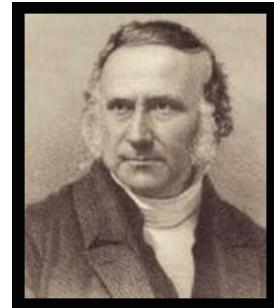


# *Excitement*



While God was pouring out his Spirit upon the congregation to which I ministered, and upon many other places around us, two individuals belonging to my parish went to a neighboring town to attend a "camp-meeting." One of them was a young man of about twenty years of age, whose mother and sisters were members of the church. The other was a man of about twenty-six years, whose wife and wife's sister were also communicants with us. Both of these men returned from that meeting professed converts to Christ. They had gone to it, as they told me, without any serious impressions, impelled by mere curiosity. While there they became very much affected; so much so, that one or both of them fell to the ground, and remained prostrate for an hour, unable to stand. They earnestly besought the people to pray for them, and prayed for themselves. Their feelings became entirely changed; instead of grief and fear, they were filled with joy and delight. And in this joyful frame of mind they returned home, not having been absent but two or three days.

I soon visited them both, and conversed with them freely. At my first interview, I had great confidence in their conversion. They seemed to me to be renewed men, so far as I could judge, from their exercises of mind. They appeared humble, solemn, grateful and happy. In future conversations with them, my mind was led to some distrust of the reality of their conversion. They did not seem to me to have an experimental knowledge of the truth, to such an extent, as I believed a regenerated sinner would have. I could get no satisfactory answers when I asked,

"What made you fall? how did you feel? what were you thinking of? What made you afterwards so happy? What makes you so happy now? What makes you think, God has given you a new heart? What makes you think, you will not return to the world and love it as well as ever? They had ready answers to all such questions; but they did not seem to me to be right answers. They appeared to have no clear and full ideas of the exceeding sinfulness of the heart, of remaining sin, or the danger of self-delusion. And yet these men were prayerful, thoughtful, serious and happy. They studied their bibles, forsook their old companions, and appeared to value and relish all the appointed means of grace. In this way of life they continued for months. I took pains to see and converse with them often; and though they did not appear to me to blend very happily in feeling with other young Christians, or to enjoy our religious services as if they were quite satisfied; yet my mind apologized for them, on the ground of the peculiar way in which their religion commenced. And with the exception of their imperfect views and feelings, about the great doctrines of religion; I saw nothing in either of them, to make me think them unfit for connection with the church.

Some months after their professed conversion, I mentioned to them, separately, the subject of making a public profession of their faith. Each appeared to think this his duty; but each of them was rather reserved. I could not very definitely ascertain their feelings; though I aimed carefully and kindly, and repeatedly to do so. One season of communion after another passed by; and neither of them united with the church. Their particular friends, who had made such frequent mention of their conversion, as if it were more worthy of mention, than the conversion of scores of sinners around them, and who had so much rejoiced in their conversion, and had been so confident of its reality; began to be very silent about them. I found that their confidence in them was shaken.

Within a year from the time when they professed to have turned to Christ, the younger man had become entirely careless of religion; and, so far as I know, continues so to this day.

The other one was a little more steadfast. But within three years, he had become an intemperate man, and shame and a torment to his family; and the last I heard of him, he was a drunkard! He had ceased to attend divine worship on the Sabbath; family prayer was abandoned; his children were neglected; and his broken-hearted wife, with prayer for him still on her lips, but almost without hope that God would hear, was fast bending downwards towards the grave, the only remaining spot of an earthly rest!

Mere excitements of mind on the subject of religion, however powerful, unless they arise from the known truth of God, are never safe. Excitement, however sudden or great, is not to be feared or deprecated, if it is originated simply by the truth, and will be guided by the truth. All other excitements are pernicious. It is easy to produce them, but their consequences are sad. A true history of spurious revivals would be one of the most melancholy books ever written.

The great leading doctrines of Christianity are the truths which the Holy Spirit employs, when he regenerates souls. If young converts are really ignorant on such points, not having experimentally learnt them, they are only converts to error and deception. It is not to be expected, perhaps not to be desired, that young Christians should understand doctrines scholastically, or theologically, or metaphysically. But if they are Christians indeed, it is probable that their mind will be substantially right, on such doctrines as human sinfulness, divine sovereignty, atonement, justification by faith in Jesus Christ, regeneration by the special power of the Holy Spirit, and the constant need of divine aid. God's children all have the same image, and same superscription—the family mark. Heaven has but one mould. "Beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image."