CHURCH TRAMP ARTICLES

Having To Do With a Real Revival Of Religion In Christian Homes By GENERATION AND REGENERATION

The Birth of Holy Children (I. Cor. 7:14) and Their Nurture By Christian Parents, in Christian Homes, Directed and Supported By The Christian Churches

(Editor's Note: This is one of a series of articles that appeared in the Detroit News-Tribune when 14 years (1900-1910). They were written by Henry Wood Booth, of Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Hills, under the nom-de-plume of "Lais." Although we, perhaps, may not agree with all that "Lais" has written, still we believe them of sufficient value and interest to our readers to reproduce them in The Eccentric.)

MARCH 17, 1901.

Lais Cogitates About Revivals; Suggests How a New Century One May Start, and the Course It is Likely to Take When It Gets A-going.

A hundred years ago the Christians of this country were in the throes of a theological revolution. Thomas Paine had issued from the confines of a French prison the first part of his "Age of Reason" and had in 1794 committed it to the "protection of his fellow citizens of the United States of America;" following it with the second part in the next year. Americans at the time were predisposed to everything French, and French skepticism thus dished up by a renegade Englishman soon became the fashion. It is estimated that half the public men of the country became practically Deists, and it was said, and is still said with some show of reason, that "The religious opinions of Jefferson, Franklin, John Adams and a host of good and wise men in Europe and America differed in no respect from those of Paine."

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And what were Paine's religious opinions? He was not an atheist nor an agnostic, nor, properly, an infidel. He was a Deist. He expressed his creed thus:

"I believe in one God, and no more. I hope for happiness beyond this life."

"I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy."

"I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church."

Paine was a pioneer "higher critic" and most of the objections made to the text of holy scripture by Dr. C. A. Briggs and his followers, including most of our high-salaried Woodward avenue divines—Baptist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and not altogether excepting Methodist and Episcopalians, alike, may be found in the book which, but for the providence of God, would have knocked the bottom out of American morality and left the United States in a condition ten times worse than that in which the capital of France is found today. But, with the bane came forth the antidote. Christians, being confronted with a common enemy, rallied their forces. At about this time the Methodist Episcopal church was organized, and almost simultaneously the Roman Catholic church was established in this country by the appointment of a perfect apostolic in 1784, the first bishop being consecrated in 1789, and the first archbishop in 1808. It was just as people were reading Paine's book that "camp meetings" arose. John and William Mayes, brothers, the first a Methodist and the second a Presbyterian, were the first to start early in 1800, from their home in Tennessee, to make a preaching tour in Kentucky. Such meetings spread like wildfire all over the country. As many as 20,000 people have been known to camp out in the woods when in attendance at one of these meetings and tens and hundreds of thousands were added to the churches.

We have arrived at a time when conditions are very similar to what they were a century ago. The book of books, the bible, the rule of faith and standard of right among Protestants, has been attacked, not by a single book, but by a multitude of books. Not by an avowed opponent of Christianity, but by men within the churches, by eminent theologians and biblical scholars. The very foundation of our faith is being removed piece by piece and for fully 50 years a steady decline of faith and a loosening of discipline has been going on until at last it is impossible to distinguish those who are on the Lord's side from those who are on the world's side, simply for lack of a common standard with which to size people up by.

* * *

Now, at length, good earnest souls are groaning for "a revival of religion." They are singing:

Return, O heavenly dove, return
Sweet messenger of rest.

And the general consensus of opinion among the faithful seems to be that nothing will bring it about but prayer and a more earnest study of the scriptures. Many outsiders, however, are saying that there is no use in studying the bible until faith in the bible is first restored. The New York Sun, for example, in an article under the heading "No Religious Revival Without Faith," which has been very extensively copied and commented on, says:

"But the very question at issue, as raised by "evangelical" theologians themselves, is as to the authority of the bible, whether it is of man or of God. That is what men are talking about; that is the cause of "the dissatisfaction of earnest souls with the present religious life."

"Nor can there be any such religious revival as this appeal seeks to stimulate in the Protestant churches until faith in the bible as the inspired word of God is restored. Belief must replace criticism or the concerted effort will fail."

That statement may be both true and untrue, that depends, as I said before, on what is meant by "a revival". But, in any case, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Faith in the word of God can only be restored by the word of God itself. God's people, then, can make no mistake in entering into a deeper and more spiritual study of the word of God," notwithstanding the Sun. For he that willeth to do God's will shall surely in due time know of the doctrine.

Looking over the whole situation past and present and that from a point of view not enjoyed by many, I am bold to say that the key-note to the twentieth century revival has not yet been struck. One thing is sure, there will be no revival of old methods. The day of camp-meetings, when thousands were "struck," and "fell" in such heaps that they had to be laid out as dead to prevent their being trodden under foot by the multitude (Buckley's Methodism, vol. 1, p. 360), is past. So is the day of gospel hymns sung to jig and waltz tunes, and the whole claptrap of the professional revivalist. At the risk of being dubbed "Another Danjel come to judgment," I will venture to suggest how the coming revival will start—when it does start—and the course it will take when it gets a going.

* * *

Religion like charity must begin at home. "Judgment must begin at the house of God," and the first thing will be a general house cleaning. Carpets will be taken up, floors swept and scrubbed, dobwebs brushed down; bodies will be washed with pure water and then mollified with ointment, so that not even the smell of filthy lucre-getting, worldly pleasuring, unclean eating or drinking or doing of any kind shall remain upon them. Every weight will be laid aside and the sins which so easily beset poor, weak human nature will be wholly given up. In a word, when money-getting, theater going, dancing, gaming, novel reading and scandal loving, over dressing, foolish talking are given up and when thoughtless, indifferent church members are no longer courted for their "financial support" and "social weight and "influence," nor regarded in the church as being real Christians at all, but only tares of the field not to be plucked up but endured, then look out for a revival—it has then begun—in the church. That is the first step.

* * *

The next step will be taken in the home. Consecrated Christians will marry and bring forth families like a flock. Ancient Jewish women were anxious to be the mother of Messiah. Christian women should be equally as anxious to be the mothers of a multitude of Christian sons and daughters, who, in their turn, shall do likewise. Has it ever occured to you, reader, that heaven may be peopled with inhabitants far more rapidly in this way than by the united efforts of all home and foreign missionary enterprises combined? Besides, it must be remembered, if according to the old proverb, "one volunteer is worth two pressed men," so one born Christian is worth two or three Christians converted from heathendom. What, then, have Christian mothers to say when seen going about like a hen with one chick? And what have those complacent young couples to say who, having accomplished one boy and one girl coolly and unblushingly give it out that they "don't intend to have any more." Merciful God! If our fathers and mothers had followed the same plan millions of us now living on the earth would never have seen daylight. Multitudes of the greatest men and women who ever walked the earth and who are now the brightest gems in the Redeemer's Crown would never have had a being if families had always been limited to two or three. The children of Belial come forth in troops. The negroes of the south are multiplying without let or hindrance. Ditto our foreign population generally. Roman Catholics, if it were not for priests and other celibates, male and female, would soon outnumber Protestants as things are now going. Statisticians tell us that, where there is no increase by immigration the men and women of a community must produce on an average four children each in order that the population may not decrease. This is necessary because of the number who die before arriving at maturity, imbeciles, incompetents, etc. The same rule applies in churches, and the reason why we see so many empty pews nowadays is not because there are so few conversions from the outside world but because members are not reproducing themselves from within. I have been utterly astonished at the few children I have seen in the Sunday schools of some of our largest churches in this city. I am saying nothing about the sin of the thing. That is another matter. The second feature of the coming revival then will be the revival of large Christian families, and these will be made possible when Christians cease to ape the world and have fashions of their own and are not afraid of being singular.

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Christian families being revived by thoroughly consecrated christian fathers and mothers, family worship will follow as a consequence, and this will be best maintained by the adoption of some simple form for general use. Regular family worship is greatly hindered and is more apt to fall into decay when the leader undertakes to conduct it extemporaneously. The father comes home late, tired, depressed and generally out of sorts. He finds it difficult to compose his mind or gather his thoughts together. So the mother, sympathizing with him, suggests to the children that perhaps they had better go right to bed and read a chapter in their rooms. That is the beginning of the end. But, where a simple form of prayer is used which the mother or one of the older children could lead, the practice is far more likely to be permanent. I know a family of all boys where the regular practice is to simply read a chapter and all say the Lord's prayer together. This is extended, of course, on special occasions; nothing more, however, is attempted as a rule—but it is never omitted.

Another revival in the same line will be the custom of saying grace or asking a blessing at meals. This also will be much more likely to be permanent if a brief regular form is used. I have myself used practically the same form for 42 years, adding occasionally a few words, when, for example, some who have been a long time absent are permitted to sit at table with us again, etc. I firmly believe the new revival will see a more general return to forms of prayer, particularly for the use of lay people and in the common services of the church. The new revival will appeal to the intellectual—the reasonable—rather than to the emotional and sensational.

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But the most important feature of the new revival will be the establishment of schools for the education of christian children on evangelical principals. This will in no wise interfere with the present well-established and admirable common school system, excepting that the children of evangelized christian parents will be withdrawn from them and educated in separate schools just as catholic children are now. Without a shadow of a doubt, the Roman catholic church is right in principle in this matter. And evangelistic protestants will never get on the right track until they go and do likewise. The Sunday school is a dead failure as a means of religious instruction. It was never intended at the first for any but the poorest of poor people's children who could not afford to go to the regular day schools. Since the establishment of common public schools, where all religion is excluded, Sunday schools have been depended on to supply this deficiency, but a half hour's study once a week can never do it. The general ignorance of the protestant laity as to the true basis of morals, the fundamental doctrines of christianity, church history and the things which all christians ought to know generally, is notorious. "The editor of this department of The News-Tribune tells me that he has abundant evidence of this at the present time, in connection with the controversy now going on between catholics and protestants, for while he is overwhelmed with well-written communications from Catholic lay people, those coming from protestants of the same class are few, crude and, as a rule "poor stuff," that side of the controversy being sustained mainly by two or three persons who received their education elsewhere.

* * *

The federation of evangelical churches is what will bring about this educational revival. It cannot deal with distinguishing doctrines nor with varying methods of worship, but it can unite all who base their religion on the bible in missionary and educational work, and that is what I think federation will surely do eventually. In fact, professors of christianity must in time sink or swim into the three camps, divided by three irreconcilable rules of faith—the church, the bible, the conscience. They will be known as catholics, protestants and liberals. They have to agree to differ, as none of the three recognize any common ground of faith, and action. Liberals, who look upon every child of Adam as being also a child of God, will fall in with the community at large and use the public schools; while both protestants and catholics, alike regarding the children of God as being a separated people taken out of the world, will esteem it to be their duty to train such children in their most holy faith by establishing separate schools for the purpose. This may not come in my day, nor in your day, reader, but it must come, or else protestantism will die a natural death, and sacerdotal catholicism and liberal rationalism will divide the religion of this country between them.

* * *

Finally there will be a revival of worship. There was never so little of anything like worship in the regular services of any church or religion as in our popular American protestant churches of today—excepting of course, episcopal churches, very few of which now claim to be protestant.

To enter a seat without any formality and sit bolt upright during the whole service listening to the choir and the preacher while such performs his of their part, just as people do in an opera house, is not worship. Neither is it worship to gabble off gospel hymns by rote without regard to either words or sentiments, but "just to make the proceedings lively" and "get the people together." Can it be denied that public worship in nearly all non-liturgical churches has gone to seed? Is not a revival, or a reformation or a revolution, or something of the kind needed? I think it is.

Now, note a few things. Catholicism, as has been said, never repents, never revives, never reforms, it is semper idem, always the same. This latter, as I see it, cannot be quite true, for it is constantly making additions to its system and has been all along the centuries of the christian era. It adds and adds and adds, but it lops off nothing of its doctrine; it does away with no essential details of its worship. On the other hand, protestantism adds nothing to its creed, once adopted, but keeps lopping off first one thing and then another, until a good many churches are now prying themselves on having no creed at all. The same with forms of worship, for every new thing introduced, half a dozen old landmarks are done away. This has come about in the very nature of things. The reformation, in the first place, was essentially a doing away with accretions and returning to primitive customs. Many thought the first reformers had not gone far enough, so other things were lopped off, while other reformers lopped things still closer. And, then, when an attempt was made to reinstate by force some of these lopped off things, as when "Claverhouse's gang" tried to force the English "Mangled mass book" on the covenanters of Scotland, for instance, the Scotch responded by doing more lopping off again—if episcopalians dressed their ministers in a white gown, presbyterians would dress their ministers in a black gown; if episcopalians prayed kneeling, presbyterians would pray standing; if episcopalians sang standing, they would sing sitting; and this principle has been continued right down to our day, so that now, even methodists, who, in anti-bellum days, always knelt in public worship, now seldom bow the knee except in prayer meeting—because they don't want to do as catholics do, I suppose. I know of no other reason.

such prosperity annually as were never known before, cannot but impress all thoughtful minds with a sense of religious gratitude to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. And yet, when the thoughtless indifference, regarding things pertaining to common morality; the callous ignoring of other things having to do with even the outward forms of religion, and the absolute atrophy of personal piety which prevail almost everywhere—to say nothing of the increase of crimes and public dishonesty in high and low places—are considered, then even the most grateful mind is turned sad and the righteous remnant is led to exclaim, in prayer, with the prophet Habakkuk, "O Lord, revive thy work".

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On Wednesday, Nov. 28, the Rev. Josiah Strong, D. D., was inaugurated at New York as president of the new Institute of Social Service. A number of letters were read on the occasion. Among them was the following from President Roosevelt:

"This Institute is fitted to render a great and peculiar service, not merely to this country, but to all countries. Apparently it is proving to be the beginning of a world movement, and is being recognized by the best men of many different countries as a necessity in each and all of these countries in order to facilitate the readjustment of social relations to the new conditions created by the modern industrial revolution."

A year after that Dr. Strong issued a book, entitled "The Next Great Awakening". It is a good book. I would advise everybody to read it. But I do not think the Author has struck the keynote of the coming revival. His claim is that each of all former religious awakenings "came in connection with the preaching of a neglected scriptural truth which was precisely adapted to the peculiar needs of the times". In the sixteenth century this neglected truth was "Justification by Faith", in the seventeenth, "Divine Sovereignty".

I think the time has arrived when all such foolish nonsense will be done away with. Let protestants simplify their principles by putting them into practice. If the mass, with its real presence, lights, incense, vestments, crosses, crucifixes, holy pictures and other similar paraphernalia is not necessary in order that there may be solemn worship, let us have solemn worship without them. If God is present where two or three are gathered together in his name, "Let us worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our maker," and not be afraid of doing so for fear we may look like a lot of catholics when adoring the consecrated wafer. Worship of the body is just as pleasing to the Almighty as the worship of the lips. We must learn to discriminate between things that differ and render a reasonable service. The ritualists have done much to restore the forms and principles of worship in public church services; the trouble is that, in doing so, they have brought back at the same time the sacerdotal sacramentalism which the reformers worked so hard to get rid of. What modern protestants want is a revival of solemn worship without sacerdotalism or idolatrous rites of any kind. Will it come?

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