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A

L E T T E R

ON

P R O T R A C T E D M E E T I N G S :

ADDRESSED TO THE CHURCH IN PARIS,

BY WILLIAM R. WEEKS,

Late Minister to that Church.

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Utica:

PRESS OF WILLIAM WILLIAMS, GENESEE STREET.

1832.

TO THE CHURCH IN PARIS :

Dear Brethren—The following letter was forwarded to your moderator several days before your late protracted meeting commenced. Not having heard of its being communicated to you, and wishing to have my sentiments on this subject understood by the public, I now address you through the press.

March 21, 1832.

L E T T E R , & C .

UTICA, February 24, 1832.

TO THE CHURCH IN PARIS :

Dear Brethren—Through the Rev. Daniel A. Clark, your moderator, I have received your invitation to attend a protracted meeting which you have appointed. For this mark of attention and respect, and for all the instances of kindness experienced at your hands, through more than ten years residence among you, I beg you to accept my cordial thanks. In days that are past we have often “taken sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company;” and the remembrance of these things will be gratefully cherished by me while I have any sensibility to the joys or the sorrows of life; and will, I trust, be looked back upon, both by you and me, from the eternal world, with still deeper interest, when the consequences of preaching and of hearing the word of God shall be developed in all their amazing reality.

Such an invitation from you I could not find in my heart to treat with neglect; and yet, I cannot tell whether I ought to comply with it, or to excuse myself, till I am informed what sort of a meeting you intend to have. The mere circumstance of having religious exercises continued more than one day, would not be a reason in my mind for declining your invitation. I think you have never found any reluctance in me to attend religious exercises as often and as long as encouragement was afforded for them by the attendance of the people. In two or three instances, you know, when some special attention appeared among you. I wore myself down, by attending upon such exercises beyond my strength, till I was laid upon a sick bed in consequence. And I always did it with pleasure; for I have always esteemed it a privilege to have opportunities multiplied of declaring “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”

I should love to attend a protracted meeting of such a kind as I can easily conceive of, in my own mind, though I may not be able to describe it upon paper so clearly as I could wish. It should be a meeting for which the church had previously prepared the way, by turning from their backslidings, putting away all their sins, and engaging in the diligent discharge of every duty. They should have “put away from among them all bitterness, and wrath, and clamor, and envy, and evil speaking, and be kindly affectioned one toward another with brotherly love.” They should have looked closely into their own hearts, and have deeply humbled themselves before God. They should have carefully looked after their wandering breth-

ren, and have administered the discipline of the gospel in the true spirit of it. They should feel their dependence upon God for every blessing, and not be looking to creatures for help. They should realize that God has a right to grant or withhold the influences of his Spirit, as he may see best, and feel that they have no claims upon him, but are utterly unworthy of the favors they ask. They should be disposed to come to God with the temper of dutiful and affectionate children, who have more confidence in the judgment of a wise and good Father, than they have in their own; and should be as willing to be denied the favors they ask, if he shall see that to be best, as they are thankfully to accept what he shall be pleased to bestow. They should desire a revival of religion, chiefly that God may be honored; and while they are prepared to rejoice in the triumphs of his grace, they should be also prepared to rejoice in his adorable sovereignty, and his glorious justice, which are always displayed at such a time, and be willing he should "have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will." They should put away from them, as utterly unworthy of christians, that arrogant spirit, which aspires to dictate to the Almighty, and pretends to "take God at his word, and hold him to his promise," when he has not promised in his word the conversion of any particular sinner, nor of any sinners in a particular place, nor at a particular time. They should be prepared to hear, and desire to hear, and take effectual measures to hear, on such an occasion, those glorious doctrines of the gospel, which exalt God and abase the creature. They should invite, on such an occasion, those preachers of the gospel who most value these precious truths, and exhibit them most clearly and abundantly in their discourses; and such as "see eye to eye, and lift up the voice together." They should carefully close up every avenue by which error might creep in, at such a time, and take effectual measures to have *truth*, in a full, and copious, and unbroken stream, pour in upon the understanding, and conscience, and heart, of every one who attends. They should give place to no human contrivances, no artifice, nor trick, to play upon the passions, and produce a theatrical effect. The native majesty, and simple dignity of *truth*, as exhibited by the prophets and apostles, in the words which the Holy Ghost has taught in the Bible, will produce deeper feeling, and be attended with better effects. Let God be exhibited, in the beauty of holiness, loving righteousness and hating iniquity; let him be seen, "making all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil;" let him be held forth to view, as the Sovereign Potter, forming whom he will into vessels of mercy, to the praise of the glory of his grace, and equally forming whom he will into vessels of wrath, to the praise of the glory of his justice; let him be seen, determining "to

show his wrath and make his power known" in punishing sin, as well as determining to show his mercy in the salvation of some; let these things be solemnly and earnestly pressed upon the audience, and there will be feeling. Saints will feel; and sinners too will feel, in view of these things. So deep solemnity, and so earnest attention, I have never witnessed, under the exhibition of any other subjects, as has usually attended the exhibition of these. Let Christ be exhibited, as having the same feelings with the Father, delighting in justice as really as in mercy; and rejoicing in spirit, and saying, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let the law of God be exhibited, which binds the sinner to love this holy and righteous Sovereign, and denounces eternal death as the just penalty for the slightest failure, and which requires every one to "accept the punishment of his iniquity," and say *amen* to the penalty which it denounces upon him; let it be seen that the law reaches to the heart, and condemns selfishness in every form; let it be seen, that all those religious affections and performances which have *self* for their object, are transgressions of the law, and that, for this reason, "the ploughing of the wicked is sin, and the prayer of the wicked is abomination;" let it be understood, that the prayers, and cries, and tears, and resolutions, and promises, and efforts, which sinners make, and all the steps they take in order to get converted, before actual submission to God, are nothing but sin; and let them be warned against all such things so done, and be pressed with the duty of instant submission to the penalty of the law, and a cordial reconciliation to the justice and sovereignty of God; let this be earnestly and solemnly done, and there is some hope that they may be brought under conviction. Let them see, that God has a right to save or destroy them as he pleases; that nothing which they do, and *nothing which christians do*, lays God under the least obligation to save them; that he has made no promises to save them; and that there is nothing in the whole book of God which affords any ground for any one yet in his sins to believe that *he* shall be saved; let him see that he is in the hands of God, and cannot get out of his hands, and that it is altogether uncertain, as yet, what God means to do with him; and when all his sins appear in array before him, and the enmity of his heart against God is strongly felt, and he is pressed in his conscience to the performance of that duty to which his whole heart is opposed; then, he will be likely to see that he is in an evil case, and that there is no hope for him, unless God shall be pleased, not for *his* sake, but for his own name's sake, to stretch out his almighty arm, and subdue the enmity of his heart. In this situation, I have seen some among you, as I trust, brought,

by the new creating energy of the Holy Spirit, to let go their hold upon their own interest, to consent to the penalty of the law in their own case, and to be filled with admiring views of the holiness and justice and adorable sovereignty of the glorious God. The nature of experimental religion should be clearly exhibited at such a time, and be carefully distinguished from all counterfeits; that christians may see what is wrong in themselves, and repent of it, and not exalt themselves in their own eyes for that which God abhors; and that those who are awakened may not be deceived with a false hope. The true nature of prayer should be shown, and its duty urged, the prayer of *faith in God*, and not faith in ourselves, that prayer which expresses more confidence in the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father, than in our own, and leaves our requests before him, to be granted or denied, as he shall see best. The office work of the Holy Spirit should be shown, in making men holy, as consisting, not merely in *persuasion*, by the exhibition of motives, but in giving efficacy to those motives by his new creating energy, by the same exertion of almighty power which raised Christ from the dead. And this should be done, that christians may feel their dependence upon him, and realize that they are "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works;" and that sinners may feel, that, though they are able to do what God requires, and are justly condemned for not being willing, yet, there is no hope that they ever will be willing, unless God make them willing in the day of his power. False religion should be exposed, in all those forms of it by which saints and sinners are usually deceived, and to accomplish which Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. And both christians and sinners should be stripped of every excuse, and driven from every refuge of lies, that they may be effectually humbled, and brought to repent and turn to God.

In short, I would have all the exercises of such a character, that the whole tendency of the meeting should be, to present truth to the mind, and press it upon the conscience; to strengthen the hands of the faithful minister, to increase his influence, and the influence of the church, in their efforts to maintain the ascendancy of evangelical sentiments, and to stay the progress of error and irreligion; and thus to promote the glory of God, the peace of the church, and the salvation of men.

But there are protracted meetings of a different character. I have been present at some, where sentiments were advanced, and practices were introduced, which were exceedingly painful to me, and which I could not, with a clear conscience, do any thing to countenance; and that, both because they seemed to me to be adapted to dishonor God, and to destroy the souls of men. And I have seen the bare expectation of such a meeting produce ill effects. When your former three days' meeting

was resolved upon, it seemed to me that several members of the church were looking to it as something that would do their work for them, and save them the necessity of humbling themselves before God, and of keeping their own hearts; and there seemed a very plain relaxation of personal efforts to promote religion in their own souls, and in the souls of others. Now, so far as this effect is produced, by a resort to any extraordinary measures, I suppose all will admit that it is bad. Another bad effect which I think is greatly to be feared, in every place, is, that by a resort to these extraordinary measures, the ordinary means of grace will come to be undervalued and despised; and the stated ministers of the gospel, in their ordinary labors, will spend their strength, as to any good to their people, to very little purpose. And this effect I think was produced among you to some extent, and the good work which was then in progress very much hindered by it, while it lasted, and ultimately broken off, and entirely stopped. And so I think two revivals among you before, while I was your minister, were interrupted and stopped, by the violent crowding in of new measures, to which the church and people had not been accustomed, and to which many of them at least had conscientious objections. While I think the ordinary means of grace to have been divinely appointed, I cannot, with a clear conscience, willingly contribute any influence of mine to bring them into disrepute.

I have not yet attended any protracted meeting, in which I did not hear a great deal of low and vulgar language, adapted to expose divine things to contempt; and that too, sometimes, from educated men, who in this respect seemed to copy the defects of the ignorant and uneducated. Now, you know, that my habit has been to study great plainness of speech, and to seek after language which should be intelligible to the most uncultivated mind. This I think is the duty of the preacher. But vulgarity is not necessary; and for one who is capable of any thing better to indulge in it, in the pulpit, is intolerable. It is degrading the gospel, and unnecessarily exposing it to contempt. I have also been greatly pained to hear, on every such occasion, more or less of language which I consider profane. I could give you specimens, if I did not scruple the propriety of repeating the profaneness of others, even as a caution against it. It is such a use of the divine name, such a use of the words *devil*, *hell*, *dammned*, and the like, as is commonly heard among profane swearers. I was extremely shocked, on a late occasion, to hear a preacher, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, personate the sinner, and tell God how little he cared for his favors or his frowns. His language, his action, his tone, and whole manner, seemed copied from that which is employed by the lowest classes in expressing their contempt for their fellows when greatly provoked by them. I could not in conscience go into the pulpit

with such a man, and seem to countenance by my presence a scene, which, in a bar-room, would be deemed shockingly blasphemous.

I have been distressed to hear the scriptures wrested from their plain and obvious meaning, to support a favorite theory, to hear scripture facts grossly misstated, and a sense given to particular words, and an emphasis laid upon them, which neither the original nor the connection would justify; and that too by educated men, who could not make the poor apology of unavoidable ignorance. I have seen the good old practice of resorting to the Bible for illustrations and proofs, in a great measure laid aside by some preachers, and the place supplied by anecdotes and story telling. In all the meetings of this description which I have attended, there has appeared to be a studious concealment of those precious truths of the gospel which exalt God on the throne, and place the creature in the dust. Those truths which are best adapted to warm the hearts of christians, and to fill the hearts of sinners with pain, seem to be laid aside, by common consent, as not adapted to promote a revival of religion, in modern times. Though it must be confessed, if it is admitted that there were any revivals under the ministry of Edwards, and Brainerd, and Bellamy, and their successors, till within a very few years, that those truths have been eminently instrumental in promoting them, and indeed have been considered essential to their existence. The glorious justice of God, and his holy sovereignty, his right to do what he will with his own, and his purpose to form some into vessels of mercy and others into vessels of wrath, and the duty of the sinner to be reconciled to these things, I have not heard clearly exhibited at any of these meetings. Rarely, indeed, have I heard a single sentence, on such occasions, which would not be approved by the most thorough Arminian. On the contrary, I have heard several Arminian sentiments plainly stated, and strongly urged. That God does on the whole desire the salvation of every sinner, I take to be the fundamental error of both Arminians and Universalists. The latter believe he can and will do as he desires. The former think he cannot control the heart of man, and "turn it whithersoever he will," nor use any other influence upon it than the mere influence of persuasion in the view of motives. On this subject I have not heard any other representation made than what an Arminian would make. I suppose no other has been intended. God has been represented as having a desire for the salvation of sinners infinitely strong; and some have plainly declared that he does all he can to save every sinner. I have indeed heard much said about the influence of the Holy Spirit, but it has usually been precisely what an Arminian would say. No agency has been usually ascribed to him, in my hearing, but that of *persuasion* by the exhibition

of motives. The doctrine of the *special* agency of the Spirit in the conversion of sinners, I have heard treated with sarcasm, as if it furnished the sinner with an excuse. I have heard the sinner represented as making the plea, "I am what God made me," and heard his plea answered by the representation, "*God never made a sinner.*" And the preacher, after endeavoring to support his assertion, by representing sin and holiness as consisting in voluntary exercise, affirmed with great emphasis, "*God cannot create holiness, nor can he create sin.*" Of course, I conclude, he would have his hearers believe that *God never made a saint.* And I see not why the reasoning would not hold good in this case, if it is in the other. But, that the numerous converts of the present day are all *man-made* converts, is certainly more than I had expected any friend of the new measures to affirm. Real converts must be such as are "Born of God—If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*,—[there is a *new creation*].—We are his workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works.—*Create* in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.—Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.—That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.—Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: I the Lord have *created* it." In view of such language of scripture as this, I shudder at the boldness of denying that God can *create* holiness; and I dare not place myself in a situation to be considered in any way responsible for such declarations.

I have heard such an explanation of the nature of prayer, as I think erroneous in theory, and highly dangerous in its practical consequences. You, as well as I, have heard it said, that all right prayer is dictated by the Holy Ghost, and that it is really not we, but the Holy Ghost praying in us; and that we may be certain, when we pray in faith, that the identical thing asked for will be granted. It is commonly urged upon christians to *expect* what they ask for; and all those prayers which have not obtained what they asked for, have been condemned as abomination in the sight of God. Now, I think this is condemning much prayer that is acceptable with God, and thus "making the hearts of the righteous sad, whom God has not made sad." I think it is also "strengthening the hands of the wicked, that he should not turn (in reality) from his wicked way, by promising him life." For, when the sinner knows that christians pray fervently for him, he will expect to be converted, and be ready to lay hold on any change in his feelings, and consider it conversion to God, when, in truth, the change has been merely circumstantial, and not a change of heart. It seems to me that I should feel very great embarrass-

ment in urging this notion of prayer upon others, if I believed it true ; as I should scarcely expect my hearers would give me credit for being honest in it. For, if it is true, and all right prayer obtains the very thing asked for, why do I not pray for the conversion of every sinner, and have it done ? I could not urge upon others as a duty that which I was compelled to confess I had totally neglected myself. But, I have heard this notion of prayer urged, and christians told that if they will go home and pray thus in their closets, for their children, they may go about their house and look up those children, in the assured expectation of finding them converted. And when they had been told all this, I have seen them called upon to rise, and promise, before God, and the world, that they would do so. I could not rise to make such a promise, a promise which I knew I should not fulfil, and which the Bible no where requires me to make ; and I could not see, without amazement, the readiness with which multitudes seemed to rise, and take those tremendous vows upon them ; when, if they had taken one moment to consider, they must have known they should every one of them break their vows within twenty-four hours.

I have serious objections to this whole system of calling people out, to confess, and promise, and be prayed for, both in the case of professed christians, and of the impenitent. And I have chosen rather to submit to the reproach of being represented, from my own pulpit, in common with some of the best christians I know, as being unwilling to be prayed for, and as practically saying, I did not believe there is a God, a heaven, or a hell. Such remarks you know were made, at your former protracted meeting, upon those professors who did not rise, while I sat in the pulpit, and some of you sat in your seats. I supposed the preacher who did it, " verily thought he was doing God service," and therefore I forgave him. But I am not willing to do any thing which can be construed into an approval of such things. I suppose they are all intended to produce a kind of *stage effect*, and are a part of a system, the whole tendency of which appears to me to be injurious to the souls of men. I have always been in favor of public confessions for public sins. But, they should be only for such sins as are public, and should be written, and definite, that there may be no mistake about them afterwards. The frequent repetition of general, indefinite confessions, which may mean any thing or nothing, I believe to be worse than useless. Many years observation has convinced me, that those who are the most ready to make such confessions, are not the most ready to reform, nor the most careful to live as they ought afterwards. For a church to renew their covenant, I think a proper step, at some times ; but, then, it should be the *covenant of the church*, and not any thing and every thing which a stranger may happen to dictate, according to his own fancy.

But the chief design of these measures, I suppose to be, to have an effect upon impenitent sinners. And what effect is intended? Is it to impress them with the importance and solemnity of serious things? It may possibly have this effect for once; but I should expect reflecting men would look rather at the manner of life of professed christians, and, if they saw this to be consistent, would be far more deeply impressed by it than by confessions, promises, and professions. I should think the frequent repetition of these things, and the little consideration with which they are apparently done, would have the contrary effect, as a permanent result; and lead the impenitent to conclude, that christians themselves regard the most solemn professions and promises as a very light matter. Is it designed, by calling out professed christians to make promises, to lead the impenitent to expect, that, *now* christians are about to pray for them, and to make such prayers too, as will certainly issue in their conversion? This I suppose is designed; for, on one occasion, after christians had been called upon to rise, in token of such a promise, and, not anxious sinners merely, but all sinners who were willing to be prayed for, were called upon to rise, to express that willingness, I heard a preacher tell those sinners that rose, "Now, if these christians do as they have promised, you *will* be converted." And the next day, I heard him tell other sinners, by way of persuading them to rise also, that the first who rose the night before, had found salvation before morning. As might be expected, several rose, as soon as they were told this, expecting, I conclude, that they should be converted also. And that the design is, to excite such an expectation, I have been led to conclude, by the statements frequently made, of numbers in other places being converted, in consequence of their thus coming forward, and of those who would not thus come forward having been passed by, and not converted. Indeed, the whole course of measures now prevailing, as far as I have witnessed it, seems to be designed, and adapted, to excite this expectation. Sinners are urged to rise, to take certain seats, to kneel, to go to certain places, and the like, with an earnestness which indicates that by doing so they are almost sure of being converted, and by refusing almost sure of being lost. And, on a late occasion, after a preacher had been some time urging the impenitent to resort to the anxious room to be conversed with, he closed by saying, as I took it down at the time, "*Go, and the Holy Spirit will seal you unto the day of redemption.*" Now, all this appears entirely consistent with Arminian sentiments, and with the idea that conversion is the work of man; but does not appear to me to be at all according to what the Bible teaches of the character of unregenerate doings, and of the true state of the sinner. It appears to me to be extremely well adapted to

flatter the sinner into a false hope, and to strengthen and encourage that hope when once imbibed, and thus lead to a whole life of false religion. And when, in addition to these measures, the general strain of what is said to sinners is adapted to work upon their selfish feelings and animal passions, as most of what I have heard has been, and some of it extremely well adapted to work up those feelings to a high pitch; it would be strange if some affections were not excited which they might readily mistake for true religion. When God is represented as desiring their salvation, without the least qualification, and that his desire for it is infinitely strong, what impenitent sinner, that has the least seriousness of mind, is not prepared to be pleased? If "sinners love those that love them," as our Lord assures us, they can love such a being as God is represented to be, without any change of heart. A God all mercy, is just such a God as sinners desire. Will it be said that his justice is also brought into view, and that the terrors of hell are exhibited? True; but in what light are they exhibited? Is it not commonly in a light to which the selfish heart will as readily accord? God is angry with the sinner because he neglects his own salvation, and will punish him for ever because he would not consent to be saved. Is not this the sole reason commonly presented? I have rarely heard any thing else urged. And while such views of God are presented, as are agreeable to the selfish heart, and every thing in the Bible, which the sinner is permitted to hear, is presented in the light of interest; and while conversion is continually represented as a thing of so very easy accomplishment, what wonder is it, if sinners generally who can be prevailed upon to attend to the subject sufficiently to feel serious at all, should obtain a hope, and think they are converted? The wonder to me is, that any, who can be made to believe these representations to be correct, should fail of obtaining a hope. The wonder is, that whole congregations are not converted at once, with such a conversion as this, without being obliged to meet a second time. But, are they truly converted to God, in this way? This is a very serious and important question; one which deserves the careful and solemn consideration of all. How many of them are true converts, is not necessary for me to know. I would not limit the Holy One of Israel. I do not know how much truth must be before the mind, in order to render it consistent for God to change the sinner's heart. But, so much appears to me very plain: Such measures, and such instruction as I have described, are extremely well adapted to produce a false hope, and to promote selfish religion; and for that reason, I cannot in conscience adopt them, or countenance them. I should expect to be chargeable with the blood of perishing sinners, if I did. I have not learned from the Bible, that any sinner,

while such, has any reason to expect that he shall be saved. I have not learned that he can place any dependence upon any thing that he has done, or upon any thing that others have done, till he actually repents ; but that it depends solely upon the sovereign pleasure of that God " who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardeneth whom he will." I suppose that every promise he makes, every resolution he forms, every step he takes, with a selfish heart, or from motives of personal interest, is nothing but sin. And I believe, that, so long as he is acting with the expectation of being converted, he is not likely to exercise that submission to the justice of God, which he *must* exercise, or be unprepared for mercy.

And I think the confidence which is usually expressed in the christian character of those who obtain a hope, is adapted greatly to increase the danger of their being finally and fatally deceived. They are commonly spoken of as converted, without any qualifications. And in some instances I have witnessed this expression of a hope for them in very strong terms, in their hearing, when I could discover no grounds for it all. In one instance, after an address well adapted to work upon the sympathies, and excite the natural gratitude of the sinner towards God, and which produced a general burst of feeling, all who were willing now to be reconciled to God were called upon to rise. Some did so, and among the rest a little girl too young to have much sense of what was meant, upon which the preacher exclaimed, " Here is another little daughter come to Jesus." And when a young man said, " I *will* submit, come life, or come death," the preacher exclaimed, " bless the Lord, O my soul." And on prayer being offered, the persons who had risen were alluded to, as if they had now been converted. The young man I conversed with some weeks after, and he had then, by his own account, about lost all his seriousness. I think I have seen a very strong solicitude, expressed in many ways, to have as many as possible think themselves converted ; and if they can only be made to think so, to speak of them as such, and hurry them into the church, before they have had any time to examine themselves, or any opportunity to gain any scriptural evidences to themselves or afford any to others, by the fruit of a holy life. Indeed, it seems to me, that opportunity for sober reflection, and a calm looking at truth, and self-examination by it, are regarded as unfavorable and dangerous. The idea that sinners must be brought under thorough conviction of sin, before they will repent, seems to be laid aside, and the use of means to produce such conviction in sinners, considered quite unnecessary.

Means of excitement seem to be contrived, of almost every possible kind, and the use of them continued in almost every possible way, that the sinner may have no time to think, nor

to read his Bible, nor to compare his heart with its requirements. I do not object to the sinner's being told that it is his duty to repent *now*, without waiting for further reflection, or reading, or self-examination. It has been my uniform practice, as you know, to tell him this. Yet, while I tell him he ought to repent *now* of all the sin he is conscious of, and love all the truth he knows, I feel bound to tell him that he ought also to look into his own heart, and compare it with the divine requirements; that he ought to read his Bible, and look at truth and duty; that he ought especially to look at the divine character, in all its parts; and by all these means endeavor to obtain a clearer view of his sins, in their number, and magnitude, and aggravation, and repent of all, and a clearer view of God, in his whole character, and love it all. I do not think it possible that there should be any more true religious feeling, than there is of a correct view of the objects of religious feeling. And some degree of calm reflection upon divine things, and of attentive looking at them, is necessary to such a view. Every high excitement of the passions, it is well known, is unfavorable to calm reflection. Just so far as the mind is agitated, just so far is it disqualified from that steady contemplation of divine things which is necessary to the existence of proper affections towards them. I do not mean that nothing should be said to careless sinners to arouse their fears. They need to have them aroused in a sufficient degree to secure their attention to truth and duty. When that is accomplished, any further excitement of them, to such a degree as to hinder their attention to truth and duty, and render their views of them indistinct and confused, must be injurious. Both christians and sinners should have time for the duties of the family, and for the duties of the closet. Public meetings never can supply the place of these; and they ought not, as they frequently do, by being both late and early, to render proper attention to these impossible. In some late instances, which have been published by those who approve of them, meetings have been continued all night, as well as all day, for several days and nights in succession. And in some instances, the practice has been introduced of several praying aloud at a time, and so loud as to drown the voice of him who was professedly leading in prayer, as I have heard publicly stated by those who were present. In some instances, impenitent sinners have been called upon to pray aloud, in the anxious meeting, as many as possible at a time. In other instances, while one is praying aloud for sinners, others are talking to them, and pressing them to submit now, while the prayer is made. In many places, and to a great extent, and in some very public meetings, females have been allowed and encouraged to pray and exhort, notwithstanding that the Bible so plainly commands them to be silent. Now, all these things are proba-

bly intended to produce excitement, and they are certainly well adapted to do it, and such excitement, such a tumult of the passions, and such confusion of thought, as seem to me to render it next to impossible for any one to know whether he exercises any true religious affections or not. And to diminish, in the same ratio that they are increased, all probability of the true conversion of those who are exposed to their influence. I do not say these things because I think there is any too much feeling, as to its quantity. Far from it. I think there is much too little. I greatly miss that deep and solemn feeling, both in christians and sinners, to which I have been formerly accustomed in revivals of religion; and which I think would still be witnessed, if the animal passions were kept down, and the full blaze of truth was made to shine into the mind, and to press upon the conscience and the heart, as was the practice of our fathers in times of revival.

I am aware that many will reply to the objections which I have stated, as has been commonly replied to all objections, for some years past, that these measures are *successful*, and therefore have the seal of the Holy Spirit stamped upon them. And this appeal to *success*, as proof that any thing is right, instead of appealing to the Bible, is to me, one of the most painful indications that those who do it are wrong, and have gone far from the right way. The same argument might be pleaded in favor of the worst systems of false religion which have been contrived since the world began; it would justify the falsehood of Jacob, who obtained the blessing by a deceitful and wicked contrivance; and it would condemn the Old Testament prophets and saints in general, and even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who had occasion to say, "who hath believed our report?" But, "to the law and to the testimony," we must resort; "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." According to this standard, and not according to our success, must we all be tried in the great day.

On the whole, so far as my observation has extended, there has been, and is, a strong tendency to Arminianism, and increased opposition to the doctrines of grace. The fundamental principles of Arminianism are strongly urged, and dwelt upon, and embraced, and the whole system seems to be fast coming in. Attachment to the Calvinistic doctrines, those doctrines which used to be considered essential to revivals, is now made a ground of reproach; and a disposition to insist upon them, is considered not only injudicious, but wrong. Though, indeed, if it were wrong, I do not think it exists to such an extent in this region, as needs to create any alarm. Silence respecting them, while the contrary doctrines are inculcated, would soon obliterate them from the churches. Selfishness is natural to

fallen man ; and if it is encouraged but indirectly, it will be very sure to prevail. That form of it which consists in the pursuit of worldly good, may be strongly condemned, and that form of it which consists in making our eternal interest our great object, may be more deeply rooted and more extensively prevalent. This has been the tendency of nearly all the instruction I have heard at such meetings, and of the whole system of measures pursued. The grand difficulty in the way of the sinner's conversion has been represented to be the love of worldly gratifications ; and sinners have been exhorted to part with these for the joys of heaven. And, to submit to this, has been the self denial to which sinners have been urged. Instead of being called upon to submit to the justice of God, they have been called upon to *submit to be saved*, as if every sinner did not already wish to be saved. The glory of God is, indeed, often spoken of ; but it is the glory of his *mercy*, and not the glory of his justice and sovereignty. And such a view is given of God and his glory as entirely suits the selfish heart. I do not remember to have heard any warnings or cautions against being deceived with a selfish religion ; and I suppose that such warnings and cautions, if they should happen to be given by any, would be considered out of place, and be strongly condemned, as my reading the experience of David Brainerd, once was, by some among you.

This tendency to Arminianism, in theory, in experience, and in practice, and this encouragement of selfish religion, to the ruin of souls, as I believe it is, is what I feel bound in duty not to promote, nor approve, nor countenance.

I could say more, my dear friends, on these subjects. I could give more examples of instruction, and more examples of measures, which seem to me full of error, and full of danger. I have but just touched upon some of the prominent points, that you may see some of the reasons why I hesitate to comply with your request, as at present advised. It has not been my object to impeach the motives, or question the sincerity of others, who think differently. When I preach, I claim the right to preach my sentiments, a right which I am as ready to concede to others, as to claim for myself—expecting that both they and we shall give account, each for his own sentiments and practices, before the judgment seat of Christ.

These thoughts have been thrown together in haste, in the little scraps of time that I could command from my other engagements, and may not have all that connection and clearness, which is desirable. And on this account, I trust, you will pardon any defects of this kind which you may discover, and believe me to be, with sincere affection,

Your friend and servant in the gospel,

WILLIAM R. WEEKS.







