

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

Introduction

The Christian History was a revivalist periodical founded by the Boston clergyman Thomas Prince in 1743 to report on the religious revivals sweeping across Europe and the United States. It was the first Christian periodical published in the United States, but lasted only two years. The revivals of that period were ignited by Jonathan Edwards, whose theology sparked renewed enthusiasm and emphasized human depravity, divine omnipotence, and a personal relationship with God. This period is often referred to as the “First Great Awakening,” although the term “Great Awakening” wasn’t broadly used to describe the religious revivals that took place in the American colonies until the 1842 publication of Reverend Joseph Tracy’s book of that title.

As Prince traveled from church to church in New England to preach, he recorded the reactions of the various congregations in his periodical. This June 1744 issue of the journal comments on the evangelical spirit present in Connecticut.

Excerpt

June the 15th, I rode out to Mr. *Throop*’s a new Society in *Norwich*, and preach’d *one* Sermon for him, to a full Assembly. There seem’d to be a great listning to the Word; great Concern appear’d in the Countenances of many; a great Number were in Tears, and several cried out: Some fainted away, and *one* or *two* rag’d. After the Sermon was over I took Pains to find out the Spring of that Distress which appeared in many Instances, and I think, they gave Grounds to judge it was from Conviction of Sin; except those Instances that were distress’d with their out-rageous Passions.

Questions for Discussion

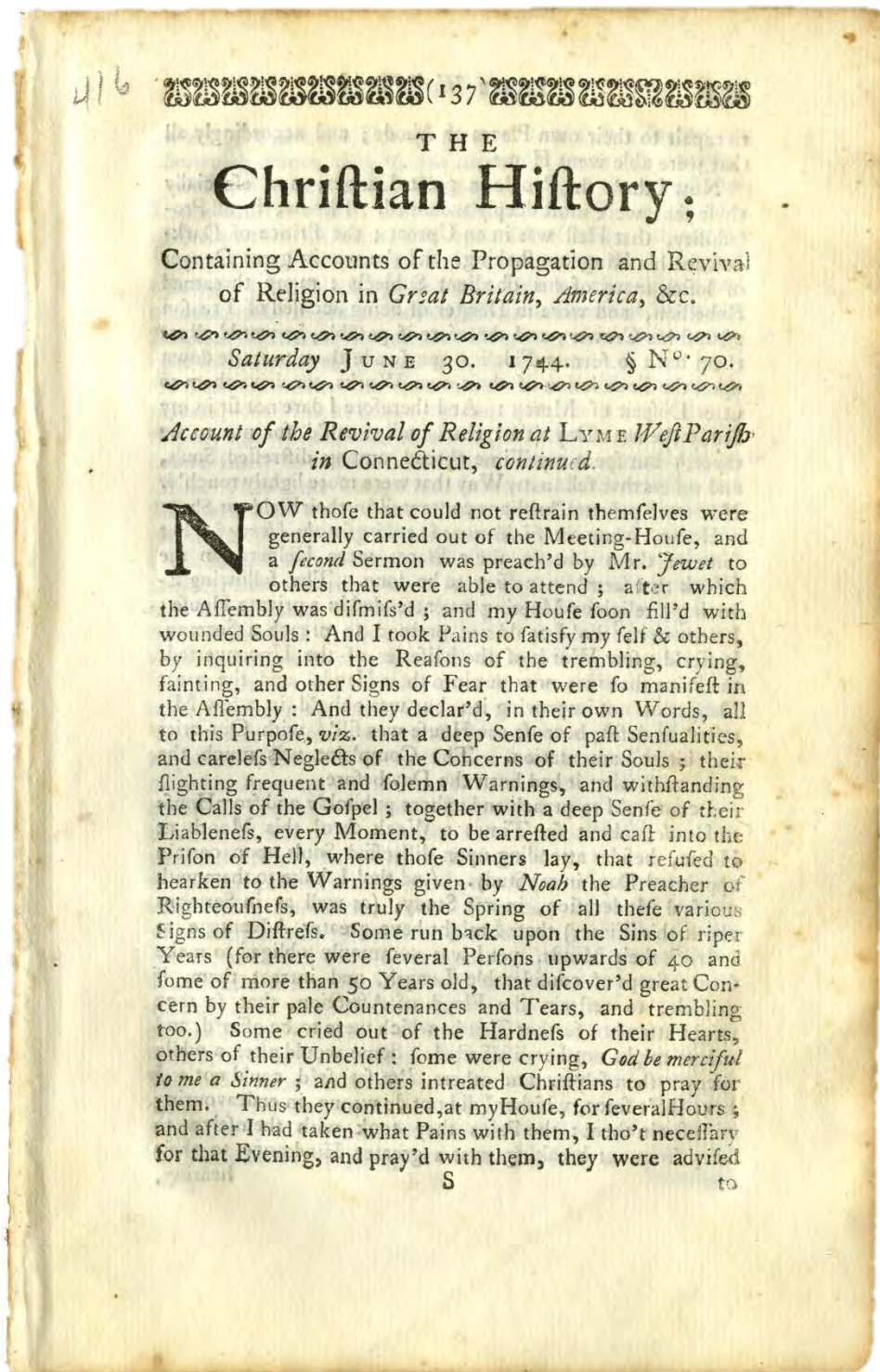
Read the introduction, view the image of the actual document, and read the transcribed excerpt. Then apply your knowledge of American history as well as the text of *The Christian History* to answer the following questions:

1. Who was the author of this account and what was he describing?
2. Describe the reaction of two or three individuals to the sermon.
3. How does the author explain these reactions?

Additional Question: How did the evangelical practices in the church service described here differ from worship in mainline Protestant churches?

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

Image

Thomas Prince, *The Christian History* [Vol. 2, no. 70] (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08819p137)

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

138

LYME *W. & Parish*

to repair to their own Places of Abode; and accordingly all that were able went Home.

Now I tho't the People in great Danger, and especially those that were most deeply wounded. I knew, in all Probability, that Hell was in an Uproar; the Prince of Darkness see his Kingdom shaking, and he was in great Danger of losing many of his obedient Subjects: many threatned Rebellion, and were in Danger of being accused of Treason against his Crown; and therefore if possible, he would allure them back to former Fidelity; perswade them to settle down upon the Foundation of their own Works, or drive them to utter Despair of Mercy: And therefore I dare not sit in my Study the next Day (tho' that loudly call'd for me to be there,) but spent my Time abroad among distressed Souls, and others that fell in my Way that were more lightly touch'd. Nor were private Christians contented in their Fields or Shops at Home, when *the Fields were so white for the Harvest*: but some of them also, in their Places were Helpers, in the Work that seem'd necessary to be done. The following Evening a religious Meeting was attended in a private House; I went to it, tho' I could not pretend to preach a Sermon. I offer'd a few Words of the Miseries of the Unconverted, the Price that was now put into their Hands, and the great Danger of not improving it; but was oblig'd in a few Minutes, to desist, because the House was fill'd with Out-cries and bitter Lamentation. The Complaint was much the same with what it had been the Day before.

I continu'd to preach and exhort publickly and from House to House, about six Times a Week thro' this Month at Home, besides attending upon distressed Souls upon certain appointed Days in my Study. And tho' I spake to them with unusual Moderation, in my Study, (as well as in Sermons about this Time,) that I might have greater Advantage to instruct their Minds, yet I was commonly obliged to make several Stops of considerable Length, and intreat them, if possible, to restrain the Flood of Affection, that so they might attend to further Truths which were to be offer'd, and others might not be disaffected. Some would after a while recover themselves, and others, I'm satisfy'd could not. I have tho't since, whither I did not do wrong in endeavouring to restrain them: the Pains they took with themselves to keep from out-breakings was a greater Hindrance to their hearing,

Thomas Prince, *The Christian History* [Vol. 2, no. 70] (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08819p138)

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

iii Connecticut.

139

hearing, than their Out-cries were: and it was so far from satisfying others, that it was improv'd as an Argument against the Reality of their Concern, if, upon the utmost Violence used with them they could after some Time hold in. I find no such Restraints laid upon distressed Souls in the Apostles Days, tho', we must allow, that they were as good Judges of what is Right in such a Case as other Men: and indeed, why might we not expect some Direction from the inspired Writers if it was our Duty to restrain them, and put them upon the Torture to keep Silence? If the Lord is pleas'd to make this open Shew of the Victories of his Grace, his Will be done: let him take his own Way: I think, upon Trial, the wondering Multitude are not the more likely to receive Conviction, for our prescribing to Him. The same Things that served for the Conviction and Conversion of many in our Saviour's and the Apostles Days, were the Occasion of blinding and hardning of others to their utter Ruin: And the distressing Out-cries of awaken'd Sinners were blessed to convince many, tho' others cavil'd and found Fault. Tho', I think, none ought to speak or pray with a loud Voice in the Time of publick Worship, yet I am free to confess that I mistook my Duty in taking so much Pains to prevent Out-cries in the Assembly. 'Tis true, Persons may, of Design, cry out; but then, 'tis like, they would generally be detected, and have their Madness exposed. However, if our blessed Lord is pleas'd to make bare his Arm upon stubborn Rebels, to the Glory of his sovereign Grace, why should I say that he shall not take this Method to bear Witness before the ungodly World, of the dreadful Miseries hastening upon them?

On the 20th of this Month I preach'd one Sermon for Mr. Griswold of Nabauntuc, from 1 Tim. 2. 5. upon the Sufficiency and Excellency of the Mediation of Christ: Under which, as far as I cou'd observe, many Christians were sweetly refresh'd with a deep Sense of the Truth, and many Sinners as full of Anguish (tho' the Sermon was not *terrible*) as at any Time I had seen. The Assembly in general, were in Tears, and near one half, I suppose, crying out aloud in Distress. After Sermon they gave themselves Liberty to speak out the Sentiments of their Souls; some in thankful Praises to God and the Lamb; others in bitter Complaints, of themselves for despising the blessed Mediator, and for the

S 2

Hardness

Thomas Prince, *The Christian History* [Vol. 2, no. 70] (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08819p139)

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

140

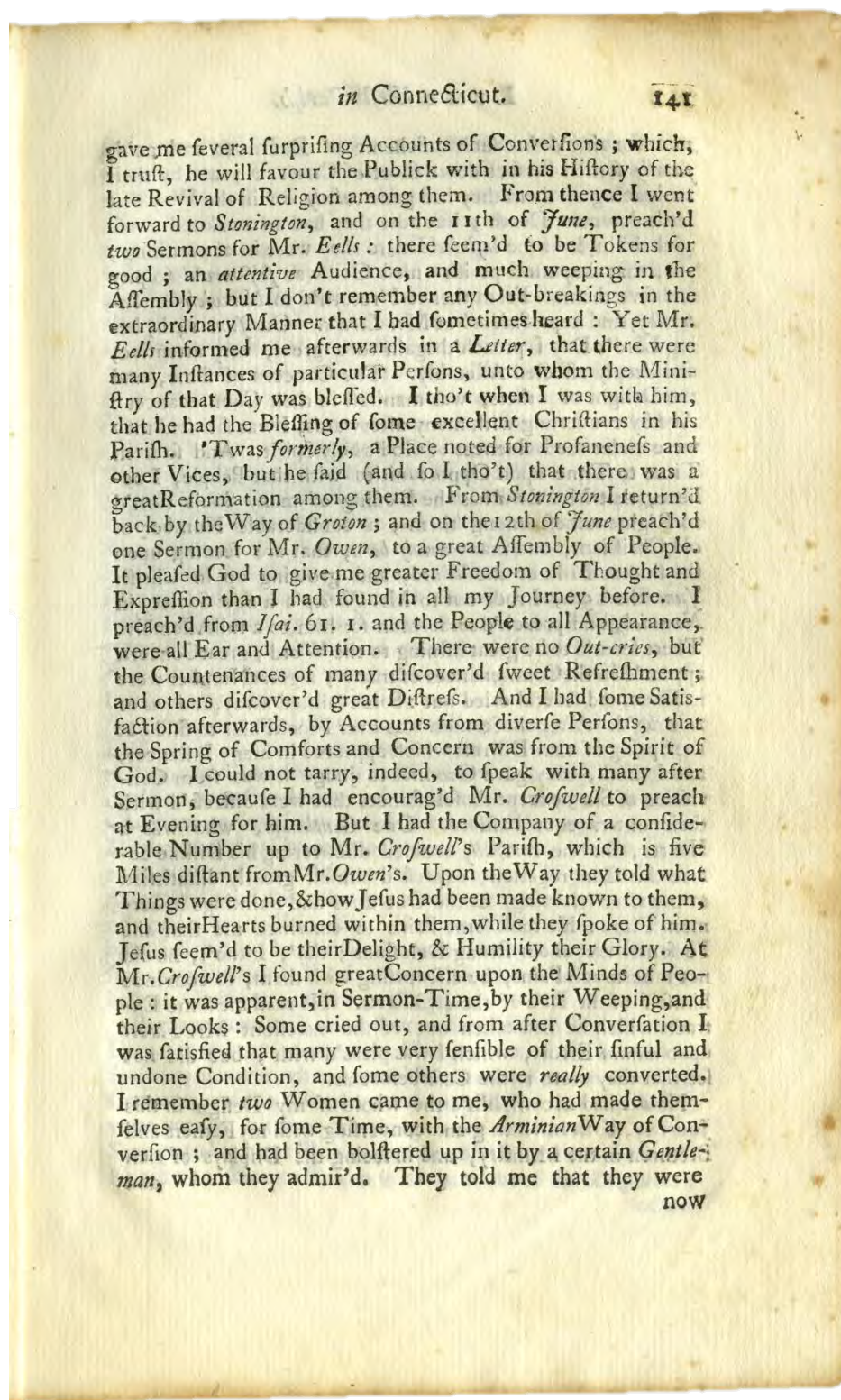
L Y M E *West Parish*

Hardness of their Hearts, and the like. Several were, at that Time, shaken off from the Foundation of their own Righteousness, and afterwards, hopefully converted.

I hope, Rev. Sir, you will pardon all my Digressions: I chuse to relate the few Things that I give an Account of, in that Order of Time, in which I observed them, and noted them in my Diary. About this Time, the Rev. Messieurs *Lord of Norwich*, *Owen of Groton*, and other Ministers in the *Eastern* Parts of this Government, sent Letters, inviting me to visit them, to see the Work of the Lord, and help them also; (for it was common in that Day for Brethren to send for each other to preach.) After some Struggles with my self, I consented to go; and accordingly set out on the 8th of *June*, intending to preach some few Sermons before I return'd. The same Day I preach'd for Mr. *Lovett* of *New-Salem* at his Desire, and there I observ'd a solemn Attention; Concern in the Countenances of some, & Delight in others. I have had some Acquaintance with the People in that Place since that Time, and believe that there is a considerable Number of Persons savingly converted in the late Season of Grace. From thence I went, the same Day at Evening, over to the *North Parish* of *New-London*, and *June* the 9th preach'd two Sermons for Mr. *Jewett*; under which, but especially the first, there was a great and general Concern visible in the Faces of the People: weeping, sighing and the like among the *Aged* and the *Youth*, while many of the *Children* of about *ten*, *twelve*, and *fourteen* Years old, cried aloud, and spake some such Sentences as these, viz. What must I do? I never honour'd this great King! || Lord Jesus help me! &c. From thence I hastned over to *Norwich*, because Mr. *Lord* expected me to preach a Lecture for him that Evening. And when I came there, there was a great Assembly gather'd, to which I preach'd from *Psal.* 119. 59, 60. they gave very solemn Attention; and there was a Concern apparent, by Tears and Sighs, in almost every Corner of the House. The next Day I preach'd another Sermon for Mr. *Lord*, the visible Effects of which were not so great as the first. I observ'd a great flocking of the People, not only to hear the Word, but to their *Pastor* for Advice. Mr. *Lord*

|| I was preaching upon the kingly Office of Christ. gave

A revival of religious fervor, 1744



in Connecticut. 141

gave me several surprizing Accounts of Conversions ; which, I trust, he will favour the Publick with in his History of the late Revival of Religion among them. From thence I went forward to *Stonington*, and on the 11th of *June*, preach'd two Sermons for Mr. *Eells* : there seem'd to be Tokens for good ; an *attentive* Audience, and much weeping in the Assembly ; but I don't remember any Out-breakings in the extraordinary Manner that I had sometimes heard : Yet Mr. *Eells* informed me afterwards in a *Letter*, that there were many Instances of particular Persons, unto whom the Ministry of that Day was blessed. I tho't when I was with him, that he had the Blessing of some excellent Christians in his Parish. 'Twas *formerly*, a Place noted for Profaneness and other Vices, but he said (and so I tho't) that there was a great Reformation among them. From *Stonington* I return'd back by the Way of *Groton* ; and on the 12th of *June* preach'd one Sermon for Mr. *Owen*, to a great Assembly of People. It pleas'd God to give me greater Freedom of Thought and Expression than I had found in all my Journey before. I preach'd from *Isai. 61. 1.* and the People to all Appearance, were all Ear and Attention. There were no *Out-cries*, but the Countenances of many discover'd sweet Refreshment ; and others discover'd great Distress. And I had some Satisfaction afterwards, by Accounts from diverse Persons, that the Spring of Comforts and Concern was from the Spirit of God. I could not tarry, indeed, to speak with many after Sermon, because I had encourag'd Mr. *Croswell* to preach at Evening for him. But I had the Company of a considerable Number up to Mr. *Croswell's* Parish, which is five Miles distant from Mr. *Owen's*. Upon the Way they told what Things were done, & how Jesus had been made known to them, and their Hearts burned within them, while they spoke of him. Jesus seem'd to be their Delight, & Humility their Glory. At Mr. *Croswell's* I found great Concern upon the Minds of People : it was apparent, in Sermon-Time, by their Weeping, and their Looks : Some cried out, and from after Conversation I was satisfied that many were very sensible of their sinful and undone Condition, and some others were *really* converted. I remember two Women came to me, who had made themselves easy, for some Time, with the *Arminian* Way of Conversion ; and had been bolstered up in it by a certain *Gentleman*, whom they admir'd. They told me that they were
now

Thomas Prince, *The Christian History* [Vol. 2, no. 70] (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08819p141)

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

142

LYME West Parish.

now convinc'd that such a Scheme of Doctrines embrac'd, *fatally* settled Persons down short of CHRIST; and by their embracing of them they had gone *calmly* on in the Way that leads down to Death; but now they had an awakned Sense of their Sin, & of the *infinite* Hazard they were in of perishing; yea, that they must perish unless God was *self-mov'd* to pity and save them. From thence I return'd to *Norwich* on *Saturday*, and kept *Sabbath* at Mr. *Lord's*. On *June 14th*, being Lord's Day I preach'd again to a great, very attentive, and deeply affected Assembly. The Concern of some, and the Delight of others, was manifest in their Countenances: And by conversing with many afterwards, I was satisfied they were under the Influences of God's holy Spirit. And so from Time to Time upon Opportunities with that People, I believe, that Mr. *Lord* has the Blessing of many Souls turn'd to Righteousness among them; a considerable Number of old Christians, and many *newly-born*, that are feeding upon the sincere Milk of the Word, and growing up in Christ. *June* the 15th, I rode out to Mr. *Throop's* a new Society in *Norwich*, and preach'd *one* Sermon for him, to a full Assembly. There seem'd to be great listening to the Word; great Concern appear'd in the Countenances of many; a great Number were in Tears, and several cried out: Some fainted away, and *one* or *two* rag'd. After the Sermon was over I took Pains to find out the Spring of that Distress which appeared in many Instances, and I think, they gave Grounds to judge it was from Conviction of Sin; except those Instances that were distress'd with their out-rageous Passions. One *Gentleman*, who was a Hearer, tho' he *carefully* avoided discovering his Dislike before the Congregation, express'd himself greatly dissatisfied to me after Meeting, at the Out-cries and Faintings in Sermon-Time: He took some Pains to convince me that the Persons were under strong Delusions; tho', I tho't, he did not take much Pains, by discoursing with them, to convince himself of the Rise of their Distress. He read me some Extracts which he had taken out of the excellent Mr. *Flavel* upon *mental* Errors, which I was pleas'd with; but did not see that they were to the Case before us.

Now I had accomplish'd the whole of my Design in this Journey, both in visiting and conversing with my Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry, and in seeing the Displays of rich and

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

in Connecticut.

143

and sovereign Grace ; and much exceeded my *first* Design in preaching. The next laid out in my own Mind was to return Home as fast as I cou'd ; but the Rev. Mr. *Adams* of *New-London* sent me a Letter, desiring that I would return that Way, and give his People some Exhortations. Having been there before in the Time of the Concern among the People, I was unwilling to deny his Request, because I had found that there were peculiar Difficulties rising up, and I fear'd my refusing might rather increase them than otherwise. There was a Number of *new Converts* with a flaming Zeal, and jealous lest the Labourers should not bear a Proportion to the Harvest : and some others, from what Spring I don't say ; (tho' some have imputed it to the Imprudence of these *new Converts*) who oppos'd themselves to the Work going on among them. Thus the Kingdom seem'd to be dividing against it self : And I was the rather inclin'd to gratify the *venerable* Mr. *Adams* on that Account, not knowing but that I might be instrumental of some Good in that Respect. Accordingly I went, and on *June 16th* preach'd *two* Sermons in that Place, besides using some private Endeavours to make Things more easy, if it should please God to make Use of me for that End : but the Success was not according to my Wishes. I found *mutual* rising Jealousies, and, as I tho't, *groundless* Surmifings in some Instances, prevailing among them. These Difficulties increas'd afterwards ; and for want of Charity and mutual Condescention and Forbearance, they have produc'd an open Separation. I doubt not but there are *excellent* Christians on both Sides ; and there has been a very great Display of divine Grace among them ; but they are doubtless to be blamed for the *Manner* of seperating. What Grounds they may have I don't know, but am afraid they have gone off upon a wrong Principle. Unhappy Case, when Christians have such sharp Contentions between them, as to part asunder from one another ! Yet so it has sometimes been with the best of Christians, *Acts 15. 38, 39.*

Perhaps some will think strange that I should be, so many Days, from my *particular* Charge, at such a critical Season as this was, when a great Number were under distressing Concern, and the Adversary was very busy : but the People were not left without preaching : and we found it of *real* Service to have our People partake of the various Gifts of Ministers ; some to Reason with them out of the Scriptures ;
others

A revival of religious fervor, 1744

144

LYME West Parish

others do address their Consciences ; others to apply to the Affections ; and all in their Manner and Measure to speak of the Things of God. I found it was eminently serviceable many Times, when I cou'd obtain the Help of my Brethren. Indeed, there is something natural in it, besides what I have observed already : *new Faces ; new Voices ; a new Method*, all tend to draw the Attention of Hearers : and hence, they were sometimes caught, by the same Truths that had been offer'd them divers Times before. I have Reason to bless God that he has sent so many of his Servants along by us, and inclin'd them to help us from Time to Time. I have not found it a Disadvantage to keep open the Pulpit Door to Ministers ; but see many ill Consequences of a contrary Practise in other Places. Those that have receiv'd *spiritual Benefit* among us from the Preaching of others, allow me as good a Share of their good Will, as those that have been more especially benefited by my Preaching. But where Ministers were---- *Noli me tangere* ---- where all those that were look'd upon Favorites of the *extraordinary Work* in the Land must stand off ; or thro' vast Difficulties Liberty has been obtained for them to preach ; I think many ill Things have follow'd that Strangeness, and fear many more are upon the Back of them.

Being return'd again to my own particular Charge, I endeavour'd to pursue the great Ends of the Ministry in the best Manner that I could ; and I don't remember that I preach'd a Sermon thro' the Month, without some manifest Tokens of the Presence of God in our Assemblies. Many were awakned and Convictions were deep : it plainly appear'd by the distinct Accounts given, that the Concern was no sudden Fright, nor the Effect of Fancy, nor yet the alone Strivings of natural Conscience, but a clear and real Sense of Sin, and it's direful Consequents, rais'd in the Mind from a realising Sense of the Majesty and Holiness of God, the Purity and Strictness of the divine Law. People flock'd to my Study daily, and in great Numbers, deeply wounded, and the Errand was to lay open the State of their Souls, and receive Direction. Sometimes I had 30 in a Day ; and sometimes many more, all upon the grand Affairs of their Souls.

(To be continued.)