

# The Commoner

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## BILLY SUNDAY AND HIS WORK

[The six articles given below were written by Mr. Bryan for the Boston Record during the Sunday meetings there and are republished in The Commoner by courtesy of that paper.—Ed.]

### WHY REVIVALS?

Is the revival needed? Yes; and needed most where the opposition to the revival is greatest. If every Christian lived up to his privileges all the time the season of special effort might not be required, but that day has not yet arrived; hence, the almost universal approval of the revival by those most thoroughly interested in the propagation of the Christian religion.

The revival has several advantages, among which three may be named as important.

First, it is an occasion which can be utilized for the awakening of the church membership. That is the first good effect noticeable. The attendance at prayer meeting increases; business and worldly cares which have been allowed to engross the attention and employ the time are pushed aside and the spiritual impulses reassert themselves. The Christian who hibernates when the religious temperature is low is quickened into new life by the warmth and glow of the revival. This, in itself, would justify the revival, even if no new converts were made. The revival ordinarily pays for itself in the greater activity which is aroused among professing Christians, with the accompanying progress toward individual consecration.

But it is impossible to stir the church to activity without practical results in the way of additions. To the children of the church, who, though reared under religious instruction, have not yet taken a stand for Christ, the revival furnishes the added impulse needed to bring them to a decision. This is an advantage which can not be easily overestimated, for the church relies largely upon the children of its members

for the continuation of its numbers. The child, boy or girl, who reaches maturity without identification with the church organization is harder to reach in after years, for the very reason that early importunities were resisted. Mr. Sunday's powerful sermon to the high school students Saturday night gladdened the hearts of a thousand parents by bringing the children within the fold.

The successful revival does more than awaken the members; it does more than gather in the children of the members; it reaches a larger circle and adds to the list of professing Christians many who have wandered away from the teachings of childhood and others who are brought for the first time to understand their need of the Saviour.

The second advantage of the revival is to bring into the community a new religious force, an expert, so to speak, in the presentation of the Gospel. The revivalist occupies a distinct place in the work of the church. By devoting himself to this particular line of effort, he acquires an experience and an effectiveness which seldom characterize those who are compelled to distribute their energies over all forms of pastoral work. The preacher who Sunday after Sunday addresses the same congregation, and who between times responds to the multitudinous calls made upon the shepherd of a flock, is rarely able to conduct a revival in his own church as successfully as a new man who specializes in evangelistic work.

The interdenominational revival, and most of the large revivals are now undenominational, has a third effect, which is not inconsiderable. It tends to bring the churches into co-operation, and this is always a gain. The various branches of the Christian church are much nearer together today than they were a half century ago, and the interdenominational revival is, in part, responsible for this more friendly attitude. It does not necessitate a surrender of creed or of any distinctive church doctrine, and it does not contemplate any future organic union. It is simply proof of an increase in the spirit of brotherhood, and of a more harmonious co-operation in the urging of the essentials upon which all the churches are built.

The revival comes in response to a need—a real need. It is a legitimate instrumentality of the church, and its use is likely to increase rather than diminish. While it is evidence of a zeal already growing, it is the cause of still further widening and deepening of the channel which is to carry spiritual enthusiasm from this to future generations.

### METHODS AND LANGUAGE

Billy Sunday's critics are quite unanimous in condemning his methods as dramatic and his

language as undignified. As to the correctness of the first charge there is no doubt. He is dramatic. No other evangelist has approached him in the completeness with which he "suits the action to the word." He needs a whole stage—and a large one, too. No "pent up Utica" will suffice him for a platform, and it needs to be as big up and down as from side to side. He not only paces from one end of the platform to the other, but he often climbs on top of the pulpit, and sometimes he lies down on the floor. He tries to keep within reaching distances of his rising climaxes, and when he is looking into the abode of Satan he gets as close to the lower regions as the platform will permit.

But why should his dramatic manner be counted as a fault? What are gestures for if not to emphasize a point? And who is in position to set bounds to the gesture? It may not be scholarly to gesticulate violently. If so, those who are more anxious to be scholarly than to be effective will avoid anything that seems too emotional.

But Mr. Sunday is not dealing with the head alone; he often addresses himself to the mind, and the scholar will find many splendid pieces of literature in his sermons; but his aim is to reach the heart, for "out of the heart are the issues of life." He is justified in swinging his arms, his legs, or his whole body, if by so doing he can drive home the appeal which he is making—and does he not do this very thing?

No two speakers are alike, and no speaker can successfully imitate another. Each man must be himself.

Nature has her cyclones, her deafening thunder, her blinding lightning, her belching volcanoes and her earthquakes. Sunday is a natural sort of a man; why should those who imitate the gentle zephyr find fault with him because the hurricane is more to his liking? The fact that he patterns after the more violent man-

### CONTENTS

BILLY SUNDAY AND HIS WORK TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
FULL FED FATNESS
A DRY NATION IN FOUR YEARS
THE LESSON IN INDIANA
THE PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL MESSAGE
ELECTION POSTSCRIPT
PROHIBITION IN 1920
GENEROUS EXPRESSIONS FROM FRIENDS
NEWSPAPER COMMENTS ON THE 1916 ELECTION
MR. BRYAN'S PART IN THE CAMPAIGN FOUR YEAR CAMPAIGN TO MAKE NATION DRY

The Commoner  
wishes a  
**Merry Christmas**  
and a  
**Happy New Year**  
to Everyone, Every-  
where, and For-  
ever.