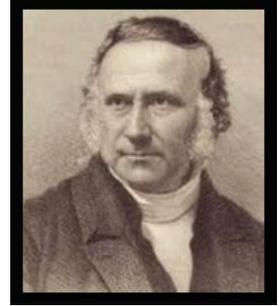


## *Fanaticism*



A young woman, who was a member of my church, came to me with the urgent request, that I would visit her sister, who was in a very anxious state of mind, and would be glad to see me. Learning that her sister had been a communicant in another denomination, and very seldom attended our church; I declined going, as I was unwilling even to appear of a proselyting spirit. But she was so urgent, that I finally consented.

She lived in a neighborhood some miles distant, where most of the people belonged to another denomination. I immediately rode to her house. She entered the room where I was, and her sister, after introducing her to me, left us alone, that she might speak freely to me. I perceived she was very much agitated, trembling and sighing. I said to her:—"You seem to be very much troubled. What is it that distresses you?"

Says she, "I have been converted three times, and I feel as if I needed it again!"

"Take care," said I, "that you do not get converted again in the same way. All that has done you no good. Has it?"

No," says she; "not at all!"

"Then, do not get converted so, again. You want a religion that shall last, a religion to die with; and I advise you to get an entirely new kind."

I conversed with her for some time, aiming to teach her the nature of religion, and to quell the excitement of her mind, which appeared to me to arise more from an agitation of her sensibilities, than from real conviction of sin. Her affections, more than her understanding and conscience, were excited. I visited her afterwards; and for some time her impressions appeared to me to become more scriptural and deep, and to promise a good result. But she was drawn away again among her old associates, at an exciting assemblage in the evening, where she professed to have become converted again. She was as joyful and happy as she had been before, and her religion lasted this time about six months.

The heart that has once been drunk with fanaticism, is ever afterwards exposed to the same evil. It will mistake excitement—any fancy, for true religion. Fanaticism is not faith.

When the affections, or mere sensibilities of the heart are excited, and the understanding and conscience are but little employed, there is a sad preparation for false hope—for some wild delusion, or fanatical faith. The judgment and conscience should take the lead of the affections; but when the affections take the lead, they will be very apt to monopolize the whole soul, judgment and conscience will be overpowered, or flung into the background; and then, the deluded mortal will have a religion of mere impressions—more feeling than truth—more sensitiveness than faith—more fancy and fanaticism, than holiness. Emotions, agitations, or sensibilities of any sort, which do not arise from clear and conscientious perception of truth, will be likely to be pernicious. The most clear perception of truth, the deepest conviction, is seldom accompanied by any great excitement of the sensibilities. Under such conviction, feeling may be deep and strong, but will not be fitful, capricious and blind. To a religion of mere impressions, one may be “converted three times,” or three times three; to a religion of truth, one conversion will suffice. In my opinion, my young

friend was all along misled by the idea, that religion consisted very much in a wave of feeling. Her instructors ought to have taught her better.