

LECTURES

ON

REVIVALS OF RELIGION;

BY

WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY:

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

ALSO

AN APPENDIX,

CONSISTING OF LETTERS FROM THE REVEREND DOCTORS ALEXANDER, WAY-
LAND, DANA, MILLER, HYDE, HAWES, M'DOWELL, PORTER, PAYSON,
PROUDFIT, NEILL, MILLEDOLER, DAVIS, LORD, HUMPHREY, DAY,
GREEN, WADDEL, GRIFFIN, AND REV. C. P. McILVAINE.

PUBLISHED BY

WEBSTER & SKINNERS, O. STEELE, AND W. C. LITTLE, Albany; J. P. HAVEN
AND J. LEAVITT, New-York; TOWAR & HOGAN, Philadelphia;
AND CROCKER & BREWSTER, Boston.

Packard & Van Benthuyzen, Printers, Albany.

.....
1832.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-two, by Joseph Alexander, in the office of the Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

LETTER XIX.

FROM THE REVEREND MOSES WADDEL.

Late President of Franklin College, Athens, Georgia.

Willington, South-Carolina, Feb. 25, 1832.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

Your letter of 26th ult. is received, in which you request me to communicate to you some general account of the revivals of religion which have occurred under my observation, or within the sphere of my labors; and also my opinion on some other subjects connected with them.

Shortly after the Revolutionary war ended, during the year 1784, there was a very solemn attention to religion excited in the minds of many persons in the congregation of Concord, where I was born, and in the adjacent churches of Bethany and Fourth-Creek; which were then under the pastoral care of that zealous, indefatigable and faithful Minister of the Gospel, the late Rev. James Hall, D. D. He then resided in Iredell county, North-Carolina, where he also died a few years ago. This revival was brought about by no other means apparently than the divine blessing which attended the evangelical, experimental and practical preaching of the pastor, together with his untiring attention to public catechising and family visitation of the churches under his care. In these two last mentioned duties, he was *in labors more abundant* than any pastor I have ever known. This period was marked with no noise or sensible disorder; but a visible solemnity seemed to pervade the congregations, and a number were added to those churches of such as, I trust, have been and shall be saved. Sacramental occasions, I think, were attended with more reverential solemnity than any I have ever witnessed.

During the years 1788 and 1789, there was a considerable attention to religion in the (then) upper parts of Georgia, including the present counties of Wilkes, Elbert, Oglethorpe, Taliaferro, Hancock and Greene, in which last I then resided. The Baptist churches partook largely of it, by the ministry of the Rev. Silas Mercer and Abraham Marshall. The Methodist churches were

much increased by the ministry of the Rev. Hope Hull and others. The Presbyterian churches at that time in Georgia were "few and far between;" yet by the missionary labors of the Rev. Daniel Thatcher, and the occasional and most refreshing visits of the Rev. John Springer, a considerable number was added to the Presbyterian church, and several congregations were organized. In these eventful and important changes, seasons of public worship in our congregations were altogether noiseless, but deeply marked with grave solemnity.

In the year 1802, what has been often called the *great or old revival*, commenced in this State, and continued in some degree to appear at some places of public worship until in 1805. This was distinguished from all others I have ever seen in our church, in many respects. It was said to have commenced in Kentucky, and gradually passed on through Tennessee and North-Carolina, into this State. The first time I attended a meeting of this kind was in July 1802, in one of our congregations called Nazareth. This meeting lasted four or five days, and was followed by the appointment of several others in different congregations within the bounds of our Presbytery, all of our ministers being then present. At that meeting many things occurred which I never had before witnessed; such as, persons falling to the ground as suddenly as if they had been pierced through the heart by a bullet or a sword, while a sermon or exhortation was being delivered, which had nothing unusually animated or appropriate in it either as to matter or manner. Some, when falling, would utter a shriek, and lie during hours, still and silent; others would weep and moan mournfully. The numbers who attended this meeting at Nazareth were variously computed by different persons, from five to eight thousand. I inclined to believe the latter more correct. I never have seen so many people collected at a place of worship before or since. This was a *camp-meeting*, and the first I ever saw, although I have witnessed a number since. Some of the following meetings of that kind, though not quite so numerous attended, yet exhibited more instances of persons falling than were exhibited there. I have never dared to say, that the operations of God's Spirit did not produce those, or many of those wonderful effects which were witnessed there and elsewhere on such occasions; nor would I

presume to say that none of those "*bodily exercises*," as they were often called, did ultimately terminate in the saving conversion of the souls of those who were so wonderfully affected; but I must say, with regret, that a number of those within the bounds of my personal acquaintance, who were prostrate on the ground for several silent hours, did not afterwards give satisfactory evidence of their heart's having been savingly changed.

The revival of religion which came more immediately and fully under my view, was that which took place in the town of Athens and state of Georgia, in the year 1826, at which time I was president of Franklin college. During five years preceding, a few professors of our small church, which had been organized there in 1820, had attended a weekly prayer meeting, and united in imploring the King of Zion to grant us an effusion of his Holy Spirit, and a season of refreshing from his presence. Two young men who had finished their academical studies in the college not long before, sickened and were cut off by death, within one month. As one died in the town and the other in the neighboring part of the country, they were both visited by a number of their fellow students, most of whose minds were deeply affected by the sufferings and the sayings of their dying friends. A more solemn attention to the ministration of the word and ordinances soon became visible, and the solemn concern of many in the college for the salvation of their souls could no longer be concealed. Seriousness became almost universal in the members of the institution, and inhabitants of the town. It commenced in August. In September and October twenty-seven students professed to have obtained a hope of the pardon of their sins, and about the same number of persons who resided in Athens and its vicinity; all of whom I think attached themselves to some church. The succeeding year continued to be visited with cheering tokens of the Divine presence and blessing, not only in the college and Athens, where the revival commenced, but the attention to religion diffused itself, if I may so speak, to and through all the adjacent counties, and many more remote parts of the State. Its effects were soon felt in the different congregations of which Hopewell Presbytery consists, as well as those in the Baptist and Methodist denominations. During this revival there was no disorder or unusual noise in any of our

religious meetings, notwithstanding numbers were known to be under pungent convictions and deep distress of mind.

To genuine revivals of religion every true minister and faithful follower of Jesus Christ must be a friend. The most proper and promising means that man can use to produce and promote a revival, I conceive to be frequent and fervent prayer on the part of ministers, elders and professors in their closets, in the sanctuary, and in social meetings, consisting of smaller numbers of professing Christians. Ministers should insist often and earnestly on the nature and necessity of regeneration founded on the entire depravity of human nature—the absolute necessity of an interest in Christ's righteousness by an humble, appropriating faith, and of the quickening, enlightening and sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit to work in the soul, both to will and to do, of God's good pleasure. To insist upon and urge these topics upon the attention of his hearers, should be the evangelist's great employment in the pulpit; and afterwards to be undeniably importunate in imploring the blessing of *Him who alone can give the increase*, upon his labors. This blessing should be sought daily in his closet. To converse privately with his hearers on experimental religion is a duty, to the neglect of which the want of ministerial usefulness and success is often attributable. Those pastors who have been most attentive to this duty, as far as my observation has extended, have been the most wise in winning souls to Christ: and what is a revival of religion but a season of gathering souls into the Ark of safety?

Family visitation is also another most important duty of a minister whose heart's desire is to see the pleasure of the Lord prosper in his hand. On such occasions, personal interviews with the individuals composing the household, I have generally thought to be most useful. A general exhortation to the family, concluding always with social prayer in their behalf, is indispensable. Such visits endear the pastor, and inspire confidence in his ministrations and concern for their spiritual interest.

Prayer for God's blessing on his word and ordinances, and frequent conversation on the experimental exercises of their souls in matters of religion with the members of the congregation and others, when opportunity is afforded, together with such cautions and counsel as may appear necessary, are also duties incumbent

on ruling elders who desire to see religion revive among them, and *the pleasure of the Lord to prosper in their hands.*

With respect to the manner of conducting a religious revival after it has pleased God to commence one, I have witnessed various methods, some of a more public, others of a more private nature; but I have observed when I visited and conversed with persons privately who were anxious for their souls, they appeared more unreserved in the statement of the exercises of their minds than when surrounded by a number of others, besides the elders of the church. I have thought that some persons whom I have seen attaching themselves to the church had been too easily and hastily admitted.

May the blissful period speedily arrive, when “the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters fill and cover the sea”—“when the righteousness of Zion shall go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth,” is the prayer, I doubt not, of yourself, and of

Your friend and

Fellow laborer in the Gospel,

MOSES WADDEL.

REV. W. B. SPRAGUE, D. D.