

*Prof. W. L. Sears*

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REVIEW.

*Essays and Dissertations in Biblical Literature. By a Society of Clergymen. Vol. I. Containing chiefly translations of the works of German critics. New York. G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1829. Pp. 567, 8vo.*

The importance of biblical literature is gradually rising to its appropriate value in the estimation of many of our clergymen. To those whose acquirements and taste have led them to feel a deep interest in the progress of theological literature in our country, and whose biblical studies have made them sensible of the want of more ample means for extending their researches, the attention recently awakened to this subject cannot fail to be highly gratifying. For deep and original investigation in this productive field our country has hitherto laboured under peculiar disadvantages, which, although diminished by the productions of every passing year, must long continue to be felt. Our public libraries are not stored with ancient manuscripts, accumulated by the contributions and collections of successive centuries; our geographical location cuts us off from many important facilities of acquiring a radical knowledge of oriental languages, literature, and cus-

## CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT AGE.

The object of this article is to direct the attention of thinking minds to the character of their own times. To us it seems to be the incumbent duty of intelligent men to know the character of their own age, not only because God has placed them in it, but because they may have influence in improving its aspect, and because they act under its influence. Whatever gives character to popular sentiment and action, should be carefully considered and well understood. There is a predominant influence under which men act, and by which the whole community is more or less swayed. The importance of correctly estimating this influence, will be obvious to those who consider its relation to all the concerns of human life. The prevailing spirit of the age should be well examined and carefully estimated, because it influences all the social relations, regulates the intercourse of human society, and operates on all the elements of the social state, not excepting the thoughts and feelings of men. It carries in its influence stability or caprice, happiness or misery, life or death. Its effects extend down the course of time, and form the subsequent age. All the interests of man, all the political interests of the nation, and all the religious interests of the church urge, to the consideration, due estimate, and proper direction of an influence so powerful. Nothing can excuse intelligent men from this examination for themselves, nor from exertions to secure a public sentiment, which shall combine a high intellectual character with unbending moral principle.

The customs of society are gradually introduced and perpetually changing by the operation of causes, which are not often contemplated, and which are entirely unknown to multitudes. But those causes govern the intercourse and pursuits of a community more effectively than the laws of the country, or the laws of God. For the time being, it is difficult to oppose the current of habits, or suddenly to change the prevailing customs of the age. But customs may change: and it may become the character of an age or country to change the prevailing habits, and break loose from all the established regulations of the community. Innovation, rather than improvement, may be the spirit of the times; and change, rather than reform, may mark the progress of a nation or church. The reverse may

also be the case. At one time, it is quite enough to put down all efforts for improving the social state, or the habits of the church, to raise the cry of innovation. Every prejudice is awake; the public mind is jealous; every thing new must be wrong, because the fathers had it not. At another time it is sufficient to set aside the most wholesome regulations to call them ancient. Whatever is new is popular, because it sets aside some former regulation under the name of antiquated usage. Thus men are always the slaves of custom. The habit of hearing, or telling, or doing some new thing, is as much the prevailing spirit of some times, as it is of others to resist every encroachment upon the old habits and prejudices of the fathers. It is therefore necessary to examine carefully the causes which operate to give stability and obstinacy to prejudices, whether political or religious; and what overturns the customs, opinions, doctrines and institutions of the fathers. The latter is immensely important to be understood, because habits and opinions, sanctioned by time, and hallowed by the associations of parental and filial relationships, and by lessons at the domestic fireside, are not easily swept away. The thing is, however, done. The spirit of innovation goes forth; the human mind becomes restless, and nothing satisfies; all the relations of life are broken up, or modified by the spirit of the age. The current breaks forth in various directions, and sweeps away whatever time, prejudice or philosophy may have interposed. Government and religion share the common influence, and are modified by the prevailing spirit. These include the most important interests of man, and are, therefore, made the grand objects of the influence. They must subserve the popular cause, or all their ties be dissolved.

The question now occurs, how are we to ascertain the character of the present age, and by what standard shall we estimate it? In answer, it is conceded that there is much difficulty in conducting an examination impartially, and perhaps more difficulty still in forming a proper estimate of the principles involved. But the concession of difficulty is not to be understood as a concession of impossibility. It may be very difficult, and yet not impossible. It requires care and skill to discern the true relations of facts and principles when we are so near them. It is like viewing a picture, whose blended colours soften in the distance, and from the proper station give so striking a resemblance that none would mistake its character; but approach very near it, and the eye of an artist

alone could discover the resemblance. To the unpractised eye it appears coarse daubing. It is therefore to men of thought and judicious observation the appeal is made. Those are the men who ought to know the character of their own age, and be able to discern the signs of the times. The responsibility resting on them is imperative.

Some aid in solving this question may be gained from the history of other times. The connexion between causes and effects, principles and practice, the influence of power, of intelligence and ignorance, have passed and repassed in public view, and their record is transmitted to us in the pages of history. By carefully tracing those connexions, which the experience of centuries shows to be laws of Providence and laws of mind, we may gain important aid in estimating the character of our own times. Especially may we derive advantage from the history of that age which immediately preceded our own. That has had a very important influence in forming the present. A familiar and accurate knowledge of the principal events in the last two centuries would enable us to form an enlightened estimate of what we now see and hear. By comparing the past with the present, we see what changes have taken place, and by tracing the progress of those changes, we may ascertain what has caused them, and what has given character to the age.

But the full discussion of this subject would require a view of our literature, science, arts, agriculture, commerce, internal improvements, government, morals and religion. All these are connected with the subject, and serve to develop the character of the age in which we live. But our limits will not permit so extensive an examination as the above departments would involve. Occasional reference to the facts, in some or all the departments which serve to illustrate the general character, is all that can be attempted in this article.

The present is an *intellectual* age. This is its true estimate, its highest eulogium and best character. Were its moral estimate equal to its intellectual, its rank would be like the sun in his rising glory compared to the star of evening. But the influence of moral principle and religion has comparatively little controul in forming and regulating public sentiment.

The cultivation of intellect holds a prominent place, in the calculations of respectable men, in all departments of human society. Intellectual efforts are combined with all the opera-

tions and occupations of men, in a manner and to an extent altogether unprecedented. It is not intended that all men, or even all in high stations of influence, love intellectual culture or effort. There are multitudes who feel no such emotion, and there are men of wealth and influence who feel discomfited and greatly embarrassed by the popularity given to intellectual pursuits. It disturbs their indolence, or interferes with their love of money. It is not intended that no other general character belongs to the age; but its intellectual is prominent, and exerts an influence so extensive, as properly to describe it. The facts which illustrate this character are very numerous, and the causes which have formed it are some of them important. It falls in with our present design to glance at a few of them.

We may consider the causes which have formed the intellectual character of the present age, as commencing their operation in the fourteenth century. At first they operated strongly against the darkness and superstition of the times; and those who employed their instrumentality to accomplish the object, suffered martyrdom. But the elevation of mind which they had manifested produced an effect not to expire.

The primary causes which gave the impulse were the study of the gospel, and the spirit with which it imbued the minds of such men as Wickliff, Hugo, and Jerome of Prague. Whenever men gained access to the holy scriptures, studied carefully with a desire to understand them, to imbibe their spirit and govern their conduct by them, it gave buoyancy to feelings and energy to thought. But the sixteenth century was the era of an influence united and persevering, that stimulated the human intellect, and gave a new character to a large portion of the world. The revival of religion awakened the spirit, and the revival of letters became the medium of its extension. Religion threw off its austerity, and superstition assumed its primitive simplicity, and became united with learning, from which it had been so long divorced. Religion and learning once united, authority and force could no longer bind the human intellect. In spite of papal superstition and civil despotism, the reformation advanced, and as its subjects became more numerous they became more intellectual. Arts and sciences improved, and became powerful auxiliaries in effecting the happy change then taking place in Europe. Before religious reformation was firmly established, science had begun to dawn, and the arts had received an impulse which

promised well to the world. The art of printing had been discovered and improved: the press began to exert its potent influence over mind and manners. The magnetic attraction had been applied to navigation, America had been discovered, and commerce begun to exert a stimulating influence. Every thing partook more or less of the intellectual character. The progress was continued, and the march of intellect was triumphant, until the power was acknowledged in all countries where the spirit of reformation had come. The connexion between the enterprise of that period and the intellectual character of the present age, is easily traced in the changes of government, the improvement of arts and sciences, and in the character of the church. But we are not now about to write this history.

Governments have since been administered more by intellectual than physical power. At first, intellectual influence was combined with force; then physical power was either laid aside, held in reserve to repel invasion, or to quell insurrectionary movements against law and intellectual power. At present the administration of governments, diplomatic intercourse and military operations are managed principally by intellectual skill. The same is true of all agricultural and mechanical operations. The applications of physical power are vastly improved, putting in requisition all the efforts of mind, accomplishing in little time and with physical ease the mightiest achievements. Our country participates largely in this mental energy. Intellectual improvement is every where manifest.

The general diffusion of knowledge among all classes, is a strong fact to illustrate our share in the intellectual character of the age. The press exerts its influence in all parts of our land, at the firesides of the whole community. Thousands of pens are employed to raise our intellectual character. Vehicles of intelligence, books of all descriptions, from the little tract to the large folio; from the trifling anecdote to the grave discussion of abstruse principles, are multiplied and circulated. In a large portion of these productions there is an elevation of thought and unprecedented research. The journals of the day, instead of being mere chronicles of facts, have a literary and scientific character, and cannot be profitably read without intellectual effort.

The natural sciences are receiving increased attention, and the absorbing interest with which they are pursued in all their departments, and by multitudes, shows a prevailing taste for

mental research. Popular sentiment gives intellectual acquirements a high estimate in all the learned professions and places of trust. With our nation, it is characteristic to call into exercise the whole intellectual power, not to cherish an aristocracy of learning, but to value most highly the mental culture of all. We wish to be thought and actually to *be* an intellectual people. The various improvements for purposes of intercourse, commerce and wealth, combine multiplied applications of science and art. The inventions and enterprises every day springing up, illustrate the character of a people fond of intellectual research. Such are some of the facts which show the progress of mental culture, and develop the character of the present age. We have made this rapid sketch preparatory to some remarks on the connexion of this spirit with religion, and its influence on the church.

Without recurring in detail to the history of past ages, it will be sufficient to state that the influence of intellectual research broke the spell of superstition over half Europe, and seemed at one time to indicate the speedy and entire prostration of papal tyranny. But the division of the protestant interests into contending sects, weakened the power of their arguments, and gave the Papists an opportunity of arousing their intellectual strength to avert the progress of reform. Driven from their strong holds of authority and brutal force, they sought by new artifices and deception to secure their influence. Sophistry and specious argumentation, with less of pomp and splendour, are now employed in propagating their dogmas. These, combined with unwearied enterprise, are giving success and extension to the Romish interests in this and other countries. But there is an apparent change in the papal character; a professed accommodation to the intellectual character of the age. We are inclined to believe it is matter of policy and not principle. The great ruling passions of human nature, the love of money, desire of power, and thirst for fame, have been cherished for centuries in the Romish priesthood, under the names of self-denial, humility, and contempt of honour. It is to be expected that craft and subtlety will be associated with religious error, especially when intellectual effort is governed by those master passions of men. When vigorous mental efforts procure wealth, power and fame, the impulse is strong, and cannot be resisted. Men must be, or seem to be, wise. There is at this time an affectation of learning and intellectual research in the priesthood of the



Romish communion. But every effort is made to prevent the people from investigating the truths of religion, in the only volume where they can be found in their original purity and simplicity. Formerly the maxim was unblushingly advocated and repeated, that ignorance was the parent of devotion, and knowledge was dangerous to the interests of piety; now, in that same church, always right, unchangeably infallible, there is an affectation of knowledge, independence of thought, and freedom from all disabilities. These facts show the influence of public sentiment over the conduct of the infallible church in doctrine as well as government. The truth is, nothing can openly stand before or against the influence of a public sentiment, so powerful as that which obtains at the present day. It is, therefore, matter of policy and necessity for every religious sect to associate their peculiar interests with popular sentiment and influence as far as possible. The more effectually this is done the more certainly they expect to succeed in extending those peculiarities. All professed reliance on intellectual agency, to propagate the dogmas of the Romish faith, is homage to the character of the present age. The papal church differs widely in this country from what it is in those countries where it predominates, and differs in spirit every where from what it was some ages past. We do not suppose that the church itself has changed its radical principles of faith or government. Her antichristian principles cannot be relinquished without her becoming protestant. Her transubstantiation, her multiplied sacraments, her clerical celibacy, her withholding the Bible from the laity, her auricular confession, her doctrine of purgatory, remission of sins, works of supererogation, supplications to the saints; her claims to infallibility, and right to lord it over the conscience, must be superstitiously held, or the whole fabric will fall. If one point be yielded, the whole claim is endangered. But with all these errors in her creed, she professes to accommodate herself to the spirit of the age, and claims to be learned, candid and liberal. This is because public sentiment forces a constrained homage to intellectual freedom.

The protestant church, in all her branches, is divorced on principle, from infallible human authority and the force of bigoted intolerance. She has so long cherished intellectual inquiry and critical investigation, that she has enlightened public sentiment, and now every thing which would interrupt such investigation is extensively reprobated. But this intellectual

research has led men in different directions to the formation of multiplied sects and denominations, distinguished by their philosophy and speculation more than by any original appeal to divine authority.

It was to be expected that divisions into sects, by reason of clashing opinions, would be the result of intellectual emancipation from human dogmas and bigoted superstition. When men come to examine the documents of inspiration for themselves, they will disagree in many details of interpretation. There are many plain matters of fact, and some fundamental principles, in which it may be expected they will all agree, so long as they admit in common the *divine authority* of the documents. But when they come to their full interpretation, they will understand many things differently, because they will bring to the task different degrees of intelligence and different principles of philosophy. By far the greatest portion of those religious opinions which divide the protestant church and disturb the harmony of her intercourse, originate in philosophical speculations. Many of them are not sustained, or sought to be sustained by divine authority. The facts, therefore, of different sects and clashing opinions, are evidences of the intellectual character of the protestant church. In this view only we now contemplate them. Of their proper estimate we shall have something to say before we close.

The character of the protestant clergy is intellectually elevated, and the taste of the people demands a high degree of mental cultivation in the pulpit. The preaching of protestant theologians is generally elevated and intellectual. The people will not bear to be fed with dogmas or rant; their food must be served up in a style of mental research. There, doubtless, may be much incoherent jargon and unmeaning rant in some protestant pulpits, but the general character of what is most popular and acceptable, is well digested and intellectual. This has not always been true of the protestant clergy since the reformation. The intelligence and mental improvement of the ministry have varied at different times. If we mistake not, there was a falling off, some half a century since, in the cultivation of science and literature, almost universal in this country. In this retrograde of knowledge, the clergy participated to a great extent. During some twenty-five or thirty years previous to the last twenty, we think the intelligent observer will at once perceive the illustration of our meaning in the introduction of vast numbers to the ministry, with very

slender acquirements in scientific or theological learning. We wish not to make invidious comparisons between the protestant denominations, or we could point to facts all over the country to illustrate our meaning. But for the last fifteen or twenty years, there has been a rapid elevation of learning in the ministry. The protestant clergy have taken the lead, in the rapid improvement of literature and science. At present they are the principal instructors, directors, and patrons of science throughout the land. Our colleges, academies, high schools and seminaries, are generally directed and taught by them. This is a fact which strongly proves the intellectual character of the clergy. Our theological schools sustain an elevated character for intellectual research. Theology is studied as a science, and more learning is brought to bear on the subject, more philosophical investigation connected with it, than has been known at any former period of our history. The theological press keeps pace with the schools, or rather precedes them in the elevation of intellectual character. Theological periodicals may be taken as the index of the prevailing taste, if not of the general talent and investigation of the ministry. He who writes for the clergy, must, in this country, accommodate himself to their taste, or they will not sustain him. He must precede them somewhat in profound investigations and intellectual speculations, or they will not read. It is very obvious that periodical publications of high intellectual character have recently been multiplied, and we think they are better sustained than at any former period. More metaphysical speculations, more argumentative discussion, and more biblical literature, now issue from the press, than has been known before. By this means the spirit of theological inquiry is diffused over the land, the intellectual powers of the whole reading community are excited, and the press becomes a potent instrument in forming the character of the church.

These remarks may be sufficient to define the character which we contemplate, in its general prevalence, and in some of its more prominent features. But the estimate of its value is yet to be made.

To make a due estimate of this intellectual agency, we must consider its *influence* and its *tendency*. In this disposition to make every thing intellectual, speculation is often substituted for fact, while much of the pure gospel of Christ is obscured, suppressed, or denied. Its influence, therefore, on the

doctrines of religion, on the interpretation of the Bible, on practical godliness, and on public morals, must be examined.

In the moral estimate of the character in question, it should be repeated that its influence has wrought much and permanent good for the church and the world. It has paralyzed the arm of ecclesiastical tyranny, torn off the guise of superstition, and broken the shackles of bigotry. It has achieved for the religious, as well as the political world, a noble triumph. God has employed intellectual power to reform the worst abuses in church and state, and to dissolve the unholy alliance of civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. But after all, the true estimate of intellectual influence is only the instrument or medium through which truth has been discerned, and moral principle brought to bear on the best interests of mankind. Moral principle has been the great reforming agent; divested of this, intelligence would be as powerless as the philosophy of Plato, or of Aristotle, in reforming the world.

Intellectual research, guided by facts and sound moral principle, must always be effective in the promotion of truth and righteousness. This is no speculative theory; it comports with the laws of human agency, and is demonstrated by the history of our world. But there is no safety in speculative theories not founded on facts, or separated from moral principle. No community was ever reformed by abstract speculations or the mere light of reason. Wise men of this age rely more upon moral principle in reforming enterprises, than upon the refined cultivation of intellect. Both are necessarily combined in all the efforts to reform the population of our country. The Sunday school would accomplish nothing without its moral principle. Tracts, addressed to intellectual culture alone, would be powerless. The observance of the Sabbath stands more upon its moral bearings than its intellectual. The missionary enterprise could accomplish nothing with only the frigid speculations of philosophy. The temperance efforts would stop in a month, if appeals to the conscience were left out of the account. Moral principle is the life and soul of all these enterprises of improvement and reform, but intelligence is the medium of approaching the springs of action. Public sentiment must be enlightened in order to bring home to men's business and bosom the influence of moral considerations. But without deducting at all from the proper estimate of intellectual power and cultivation, it should be remembered that it

is quite possible to misapply the power, and abuse the elevation to which it has raised our country.

As a philosophical fact, the cultivation of one faculty to the neglect of all others, will produce a character disproportionate, and either positively bad, or less valuable than a less cultivated but well balanced mind. Intellectual research increases the power of abstract discrimination, and induces a speculative habit, but leaves the heart untouched. The sensibilities diminish, and the affections neither kindle into life nor rise in purity. High intellectual attainments, unconnected with moral principle, in their very best character, have an unhappy influence on the mind. They lead men to a high estimate of their own power, to adopt a wrong standard of their own character, and ultimately to place more confidence in the deductions of their own reasoning or speculation, than in a "thus saith the Lord." This is to be expected from those who accredit not the revelation of God; but it is worth an inquiry, whether much of the infidelity and atheism of our country, is not from the speculative disposition of the age. This much is fact, that when a highly cultivated intellect is not only without the guidance of moral principle, but under the government of immoral and vicious propensities, great evils must be the result. That we may not be misunderstood, we repeat that the evil springs not from the cultivation of intellect, but from the neglect or abuse of the moral faculty; from a perversion of knowledge, and the power of attaining and using it. So much for the influence of philosophy.

Now, as to the existing state of things, we think that the interests of religion and morals are suffering from speculation, separated from truth as its guide, and divorced from moral principle as its controuling agency. All attempts to reform or govern the world by intellectual philosophy, speculation, or unsanctified efforts of human reason, must fail. The Bible, the revelation of God, has been the great moral power of reform. Leave this out of the question, and all the mightiest efforts of human intellect cannot reform men or preserve social order. The ancient philosophers could not do it; the mighty advocates of reason in France could not secure a single year's repose; nor can the free thinkers of this age and country do more than their predecessors have done. They may triumph for a little season over the institutions of God, and over the influence of religious men, by a specious pretension to intelli-

gence, reason, and love of country, loudly and widely echoed through the land, but will assuredly corrupt the people, and destroy the dearest rights of freedom. A population so intellectual as this cannot be stationary. Divorce public sentiment from moral principle, and that based on the revelation of God, and we shall move backward with rapid and ruinous steps. As advocates for the Bible and the best interests of man, we could not avoid this application of our principle to the violent efforts in our country to put religion under intellectual disgrace, and elevate to popular favour the long since refuted speculations of infidelity.

But our remark that religion and morality are now suffering from the unhallowed influence of speculation, is principally intended for application to that denominated theological. Were we writing the natural history of error, we might begin with the undue confidence in speculative opinions always induced, when men form their religious theories without the Bible. When once a man has acquired as much confidence in the result of his own reasonings as in God's word, it is certain that he will go astray in his investigations. What precise form of error he will adopt, or how far he will err, it is impossible to determine. He may become a Pelagian, Unitarian, Universalist, Swedenborgian, or something different from them all, and as wide from the truth. Abstract speculations are sure to induce self-confidence and self-complacency in error.

There is in our country a fondness of abstract theories, and too much speculation substituted for practical knowledge. This has led to a great diversity of theological systems, to support which, their advocates have examined, criticised, tortured and perverted the word of God, until they seem to have believed them substantiated and irrefutable. Each theory, however, must be capable of improvement, nothing is stable that rests on speculation, and every new advocate adds or subtracts something, until the theory loses its original features and its connexion with the scriptures of truth. This has been the case in other ages, but none has been so prolific in theories as the present, both in Europe and this country. From very slight departures from the truth to the impenetrable abstractions of neology, every step is taken by some theory; some intellectualized system, receding farther and farther from the simplicity of the gospel.

There are, it is true, many errors which are the offspring

of ignorance, prejudice and vanity, having little to do with intellectual speculations. But these are not properly systems or theories, but insulated falsehoods, sometimes absurd and monstrous. They are too crude and heterogeneous to be collated and systematized.

But there is a class of theories, speculative and connected, in regular gradation. They commence with the first principle of Pelagian heresy and terminate with the last sweep of Unitarian blasphemy. The first step in this philosophy is the self-determining power of the human will, and the last is the entire sufficiency of human reason to guide men in duty and in the way to life and happiness. The first commences by bringing metaphysical philosophy to aid the revelation of God, and the last closes by setting aside the whole authority and spirit of revelation. We think this system-making, this theorising spirit may be observed in many pulpits, and in a large portion of theological publications. Instead of a plain exposition and enforcement of God's own truth, we often hear the preacher attempt to establish some speculative theory, feeding immortal minds with husks instead of nutritious food. In some of those theories there may be much of divine truth incorporated, but it suffers much from the amalgamation. Whenever philosophy is the most prominent, revelation is obscured. At best, it is the philosophy of religion, not its living practical character. It may not always be the intention of such preachers or writers, but the impression is extensively if not uniformly made, that religion is subservient to philosophy; that reason is the guide, and revelation only a convenient and valuable auxiliary. Granting, for one moment, and for the sake of argument, that the philosophy is true, still we ask why make it so prominent? Certainly the word of God is able to make us wise unto salvation. It is that word which is "sharper than a two-edged sword;" by it men are convinced, not by speculative theories. The people of God are sanctified through his truth, not the speculations of philosophy. But we deny the right of any man to place his own speculations before the word of God, and we deny the truth of the philosophy in question. Let the truth be established by divine authority, then if philosophy can serve to explain, or illustrate it, there may be an appropriate and profitable use for it; not otherwise. We doubt not there is a true philosophy of religion, and it may be satisfactory to many minds to investigate it, in connexion with that authority to which they submit

in meekness and faith. But the mischief is done by the misapplication of this truth, by giving revelation a speculative character, and urging its claims on the ground of philosophy, not divine authority. The conscience is required to approve, not because God has said it, but because reason adopts it.

The speculations to which we allude, are not controuled by divine authority, but made to modify the whole system of gospel doctrine.

And here we might sketch that train of concatenated principles which afford the easy gradation, by which so many of our theologians have passed from speculative orthodoxy, through latitudinarian schemes, to the ultimate verge of all that bears the name of Christianity. Lest we should assume, out of place, the pen of the polemic, we forbear; and content ourselves by alluding to some of the later conclusions of these speculatists, in whose estimation the character of Jesus Christ is that of a good man, but not divine, according to the legitimate course of this scheme. Since no proper satisfaction to divine justice could be made by one for another, and since it was neither necessary nor possible, there could be no necessity for a divine Saviour. Besides, philosophy knows nothing of a *trinity* of persons in the Godhead, and since no explanation can be given of such a doctrine, reason decides that it is impossible. No matter how positively the scriptures assert the doctrine of the trinity or divinity of Jesus Christ, it must be either interpolation or a metaphor.

As for the *inspiration* of the scriptures, it is admitted in the scheme that some facts and truths scattered here and there, in different parts of those writings, have been communicated by God to men; but the composition is purely human. By far the greatest part of what was originally contained in those scriptures, consisted of facts previously known, historical works, traditions, superstitious views of the people, concessions to the customs and opinions of the age, and some speculations of the writers. There is, however, a revelation from God in the book, found principally in the words uttered by Jesus Christ, which however were not fully, and in some instances not correctly recorded; at the same time it must be recollected that much of what was correctly and faithfully registered, may have suffered by time and frequent transcription. Reason and philosophy alone can guide us in ascertaining what part is revelation.

Thus, all confidence in the book of God's revelation is



unsettled. Men must be capable of judging what ought to be revealed and what is actually revealed. The result of the whole is, that reason is the guide, and entirely sufficient without any revelation from God.

The influence of these speculative hypotheses on *practical godliness* is injurious. It weakens the bond of divine authority upon the conscience, and men come habitually to feel less impressed with the sentiment of accountableness. God's sacred word is contemplated with less devout reverence, and less anxiety is cherished to know precisely the mind of the Spirit. The speculative theory is more carefully examined than the life giving word. A philosophizing disposition kindles not the heart's devotion, like summoning the whole soul before the divine word, to try the feelings and actings by its simple declarations. The whole tendency of the scheme is to produce a laxity of sentiment and moral feeling, which must be attended with a corresponding laxity of conduct.

It ought certainly to be a fact, that, with an increase of knowledge, there should be an increase of pious feeling, devout worship and cheerful service of God. The more deep and thorough a Christian's knowledge of God's word in its pure doctrines, holy precepts and precious promises, the more devout should be his worship, and the more constant his obedience. This accords with the representation given in the holy scriptures, and must be admitted. But the more superficial and speculative his knowledge, the less consistent and persevering will be his devotion and service.

The fact is certain, that, in this speculative age, there is a defection in the tone and consistency of practical religion. This is manifest from one end of the land to the other. There are some precious exceptions; but we are persuaded that among the mass of those who profess religion, there is a mournful defection. Almost every where may be seen more conformity to the world; more importance attached to fashions and etiquette; and more temporizing policy in social intercourse and commercial transactions, than was common with our pious forefathers. Christians may employ their intellect as much on subjects of religion, but there is less of the heart put in requisition. In this estimate something, doubtless, may be accredited to an impression, common in ripened years, that there is less godliness because more of the existing corruptions are seen. But after all due allowance for this impression, often somewhat erroneous, it will be readily admitted

that there is less ardent piety in most, if not all parts of the church, than there was before the refinements of speculation commenced.

How much of this defection is to be ascribed to the influence of speculations in theology, may not be easy to determine with precision, and it is not necessary here to decide. That they have had an agency is manifest; that other causes have operated is fully admitted. But so far as speculation absorbs the attention, the sense of moral obligation is weakened, which always tends to the defection of piety. Facts, in very many parts of the church, afford melancholy evidence of the influence and its results. The danger of defection increases because the disposition to speculate is advancing. It is yet due here to state, that many men of piety and christian example preserve their zeal for the spirituality of religion, who indulge in some of these philosophical hypotheses. They may be too strongly bound by the living influence of godliness, to be broken loose by the tendency of their speculative philosophy. But the same cannot be expected from their young disciples. These begin with metaphysical speculations; give them a higher place in their system of theology; and permit them to have greater influence over their feelings and conduct. There is reason to apprehend a gradual increase of the influence until it shall assume the entire controul. The history of all speculative errors shows their tendency to lower the standard of piety, and of all heretical opinions to a defection of morals.

*Public morals* are suffering throughout this country from the influence of speculative philosophy. This is a necessary consequence of lowering the standard of piety. When the standard of the latter is abated, the standard of the former sinks. Let it be once doubted that the Bible is the code of ethics to be universally adopted as the standard of public as well as private morals, the whole community must feel the injury. The only safety of morals is gone. All other barriers against vice and corruption are thenceforth swept away. The Sabbath, that monument of God's sovereignty, and bulwark of moral influence, finds feeble support in speculative philosophy, and all the institutions of religion become inefficient restraints. This is a matter so obvious, that we think it needless to spread out its details. Any accurate observer can fix his eye on the illustrations in those countries, and in those parts of our country, where speculative philosophy has

taken the place of revelation. It is a fact every where demonstrated, that whatever relaxes gospel influence, injures public morals. It is a fact which should pass into a maxim, and be inscribed in letters of light on every pulpit, on every enterprise, on every press, and on every legislative hall in the land.

Our limits admonish us to waive, for the present, an examination of other characteristics belonging to the present age. But in concluding this article, the question presses upon us, how is the intellectual character of this age to be preserved and improved, and how are the evils of theological speculation to be prevented? This is a question of absorbing interest to all who love solid research and the orthodox faith, and to all who desire the prevalence of ardent piety and correct morals. In all its bearings there is much to arouse every energy of the Christian, and make him adhere more firmly to the pure word of God, as his rule of faith and manners. We cannot now reply in detail; but with reference to the last part of this question it readily occurs to say, that every good man should sedulously guard himself against indulging in speculative philosophy.

Two things must not be omitted, which are immensely important at the present time. One indispensable requisite is the cultivation of a deep, heartfelt and humble piety. This includes a constant sense of human weakness, liability to error, need of spiritual illumination, careful meditation on God's word, and earnest prayer for direction. For the ministry of reconciliation such piety is unspeakably important.

Next to this ardent, living piety, we place the attainments necessary to a thorough knowledge of the Bible; not merely its excellent translation, but the precise meaning of the text; the mind of the Spirit. These include the qualifications for scriptural interpretation. To execute this work judiciously and safely, those languages in which the word of God was originally communicated must be *extensively and well* understood. It is comparatively easy to get possession of a few philosophical speculations, and apply them to the scriptures; but to understand the original language of the Bible, the words, phrases, idioms, usage of speech, unusual senses, and all that belongs to grammatical interpretation; *hic labor, hoc opus est*. Where shall we find the men who have acquired all this? Not certainly among those who use so freely their philosophical theories. Where shall we find the men who seek to attain such

an acquaintance with the only medium through which God communicated to us his revelation? They are extremely few in this land, few in the ministry, and few among those who are preparing for this sacred office. This is a subject which should occupy more thoughts in the church, and more attention in the schools of theology. Something must be done to elevate the standard of biblical knowledge, and thereby depress the philosophizing theories. It has been said that the church needs men of active labour more than men of learning; but the truth of this is questionable, unless learning means skill in metaphysical and philosophical theories; then it is true, and the fewer of such the better. But the church in this land is greatly deficient in men of biblical learning. The mischiefs of perverted learning can never be prevented or obliterated by ignorance, however active and laborious. Sound biblical knowledge and plain gospel truth must be restored to their places, and then the work will be done.

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#### REVIEW.

*A Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland; in which the manner of Public Worship in that Church is considered; its inconveniences and defects pointed out, and methods for removing them humbly proposed.* 12mo. Pp. 80. R. P. & C. Williams. Boston. 1824.

This letter was originally published in Scotland, between seventy and eighty years ago, and though purporting to be the work of a "Blacksmith," was, no doubt, written by one accustomed to literary pursuits, who wished, under the disguise of an humble mechanic, to exhibit his strictures with less pretension, and consequently with more force. The writer also presents himself before his readers as a zealous Presbyterian, an honest and devoted friend of the church of Scotland; and professes, in this character, to be earnestly desirous of her reformation as to various points in her mode of worship. His proposed reformation, however, is all of such

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ART. I.—RITES AND WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

*From the German of Neander\*.*

As the idea of the priesthood of all Christians, became more and more superseded by the notion of a class of persons peculiarly consecrated to God, and set apart for divine service; in the same proportion, the original relation of united Christian worship to entire Christian life—a relation grounded in the very essence of the system—became more and more obscure. It was forgotten, that the divine worship of believers is confined to no certain places, times, or actions, but embraces the whole of a life consecrated to God. Distinguished theologians, however, such as Chrysostom and Augustin, acknowledged that vital Christianity could proceed only from that

\* This article consists of a translation from the last volume of the Ecclesiastical History of Neander. The reader will bear in mind that all the statements which it contains relate exclusively to the period between A. D. 312, and A. D. 590; the *second period*, according to the division of this historian. It falls, therefore, within that part of the work which has not yet appeared in English; for the translation by Rose included the history of the first period only. The extract here given will probably be interesting, both as the specimen of a work which is attracting great attention in Europe, and as containing a body of instructive matter upon a very important branch of the subject.

[*Ed. Bib. Rep. & Theol. Rev.*]

“a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation—till the Spirit be poured from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field”—till these clouds of mercy, the glory of the age in which we dwell, and the hope of ages to come, shall issue in one extended and long continued effusion of the Holy Spirit—till the earth shall become a temple, and time a Sabbath, and these humble notes, so indistinctly heard from here and there a voice scattered over this wide creation, shall receive the accession of ten thousand tongues, and burst forth in one harmonious Alleluia to Him who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever.

DAVIES.

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#### ART. VII.—CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT AGE.

IN our second volume, page 372, we commenced some remarks on this subject, and took a rapid sketch of the *intellectual* features of our own age. It was our intention to have resumed the subject before this time, but circumstances beyond our control have compelled us to postpone it until now. Without recapitulation we proceed to say, that the present is an *age of strong excitement*.

The human mind is actuated by high and powerful excitements, in almost every department of social interest and important concern. If we have not greatly erred in our observation, it forms a prominent characteristic of the age in which we live.

It may seem, at first view, incompatible with intellectual attainments and influence, that feelings should be precipitate, prejudices strong, or energies fitful. The opinion is common that intellectual research is cold, too calculating and wary to admit of tumultuous feelings. In some respects, this sentiment is true. It is true in its application to the individual who secludes himself from social intercourse, and cultivates a severe employment of his intellect. The loftiest exercise of mere intellect may be cold as the polar firmament; and although its rays may illumine a hemisphere, they shed no genial warmth, and excite no emotion. It is also true that intellectual attainments, well directed, have a tendency to prevent a highly excited state of feeling. But more depends upon correct mental

discipline than the mere acquisition of knowledge, in regulating an excited state of feeling.

However we may account for the facts, it is undoubtedly true that this is both an intellectual age, and, at the same time, an age of great excitement. It would seem, therefore, that the concession, which we have made to the coldness of intellectual pursuits, can only apply to recluse students, never forming a large class of the people, and always unable to give character to the times. They may furnish the standard by which after ages shall estimate that in which they lived, because their writings may live, when the ephemeral notices, furnishing the true indices of the age, have perished. As for any further application of what we concede, the general cultivation of intellect only serves to suppress some of the grosser passions, refining and connecting them with other objects. But this is an important fact in the regulation, pursuits, and happiness of society. It may subserve our purpose to examine a little, this fact, by a few obvious principles of mental philosophy.

There are a few obvious and fixed laws of mental operation, which certainly allow the combination of highly excited feelings with cultivated intellect. Take the universal law, that feelings are the main spring of action, and the general fact, that unless the feelings are excited, nothing can be accomplished; and we have at once the necessity of some emotion, and the first element of strongly excited action. Add to these the social principle, by which men are induced to seek intercourse and unite their attempts, and the selfish propensity by which men are led into collision of feelings; and we have all necessary elements for tumultuous excitement. Another law of mind is, that the feelings are excited only through the medium of the intellect. Objects must be apprehended in order to affect the heart. We can have no feelings toward an unknown or unconceived object; consequently, the character of the medium through which the feelings are affected, must modify and give character in some measure to excited feelings. Ignorant minds may perceive only a single object, and that only in one aspect, calculated to make a strong impression, while cultivated minds take a wide range of thought, and perceive extensively the relations of things. The mind, which can only apprehend a single view of a given object, immediately and strongly associated with its own interests or prejudices, will be strongly excited; and that excitement may be



sudden and ungovernable. But the mind which contemplates things in their various aspects and relations, will be affected by the whole view. If that be calculated to make the impression strong, the feelings may be highly excited. The consequence is, that one is cool, deliberate, and unexcited, while the other is thrown into an ecstasy of passion. These remarks naturally connect with the proper rise of knowledge, and with the precise and most important point of mental discipline. It is the appropriate and judicious application of knowledge to regulate the feelings and acquire a habit of self-control. It is more important to acquire the habit of governing the passions and regulating the feelings, by sound discretion, than to acquire any conceivable amount of knowledge. This is not always the result of cultivating the intellect; but in most cases, extensive intellectual attainments have an influence over the excitements of feeling. The feelings may be as strongly excited in well informed, as in ignorant minds, but they are not so gross and so foolishly absurd in their association with their objects. When, therefore, the minds which govern the concerns of society are cultivated and imbued with useful knowledge, the passions of the whole are more under control, excitements are connected with more valuable objects, directed with more skill and consistency, and are neither so tumultuous nor ungovernable. Hence, when the feelings are highly excited in favour of useful objects, guided by extensive knowledge and sound discretion, human efforts are employed in the best manner, and human character developed in its most amiable and interesting aspects.

We now return to the fact asserted, that this is an *age of great excitement*. We do not mean to assert, or suffer the inference, that no other age has ever been so characterized. Almost every age of the world has had its exciting interests, and the public mind has been swayed by strong emotions. The character has varied with the objects which awakened the excitements, and the circumstances, in which they were produced. Of the earliest ages we have few authentic records of fact or character; but enough is preserved to show that men acted under the dominion of passions strongly excited, in so much that "the earth was filled with violence." During four thousand years the record shows multitudinous excitements of martial, idolatrous, avaricious, licentious character, and sometimes of a more pure, religious kind. Perhaps it may not be too much to say, that the master passion assumed a warlike

aspect, and martial excitements were the most prominent, frequent, and general. Religious excitements, so called, among Jews and Gentiles, occasionally took place, which gave character to a part or the whole of an age. The evidence is full, that men in those ages possessed an excitability capable of being wrought up to a very high and even frenzied state. Any thing, and every thing, which was deemed of sufficient importance to enlist general exertion, became the subject of great enthusiastic attachment or aversion.

At the time of the Saviour's advent, and the age which succeeded it, although the world was at peace, and more intellectual improvement prevailed than at any former period, we discern evidence of great excitability; and popular commotions were both frequent and violent. Subsequently, for we cannot now trace the characters, as developed in each period, martial and religious excitements have been obviously prevalent with some variation in degree, and some short intermissions, until within a short period. The martial excitement seems always to have kindled most readily, and fired the passions most ardently; and when this spirit has combined with some superstitious feelings, and connected in the pursuit of one object, martial and superstitious excitement, frenzy has been the most complete, and fury the most ungovernable. The history of the crusades fully illustrates this remark, and shows how reckless of means and consequences are men under such excitements. That was an age, not perhaps of so much more, as of misdirected and reckless passions. Still the world has never had so large a portion of its population engaged in one object so madly and perversely. But more recently other subjects than martial or religious, awake all the enthusiasm of feeling, and have left almost no object of human pursuit free from high, unwonted, and protracted excitement. It is in view of this fact, that we have denominated this *an age of excitement*.

Europe is at this moment agitated from one end to the other; and no class or department of society quietly pursues any uniform course. All are in bustle and commotion. In the political sphere, excitements shake thrones and overturn kingdoms; revolution follows revolution in rapid succession. Nothing of a political character is settled or stable, except when it is held so firmly in the grasp of despotism that life is ready to expire. In most of those cases, the grasp is so convulsive, that it indicates a strong excitement of feeling ready

to burst forth in ungovernable fury. The recent revolutions of France, Belgium, and Poland, furnish an illustration of the character not to be mistaken. The course of Prussia and Holland show conclusively that the despotism of Europe is shaken, that its advocates are alarmed, and are making violent efforts to prostrate the spirit of liberty and intelligence which has been directly efficient in the popular excitements. Force opposed to force always produces great political excitement; but power opposed to intelligence and the spirit of freedom, brings all the passions into unrestrained commotion. It is impossible to foresee the result of such high excitement in the political concerns of the old world. Almost the whole population of Europe seem wrought up to a state of intense feeling, just ready for some violent and tremendous catastrophe.

There is also much excitement arising from the atheism, infidelity, and superstition of the people in Europe. The papal superstition is assailed by the advocates of atheism and infidelity in France, and by the rationalists of other countries. The pure principles of Christianity are assailed by all the devotees of licentiousness, exciting all the feelings which can be brought under their influence. In truth, there is no interest of a general or public character, that can be long unconnected with the agitations of the times. Such a day of excitement on all subjects, Europe has never before seen.

There is scarcely any country, inhabited by civilized men, free from some general agitating excitement. Our own country feels deeply from its centre to its extremities, agitating and absorbing excitements, which nothing can allay until their causes be removed, the public mind becomes wearied, or what is more probable, because it more commonly occurs, some other subjects, involving deep and general interest, shall be substituted in the place of those which have kindled the excitement. It cannot be denied that the political state of our country is in great agitation. From what cause or causes, it is not our purpose now to inquire, but the fact is obvious to all. There is no question of public interest calmly discussed in Congress, or in State legislatures. No election takes place without high popular excitement; and an impartial discussion in the political journals of the times is unlooked for, and seldom, if ever found. On this topic, a word is sufficient for our purpose.

There is an impulsive influence felt in all the walks of life,

and in all the enterprizes of our country. The very movements of travellers, their impatience of delay, and the constant efforts to increase their speed—the impetuous efforts of men in the occupations and in the ordinary business of life, illustrate the character. Arts and sciences are pursued under some strong impulse, and inventions are constantly multiplied, professing to discover some short method to gratify the impatient in their pursuit of knowledge. These are a few of the common and obvious manifestations of excitement pervading the country. But there are other illustrations of a more important estimation for good or evil. The public improvements in our country, in canals, railroads, labour saving machinery, and applications of steam power, are all moving forward with unexampled celerity. Indeed, there is nothing done which merits the name of improvement or enterprize, except under the influence of high excitement. Any man or set of men might as well sleep as undertake the accomplishment of any important object, without “getting up” an excitement of an impressive character. But under its influence, funds can be collected an hundred fold more for any given purpose, than could have been done a few years ago for precisely the same object. A road, a canal, steamboat, or some publication will furnish a topic of fruitful remark, anxious speculation, and liberal pecuniary contribution. It is evident from these objects and others of a more speculative character, what excitements are constantly agitating the country.

Atheism, infidelity, and religious errors are also exerting influences that produce turmoil and agitation. The spirit of excitement, for such it may be called, mingles with religious objects as well as with the policies and temporal interests of men. Indeed, it is the most important object of our design to connect a proper view and estimate of religious excitements in our own country. In these, the character of the age is as fully developed as in any other department, while its importance is much greater in such a sphere, and comes more directly within the objects of our periodical, than any other illustration.

A spirit of sectarian zeal and proselytism is now connected with great excitement, and no efforts are spared to promote a religious party. Without attempting to decide which, of all the denominations professing to be Christian, exhibits most sectarian zeal, it may be safely said, that there is an increasing influence of party excitement in the visible Church through-

out this land. All the efforts to unite, of which there have been many, have not even approximated the object, but have served to divide the more. Not that we suppose there is any thing wrong, or adverse to the spirit of religion in union; but a difference in ecclesiastical order, and diversity in exposition of doctrine, at such a time as this, are quite sufficient to call forth strong pertinacious feelings. It is our deliberate opinion, that denominational lines are becoming more distinct, and sectarian divisions wider, notwithstanding all the cry of catholicism and union. Contrary to the intention, the great propensity to make our public, charitable institutions national in name and influence, has had, in most cases, a divisive effect. The Bible Society stands alone, an exception to their divisive influence, in a greater or less degree. It is true, that in times which are passed, the exciting efforts seemed to have an influence favourable to the union of all parties and sects; and it was often predicted with great confidence, that the spirit of the times would soon prostrate all sectarian interests, and bind men together in one great, harmonious brotherhood—that the day of millennial peace was at hand, when the watchmen of Zion should see eye to eye, and nothing be found to disturb in all the Church militant. All such predictions have failed, and high hopes been blighted, by an unexpected increase of sectarian zeal. It would not be right to ascribe this divisive result to efforts for union, nor to the fact of excitement obtaining; but all efforts to produce union, which fail, will ever become the occasion of wider division. And when once excitements are connected with party interests, schism and proselyting zeal become more conspicuous.

Denominations of the same name and ecclesiastical connexion are divided into parties, distinguished by some speculations of doctrine, or measures of expediency. No sect of considerable extent can be found in our land peacefully united. Local jealousies, struggles for pre-eminence, criminations, and recriminations are every where witnessed, developing the great excitability of men's feelings. No Christians belonging to parties can be indifferent to the shibboleth of their distinction; and, however good and moderate men may unite to resist the extremes of party influence, they soon catch the spirit of the age, and act like others under the pressure of high excitement. Nothing, except an icy indifference, is proof against the prevailing spirit of party excitement and proselyting zeal. It would seem, therefore, that every man must take his side on

all religious doctrines and measures; and it is well if he can avoid the extremes of speculation, feeling, and action.

The benevolent exertions, to promote the cause of Christ, and benefit man, which are the glory of our country, are awakened and sustained by high excitement. Sober calculations, acute reasonings, and philosophical speculations can accomplish little. However important such calculations and reasonings may have been in times that are past, or may now be considered, they must be combined with some strong impressive influence, which pervades the community, or they are utterly inefficient. Ask a man to engage in any benevolent enterprize, and commend it to his understanding, it is equivalent to leaving him altogether out of the engagement. Some impulse must reach his feelings, and excite them to a high tone, or his habits of action are not complied with, and he will do comparatively nothing. If a Bible, Tract, Sabbath School, or Missionary enterprize is to be accomplished, people must be collected together, highly wrought and exciting representation must be made, until the tone of feeling is highly raised, resolutions are passed, and pledges made under the highest possible excitement. It is not necessary to follow out the details of those enterprizes or any other charitable efforts; the facts are prominent, and the character most distinctly illustrated. We are not now estimating the value or disadvantage of this characteristic of the times, but only alluding to the facts of its exhibition and prevalence. But it seems proper to recur for a moment to the missionary cause, which is associated with this excited agency. Both domestic and foreign missions receive little aid except under the influence of some exciting impulse to the feelings. We speak now of the aid received from the Christian public, and not of those devoted, self-denying men, who, taking their lives in their hands, have gone to the destitute and the heathen. To us it seems evidently more a matter of impulse than of principle in most cases, when much is done for the missionary cause. Generally, unless there be some excitement more than common, nothing is done for the noble enterprize.

There is one exhibition more, of this character, which deserves some particular attention—we mean in what are popularly called revivals of religion. Since the commencement of the present century, these have been of more frequent occurrence than at any other period for centuries past. But within two years past their prevalence has been remarkable; probably

more than two thousand congregations have felt a powerful revival influence, and the number is daily increasing. It has come to be almost a universal fact, that religion is considered as declining in every place where the excitement is not felt. Few are added to any branch of the Church except in these revivals. The common style of speaking associates religious prosperity only with a highly excited state of feelings. It is true, that there are some ministers and professors of religion, who oppose all these excitements, and all the means and measures which are supposed to be peculiarly adapted to promote the revivals in question. But this opposition seems to be fast melting away before the heat, which glows in revival feelings and measures. It has, certainly, become a characteristic of the Church, in this country and age, to manifest frequent variations from low and discouraging languor, to high, and in very many instances, convulsive excitement. And there seems to be a state of things approaching, when excitement will be considered as the whole of vital religion. Persons and communities must be wrought up to such a state of feeling and action as to task every capacity to its utmost; and there is some danger that men and churches will feel as if they had accomplished the duties of a year in a month, and that they may slumber the rest of the time. We here state, not the avowed sentiments of any, but what seems to be the practical tendency of the course and state of things when revivals have been enjoyed at one time, and succeeded by a most lamentable coldness at another. This has been called an age of revivals; and in our land it certainly is an age of wonderful religious excitement. It is quite common to hear, in the familiarity of intercourse, of revival men and preaching, while others are spoken of as not of a revival character. The same is true of sentiments and measures. The pulpit and the Christian parlor, the seminary and the press, all furnish illustrations of this character in the religious interests of the Church.

The preceding allusions and illustrations are sufficient for our purpose; and if we have not misapprehended, or misrepresented the facts, they show conclusively the truth of our declaration. But if there should be thought some misapprehension, or defective statements in the illustrations, we think every reflecting mind will perceive, from his own observation, enough to justify the declaration concerning the age in which we live.

We now inquire for the causes of this character and its prominence in this country? In answer to this question, we have only time and room for some general observations concerning those causes, which operate in our own country, with some more particular reference to the prominence in religious revivals. With some modification, however, a part of our remarks might be applied to other countries: but the genius of this nation has doubtless undergone changes, which have prepared the people for strong emotions and excited action. We might look for the causes in the genius and circumstances of the people; but we might look beyond these, and ask, what has formed such an excitable character?

Education obviously has the most prominent and controlling influence in forming the character. Our children and youth are taught to cherish freedom of thought and action—to take an interest in every enterprize and concern of importance—to be tenacious of their own opinions and interests—and to feel strongly on all subjects of general welfare. There is one great defect in the education of children and youth, which has indirectly a decisive influence to form the character in question: we mean the neglect to restrain the passions, and accustom children to cheerful submission and self-control. This neglect is equivalent to educating the passions and teaching self-gratification. A habit of indulging the feelings and seeking unrestrained gratification, forms a character of great excitability, and prepares the mind to be governed more by impulse than principle. We think this defect is so general in early education, as to have an influence all over the land in forming the character of society. To this we may add the character of our government and free institutions, which are calculated to cherish high notions of independence in feeling and action. Under proper direction, and appropriate instruction, the influence of our free institutions would develop the most amiable, firm, and valuable character; but perverted by defective education, it contributes to produce the same excitability as stated above. This fact illustrates the principle, that the best advantages, perverted and abused, often form the worst character. It is not the fault of free institutions, but the tendency of human nature to cherish under them a licentious, uncontrolled feeling. But the *prosperity* of our country has a controlling influence in forming a character of unrestrained feelings and calculations. National and individual prosperity in this land and age is unexampled in the world's his-



tory. Its obvious and immediate effect is a rashness and extravagance of feelings, carried with all their exciting influence, into the enterprizes of social and individual effort. It kindles up all the passions and energies of men, and hurries them on with accumulating fervor and accelerated force. To stand still is out of the question, and to move sluggishly is equally impossible. When a people, so conditioned and educated, feel and act, it must be under a strong impulse.

The social temperament, cherished and gratified, with almost no restraint, has an agency in forming the character. We have so much time and means, consequent upon our prosperity, that we can cultivate the social principle at pleasure. Intercourse is so easy and so exhilarating, that it is constantly indulged. The rapidity and convenience of travelling annihilate distance, and bring distant cities and towns into immediate neighborhood. The variety and abundance of intelligence so rapidly transmitted, tempt to constancy of intercourse, and keep up a feverish anxiety, which prepares us to feel high and varied excitement.

We wish now to submit a few remarks on modern religious revivals, as modified by the above causes. Carry the above thoughts to the examination, and we shall perceive that revivals appear just what we might expect to see them—just what they must be from the genius and character of this whole people. Our early education, our popular institutions, our prosperity, our social habits, and the rapid circulation of intelligence, have formed a character which must be developed in every thing that affects our present or future interests. If such a people become religious, it must be by impulse; if they act religiously, it will be zealously; if they employ means to promote revivals, they must be such as are adapted to the genius and character of the people. On the means actually employed at the present day to promote revivals of religion, we ought to remark, both to illustrate the character of the age and to delineate some causes of those high religious excitements. Let it here be premised that the only agency, which can produce a real revival of pure and undefiled religion, is the *special influence of the Holy Ghost*. The Spirit of God alone can renew the heart, enlighten the mind, sanctify and cheer the soul in the gospel hope of salvation. The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit's influence must always be acknowledged and sought in religious revivals. This being understood, instrumental agencies may regulate the visible character of genuine

religious excitements. There may be counterfeits of this good work, with which the Holy Ghost has no agency, both in the excitement of individuals and of communities. These we will not now attempt to describe. But so far as our observation has extended, the aspect of religious revivals has corresponded with the character of the means employed, and the manner of using them. They have presented a scene of still, solemn, and powerful emotion, or of noisy, lively, and superficial excitement, just in accordance with the means: and we think the revivals are genuine, doubtful, or extravagant, according to the character of their instrumental agency. This fact is easily explained. When the Spirit of God awakens sinners, their minds are very tender and excitable; they are ready to catch at any thing which affords the least prospect of relief from their anxiety. If the truth of the gospel be preached in a faithful, plain, solemn, affectionate, and appropriate manner, the thoughts and feelings, consequently the visible aspect, will be still, solemn, and one which indicates deep feeling. If the conversation and prayers be kind, affectionate, and earnest, the whole appearance will correspond in character. But if the preaching be exhortatory and boisterous, mingled with invective, and addressed mainly to the passions and animal sympathies; if the conversation and prayers be of a corresponding character, the scenes will be confused, noisy, and enthusiastic. Perhaps these remarks are sufficient to explain what we mean by regulating the external appearance of religious revivals. We have no doubt that sometimes strong excitements of the animal sympathies are mistaken for renewing grace and religious feelings: and it is quite possible that the Spirit of God is sometimes grieved away by violent measures to excite mere animal sympathies, shortly after what seemed a hopeful commencement of his gracious visitation. On the other hand, we have as little doubt that the Spirit sometimes brings men under the influence of truth when the sympathies have, in the first instance, been highly excited.

The means which are now popular, in this land, for promoting revivals, are such as are calculated to give an agitating character and high excitement to them. The style of preaching, praying, and exhorting is adapted to the genius and habits of the people; meetings are frequent and long protracted, and an expectation is cherished that extra services will be attended with extra excitement. We take the liberty of stating here, by the way, our opinion, that frequent and pro-

tracted religious meetings are in themselves proper and vastly important. As far as we can perceive, no valid objection can be made against what are now called three or four days' meetings. The Divine Lawgiver commanded his ancient people to hold, annually, at least three public convocations of eight successive days each, in which religious solemnities were daily celebrated. Large convocations were frequently held for days together in the time of Christ. On two occasions, our blessed Saviour wrought miracles to feed the fasting multitudes, who had attended for several successive days at those meetings. Besides, it seems to us right, and calculated for great benefit, that God's people should occasionally set apart three or four days for coming together unitedly to entreat the special blessing of the Holy Spirit, and listen, with absorbing and undivided attention, to the precious truths of the gospel. If there be any objection it can only lie against the manner in which they are sometimes conducted. But this is only an objection against their abuse. We are fully aware that there is a tendency in our character, as a people, to extravagance in almost every thing, and on such occasions there is danger of its indulgence. Add to this the tendency, mentioned in our former No. to excess of speculation and self-confidence, and we shall perceive a danger, that is doubtless often realized. There is a liability on these occasions, therefore, to a great evil in the manner of conducting the exercises. It consists in cherishing a sentiment of man's ability to convert himself to God. We fear this is too often done, not only at such meetings, but in the ordinary instructions from the pulpit. We greatly fear the effect of such addresses as would teach sinners to place confidence in their own ability. It is dangerous in the extreme, for a sinner to imbibe false sentiments of his own power, because it tends to inflate him with pride, grieve the Spirit of God, and suggest peace when there is no peace. Much, very much importance should be attached to the manner in which means are employed. Extra meetings and religious services are demanded by the genius of the people, rendered necessary by the unrestrained and highly exciting efforts of the licentious to oppose truth and righteousness, and sanctioned by the special blessing of God. But they undoubtedly show the excitable character of the people, and tend to promote high and agitating excitement in religious revivals.

A question may now be asked, what is the proper estimate

of such an age? In forming our estimate of any age, we take the prominent characteristics, inquire into their influence over present interests and future prospects, and especially their moral influence. Take the excitement of the present age, which certainly has a controlling influence in forming the whole character, giving efficiency to enterprize and improvement, spreading with great rapidity whatever principles with which it is associated, and we shall be led to attach high importance to it, and perceive that this age may form a crisis in the world's history. We cannot confidently say that the crisis is already come, but that the world is approximating a momentous crisis, we think is very evident. The present highly excited state of Europe, indicates a turning point greatly in favour, or against civil and religious liberty—for the establishment of Popery or its desolation—for the triumph of atheism and infidelity, or their prostration. Of prospective scenes we cannot speak definitively; but that great changes must follow such high excitement seems unavoidable. The result may not be so near as we apprehend, and it is impossible to decide whether calamity or glory be most probable. It is, however, a just estimate to say, that the excitements of this age are fraught with great danger to the best interests of man. We cannot here give any illustrations of prophecy, but we have no apprehension that we stand amid scenes introductory to the millennium. We do not believe that those bright spots in the political or ecclesiastical horizon, are occasioned by the millennial dawn.

To the Church of God in this land, the present excitements portend fearful or happy results beyond any thing before witnessed. Those religious revivals so frequently and extensively occurring, so generally cherished and earnestly sought, must have an unprecedented influence upon the interests of religion in the land. We fully believe that, under the continued influence of such high excitement, revivals are to be the salvation or prostration of Christianity for a long time to come. There is no standing still; the whole Church is in accelerated motion; if rightly directed, the result will be glorious and triumphant; but if otherwise, the result will be most fearful and disastrous. The influence of religious men, now exerted, will be felt with unabated force by ages to come. The next generation can bear no such proportion of good and evil as the past and present. We do not forget the consoling truth that the Lord reigns; and the gates of hell shall not

prevail against his Church. But whether he will, in righteous judgment, suffer it to be corrupted, scourged, and diminished under the exciting influences of the present age, or whether he will gloriously enlarge and beautify it, we do not know: and we confess, our estimate of this age occasions no small degree of anxiety. To us, the signs of the times seem portentous of evil as well as of good.

A brief answer to one practical question is all that our limits permit in the conclusion of this article—How shall these high excitements be regulated and guided to a desirable consummation? There are doubtless some who would say, use all appropriate means to discourage and put down the excitements. But such a course would not accomplish the object, were it desirable. It is impossible to stop the current. Every obstacle cast in its way would only produce a temporary restraint, and then serve to increase the flood in the same or some other direction. With such a population as ours, excitement can be put down only by counter excitement, or by withdrawing from its influence. In one case, nothing valuable is gained, and in the other, a substitute will soon be found. Excitements we must have, and it is useless to spend time and efforts to prevent them. A far more grave question is how to direct their course and objects.

Heedless extravagance, under this influence, would be still worse. To fall into the current in such a manner, would increase their violence, without regard to the objects, or their manner and means of influence. Something may be done by wisely selecting the objects, encouraging attention to them, and associating the best means for their attainment. This suggests the amazing responsibility of those men, who, by their talents, intelligence, weight of character, or station, can exert a salutary influence. But after all, principle, enlightened, settled moral principle, must guide a people liable to such excitement. Public sentiment, based on moral principle, can sway us; and nothing without it, in the sphere of human agency, can guide and govern an excited free people.

We must go back to the education of children and youth for a solution of this question. The rising generation will soon be obliged to regulate excitements of a more agitating character, or be swept away as by a resistless tornado. The religious education of youth must be vigorously and thoroughly prosecuted, or our hopes expire. There is no sure foundation, no stable, settled principle of morals, except the Christian

religion. The Bible must be restored to the nursery, common schools, academies, and seminaries of education, from which it has been so long banished. It is matter of gratulation that the Sabbath school is labouring to produce this reform. This institution should be most assiduously cherished. Imbue the minds of the rising generation with religious principle, and the best interests of man and the interests of the Church are safe. Christian principle will secure them all, however strong and agitating the existing influences may become.

Just at this time it is a question of absorbing anxiety, how are religious excitements to be regulated and conducted to a happy result? To the various interests of our country, this is a question of unspeakable importance. If these revivals, which are now occurring with unexampled frequency, should continue, and be wisely directed, they will regenerate public sentiment, bring back the Bible to our schools, and raise up a generation under the influence of stable, correct moral principle. To secure, therefore, the proper regulation and judicious guidance of revivals, is immensely important. How is this to be done? Can it be done by philosophical speculations? Never. Can it be secured by teaching man's ability? Not at all. Can it be done by naked illustrations of cold orthodoxy? By no means. Several things must be combined. There must be an intelligent, plain, affectionate, faithful exhibition of gospel truth—devout, earnest, unceasing prayer to God—and an humble, confident reliance upon the influence of the Holy Ghost. Preaching and conversation must be *intelligent*, exhibiting the great truths of the Gospel distinctly, distinguishing one from another, and at the same time showing the connexion, relations, and harmony of the whole. They must be *plain*, presenting the mind of the Spirit in the simplicity and excellence of the truth. They must be *affectionate*. Every thing harsh and provoking should be avoided, as ill comporting with the tender and persuasive kindness of the Saviour's love, and not calculated to subdue the heart. Even the terrors of the Lord should be urged with the kindest affection for the souls of men. They must be *faithful*. This intends a right and appropriate application of truth to the consciences of men. Appeals are not only to be made to the understanding, but to the heart, with earnestness and solemnity. It includes rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving to each his portion in season. It is not only important that the momentous truths of God's message be rightly divid-

ed, but seasonably administered; adapted in solution and illustration to the state of the people.

We cannot too highly estimate, in this plan, the importance of earnest, united, unceasing prayer, for the Holy Spirit's influence. Without his agency, nothing can be accomplished. An humble, confident reliance on his blessed efficiency, unitedly expressed in fervent, persevering prayer, indicates our only hope. The most encouraging thought which associates with our prospect, is the connexion of these revivals with the widely extended observance of the monthly concert for prayer. These concert seasons seem to have excited a solemn earnestness of humble entreaty, which binds the interests of the Church and immortal souls to the intercession of Christ our advocate. Let every Christian who knows the way to the Mercy seat, there be often found; there plead for the influence of the Holy Ghost on the whole population of all lands; there pray that these reviving excitements may be conducted by the Holy Spirit's agency to the glorious consummation of converting from sin to God this nation, and the world.

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ART. VIII.—SHORT NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

I.—*The Book of the Priesthood: an Argument, in three parts.* By Thomas Stratten, Sunderland. New-York, Jonathan Leavitt. Boston, Crocker & Brewster. 12mo. pp. 285.

THIS is a work of real talent, and of no small value. When we first glanced at its *title* in a bookseller's advertisement, we had no doubt that it announced a production of some high-toned and zealous advocate of prelacy. The perusal of a few lines of the preface, however, agreeably undeceived us. And we soon discovered that the writer, (who is an English Dissenter of no common power,) under cover of a title somewhat quaint, and, perhaps, not entirely judicious, has assailed the fundamental principles of the hierarchy, whether Popish or Protestant, with great force and effect.

In Part I. of his work, the author demonstrates that "*the*