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JOHN HUMPHREY NOYES AND HIS "BIBLE COMMUNISTS"

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I. THE ENVIRONMENT

Few things are more noticeable, among the advocates of perfectionism from the opening of the second third of the nineteenth century, than their extreme reluctance to accept the name of "Perfectionists." Many things may no doubt have coöperated to produce this attitude. Its main occasion lay, however, in the association of the name with a particular body of perfectionists, then claiming the attention of the public, with which other perfectionists were very loath to be confused. How anxious they were not to be confused with this body may be measured by the vigor of the language in which, themselves perfectionists, they repudiate all connection with "Perfectionists." Asa Mahan, for example, writing at the beginning of this period,¹ intemperately declares that the doctrine he teaches "has absolutely nothing in common" with "Perfectionism," "but a few terms drawn from the Bible." In order to distinguish his doctrine from "Perfectionism," however, he requires to describe the rejected doctrine as "Perfectionism technically so called," a mode of speech which already suggests that perfectionism, plainly understood, is — as it really is — common ground between the two. Possibly to atone for this necessary confession of general kinship, he sweepingly declares that "Perfectionism technically so called," is, in his judgment, "in the nature and necessary tendencies of its principles, worse than the worst form of infidelity." To William E. Boardman, writing twenty years later,² the danger of confusion with this "Perfectionism" seems less imminent, and he is therefore able to speak of it with less passion. He is not the less determined, however, to separate himself decisively from it.

This, it must be confessed, he does not accomplish, in every respect, without some apparent difficulty — describing its fundamental mystical doctrine of the indwelling Christ in terms which would not serve badly to describe the doctrine to which he himself ultimately came. It is, in point of fact, not the perfectionism of the rejected “Perfectionism” which offends him, any more than Mahan, but its antinomianism. And his real concern is to protest that not all perfectionism, — not his own variety, for example, — is chargeable with the antinomianism which men had been led to associate with the name through experience with the body of religionists who had arrogated to themselves, and had had accorded to them by common usage, the specific name of “Perfectionists.” How firmly this special body of perfectionists had attached the general descriptive name of “Perfectionists” to themselves as their particular designation (just as other bodies of religionists have laid claim to the names of “Christians,” “Disciples,” and the like as their specific names), is illustrated by the survival of this special use of the term, and that in an even narrower application, alongside of its more general employment, in the definition of the word “Perfectionist” (not usually of “Perfectionism”)³ in our current English dictionaries, as well as in our Religious encyclopædias. A very good example is supplied by John Henry Blunt’s “Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought” (1874). Under the head of “Perfectionists,” he describes only “a licentious American sect of Antinomian communists.”⁴ All other perfectionists he classes under the head of “Perfectibilists,” a distinction in designation to which he did not succeed in giving currency.⁵

The particular sect to which thus the name of “Perfectionists” is reserved by Blunt is no more perfectionist than other perfectionist parties; nor did it arise under influences specifically different from those to which the perfectionist parties which have most sharply repudiated relationship with it owed their own origin, nor can it be

represented as without some common interests with them. It differs from them, however, not merely in drawing off to itself and forming a separate sect instead of contenting itself with acting as leaven within existing churches; but also in the particular doctrinal system which it developed for itself, and which it utilized for the support and exposition not only of its perfectionism, but also of certain radical social theories, which, having the courage of its convictions, it presently put into practice up to a very bitter end. In this perfectionist sect, we have therefore the opportunity to observe a perfectionism working itself out in life under leadership strong enough to enable it to go its own way, along the lines of a development distinctly logical, although narrow and inconsiderate, untrammelled by considerations derived from tradition, whether religious, ethical, or social, and unaffected by the universal judgment of the community in which it lived. A great deal of ability was expended in the elaboration of its underlying religious and social theory; an incredible audacity was shown in putting this theory into practice; and a certain amount of temporary success attended the enterprise. But the thinking embodied in it was as grotesque as it was acute; it was astuteness rather than wisdom which presided over its social organization; and the experiment had fairly reached the end of its possibilities of persistence in about a third of a century. There is much to be learned from a study of it; there is nothing about it which can fairly be represented as edifying.

The "Perfectionists" or "Bible Communists," as they otherwise called themselves, are only one of the many unwholesome products of the great religious excitement which swept over western and central New York in the late twenties and early thirties of the last century, finding its way in the early thirties also into New England and thence over the world. Albert Barnes defines a revival for us as "the simultaneous conversion of many to Christ"; adding, in order to give completeness to the description, "and a rapid advance in promoting the purity

and zeal of Christians.”⁶ If this were a complete description of the phenomena which may display themselves in revivals, they would always be such unmixed blessings that they could scarcely be connected with an earthly origin; and they certainly could leave behind them nothing but good effects. In point of fact, however, human elements are always mixed with them; and these human elements may on occasion be so predominant that any divine ingredient which may be hidden in them may be negligible. Accordingly Albert Barnes proceeds at once to speak of them, as actually experienced, as also periods of religious “excitement”; and to liken this excitement in its nature and effects to the excitement which tears men in a political campaign or sweeps them off their feet on the approach of war. Here is something quite out of the focus of his former description; for excitement, even though religious, has no necessary relation, whether as cause, accompaniment, or effect, with the converting or reviving operations of the Spirit of God. “A revival or religious excitement,” Archibald Alexander tells us,⁷ “may exist and be very powerful, and affect many minds, when the producing cause is not the Spirit of God; and when the truth of God is not the means of the awakening.” “Religious excitements,” he accordingly adds, “have been common among Pagans, Mohammedans, heretics and Papists.” W. B. Sprague similarly warns us in the opening pages of his classical “Lectures on Revivals of Religion,”⁸ not to “mistake a gust of animal passion for the awakening or converting operations of God’s Holy Spirit.” Great excitement may no doubt attend a true revival, but it is not part and parcel of it; and it may be very great and yet there be no true revival at all. “It may be an excitement produced not by the power of divine truth, but by artificial stimulus applied to the imaginations and passions for the very purpose of producing commotion both within and without.” Let us remember that God declares Himself the God of order, and that disorder can therefore never be the authentic mark of His working. If God is working

where disorder is, it is in spite of the disorder, not because of it; the disorder is itself only the cause of evil. "A great work of the Spirit," says Archibald Alexander,⁹ "may be mingled with much enthusiasm and disorder, but its beauty will be marred and its progress retarded by every such spurious mixture." "All means and measures which produce a high degree of excitement, or a great commotion of the passions," he therefore advises, should be avoided; because religion does not consist in these violent emotions, nor is it promoted by them; and when they subside a wretched state of deadness is sure to succeed. Fanaticism, however much it may assume the garb and language of piety, is its opposite." "The Church," he accordingly continues, "is not always benefited by what we call revivals; but sometimes the effects of such commotions are followed by a desolation which resembles the work of a tornado. I have never seen so great insensibility in any persons as in those who had been subjects of violent religious excitement; and I have never seen any sinners so bold and reckless in their impiety as those who had once been loud professors and foremost in the time of revival."

It is with these evils in mind that, in face of the possibility that a sinner here and there may nevertheless chance to be really converted through the action of this excitement, Joel Hawes of Hartford declares¹⁰ that "a sinner may be converted at too great an expense." No more awful arraignment of the religious excitement, which sometimes accompanies and sometimes serves as a substitute for revivals, could be phrased. In point of fact such excitement has no Christian character whatever; its affinities are, as Archibald Alexander has already reminded us, with the universal religious phenomena which Elizabeth Robbins sums up under the name of manadism,¹¹ a term which she defines broadly enough to make it include "all intoxicating, will-destroying excesses of religious fervor in which 'the multitude' have a part." When we remember the "exercises" which have often attended revivals and the moral delinquencies which have sometimes stained them,

we shall be compelled with bowed heads to recognize that they too may be so perverted as to be included in her observation:—“It is a remarkable fact in the history of religion that men of widely differing creeds and countries have agreed in attaching a spiritual value to hysteria, chorea, and catalepsy on the one hand, and to a frenzy of cruelty and sensuality on the other. Diseased nerves and morals have often been ranked as the highest expression of man’s faith and devotion.”

The intrusion of this debasing excitement into revival movements, with the effect sometimes of destroying them altogether, sometimes of only greatly curtailing and marring their beneficent results, is ordinarily traceable to one or the other of two inciting causes. One of these is found in the character of the population among whom the revival is propagated; the other in the character of its promoters and the methods they employ in promoting it,—methods better adapted to lash the nerves into uncontrollable agitation than to bring the sinner to intelligent trust in his Saviour. Both of these causes were present and operative in the great revival movement which swept over western and central New York in the late twenties and early thirties of the last century.

It has been thought that the character of the population of this region, derived from that of its first settlers, laid them particularly open to fanaticism. The earliest stratum of settlers, entering the Palmyra country from Vermont in the second decade of the nineteenth century, was, we are told, of “rather unsavory fame”; and although this stratum was overlaid in the next decade by a virile, intelligent, industrious class of settlers from eastern New York and New England, the earlier settlers remained, and by mixture with the newer comers gave a psychological character and a psychological history of its own to this region. It has been, therefore, it is said, on the one hand “a center of sane and progressive social movements,” but on the other hand a veritable “hot-bed of fanaticism,” and the two tendencies have entered into every possible combination

with one another, some of them startling enough. It seems hardly just, however, to ascribe the whole of the evil to the earlier and the whole of the good to the later immigration. There were many men of the highest character among the earlier immigrants, and the newcomers themselves brought with them that tendency to eccentricity of opinion and extremity of temper which seems to be in the New England blood, and which has made New England, along with its intellectual and moral leadership of the nation, also unhappily the fertile seed-plot of fads and extravagances. Central and western New York was in effect only an extended, and, because of its isolation and the hardness of its pioneer life, in these respects, an intensified New England.¹² The period, moreover, was one of universal excitability. "The great improvement in the mechanic arts, and the wide diffusion of knowledge," says Albert B. Dod, writing in 1835,¹³ "have given a strong impulse to the popular mind; and everywhere the social mass is seen to be in such a state of agitation, that the lightest breath may make it heave and foam." Men stood in a condition of permanent astonishment. Everything seemed possible. They did not know what would come next, and thought it might be anything. They lived on perpetual tip-toe. It would have been strange if a raw population like that of central and western New York had retained its balance in such a time. That it did not may be observed from the long list of fanaticisms into which it fell, some of which are alluded to by the writer on whom we were drawing at the opening of this paragraph; and the waves of most of which it sent washing back into the parent New England.

"The earliest agitation which helped to reveal the unfortunate strain in the blood," he writes, "was the crusade against the Masonic Fraternity in 1826, originating in a wide-spread belief, unconfirmed by sound evidence, that one Morgan had been foully dealt with at the behest of the Order, whose secrets he was accused of revealing. A single and mighty wave of indignation nearly obliterated the fraternity from that part of the United States. In the

early forties the Rochester country was one of the two chief centers of the propaganda and excitement associated with the predictions of the Vermont farmer, William Miller, with respect to the approaching judgment and the destruction of the world. In Western New York, it became a thoroughly irrational epidemic. Men and women forsook their employments and gave themselves over to watchings and prayer. They hardly slept or ate, but in robes of white awaited the coming of the bridegroom. The result in very many cases was either physical or mental exhaustion, ending in the horrors of insanity. . . . In the late forties the delusion of spiritualism entered upon its epidemic course with the 'Rochester rappings' of the Fox sisters. It spread by imitation to New England, and thence to Europe, and many of the phenomena attending it,—the trance, the vision, the convulsive movement, the involuntary dancing, the many indications of mental and nervous irritability,—had closest affinity to the extraordinary revival effects which we have elsewhere observed. . . . I wish to remark again one other strange and base spiritual product of this unique population. Of course it is generally known that Mormonism had its beginning in this region, but it is not so generally understood, I think, that Mormonism was literally born and bred in the unhealthy revival atmosphere which has just been described.¹⁴ In fact the sect of so-called Latter-Day Saints might never have existed except for the extraordinary mental agitation about religious matters which pervaded Western New York in this period. Mormonism has two main roots, the one to be traced into the mental and nervous characteristics of the personality of Joseph Smith, Jr., the other into the revival environment in which he lived and moved—and neither is a sufficient explanation without the other."¹⁵

A population like this could be trusted to produce spontaneously all the evil fruits of spurious religious excitement. In point of fact it did so. The writer upon whom we have been drawing, speaking of the period preceding that to which we wish to direct particular attention, points out that during it "an unbridled revival activity characterized the ordinary religious life of Western New York."

"Before Finney's personality issued upon the scene," he says,¹⁶ "before any particular individual assumed the

leadership, this fanatical restlessness, this tendency to spiritual commotion, was in the mind of the population and periodically broke forth in fantastic and exciting revivals. There were whole stretches of country in those parts that for generations were known as the 'burnt district,' and which Finney found so blistered and withered by constant revival flame that no sprout, no blade of spiritual life could be caused to grow.¹⁷ Only the apples of Sodom flourished in the form of ignorance, intolerance, or boasted sinlessness, and a tendency to freedom and spiritual affinities."

But this fanaticism-loving populace was not left to the spontaneous manifestation of its tendency to religious excitement. It was sedulously incited to it by its religious leaders, and naturally its last state was no better than the first. If anyone wishes to enjoy the illusion of actually "assisting" at an average revival-meeting of this period, he has only to read Mrs. Trollope's painfully realistic descriptions, alike of a town revival and of a camp meeting.¹⁸ Albert Barnes warns us,¹⁹ to be sure, against trusting the testimony of "the Trollopes, and the Fidlers, and the Martineaus" — "persons," he says, "having as few qualifications for being correct reporters of revivals of religion as could be found in the wide world."²⁰ It would be absurd, of course, to resort to Mrs. Trollope for the religious interpretation of revival phenomena; but the general trustworthiness of her report of revival occurrences, actually witnessed by her, is unimpeachable, when allowance is once made for the one-sidedness of her observation, due to her unsympathetic attitude. She describes only what she saw; she does not herself generalize on it. But what she describes might be seen anywhere in the western country at the time, sometimes no doubt in less, often unfortunately in much more, offensive forms.

Of course we are not confined to the testimony of Mrs. Trollope and writers of her type to learn what revivals at this period were like. We have, for example, a very sympathetic summary account of them from the pen of Andrew Reed, one of two very competent observers sent

in the early thirties by the Congregational Union of England and Wales, to visit the American churches.²¹ Reed does not doubt that the revivals were in themselves a work of God, the results of which by and large were for his glory.²² But neither is he able to close his eyes to the evils which accompanied them; especially the opportunity afforded by them and eagerly availed of, for vain, weak, and fanatical men to exploit for their own ends the emotional excitement which was aroused. That there were serious evils intrinsic in the very manner in which the revivals were conducted, he is compelled to recognize; but that, he says, was not after all the worst of it,—“they seem to have the faculty of generating a spirit worse than themselves.” “Rash measures attract rash men,” he explains:²³ “and their onward and devious path is tracked by the most unsanctified violence and reckless extravagance.” “They are liable to run out into wild fanaticism,” he explains further.²⁴

“A revival is a crisis. It implies that a great mass of human passion, that was dormant, is suddenly called into action. Those who are not moved to God will be moved to the greater evil. The hay, wood and stubble, which are always to be found even within the pale of the church, will enkindle, and flash, and flare. It is an occasion favorable to display, and the vain and presumptuous will endeavor to seize on it, and turn it to their own account. Whether such a state of general excitement is connected with worldly or religious objects, it is too much, and would argue great ignorance of human nature, to expect, that it should not be liable to excess and disorder.”²⁵

These somewhat general reflections are brought nearer to the point of most interest to us by the testimony of James H. Hotchkin, the historian of western New York, and a most cautious and sober-minded man, speaking directly out of his own experience.²⁶ He, too, of course, is sympathetic to the revival movement in itself. But he feels constrained to note explicitly that “circumstances have occurred in connection with these revivals, which give the most painful exhibition of the wickedness and folly of

man, when, leaving the divine word, he imagines himself wiser than God." He is led by his experience to the generalization that "whenever the religious excitement has been strong, a spirit of fanaticism has been induced, and has greatly hindered the good work, and marred its beauty." He has observed further that these evils have been particularly apparent, when the revival-work was carried on, not by the settled ministry, but by outsiders called in because of some fancied particular adaptation to this work. No doubt there were among these "revival men" or "revival preachers" men of true piety, whose usefulness was demonstrated by the results of their labors. Of others, however, Hotchkin declares himself "constrained to believe that if they were not impostors they must have been self-deceived fanatics"; and, certainly, he declares, "their operations and influences were destructive in a high degree and brought discredit on the revival." One and another of these men are mentioned and described; and it is pointed out that while mighty men in stirring up excitement, they failed, under the test of time, in bringing men really to Christ. Thus they proved themselves to be mere religious demagogues; for does not Gustave Le Bon tell us,²⁷ when describing demagogues and their ways, that, "it is easy to imbue the mind of a crowd with a passing opinion, but very difficult to implant therein a lasting belief"?

It is not, however, until we turn to the portion of his book in which Hotchkin records the life-histories of the individual churches that we realize the amount either of the excitement stirred up by these men or of the evil wrought by it. Yet, as he is speaking only of the Presbyterian churches, which suffered least of all the churches from this disease, we are looking through his eyes only at the outer fringes of the evil. Even in the Presbyterian churches it certainly was bad enough.²⁸ One Augustus Littlejohn²⁹ seems to have been the evil genius of the Presbytery of Angelica, one Luther Myrick³⁰ of the Presbytery of Onondaga, one James Boyle³¹ of the Presbytery of Geneva. These were all famous revivalists, enjoying

high favor not only in western New York, but to the East as well, and running through great careers; and only when they had wrought their ruin, did they fall at last under the ban of the church they had distracted and whose people they had harassed and misled. It is appalling to observe the number of churches of which it is recorded that they were disturbed, injured, or destroyed by the activities of these men and their coadjutors. We need not repeat these records here: let that of Manlius Center Church serve as a single example — it was, we read,³² “torn to pieces and became extinct through the influences of Mr. Myrick and other errorists.” We prefer to transcribe merely the long record of the experiences of the church of Conhocton,³³ as particularly instructive of the state of mind induced by the prevalent religious excitement.

“In the summer of 1832,” we read, “Rev. James Boyle held with this church a protracted meeting, which was continued through a number of days. The measures which were common with him and others of that class of evangelists were employed, and a state of high excitement was produced, and many professed to be converted, and no doubt some souls really were born again. A large number were received into the church, swelling its numbers to one hundred and ten members. It might seem that the days of the mourning of this church were now ended, and that she must now have acquired such a measure of strength as to be able in all future time to enjoy the stated ministrations of the gospel. But such was not the case. Very little pecuniary strength was acquired, a spirit of fanaticism was infused into the minds of many, and a state of preparation to be carried away with any delusion was induced. With respect to the converts, so called, the writer is unable to say what has become of them. He believes very few of them give satisfactory evidence of having been born again. In the winter of 1837–38, a very singular state of things existed. Mrs. Conn, who had been a member of the church a number of years, and highly esteemed by some, at least, as a woman of piety and activity in promoting the cause of Christ, began to take a very conspicuous part in the meetings for social and religious worship. She professed to have special communications from God, and to know the secrets of the hearts of those with whom she

was conversant. She assumed an authoritative position in the church, and gave out her directions as from God Himself, denouncing as hypocrites in the church all who did not submit to her mandates. She predicted the speedy death, in the most awful manner, of particular individuals who opposed her authority, and manifested a most implacable rancor against all who did not acknowledge her inspiration. In her proceedings she was assisted by a young man, who for his misconduct had been excommunicated from the church of Prattsburgh. A number of the members of the church of Conhocton were carried away with this delusion, and acknowledged Mrs. Conn as one under the inspiration of the Almighty. So completely were they infatuated, that they seemed to suppose that their eternal salvation depended on the will of Mrs. Conn. They were ready to obey all her commands, and to assert as truth anything which she should order. Some of them became permanently deranged, and one or two families were nearly broken up. Nor was this delusion confined wholly to the church of Conhocton. Mrs. Conn and her coadjutor went into the county of Wyoming, and some in that region were brought under the delusion, and received her as a messenger sent from God. Whether to view Mrs. Conn as an impostor, a wild fanatic, or a deranged person, the writer will not assume the responsibility of determining. Many circumstances would favor the idea of imposture. The writer is informed that she has become a maniac. This circumstance may favor the idea of mental aberration. But the consequences to the church were most disastrous."

One of the most distressing accompaniments of revival excitements has been a tendency which has often showed itself in connection with them to sexual irregularities. This tendency does not seem to find its account, solely at least, in the low level of culture of the populations which have furnished the materials on which these revivals chiefly worked. And it certainly is not to be confounded with the opportunity taken by evil-minded persons from the conditions created by the revivals for corrupt practices. The opportunity has been afforded and improved, the camp meetings of course supplying the most flagrant instances. R. Davidson, describing the great Kentucky revival at the

opening of the century, feels bound to consecrate a section to the "too free communication of the sexes," and, although he excuses himself from giving details on account of the delicacy of the subject, he tells us plainly that dissolute characters of both sexes frequented the camps "to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the prevailing licence and disorder."⁸⁴ This, however, was only incidental to the revivals themselves. What needs to be recognized is that the nervous exaltation, which was the direct product of the revival methods too frequently employed, seems not merely to have broken down the restraints to the unchecked discharge of other than religious emotions, but to have opened the channels for their discharge, and even to have incited to it,—so that, as W. Hepworth Dixon puts it in vivid phrase, "the passions seemed to be all unloosed, and to go astray without let or guide."⁸⁵ It was the participators in the revival excitement themselves who went astray. John Lyle, reviewing the case of the women who had been the subjects of the "falling exercise" prior to November, 1802, found several "by the most unequivocal proofs, to have since *fallen* still more woefully; no fewer than four individuals having transgressed in the most flagrant manner."⁸⁶

Occasion has of course been taken from such facts to confuse emotions which differ *toto cælo*. There is actually a theory extant that the religious emotion is nothing but the sexual ecstasy misinterpreted,⁸⁷ and it is quite common to represent "the human love-passion and the spiritual love-passion" as lying in particularly close contiguity, if not even as "delicately interwoven."⁸⁸ There is no justification for such representations. They rest on an incredible confusion of the movements of the human soul set in the midst between two environments, and accessible to influences alike from below and above. Not even all love of man is sex-love; no love of man is religious love; religious love is not the entirety of the religious emotion. We are in the presence here of nothing more mysterious than the obvious fact that man's emotional nature is a

unit, and violent emotional discharges may readily be deflected from one to another direction. The phenomenon we are witnessing is only the familiar one of the peril of abandoning control of ourselves. When once we drop the reins and give unbridled play to our passional movements, there is no telling what the end may be. We cannot act the mænad in religion and expect our mænadism to manifest itself nowhere else. If religion becomes synonymous to us with excess, all excess is very apt to come to seem to us religious. It is in this sense only that it is true, when Baring Gould declares that "spiritual exaltation runs naturally, inevitably, into licentiousness, unless held in the iron bands of discipline to the moral law."³⁹ Davenport's wider generalization is truer:⁴⁰ "Whenever reason is subordinated and feeling is supreme, the influence is always in the direction of the sweeping away of inhibitive control."

It is, moreover, not merely into licentiousness that religious mænadism tends to run, but into all forms of lawless action. J. H. Noyes shows an insight unwonted to him, therefore, when he represents revivals—of course, as known to him, that is to say the revivals of "religious excitement"—as intrinsically subversive of the whole social as well as moral order. Defining them from the true mænadistic point of view, and even in language strongly reminiscent of heathen modes of speech, he declares⁴¹ that a revival is the actual intrusion of the power of God into human affairs: that is to say, says he, it is the entrance into the complex of active causes of "the actual Deity." This entrance of "the actual Deity" into human life is conceived after the fashion of the intrusion of a universal natural force, only more powerful than other natural forces.⁴² Conservatives fancy that its operations are restricted to the conversion of souls. That, says Noyes, is absurd: you cannot cabin and crib such a force in that way. Once set in motion, "it goes, or tends to go, into all the affairs of life." A revolution is really inaugurated in every revival, and if it does not overturn and recon-

stitute all the life of the world, that is only because its action is prematurely checked. "Revival preachers and Revival converts are necessarily in the incipient stage of a theocratic revolution; they have in their experience the beginning of the life under the Higher Law; and if they stop at internal religious changes, it is because the influence that converted them is suppressed." The term "higher law" here is ominous: the first effect of revivals is conceived as emancipation from the laws which now govern life; and if redintegration follows it must be under a higher law than they. They do and always must leave social disintegration in their train.

The prominence particularly of sexual irregularities in the train of the revivals of "religious excitement" is probably in large part due, therefore, only to the large opportunities and immediate temptations to irregularities of this particular order offered by revival intimacies. The period in which the revivals of the late twenties and early thirties took place was, moreover, one of widespread unrest with respect to the relations of the sexes, and of relaxation of the strictness of traditional habits; and the communistic experiments incited in the middle years of the twenties by Robert Owen no doubt also brought their contribution to the result. With respect to these particular revivals, however, we must not underestimate the influence of the fantastic apocalyptic theories, by which a large part of their unhealthy excitement was produced, and which by persuading men that they no longer lived on the earthly plane or under earthly law, gave to sexual irregularities a religious sanction or even made them appear a religious duty. Being mænads, men and women committed adultery for the Kingdom of God's sake,—as the victims of the atrocious Cochrane were doing in Maine and New Hampshire a short decade before,⁴³ and the associates of the unspeakable Matthias—himself a product of these revivals—were doing contemporaneously in New York and Sing Sing.⁴⁴ Thus arose the shocking theory of "spiritual wives" which was intimately connected with the perfec-

tionism that constituted, after all said, the most unwholesome product of the revival excitement. There is no reason to suppose that the "spiritual wives" at the outset were anything other than the name, strictly taken, imports, — intimate spiritual companions and fellow workers in a common task.⁴⁵ The hot perfectionist, living in the new order, attached to himself a like-minded female companion who shared his labors at home and abroad; they lived together, traveled together, worked together, in a fellowship closer than and superseding that of husband and wife. It was a renewal of the "spiritual wives" — the *agapetae* or *virgines subintroductae* — of the early church;⁴⁶ but it required only a few months to run through the development that its earlier model consumed some centuries in traversing. What was in the first instance only an incredible folly and dangerous fanaticism soon became an intolerable scandal and dissolute practice. "Spiritual wives" became carnal mistresses: here and there injured husbands avenged their wrongs by physical assaults upon the clerical offenders, and when the husband was complaisant the outraged community was apt to treat both legal and spiritual husband to a coat of tar and feathers and a ride on a rail.⁴⁷ Though actually only sporadically practiced, the advocacy of this indecency was widespread in perfectionist circles. Its roots were planted in the prevalent notion that the "saints" had advanced beyond the legalities of the worldly order, and that it behooved them to be putting the freedom of the resurrection life into practice.

The perfectionism of which this deplorable practice was one of the fruits was pervasive, and everywhere it went it worked destruction. It was intensely individualistic in its temper and operated accordingly as a disintegrating force in the church organizations into which it found entrance. This effect was increased by its affiliation with a powerful unionistic movement which was vexing the churches of this region. Like other unionistic movements, this one also was much more effective for tearing down the existing organizations which stood in its way, than for

realizing its own professed Utopian ends.⁴⁸ At all events ruin marked the pathway along which the combined perfectionist-unionist forces moved. Here is a typical notice: "Rev. A. Hale from the Black River Association distracted the church with perfectionism, and Rev. Luther Myrick with unionism. Twenty male members broke away from the church at one time as perfectionists."⁴⁹ There was an active organization, vigorously at work among the churches, calling itself "The Central Evangelical Association of New York," which consisted, as Hotchkin tells us,⁵⁰ just of "a body of Perfectionists and Unionists." The Synod of Geneva at its meeting in October, 1835, warned the ministers and churches under its charge against it, because, as it said, "it does not sustain the reputation of an orthodox body," and "the course of proceedings adopted by most of its ministers is calculated to divide, corrupt, and distract the churches." The Synod therefore declared that it "deemed it irregular for any minister or church in our connection to admit the ministers of said Association to their pulpits, or in any way to recognize them, or the churches organized by them as in regular standing."⁵¹ Such a deliverance was necessarily a mere *brutum fulmen*. Even had it taken a more authoritative form, it was locking the door after the horse had been stolen. Nor is it easy in any event to see how the closing of Presbyterian pulpits to perfectionist agitators could have been expected to protect the people from the flames of wild religious excitement flaring up hotly in churches of other connections half a block away. The communities were small, and the people therefore in close contact and intimate intercourse with one another; the religious excitement that was raging was the property of no one denomination, but pervaded all; it was the professed object of one of the most active organizations engaged in fostering it—and the actual effect of many with no official connection with that organization—to obliterate all dividing lines and to reduce the whole Christian body to an indiscriminate mass of fanaticism.

Certainly perfectionists swarmed over the land, drawing from all churches, forming none. No doubt the ever-present fact of Wesleyan perfectionism lay in the background and supplied everywhere a starting-point and everywhere gave a certain dignity and stability to the movement. A number of the perfectionist leaders were of Methodist origin.⁵² But the most effective forces in the production of the prevalent perfectionism were derived from quite different quarters, particularly from the Pelagianizing theories of the will emanating from New Haven.⁵³ The perfectionism actually developed⁵⁴ ran, however, in point of fact, into mystical molds. "These perfectionists," as a contemporary writer⁵⁵ very fairly puts it, "believe that they have the inward Christ—can do no wrong—that to the pure all things are pure—that Christ is responsible for all they do—and other such blasphemous absurdities." Their chief or, at least, their most obvious, characteristic accordingly was less correctness in conduct than freedom in the Spirit. And this in fact constituted their main attraction to the populace. J. H. Noyes fully recognizes⁵⁶ that "some doubtless joined the standard of Perfectionism, not because they loved holiness, but because they were weary of the restraints of the duty-doing churches. Perfectionism presented them a fine opportunity of giving full swing to carnality; and at the same time, of glorying over the 'servants' under law." Nothing was further from their intention, of course, than to submit themselves to the restraints of organization. Each wished to be a law to himself—and as far as he could compass it, a law also to everybody else. They erected what Noyes calls "disunity"⁵⁷ into a principle and denounced organization as in itself an evil—a slavery to which free men in the spirit would not submit. "To perfectionists generally," writes William A. Hinds,⁵⁸

"the idea of discipline, organization, submission one to another was intolerable. Were they children of the covenant that 'gendereth to bondage'? they asked themselves; or were they called to 'stand fast in the liberty

wherewith Christ had made them free'? Were they not living in the very days foretold by the prophets when all were 'to know the Lord from the least unto the greatest,' and when no one 'should teach his neighbor or his brother, saying Know the Lord'? 'Perfectionists,' said the eloquent James Boyle, 'stand as independent of each other, as they do of any anti-Christian churches — they will not be taught by each other, as they are all taught of God, nor will they acknowledge any man as a leader or chief or anything of the kind.'"

Such extreme individualism as is here announced cannot really maintain itself in practice. The perfectionists, too, of course found leaders and showed sufficient coherence to hold conventions at which a common platform was proclaimed and joint undertakings inaugurated. Even centers of activity were formed from which perfectionist influences radiated after a fashion which suggested at least the beginnings of institutional organization. One of the earliest of them was established at the little cotton-mill village of Manlius, where the little Presbyterian Church (Manlius Center) was stamped out. Hiram Sheldon was recognized by the Manlius perfectionists as their leader and expositor, but there were associated with him such men as Jarvis Rider, Martin P. Sweet, and Erasmus Stone. In this coterie originated most of the extravagances which characterized the perfectionist movement. "At Manlius," says Dixon,⁵⁹ "the chosen took upon themselves the name of 'Saints.' Here they announced their separation from the world. Here they began to debate whether the old marriage vows would or would not be binding in the new heaven and the new earth." It was Albany, however, which became the real distributing center of the movement at least for the East; and the house of the Misses Annesley there became the center of the center.⁶⁰ Thence missionaries proceeded into New England and groups of perfectionists were established here and there — at Southampton, Brimfield, New Haven.⁶¹ At Albany, of course, the same ruin was wrought as elsewhere: the churches were greatly troubled. The Fourth Presbyterian Church, E. N. Kirk's, was

required to put into action extensive disciplinary proceedings;⁶² and even the classroom of the little theological seminary which E. N. Kirk had established was invaded by the fanaticism.⁶³ We hear of its being carried from this center as far as the extreme western border of frontier Wisconsin.⁶⁴

NOTES

¹ *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (1839), ed. 7, 1844, pp. 70 ff.; cf. *Autobiography, Intellectual, Moral and Spiritual* (1882), pp. 373 f., where the antinomianism of the "Perfectionists" is exhibited. C. G. Finney (*Lectures on Systematic Theology* [1847], vol. II, p. 166) speaks of the "Perfectionists," as "the sect called Antinomian Perfectionists," and (*Memoirs* [1876], p. 341) describes them as a body which taught "Christian perfection in the Antinomian sense of the term"; cf. *Lectures to Professing Christians* (1837), 1880, p. 358. Henry Cowles (*The Holiness of Christians* [1840], pp. 9 ff.) separates himself decisively from "Antinomian perfectionism."

² *The Higher Christian Life* (1859), pp. 64 ff. Cf. *Mrs. Boardman's Life and Labors of the Rev. W. E. Boardman* (1887), pp. 52, 58, 135, 170.

³ The *Oxford Dictionary* includes this special sense also in the definition of "Perfectionism"; but not the *Century*, nor the *Standard*, nor *Webster*, nor *Worcester*.

⁴ He adds at the end of the article that the Princeites have some affinities with this sect. For the Princeites, see the article "Agapemone" in *Hastings's Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, with its bibliography; W. H. Dixon, *Spiritual Wives* (1868), vol. I, pp. 226 ff.; and a series of articles in *The British Weekly*, beginning in the number for March 22, 1889 (vol. V, p. 125).

⁵ So say Otto Zöckler in *Herzog-Hauck* (ed. 3, vol. XV, p. 130; cf. the entry in *The New Schaff-Herzog*), and W. Köhler in *Schiele und Zcharnack* (vol. IV, p. 1356).

⁶ *Sermons on Revivals* (1841), p. 48. John Breckinridge (*The Biblical Repertory*, Oct. 1832, p. 460) reverses the emphasis: "It is the divine influence upon the mass—the popular and social application of religion. It is the Spirit of God awakening, at the same time, to holy love, and harmonious action, the whole body of Christians in a particular place. . . . When the real spiritual church among a people experiences this deep and simultaneous renovation, it is most properly styled a *revival of religion*. . . . As an inseparable concomitant of a revival of religion among a people, is the *simultaneous conviction and conversion of many sin-*

ners." Charles G. Finney (Lectures on Revivals of Religion [ed. 2, 1835], p. 437), says: "It is just as indispensable in promoting a revival, to preach to the church, and make them grow in grace, as it is to preach to sinners and make them submit to God."

* Letter (March 9, 1832), printed in W. B. Sprague, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (1833), ed. 2, 1850, pp. 229-235. C. G. Finney was quite aware that "excitement" had no converting effects. He chides people for supposing that when the excitement, with which revivals regularly began in his practice, subsided "the revival is on the decline,"—"when, in fact," he says, "with much less excited emotion, there may be vastly more real religion in the community" (Views of Sanctification [1840], p. 19). He deliberately used excitement as an advertising agency (Lectures on Revivals of Religion [1835], Lect. XIV.; cf. the caustic criticisms of Albert B. Dod in The Biblical Repertory, Oct. 1835, pp. 632 ff.). "It seems sometimes to be indispensable," he remarks in the Views of Sanctification (p. 19), "that a high degree of excitement should prevail for a time, to arrest public and individual attention, and to draw people off from other pursuits to attend to the concerns of their souls." But so far from beneficial to the religious life is this excitement in itself, that if long continued, it would be destructive even to mental sanity: "the high degree of excitement which is sometimes witnessed in revivals of religion, must necessarily be short, or the people must become deranged." The revival does not consist in this state of exalted emotion, but "in conformity of the human will to the law of God." Finney repeats all this in his Systematic Theology (ed. 2, 1851), p. 170.

* P. 11.

* *Loc. cit.* Compare the remarkable testimony of the General Association of Congregational Churches in Connecticut in 1836 against itinerant lecturers assuming to instruct the people over whom they had not been called to be overseers, and itinerant evangelists rousing among them "blind excitement" (Minutes [1836], pp. 8, 20).

* Sprague, as cited, p. 282. Lyman Beecher, in his famous letter of Jan. 1827, develops the idea. "The importance of the soul and of eternity is such," says he, "as that good men in a revival are apt to feel no matter what is said or done, provided sinners are awakened and saved. But it ought to be remembered, that though the immediate result of some courses of conduct may be the salvation of some souls, the general and more abiding result may be the ruin of a thousand souls, destroyed by this conduct, to one saved by it; and destroyed by it, as instrumentally, in the direct and proper sense of the term, as any are saved by it."

"Atlantic Monthly, Oct. 1833, pp. 437-497.

"John Bache McMaster (A History of the American People, vol. v. pp. 109, 120) points out that the Morgan excitement was limited to "the New England belt of emigration." "The whole New England belt from Boston to Buffalo fairly teemed with anti-masonic newspapers." This is a typical instance.

"Frederick Morgan Davenport, Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals (1905), pp. 183 ff.

"As to Mormonism, John Humphrey Noyes himself (Dixon's Spiritual Wives, vol. ii. p. 180), speaking of these revival excitements, says: "Mormonism, doubtless, came out of the same fertile soil. Joe Smith began his career in Central New York, among a population that was fermenting with the hope of the Millennium, and at a time when the great National Revival was going forth in its strength." Noyes was himself a product of this "great National Revival." Similarly, D. L. Leonard, writing the history of the fads and fanaticism of the time, says of Smith, that "in him were embodied the grossest type of Americanism and the most earthly and irrational impulses resulting from the intense revival fervor then prevalent" (The Story of Oberlin [1898], p. 118).

"Davenport, as cited, p. 184.

"Evans' Mills is called by Finney himself "a burnt district." "I found that region of the country," he writes in his Memoirs (1876, p. 78), "what, in the western phrase, would be called, 'a burnt district.' There had been, a few years previously, a wild excitement passing through that region, which they called a revival of religion, but which turned out to be spurious. I can give no account of it except what I heard from Christian people and others. It was reported as having been a very extravagant excitement; and resulted in a reaction so extensive and profound, as to leave the impression on many minds that religion was a mere delusion."

"The same figure of a "burnt district" is spontaneously used here too, to describe the effect of these later revivals. "Look at the present condition of the churches of western New York, which have become in truth a people scattered and peeled," writes William L. Stone (Matthias and His Impostures [1835], pp. 314 ff.). "The time has not come to write the ecclesiastical history of the past ten years. And yet somebody should chronicle the facts now, lest in after times the truth, however correctly it may be preserved by tradition, should not be believed. . . . The writer entertains no doubt that many true conversions have occurred under the system to which he is referring. But as with the ground over which the lightning has gone, scorching and withering every green thing, years may pass away before the arid waste

of the church will be grown over by the living herbage." This sad result of their labors was not hidden from Finney himself and his coadjutors in the fomenting of these "revivals of excitement." James Boyle writes to Finney, Dec. 25, 1834, to the following effect. "Let us look over the fields, where you and others and myself have labored as revival ministers, and what is now their moral state? What was their state within three months after we left them? I have visited and revisited many of these fields, and groaned in spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal, contentious state into which the churches had fallen — and fallen very soon after our first departure from among them" (*Literary and Theological Review*, March, 1838, p. 66). Cf. what Asa Mahan says, below, Note 28.

"*Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), 1901, chaps. viii. and xv.; cf. also chap. xix. The camp meeting at its best is described with great vividness by Andrew Reed in pp. 183–205 of his and James Matheson's *Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches, etc.*, 1835. Ill and good will count for much in the two descriptions, but not for all; and Reed is not blind to the possibilities of evil intrinsic in the circumstances and methods of such assemblies. On *Camp Meetings*, cf. S. C. Swallow, *Camp Meetings: Their Origin, History and Utility, also their Perversion* (1878).

"As cited, p. 69.

"Neither Isaac Fidler's *Observations on Professions, Literature, Manners and Emigration, in the United States and Canada, made during a Residence there in 1832* (1833) — a book which can be described only as flat, stale, and unprofitable, — nor either of Harriet Martineau's two very informing books, *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), contains any "reports of revivals of religion." Albert Barnes's coupling of them with Mrs. Trollope's volume as possible sources of misinformation as to revivals is a purely rhetorical flight. Miss Martineau does, however, tell us (*Society in America*, vol. ii. p. 344), in a few incidental words, what she thinks of "meetings for religious excitement." "The spiritual dissipations indulged in by the religious world," she pronounces more injurious to sound morals than any public amusements indulged in under modern conditions. "It is questionable," she then adds, "whether even gross licentiousness is not at least equally encouraged by the excitement of passionate religious emotions, separate from action: and it is certain that small spiritual vices, pride, selfishness, tyranny and superstition, spring up luxuriantly in the hotbed of religious meetings." On the large literature of British criticism of American ways which sprang up after the War of 1812 and raged for a quarter of a century, see *The Cambridge History*

of American Literature, vol. i. (1917) pp. 205 ff., with the accompanying Bibliography, pp. 468 ff.

* A narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Delegation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, by Andrew Reed, D.D., and James Matheson, D.D., 1835, vol. ii. pp. 7-50. An admirable review of this book by Charles Hodge, from the religious and theological point of view, will be found in *The Biblical Repertory*, Oct. 1835, pp. 598 ff.; and it is well reviewed, from the general literary point of view, by W. B. O. Peabody, in *The North American Review* for 1835, pp. 489 ff.

* A more judicious or generally sympathetic account of the revivals centering in 1831 could scarcely be found than that given by Lyman H. Atwater in his article on "Revivals of the Century," *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, vol. v. (1876) pp. 703 ff. And Charles Hodge in his review of Reed and Matheson's book (*Biblical Repertory*, Oct. 1835, pp. 598 ff.), deals with the whole matter most judiciously.

* P. 35.

* P. 43.

* When Charles Hodge (as cited, pp. 608 ff.) traverses some of these judgments, he does so only on the understanding that they apply to revivals as such. As to the special revival movements of western and central New York of this period he is of the same mind with Reed.

* A History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York, and of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in that Section (1848), pp. 159 ff.

* *The Crowd* (E. T. 1896), p. 162; cf. p. 58: "The art of appealing to crowds is no doubt of an inferior order, but it demands quite special aptitudes." A correction of the over-exploitation of "crowd-psychology" (as in Davenport) may be found in Graham Wallas, *The Great Society* (1920), pp. 115-138. On the general subject of "Crowd Psychology and Revivals," see J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness* (1920), pp. 165-194.

* There is no more distressing description of the evil effects of these revivals on people, pastors, and evangelists, than that in Asa Mahan's *Autobiography* (1882), pp. 227 ff. The people were left like a dead coal which could not be reignited. The pastors were shorn of all spiritual power. Of the evangelists he writes as follows:—"It is with pain that I refer to the evangelists of that era. Among them all—and I was personally acquainted with nearly every one of them—I cannot recall a single man, brother Finney and father Nash excepted, who did not after a few years lose his unction, and become equally disqualified for the office of evangelist and that of pastor. The individual who, next to Mr. Finney, had the widest popularity and influence, when in

the meridian of life, left the ministry, and lived and died a banker, manifesting no disposition to preach the gospel to any class of men. The individual who probably stood next to him, after a series of years of most successful labor, retired into the far Western States, and I could never learn even his whereabouts. One who was very constantly with Mr. Finney, and labored, for a time, as his successor in the Chatham Street Chapel, in the City of New York, abandoned wholly the Evangelical faith. Another, a preacher of great power, first joined Noyes, the Free Lover, and then the infidel abolitionists of the Garrison school. What finally became of him I never learned. I refer to but one other case from the painful catalogue before me. This individual probably had as great power over his audiences as any that can be named, and multitudes were no doubt won to Christ through his influence. . . . The last time I met that evangelist . . . he told us . . . that he had just left a great revival and was on his way for absolutely necessary rest to visit his friends in Michigan. We afterwards learned he was going as a fugitive from the legal liabilities of his vices, and he subsequently, I believe, led a kind of vagabond life."—The first-mentioned of these evangelists we take to be Jedediah Burchard, a most ambiguous figure. The plain facts about him may be read in Hotchkiss, as cited, p. 170, while the best that can be said of him is said by P. H. Fowler, *Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism within the Bounds of the Synod of Central New York (1877)*, p. 236. W. F. P. Noble's account (*A Century of Gospel Work, 1876*, pp. 401 ff.) is mere indiscriminate adulation. Cf. Finney, *Memoirs*, pp. 388 f. A very curious picture is given of Burchard at work in a little book published at Burlington, Vermont, in 1836, bearing the title: *Sermons, Addresses and Exhortations by Rev. Jedediah Burchard, with an Appendix, by C. C. Eastman* (12mo, pp. vi, 120), a very slashing review of which by Leonard Withington will be found in *The Literary and Theological Review* for June, 1836, pp. 228-236. The material for the book was obtained by stenographers working not only without Burchard's permission but against his violent opposition. It seems that an earlier publication of similar character had been made by a Mr. Streeter of Woodstock. The sermons printed in Eastman's volume, we are afraid, would no longer shock; and we wish to record to Burchard's credit that he was no "Perfectionist." To his young converts he says: "You know who the perfectionists are. Strange that there are such beings, but it is so. In the judgment of charity, there are many who are sincere in this error. Now, my young friends, I wish to guard you particularly against everything of this kind."

* A concurrence of witnesses testifies to the ineffable vulgarity,

fanaticism, and unsoundness of Littlejohn's preaching, as well as to the coarseness of his manners and the impurity of his life. Nevertheless, he retained his connection with the Presbyterian Church until, tardily, on March 18, 1841, "he was by the Presbytery of Angelica, deposed from the ministerial office and excommunicated from the Church, on account of grossly immoral conduct, practiced clandestinely at various times through a long period" (Hotchkiss, as cited, pp. 171, 172). Cf. also to the same effect, P. H. Fowler, as cited, pp. 235, note, 277; and the letter signed "Wyoming," in *The New York Evangelist*, July 27, 1876, and reprinted thence in *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, Oct. 1876, p. 713, note. James A. Miller (*The History of the Presbytery of Steuben* [1897], pp. 15 f.) draws on William Waith (*Recollections of an Emigrant's Family*) for a description of Littlejohn. "He was a common laborer," says Waith, "but was endowed with a natural eloquence which gave him the complete mastery over any group that he addressed. He would collect a gang of his fellow workmen and preach a funeral sermon over a dead horse or dog, that would fill the eyes of his hearers with tears. This man professed conversion to Christianity, and began holding forth in school houses or in churches to which pastors would admit him, and hearts were melted, and knees were bent in penitence, to such an extent that people thought this man 'the great power of God.' He offered himself as a candidate for the ministry; but the older heads of the Presbytery were unyielding in their opposition to his licensure. Littlejohn, however, went right on with his fervent appeals, and converts were multiplied within the parishes of the very pastors that opposed him. . . . The pressure upon the Presbytery became so strong that any longer to refuse licensure appeared like fighting against God." Miller himself continues the story: "In 1830 he was licensed. In 1833 a day was set for his ordination as an evangelist. When the day came there were charges against him of doctrinal unsoundness and imprudent conduct, and his ordination was postponed. A month later Geneva Synod criticized the method of his licensure and directed Presbytery to reexamine him. Instead of reexamining him for licensure, Presbytery ordained him. This action Genesee Synod censured. Difficulties arose later between Littlejohn and his wife, but Presbytery exonerated him from blame and highly commended his work as an evangelist. In 1839 there were charges against his character. Presbytery appointed a committee to investigate, but in 1840, before that committee reported, made him moderator. About the same time Presbytery refused a request of Ontario Presbytery to investigate charges against Littlejohn—not even recording the charges on the minutes. The Synod of Genesee censured Pres-

bytery very sharply for making him moderator while charges were pending against him, and for passing over the request of Ontario Presbytery. After a good many other actions, in 1841 he was cited to answer definite charges of grossly immoral conduct. There was an exhaustive trial at Almond in March, 1841. At last Presbytery saw him as he was, and unanimously deposed him from the ministry and excommunicated him from the church." This assuredly is a case of all is *not* well that ends well.

*The Presbytery of Cayuga, Aug. 1833, warned the churches under its care against employing Myrick because of the unsoundness of his doctrine and the evil practical effects of his preaching. It mentions that he was at the time under summons by his Presbytery (that of Oneida) for trial. Similar action was taken by the Presbytery of Onondaga; and both Presbyteries entered a complaint against him to the Presbytery of Oneida. Cf. Hotchkin, as cited, p. 173; Fowler, as cited, pp. 137, 278; and especially, James Wood, *Facts and Observations concerning the Organization and State of the Churches in the Three Synods of Western New York, etc.*, 1837, pp. 25 f. Myrick was a member of the Presbytery of Oneida from 1828 to 1844. The dealing of the Presbytery of Oneida with him showed the same general characteristics which marked the dealing of the Presbytery of Angelica with Littlejohn. It must have been quite clear from his first appearance before the Presbytery in 1825 as a candidate that he was not a suitable person to induct into the ministry. Yet the Presbytery carried him through his trials, ordained him over a congregation with a protesting minority, and when the inevitable charges were brought before it, dawdled with them; and finally, when at last, Oct. 24, 1833, he was found guilty of both doctrinal errors (denying the doctrine of Perseverance, and asserting the doctrine of Perfection) and disorderly conduct (disorganizing churches, encouraging confusion in religious meetings, defaming the Presbyterian Church, slanderous and coarse language), removed the suspension imposed on him on his expressing sorrow for nothing but his "improper expressions." Next spring (Feb. 6, 1834) he asked to be dismissed to the Black River Association; but that body would not receive him; and he thereupon simply "withdrew from the fellowship of the Presbyterian Church" (June 24, 1834), and his name was erased from the roll. He retained his residence within the bounds of the Presbytery, a Congregationalist in affiliation, and gave himself to the propagation of his perfectionist doctrine. "He is the editor of a paper," says Wood in 1837, "and by this means as well as by his preaching, is promulgating his pernicious doctrines — and I regret to add, they are embraced by a *few* in quite a number of churches, to the great grief and vexation of their brethren and pastors." "He was an enthusiast, probably

sincere," Fowler sums up, "but wrought up to the point of derangement, and while gathering large assemblies and exciting them, his proper place was the asylum rather than the pulpit." It is worth noting that one of his "methods" was to report (in *The Evangelist* or *Western Recorder*) the results of the revivals carried on by him, quite without regard to the facts.

"Of Boyle, Hotchkin (p. 171) says that almost every church in which he worked, though greatly enlarged in its membership by him, fell shortly into decay. He adds that he "lost his ministerial character, was deposed from the ministry and excommunicated from the church." He "came to the Presbytery of Oneida" (as Fowler expresses it) "with clean papers from the Methodist ministry," and on those credentials was received as a member of the Presbytery. He was a member of the Presbytery of Oneida from 1827 to 1835—never through that period becoming a pastor of a church. In 1834 he was preaching for the Free Church of New Haven, and there imbibed Perfectionist doctrines in the New Haven form. For these he was arraigned by the Presbytery in the spring of 1835 on the basis of "common fame." The charges as formulated by the Presbytery having been all admitted by him, he was suspended from the ministry April 29, 1835. The erroneous teachings thus confessed by him are these: "That under the Gospel men are wholly sinful or wholly righteous"; "that there is no security of ultimate salvation without perfect freedom from sin"; "that a pardon through Jesus Christ which covers all past sin is inseparably connected with a perfect and perpetual sanctification of the soul"; "that the licensing and ordaining of ministers by Presbyteries, Associations, and Councils is an assumption of the high prerogatives of the Church." These confessed teachings include the assertion of the notion of what is known as "the simplicity of moral action"—a man is always either as bad as he can be or as good as he can be; attach perfection immediately to justification—every saved soul is perfect; make this perfection indefectible; and assert what J. H. Noyes calls "disunionism"—the absolute independence of every minister of the word of all ecclesiastical authority. Boyle, a native of Lower Canada, was born and bred a Roman Catholic and after his career as Methodist, Presbyterian, and Perfectionist, came into connection with Gamaliel Bailey, Jr., and William Lloyd Garrison, and ran a notable course as Anti-Slavery Agitator. We find Garrison already printing in *The Liberator* of March 23, 1838, a letter from Boyle, which Garrison describes as "one of the most powerful epistles ever written by man," on "Clerical Appeal, Sectarianism and True Holiness," and another the next year "On Non-Resistance, — The 'Powers that Be,' Civil, Judicial and Ecclesiastical—Holiness." The former was dated from Vol. LXXVIII. No. 309. 5

Rome, Ohio, the latter from Cincinnati, where Boyle was already working on Bailey's *Philanthropist*. In July, 1839, he became lecturing and financial agent of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, and we are told that Oliver Johnson said of him that "probably there was no man living whose religious views were more in harmony with Mr. Garrison's." For these facts see William Lloyd Garrison: *The Story of His Life Told by his Children*, vol. ii. (1885) pp. 286-287. It will be seen from this that what Noyes called his "disunionism" became in fact the fundamental note of his thinking.

* P. 315.

* P. 470.

* *History of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky, etc., 1847*, pp. 163-165. David Ramsay (*History of South Carolina, 1676-1808* [1808, 1809], vol. ii. p. 36, note) says temperately:—"The effect of these camp-meetings was of a mixed nature. They were doubtless attended for improper purposes by a few licentious persons, and by others with a view of obtaining a handle to ridicule all religion. . . . The free intercourse of all ages and sexes under cover of the night and the woods was not without its temptations."

* *New America* (ed. 4, 1867), vol. ii. p. 146. The phrase occurs in a vivid description, which is also an arraignment, of the camp meeting, sensationally written, but not essentially untrue to fact. "In the revival camp," he says, "men quarrel and fight, and make love to their neighbors' wives." "'I like to hear of a revival,' said to me a lawyer of Indianapolis, 'it brings me a crop of cases.'"

* Davidson, as cited, pp. 163 f.

* Theodor Schroeder has made himself the persistent advocate of this notion: cf. *Journal of Religious Psychology*, vols. iii. (1908) pp. 16 ff.; v. (1912) pp. 394 ff.; vi. (1913) pp. 95 ff.; vii. (1914) pp. 23 ff. E. D. Starbuck says: "In a certain sense the religious life is an irradiation of the reproductive instinct" (*Psychology of Religion* [1900], p. 401). Cf. also G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, vol. ii. p. 301; J. B. Pratt, as cited, pp. 108 ff.

* Davenport, as cited, p. 81, cf. p. 292. S. Baring-Gould (*Freaks of Fanaticism* [1891], p. 268) says extremely: "The religious passion verges so closely on the sexual passion, that a slight additional pressure given to it bursts the partition, and both are confused in a frenzy of religious debauch." This was already the theory of John Humphrey Noyes: "The tendency of religious unity," says he (*Bible Communism* [1853], p. 31), "to flow into the channel of amativeness, manifests itself in revivals and in all the higher forms of spiritualism. Marriages and illegitimate amours usually follow religious excitements. Almost every spiritual sect has been troubled by amative tendencies. These facts are not to be

treated as unaccountable irregularities, but as expressions of a law of human nature. Amativeness is in fact . . . the first and most natural channel of religious love." "Religious love is very near neighbor to sexual love," says he again, "and they always get mixed in the intimacies and social excitements of Revivals." "The next thing a man wants," he adds less appositely, "after he has found the salvation of his soul, is to find his Eve and his Paradise. Hence these wild experiments and terrible disasters" (W. H. Dixon, *Spiritual Wives* [ed. 2, 1868], p. 176). "It is a very sad fact," Dixon himself adds to this citation (p. 10), "which shows in what darkness men may grope and pine in this wicked world, that when these Perfect Saints were able to look about them in the new freedom of Gospel light, hardly one of the leading men among them could find an Eden at home, or an Eve in his lawful wife."

* As cited, p. 14.

^a As cited, p. 28.

^a Dixon's *Spiritual Wives*, vol. II, pp. 176 f.

^a This materialistic mode of conceiving God appears to have been habitual with Noyes. Commenting with much commendation on Buchanan's experiments in Animal Magnetism, — in which he sees effects not differing in kind from Christ's miracles — he says (*The Berean*, p. 77): "Perhaps in the progress of his investigation, Dr. Buchanan will find means to increase his nervous powers, either by self-training, or availing himself of the power of others. But he will never approach equality with Christ, as a practical neurologist, till he establishes communication with God, the great source of vital energy. . . . So long as mere human life is the fountain of magnetic influence, its effects will only be proportioned to the weakness of human nature." God is a physical force which may conceivably be tapped and drawn upon by the practitioner of Animal Magnetism; and which, set at work in the world, will move blindly to this or that effect.

^a For a brief notice of Cochrane's career, see W. L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures*, etc., 1835, pp. 296 ff. (repeated in part in H. Eastman, *Noyesism Unveiled* [1849], p. 400). The allusion in J. Brockway's *A Delineation of the Characteristic Features of a Revival of Religion in Troy, in 1826 and 1827* (1827), p. 59, seems to be to something in general similar: — "A sect started up, two or three years ago in the eastern part of Vermont, putting defiance to all the laws of modesty and decency, breaking down all distinctions of sex; they were too pure to be defiled by any intercourse. The civil law was stretched out to put a stop to this outrage on humanity; and the cry was reiterated — 'persecution,' 'persecution.'" This was written too early to refer to Noyes and his Putney community.

"The story of Matthias is told at length and very temperately by W. L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures*, etc. (1835). See also the favorable review and abstract of Stone's book by Edward Everett, *North American Review*, vol. xl. (1835) pp. 307 ff. It is told from a different point of view by G. B. Vale, *Fanaticism, its Sources and Influence illustrated in the case of Matthias, etc.*, a reply to W. L. Stone (1835), and more recently by Theodor Schroeder in *The Journal of Religious Psychology*, 1913, pp. 59-65. Schroeder attaches a brief bibliography. There are very short notices of Matthias in Drake's *Dictionary of American Biography*, and McClintock and Strong's *Encyclopædia of Religious Knowledge, sub nom.* "The imposture of Matthias and the perfectionism of New Haven," says Albert B. Dod (*The Biblical Repertory*, Oct. 1835, p. 661), "are monster growths in different directions of the same monster trunk"—meaning the "revival of excitement," or as he, following Stone, expresses it, "the spirit of fanaticism which has transformed so many Christian communities in the northern and western parts of New York and states contiguous, into places of moral waste and spiritual desolation."

"This is the testimony of J. H. Noyes (*Dixon's Spiritual Wives*, vol. ii. p. 179):—"The original theory of the Saints, both at the East and West, was opposed to actual intercourse of the sexes, as 'works of the flesh.' They 'bundled,' it is true, but only to prove by trial their power against the flesh; in other words, their triumphant Shakerism. Dr. Gridley, one of the Massachusetts leaders, boasted that 'he could carry a virgin in each hand, without the least stir of unholy passion!' At Brimfield, Mary Lincoln and Maria Brown visited Simon Lovett in his room; and they came out of that room in the innocence of Shakerism."

"See especially H. Achelis, *Virgines Subintroductæ: Ein Beitrag zu 1 Cor. 7* (1902), or his article "Agapetæ" in *Hastings's Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. i. pp. 177 ff. Also Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. vi. (1910) pp. 151 ff. or the abstract from him in *Hastings*, as cited, vol. lili. p. 487.

"The classical account of the matter is of course that of W. H. Dixon, *Spiritual Wives* (ed. 2, 1868), vol. ii. This account is written in a sensational style, but in its substance is good contemporary history from the hands of eyewitnesses. J. H. Noyes in his *Dixon and His Copyists* (1871), p. 32, tells us that, except chaps. vii., viii., and xxvi.-xxxI., which are Dixon's, the whole of the contents of the book was supplied by himself or George Cragin, i. e. by intimate actors and witnesses in the occurrences described.

"Cf. P. H. Fowler, as cited, pp. 137-138: "'Unionism' made high pretensions to piety and charity, but was bitter towards the existing denominations, and finally assailed them and sent forth multitudes of extemporized preachers to spit venom upon them,

and to strike silently at them, and the Presbyteries stripped it of its disguise and exposed its ugliness and mischievousness."

* Hotchkln, as cited, p. 314.

° P. 313.

° Hotchkln, as cited, p. 173.

° Charles G. Finney, in his *Views of Sanctification* (1840), p. 136, says: "So far as I can learn, the Methodists have been in great measure if not entirely exempt from the errors held by modern Perfectionists." He is not in this, however, speaking of the sources upon which the Perfectionists drew for their membership, but of the teaching current in the Methodist Church in contrast with theirs. He does, however, add that "Perfectionists, as a body, and I believe with very few exceptions, have arisen out of those denominations that deny the doctrine of entire sanctification,"—and this doubtless was true of the perfectionists he had in mind, if taken as a general fact. It was not, however, the whole truth.

° This is fully argued and illustrated by Joseph I. Foot, in "An Enquiry respecting the Theological Origin of Perfectionism, and its Correlative Branches of Fanaticism," in *The Literary and Theological Review*, March, 1836, pp. 1-33. He declares that in point of fact the errors of "the New Dispensation" are practically confined to congregations in which "the New Divinity" had been taught, laying the stress especially on its assertion of human ability and its representation of regeneration, as "effected by 'divine moral suasion,'"—that is to say on its Pelagianism. "We come then to the conclusion," he sums up (p. 28), "that the system of light and motives, including its assumption respecting the human will, or heart, is the parent of perfectionism." Similarly, Ebenezer H. Snowden, writing in 1837 (*The Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine*, vol. iii. [July, 1837] pp. 310 ff.), says of these perfectionists of Western New York that, "they are the results of the doctrine of man's ability and the new measures," and that, compared with them, "the Methodist perfectionists are very orthodox." He describes them as mystical in doctrine, antinomian in practice, and disintegrating in their relation to the churches. They hold that "do what they may they *cannot sin*,—yea, that it is as impossible for them as for God Himself." They are guilty of "acts of gross sensuality justifying themselves on the principle that they can do no wrong." "They consider ministers *nuisances*, and churches *useless*, and that they ought to be torn down." Hence Samuel J. Baird (*A History of the New School* [1868], p. 224), says, speaking of Taylorism,— "The system attained to its logical results in the perfectionism which sprang up, broadcast, as an after-crop, in Western New York. . . . If the divine commands are criteria of our ability, the words, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect,' are an assurance that we can be as

perfect as God." Cf. Lyman H. Atwater, *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, July, 1877, pp. 410 ff.

"A good account of their origin and teaching is given by Joseph I. Foot in two publications, the one, a separate pamphlet entitled *Discourses on Modern Antinomianism*, commonly called *Perfectionism*, and the other an article in *The Literary and Theological Review* for Dec. 1834, pp. 554-583, bearing the caption: "'The New Dispensation,' or *Modern Antinomianism*, commonly called *Perfectionism*." In the latter of these he sums up their doctrine under three heads: (1) "They do not regard the moral law as obligatory on believers"; they "affirm that 'they have nothing to do and have already entered into rest.'" (2) They "profess to be personally united to Christ, or to the Holy Spirit; they interpret the phrase, 'Christ is come in the flesh' (in 1 Jno. iv. 2) as denoting 'His coming into their bodies, and being personally united to them.'" (3) They "declare themselves 'to be perfect, to be as holy as God.'" They expressed their views as to their relation to Christ by the terms "communication," or "commutation," by which they meant such an exchange of character with Christ that "we become as completely holy as He, and He as completely sinful as we." Another very prominent characteristic of their teaching was the profession to be so led by the Spirit as to supersede all dependence on the Word. "I have never known or heard of a disciple of the 'New Dispensation,'" says Foot (p. 565), "who did not profess either to receive immediate revelations, or to be personally united to Deity. In the latter case, though there evidently can be no need of such revelations, they are frequently claimed. . . . They regard their own sayings and epistles as of equal authority with those of the apostles. They even declare, that the apostolic writings pertain only to their own times, and are now superseded by modern revelations." Asa Mahan (*Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* [1839], ed. 7, 1844, pp. 70-73) gives rather a full account of their teachings. "(1) Perfectionism in its fundamental principles, is the abrogation of all law . . . (2) In abrogating law, as a rule of duty, Perfectionism abrogates all obligation of every kind. (3) Perfectionism is a 'rest' which suspends all efforts and prayer, even for the salvation of the world. (4) Perfectionism substitutes the direct teaching of the Spirit, falsely so called, in the place of the 'word.' (5) Perfectionism surrenders up the soul to blind impulse, assuming that every existing desire or impulse is caused by the direct agency of the Spirit and therefore to be justified. (6) Perfectionism abrogates the Sabbath and all the ordinances of the Gospel, and, in its legitimate tendencies, even marriage itself. (7) Perfectionism by abrogating all law, abrogates all standards of conduct and accordingly demoralizes man. (8) Perfectionism, in short, in its essential elements, is the perfection of licentiousness." Compare the descrip-

tion of the system by Henry Cowles, *Holiness of Christians in the Present Life* (1840), pp. 9 ff. The system, he says, "disclaims all obligation to obeying the moral law," substituting the law of love. It "supposes the Christian to receive Christ within him, in such a way, that henceforth Christ only acts within him; and whatever himself seems to do, Christ really does. Some even suppose their own individual being to be absorbed or merged into Christ, so that themselves as distinct persons, have ceased to exist, and all that was themselves is now Christ." It "either avowedly or virtually annihilates personal agency and responsibility." "As a consequence, mental impressions supposed to be from the Spirit of God, are deemed perfect truth and law, paramount even to the Bible itself." "These principles lead more or less extensively, as the case may be, to the rejection of all Gospel ordinances, the disuse of prayer, and to all manner of licentiousness." Compare also the vivid description of the Antinomian Perfectionists in Charles Fitch, *Views of Sanctification* (1839), pp. 19 ff.

"W. L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures, etc.* (1835), p. 316.

"*The Berean*, p. 460.

"Cf. §68 of *The Berean*, on "The Doctrine of Disunity," in which he says (in *American Socialisms*, p. 623) he was aiming at "a theory that prevailed among Perfectionists, similar to Warren's *Individual Sovereignty*." Among the most influential of the advocates of the theory were James Boyle and Theophilus R. Gates, both of whom were closely associated with Noyes in the earlier stages of his development.

"*American Communities* (Revised edition, 1902), p. 159.

"*Spiritual Wives*, vol. ii. p. 9; cf. p. 48. On Hiram Sheldon and his work, compare H. Eastman, *Noyesism Unveiled* (1849), p. 31, note.

"Joseph I. Foot (*Discourses on Modern Antinomianism*, commonly called *Perfectionism* [1834], p. iv), says: "This class of religionists is found in small numbers in various places in this state. Perhaps one of the churches in Albany, and those in Rochester, have been more annoyed by them than any others." The occasion of his writing was the annoyance suffered from a small band of them in his own parish at Salina, Onondaga County. Cf. the general statement of C. G. Finney (*Memoirs* [1876], p. 341): "About this time, the question of Christian Perfection, in the antinomian sense of the term, came to be agitated a good deal at New Haven, at Albany, and somewhat at New York City."

"*Spiritual Wives*, p. 35. Joseph I. Foot, as cited, p. 51, note: "Females sometimes accompany these itinerant errorists, and in other cases go alone 'to preach the Gospel,' as they call their delusions. A woman recently sowed the seed of this heresy in Brim-

field (Mass.), where they have sprung up as in other places, and are likely to produce bitter fruit."

* Mrs. Boardman (*Life and Labors of the Rev. W. E. Boardman* [1887], chap. iii.) tells of living at Potosi, Wisconsin, in close intimacy with a number of persons who had been excluded from E. N. Kirk's church in Albany on account of their Perfectionism.

* H. Eastman, as cited, where "a gentleman residing in central New York" is quoted as explaining that "the lumen of Eastern New York Perfectionism is referred to John B. Foot, a theological student in Kirk's school at Albany. Modest and timid to excess, the revival soon compelled him with its deep-toned enthusiasm. Around him gathered the most devoted of his class. Mr. Kirk tried to quell the storm but failed. The refractory students became the preachers of the new faith. To their labors most of the Perfectionism in Massachusetts and westward owes its existence." An account is given of Kirk's theological school in D. O. Mears, *Life of Edward Norris Kirk, D.D. (1877)*, pp. 85 f. Against some of the names of the students in Kirk's private catalogue, we are told, is written, "Became a fanatic." John Brownson Foot, after an exemplary youth, was graduated at Williams College in 1831, and shortly afterwards, says Calvin Durfee (*Williams Biographical Annals* [1871], p. 460), was licensed to preach the Gospel; but Durfee adds, apparently endeavoring to excuse the inexcusable, "Ere long he entered on an eccentric and wild career, which, in a man of his former habitual uprightness and sober good-sense, could be accounted for only on the supposition that reason was dethroned." A horrible account is given by Dixon (*Spiritual Wives*, vol. ii. pp. 75 ff.)—actually from the hand of Noyes—of a peculiarly obnoxious instance of the practice of "spiritual wives," in which Foot was implicated—though not as a principal. He is here represented to have become "a convert to Hiram Sheldon's doctrine of salvation from sin, and to the social theory which seems to have been connected in every man's mind with that doctrine of the final establishment of heaven and earth"—phraseology which is very distinctly that of Noyes. At a little later date (1847) we find Foot and Noyes sharing the leadership in certain Conventions of the "Western division of Perfectionists," at the head of which we are told that Foot had "for a considerable period" stood (Eastman as cited, pp. 140, 143).

* Mrs. Boardman, as cited in Note 62.