

REVIVALS IN THE HIGHLANDS
AND ISLANDS
IN THE
19th CENTURY

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PREFACE

FOR a number of years I have been searching and reading accounts of revivals of religion in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and, as I became gradually acquainted with the mighty works of God in these regions, my sense of gratitude for the numerous manifestations of the power of grace steadily increased, as did also my amazement and regret that the records of His mighty acts were not better known among the people. Considering the deep interest that is happily taken in the Lord's work in our time, and knowing that the reading of narratives of revivals elsewhere was the immediate occasion of those at Kilsyth (1839), Latheron and Wick (1859), and other places, I resolved to give to the public, in volume form, authentic and graphic narratives of thrilling scenes of some of the most interesting revivals that have taken place during the 19th century, hoping that their circulation may, to some extent, be used by the Holy Spirit to awaken, quicken, and deepen the spiritual life of their readers.

While I do not claim that this volume reports all the revivals that have taken place in the Highlands and Islands, I do claim that the reports here given are authentic and representative. I have added two chapters, giving brief sketches of revivals in the 18th and 20th centuries.

I desire to record my most grateful thanks to the Rev. J. S. Macphail, of Benbecula, who gave me his extensive and valuable M.S. notes, and whose account of revivals in Skye is given *verbatim* (see pp. 45-49); also to the Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D., Edinburgh,

Rev. John MacKay, M.A., Crombagh, the Rev. Kenneth Macleod, M.A., Kincardine, and others, who gave me access to rare books and other sources of information.

Everything of a controversial or sectarian nature has been carefully excluded, my desire being that the fires of sectarianism should die out, and that the devout hearts of the Highland people should be made to glow again with the holy flame of the Divine Love.

ALEXANDER MACRAE

CREICH, ARDGAY.

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*“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out My Spirit upon all
flesh; and your sons and your
daughters shall prophesy, your old
men shall dream dreams, your young
men shall see visions: and also upon
the servants and upon the handmaids
in those days will I pour out My Spirit.”*

Joel II., 28-29.

. *“That is that”*

Acts II., 16.

INTRODUCTION

THE Church of Christ in the world is sustained by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in active operation. While the different visible organisations vary in type according to the plan of tradition, or of the New Testament Scriptures, the Operations of the Spirit are not confined to any particular organisation. He may reasonably be expected, however, to act most graciously, effectually, and continuously in that Church which is built most strictly after the New Testament plan, and which most highly honours and exalts the Saviour and His Word. "From one point of view, and that not the least important," writes Principal Lindsay,* "the history of the Church flows on from one time of revival to another, and, whether we take the awakenings in the Old Catholic, the mediaeval, or the modern Church, these have always been the work of men specially gifted with the power of seeing and declaring the secrets of the deepest Christian life, and the effect of their work has always been proportionate to the spiritual receptivity of the generation they have spoken to."

So far as the Highlands are concerned, the question of organisation may be left untouched, for the Highland people have, with all but entire unanimity, adopted Presbyterianism as being, in their view, most in accordance with the New Testament Church. Yet Congregationalists, Baptists, and others, as well as

* *The Church and the Ministry in the early Centuries*, pp. 71-72.

Presbyterians, have experienced powerful revival movements even in the Highlands. In Kintyre, Breadalbane, Skye, and Caithness, the first revivals on record took place under the preaching of the Haldanes and their evangelists; while in Tiree and elsewhere a work of grace, that spread to all denominations, began among the Baptists. No one familiar with the history and progress of religion in the Highlands and Islands can fail to see how “the history of the Church flows on from one time of revival to another,” and how a revival in one part of the country affects another.

The awakenings that took place throughout the north, almost simultaneously, in districts far removed from one another, during the first two decades of the century, did more for the moral and intellectual development of the people than it is possible now to compute. With the exception of the districts of Moray, Easter Ross, and Sutherland, the land was held in the deadening grip of the black frost of moderatism. With two or three conspicuous exceptions every pulpit, from Mull of Kintyre to Cape Wrath along the western shores, and every pulpit in the islands, without exception, was without the light of the living gospel of the grace of God at the close of the 18th century. The philosophic unbelief of that age, led by Hume in Scotland, dominated the theological schools, and banished the living Christ from the pulpits of the land. The candidates for the ministry were the sons of landed proprietors and large farmers who, as a matter of course, enjoyed the privileges of a university education, and who, at the close of the arts curriculum, had to choose, for their future career, between a *living* in the Kirk and a *billet* in the army. If the Church was chosen, it was always understood that a relative or influential

friend was the patron of two or more rich livings. It thus happened that the west coast and the islands generally, where the patrons were not noted for their protestantism or their piety, had ministers presented to the livings who were in all respects like their patrons; while in Sutherland, Easter Ross, and Moray, where the landed gentry were, on the whole, zealous and pious Protestants, evangelical and zealous ministers were settled among the people. Hence arose the difference so evident in the religious condition of the east coast from that of the west coast at the close of the 18th century. It is noteworthy, in these circumstances, that the first and the greatest revivals, during the period under review, took place in districts that had hitherto been under the deadening influence of moderatism. The sun shone on those districts, the frost yielded, fresh life burst forth, and the land that was desolate became like the Garden of Eden. East and west were made one in the possession of a common Christian life and experience. It was by the influence of one revival of religion after another that moderatism was gently thawed out. The moral improvement of the districts affected was immediate and conspicuous. Immorality, drunkenness, profanity, Sabbath-breaking, and other forms of sin, practically disappeared from the life of communities for longer or shorter periods after a revival movement. Ministers and others, who had no sympathy with revivals, have left written acknowledgments of the improved character of the people after a revival. A Skye minister, writing in 1817, after the first great Skye revival, severely criticised the movement and those who took part in it; yet he was forced to acknowledge that "some of both sexes, who were before of abandoned lives, came, at that time, under serious impressions of religion which have ever since remained undefaced;

and to this day they continue patterns of piety, of zeal, and devotedness to God." This man is well known to have lived and died a moderate. Indeed, a vast, an almost incredible, change for the better has taken place in the religious, moral, and social life and thought of the Highland people during the century, and that change can be attributed in the first place, to the revivals of religion described in this volume, and to the intellectual awakening that accompanied and followed those movements. It is only necessary to read the accounts here given to feel and to appreciate how extensive, and how gracious, the change has been.

Intellectually the results of a revival are not so immediately apparent as the moral results; yet they are in many respects more interesting and more permanent. It is a striking fact that the children and the grandchildren of people brought to Christ in a great spiritual movement rise to prominence in literature, philosophy, science or art, as well as in theology. There are people (whose names could be mentioned) occupying prominent positions in the high places of the social and intellectual world of today who owe their place and influence to the conversion and consecrated lives of their grandparents and parents. It is also the case that spiritual and intellectual revival take place together. The Spirit of God quickens the whole life. In the Highlands some of the most gracious movements that took place were the direct result of an intellectual awakening. The publication of the Scriptures in the Gaelic language in 1807, and the circulation of them among the people, followed by the Christ-like exertions of the Gaelic School Society, created a genuine revival in Skye, Lewis, and other places. Both intellectually and spiritually the Highland people owe more to that Society than it is possible for them ever to appreciate.