

The Great Revival of Religion, 1740-1745

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

THE great revival, which about a hundred years ago visited so extensively the American churches, is so much implicated with the ecclesiastical history of our own denomination, that the latter cannot be understood without some knowledge of the former. The controversies connected with the revival are identical with the disputes which resulted in the schism which divided the Presbyterian Church in 1741. Before entering, therefore, upon the history of that event, it will be necessary to present the reader with a general survey of that great religious excitement, which arrayed in conflicting parties the friends of religion in every part of the country. This division of sentiment could hardly have occurred, had the revival been one of unmingled purity. Such a revival, however, the church has never seen. Every luminous body is sure to cause shadows in every direction and of every form. Where the Son of man sows wheat, the evil one is sure to sow tares. It must be so. For it needs be that offences come, though woe to those by whom they come.

The men who, either from their character or circumstances, are led to take the most prominent part, during such seasons of excitement, are themselves often carried to extremes, or are so connected with the extravagant, that they are sometimes the last to perceive and the slowest to oppose the evils which so frequently mar the work of God, and burn over the fields which he had just watered with his grace. Opposition to these evils commonly comes from a different quarter; from wise and good men who have been kept out of the focus of the excitement. And it is well that there are such opposers, else the church would soon be over-run with fanaticism.

The term "revival" is commonly used in a very comprehensive sense. It includes all the phenomena attending a general religious excitement; as well those which spring from God, as those which owe their origin to the infirmities of men. Hence those who favour the work, for what there is divine in it, are often injuriously regarded as the patrons of its concomitant irregularities, and those who oppose what is unreasonable about it, are as improperly denounced as the enemies of religion. It is, therefore, only one expression of that fanaticism which haunts the spirit of revivals, to make such a work a touchstone of character; to regard all as good who favour it, and all as bad who oppose it. That this should be done during the continuance of the excitement, is an evil to be expected and pardoned; but to commit the same error in the historical review of such a period, would admit of no excuse

That the state of religion did rapidly decline after the revival, we have abundant and melancholy evidence. Even as early as [March] 1744, President Edwards says, "the present state of things in New England is, on many accounts, very melancholy. There is a vast alteration within two years." God, he adds, was provoked at the spiritual pride and self-confidence of the people, and withdrew from them, and "the enemy has come in like a flood in various respects, until the deluge has overwhelmed the whole land. There had been from the beginning a great mixture, especially in some places, of false experiences and false religion with true; but from this time the mixture became much greater, and many were led away into sad delusions." In another letter, dated May 23, 1749, he says, "as to the state of religion in these parts of the world, it is, in general, very dark and melancholy." In the preceding October, when writing to Mr. Erskine of Edinburgh, he communicates to him an extract from a letter to himself, from Governor Belcher of New Jersey, who says, "The accounts which I receive from time to time, give me too much reason to fear that Arminianism, Arianism, and even Socinianism, in destruction to the doctrines of grace, are daily propagated in the New England colleges." In 1750, he writes to Mr. McCulloch in the following melancholy strain: "It is indeed now a so now full time on this side of the ocean. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. Multitudes of fair and high professors, in one place or another, have sadly back-slidden, sinners are desperately hardened; experimental religion is more than ever out of credit with far the greater part; and the doctrines of grace and those principles in religion which do chiefly concern the power of godliness, are far more than ever discarded. Arminianism and Pelagianism have made a strange progress within a few years. The Church of England in New England, is, I suppose treble what it was seven years ago. Many professors are gone off to great lengths in enthusiasm and extravagance in their notions and practices. Great contentions, separations, and confusions in our religious state prevail in many parts of the land." In 1752, in a letter to Mr. Gillespie, relating to his difficulties with his congregation, he says, 'it is to be considered that these things have happened when God is greatly withdrawn, and religion was very low, not only in Northampton, but all over New England." The church in Stonington, Connecticut, was torn to pieces by fanaticism, and a separate congregation erected. The excellent pastor of that place, the Rev. Mr. Fish, a warm friend of the revival, exerted himself in vain to stem the torrent; "and other ministers," he says, "that came to our help carried on the same design of connecting the false notions which new converts had embraced about religion; particularly the late judicious and excellent Mr. David Brainerd, who, in this desk, exposed and remonstrated against the same errors, and told me that such false religion as prevailed among my people, had spread almost all the land over."

Somewhat later, President Clap found it necessary, on account of the increasing prevalence of error, to write a formal defence of the doctrines of the New England

churches. The leading features of the new divinity, of which he complained, were, 1. That the happiness of the creature is the great end of creation. 2. That self-love is the ultimate foundation of all moral obligation. 3. That God cannot control the acts of free agents. 4. That he cannot certainly foreknow, much less decree such acts. 5. That all sin consists in the voluntary transgression of known law; that Adam was not created in a state of holiness, but only had a power to act virtuously; and every man is now born into the world in as perfect a state of rectitude as that in which Adam was created. 6. The actions of moral agents are not free, and consequently have no moral character, unless such agents have plenary ability and full power to the contrary. Hence it is absurd to suppose that God should implant grace or holiness in any man, or keep him from sin. 7. Christ did not die to make satisfaction for sin, and hence there is no need to suppose him to be essentially God, but only a perfect and glorious creature. No great weight ought to be laid upon men's believing Christ's divinity, or any of those speculative points which have been generally received as the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of the gospel; but we ought to have charity for all men, let their speculative principles be what they may, provided they lead moral lives. These doctrines were a great advance of the Arminian or even Pelagian errors over which President Edwards lamented, and show what might indeed be expected, that the churches had gone from bad to worse.

This is certainly a gloomy picture of the state of religion so soon after a revival, regarded as the most extensive the country had ever known. It is drawn not by the enemies, but in a great measure by the best and wisest friends of religion.

This low state of religion, and extensive departure from the truth, in that part of the country where the revival had been most extensive, is certainly *prima facie* proof that there must have been something very wrong in the revival itself. It may, however, be said, that the decay of religion through the land generally, is perfectly consistent with the purity of the revival and the flourishing state of those particular churches which had experienced its influence. The facts of the case, unfortunately, do not allow us the benefit of this assumption. It is no doubt true, that in some congregations... religion was in a very desirable state, in the midst of the general decline; but it is no less certain, that in many instances, in the very places where the revival was the most remarkable, the declension was the most serious. Northampton itself may be taken as an illustration. "That church was pre-eminently a city set upon a hill. Mr. Stoddard, during a remarkably successful ministry, had drawn the attention of American Christians for fifty-seven years. He had also been advantageously known in the mother country. Mr. Edwards had been their minister for twenty-three years. In the respect paid to him as a profound theological writer, he had no competitor from the first establishment of the colonies, and even then, could scarcely find one in England or Scotland. He had also as high a reputation for elevated and fervent piety as for superiority of

talents. During the preceding eighty years, that church had been favoured with more numerous and powerful revivals than any church in Christendom." This account, though given in the characteristically large style of Edwards's biographer, is no doubt in the main correct. Here then, if any where, we might look for the most favourable results of the revival. During the religious excitement in the years 1734 and 1735, within six months, more than three hundred persons, whom Edwards regarded as true converts, were received into the church. In 1736, the whole number of communicants was six hundred and twenty, including almost the whole adult population of the town. The revival of 1740-2, was considered still more pure and wonderful. What was the state of religion in this highly favoured place, soon after all these revivals? In the judgment of Edwards himself it was deplorably low, both as to Christian temper and adherence to sound doctrine. In 1744, when an attempt was made to administer discipline somewhat injudiciously, it is true, as to the manner of doing it, it was strenuously resisted. The whole town was thrown into a blaze. Some of the accused "refused to appear; others, who did appear, behaved with a great degree of insolence, and contempt for the authority of the church, and little or nothing could be done further in the affair." From 1744 to 1748, not a single application was made for admission to the church. In 1749, when it became known that Edwards had adopted the opinion that none ought to be admitted to the Lord's Supper but such as gave satisfactory evidence of conversion, "the town was put into a great ferment; and before he was heard in his own defence, or it was known by many what his principles were, the general cry was to have him dismissed." That diversity of opinion between a pastor and his people on such a practical point, should lead to a desire for a separation, might not be very discreditable to either party. But when it is known that on this occasion the church treated such a man as Edwards, who not only was an object of veneration to the Christian public, but who behaved in the most Christian manner through the whole controversy, with the greatest injustice and malignity, it must be regarded as proof positive of the low state of religion among them. They refused to allow him to preach on the subject in dispute; they pertinaciously resisted the calling of a fair council to decide the matter; they insisted on his dismissal without making any provision for his expensive family; and when his dismissal had taken place, they shut their pulpit against him, even when they had no one else to occupy it. On the unfounded suspicion that he intended to form a new church in the town, they presented a remonstrance containing direct, grievous, and criminal charges against him, which were really gross slanders. This was not the offence of a few individuals. Almost the whole church took part against Edwards. Such treatment of such a man certainly proves a lamentable state of religion, as far as Christian temper is concerned. With regard to orthodoxy the case was not much better. Edwards in a letter to Erskine, in 1750, says, there seemed to be the utmost danger that the younger generation in Northampton would be carried away with Arminianism as with a flood; that it was not likely that the church would choose a Calvinist as his successor, and that the older people were never so indifferent to things of this nature.

The explanation which has been proposed of these extraordinary facts, is altogether

unsatisfactory. It is said that the custom which had long prevailed in Northampton, of admitting those to the Lord's Supper who gave no sufficient evidence of conversion, sufficiently accounts for all this ill conduct on the part of the church. But where were the three hundred members whom Edwards regarded as "savingly brought home to Christ," within six months, during the revival of 1734-5? Where were all the fruits of the still more powerful revival of 1740-42? The vast majority of the members of the church had been brought in by Edwards himself, and of their conversion he considered himself as having sufficient evidence. The habit of free admission to the Lord's table, therefore, by no means accounts for the painful facts above referred to. After all that had been published to the world of the power of religion in Northampton, the Christian public were entitled to expect to see the people established in the truth, and an example in holiness to other churches. Instead of this, we find them resisting the administration of discipline in less than eighteen months after the revival; alienated from their pastor; indifferent to the truth, and soon driving from among them the first minister of his age, with every aggravating circumstance of ingratitude and injustice.

It is all in vain to talk of the religion of such a people. This fact demonstrates that there must have been something wrong in these revivals, even under the eye and guidance of Edwards, from the beginning. There must have been many spurious conversions, and much false religion which at the time were regarded as genuine. This assumption is nothing more than the facts demand, nor more than Edwards himself frequently acknowledged. There is the most marked difference between those of his writings which were published during the revival, and those which appeared after the excitement had subsided. In the account which he wrote in 1736, of the revival of the two preceding years, there is scarcely an intimation of any dissatisfaction with its character. Yet, in 1751, he speaks of it as having been very far from pure; and in 1751, he lamented his not having had boldness to testify against some glaring false appearances, and counterfeits of religion, which became a dreadful source of spiritual pride, and of other things exceedingly contrary to true Christianity. In like manner, in the contemporaneous account of the revival of 1740-42, he complains of nothing but of some disorders introduced towards the close of the year 1742, from other congregations; whereas, in his letters written a few years later, he acknowledges that many things were wrong from the first. This is, indeed, very natural. While in the midst of the excitement, seeing and feeling much that he could not but regard as the result of divine influence, he was led to encourage many things which soon brought forth the bitter fruits of disorder and corruption. His correspondence affords abundant evidence how fully sensible he became of the extent to which this revival was corrupted with false religion. When his Scottish friends had informed him of the religious excitement then prevailing in some parts of Holland, he wrote to Mr. Erskine, June 28, 1751, expressing his anxiety that the people might be led to "distinguish between true and false religion; between those experiences which are from the saving influence of the Spirit of God, and those which are from Satan transformed into an angel of light." He wished that they had the experience of the church of God in America, on this subject, as they would need all the

warning that could be given them. "The temptation," he adds, "to religious people in such a state to countenance the glaring, shining counterfeits of religion, without distinguishing them from the reality," is so strong that they can hardly be restrained from committing the mistake. In reference to the wish of the Dutch ministers to have attestations of the permanently good effects of the revivals in Scotland and America, he says, "I think it fit they should know the very truth in the case, and that things should be represented neither better nor worse than they are. If they should be represented worse, it would give encouragement to unreasonable opposers; if better it might prevent a most necessary caution among the true friends of the awakening. There are, undoubtedly, very many instances in New England, in the whole, of the perseverance of such as were thought to have received the saving benefit of the late revivals of religion, and of their continuing to walk in newness of life as becometh saints; instances which are incontestable. But I believe the proportion here is not so great as in Scotland. I cannot say that the greater portion of the supposed converts give reason to suppose, by their conversation, that they are true converts. The proportion may, perhaps, be more truly represented by the proportion of the blossoms on a tree which abide and come to mature fruit, to the whole number of blossoms in the spring."...

These passages give a melancholy account of the results of the great religious excitement now under consideration. In the preceding estimate, Edwards does not speak of those who were merely awakened, or who were for a time the subjects of serious impressions, but of those who were regarded as converts. It is of these, he says, that only a small portion proved to be genuine. If this be so, it certainly proves that, apart from the errors and disorders universally reprobated by the judicious friends of the revival, there were serious mistakes committed by those friends themselves. If it was difficult then, it must be much more so now, to detect the causes of the spurious excitement which then so extensively prevailed. Two of these causes, however, are so obvious that they can hardly fail to attract attention. These were laying too much stress on feelings excited through the imagination, and allowing, and indeed encouraging the free and loud manifestation of feeling during public or social worship.

It is one office of the imagination to recall and reconstruct conceptions of any object which affects the senses. It is by this faculty that we form mental images, or lively conceptions of the objects of sense. It is to this power that graphic descriptions of absent or imaginary scenes are addressed; and it is by the agency of this faculty that oratory, for the most part, exerts its power over the feelings. That a very large portion of the emotions so strongly felt, and so openly expressed during this revival, arose not from spiritual apprehensions of divine truth, but from mere imaginations or mental images, is evident from two sources; first, from the descriptions given of the exercises themselves; and, secondly, from the avowal of the propriety of this method of exciting feeling in connection with religious subjects. Had we no definite information as to this point, the general account of the effects of the preaching of Whitefield and others would satisfy us that, to a very great extent, the results were to be attributed to no supernatural influence, but to the natural

powers of oratory. There is no subject so universally interesting as religion, and therefore there is none which can be made the cause of such general and powerful excitement; yet it cannot be doubted that had Whitefield selected any worthy object of benevolence or patriotism, he would have produced a great commotion in the public mind. When therefore he came to address men on a subject of infinite importance, of the deepest personal concern, we need not be surprised at the effects which he produced. The man who could thaw the icy propriety of Bolingbroke; who could extort gold from Franklin, though armed with a determination to give only copper; or set

Hopkinson, for the time being, beside himself; might be expected to control at will the passions of the young, the ignorant, and the excitable. It was far from being denied or questioned that his preaching was, to an extraordinary degree, attended by a divine influence. That influence is needed to account for the repentance, faith, and holiness, which were in a multitude of cases the result of his ministrations. It is not needed, however, to account for the loud outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations which attended his course. These are sufficiently explained by his vivid descriptions of hell, of Heaven, of Christ, and a future judgment, addressed to congregated thousands of excited and sympathizing hearers, accompanied by the most stirring appeals to the passions, and all delivered with consummate skill of voice and manner. It was under such preaching, the people, as he tells us, soon began to melt, to weep, to cry out, and to faint. That a large part of these results was to be attributed to natural causes, can hardly be doubted; yet who could discriminate between what was the work of the orator, and what was the work of the Spirit of God? Who could tell whether the sorrow, the joy, and the love expressed and felt, were the result of lively imaginations, or of spiritual apprehensions of the truth? The two classes of exercises were confounded; both passed for genuine, until bitter experience disclosed the mistake. It is evident that Whitefield had no opportunity of making any such discrimination; and that for the time at least, he regarded all meltings, all sorrowing, and all joy following his fervid preaching, as evidence of the divine presence. It is not, however, these general accounts so much as the more particular detail of the exercises of the subjects of this revival, which shows how much of the feeling then prevalent was due to the imagination. Thus Edwards speaks of those who had a lively picture in their minds of hell as a dreadful furnace, of Christ as one of glorious majesty, and of a sweet and gracious aspect, or as of one hanging on the cross, and blood running from his wounds. Great stress was often laid upon these views of "an outward Christ," and upon the feeling resulting from such conceptions. Though Edwards was from the beginning fully aware that there was no true religion in such exercises; and though in his work on the Affections, written in 1746, he enters largely on the danger of delusion from this source, it is very evident that at this period he was not properly impressed with a sense of guarding against this evil. Just after stating how commonly such mental pictures were cherished by the people, he adds, "surely such things will not be wondered at by those who have observed, how any strong affections about temporal matters will excite lively ideas and pictures of different things in the mind." In his sermon on the distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God, he goes much further. He there says, "Such is our nature, that we cannot think

of things invisible without some degree of imagination. I dare appeal to any man of the greatest powers of mind, whether he is able to fix his thoughts on God, or Christ, or the things of another world without imaginary ideas attending his meditation." By imaginary ideas, he means mental images, or pictures. In the same connection, he adds, "the more engaged the mind is, and the more intense the contemplation and affection, still the more lively and strong will the imaginary idea ordinarily be." Hence, he insists, "that it is no argument that a work is not a work of the Spirit of God, that some who are the subjects of it, have been in a kind of ecstasy, wherein they have been carried beyond themselves, and have had their minds transported in a train of strong and pleasing imaginations, and a kind of visions, as though they were rapt up even to Heaven, and there saw glorious sights."

It is not to be denied that there is a legitimate use of the imagination in religion. The Bible often addresses itself to this faculty. The descriptions which it gives of the future glory of the church, and of Heaven itself, are little else than a series of images; not that we should conceive of the millennium as of a time when the lion and lamb shall feed together, or of Heaven as a golden city, but that we may have a more lively impression of the absence of all destructive passions, when Christ shall reign on Earth, and that we may learn to think of Heaven as a state of surpassing glory. In all such cases, it is the thought which the figure is meant to convey, and not the figure itself, that the mind rests upon in all truly religious exercises. When, on the other hand, the mind fixes on the image, and not upon the thought, and inflames itself with these imaginations, the result is mere curious excitement.

So far then as the imagination is used to render the thoughts which the understanding forms of spiritual things distinct and vivid, so far may it minister to our religious improvement. But when it is made a mere chamber of imagery, in which the soul alarms or delights itself with spectres, it becomes the source of all manner of delusions.

It may still further be admitted, that images borrowed from sensible objects often mix with and disturb the truly spiritual contemplation's of the Christian, but this is very different from teaching that we cannot think of God, or Christ, or spiritual subjects, without some pictorial representations of them. If such is the constitution of our nature that we must have such imaginary ideas of God himself then we ought to have and to cherish them. But by the definition, these ideas are nothing but the reproduction and varied combinations of past impressions on the senses. To say, therefore, that we must have such ideas of God, is to say that we must conceive of him and worship him under some corporeal form, which is nothing but refined idolatry, and is as much forbidden as the worship of stocks or stones. It certainly needs no argument to show that we cannot form any pictorial representation of a spirit, and least of all, of God; or that such representations of Christ or Heaven cannot be the source of any truly religious affections. What have such mental images to do with the apprehension of the evil of sin, of the beauty of holiness, of the mercy of God, or the merits of Christ, or with any of those truths on which the mind acts when

under the influence of the Spirit of God?

From the accounts of this revival already quoted, from the detail given of the experience of many of its subjects, and especially from the arguments and apologies just referred to, it is evident that one great source of the false religion, which it is admitted, then prevailed, was the countenance given to these impressions on the imagination and to the feelings thus excited. It was in vain to tell the people they must distinguish between what was imaginary and what was spiritual; that there was no religion in these lively mental images, when they were at the same time told that it was necessary they should have them, and that the more intense the religious affection, the more vivid would these pictures be. Under such instruction they would strive to form such imaginations; they would gloat on them, inflame themselves with them, and consider the vividness of the image, and the violence of the consequent emotion, as the measure of their religious attainment. How deeply sensible Edwards became of the evil which actually arose from this source, may be learned from his work on the Affections. When an "affection arises from the imagination, and is built upon it, as its foundation, instead of a spiritual illumination or discovery, then is the affection, however, elevated, worthless and vain." And in another place he says "When the Spirit of God is poured out, to begin a glorious work, then the old Serpent, as fast as possible, and by all means, introduces this bastard religion, and mingles it with the true; which has from time to time, brought all things into confusion. The pernicious consequence of it is not easily imagined or conceived of, until we see and are amazed with the awful effects of it, and the dismal desolation it has made. If the revival of true religion be very great in its beginning, yet if this bastard comes in, there is danger of its doing as Gideon's bastard, Abimelech, did, who never left until he had slain all his threescore and ten true-born sons, excepting one, that was forced to flee. The imagination or phantasy seems to be that wherein are formed all those delusions of Satan, which those are carried away with, who are under the influence of false religion, and counterfeit graces and affections. Here is the devil's grand lurking-place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits."

If Edwards, who was *facile princeps* among the friends of this revival, could, during its early stages, fall into the error of countenancing the delusions which he afterwards so severely condemned, what could be expected of Whitefield and others, who at this time, (dates must not be neglected, a few years made a great difference both in persons and things) passed rapidly from place to place, neither making nor being able to make, the least distinction between the effects of an excited imagination, and the exercises of genuine religion? That they would test the experience of their converts by its fruits, is not denied; but that they considered all the commotions which attended their ministrations, as proofs of the Spirit's presence, is evident from their indiscriminate rejoicing over all such manifestations of feeling. These violent agitations produced through the medium of the imagination, though sufficiently prevalent, during the revival in this country, were perhaps still more frequent in England, under the ministrations of Wesley, and, combined with certain peculiarities of his system, have given to the religion of the Methodists its peculiar, and, so

far as it is peculiar, its undesirable characteristic.

Another serious evil was the encouragement given to loud outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations during the time of public worship. It is remarkable that these effects of the excitement prevailed generally, not only in this country, but also in Scotland and England. The fanatical portion of the friends of the revival not only encouraged these exhibitions, but regarded them as proofs of the presence and power of the Spirit of God. The more judicious never went to this extreme, though most of them regarded them with favour. This was the case with Whitefield, Edwards, and Blair.

The manner in which Whitefield describes the scenes at Nottingham and Fagg's Manor, and others of a similar character, shows that he did not disapprove of these agitations. He says he never saw a more glorious sight, than when the people were fainting all round him, and crying out in such a manner as to drown his own voice. Edwards took them decidedly under his protection. He not only mentions, without the slightest indication of disapprobation, that his church was often filled with outcries, faintings, and convulsions, but takes great pains to vindicate the revival from all objection on that account. Though such effects were not, in his view, any decisive evidence of the kind of influence by which they were produced, he contended that it was easy to account for their being produced by a "right influence and a proper sense of things." He says, ministers are not to be blamed for speaking of these things "as probable tokens of God's presence, and arguments of the success of preaching, because I think they are so indeed. I confess that when I see a great outcry in a congregation, I rejoice in it much more than merely in an appearance of solemn attention, and a show of affection by weeping. To rejoice that the work of God is carried on calmly and without much ado, is in effect to rejoice that it is carried on with less power, or that there is not so much of the influence of God's Spirit." In the same connection he says, that when these outcries, faintings, and other bodily effects attended the preaching of the truth, he did not "scruple to speak of them, to rejoice in them, and bless God for them," as probable tokens of his presence.

The Boston ministers, on the other hand, appear to have disapproved of these things entirely, as they mention their satisfaction that there had been little or nothing of such "blemishes of the work" among their churches. The same view was taken of them by President Dickinson, William Tennent of Freehold, and many others.

That the fanatics, who regarded these bodily agitations and outcries as evidences of conversion, committed a great and dangerous mistake, need not be argued; and that Edwards and others, who rejoiced over and encouraged them, as probable tokens of the favour of God, fell into an error scarcely less injurious to religion, will, at the present day, hardly be questioned. That such effects frequently attend religious excitements is no proof that they proceed from a good source. They may owe their origin to the corrupt, or at least merely natural feelings, which always mingle, to a greater or less degree, with strong religious exercises. It is a matter of great practical importance

to learn what is the true cause of these effects; to ascertain whether they proceed from those feelings which are produced by the Spirit of God, or from those which arise from other sources. If the former, we ought to rejoice over them; if the latter, they ought to be repressed and discountenanced.

That such bodily agitations owe their origin not to any divine influence, but to natural causes, may be inferred from the fact that these latter are adequate to their production. They are not confined to those persons whose subsequent conduct proves them to be the subjects of the grace of God; but, to say the least, are quite as frequently experienced by those who know nothing of true religion. Instead, therefore, of being referred to those feelings which are peculiar to the people of God, they may safely be referred to those which are common to them and to unrenowned men. Besides, such effects are not peculiar to what we call revivals of religion; they have prevailed, in seasons of general excitement, in all ages and in all parts of the world, among pagans, papists, and every sect of fanatics which has ever disgraced the Christian church. We are, therefore, not called upon to regard such things with much favour, or to look upon them as probable tokens of the presence of God.

That such bodily agitations owe their origin not to any divine influence, but to natural causes, may be inferred from the fact that these latter are adequate to their production. They are not confined to those persons whose subsequent conduct proves them to be the subjects of the grace of God; but, to say the least, are quite as frequently experienced by those who know nothing of true religion. Instead, therefore, of being referred to those feelings which are peculiar to the people of God, they may safely be referred to those which are common to them and to unrenowned men. Besides, such effects are not peculiar to what we call revivals of religion; they have prevailed, in seasons of general excitement, in all ages and in all parts of the world, among pagans, papists, and every sect of fanatics which has ever disgraced the Christian church. We are, therefore, not called upon to regard such things with much favour, or to look upon them as probable tokens of the presence of God. That the bodily agitations attendant on revivals of religion are of the same nature, and attributable to the same cause, as the convulsions of enthusiasts, is in the highest degree probable, because they arise under the same circumstances, are propagated by the same means, and cured by the same treatment. They arise in seasons of great, and especially of general excitement; they, in a great majority of cases, affect the ignorant rather than the enlightened, those in whom the imagination predominates over the reason, and especially those who are of a nervous temperament, rather than those of an opposite character. These affections all propagate themselves by a kind of infection. This circumstance is characteristic of this whole class of nervous diseases. Physicians enumerate among the causes of epilepsy "seeing a person in convulsions." This fact was so well known, that the Romans made a law, that if any one should be seized with epilepsy during the meeting of the comitia, the assembly should be immediately dissolved. This disease occurred so frequently in those exciting meetings, and was propagated so rapidly, that it

was called the *morbus comitialis*. Among the enthusiasts who frequented the tomb of the Abbe Paris, in the early part of the last century, convulsions were of frequent occurrence, and never failed to prove infectious. During a religious celebration in the church of Saint Roch, at Paris, a young lady was seized with convulsions, and within half an hour between fifty and sixty were similarly affected. A multitude of facts of the same kind might be adduced. Sometimes such affections become epidemic, spreading over whole provinces. In the fifteenth century, a violent nervous disease, attended with convulsions, and other analogous symptoms, extended over a great part of Germany, especially affecting the inmates of the convents. In the next century something of the same kind prevailed extensively in the south of France. These affections were then regarded as the result of demoniacal possessions, and in some instances, multitudes of poor creatures were put to death as demoniacs.

The bodily agitations attending the revival, were in like manner propagated by infection. On their first appearance in Northampton, a few persons were seized at an evening meeting, and while others looked on they soon became similarly affected; even those who appear to have come merely out of curiosity did not escape. The same thing was observable at Nottingham, Fagg's Manor, and other places, under the preaching of Whitefield. It was no less obvious in Scotland. It was exceedingly rare for any one to be thus affected in private; but in the public meetings, when one person was seized, others soon caught the infection. In England, where these affections were regarded at least at first, by Wesley, as coming from God, and proofs of his favour, they were very violent, and spread with great rapidity, seizing, at times, upon opposers as well as friends. Thus on one occasion, it is stated, that a Quaker who was present at one meeting, and inveighed against what he called the dissimulation of these creatures, caught the contagious emotion himself, and even while he was biting his lips and knitting his brows, dropt down as if he had been struck by lightning. "The agony he was in," says Wesley, "was even terrible to behold; we besought God not to lay folly to his charge, and he soon lifted up his head and cried aloud, 'Now I know thou art a prophet of the Lord.' " On another occasion, under the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Berridge, a man who had been mocking and mimicking others in their convulsions, was himself seized. "He was," says the narrator, "the most horrible human figure I ever saw. His large wig and hair were coal-black, his face distorted beyond all description. He roared incessantly, throwing and clapping his hands together with his whole force. Some of his brother scoffers were calling for horsewhips, till they saw him extended on his back at full length; they then said he was dead; and indeed the only sign of life was the working of his breast, and the distortions of his face, while the veins of his neck were swelled as if ready to burst. His agonies lasted some hours; then his body and soul were eased." "At another meeting," he says, "a stranger who stood facing me, fell backward to the wall, then forward on his knees, wringing his hands and roaring like a bull. His face at first turned quite red, then almost black. He rose and ran against the wall, till Mr. Keeling and another held him. He screamed out, 'Oh! what shall I do! What shall I do! Oh, for one drop of the blood of Christ!' As he spoke, God set his soul at liberty; he knew his sins were blotted out; and the rapture he was in seemed too

great for human nature to bear." "One woman tore up the ground with her hands, filling them with dust and with the hard trodden grass, on which I saw her lie as one dead. Some continued long, as if they were dead, but with a calm sweetness in their looks. I saw one who lay two or three hours in the open air, and being then carried into the house, continued insensible another hour, as if actually dead. The first sign of life she showed, was a rapture of praise intermixed with a small joyous laughter." These accounts, however, must be read in detail, in order to have any adequate conception of the nature and extent of these dreadful nervous affections. Wesley at one time regarded them as direct intimations of the approbation of God. Preaching at Newgate, he says, he was led insensibly, and without any previous design, to declare strongly and explicitly, that God willed all men to be saved, and to pray that, if this was not the truth of God, he would not suffer the blind to go out of the way; but if it was, he would bear witness to his word. "Immediately one and another sunk to the Earth; they dropt on every side as thunderstruck. In the evening I was again pressed in spirit to declare that Christ gave himself a ransom for all. And almost before we called upon him to set to his seal, he answered. One was so wounded by the sword of the Spirit, that you would have imagined she could not live a moment. But immediately his abundant kindness was shown, and she loudly sang of his righteousness."

The various bodily exercises which attended the Western revivals in our own country, in the early part of the present century, were of the same nature, and obeyed precisely the same laws. They began with what was called the falling exercise; that is, the person affected would fall on the ground helpless as an infant. This was soon succeeded, in many places, by a species of convulsions called the jerks. Sometimes it would affect the whole body, jerking it violently from place to place, regardless of all obstacles; at others, a single limb would be thus agitated. When the neck was attacked, the head would be thrown backwards and forwards with the most fearful rapidity. There were various other forms in which this disease manifested itself, such as whirling, rolling, running, and jumping. These exercises were evidently involuntary. They were highly infectious, and spread rapidly from place to place; often seizing on mere spectators, and even upon those who abhorred and dreaded them.

Another characteristic of these affections, whether occurring among pagans, papists, or Protestants, and which goes to prove their identity, is, that they all yield to the same treatment. As they arise from impressions on the nervous system through the imagination, the remedy is addressed to the imagination. It consists in removing the exciting causes, that is, withdrawing the patient from the scenes and contemplations which produced the disease; or in making a strong counter-impression, either through fear, shame, or sense of duty. The possessions, as they were called, in the south of France, were put a stop to by the wisdom and firmness of certain bishops, who insisted on the separation and seclusion of all the affected. On another occasion, a strange nervous agitation, which had for some time, to the great scandal of religion, seized periodically on all the members of a convent, was arrested by the magistrates bringing up a company of soldiers,

and threatening with severe punishment the first who should manifest the least symptom of the affection. The same method has often been successfully resorted to. In like manner the convulsions attending revivals have been prevented or arrested by producing the conviction that they were wrong or disgraceful. They hardly ever appeared, or at least continued, where they were not approved and encouraged. In Northampton, where Edwards rejoiced over them, they were abundant; in Boston, where they were regarded as "blemishes," they had nothing of them. In Sutton, Massachusetts, they were "cautiously guarded against," and consequently never appeared, except among strangers from other congregations. Only two or three cases occurred in Elizabeth town, under President Dickinson, who considered them as "irregular heats," and those few were speedily regulated. There was nothing of the kind at Freehold, where William Tennent set his face against all such manifestations of enthusiasm. On the other hand, they followed Davenport and other fanatical preachers, almost wherever they went. In Scotland, they were less encouraged than they were here, and consequently prevailed less. In England, where Wesley regarded them as certainly from God, they were fearful both as to frequency and violence. The same thing was observed with regard to the agitations attending the Western revivals. The physician already quoted, says: "Restraint often prevents a paroxysm. For example, persons always attacked by this affection in churches where it is encouraged, will be perfectly calm in churches where it is discouraged, however affecting may be the service, and however great the mental excitement." It is also worthy of consideration that these bodily affections are of frequent occurrence at the present day, among those who continue to desire and encourage them.

It appears, then, that these nervous agitations are of frequent occurrence in all times of strong excitement. It matters little whether the excitement arise from superstition, fanaticism, or from the preaching of the truth. If the imagination be strongly affected, the nervous system is very apt to be deranged, and outcries, faintings, convulsions, and other hysterical symptoms, are the consequence. That these effects are of the same nature whatever may be the remote cause, is plain, because the phenomena are the same; the apparent circumstances of their origin the same; they all have the same infectious nature, and are all cured by the same means. They are, therefore, but different forms of the same disease; and, whether they occur in a convent or a camp-meeting, they are no more a token of the divine favour than hysteria or epilepsy.

It may still be said, that, although they do sometimes arise from other causes, they may be produced by genuine religious feeling. This, however, never can be proved. The fact that undoubted Christians experience these effects, is no proof that they flow from a good source; because there is always a corrupt mixture in the exercises of the most spiritual men. These affections may, therefore, flow from the concomitants of genuine religious feelings, and not from those feelings themselves. And that they do in fact flow from that source, may be assumed, because in other cases they certainly have that origin; and because all the known effects of true religious feelings are of a different character. Those apprehensions of truth which arise from divine

illumination do not affect the imagination, but the moral emotions, which are very different in their nature and effects from the feelings produced by a heated fancy. This view of the subject is greatly confirmed by the consideration that there is nothing in the Bible to lead us to regard these bodily affections as the legitimate effects of religious feeling. No such results followed the preaching of Christ, or his apostles. We hear of no general outcries, faintings, convulsions, or ravings in the assemblies which they addressed. The scriptural examples cited by the apologists of these exhibitions are so entirely inapplicable, as to be of themselves sufficient to show how little countenance is to be derived from the Bible for such irregularities. Reference is made, for example, to the case of the jailer at Philippi, who fell down at the apostles' feet; to Acts ii. 37, ("Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?") and to the conversion of Paul. It is, however, too obvious to need remark, that in no one of these cases was either the effect produced, or the circumstances attending its production, analogous to the hysterical convulsions and outcries now under consideration.

The testimony of the Scriptures is not merely negative on this subject. Their authority is directly opposed to all such disorders. They direct that all things should be done decently and in order. They teach us that God is not the God of confusion, but of peace, in all the churches of the saints. These passages have particular reference to the manner of conducting public worship. They forbid every thing which is inconsistent with order, solemnity, and devout attention. It is evident that loud outcries and convulsions are inconsistent with these things, and therefore ought to be discouraged. They cannot come from God, for he is not the author of confusion. The apology made in Corinth for the disorders which Paul condemned was precisely the same as that urged in defence of these bodily agitations. We ought not to resist the Spirit of God, said the Corinthians; and so said all those who encouraged these convulsions. Paul's answer was that no influence which comes from God destroys our self-control. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Even in the case of direct inspiration and revelation, the mode of communication was in harmony with our rational nature, and left our powers under the control of reason and the will. The man, therefore, who felt the divine afflatus had no right to give way to it, under circumstances which would produce noise and confusion. The prophets of God were not like the raving Pythoness of the heathen temples; nor are the saints of God converted into whirling dervishes by any influence of which he is the author. There can be little doubt that Paul would have severely reprobated such scenes as frequently occurred during the revival of which we are speaking. He would have said to the people substantially what he said to the Corinthians. If any unbeliever or ignorant man come to your assemblies, and hear one shouting in ecstasy, another howling in anguish; if he see some falling, some jumping, some lying in convulsions, others in trances, will he not say, Ye are mad? But if your exercises are free from confusion, and your discourses addressed to the reason, so as to convince and reprove, he will confess that God is among you of a truth.

Experience, no less than Scripture, has set the seal of reprobation upon these bodily

agitations. If they are of the nature of an infectious nervous disease, it is as much an act of infatuation to encourage them, as to endeavour to spread epilepsy over the land. It is easy to excite such things, but when excited, it is very difficult to suppress them, or to arrest their progress; and they have never prevailed without the most serious mischief. They bring discredit upon religion, they give great advantage to infidels and gainsayers, and they facilitate the progress of fanaticism. When sanctioned, the people delight in them, as they do in all strong excitement. The multitude of spurious conversions, the prevalence of false religion, the rapid progress of fanaticism, and the consequent permanent declension of religion immediately after the great revival, are probably to be attributed to the favour shown to these bodily agitations, as much as to any one cause.

Besides the errors above specified, which were sanctioned by many of the best friends of the revival, there were others which, though reprobated by the more judicious, became, through the patronage of the more ardent, prolific sources of evil. There was from the first a strong leaven of enthusiasm, manifesting itself in the regard paid to impulses, inspirations, visions, and the pretended power of discerning spirits. This was decidedly opposed by Edwards, by the Boston clergy, by Tennent, and many others. Whitefield, on the contrary, was, especially in the early part of his career, deeply infected with this leaven. When he visited Northampton, in 1740, Edwards endeavoured to convince him of the dangerous tendency of this enthusiastic spirit, but without much success. He had such an idea of what the Scriptures mean by the guidance of the Spirit, as to suppose that by suggestions, impressions, or sudden recollection of texts of the Bible, the Christian's duty was divinely revealed, even as to the minutest circumstance, and that at times even future events were thus made known. On the strength of such an impression he did not hesitate publicly to declare that his unborn child would prove to be a son. "An unaccountable but very strong impression," that he should preach the gospel, was regarded as a revelation of the purpose of God respecting him. The question whether he should return to England was settled to his satisfaction by the occurrence to his mind of the passage, When Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him. These few examples are enough to illustrate the point in hand.

In Whitefield there was much to counteract the operation of this spirit, which in others produced its legitimate effects. When Davenport was asked by the Boston ministers the reason of any of his acts, his common reply was, God commanded me. When asked whether he was inspired, he answered, they might call it inspiration, or what they pleased. The man who attended him he called his armour-bearer, because he was led to take him as a follower, by opening on the story of Jonathan and his armour-bearer. He considered it also as revealed that he should convert as many persons at a certain place as Jonathan and his armour-bearer slew of the Philistines.

This was the only one of the forms in which this spirit manifested itself. Those under its influence pretended to a power of discerning spirits, of deciding at once who was and who was not converted; they professed a perfect assurance of the favour of God, founded not upon scriptural evidence, but inward suggestion. It is plain that when men thus give themselves up to the guidance

of secret impressions, and attribute divine authority to suggestions, impulses, and casual occurrences, there is no extreme of error or folly to which they may not be led. They are beyond the control of reason or the word of God. They have a more direct and authoritative communication of the divine will than can be made by any external and general revelation. They of course act as if inspired and infallible. They are commonly filled with spiritual pride, and with a bitter denunciatory spirit. All these results were soon manifested to a lamentable extent during this revival. If an honest man doubted his conversion, he was declared unconverted. If any one was filled with great joy, he was pronounced a child of God. These enthusiasts paid great regard to visions and trances, and would pretend in them to have seen Heaven or hell, and particular persons in the one or the other. They paid more attention to inward impressions than to the word of God. They laid great stress on views of an outward Christ, as on a throne, or upon the cross. If they did not feel a minister's preaching, they maintained he was unconverted, or legal. They made light of all meetings in which there was no external commotion. They had a remarkable haughtiness and self-sufficiency, and a fierce and bitter spirit of zeal and consciousness.

The origin and progress of this fanatical spirit is one of the most instructive portions of the history of his period. In 1726, a religious excitement commenced in New Milford, Connecticut, which was at first of a promising character, but was soon perverted. Its subjects opened a communication with the enthusiasts of Rhode Island, and began to speak slightly of the Bible, especially of the Psalms of David, and to condemn the ministers of the gospel and civil magistrates. They organized themselves into a separate society, and appointed officers not only to conduct their meetings, but to regulate their dress. They made assurance essential to faith; they undervalued human learning, and despised the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. They laid claim to sinless perfection, and claimed that the standing ministers were unfit to preach, and that the people ought to leave them. One of the leaders of this company was a man named Ferns, who entered Yale College in 1729. A contemporary writer says of this gentleman, He told me he was certain not one in ten of the communicants in the church in New Haven could be saved; that he should have a higher seat in Heaven than Moses; that he knew the will of God in all things, and had not committed any sin for six years. He had a proud and haughty spirit, and appeared greatly desirous of applause. He obtained a great ascendancy over certain of the students, especially Davenport, Wheelock, and Patneroy, who lived with him most familiarly. He remained in College until 1732, and then returned to New Milford. He ultimately became a Quaker preacher.

Such was the origin of that enthusiastic and fanatical spirit, which swept over the New England clutches. Messrs. Wheelock and Patneroy seem soon to have escaped from its influence; but Davenport remained long under its power, and was the cause of incalculable mischief. He was settled as pastor of the church in Southhold, Long Island. In March, 1740, he became satisfied that God had revealed to him that his kingdom was coming with great power, and that he had an extraordinary call to labour for its advancement. He assembled his people on one occasion, and

addressed them, continuously, for nearly twenty-four hours; until he became quite wild. After continuing for some time his exciting labours in his own neighbourhood, he passed over into Connecticut. The best and most favourable account of his erratic course is given by the Rev. Mr. Fish, who knew him intimately. The substance of this account, given nearly in the language of its author, is as follows. The good things about him, says this writer, were, that he was a fast friend of the doctrines of grace; fully declaring the total depravity, the deplorable wretchedness and danger, and utter inability of men by the fall. He preached with great earnestness the doctrines of man's dependence on the sovereign mercy of God; of regeneration; of justification by faith, & c. The things that were evidently and dreadfully wrong about him were, that he not only gave full liberty to noise and outcries, but promoted them with all his power. When these things prevailed among the people, accompanied with bodily agitations, the good man pronounced them tokens of the presence of God. Those who passed immediately from great distress to great joy, he declared, after asking them a few questions, to be converts; though numbers of such converts, in a short time, returned to their old way of living, and were as carnal, wicked, and void of experience, as ever they were. He was a great favourer of visions, trances, imaginations, and powerful impressions in others, and made such inward feelings the rule of his own conduct in many respects....

This is a formidable array of evils. Yet as the friends of the revival testify to their existence, no conscientious historian dare either conceal or extenuate them. There was too little discrimination between true and false religious feeling. There was too much encouragement given to outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations, as probable evidence of the presence and power of God. There was, in many, too much reliance on impulses, visions, and the pretended power of discerning spirits. There was a great deal of consciousness, and of a sinful disregard of ecclesiastical order. The disastrous effects of these evils, the rapid spread of false religion, the dishonour and decline of true piety, the prevalence of erroneous doctrines, the division of congregations, the alienation of Christians, and the long period of subsequent deadness in the church, stand up as a solemn warning to Christians, and especially to Christian ministers in all times to come. It was thus, in the strong language of Edwards, the devil prevailed against the revival." It is by this means that the daughter of Zion in this land, now lies in such piteous circumstances, with her garments rent, her face disfigured, her nakedness exposed, her limbs broken, and weltering in the blood of her own wounds, and in nowise able to rise, and this so soon after her late great joys and hopes."



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