

# 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.

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## LETTER XVIII.

FROM THE REVEREND ASHBEL GREEN, D. D.

Late President of the College of New-Jersey, Princeton.

*Philadelphia, April 10, 1832.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

It was my intention, as I have heretofore informed you, to take a somewhat extended view of the state of religion in our country, in time past, especially with reference to revivals of religion. But this I now find impracticable, in as much as your contemplated publication is, it appears, already in its passage through the press; and the state of my health, and some unavoidable engagements, permit me to devote but a small portion of time to this important service.

Leaving then to yourself, or to your other correspondents, the proper notice of the religious revivals which have occurred in our land at large, I shall confine myself to four points. 1. Revivals of which I have had some personal knowledge. 2. More especially those which have taken place in the college of New-Jersey. 3. Remarks on the best method of conducting revivals, so that under the blessing of God they may be productive of the greatest amount of good. 4. The errors and abuses which are too often witnessed in a time of great and general excitement on the subject of religion—On each of these points I shall endeavor to be brief.

On the first, I must say something negatively—In the second presbyterian church of Philadelphia, to which I sustained the pastoral relation for something more than five and twenty years, there has never been what is usually understood by the phrase “a general revival of religion;” that is, a period when nearly the whole congregation, or a large majority of those who have composed it, have been in a state of serious and deep anxiety in regard to their eternal interests; and this resulting in a large number of hopeful conversions, and great additions to the communicating members of the church. The congregation I served, was originally composed, almost exclusively, of the friends and followers of the celebrated Mr. Whitfield; and the church was, at first, consti-

tuted, I think wholly, of converts made under his ministry, and that of his coadjutors, the Tennents, Blairs, and Dr. Finley, afterwards president of the college at Princeton, New-Jersey. The first pastor of this church was the Rev. Gilbert Tennent, whose wonderful success, in a preaching tour which he made through New-England, in the close of the year 1740 and the beginning of 1741, is still pretty correctly known by tradition.\* Yet there was never any special revival of religion in the congregation to which he ministered in this city; and he was its pastor for more than twenty years. He had, first and last, a good many seals of his ministry, but they never appeared in clusters. The immediate successor of Mr. Tennent was the well known Mr. John Murray, who after he fled from Philadelphia, was settled at Newburyport. Under his ministry, as I have been informed, there was, for a short time, something like a partial revival of religion—Probably more were awakened, and more added to the church, in the short period of his ministry, than in any one year of Mr. Tennent's labors in this congregation. To him succeeded my venerable and beloved colleague, the Rev. Dr. James Sproat. His faithful ministrations were blessed to a goodly number, during the five and twenty years of his pastoral relation to this people; but still, there was no special or general revival of religion. During my incumbency—for about half the time in a collegiate connexion with the Rev. Dr. Janeway—there were some periods, as there were under the ministrations of our predecessors, in which there was a much more lively attention to religion than at others, and in which much larger additions than usual were made to the church. There was one period, extending from the latter part of 1802, to the former part of 1804, when both my colleague and myself had a degree of raised expectation, that we were about to witness a day of God's power, in a general turning to the Lord of the beloved people of our pastoral charge. But in this we were not gra-

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\* In the early part of my ministry in this city, there were still living several members of the church who had belonged to it in the time of Mr. Tennent. One of these, a very pious and intelligent old lady, told me that she once asked Mr. Tennent what was the manner of his preaching which was so singularly and generally successful, in his journey through New-England. She said his answer was—"Madam, there was nothing peculiar in my manner of preaching, in that journey. I was constantly travelling, and had scarcely any time to study or meditate. But I went into the pulpit and preached as well as I could, and God taught the people. I had very little to do with it."

tified ; although a considerable number of hopeful conversions did then take place. The most numerous addition to the communion of the church, in any one year of my ministry, did not I think exceed fifty. Yet there was no year without some additions.

I have witnessed two or three revivals of religion in the place of my nativity—Hanover, Morris county, New-Jersey. The most remarkable one, and the only one I shall particularly notice, was in the year 1790. It commenced and attained its height under the ministry of my father, and he died in the midst of it. My mother wrote to me, to hasten me to my father's death bed ; but although I made as much speed as I could, he was dead and buried before I could reach his residence. The state of the congregation was deeply interesting and affecting. About thirty individuals—the gleanings of the harvest—came to converse with me on the state of their souls, in one day. Some of them greatly lamented that they had permitted their pastor to die, without letting him know their anxious feelings, and receiving his counsel—They were kept back by fear and shame. On one occasion, at this time, when I was preaching in the pulpit vacated by the recent death of my father, and making a particular address to the youth of the congregation, recognizing them as my coevals and some of them as my school fellows, they rose, by a kind of sudden and simultaneous impulse, and stood up in every part of the house. This was not a matter of any preconcert, for the occurrence was, I believe, entirely singular, and they certainly did not know that I intended to address them, for my intention was known to no one but myself. Having mentioned this fact, it seems peculiarly proper to observe, that this revival was conducted with a remarkable freedom from ostentation and noise. A minister only nine miles distant, told me, that till he went to attend my father's funeral, he did not know that there was any particular attention to religion in the place. The people had been unusually well indoctrinated and grounded in religious truth ; and hence, when the special influences of the Holy Spirit descended on them, they were not overwhelmed with the confusion and agitation, which the ignorant and uninstructed often manifest when their eyes are first effectually opened on their guilty and undone condition—I find I am running into too much



length, and will therefore not add any thing farther under this head, but proceed—

2. To give some account of the revivals of religion which have taken place in the college of New-Jersey. A more extended and particular narrative than I can now give, may be seen in my history of the college, appended to the Baccalaureate discourses, which I published twelve years ago—You are aware, I suppose, that Nassau Hall was founded by the friends and advocates of the great and general revival of religion in the time of Whitfield; and that the favorite object of its founders was, to provide a nursery for the church, or for the education of youth for the gospel ministry. In less than the first twenty years of its existence, it lost by death five presidents—Dickinson, Burr, Edwards, Davies and Finley—all of them ardent friends of revivals. Many of the first students of this institution, being educated professedly for the gospel ministry, were hopefully pious when they entered college; and to cherish and promote practical piety, was ever an object of care and solicitude with the eminently holy men whose names I have mentioned. Nor were their hopes disappointed, or their labors without a rich reward. The first location of the college was at Newark, where it remained for ten years, under the presidency of Mr. Burr, who sustained at the same time the pastoral relation to the presbyterian congregation in that town. During this period, I have not heard of any thing that could be called a religious revival among the students—a large part of them were probably pious when they entered the institution. In 1757 the college was removed to Princeton; the buildings there having been previously prepared for its reception. The following extract of a letter from Dr. Finley, to Mr. Davies then in Virginia, and who had given the Doctor some “good news” of his success in preaching the gospel, both to the white population and the negroes—will give the best account now obtainable, of the first general revival in the college—  
“April 16th, 1757—I greatly rejoice that our Lord Jesus has put it in my power to make you a large compensation, for the good news you sent me. God has done great things for us. Our glorious Redeemer poured out his Holy Spirit upon the students of

our college,\* not one of all who were present neglected; and they were in number sixty. The whole house, say my correspondents, was a Bochim. Mr. William Tennent, who was on the spot, says, ‘He never saw any in that case, who had more clear views of God, themselves and their defects, their impotence and misery, than they had in general; that there never was he believes in any house, more genuine sorrow for sin, and longing after Jesus: that this glorious work was gradual, and spread like the increasing light of the morning; that it was not begun by the ordinary means of preaching, nor promoted by alarming methods; yet so great was their distress, that he judged it improper to use any arguments of terror in public, lest some should sink under the weight: that what makes the gracious visitation more remarkable was, that a little before, some of the youth had given a greater loose to their corruptions, than was ordinary among them; a spirit of pride and contention prevailing, to the great grief, and even discouragement of the worthy president; [Mr. Burr] that there were no public outcries, but a decorous, silent solemnity; that before he came away, several had received something like the spirit of adoption; being tenderly affected with the sense of redeeming love, and thereby disposed and determined to endeavor after universal holiness. Mr. Treat and Mr. Gilbert Tennent tell me in theirs, that the concern appeared rational, solid and scriptural; and that in a remarkable degree.’”

The next account of a general revival of religion in Nassau Hall, I had in a letter addressed to me personally, while I was writing the history of the college, by the late Rev. Dr. John Woodhull, in answer to certain inquiries I had sent to him, in regard to the state of the institution in the time of Dr. Finley. He says—“As to revivals of religion, there were some partial ones in college, [the foregoing account shows, that one at least was more than *partial*] before Dr. Finley’s time; but in his time there was something general. It began in 1762 in the Freshman class, to which I then belonged. It was a pretty large class, containing between twenty-five and thirty members. Almost as soon as the session

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\* Both Dr. Finley and Mr. Davies were eventually presidents of the college, but before either of them was so, as was the case when this letter was written, they called the institution “our college.” It was so in fact; they and their friends both founded it, and sustained it.

commenced, this class met, once in the week, for prayer. One of the members became deeply impressed; and this affected the whole class—The other classes and the whole college soon became much impressed. Every class became a praying society. Societies were also held by the students, in the town and in the country. I suppose there was not one that belonged to the college, but was affected more or less. There were two members of the senior class who were considered as opposers of the work at first. Yet both of these persons were afterwards preachers of the gospel. The work continued about one year. Fifteen, or about half of my class, was supposed to be pious; and in the college about fifty, or nearly one half of the whole number of students.”

Dr. Witherspoon was the successor of Dr. Finley, and entered on his office in August 1768. There was a remarkable revival of religion in the college under his administration; but I am not able to determine accurately the time of its commencement, nor that of its termination. From a collation of some facts and circumstances, I believe that it began in 1770, and that its effects were felt in the college till 1773; but of this revival no printed or written account has ever been seen by me. I have heard much of it; and while I was a professor in the college, before my settlement in Philadelphia, one of the subjects of it, Lewis Fulleteau Wilson, then a practising physician in Princeton, but afterwards a minister of the gospel of much reputation and esteem in North Carolina, gave me something like a connected narrative of this display of divine power and mercy; although his own case was chiefly the subject of his communication. He was an Englishman by birth, and had his grammar training in the celebrated Westminster school, but was sent to Princeton to complete his education under Doctor Witherspoon. He graduated in 1773; and his statement was in substance this—A very serious attention to religion, he said, began in the college while he was a student, and increased till a large proportion, perhaps a considerable majority, of all the inhabitants of the house, became deeply affected with a concern for their eternal well being. The work, however, had at first some opposers; and among these, my informant represented himself as the most decided and active of all. When he discovered that a meeting for prayer and religious conference was held in a particu-



lar apartment, as was often done, he said that he used to go into an adjoining room and play on his flute, that he might interrupt the exercises: and when some of his fellow students endeavored to talk with him, seriously and tenderly, he not only repelled their advances, but went and entered a complaint against them to Dr. Witherspoon. He told the Doctor that he, Wilson, was an Englishman, and an Episcopalian; and that no one had a right to intermeddle with him, or with his religion. The Doctor said something to quiet him, and sent him to his room. Shortly after this occurrence, the Rev. Dr. Spencer, a trustee of the college, delivered a sermon in the prayer hall of the edifice, which Wilson attended of course; and an impression was now made on his conscience, which he was never able to shake off. After some time of sore conflict, he obtained a comfortable hope of his reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ; and when he gave me this account, I thought him an eminently humble and fervent Christian. This individual was one of the dearest and most valued friends of my early life; and hence I have indulged my feelings in repeating his statement so particularly. But it serves to shew, better than any thing else I could say, the nature and extent of the revival which is now under consideration. I could name a number of men, afterwards of great distinction in our country, who were at this time very deeply impressed with religious truth; and who for years were considered as practically pious; and yet, eventually, lost all serious sense of religion, and probably became infidels in principle. On the other hand, however, a number—and I believe a larger number—retained and adorned their religious profession through their subsequent lives—I have understood that several eminent ministers of the gospel, besides him whom I have particularly mentioned, dated their change of heart and life, from what they experienced in the college at this time.

For the long period of full forty years, after what I have just stated, there was nothing in Nassau Hall that had the appearance, or the name, of a religious revival. The military spirit that pervaded our whole land, shortly after what took place as narrated above, was exceedingly unfriendly to vital piety, among all descriptions of our citizens. Before the colleges of our country were broken up, as the most, if not all of them were, in the course of our revo-

lutionary war, military enthusiasm had seized the minds of the students, to such a degree that they could think of little else than warlike operations. The gentleman whose case I have mentioned, was, for a few months, a tutor in the college at Princeton; and he told me that the students formed themselves into a military company, chose their officers, furnished themselves with muskets, learned the manual exercise, and could not be kept from practising their evolutions, even during the hours of study, and in the college edifice. He said that they in fact drove him out of the house; that is, they rendered his situation so unpleasant that he abruptly resigned his tutorship, and went to the study of medicine in Philadelphia. The exercises of the college at Princeton were totally suspended, for more than three years; and the edifice was a barrack, in turn for both the British and American troops; and the interior of it was completely defaced, exhibiting nothing but filth and dilapidation. In the spring of 1782, when I became a member of the institution, about two years after the recommencement of its exercises, the walls of the building were still perforated in a number of places, the effect of the cannon balls which had passed through them, from the artillery of the American army in the battle of Princeton—with a view to drive out of the edifice a British corps that had taken shelter there; and only two of the entries were in a habitable state. While I was a member of college, there were but two professors of religion among the students, and not more than five or six, who scrupled the use of profane language in common conversation, and sometimes it was of a very shocking kind. To the influence of the American war succeeded that of the French revolution, still more pernicious, and I think more general. The open and avowed infidelity of Paine, and of other writers of the same character, produced incalculable injury to religion and morals throughout our whole country; and its effect on the minds of young men who valued themselves on their genius, and were fond of novel speculations, was the greatest of all. Dr. Smith, the president of the college at that time, used to complain grievously and justly, of the mischievous and fatal effects which the prevalent infidelity had on the minds of his pupils. He told me, that one man, who sent his son to the college, stated explicitly in a letter, that not a word was ever to be said to him on the sub-

ject of religion—The youth was refused admittance. During Dr. Smith's incumbency, there were perhaps some instances, not known to me, although a trustee of the institution, of young men who became pious while they were students of the college; and there were always a number of religious students on the charitable funds, appropriated by the donors to the education of poor and pious youth for the gospel ministry; and some also who had become pious before they went to college, who there supported themselves on their own funds. But there certainly was nothing that so much as approximated to a revival of religion; and Dr. Smith's infirm state of health, in the latter part of his time as president, disqualified him for all vigorous action, in sustaining the government of the college; and this favored that tendency to dissipation and dissolute morals, which had long prevailed; and which, aided by some other concurring causes, had risen to a most fearful height, when I was called to the presidency in the autumn of 1812.

If ever a man entered on an office with fear and trembling I did so; but yet it was with a firm purpose, that by the help and blessing of God, on which I most sensibly felt my dependence, I would either work a reformation or sink under the attempt; and for a time it seemed very doubtful, which of these events would be realized. In looking over the first address that I made to the students, I find that I concluded it with these sentences—"Could you be engaged to seek effectually the favor of God, and to live habitually in his fear, you would be a law to yourselves; and all our business would be instruction, and all our labor a delight. Then your pursuits would be rightly directed, and while your prospects in this world would be cheering, those beyond it would be rapturous. Earnestly seek, therefore, the knowledge of the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, whom to know aright is life eternal. The time has been, when scarcely an individual in this house was inattentive to the concerns of his soul's salvation—It may be so again—Gracious God! let me but behold it, and thy servant will depart in peace, having seen thy salvation." —Yes, and through the undeserved and boundless goodness of God, I did at last "behold it;" but it was not till after a two years' struggle, and with such difficulties and discouragements as

no worldly recompense would induce me to think for a moment of again encountering ; but for all of which I was infinitely overpaid, when it became literally true, that “scarcely an individual in that house was inattentive to the concerns of his soul’s salvation.” My first measure, in attempting reformation, was the organizing of a system of religious instruction for the whole institution. It was summarily this—Every student was required to commit accurately to memory, and to recite to his teacher, the catechism of the church or denomination, to which his parents belonged. The Junior class studied and recited Paley’s Natural Theology—The Senior class, Paley’s Evidences of the Christian Religion : and the whole of the students, indiscriminately, prepared five chapters of the Bible, which were previously pointed out to them, for examination and recitation on the afternoon of the Sabbath. The recitations on Paley’s Evidences and on the Bible, were always taken by myself—the other officers of the college heard those on the Catechisms and Natural Theology. This arrangement made it necessary that every student should possess a Bible ; and I was surprised to find that scarcely a student, except the professors of religion, owned a copy. The deficiency was so great, that the stores in the town could not fully supply it, till they obtained a number from the cities. An account of this great and glorious work of divine grace was laid before the trustees of the institution, in a semi-annual report on the state of the college, which I was then in the habit of making. A part of this I shall transcribe, as affording the best statement of facts which I can give—The account, contrary to my expectation, was ordered by the trustees to be made public—“For nearly a year past, (says the report) a very large proportion of the students have attended on all the religious exercises of the college with more than ordinary seriousness. There was nothing more apparent, however, for six weeks after the commencement of the present session, in November 1814, than an increase of their serious attention to the religious duties of college ; an increase both of the degree of seriousness, and of the number of those in whom it was visible. Every religious service, both on secular days and on the Sabbath, was attended with a solemnity that was very impressive. In the second week of January, however, without any unusual occurrence in providence ;—without any alarming event,



without any extraordinary preaching, without any special instruction, or other means that might be supposed peculiarly adapted to interest the mind, the effect became more apparent; and in about four weeks there were very few individuals in the college who were not deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of spiritual and eternal things. There was scarcely a room—perhaps not one—which was not a place of earnest secret devotion. For a time it seemed as if the whole of our charge was pressing into the kingdom of God. This state of things has continued without much variation to the present time. Some indeed have become confirmed in the hopes and habits of evangelical piety; while others are serious, thoughtful and devout, though perhaps not in so great a degree as once they had been; and some are losing the impressions they lately felt. The result is, that of one hundred and five students, there are somewhat more than forty, in regard to whom, so far as the time will permit us to judge, favorable hopes may be entertained that they are the subjects of renewing grace. There are twelve or fifteen more, who still retain such promising impressions of religion, as to authorize a hope that the issue may be favorable: and nearly the whole of the remainder show a great readiness to attend on the social exercises of religion; not only on those which are stated and customary, but on those which are occasional, and the attendance on which is entirely voluntary.” Such was the general statement then made. The means which had been employed and blessed of God in producing the revival, were stated to be—“First and chiefly, the study of the Holy Scriptures, accompanied with comments on the portion read, and a practical application of the leading truths contained in it. God has remarkably honored and blessed his own word—it has qualified them to hear preaching with advantage, and at length the revealed truth has, we trust, been powerfully and effectually applied to their consciences, by the Holy Spirit, its author. \* \* \* \* 2. Appropriate addresses have frequently been made; and the [public] services have been conducted with a special view to their advantage and religious edification. \* \* \* \* 3. The discipline of the college vigorously and vigilantly maintained, has preserved the youth generally from those vicious practices and indulgences, which counteract and destroy all serious impressions.



\* \* \* \* 4. The few youths who were previously pious, had, for more than a year, been earnestly engaged in prayer for this event. When they perceived the general and increasing seriousness which has been noticed, several of them made an agreement to speak, privately and tenderly, to their particular friends and acquaintance, on the subject of religion: and what they said was in almost every instance, not only well received, but those with whom they conversed became earnestly engaged in those exercises which, it is hoped, have issued in genuine piety. To promote and cherish this spirit, a short address on the subject of religion was made after prayer on every Saturday evening. In preaching on the Lord's day morning, subjects were selected suited to the existing state of the college; a weekly lecture, intended for the students exclusively, was given by myself, on every Tuesday evening; a prayer meeting was held every Friday evening, at which one of the Theological professors commonly made an address; a prayer meeting was, every evening, held among themselves, at which a large proportion of the whole college attended; smaller and more select associations for prayer were also formed; the individuals whose minds were anxious were, as often as they requested it, carefully conversed and prayed with in private; writings of approved character, on doctrinal and practical religion were recommended; and a short system of questions and counsel\* was drawn up by myself, for the use of those who appeared to have entered on a life of practical piety."

Such, my dear Sir, is a summary account of the great revival of religion with which it pleased a gracious and sovereign God to bless the college of New-Jersey, while I presided over it—For a more particular and extended account, if any desire to see it, reference may be had to the pamphlet published by the order of the trustees. I know not by whom this pamphlet was sent to the editor of the Christian Observer in Britain; but nearly the whole of it was republished in that periodical for the month of October 1815, with some remarks of a laudatory kind, and some of a different character. Whether this revival was more general and extensive than some that preceded it, I am not able to determine.

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\* This has since been published as a tract, and widely distributed. When written, I had no expectation that it would go beyond the walls of the college, except as a student might choose to keep a copy for his own use in future.

First and last, but a single individual, as I had good reason to believe, remained without serious impressions of greater or less pungency: but there was one, and he a diligent and orderly student, who declared, as I was well informed, that through the whole he felt no seriousness, or emotion of a religious kind at all. The fruits of this revival were happy and lasting. For although a number lost their impressions, some speedily and some very gradually, yet there are a goodly number now in public life, who are bringing forth the fruits of that renovated nature, which was imparted to them by the gracious Spirit of God, in this revival. I once counted the number of ministers of the gospel whose conversion was believed to have taken place at this time. I forget what the number was, but I remember I thought it greater, than that produced on any similar occasion in Nassau Hall. There were two other periods, during my presidency, at which hopes were excited, that we were on the eve of another general revival. But the favorable appearances passed away, without realizing this hope; yet not without leaving several monuments of divine grace; some of them very remarkable. Mr. Ramsey, who has recently gone on a mission to the East Indies, in the employ of the A. B. C. F. Missions, narrated to me, shortly before he left this city, the circumstances of his conversion, at one of the two periods to which I have referred. There have also been favorable appearances, and some instances, apparently of a real change of heart and life, since I left the college. But of these you can obtain better information than I can give, from the present president of the college—There has not, however, been any thing like a general revival. May a gracious God soon grant it!—to an institution consecrated by its founders to the promotion of science in union with piety; and in behalf of which many fervent prayers, both of the living and the dead, have ascended to the throne of his mercy.

3. My remarks on the best method of conducting revivals, so that under the blessing of God they may be productive of the greatest amount of good, are now to be offered. Of what you may have said in your forthcoming discourses, on this topic, I am not apprized; but I suppose it probable that either incidentally or directly it has received your attention; and the statement I have just made in regard to what took place under my presidency in

Nassau Hall, indicates my general views in relation to the conducting of revivals; for what was then done I approved, and nothing that I wished done was omitted; nor has any thing since occurred to change the opinions that I at that time entertained—I then say briefly that in a time of revival, so far am I from thinking that the preaching employed should be merely hortatory, and principally addressed to the feelings, that I am persuaded it ought to be eminently doctrinal. Lively, and tender, and close, and full of application it certainly should be; but the great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel should be brought out clearly—be lucidly explained, and much insisted on. There ought to be a good many of what I would call *discriminating* discourses—in which true religion should be distinguished from every counterfeit, and the danger of embracing and resting on a false hope be fully exhibited. Of what may be denominated, by way of eminence, gospel preaching, there ought to be no lack; that is, the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to save even the chief of sinners, and his readiness to receive them, when they come to him in the exercise of faith and a contrite spirit—his readiness to cleanse them in his atoning blood, to clothe them with his perfect righteousness, to justify them freely, to sanctify them by his Spirit, to adopt them into his family, and to crown them with eternal glory, should be set forth in the most clear and persuasive manner. The true nature of regeneration—of evangelical faith, genuine repentance, and new obedience, should be carefully explained and illustrated—The danger of grieving away the Spirit of grace, by those with whom he is striving, and the danger of all *delay* in accepting the gospel offer, should be often brought into view. The peril to the unawakened and the careless, when others are anxious and pressing into the kingdom of God—the awful peril of passing a season of revival without sharing in its blessed effects, should often be pressed home, on those who remain at ease in their sins—There may be an excess of public or social exercises; for neither an inquiring sinner nor a young convert, should spend so much of his time at public meetings, or more privately with Christian friends, as to leave him very little for serious meditation and prayer by himself. Yet certainly there ought to be many meetings, not only for preaching, but for conference and prayer—some in which

experienced and established Christians should meet with inquirers ; some in which inquirers and young converts should meet by themselves, or with their pastor and an elder or two of the church, or other judicious Christians ; and some, I think, in which the people of God should come together, chiefly by themselves, to pray for the continuance and increase of the heavenly influence that has been shed down around and upon them, and that it may eventuate in a large ingathering of souls to the fold of Christ—Much, very much, it should be recollected, is to be hoped for from fervent, effectual and persevering prayer ; and very little to be expected, if this be wanting, let other means that are used be whatever they may. I am decidedly in favor of protracted meetings, if not *unduly* protracted. I think that we have scriptural examples of them, in the holy convocations of the old testament, and in the lengthened attendance of multitudes on the ministry of our blessed Saviour, as recorded in the Evangelists. But great care should be taken to prevent all abuse of these meetings, and to see that they are conducted with entire sobriety of behavior, and if possible with a pervading and deeply felt solemnity, from the beginning of them to their termination. Their happy effect, under the blessing of God, seems to result from their being adapted to keep the solemn truths of the gospel, and the realities of eternity, before the view of the mind, long enough to make a deep and lasting impression—an impression not so easily effaced as that which is often made and lost, by the single-day exercises of the sabbath. They are in fact, only a modification of the protracted sacramental solemnities, well known in Scotland, and in some parts of our country and church. To *anxious seats*, (a strange appellation) in a promiscuous congregation, on which the awakened and alarmed are placed by themselves, to be addressed and prayed for separately, and to be gazed at by the whole assembly, I confess I am not friendly. I do not deny that they may have been used without injury, perhaps with some advantage, in certain places, and on particular occasions. But as a general measure they seem to me unnecessary, and seriously objectionable. That the anxious should be specially addressed and prayed for, I not only admit, but consider as highly important. But this can surely be done, and I think to much greater advantage, after the promiscuous au-



dience has retired, or in what I think still better, a meeting specially appointed for the purpose—Such a meeting I held weekly, for the students of the college at Princeton, in the revival there of which I have spoken. But anxious seats in a promiscuous assembly, seem to me far less calculated to ascertain the number and the individuals who are truly and deeply impressed, than a meeting to which there is no motive to go, but a deeply felt anxiety of soul, and desire of relief—There is an ostentation about anxious seats, in an indiscriminate assemblage, which I am persuaded keeps some back, who are really laboring in spirit, and brings others there who feel very little; and the use of these seats has I think been, in some places, the first step to ulterior proceedings of a very exceptionable character—There ought to be as much private, individual conversation, between a pastor and those of his charge who are deeply convinced of their lost estate, and inquiring what they must do to be saved—as much of this, as his time will admit; and here in particular he should call the elders of his church to his aid, and add to it the assistance of some other discreet and judicious Christians. But the conversation of awakened sinners with persons wanting prudence and experience, although perhaps not destitute of piety, has often done much harm, and should be guarded against as far as practicable—Books, as well as conversation, ought to be used, by those whose minds are laboring in spiritual things—especially when they have reached a state in which they have hope mingled with fear, in relation to the momentous inquiry whether they have passed from death to life, or not. My “Questions and Counsel,” heretofore mentioned, were prepared for my pupils at Princeton, when they were conceiving hopes that they had become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Great care should be taken to deal faithfully, tenderly and discreetly, with all who are in this situation. Besides the Bible, the daily and prayerful reading of which should be enjoined on all who are endeavoring to ascertain their religious state, the works of our standard writers on the subjects of doctrinal and experimental religion, should be recommended, and as circumstances favor, diligently perused. I might add other remarks, but I have already exceeded proper bounds, under this particular. I cannot however omit to say, that during the whole of a revival, the solemn truth, that



true conversion is a work of God, and not of men, ought to be made prominent, in all discourses, both public and private.

4. I am to mention some of the errors and abuses which are too often witnessed, in a time of great and general excitement on the subject of religion. It may seem mysterious, that God should permit a work of his own holy and blessed Spirit to be accompanied, marred and perverted, by errors and abuses. But so it has been from the beginning. It appears from the 14th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, that in the time of the Apostle Paul, there was such an abuse, even of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, that there was danger that at least the "ignorant and unbelievers" would draw the conclusion—and the Apostle intimates that it would not be an unnatural conclusion—that those who acted in the disorderly and extravagant manner which he describes, were "mad." Alas! how often, since the time of the Apostles, have religious excitements been permitted to run into wild excesses, even greater and more pernicious than those which he rebuked. Such, it is well known, were witnessed in some parts of our country, in the great revival in the time of Whitfield, though always discountenanced by him, and by all the discreet, pious, and distinguished ministers of the gospel, who co-operated with him. I have before me while I write, a pamphlet on this subject, written and published by the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson, the first president of the college of New-Jersey. The title of the pamphlet is too long for me to insert, but it is headed with the words "A display of God's special grace, in a familiar dialogue." The copy I have, was from a second edition, printed in this city, in 1743, and the whole design of the publication avowedly is, to maintain that what then appeared was "a display of God's special grace;" and at the same time, to bear a most pointed testimony against all the extravagances and errors by which it was attended; and they were very much the same, in the substance of them, as have since appeared in our country, and are, at this time, exhibited in certain places. There is a recommendation of this work, called "A prefatory attestation," subscribed in Boston, under the date of August 10th, 1742, by Benjamin Colman, Joseph Sewall, Thomas Prince, John Webb, William Cooper, Thomas Foxcroft, and Joshua Gee. A similar attestation, accompanied the second

edition, and is dated "Philadelphia, June 1st, 1743," and subscribed by Gilbert Tennent, William Tennent, Samuel Blair, Richard Treat, Samuel Finley and John Blair. By this publication, the fathers of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches, whose names are attached to it, "being dead yet speak;" and they speak as decidedly against some of the *new measures* now in vogue, as if it had been their immediate object to condemn them. At the time when the excesses, which were witnessed in Kentucky, about thirty years ago began to appear, and which terminated most disastrously to the interests of vital piety, I advised the publication and transmission to that region, of numerous copies of Mr. Dickinson's pamphlet. But this was not done; and indeed before it could be done, those who needed it most, had gone beyond the reach of all reason or argument. They regarded themselves as the only truly enlightened men, and the exclusive friends of revivals of religion, and they looked with pity or contempt, on all who endeavored to counteract their fanaticism, and regarded and denounced them as cold hearted formalists and wretched hypocrites. You are aware, I presume, of the result of this great religious excitement. There were a considerable number, doubtless, who became truly pious. But Cumberland presbyterianism, Shakerism, Socinianism and Deism, reaped a large part of the harvest that grew up from the seed which was sown by the exclusive revival men at that time. Kentucky has not yet fully recovered from the injury which was done to her religious interests, at this memorable period. It was followed by an open avowal and general prevalence of infidel principles, with all their mournful consequences, beyond any thing that had previously appeared.

I cannot pretend to enumerate all, nor the half, of the errors broached, and the abuses committed, in the times of religious excitement which have occurred in our country. The distinguishing doctrines, and the ecclesiastical order of our church, have, at such periods, always suffered. The doctrines of God's sovereignty, original sin, the entire dependence of the sinner on the special influence of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration and conversion, and justification solely by the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believing penitent, and received by faith alone, have

almost invariably been either denied, or perverted and misrepresented, in a manner that was equivalent to a denial. The order of our church has been disregarded—All who chose have become exhorters and leaders in social worship—not, in some places and on some occasions, to the exclusion of women, even in promiscuous assemblies. The eldership of the churches, and indeed all church discipline, and all church judicatures have been disregarded, if they attempted to restrain or censure the intemperate zeal of those who considered themselves as more enlightened, and more endowed with spiritual gifts and graces, than men, however long might have been their standing in the church, and eminent their piety, previously to the period of excitement. It has even happened that a minister who has led others into extravagance, has at length found himself left behind them, and been considered and treated as a mere formalist, for whose conversion prayer needed to be made, and has been made accordingly, in the social meetings of his former disciples. I have neither time nor inclination to specify the almost innumerable acts, of imprudence in speech and action—the harsh language addressed to individuals, privately and publicly, the disregard of decorum, and the introduction of novel and ostentatious practices, in the sanctuary itself—which have characterized the advocates and leaders of new measures, in times of great religious excitement in our country. But there is one measure which seems to be pre-eminently *new*—for I have not heard of its ever having been adopted in our church, till very recently—of which I must take a little particular notice—It is the measure of admitting to the full communion of the church, persons whose supposed conversion has happened but a day or two; or perhaps but a few hours, before their admission—persons, too, who had previously manifested no serious regard to religion, and who in some instances, had been even dissolute and profane. I can scarcely conceive of a practice more evidently calculated than this, eventually to bring dishonor on religion, by filling the church with unsound professors, who will ultimately become open apostates, or at best demonstrate that they have never possessed a spark of vital piety. Who that has ever seen a general awakening of a congregation to the concerns of the soul, but has had to lament, that numbers whose exercises, for a time, seemed to be as hopeful,

perhaps even more hopeful, than those of almost any others, eventually lost all their religious impressions, and became as careless as they ever had been, and often far more hard and unimpressible, than in their former unsanctified state? Now, these individuals who thus lost their impressions, would assuredly have been taken into the communion of the church, if the new measure under consideration had been in use, in the places where these instances have occurred. And what reason have we to believe that sudden and hopeful impressions, and the appearance and profession of having experienced a change of heart, which now occur, will prove more solid and lasting than those of former times? It is admitted, that there may be, and will be, some false professors, after all the care and pains that can be taken to keep them out of the church. But they will be multiplied to an awful and reproachful extent, if some period of probation, and a good deal of sifting and close examination, be not employed to prevent the evil. The plea that is made, in favor of the mischievous practice in question, derived from what was done by the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, is, in my apprehension, of no avail. The cases supposed to be similar, are very unlike. A profession of Christianity, at that time, could not be made, but at the imminent risk of all earthly possessions, and of life itself. Besides, there was, among other extraordinary bestowments at that time, the gift of "discerning of spirits," and I have not heard that the new measure men have, as yet, pretended to this gift. Indeed the whole dispensation of the Holy Spirit, at that period, was extraordinary and miraculous; and to draw a parallel between the occurrences then, and those which now take place—a parallel extending to all the circumstances of the two cases—seems to me utterly unwarrantable and exceedingly presumptuous.

Numerous are the lamentable consequences of the errors and abuses which arise in times of religious revival—They stop the progress of revivals, as well as prevent the blessed results which might otherwise appear; they bring revivals themselves into suspicion and reproach. Many think, that if they begin to yield to any serious impressions which they may feel when a revival begins, they will be carried away into all the excesses and delusions of which they have heard so much, and they shake off their seri-



ousness, and harden their hearts against all warnings and exhortations. One of the worst consequences of the errors and abuses contemplated is, that they lead unsanctified men, especially worldly wise men, to think that all vital piety is delusive ; and that some decent regard to religious institutions and observances, with moral conduct, is religion enough, and indeed all the religion which is worthy of the name—Of this consequence of these errors and abuses the examples are multitudinous and most deplorable. New measure men, reproach us with being enemies to revivals, but they are themselves the greatest real enemies to those displays of God's special mercy, that they ever have. Those who openly oppose and blaspheme them are recognised at once as enemies, treated as such, and injure but few beside themselves. But these indiscreet and mistaken men, who claim to be, and are believed to be, the warmest friends to revivals of religion, are *in the camp*, are identified with the cause, and all that they advise and do is considered as belonging to the cause ; and they make it the subject of reproach and aversion to the world at large. Now, if the world is to be converted to God by revivals of religion—which I fully believe, and think must be evident to reflecting minds—those who abuse and pervert revivals, whatever may be their pretensions or intentions, are really opposing the plan and purposes of God. They are therefore to be withstood, with decision and firmness, yet with meekness and prudence. Now and then, an individual of them, like Davenport in the time of Whitfield, and Marshall in Kentucky may come out, and confess and bemoan their errors publicly—as every truly pious man who has been deluded, as they were, ought to do—but the instances of this frank and public acknowledgment of error, are rare ; and if they were not rare, the mischief done, is done irreparably, before those who renounce their error, are brought to bewail and repent of the share which they have had in producing it. We must oppose them, therefore, openly, and without fear or hesitation, and the sooner it is done after their operations have commenced, the better ; for after the delusion has proceeded to a certain length, it becomes like a resistless torrent, which nothing can stop, till it has spent its force. You have therefore, in my judgment, done well, in preaching and publishing discourses intended to have an effect in correcting the er-



rors and abuses to which I have referred ; and on the evening of my ministerial life, I willingly bear my solemn testimony against them, and am glad of an opportunity to record it, as here I do— May the Lord assist and bless you, in all your endeavors to plead his precious cause, and extend his blessed kingdom. So prays your friend and brother in the gospel of our dear and adored Redeemer.

ASHBEL GREEN.

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