

Correspondence.

GEORGE WHITEFIELD AND HIS OPEN AIR MEETINGS.

BY EDWARD PAYSON HAMMOND.

NO. I.

Rev. George Whitefield, among open air preachers, stands pre-eminent. When the "great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" arose, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." Violent opposers of the gospel, in their attempt to annihilate the "grain of mustard seed," only partially crushed it, and thus its aroma was spread "abroad," its life-giving power was made known to the "regions beyond." In a similar manner efforts to shut Whitefield from the churches, only opened to him a wider and effectual door.

WHITEFIELD'S FIRST PREACHING IN THE OPEN AIR.

Before leaving for America, his friends, with a view to dissuade him, said: "What need to go abroad? Have we not Indians enough at home? If you have a mind to convert Indians, there are colliers enough in Kingswood, (near Bristol.)" "Findings," he says, "that the pulpits are denied me, and the poor colliers are ready to perish for lack of knowledge, I went to them, and preached on a mount to upwards of two hundred. Blessed be God, that the ice is now broken, and I have now taken the field." "I thought it might be doing the service of my Creator, who had a mountain for his pulpit and the heavens for his sounding-board; and when the gospel was refused by the Jews, sent his servants into the highways and hedges."

The news soon spread, and on the next occasion when he went among them, upwards of ten thousand were assembled. The trees and hedges were crowded with the poor fellows; it was on a week-day, and their black faces and soiled clothes bespoke the nature of their labor. Whitefield says: "All was hush; I spoke for an hour, and so loud that all, I was told, could hear. Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend to publicans and sinners, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The first discovery of their being affected was to see the white gutters faded by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of the coal-pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions, which ended in sound and thorough conversions."

The churches in Bristol being closed to him, and people hungering and thirsting after the Word of God, what was he to do? He did not hesitate a moment, but wherever there was an opening he was ready to go forth in his Master's name. Nor had he to wait long; in March he was to be found boldly preaching at a large open space called the Bowling Green. "God will work," he writes, "and who shall hinder?" Two other spots in the neighborhood of Bristol were also chosen—Hannam and Rose Green. At these three places Whitefield addressed vast numbers every Sunday, during the remainder of his stay. One Sunday in July, in particular, he mentions preaching early in the morning to about ten thousand at the Bowling Green; and at eleven, to about the same number at Hannam; and, again, at seven in the evening, to upwards of twenty thousand at Rose Green.

"To behold such crowds standing together for hours wrapped," as he describes it, "in such an awful silence, and to hear the echoes of their singing, was very solemn and striking." His powerful voice was heard by all. Many people came on a Sunday in carriages and on horseback from a distance to attend upon these stated services. Sometimes between twenty and thirty carriages would be drawn up around him. Bristol, in those days, was already noted for the manufacture of glass, and in the yards of the glass-houses, he collected a number of the workmen. "Men, for the most part," he said, "who neither feared God nor regarded man." Here he frequently preached for hours on the summer evenings.

WHITEFIELD AT KENNINGTON COMMON AND MOOREFIELDS.

Some of Whitefield's more triumphant victories over the power of darkness were achieved in Moorefields and Kennington Common, London, where he first appeared in April, 1739, and where, as he states in his journal, upwards of twenty thousand were supposed to be present.

Gillies, in his "Life of Whitefield," says: "Whitefield went in between two of his friends, who, by the pressure of the crowd, were soon parted, and were soon obliged to leave him at the mercy of the rabble. But these, instead of hurting him, formed an open passage,

along which he was carried to the midst of the field. * * He preached without molestation, though many had told him he would never come out of that place alive."

He continued for some time to preach every Sabbath at these two places. At Moorefields the following Sabbath he had twenty thousand to hear him, it is stated; and on the same evening at Kennington, "such a sight," he says, "I never saw before. Some supposed there were between thirty and forty thousand present, and nearly four-score coaches; there was an awful silence amongst them, and I preached for an hour and a half."

"At Iconium" the disciples "so spake that a great multitude believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. But the multitude of the city was divided." The history of the progress of the church shows that there are never wanting despisers "who wonder and perish." It was so in Whitefield's day. In a "Life of Whitefield" recently published by Messrs. Morgan & Chase, in London, I find an extract which I do not remember to have seen before. It is from the "Gentleman's Magazine" for 1739, in which some one thus describes one of these scenes at Moorefields:

"I lately went through Moorefields while an itinerant pretender to the science of physic was cheating the deluded multitude of their money and health. I walked away in disgust, but was concerned to take notice of a much more extraordinary itinerant. This gentleman (Whitefield) that on Sunday morning succeeds the mountebank, harangued his congregation, and by the choice of his text most blasphemously compared himself to our blessed Saviour. There is something so extravagantly ridiculous in the behaviour of this young man, it is difficult for a person of any humour to keep his countenance, but for the dishonor done to God and religion by making a farce of it. I am a good deal more at a loss to excuse this gentleman than the mountebank. There is also less to be said in favor of those who attend his enthusiastic ravings."

Is it not possible that some are shocked by this language, who, if they had lived in 1739, would at least have questioned whether such meetings were not productive of more evil than good? But while enemies malign'd him on every hand, he rejoiced to know that the Holy Spirit blessed his words. As Whitefield beheld the good results of open air meetings, he exclaimed, "Oh! the blessed effects of field-preaching! Oh! that I was humble, that I was thankful; help me to entreat the Redeemer to make me as a little, a very little child!"

Doubtless many who witnessed the success of Whitefield's efforts to win souls to Christ, were watchful to discover the seeds of pride and vanity springing up in his heart. But if God has a special work for a servant of his to perform is he not able to fit him for it and to keep him humble, perhaps, by some "thorn in the flesh" not known to the world?

Dr. Payson once said that "Few know the penalties of popularity." Whitefield must have known some of them, and shed many bitter tears in secret, when those,—it may be good men—who did not understand him, thought that he was glorying over his marvelous successes. After preaching to vast audiences when the Spirit of God had convinced multitudes of their vices, instead of attributing the results to his "own power or holiness," he used to retire to his room, and sometimes in agony upon the floor, weep and tremble as if in the presence of the heart-searching God. Would the Lord have continued to use him, had not such been his feelings? He must, at such times, have had something of the same feeling which Peter experienced, when surprised at the exhibitions of the Saviour's divine power, he cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, Oh, Lord!" He, Whitefield, knew the truth of Paul's words to the Corinthians—"But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able to bear." Yes, "God knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation."

Cowper well understood the danger to which a man like Whitefield was exposed when he wrote: "Oh popular applause! what heart of man is proof against thy sweet seducing charm! The wisest and the best feel urgent need Of all their caution in thy gentlest gales, But swell'd into a gust—thy wind, alas! With all his canvass set and in expert, And therefore heedless, can withstand thy power." and yet Cowper, in his well-known panegyric of Whitefield, which I venture to quote, seems to think that he was enabled, amid frowns and flatteries, with "the shield of faith," to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Leuconomas! Beneath well-sounding Greek I slur a name a poet may not speak—

Stood pilloried on infamy's high stage And bore the pelting shower of half an age. The very dart of slander and the plot For every dart that malice ever shot. The man that mentioned him at once dismissed All mercy from his lips, and sneered and hissed. His crimes were such as Sodom never knew And perjury stood up to swear all true. His aim was mischief and his zeal pretence, His speech, rebellion against common sense. A knave when tried on honesty's plain rule, And when by that of reason, a mere fool. The world's best comfort was, his doom was passed, Die when he may he must be damned at last.

Now truth! perform thine office. Waft aside The curtain drawn by prejudice and pride, Reveal (tho man is dead) to wondering eyes, This more than monster in his proper guise! He loved the world that hated him; the tear That dropped upon his Bible was sincere Assailed by scandal and the tongue of strife, His only answer was a blameless life. And he that stood, and he that threw the dart, Had each a brother's interest in his heart, Paul's love of Christ, and steadfastness unbribed, Were copied close in him, and well transcribed. He followed Paul, his zeal a kindred flame; His apostolic charity the same. Like him, crossed cheerfully tempestuous seas, Forsaking kindred, country, friends and ease, Like him, he labored and like him content; To bear it, suffered shame where'er he went. Blush, calumny, and write upon his tomb, If honest eulogy can spare thee room. Thy deep repentance of thy thousand lies, Which, aimed at him, have pierced the of-fended skies. And say, blot out my sin, confessed, deplored, Against thine image in thy saint, Oh, Lord!

LETTER FROM A YOUNG LADY Who Attended Mr. Hammond's Recent Parlor Meetings in this City.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS:—The first thing you should do after you feel that you have "found Jesus" is to go and tell others about it. Mr. Hammond told me this—and I am acting upon his advice. You will believe how much this course will help you to forget the world and all its vanities, and bring you nearer to home and Heaven. It has only been three weeks since last Tuesday evening that I could feel this great truth.

I always thought I loved the Saviour; if any one had told me I hated him I would have been very angry; but when I went to kneel down at night to commit myself to his kind care, I did not feel that perfect safety that I knew I ought to feel, if I was a true child of God. And why was I not? I have been the child of many prayers—the loved sister of dear Christian brothers, who have taken my name to the throne of grace for many years. I wanted to be a Christian, but I could not give up the world. Oh, it had many charms for me. The opera, dancing and the drama—I could not give up all these most fascinating amusements and join the church; and I would not join the church and continue in my old ways. I soiced myself, or thought I did, with the thought that when I was older I would give up all for Christ, but not now! I am young and full of fun. I thought to be a member of a church was good enough for old people, and those who never had anybody to take them out in the evening; but oh, I could not do it. Still I never gave up the thought that one day, perhaps soon, I would give up all, but I never could say right out loud, I would now.

One day, not long since, Mr. Hammond said to me: "Miss —, you say you love the Saviour. Then why are you not a member of the church? Why not a working Christian? What is it that keeps you away from God?" I told him how I felt about it, and he begged me to "come to Jesus," just now—if it was the opera that kept me away to give it up. I felt almost like saying "I will," but no, I was going that very evening, and go I did, and for nearly every night I went. But was I happy thus in that splendid Academy? Did the smiling faces of my friends bring a smile to mine, and did the music sound grand? O no! I was miserable. Still I went on, until one evening Mr. H. held a little parlor prayer meeting, and asked me to attend. It would last from 5 to 6 1/2 P. M., and I found I could just get home in time to dress for the opera. So I went to the prayer meeting first, and was very much impressed. There were a number of children there—it was for children—and after singing and prayer, Mr. H. and several Christian friends came around to talk with us. They asked me the same questions, Why was I not in the church? I gave them the same answer. I went away from that meeting wishing, hoping, fearing and praying, that I might have strength in me to give up all that kept me from Christ—but I went to the opera. And all through that evening I thought of the meeting; and not the splendid music charmed my ear, but the beautiful hymns we had sung flashed through my brain; and the words, "He will save you just now," rung through my ears and sounded louder than a thousand opera airs played at once. I made up my mind then in the Academy that I would just give it up—it was a little thing to give up for Christ, when I thought what he had done for me. Go and look at that picture of Benjamin West's, "Christ Rejected," in the Academy of the Fine Arts, and while you sit there, think what Christ did for us;

how he gave up every thing; stood in that crowded hall, with his hands tied together, and wicked men around him cursing, and spitting upon him. He doing all this for me, and I not willing to give up the opera!

Oh my dear young friends! just think of all this. Do not wait as long as I did, but be happy now. You will not know what it is to be happy until you kneel down and say, "Here, Lord, I give myself to thee." Don't wait until you see why you should give up all that you think so dear. You will find Jesus far dearer than anything you imagined or dreamed of before.

My dear young friends, it will not make you old, or sober, or quiet, to be true Christians; it only makes you happier, better, dearer to your true friends. Then be all of you true Christians. Affectionately, * * *

POPULAR OPINION IN THE RURAL DISTRICTS.

Determination to Subdue the Rebellion—God Acknowledged by the Masses—Bravado at an End—True Repentance and Advance of Sentiment on Slavery—Insufficiency of Beecher's Defence in England—Preparedness for a Revival.

NEW YORK, December, 1864. Bro. J. W. MEARS:—For the past few weeks it has been my lot to meet with the people of the rural districts in their homes. The extent and nature of the changes that have taken place within five or six months, have greatly surprised as well as encouraged me.

1. There is a determination on the part of the people to prosecute the war for the extermination of treason to a successful end, though it should require four, or even ten years more of toil and privation, and disaster. I believe that if our armies under Grant and Sherman should meet with utter overthrow, the country would quickly and cheerfully raise other armies to take the place of them. Our legislators should know that, if taxes double the present rates are needed in order to sustain our national credit, the masses of our taxpayers are ready to bear the burden. Men are asking the question "What is our property worth if our government is not sustained?" Some are talking about enlisting in case of another call for troops, who thought one year ago that it was impossible for them to go. There is undeveloped back bone in the people that our leaders have not dreamed of. Truly we may now say with humble confidence, what once was said with presumption, that this people is "worth saving."

2. The great masses acknowledge the guiding hand of Providence, in our national affairs. This may be observed not only on the part of professors of religion, but of great numbers of non-professors. It seems, too, totally devoid of cant. I have noted this devout spirit in hundreds of instances. That latent feeling of godless infidelity, which once prevailed so alarmingly, is being undermined.

3. The events of the war have taught our people to look upon the former bravado spirit of pride in our ability to contend with England, or France, or, if need be, with all the world, as a ridiculous vanity. I was not expecting to find this. We have been made wiser and more humble. Though all feel keenly the insults which have been given us by foreign nations during this contest, yet the country will be less ready to engage in foreign war. The sorrows that have come upon us,—this humbling of national pride, this mourning brought upon every family,—have chastened us. We are willing to own our entire dependence for national prosperity, and for national life, upon the great Ruler of Nations.

4. There has been repentance for private and national sins. The latter is quite marked. Surely, if ever a nation was disciplined with a view to lead it to repentance, ours has been. Many have despaired of ever seeing this end accomplished by the power of moral suasion. Nothing but the judgments of God could have done it,—humanly speaking. The change of sentiment on the question of slavery experienced by many of our religious leaders, has produced a great effect upon the church. The confession of Dr. Spring, whose cloak has been in times past the hiding-place of so much obstinate and intolerant proslaveryism, that he had been "wrong, all wrong," in his former course, caused a profound sensation. To my personal knowledge, many ministers have publicly acknowledged their former error. Among the body of church members, the change has been almost universal. During the last presidential campaign, those pastors whom the people have denominated "copperhead ministers," have met about the same opposition and embarrassment as the radical abolition ministers used to encounter. It has been in vain for them to appeal to past precedent. Such appeals have met with no toleration. Men are often heard confessing volun-

tarily that the old pro-slavery interpretation of the constitution was cruelly unjust to the slave, and that nothing but the judgments of the war would have changed our leading party from it. They clearly see that the merciless though consistent enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law by President Lincoln, (with a rigor which the preceding Democratic administrations had not dared to attempt), was in the sight of God an abomination and a mockery. Yet it is true that our leaders verily thought that they were doing God service. The three hundred blacks that were driven from their homes in Chicago, and the poor girl, who was returned by an officious committee of Republicans from Gidding's district, as well as many others, had a right to be heard in their cry to Heaven, since there was no human helper.

Beecher's defence of the North before the people of England would not be accepted now without qualification. He said (in substance) that the position of a State in our Union was illustrated by that of a man in a business co-partnership; that he was not responsible if any other member of the firm was an imtemperate or licentious man, and abused his wife and daughters; that his relation to him was purely of a business nature.

Now setting aside the question whether a man has a moral right to enter into close business relations with a man of notoriously bad character, in order to make the comparison adequately represent the case, he should have added that one party was vested with constitutional authority to grant the right to the others to abuse their families; that they sent their employees to assist these men in their nefarious work; and when these abused wives and daughters escaped and found a refuge in the homes of the more respectable portion, that they seized them and sent them back. Mr. Beecher's statement on this vital point was a fallacy. Inasmuch as it was immediately exposed by those whom it was designed to influence, it was worse than useless to have spoken of it. But this manner of defence, which was once received with scarcely a question, would not now be accepted by the thoughtful.

The truth is, that since the former anti-slavery interpretation of the constitution, held by our Revolutionary Fathers, was abandoned, we have not had a just form of government, nor one that allowed our rulers to be "just, ruling in the fear of God," till the Emancipation Proclamation and the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. But now, with an overwhelming vote in favor of an amendment to the constitution, which shall be a perpetual injunction against slavery, and with the requisite majority in our national and (probably) State legislatures, and with such evidences of repentance as may be witnessed on the part of the people, may we not hope that still, though far from righteousness, God will hear our prayers and save us?

The system of slavery has caused more sin in our church and land than all other corrupting influences put together. It has caused more injustice, more false witness in argument and statement, more hard-hearted denial of truth and right, more shameless defence of wrong, more forsaking of principles for selfish ends, and was more destructive to the true spirit of our republican institutions, than all other systems in our land. But now, happily, we may hope that it will never again exert any influence.

If human judgment might pronounce, it would seem as if the present of all times were the most favorable, and, on many accounts, the most urgent, for a general revival of religion over the whole land. Thousands of minds are ripe for it. It will be a great day when the churches of the North, and those too of the South, shall be opened to offer up thanks to God for the return of peace. The account recently published of the conversion of our President has touched many hearts. We are drawing nearer to the time for observing the week of prayer. Should not those who have influence among us use their utmost endeavors to turn attention to this important time, and to prepare the hearts of all to be benefitted by it?

I am yours very sincerely and respectfully, OBSERVER.

Minister Webb's Letter in London.—The London Times treats the rather remarkable letter of our Brazilian Minister, so far as its views of the British are concerned, as a harmless ebullition—mere steam from a safety valve—"a matter of not the slightest political importance." "It is fortunate," says the Times, "for the peace of the world that the English nation is not easily moved by unseemly language, but, content with resistance to actual wrong, permits words, guard. Happily our steady resolve to abstain from interference in the affairs of an agitator's or irrevocable coming from Americans, that 'the peace of the world' is duly sensible of these concessions of feeling for the sake of its protection.

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