

forward, ought to be *revolutionized*; new views must be taken, new feelings cherished, and new modes of action adopted. But we are not by any means prepared to adopt the sentiment, that a church, which is not receiving additions to its numbers at any given time, is in a state of declension; although this is not by any means a condition to be desired, or with which to be satisfied. But faith, love, and obedience may be there; the institutions of Christ may be maintained, and his ordinances administered, and much preparation may be made for a more prosperous state of things. If, indeed, the members of such a church were fully satisfied with all this, and never prayed and laboured for any thing better,—if they did not feel for the melancholy and dangerous condition of their unconverted fellow-men around them, nor make any direct efforts to bring them to Christ, we might certainly conclude, that they had departed from God, “forgotten their first love,” and “gone after the ways of the world.” But after all, it is evident, from the very nature of the case, that no Christian church which is acting in obedience to God, can possibly be uninterested in the conversion of sinners, or fail to cherish earnest desires for the “enlargement of Zion;” although we can easily conceive a church to be in this very condition, and receive no accessions of converts, at least for a time. It will be increased *eventually*, unless there be some special reason to the contrary; but the mere fact, that it is not receiving additions at any specific time, it is not by any means proof positive that it is in a condition of barrenness and declension.

We fear that upon the subject of religious revival, there has been much practical error in the churches. It has been greatly misunderstood and most grievously abused. Churches, and individual Christians also, have

acted from impulse, and gone by fits and starts; occasionally much excited, and in the enjoyment of great apparent prosperity, and in a short time as much or even more depressed, and cursed with worldliness and declension. Some good men have actually thought that it must be so; that prosperity, or, as they have termed it, *revival*, was an occasional and transitory thing, delightful when it came, but, like an angel from the skies, speedily taking its departure; and the intervening periods have been seasons of discouragement, despondency, and gloom. Christians and Christian churches have, by a peculiar process, wound themselves up to a high state of excitement, and then come down again to the low level of worldliness and unbelief, only to make new efforts at some future period, and repeat the same process of relapse, till their spiritual strength was actually exhausted, the church weakened, and the world hardened in unbelief. Religion had thus been made a matter of mere feeling,—feeling changeable as the wind; while principle, and the practical every-day obedience dependent upon principle, have been discarded and neglected. The church has become nervous, hysterical, and diseased, and much of the health and vigour of earlier and better days has been lost.

And it must be so, as long as the faith and enjoyment of individual Christians is made to depend upon the outward prosperity of the church, and especially upon the conversion of sinners, instead of being made to depend upon the veracity and goodness of “a covenant-keeping God.” It has been too hastily concluded, that the want of special success in the conversion of sinners is an indication of individual and general declension; hence, individuals and churches have become dissatisfied with themselves, and discouraged about their prospects. The result