D.

"Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Ps. 85:6).

THIS prayer of the psalmist has repeatedly been the supplication of God's people down through the ages, and is to-day ascending up on high from many an earnest heart. It looks backward and forward, and, in the light of past experience, contemplates a quickening of the Lord's followers as something greatly to be desired. The history of any church, the history of the whole kingdom of redemption, bears witness to the place and power of revivals of religion as the means appointed of God to gather his people out from the world, build them up in grace, and equip them for his service. Whatever prejudice there may be against such spiritual awakenings, no matter what evils may be discerned at times in connection with seasons of special religious interest, however much it may be contended that the growth of the church should be steady and constant, without dependence upon extraordinary times of refreshing, the fact remains, which cannot be questioned, that revivals have marked God's dealings with his people down through all their history.

Just as there have been times of spiritual declension, when the life of the church has fallen to the lowest ebb, when her pulse-beat could scarcely be felt, and she has lain prostrate, helpless, inactive, so there have been seasons of special interest and growth, when the quickening life of God has pulsed through the heart of the church, and she has been stirred to vitalized activity; when the tone and standard of piety have been elevated among the followers of Christ, and the true light of the Shekinah has hovered around them, and inquiring souls have flown as a cloud, and have taken refuge in the wounds of Christ. In the time of the apostles we read of churches which left their first love, which became lukewarm in the service of the Master, churches in which there were only a few who had not defiled their garments so that the God of Israel might well say of them, as of his ancient church, "My people are bent to backsliding from me"; while, on the other hand, we

behold the more pleasing picture of Pentecost with its extensive effusion of the Holy Spirit, or of that work in Ephesus, when mightily grew the word and prevailed so that all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

However much we may deplore the fact, the career of the church has not been a regular and constant advance. Her course in the world has been compared to a ship at sea, becalmed at times, then tossed about on boisterous waves, driven back it may be by unfriendly gales, and then borne forward by favorable tides and propitious winds, so that in the main there has been a marked progress. Not only have the periods of largest growth and greatest efficiency been revival seasons, as we call them, but as another has truthfully said, "The history of redemption has been a continuous record of spiritual declensions, succeeded and overcome by great and wonderful spiritual revivals."

In such awakenings, Presbyterianism has taken a leading part. Some may challenge this assertion under the impression that the Calvinistic preacher is coldly intellectual and afraid of emotional outplay; that to his mind a sigh, a tear, a contrition has not half the value of the conviction that God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. He is supposed to be rendering a literal obedience to the advice of the archbishop in Robert Elsmere, who in the light of all his experience had only this counsel to give to a bishop, "Place before your eyes two precepts and only two: One is, Preach the gospel; and the other is, Put down enthusiasm." It must be admitted that in connection with many of the great historic revivals there has been a contagious spasmodic excitement, not grounded in intelligent conviction, which Presbyterians have deplored, and to which they are much opposed to-day. Such excitement often attended the preaching of such Puritan divines as Jonathan Edwards, the Tennents, George Whitefield, to say nothing of the pioneer Presbyterian ministers of the West. But I am sure all of us are agreed that there is a proper enthusiasm which the faithful preaching of the gospel is sure to arouse. It did so in the time of the apostles when conscience-stricken hearers were constrained to cry out, What shall we do? And that enthusiasm which is generated and maintained by the truth of God, is congenial to Presbyterianism and our Church has ever sought to foster it.

This is just what might be expected, when you consider that for which the Presbyterian Church stands. We do not seek to exalt a system of doctrine, or a form of government, or a directory of worship as an end in itself. We recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as

the only head of the church, and in our standards we seek to define the oracles, the ordinances and the ministry which he hath given for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world. In our beliefs, in our fundamental principles and aims, we endeavor to exalt the religion of Jesus Christ, going back to the Scriptures as our rule of faith and obedience, placing great emphasis on the evangelical principle of the Reformers, that the Spirit of God maketh the reading and the preaching of his holy Word an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners, driving them out of themselves unto Christ; conforming them to his image and building them up in grace.

True Presbyterianism stands for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and proclaims with no uncertain sound those very truths of sin and grace which God has revealed and which he always blesses in large spiritual awakenings. We would not contend that our Church has always been true to her trust and her mission, nor that the ministers of our denomination have always with the power of the Spirit faithfully declared the whole counsel of God to sinful men; nor would we depreciate in the least the great and noble work for God which our sister churches have accomplished and are accomplishing. Yet it is a simple fact of history that Presbyterianism has the strongest affinities with genuine revivals of religion, and has been wonderfully used of God in promoting them.

In illustration of this, let me remind you first of all, that the Presbyterian Church is the direct fruitage of that great revival of religion which swept over Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which we commonly call the Reformation. No matter what emphasis we may put upon the intellectual, the ecclesiastical, the social, the political significance of that momentous movement, we must not ignore its preëminently religious intent and power. Its leaders were men of God, who had passed through a deep religious experience. Burdened with a sense of sin, they had sought relief in mediæval Catholicism, and had sought in vain. Turning in revolt from the errors and corruptions of a degenerate church, their attention was called to the plain teachings of God's Word, to the simple gospel of Christ, and they found light and peace and comfort in those saving truths which a formal and worldly church had lost sight of. And when they proclaimed the biblical doctrine of sin and salvation by grace, it went flaming through the heretical, sacerdotal, and ceremonial rubbish which had accumulated through the centuries, and set all Europe on fire. Luther, the hero of the

Reformation, by his sermons as by his theses sought to recall the people from their backsliding and bring them into fellowship with the Father through the justifying merits of Jesus Christ. Zwingli, from the old cathedral pulpit in Zurich, preached Christ and him crucified, and made the moral desert of that city to blossom as the rose. Knox, in Scotland, Crammer and Latimer, in England, sought to revive the church by reaffirming the great evangelical principles declared by Christ and his apostles. And truly the Spirit of God was at work, convincing of sin, glorifying Christ, transforming human lives, and nourishing them with the soul-satisfying truth of God.

The faith of the Reformers was elaborated and consolidated by Calvin, in whose system of grace the evangelical principles of the gospel were clearly and comprehensively set forth. The impression is prevalent that John Calvin was a mere speculative theologian, one of the subtly metaphysical schoolmen who indulged in the most abstruse questionings, and soared aloft into a realm of thought far removed from practical life. But he was preëminently a preacher of the gospel and from the pulpit of his cathedral he was recognized as the religious instructor not only of Geneva, but, one might say, of all Europe. And the system he formulated comprised the results of an earnest attempt to apprehend and render intelligible the great facts of redemption in their application to a lost world. His powerful influence inspired the revival movement everywhere. During the persecution under Queen Mary, multitudes came over from England to Geneva, sat at the feet of Calvin, whom they loved and revered as a father in Israel, and when they returned home upon the news of Elizabeth's accession, became the leaders of the great Puritan revival, which Carlyle has called the greatest movement in the history of the world. It was a popular uprising stimulated by the Word of God, and demanding a real reformation and a purer, more spiritual conception of religion.

The Westminster standards were the product of this movement of the people and were formulated by God-fearing and practical men with a view to vital Christianity. It is a great mistake to think of the Westminster divines as a select body of scholars who were not in touch with the common people and the religious wants and aspirations of humanity. That they were eminent theologians cannot be denied, but the majority of them were hard-working pastors, who knew by experience the saving truths of redemption which alone could regenerate the heart and bring peace and joy to burdened souls. And the standards prepared by them were

meant for the practical purpose of keeping the Church loyal to the truth of God, not only in belief and worship, but in life, according to that fundamental Presbyterian principle enunciated some years later, that the truth is in order to goodness and that the touchstone of truth is its tendency to promote holiness. Now I do not hesitate to maintain that these standards are not only the ripest product of the Bible study and thought and of the religious experience of that great revival period, but also that they are the best expression of the Biblical doctrines of sin and grace ever formulated. And the preachers who have been saturated with the Westminster teaching on the subject of salvation have been, as a rule, great revivalists. I wish there might pass in review before us the great spiritual awakenings of the past two or three centuries, and as we would study them one by one, I am sure our conclusion would be that Calvinistic preaching has had under the blessing of God most to do with their promotion.

Take a few instances in connection with the religious life of our own country. Think of the Protestant colonization of America, which was so largely promoted by a spiritual awakening. It is, perhaps, a natural thing for us to contemplate only conversions in connection with revivals of religion, because, as a general thing, the mighty workings of God's Spirit have brought large numbers into the church. But this is not always the case. Strictly speaking a revival can only be predicated of God's people when their spiritual life which has died down is quickened and stirred to intenser manifestations. The fruits of this generally appear in conversions of the impenitent. But you have, perhaps, heard of an instance where the evidence of a marvelous work of grace was seen in the fact that twenty or thirty people were put out of the church. In one of our western Synods this fall, it was regarded by some as the proof of the Spirit's presence that the church rolls had been so pruned down that the net gain in the whole Synod was only four.

In the time of Moses, a revival of religion caused the Israelites to forsake Egypt and journey to the land which God had selected for them. And it was religious faith and enthusiasm which impelled our Puritan fathers to leave the old country and brave the perils of an unknown wilderness, and the Protestant colonization of our Republic was due in large measure to the great quickening of religious life that was going on in Europe during the seventeenth century. The early settlers of our land came to these shores in order to secure greater freedom and spirituality of faith

and worship, and it was religious conviction, the desire to keep in right relations with God, which directed and controlled them in their movements. I do not stop to speak of the national ideas and institutions which have come down to us as a rich heritage from our Puritan forefathers. The point I make is that the colonization which laid the foundations of the American Protestant church, which has been such a powerful and aggressive force in the growth of the kingdom, was the direct result of a true revival of religion, when the Holy Ghost was at work, when the consciences of men were aroused, when their convictions of truth and duty were based on the Word of God, and they were determined to be true to Jesus Christ, no matter where he might lead them. And these American settlers were, to a large extent, Presbyterians. The Pilgrim fathers, who were Independents in church government, took the first opportunity they could get to adopt the "Westminster Confession of Faith," for the "substance of doctrine." The Puritans who settled in Massachusetts and in Connecticut were, in the main, Presbyterians, although many of them had not renounced their connection with the Anglican Church. The same thing may be said of the Dutch colonists, and of the Huguenots, not to mention the Scotch-Irish immigration of a later date, which for a number of years planted twelve thousand colonists annually on American soil. The early history of the churches thus planted points to almost innumerable revivals—"times of refreshing," as they were called then. For example, in the church of Northampton, prior to the ministry of Jonathan Edwards there had been no less than five great "harvest seasons."

The most remarkable revival in the early history of our country was what is known as "the great awakening of 1740," although it was not limited to that single year. It began in the Calvinistic Dutch Church of Raritan, New Jersey, but was promoted mainly by Jonathan Edwards, who, though he was the pastor of a Congregational church, was a pronounced Calvinist in his theology, and put himself on record to this effect, "The Presbyterian way has ever appeared to me most agreeable to the Word of God, and the reason and nature of things." Those were wonderful days of the Son of Man. In Northampton a general seriousness spread over the whole town, and there was scarcely a person, young or old, who was not concerned about eternal things. The town seemed full of the presence of God, and in almost every home the divine Spirit was at work. The number of communicants rose to over six hundred, who solemnly covenanted to renounce all evil ways,



and watchfully to perform every known duty. The revival spread through New England and the Middle States and left its impress on more than one hundred and fifty towns. And it has been estimated that as many as fifty thousand people were born into the kingdom. There were attendant evils, which can only be deplored, yet Edwards who had carefully studied the whole movement, considered it a genuine and most beneficent work of God's grace. And mark you this, not only were the leaders in that great awakening Calvinistic in their theology, but the staple of their preaching was the Westminster doctrine of sin and of sovereign grace revealed through an all-sufficient Saviour.

But some one will ask us to look at the great evangelical revival in England which was contemporary with the awakening in this country, and out of which Methodism came. Of the operations of that important and wide-reaching movement, it may be said, as John Wesley said of William Law's practical treatises, "Of how great service these have been in reviving and establishing true, rational, scriptural religion cannot be fully known till the Author of that religion shall descend in clouds from heaven." Among other things it led to the abolition of slavery in England and her colonies. The Religious Tract Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society were direct results. The work of foreign missions received a great stimulus, and there were founded in consequence the Wesleyan Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the great Church Missionary Society—without question a wonderful work of God. But are we to suppose that the doctrines proclaimed were Arminian, and that Presbyterianism had no part in this great movement? By no means. In the first place the great awakening in America preceded the English revival and it was Edward's account of the work which came under his observation which stimulated and gave form to the ideas that were fermenting in Wesley's mind. The movement began in England with the preaching of George Whitefield, a Calvinist, and he was *par excellence* the preacher of the revival, while Wesley was its organizer. On the subject of election and predestination Wesley was anti-Calvinistic. But along with the other evangelical preachers of his day, he emphasized good, old-fashioned doctrines in which Presbyterians have always believed; for example, the total depravity of human nature, the free and undeserved mercy of God, as the sole originating cause of man's salvation, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ as the sole meritorious cause of man's acceptance with God, and the total inability of man to turn

to God without the Holy Spirit. The old Calvinistic hymn of Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," was written at this time, and, as has been truly said, it contains the gospel of all the great evangelists, the gospel that supplies the soul's deepest needs, the gospel that may be prayed and may be sung.

Our thought this day goes back to the revival of one hundred years ago, which doubtless had much to do with the beginnings of this church. There was at that time a most copious and extensive outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it was certainly greatly needed. Religion and morality had fallen to the lowest water-mark of the lowest ebb-tide ever reached in our country. French infidelity had come in like a flood, and our leading statesmen were unbelievers. Intemperance was so general and the demand for distilled liquor so great, that the attempt of the Government to levy a tax led to the Whiskey Insurrection of 1794. The church had become so honeycombed with worldliness and sin, that the General Assembly issued a pastoral letter in 1798 deploring "the visible and prevailing impiety and contempt for the laws and institutions of religion and abounding infidelity, together with an advancing profligacy and corruption of public morals" and the Assembly called upon the people to observe a special day for humiliation, fasting, and prayer. Starting with the revival that took place in Vance's Fort of Western Pennsylvania under the leadership of that godly layman, Joseph Patterson, a gracious work was carried on in those old historic churches, such as Cross Creek, Upper Buffalo, Chartiers, and Cross Roads, many of whose sons and daughters are scattered to-day throughout the West. Among the preachers of that time were those spiritual giants, Joseph Smith, Thaddeus Dod, John McMillan, and Elisha Macurdy, and under their heart-searching preaching, more than a thousand persons were added to the kingdom. In its wider movement the rain of heavenly grace fell upon the sparsely-settled districts of the West. The revival spread eastward and southward, and some of the scenes witnessed in Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, seem almost incredible.

The results of the awakening were so gratifying to Presbyterians that the General Assembly of 1803 declared, after scrupulous inquiry, that nothing had ever occurred in this country so favorable and so gratifying to the friends of truth and piety. Whatever criticism may be passed on the intense and extravagant physical manifestations, such as sudden outcries, hysteric weeping, prostrations on the ground, and "the jerks," the great revival of 1800



**REV. JAMES C. BARNES,  
1836-1845.**

was an epoch-marking event in the history of the American Church, for it was the beginning of a long period of abundant and vigorous life, which lifted up the church from its low estate, and girded it for the stupendous tasks which have been and are still devolving upon it. Since the preaching of that time was decidedly Calvinistic, and the revival itself was mainly within the Presbyterian Church, naturally Presbyterianism received a powerful impetus. At that time were organized old historic churches which have since been citadels of the kingdom and radiating centers of divine influences. The Board of Home Missions came into existence as a result, and who can estimate the wide-reaching service of that agency in caring for destitute flocks and in sending the gospel to the needy portions of our land. The series of missionary efforts that followed led to the organization of our Board of Foreign Missions, that has been so wonderfully blessed of God in planting the cross in the regions beyond. The revival of a hundred years ago gave a great impetus to higher education. Witness Jefferson, Washington, Union, Hamilton, and Miami colleges. To provide for an educated ministry, a theological seminary was established at Princeton, for the purpose of training preachers who should be "lovers as well as defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus, and *friends of revivals of religion.*" There have been many fruitful revivals since that time, both in individual churches, and throughout various portions of the kingdom; and the history of the Presbyterian Church, in this land and in other lands, is the record of many a gracious rain that has fallen on God's inheritance, when it was parched and thirsty, and yearning for him to bow the heavens and come down.

The prayer of the psalmist, "Wilt thou not revive us again?" has of late been ascending to God from many a waiting heart and from many a congregation that is weary with watching and warfare. Many eminent Christian workers believe that the church of Christ is on the eve of a great revival of religion. God grant that it may come. But since the truth of God, and the gospel of Christ do not change, are we to suppose that the next revival will be essentially different from those in which Presbyterians have taken such a large part? A distinguished English writer has recently discussed this question, regarding the characteristics of the next revival, and he concludes that it will make Christ and him crucified to shine before the souls of men as the sin-bearer, that it will concern itself also with the perfecting of the saints, and will promote the rule of righteousness toward God and

man. And I think he might have added that the next revival will cause the Lord's people to heed the Saviour's great commission, and, as never before, rally round the idea of world-wide evangelization. To promote such a revival Presbyterianism is certainly well fitted, under the power of God, since its aim has always been to bring sinners to the atoning Saviour, that they may trust the redeeming power of the blood that has been shed on Calvary. It has striven furthermore to build up the saints in holiness and comfort, teaching them the power of Christ's spirit and the ways of his strengthening love, and also that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty, for true religion sanctifies all the relationships of life and makes men righteous and moral. And with all our superb equipment, with the vast resources at our command, the old Presbyterian, blue banner of the Covenant should be carried as heretofore, well to the front of the Lord's army in its battle with the powers of darkness, and the combined forces of righteousness and sin. In the great forward movement of the church of God, I trust this congregation may zealously unite. In the history of this church there have been many spiritual harvests. Spiritual life which has grown languid and weary has been kindled again and again to new energy and hope, and a multitude of souls has been here gathered into the kingdom. But may the days to come be more fruitful and more glorious than any yet known, and throughout the next century may there be that abundant life which only the presence and power of the Holy Ghost can impart and quicken.