

YARMOUTH, March 4th, 1869.

Dear Brother,—

The hope that the perusal of the following account of the Conversion and Religious Exercises of President Edwards, may be made a blessing to many of the readers of the *Christian Messenger* is my only apology for requesting you to publish it.

Yours truly,
SAMUEL BROWN.

CONVERSION OF PRESIDENT EDWARDS.

I had a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul from my childhood; but had two more remarkable seasons of awakening, before I met with that change by which I was brought to those new dispositions, that new sense of things, that I have since had. The first time when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation, I was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion and my soul's salvation; and was abundant in duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys, with whom I used frequently to meet for prayer. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much self-righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties. I joined with some of my school mates, and built a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot, for a place of prayer. And besides, I had particular secret places of my own in the woods, where I used to retire by myself; and was from time to time much affected. My affections were lively and easily moved, and I seemed to be in my element when engaged in religious duties. And I am ready to think, many are deceived with such affections; and such a kind of delight as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.

But in process of time, my convictions and affections wore off; and I entirely lost all those affections and delights, and left off secret prayer, at least as to any constant performance of it; and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in the ways of sin. Indeed I was at times very uneasy, especially towards the latter part of my time at college; when it pleased God to seize me with pleurisy, in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and caused me to tremble over the pit of hell. And yet, it was not long after my recovery, before I fell again into my old ways of sin. But God would not suffer me to go on with any quietness; I had great and violent inward struggles, till after many conflicts with wicked inclinations, repeated resolutions and bonds that I laid myself under, by a kind of vows to God, I was brought wholly to break off all former wicked ways, and all ways of known outward sin; and to apply myself to seek salvation, and practise many religious duties; but without that kind of affection and delight which I had formerly experienced.

My concern now wrought more by inward struggles and conflicts, and self-reflections. I made seeking my salvation the main business of my life. But yet, it seems to me I sought after a miserable manner which has made me sometimes since to question, whether it ever issued in that which was saving; being ready to doubt whether such miserable seeking ever succeeded. I was indeed brought to seek salvation in a manner I never was before; I felt a spirit to part with all things in the world, for an interest in Christ. My concern continued and prevailed, with many exercising thoughts and inward struggles; but yet it never seemed to be proper to express that concern by the name of terror.

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty and other distinguishing truths of the Gospel. This and other doctrines used to appear like horrible doctrines to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied with them; yet never could give an account how, or by what means, I was thus convinced, nor imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was an extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it; but only that now I saw farther, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of them. However, my mind rested in them; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections. And there has been a wonderful attention in my mind, with these doctrines from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against them. But I have often, since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of these truths than I had then. I have had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. These doctrines have very often appeared exceedingly pleasant.

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, (1 Tim. i. 17.) Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever, Amen. As I read the words, there came into my soul, and as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought within myself, how excellent a Being that is, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy him and be taken up to him in heaven, and be as it were, swallowed up in him forever; I kept saying over these words of scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him, and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thoughts, that there was any thing spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.

From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehension and idea of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him. I found no books so delightful to me as those that treated of these subjects. Those words used to be abundantly with me, I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys. Cant. ii. 1. The words seemed to me fitly to represent the loveliness and beauty of Jesus Christ. The whole book of Canticles used to be pleasant to me, and I used to be much in reading it, about that time; and found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that would carry me away, in my contemplations. This I know not how to express otherwise, than by a calm, delightful abstraction of the soul from all the concerns of the world; and sometimes a kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and rapt and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up an ardour in my soul, that I know not how to express.

Not long after I began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father of some things that had passed in my mind. I was much affected by the discourse we had together; and when it was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was a gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; a high, and holy gentleness.

After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be as it were, a calm, beautiful appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity, and love, seemed to appear in every thing: in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, and trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fill my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon for a long time; and in the day, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the glory of God in these things; in the meantime singing forth, with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer. Scarcely any thing, among all the works of nature, was so delightful to me as thunder and lightning: formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. Before I used to be uncommonly terrified with thunder, and to be struck with terror when I saw a thunder storm rising; but now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God, so to speak, at the first appearance of a thunder storm, and used to take the opportunity, at such times, to fix myself, in order to view the clouds, and see the lightning play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder, which oftentimes was exceedingly entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.

I felt then great satisfaction, as to my good state; but that did not content me. I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness, wherewith my heart seemed to be full, and ready to break; which often brought to my mind the words of the Psalmist, Ps. cxix. 28. My soul breaketh for the longing it hath. I often felt a mourning and lamenting in my heart, that I had not turned to God sooner, that I might have had more time to grow in grace. My mind was greatly fixed on divine things; I was almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent. The delights which I now felt in the things of religion, were of an exceedingly different kind from those before mentioned, that I had when a boy, and what I then had no more notion of than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colours. They were of a more inward, pure, soul-animating, and refreshing nature. These former delights never reached the heart, and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God, or any taste of the soul satisfying and life-giving good there is in them.

My sense of divine things seemed gradually to increase for about a year and a half, when I went to preach at New York, and while there it was raised to a much higher degree than before. My longings after God and holiness were much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heavenly Christianity, appeared exceedingly amiable to me. I felt an ardent desire to be in everything a complete Christian, and conformed to the blessed image of Christ; and that I might live, in all things, according to the pure and blessed rules of the Gospel. I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things; which put me upon pursuing and pressing after them. It was my continual strife, day and night, and constant enquiry, how I should be more holy, and live more holily, and more becoming a child of God, and a disciple of Christ. I now sought an increase of grace and holiness, and a holy life, with much more earnestness than ever I sought grace before. I had it: I used to be continual-

ly examining myself, and studying and contriving for likely ways and means, how I should live holily, with far greater diligence and earnestness than ever I pursued anything in my life; but yet with too great a dependence on my own strength, which afterward proved a great damage to me. My experience had not then taught me, as it has done since, my extreme feebleness and impotence, every manner of way, and the bottomless depths of secret corruption and deceit there were in my heart. However I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness, and conformity to Christ. The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness; to be with God, and spend my eternity in divine love, and holy communion with Christ. My mind was very much taken up with contemplations of heaven, and the enjoyments there, and living in perfect holiness, humility and love; and it used at that time to appear a great part of the happiness of heaven, that there the saints could express their love to Christ. It appeared to me a great clog and burden, that what I felt within I could not express as I desired.

The inward ardour of my soul seemed to be hindered and pent up, and could not freely flame out as it would. I used often to think how in heaven this principle should freely and fully vent and express itself. Heaven appeared exceedingly delightful, as a world of love. It appeared to me that all happiness consisted in living in pure, heavenly, divine love.

I remember the thoughts I used then to have of holiness, and said sometimes to myself, "I do certainly know how I love holiness, such as the Gospel prescribes." It appeared to me that there was nothing in it but what was ravishingly lovely; the highest beauty and amiableness—a divine beauty; far purer than anything here upon earth; and that every thing else was like mire and delfement in comparison with it. . . . While at New York, I was sometimes much affected with reflections on my past life, considering how late it was before I began to be truly religious; and how wickedly I had lived till then; and once so as to weep abundantly, and for a considerable time together.

On January 12, 1723, I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself, and all that I had, to God; to be for the future in no respect my own; to act as one that had no right to himself, in any respect; and solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience; engaging to fight, with all my might, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to the end of my life. But I have reason to be infinitely humbled, when I consider how much I have failed of answering my obligations.

I had then abundance of sweet religious conversation in the family where I lived, with Mr. John Smith and his pious mother. My heart was knit in affection to those in whom were the appearance of true piety; and I could bear the thoughts of no other companions but such as were holy, and the disciples of the blessed Jesus. I had great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; and my secret prayer used to be, in great part, taken up in praying for it. If I heard the least hint of anything that happened, in any part of the world, that appeared in some respect or other, to have a favorable aspect on the interests of Christ's kingdom, my soul eagerly caught at it, and it would much animate and refresh me. I used to be eager to read public papers mainly for that end; to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interests of religion in the world.

I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the bank of Hudson's river, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God; and had many delightful hours there. Sometimes Mr. Smith and I walked there together, to converse on the things of God, and our conversation used to turn much on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the glorious things that God would accomplish for his church in the latter days. I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart and those sweet and powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders. I came away from New York in the month of April, 1723, and had a most bitter parting with Mrs. Smith and her son. My heart seemed to sink within me at leaving the family and city, where I had enjoyed so many sweet and pleasant days. . . . However, that night after this sorrowing parting, I was greatly comforted in God at West Chester, where we went ashore to lodge, and had a pleasant time of it all the voyage to Saybrook. It was sweet to me to think of meeting dear Christians in heaven, where we should never part more. At Saybrook we went ashore to lodge, on Saturday, and there kept the Sabbath, where I had a sweet and refreshing season, walking alone in the fields.

After I came home to Windsor, I remained much in a like frame of mind as when at New York, only sometimes I felt my heart ready to sink with the thoughts of my friends at New York. My support was in the contemplations of the heavenly state, as I find in my Diary of May 1, 1723. It was a comfort to think of that state where there is fulness of joy; where reigns heavenly calm, and delightful love, without alloy; where there are continually the dearest expressions of this love; where is the enjoyment of the persons loved, without ever parting; where those persons who appear so lovely in this

world, will really be inexpressibly more lovely and full of love to us. And how sweetly will the mutual lovers join together to sing the praises of God and the Lamb! How will it fill us with rapture to think that this enjoyment, these sweet exercises, will never cease, but will last to all eternity! I continued much in the same frame, in general, as when at New York, till I went to New Haven as tutor of the College, having one season of special enjoyment at Bolton, on a journey from Boston, while walking out alone in the fields. After I went to New Haven I sunk in religion, my mind being diverted from my eager pursuits after holiness, by some affairs that greatly perplexed and distracted my thoughts.

(Conclusion in our next.)

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

MORE ABOUT SINGING GOD'S PRAISE.

The following communication was received some weeks since but has been overlooked.

Mr. Editor,—

Will you kindly allow me a corner in the *Messenger* once more on the above subject. I thankfully received your observations on the matter, though not wholly convinced of the necessity of carrying note-books to Church, but that is a matter of small importance. The main question is, What will glorify God and edify the Church?

"Alfing," in your issue of January 6th, has settled the question, if all the readers of the *Christian Messenger* will accept his rendering of 1 Cor. xiv. 15. He has sent me to the Bible where I take it for granted no Baptist is afraid to go. I am thankful he did not send me to some other place. He says, "if friend 'Inquirer' will take the Bible with him and all Baptists profess to take." Yes, friend "Alfing," I will take the Bible for my text-book, but all will not take your version of that chapter and verse. Although you may be well posted up in singing, and perhaps a leader of a choir, to which I make no objection, neither do I to week-day training. I only wish it was possible for more of our people to avail themselves of those opportunities to perfect themselves in singing. In cities it is easy to get a large choir or to get the proper training that "Alfing" speaks of, but not so in the country where the population is scattered. Congregations of 500 or 600 are seldom met with in the country, and, I am sorry to say, I have never on ordinary occasions seen it in the city. The "will-nots" must belong chiefly to the city, and the "cannots" to the country, yet I think there are few churches where they cannot sing more than two or three tunes. Better in my opinion to sing a few tunes that a large majority of the Church understand, and in which they can join in praising God, than a hundred in which only a few could unite. I have never yet supposed a choir formed of "the thoughtless, giddy, and profane" altogether. But that there are some of the above in many choirs is an obvious fact, let "Alfing" think as he will. The rebuke of the apostle was evidently for those who plumed themselves on their superior attainments. Both in regard to singing and speaking with languages in both of which they might have had a perfect understanding according to "Alfing's" meaning. But Paul though dead, can and does yet speak for himself, and tells all Bible readers what he did mean in the chapter above quoted. In verses 3rd and 4th he says, "He that prophesies speaks to edification, and exhortation and comfort, he that speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself, he that prophesies edifies the church." Is it the church or the choir, whether composed of five or twenty-five, having a perfect knowledge of tune, and having the grace to sing with the spirit, yet if the church is not edified, they come under the apostle's rebuke. For he says, verse 14th, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Is it to be supposed that the Apostle had not a perfect knowledge of his subject when he spoke with tongues? He says, "I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the understanding also. I thank God I speak with tongues more than ye all, yet in the Church I would rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand in an unknown tongue." He does not upbraid them for their ignorance in not knowing as much as he knew of different tongues or of different tunes, but enjoins on those who had but a small share of his knowledge, to use that knowledge as he did; not for display but to bring themselves to the capacity of the church as he himself did. Is not his teaching this: I would rather sing five tunes to edify the church than ten thousand for display? I would rather