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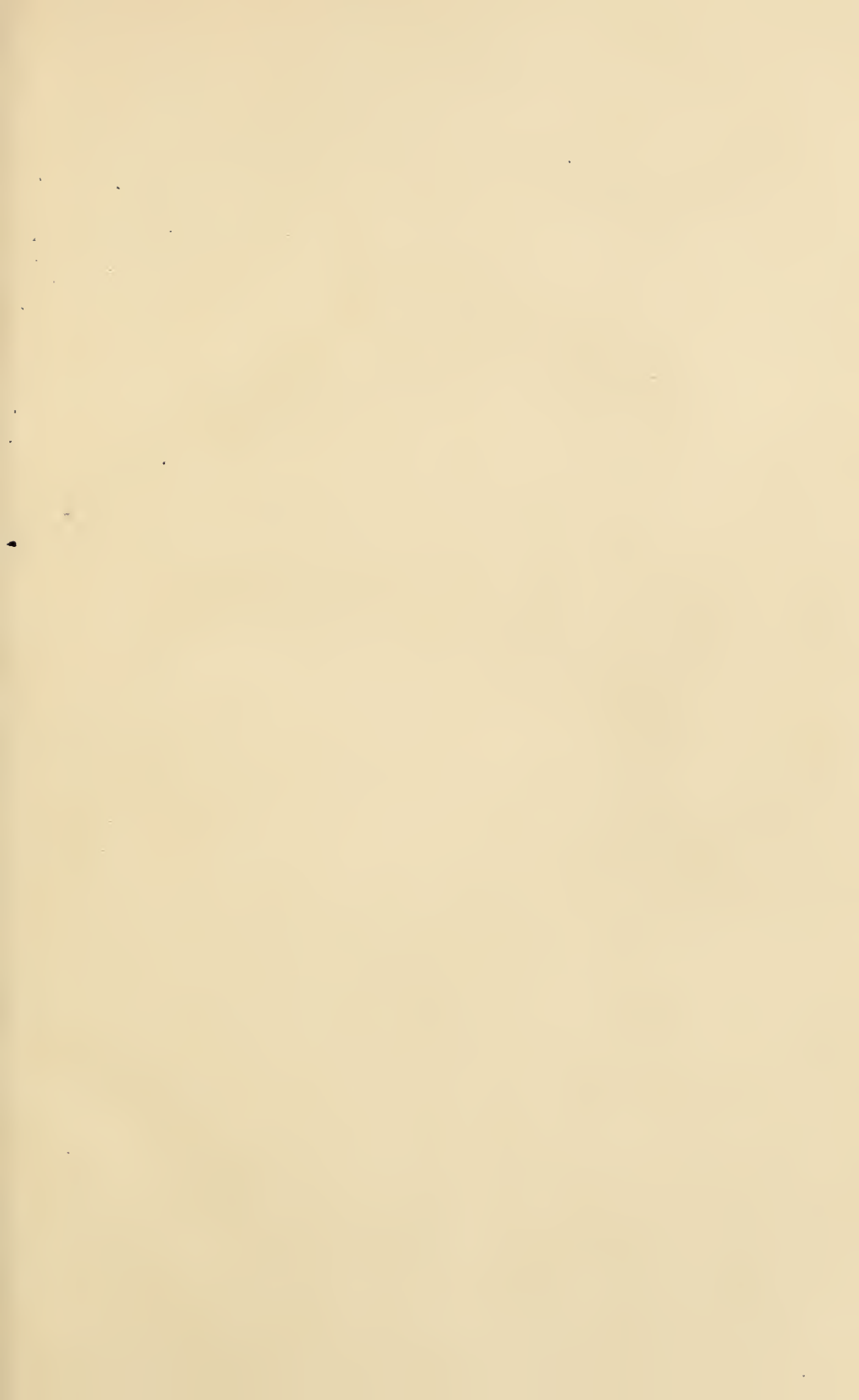
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A
LETTER

FROM

A Gentleman in *Boston*,

TO

Mr. GEORGE WISHART,

One of the Ministers of EDINBURGH,

Concerning the

State of Religion

In NEW-ENGLAND.



EDINBURGH:

Printed in the Year MDCCXLII.

NOTES

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To the READER.

THE following Account of the State of Religion in New-England, I cannot but depend upon as certain, from the Knowledge I have of the Candor and Judgment of the Person who writes it: I have therefore thought myself obliged to communicate it to the World, in Justice to the Cause of Truth, by which the Interests of real Religion can never suffer; and I am the rather induced to this, to prevent the like Extravagancies from ever prevailing with us under a Name of Religion. Though my Correspondent is one whom I never saw, having never been in this Part of the World; yet I know him to have one of the best Characters in the Country where he lives, for good Understanding, Integrity, and sincere Regard to Religion; and by such Accounts of him, which I had heard, was our Correspondence introduced. The Opposition he shows to that Spirit of Bigotry, which would

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damn all those who don't believe all the Points of Calvinism, is by no means to be constructed to the Prejudice of his own way of thinking as to these Points: I have occasion to know, that, as he is not unacquainted with the Controversies in Divinity, he is Calvinist in his Judgment; though far from confining Christianity to the distinguishing Doctrines of Calvinism. In publishing the Letter, I have made no sort of Alterations, save the leaving out some things which are personal, and on which the rest has no Dependence: some Words which I believe might have been altered with the Writer's own Approbation, I chused to keep as they were, that I might be at full Liberty to declare it to be a genuine Copy.

Edinburgh, Nov. 8.

8. 1742.

GEORGE WISHART.



A LETTER, &c.

Reverend Sir,

I Perceive by a printed Letter from a Friend in *Edinburgh*, containing *Excerpts of Letters concerning the Success of the Gospel in these Parts*, that marvellous Accounts have been sent Abroad of a most glorious Work of Grace going on in *America*, as begun by Mr. *Whitefield*, and helpt forward by those in his way of preaching and acting. I should be glad there had been more Truth in those Accounts. Some of the Things related are known Falsehoods, others strangely enlarged upon; and the Representations, in general, such, as exhibite a wrong Idea of the *religious* State of Affairs among us. I had Thoughts of sending you the needful Corrections of that *Pamphlet*; but my Circumstances being such, at

present, as not to allow of this, must content myself with giving you the following *summary* Narration of things as they have appeared among us.

The Minds of People in this Part of the World, had been greatly prepossess'd in Favour of Mr. *Whitefield*, from the Accounts transmitted of him, from time to time, as a *Wonder of Piety, a Man of God*, so as *no one was like him*: Accordingly, when he came to *Town*, about two Years since, he was received as though he had been an *Angel of God*; yea, a *God come down in the Likeness of Man*. He was strangely flock'd after by all Sorts of Persons, and much admired by the *Vulgar*, both *great* and *small*. The *Ministers* had him in Veneration, at least in Appearance, as much as the People; encouraged his Preaching, attended it themselves every Day in the Week, and mostly *twice* a Day. The grand Subject of Conversation was Mr. *Whitefield*, and the whole Business of the Town to run, from Place to Place, to hear him preach: And, as he preach'd under such uncommon Advantages, being high in the Opinion of the People, and having the Body of the Ministers hanging on his Lips, he soon insinuated himself still further into the Affections of Multitudes, in so much that it became dangerous to menti-

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on his Name, without saying something in commendation of him.

His Reception, as he past through *this* and the neighbouring Governments of *Connecticut* and *New-York*, till he came to *Philadelphia*, was after much the same Manner; save only, that he met with no Admirers among the *Clergy*, unless here and there one, any where but in *Boston*: And, whether the Ministers here in general, really thought better of him than they did elsewhere, I will not be too positive to affirm. 'Tis possible, they might act as tho' they had a great Veneration for him, and so as to lead People into such an Apprehension, from *Cowardice*, *Affectation of Popularity*, or a rigid Attachment to some Sentiments in Divinity, they might imagine there was now an Advantage to establish and propagate: And I would not undertake to prove, that they might none of them be under an undue Influence from some or other of these Motives.

Much began to be now said of a *glorious Work of God* going on in the Land. *Evening-lectures* were set up in one Place and another; no less than six in this Town, *four* weekly, and *two* monthly ones, tho' the Town does not consist of above 5000 Families at the largest Computation. At

some of these Lectures, it was common to mention Mr. *Whitefield* by Name, both in the *Prayers* and *Sermons*; giving God Thanks for sending such an *extraordinary* Man among us, and making him the Instrument of *such extraordinary Good* to so many Souls. He was indeed spoken of, as *the Angel flying through Heaven with the everlasting Gospel*, and such Honours sacrificed to him as were due to no meer Man: Nay, to such a Height did this Spirit rise, that all who did not express a very high Thought of Mr. *Whitefield*, were lookt upon with an evil Eye; and as to those who declared their Dislike of what they judged amiss of the Times, they were stigmatised as *Enemies of God and true Religion*; yea, they were openly represented, both from the *Pulpit* and the *Press*, as in danger of committing *the Sin against the Holy Ghost*, if not actually guilty even of this *unpardonable Sin*.

And here you will doubtless be disposed to enquire, what was the *great Good* this *Gentleman* was the Instrument of?

In answer whereto, I freely acknowledge, wherever he went he generally moved the *Passions*, especially of the *younger* People, and the *Females* among them; the Effect whereof was, a great Talk about Religion,

together with a Disposition to be perpetually hearing Sermons, to neglect of all other Business; especially, as preach'd by those who were Sticklers for the *new Way*, as it was called. And in these things chiefly consisted the Goodness so much spoken of. I deny not, but there might be here and there a Person stopp'd from going on in a Course of Sin; and some might be made really better: But so far as I could judge upon the nicest Observation, the Town, in general, was not much mended in those things wherein a Reformation was greatly needed. I could not discern myself, nor many others whom I have talked with, and challenged on this Head, but that there was the same Pride and Vanity, the same Luxury and Intemperance, the same lying and tricking and cheating, as before this Gentleman came among us. There was certainly no *remarkable* Difference as to these things: And 'tis vain in any to pretend there was. This, I am sure of, there was rais'd such a Spirit of bitter, censorious, uncharitable judging, as was not known before; and is, wherever it reigns, a Scandal to all who call themselves Christians: Nor was it ever evident to me, but that the greatest Friends to Mr. *Whitefield* were as much puffed up with Conceit and Pride as any of their Neighbours;

bours; and as to some of them, and the more eminent too, I verily believe they possess a *worse Spirit* than before they heard of his Name, and it had been as well for them if they had never seen his Face.

But I have only entred as yet upon that Scene of Things, which has made so much Noise in the Country. A Number of Ministers, in one Place and another, were by this Time formed into Mr. *Whitefield's* Temper, and began to appear and go about preaching, with a Zeal more flaming, if possible, than his. One of the most famous among these was Mr. *Gilbert Tennent*, a Man of no great Parts or Learning; his preaching was in the *extemporaneous* Way, with much Noise and little Connection. If he had taken suitable Care to prepare his Sermons, and followed Nature in the Delivery of them, he might have acquitted himself as a *mid-dling* Preacher; but as he preached, he was an *awkward Imitator* of Mr. *Whitefield*, and too often turned off his Hearers with *mere Stuff*, which he uttered with a Spirit more bitter and uncharitable than you can easily imagine; all were *Pharisees, Hypocrites, carnal unregenerate Wretches*, both Ministers and People, who did not think just as he did, particularly as to the Doctrines of *Calvinism*; and those who
op-

opposed him, and the Work of God he was sure he was carrying on, would have opposed *Christ Jesus himself* and *his Apostles*, had they lived in their Day. This Gentleman came from *New-Brunswick* in the *Ferries* to *Boston*, in the Middle of Winter, (a Journey of more than 300 Miles) to water the good Seed sown by *Mr. Whitefield* in this Place. It was indeed at *Mr. Whitefield's* Desire, and in consequence of a Day of *Fasting and Prayer*, kept on purpose to know the Mind of God as to this Matter, that he came among us; the *Ministers in the Town*, though *fourteen* in Number, being thought insufficient to carry on the good Work he had begun here in the Hearts of People. And though the Design this Gentleman professedly came upon, was a bare-faced Affront to the *Body of the Ministers*, yet not only the People, (which is not to be wondred at) but some of the Ministers themselves admired and followed him, as much as they had done *Mr. Whitefield* before him; and here he was, by their Encouragement, a great Part of the Winter, preaching every Day in the Week, to the taking People off from their Callings, and the introducing a Neglect of all Business but that of hearing him preach. He went from *Boston* to the *eastward*, to visit the Places where

Mr.

Mr. *Whitefield* had been; and on his Return home passed through the Country, preaching every where as he went along, in the same Manner, and with the same Spirit he did here in *Boston*.

And now it was, that Mr. *Whitefield's* Doctrine of *inward Feelings* began to discover itself in Multitudes, whose *sensible Perceptions* arose to such a Height, as that they *cried out, fell down, swooned away*, and, to all Appearance, were like Persons in *Fits*; and this, when the Preaching (if it may be so called) had in it as little well digested and connected good Sense, as you can well suppose. Scores in a Congregation would be in such Circumstances at a Time; nay some hundreds in some Places, to the filling the Houses of Worship with Confusion not to be expressed in Words, nor indeed conceived of by the most lively Imagination, unless where Persons have been Eye and Ear-witnesses to these Things. Though I may add here, that to a Person in possession of himself, and capable of Observation, this surprising Scene of Things may be accounted for: The *Speaker* delivers himself, with the *greatest Vehemence* both of *Voice* and *Gesture*, and in the most *frightful Language* his Genius will allow of. If this has its intended Effect upon *one or two weak*
Wo-

Women, the Shrieks catch from one to another, till a great Part of the Congregation is affected; and some are in the Thought, that it may be too common for those *zealous in the new Way* to cry out themselves, on purpose to move others, and bring forward a *general Scream*. *Visions* now became common, and *Trances* also, the Subjects of which were in their own Conceit transported from Earth to Heaven, where they saw and heard most glorious Things; conversed with *Christ* and *holy Angels*; had opened to them the *Book of Life*, and were permitted to read the Names of Persons there, and the like. And what is a singular Instance (so far as I remember) of the working of Enthusiasm, *laughing, loud hearty laughing*, was one of the Ways in which our *new Converts*, almost every where, were wont to join together in expressing their Joy at the Conversion of others.

'Tis scarce imaginable what Excesses and Extravagancies People were running into, and even encouraged in; being told such Things were Arguments of the *extraordinary Presence of the Holy Ghost* with them. The same Houses of Worship were scarce emptied Night nor Day for a Week together, and unheard of Instances of supposed

posed Religion were carried on in them. In the same House, and at the same time, some would be *praying*, some *exhorting*, some *singing*, some *clapping their Hands*, some *laughing*, some *crying*, some *shrieking and roaring out*; and so invincibly set were they in these Ways, especially when encouraged by any Ministers, (as was too often the Case) that it was a vain Thing to argue with them, to shew them the Indecency of such Behaviour; and whoever indeed made an Attempt this Way, might be sure beforehand of being called an *Opposer* of the *Spirit*, and a *Child of the Devil*.

At these Times there were among the People what we call here EXHORTERS; these are such as are esteemed to be *Converts* in the *new Way*. Sometimes they are *Children*, *Boys* and *Girls*, sometimes *Women*; but most commonly *raw, illiterate, weak and conceited young Men*, or *Lads*. They pray with the People, call upon them to come to Christ, tell them they are dropping into Hell, and take upon them what they imagine is the Business of preaching. They are generally much better thought of than any Ministers, except those in the *new Way*, I mean by the Friends to the *Extraordinaries* prevalent in the Land; and they are the greatest Promoters of them. 'Tis indeed

at the *Exhortations* of these poor ignorant Creatures, that there is ordinarily the most Noise and Confusion: And what may be worth a particular Remark, 'tis *seldom* there are any great Effects wrought, till the Gloominess of the Night comes on. It is in the *Evening*, or more late in the *Night*, with only a *few Candles* in a *Meeting-house*, that there is the *screaming* and *shrieking* to the greatest Degree; and the Persons thus affected are generally *Children, young People, and Women*. Other Instances there may have been, but they are more rare; these bear the chief Part.

I shall here insert a Paragraph of a Letter sent me by a Friend living at *Newhaven*, the Seat of one of our *Colleges*, a Gentleman of known Integrity and Veracity, giving an Account of the Managements of one of the Preachers of Mr. *Whitefield's* making, with the Appearance following thereupon. Says he, “ After the Conclusion of
 “ the Exercises usual in our religious As-
 “ semblies, he came down from the *Pulpit*
 “ into the *Deacon's* Seat. His Exercises
 “ were, 1. *Short Prayers*; wherein he u-
 “ sed very uncommon Expressions, and such
 “ as had no Tendency, at least in my Mind,
 “ to excite Devotion; which he delivered
 “ with a boisterous Voice, and in a Man-
 “ ner

“ ner to me very disagreeable. 2. *Singing*
 “ *Psalms* and *Hymns*; which he himself
 “ repeated with an awful Tone and fright-
 “ ful Gestures. 3. *Exhorting*, as they
 “ called it; to which many *Laymen* were
 “ admitted as *Assistants*. In performing
 “ these Exercises they observed no stated
 “ Method, but proceeded as their present
 “ Thought or Fancy led them: And by this
 “ means the Meeting-house would be filled
 “ with what I could not but judge great
 “ Confusion and Disorder; for the whole
 “ House would many times seem to be in a
 “ perfect Hubbub, and People filled with
 “ Consternation. These Meetings they
 “ would continue till 10, 11, 12 o’ Clock
 “ at Night; in the midst of them sometimes
 “ 10, 20, 30, and sometimes many more
 “ would *scream* and *cry out*, or send forth
 “ the most *lamentable Groans*, whilst o-
 “ thers made great Manifestations of Joy,
 “ by *clapping their Hands*, uttering *ex-*
 “ *tatick Expressions*, *singing Psalms*, and
 “ *inviting* and *exhorting* others. Some
 “ would *swoon away* under the Influence
 “ of distressing Fears, and others *swallow-*
 “ *ed up with insupportable Joy*. While
 “ some were *fainting*, others laboured un-
 “ der *convulsive Twitches of Body*, which
 “ they said were involuntary. But in vain
 “ shall

“ shall I pretend to describe all the Pro-
 “ ceedings at those Meetings. But what
 “ appeared to me most dangerous and hurt-
 “ ful was, that very much Stress was laid
 “ on these *Extraordinaries*, as tho’ they
 “ were *sure Marks*, or, at least, *sufficient*
 “ *Evidences* of a just Conviction of Sin
 “ on the one Hand; or, on the other, of
 “ that Joy which there is in believing, and
 “ so of an Interest in the Favour of God.”

You may be ready perhaps to think I
 have here given you a romantick Represen-
 tation of Things; but it is the real Truth
 of the Case without a Figure; yea, this has
 been the Appearance in all Parts of the
 Land more or less, and so known to have
 been so, that there is no room for Debate
 upon the Matter: Nay, those who are Friends
 to the *new Way* were *once* so far from be-
 ing ashamed of these Things, that they boast-
 ed of them, and entertained an ill Opinion
 of all who did not speak of them as *Evi-*
dences of the *wonderful Power of the Spi-*
rit of God: I say, they *at first* boasted of
 these Things, and some of them do so still;
 though the Generality have begun, for some
 time, to speak publicly of the *Subtilty of*
Satan, to tell People he may appear as an
Angel of Light, and to warn them against
 being carried away by his Devices.

Mr. *Tennent* himself, one of the main Instruments of all our Disorders, has, in a couple of Letters to some of his Friends, published in the *Prints* (a), expressed his
Fears

(a) As the *Caledonian Mercury*, in which is republished one of Mr. *Tennent*'s Letters above referred to, may not be in every Body's Hands, the Letter, with the Title prefixed to it in the *Boston Evening-Post*, July 26. 1742. is as follows :

Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Mr. G. Tennent, to the Rev. Mr. Dickinson of the Jerseys, the Original of which is in the Hands of the Rev. Mr. Clap, Rector of Yale-College, and was lately given him by Mr. Dickinson.

Dear Sir,

I Have had many afflicting Thoughts about the Debates that have subsisted for some time in our Synod: I would to God the Breach were healed, if it was the Will of the Almighty.—As for my own Part, wherein I have mismanaged in doing what I did;—I do look upon it to be my Duty, and should be willing to acknowledge it in the openest Manner.—I cannot justify the *excessive Heat of Temper* which has sometimes appeared in my Conduct.—I have been of late (since I returned from *New-England*) visited with much spiritual Desertions, Temptations, and Distresses of various kinds, coming in a thick, and almost continual Succession, which have given me a greater Discovery of myself than I think I ever had before. These Things, with the Trials I have had of the *Moravians*, have given me a clear View of the Danger of every thing which tends to *Enthusiasm* and *Division* in the visible Church.—I think that while the enthusiastical *Moravians* and *Long-beards*, or *Pickists*, are uniting their Bodies, (no doubt to increase their Strength, and render themselves more considerable) it is a Shame that the Ministers (who are in the main of sound Principles of Religion) should be divided and quarrelling.—Alas for it! my Soul is sick of these Things: I wish that some scriptural healing Methods could be fallen upon to put an End to these Confusions. Sometime since I felt a Disposition to fall upon my Knees,
if

Fears lest the Churches should be undone with a *Spirit of Enthusiasm*, and these *Exhorters* which have risen up every where in the Land. He seems indeed to have quite

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turned

if I had Opportunity, to intreat them to be at Peace. I add no more at present, but humble and hearty Salutations, and remain with all due Honour and Respect,

Your poor worthless Brother

in the Gospel-Ministry;

New-Brunswick,
Feb. 12. 1741-2.

G. TENNENT.

P. S. I break open the Letter myself to add my Thoughts about some extraordinary Things in Mr. *Davenport's* Conduct.—As to his making his Judgment about the *internal* State of Persons, or their *Experience*, a Term of Church-fellowship, I believe it is *inscriptural*, and of awful Tendency to rend and tear the Church: It is bottomed upon a false Base, *viz.* That a certain and infallible Knowledge of the good Estate of Men, from their Experience, is attainable in this Life. The Practice is *schismatical*, in as much as it sets up a *new Term* of Communion which CHRIST has not fixed.

The late Method of setting up *separate Meetings*, upon the *supposed Unregeneracy* of Pastors of Places, is *enthusiastical*, *proud*, and *schismatical*. All that fear GOD ought to oppose it as a most dangerous Engine to bring the Churches into the most damnable Errors and Confusions. The Practice is built upon a twofold false Hypothesis, *viz.* Infallibility of Knowledge; and that unconverted Ministers will be used as Instruments of no good to the Church.

The Practice of *openly exposing Ministers*, who are supposed to be unconverted in publick Discourse, by particular Application of such Times and Places, serves only to provoke them, (instead of doing them any good) and to declare our own Arrogance. It is an unprecedented, divisial, and pernicious Practice; it is a lording it over our Brethren, a Degree superior to what any Prelate has pretended since the coming of CHRIST, (so far as I know) the *Pope* only

turned about: The Reason whereof may be this; the *Moravians* who came to *Philadelphia* with Count *Zinzendorf*, have been among his People, and managed with them as he did elsewhere, and brought the like Confusion among them; and now he cries out of Danger, and expresses himself much as those did, whom before he had sent to the Devil by wholesale.

Various are the Sentiments of Persons about this *unusual Appearance* among us. Some think it to be a *most wonderful Work of God's Grace*; others a *most wonderful Spirit of Enthusiasm*; some think there is a *great deal of Religion*, with some *small Mixture of Extravagance*; others, a *great deal of Extravagance* with some *small Mix-*

excepted; though I really do not remember to have read that the *Pope* went on at this Rate.

The sending out of *unlearned Men to teach others*, upon the Supposition of their Piety, in ordinary Cases, seems to bring the Ministry into Contempt; to cherish *Enthusiasm*, and bring all into Confusion: Whatever fair Face it may have, it is a most perverse Practice.

The Practice of *singing in the Streets* is a Piece of *Weakness*, and *enthusiastical Ostentation*.

I wish you Success, *dear Sir*, in your Journey: My Soul is grieved for such *enthusiastical Fooleries*, they portend much Mischief to the poor Church of *God*, if they be not seasonably check'd: May your Labours be blest for that End.

I must also declare my Abhorrence of all Pretence to *immediate Inspiration*, or following *immediate Impulses*, as an *enthusiastical perillous ignis fatuus*.

Mixture of that which may be called *good*; some think the *Country* was never in such a *happy* State on a *religious* account, others that it was never in a *worse*.

For my self, I am among those who are clearly in the Opinion, that there never was such a *Spirit* of *Superstition* and *Enthusiasm* reigning in the Land before; never such *gross Disorders* and *barefaced Affronts* to *common Decency*; never such *scandalous Reproaches* on the *Blessed Spirit*, making him the Author of the greatest *Irregularities* and *Confusions*: Yet, I am of Opinion also, that the *Appearances* among us (so much out of the ordinary Way, and so unaccountable to Persons not acquainted with the History of the World) have been the Means of awakening the Attention of many; and a good Number, I hope, have settled into a truly *Christian Temper*: Tho' I must add, at the same time, that I am far from thinking, that the Appearance, in general, is any other than the Effect of *enthusiastick Heat*. The Goodness that has been so much talked of, 'tis plain to me, is nothing more, in general, than a *Commotion in the Passions*. I can't see that Men have been made *better*, if hereby be meant, their being formed to a nearer Resemblance to the *Divine Being* in *moral Holiness*.

'Tis

'Tis not evident to me, that Persons, generally, have a better Understanding of Religion, a better Government of their Passions, a more Christian Love to their Neighbour, or that they are more decent and regular in their Devotions towards God. I am clearly of the Mind, they are worse in all these Regards. They place their Religion so much in the *Heat* and *Fervour* of their *Passions*, that they too much neglect their *Reason* and *Judgment*: And instead of being more kind and gentle, more full of Mercy and good Fruits, they are more bitter, fierce and implacable. And what is a *grand discriminating Mark of this Work*, where-ever it takes Place, is, that it makes Men *spiritually proud* and *conceited* beyond Measure, infinitely *censorious* and *uncharitable*, to *Neighbours*, to *Relations*, even the nearest and dearest; to *Ministers* in an especial Manner; yea, to all Mankind, who are not as they are, and don't think and act as they do: And there are few Places where *this Work* has been in any *remarkable* manner, but they have been filled with Faction and Contention; yea, in some, they have divided into Parties, and openly and scandalously separated from one another.

Truly the Accounts sent Abroad, were sent
too

too soon; too soon, I am satisfied, to reflect Honour upon the Persons who wrote them: And they bewray such a want of Judgment, as I was really sorry to see them falling into. There are few Persons now, perhaps none but such as are evidently over-heated, but begin to see that Things have been carried too far, and that the Hazard is great, unless God mercifully interpose, lest we should be over-run with *Enthusiasm*. And to speak the plain Truth, my Fear is, lest the End of these things should be *Quakerism* and *Infidelity*: These we have now chiefly to guard against.

A particular Account of one Mr. *James Davenport*, with his *strange Conduct* in this *Town* and *elsewhere*, I doubt not would have been agreeable: But I have exceeded already. He is the *wildest Enthusiast* I ever saw, and acts in the wildest manner; and yet, he is vindicated by some in all his Extravagancies.

I now beg Pardon, Sir, for thus trespassing upon your Patience. As Mr. *Whitefield* has been in *Scotland*, and *human Nature* is the *same every where*; this Narration of the Effects he has been the Instrument of producing here, may excite your Zeal to guard the People in time against any such

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Extravagancies, if there should be Danger of them where you may be concerned. I am,

Reverend Sir,

With all due Regard, &c.

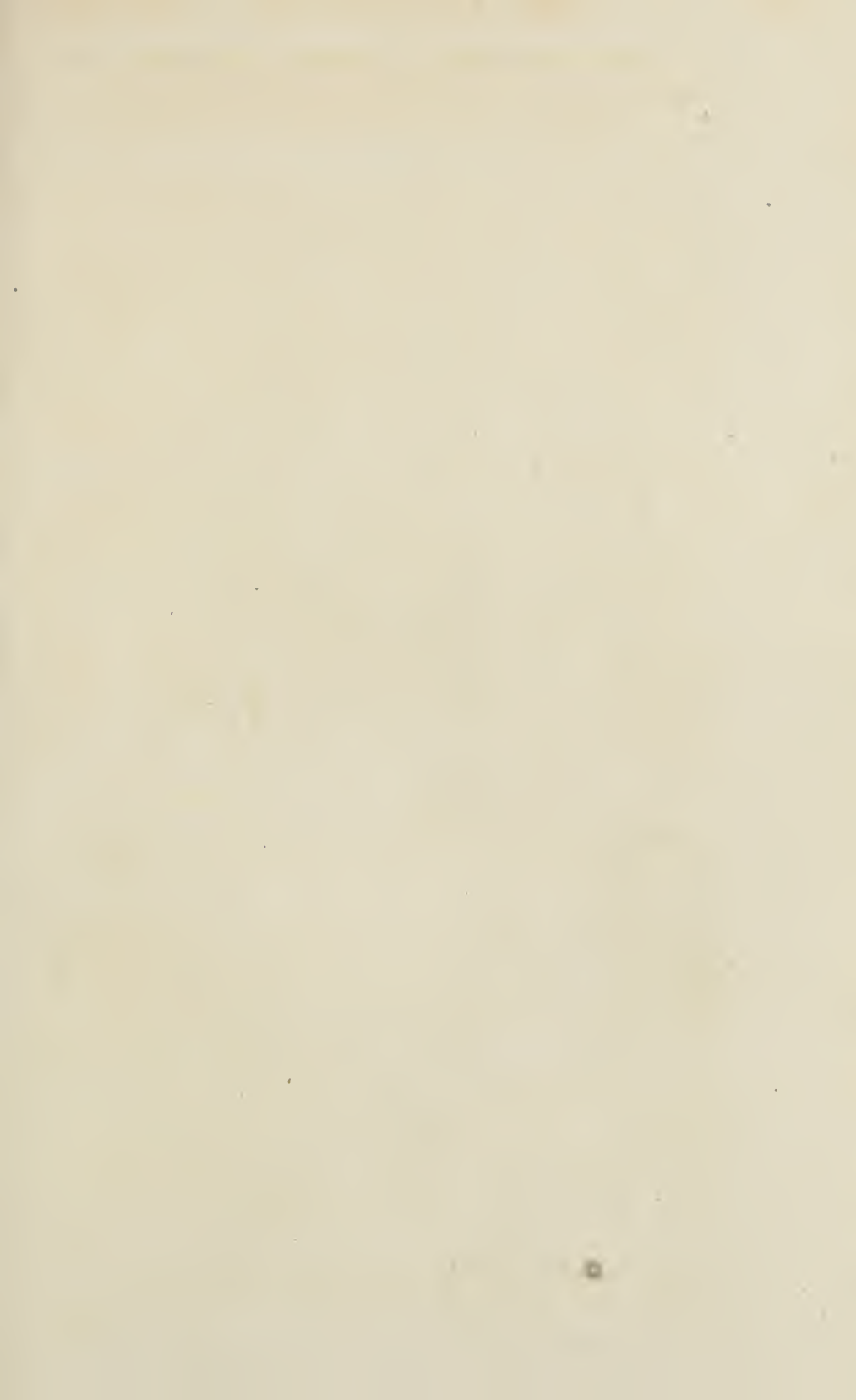
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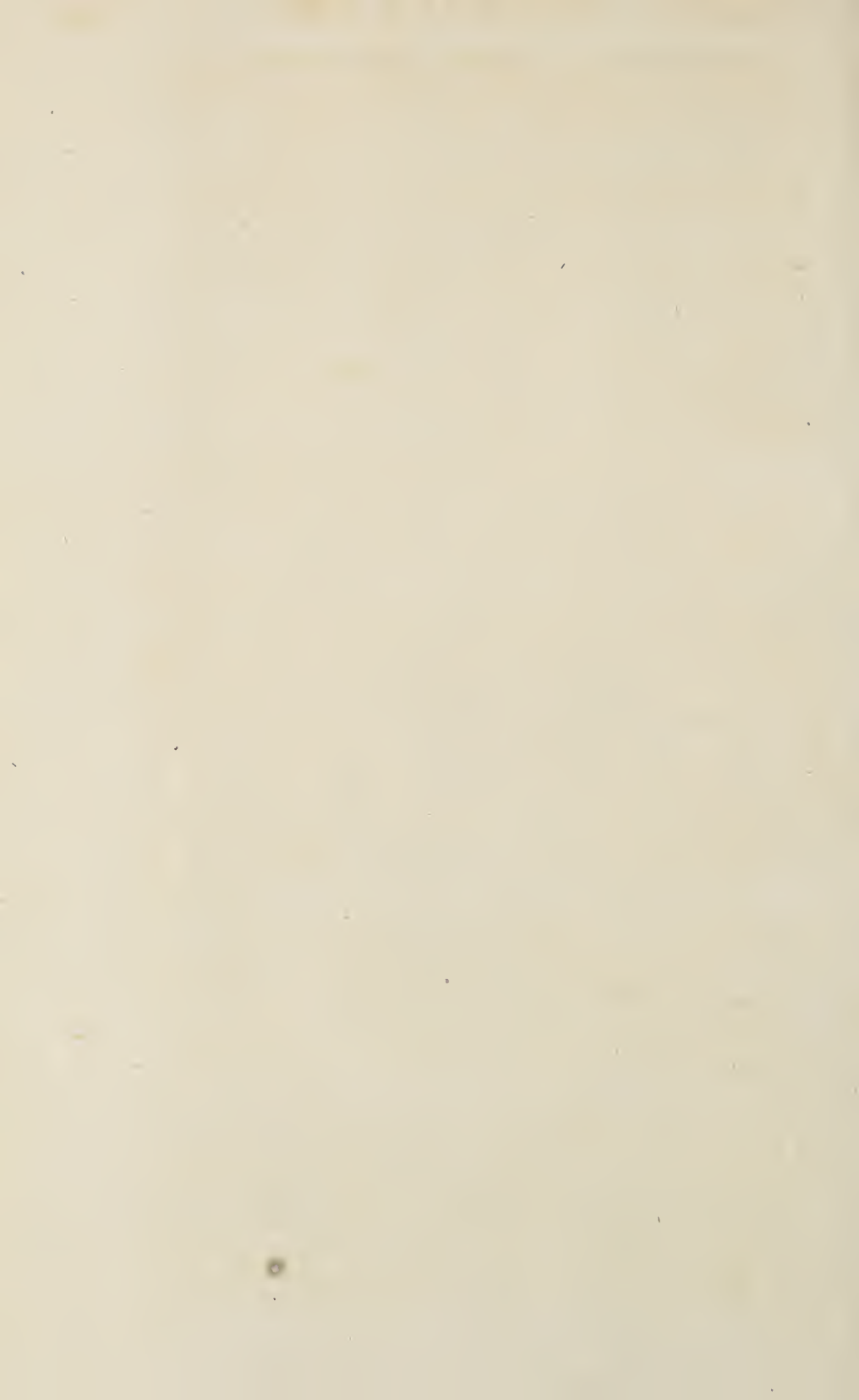
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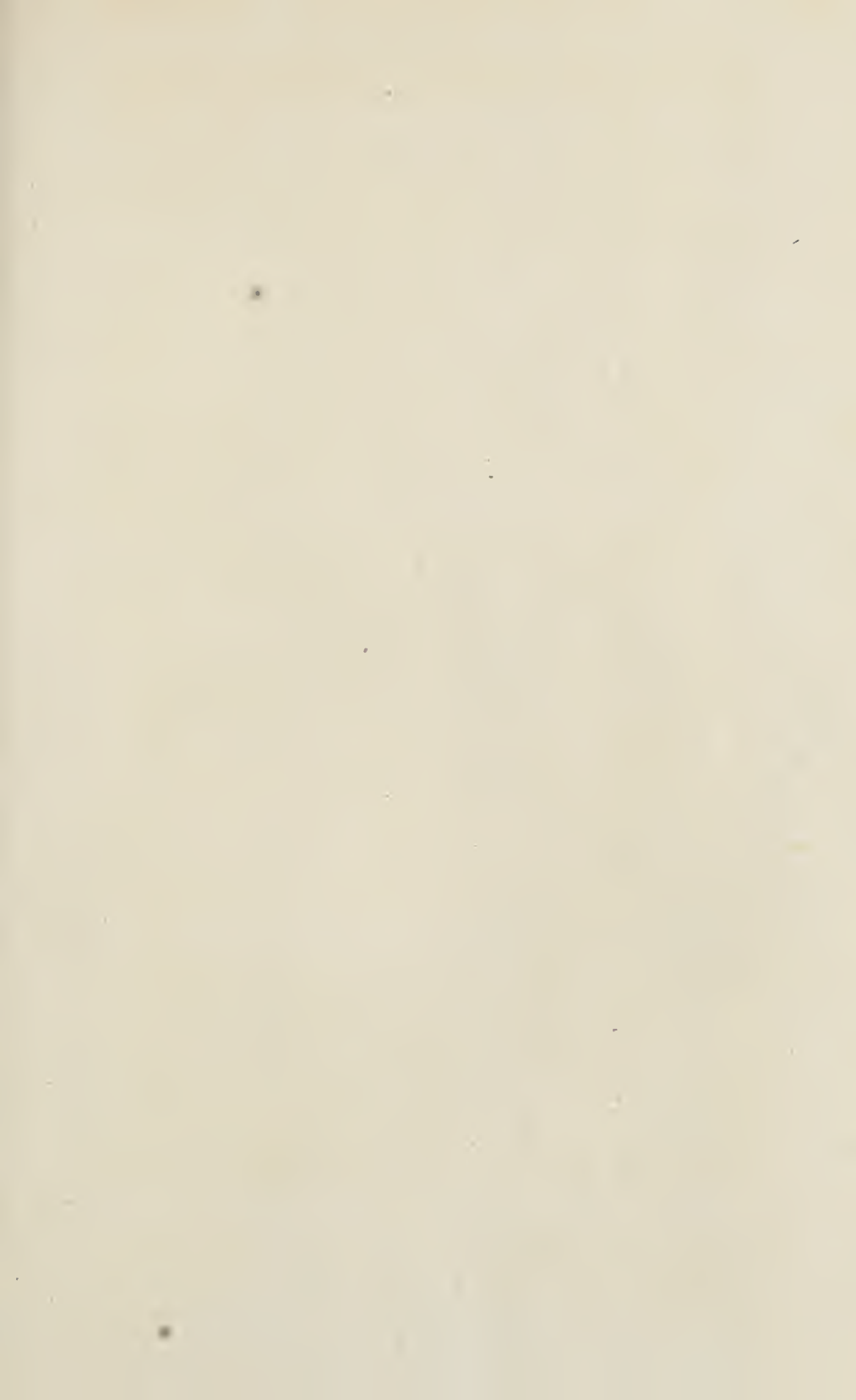
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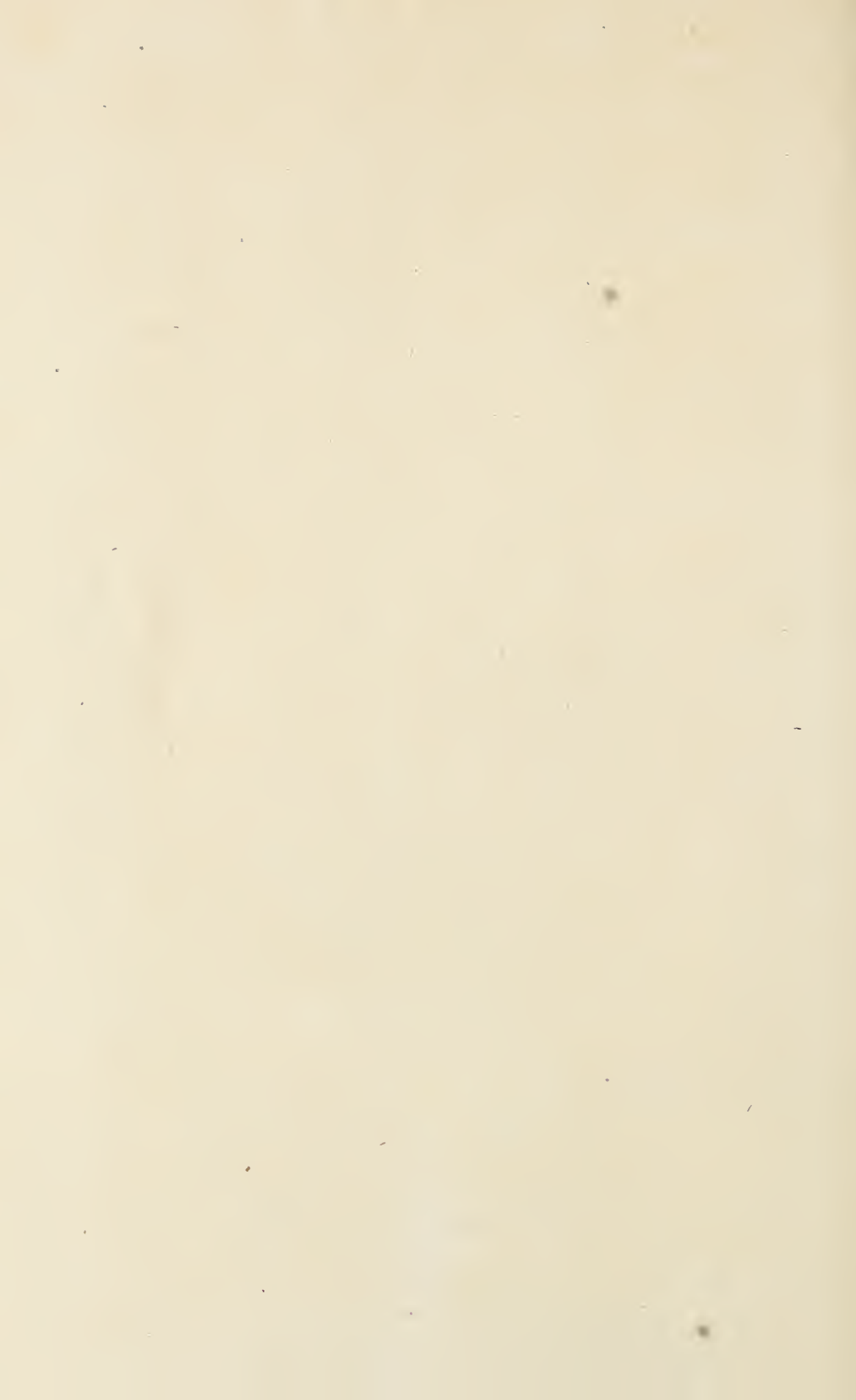
ONE thing I forgot to mention, which yet is worthy of Note. It is, That in many Places, where Persons can't any longer *scream out* for themselves, supposing themselves to have got into a *converted State*, they will *scream and cry out*, and make as great a Noise as they can on the account of others, for their *unconverted Neighbours*, that are in a State of Sin, and going to Hell. This begins now to be common; it has been practised in many Places.

F I N I S.









My price

