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THOUGHTS

ON THE EDUCATION OF

PIOUS AND INDIGENT CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY.

ALEXANDER

THERE is in the minds of many a strong prejudice against the whole plan of educating young men for the ministry, on the funds of the Church. Of this prejudice, the writer confesses that he once was a partaker, owing to his education among the descendants of the Scotch, who generally entertain a strong aversion to every idea of depending on others for their subsistence. There can be no doubt that this feeling of independence has been of great service to the Scottish nation, in leading the poor every where to struggle hard to maintain themselves. This is, therefore, a feeling which should be respected and cherished; and all persons should have it instilled into their minds in their early education. I have known many young men, who were so much under the influence of this sentiment that they have rejected all offers of gratuitous aid, and have laboured, for years, to acquire the means of finishing their education. And although I cannot but respect the character of such, I am now of opinion that an enlightened and enlarged view of all the circumstances which should regulate the conduct of candidates for the ministry would lead to a different conclusion.*

The true state of the case is this. The Church wants ministers, and must languish and decline, if she does not obtain a sufficient supply. Every pious young man who has talents to be useful in the ministry, has the ability to make for himself a comfortable living, in some secular business; and in a worldly point of view, every young man of vigorous mind and enterprising disposition makes a sacrifice of his temporal interest by becoming, in this country, a candidate for the ministry. If then, a sufficient number of candidates, from the class able to support themselves, do not offer, is it not the duty of the Church to assist in the education of indigent and pious youth, possessed of good natural abilities? The question to be decided is extremely plain, and simple—Shall the

* The Free Church of Scotland has adopted the system of aiding her indigent candidates for the ministry.

Church do without a sufficient supply of ministers, or endeavour to obtain such a supply, by educating pious young men, who are unable to gain an education by their own means? Suppose the Church to proceed on the principle involved in the objection to this mode of procuring a supply of ministers, what will be the consequence? The appeal must here be made to facts. What has been for twenty years past, the proportion of candidates who have had it in their power to support themselves? Upon looking over the catalogue of our students, from the commencement of this Seminary, I find that, at least, one half the whole number have required to be aided by the funds of the Church, or by benevolent individuals. Some of these, by spending years in teaching, might have found their way into the ministry; but the greater number would have been discouraged, and would have turned their attention to some other pursuit; or, they would have sought an entrance into the sacred office, without any suitable and thorough preparation. Certainly, we have not had a superabundance of good ministers; and surely, no one would wish to see our Church filled with men imperfectly prepared. With all our exertions by means of the Board of Education, the number of our ministers falls far short of the demand.

Perhaps, there is a lurking idea, in the minds of many, that some disgrace attaches to this plan of education. As it would be a disgrace to an able bodied man, to live upon the charities of his neighbours, so it is thought, that something of the same disgrace must attach to the young man, who is able to provide for himself by honest industry in some lawful occupation, to live on the funds of the Church. Now this would be a fair statement of the case, if nothing else was to be taken into consideration but the interest of the person himself. But if the Church needs his services, and if in order effectually to serve her, he must be educated, the case is entirely changed. While she is educating these youth, she is preparing ministers for her own use, and whose services are necessary to her prosperity. If the state needs skilful officers and expert engineers for her defence, she finds it expedient to institute military schools for the education of such as are willing to turn their attention to the military profession: and no question is asked about their wealth or indigence, because the good of the country is the object in having them thus educated. This is right; and no one ever thinks that any disgrace attaches to those young men, who are thus educated, at the public expense. And if the Church were able, it would be

but justice for her to educate all, of whatever external circumstances, who were qualified to do her service. But this is not demanded; all that she is requested to do is, to support, or aid such young men as are unable to furnish the means of their own education.

What has now been said will answer an objection often made by plain, well-meaning people, when applied to, to contribute to this object. They say, "our sons have to labour for their living, and what obligation is on us to give money to educate other men's sons." To such, we would respectfully say, "Have you a minister who preaches the gospel to you on the Sabbath, and do you value this privilege? Or, if you are destitute of the stated dispensation of the word, do you not desire it, as the richest privilege you can possess in this world? Well, if you need ministers, where do you think they are to come from? If all are of your mind, and refuse to aid in preparing young men for the ministry, the consequence will be, that there must be a great deficiency of educated ministers; and when you wish to obtain one, it may not be in your power; and your children may be brought up without the regular administration of the word and ordinances of God, which you must esteem a great calamity, if you have any just estimation of the worth of their souls. But if you are so situated as to be sure of enjoying the means of grace, do you feel as a Christian, no compassion for the extensive regions in our own country, which are destitute of the regular preaching of the gospel? Do you never consider the case of the millions, and hundreds of millions, of benighted heathen, who are now on their way to the great tribunal? If in the sovereign dispensations of divine mercy, we have received and enjoyed the preaching of the word, shall we be so selfish, as not to be willing to send it to those who are perishing for lack of knowledge; who are suffering a dreadful famine, not for the want of bread, but for the want of the word of the Lord?"

Perhaps, you say, that you are the friend of missions, and willing to contribute to this object, but not to the Board of Education. But permit me to ask how the missionary enterprise can proceed without devoted ministers? The cry every year of the Missionary Boards is, "Who will go for us?" But how can they go unless they be sent? And how can they be sent, unless they are prepared and educated for the work? The truth is, that without the Education Board, your other Boards would be, in a great measure, useless. Look over the wide missionary field at home and abroad, and ask

yourselves where these men who are bearing the heat and burden of the day, were obtained? The answer will be, from our Colleges and Seminaries, and a large portion of them were beneficiaries of Education Boards. They exercised the pious self-denial, to become beneficiaries of the Church, that they might have the opportunity of preparing themselves for the arduous work in which they are now wearing out their lives. I have called them *beneficiaries*, but I doubt the propriety of the term; *they* are not the obliged persons; but the Church is their debtor. And their sacrifice is far greater than that of the most liberal contributor to their support. And let our farmers and mechanics, when called on to contribute to this object, not consider it as a gratuity to the individuals aided, but as a necessary means of keeping up a supply of faithful pastors for our increasing Churches, and as the only effectual method of obtaining missionaries to carry the gospel to the destitute, both on our continent and in foreign lands. Let it be considered, also, that if God should favour their sons by calling them to prepare for the work of the ministry, other people will be solicited to assist them in obtaining the requisite education.

And here it may be proper to remark, that many pious parents ought to seek this honour for their sons; and every congregation should have pious young men in a course of education for the ministry. The neglect of some large congregations, in this respect, is great and surprising. They may have experienced frequent revivals of religion, and yet have never sent forth a single minister from their bounds; whilst other Churches have, within the last half century, sent out dozens. In reading the "Life of the late Dr. Proudfit," nothing struck me more forcibly, than the fact that from the single church of which he was pastor, thirty or forty young men had entered the ministry; probably a larger number than from any single congregation on the continent; or perhaps in the world. Every parent, or pastor, who furnishes a good minister to the Church, becomes thereby a rich benefactor to the whole body. And if they have not the ability to give a good education to the promising youth who may rise up among them, the Church is bound to aid them; and in order to this, application must be made to all our congregations for their contributions.

Another objection to this mode of obtaining candidates for the ministry is, that poor young men taken up to be educated, are commonly rude and unpolished in their manners, having grown up among rough, unmannered people. And it is re-

marked, that such seldom acquire the refinement and polish of manners, which are expected and should be found in ministers of the gospel. If this objection had weight, it would operate powerfully against the selection of the apostles, by our blessed Lord; for they were all taken from the humbler walks of life; and although their Master miraculously supplied their want of learning, by endowing them with supernatural knowledge and the gift of tongues, yet we do not read that he wrought any miracle to give them the manners of polished gentlemen. Perhaps, the objector lays too much stress on the mere polish of manners. In our opinion, true humility, meekness, and benevolence will produce the most genuine politeness, and if these dispositions are possessed in a high degree by the minister of the cross, the want of exterior accomplishments, though desirable, may easily be dispensed with.

It is not intended to be intimated, that clerical manners are of trivial consequence; they are undoubtedly important, and when of the right kind, tend to promote the usefulness of ministers of the gospel. The idea which I intend to communicate is, that those manners which are in vogue among the higher classes of society are not exactly those which always become a preacher of the gospel. A young man who possesses genuine piety and good sense, will be likely, in the course of seven years' training, to acquire as much ease and polish of manners as are necessary, in a majority of clergymen; for, while a few have to mingle with the wealthy and fashionable classes of society, the greater number must labour among poor and plain people, with whom sincerity and friendliness are the qualities in a minister's conduct which serve best to recommend him to their esteem and confidence. And I venture to assert, that of the hundreds of students who have passed under my observation, those from rich families have possessed no superiority of manners over their poorer brethren.

And this leads me to notice another objection of a still more serious nature. It is, that a dependence of this kind for the means of education must have a debasing effect on the minds of youth, and detract from that manly independence which is an estimable trait in the character of any man, and especially of a minister. Now, in my judgment, this objection is utterly without confirmation from the facts which have fallen under my observation. The circumstance of indigence may, indeed, have the effect of keeping down that spirit of pride and arrogance, which is so apt to arise in the minds of youth born to affluence; but this is a real benefit. But as to any spirit of meanness generated by this mode of education, it has no

existence, except in the imagination of those who make the objection. If the candidate is actuated by the elevated aims and pious motives which should govern all who aspire to this office, he will not be liable to any influence of the kind supposed. Indeed, commonly, the funds of the Church are so dispensed, that the beneficiary seldom knows the individual to whom he owes his support: he receives the aid needed as coming from the Church, through the agency of the Board of Education.

From the origin of this seminary as was before stated, at least one half the students have been more or less dependent on charitable funds for their support; and yet it has never been observed by the professors that these were, as a body, inferior to the others in any respect whatever. Certainly their being beneficiaries has not lowered them in the opinion of their fellow students, as far as the fact was known; for in a majority of cases, the wants of the needy are supplied without giving such publicity to the transaction that it becomes known even to their fellow students.

If we should now take a survey of all the pastors and evangelists in connexion with the Presbyterian Church, whether labouring at home or in the foreign field, there would be found no marked inferiority in those educated on the funds of the Church in manners, piety, talents, or usefulness. If all who were thus educated should at once be withdrawn from the field of labour, it would leave such a chasm, or rather such a desolation as would fill every pious mind with grief and discouragement. If then, this plan of providing a supply of ministers for the Church has been found necessary in times past, why should it not be equally, yea more necessary hereafter, as the field is every day widening both at home and abroad, and the demand for labourers more urgent, every succeeding year?

Contributing to aid pious students in their preparation for the gospel ministry, has ever been considered a laudable species of benevolence; and the establishment of scholarships and bursaries in Colleges and Universities, has been with a direct view to this object. From the biography of the reformers, and other eminent men since their time, it appears that they felt a deep interest in the subject, and often used their influence to obtain aid to enable candidates for the ministry, to pursue their theological studies to their completion, without interruption.

There is scarcely any plan to which objections may not be made: but if this plan be essential to the prosperity of the

Church—I had almost said, to its existence, why make objections? They may injure a good cause, but cannot possibly do any good. In these cases, it has been truly remarked, that those who contributed most largely to educational funds were not the persons who usually find fault, but such as desired an excuse for not giving. Now, as charity ought to be free and unconstrained, let such keep their money, but let them not influence others, by their objections, to hold back their contributions. If there be any thing wrong in the management of this business, let it be pointed out, that it may be corrected. If any improvement in collecting and disbursing these charitable funds can be devised, let it be suggested, that it may be adopted and carried into effect. But we earnestly beseech all the friends of our Church, not to raise nor listen to a clamour against this necessary scheme of benevolence, at a time when the demand for labourers is greater than it ever has been. To hinder or discourage the education of poor and pious youth of good talents, for the holy ministry, is actually to oppose the vital interests of Christ's Church; and when this is done by Presbyterian ministers, it is a species of ecclesiastical suicide. It is virtually to cut the nerves by which our efforts in advancing the kingdom of the Redeemer must be made.

Here we might leave the subject, but it is our wish to meet every objection which has been made, or can be made to the principles and plan of our Board of Education; for we are both sorry and surprised to learn, that in some quarters, and with some persons, this Board has become unpopular. It is alleged, that there cannot be a very urgent need of our multiplying ministers, while there are so many unemployed, hanging about our large cities; and whenever a Church becomes vacant, immediately a swarm of candidates are found seeking a place and a living. For such ministers we have no apology to offer, except that many will get into the ministry, who have not popular talents, and therefore do not readily find a field where they can do good and support their families. Such are sometimes truly pious men, and if they had a charge would be faithful and edifying pastors. And they are not to be blamed for seeking a place in which they may be useful, and at the same time gain a living for their dependent families. Again, settled pastors are often through the caprice of their people, obliged to resign their charge and being cast out, without means of subsistence, it is natural and reasonable for them to seek another situation. Often they are not censurable for being without charges, but the people to whom

they ministered, and who had engaged to afford them a support. Cases are known, in which a single person has had influence to occasion a severance of the sacred bond, which subsists between a pastor and his flock. But after all, this thing is greatly exaggerated. Look into our cities and large towns, and how many unemployed Presbyterian ministers do you find? Some, indeed, are engaged in teaching; and in whose hands can youth be more safely and advantageously placed than in those of ministers? It is devoutly to be wished that pious ministers were so abundant, that every school in the land might have one at its head. But what connexion has this with educating poor and pious youth? These when received into the ministry, are not usually the persons who spend their time in idleness. Let facts be ascertained, and you will find that poor ministers are the most laborious and the most ready to go on foreign missions. Christ himself was, as to worldly goods, the *poorest of the poor*; and by choosing that condition, he has sanctified a state of poverty, and rendered it honourable in ministers of the gospel to be poor. He, therefore, commonly calls his most faithful servants from this class; but as he himself subsisted on the charities of his devoted friends, he would have his Church to be liberal in the support of poor ministers, and in aiding pious students to prepare for their sacred work.

Another objection is, that many of those youth selected to be educated for the ministry, do not possess sufficient strength of mind to avail themselves of the advantages to be derived from a liberal course of learning; so that, when they have passed through all the schools, they are found poorly qualified to be useful ministers of the gospel. It must be confessed, that there has not always been sufficient caution in receiving young men on the funds of the Church. There has not been, in many cases, a sufficiently rigid scrutiny into the natural capacity of the candidate. Some pious persons are so destitute of the powers of mind requisite to profit by a liberal education, that after passing through all the usual stages of a literary course, they are almost as little qualified for the work of the ministry, as if they had remained at the plough, or in the counting-house. Though there has been a fault in regard to this matter, yet the blame does not lie at the door of the Board of Education, but with the too partial friends of the youth who recommended him. And, perhaps, there has been some want of vigilance and care in the Committees of Presbyteries, who have had committed to them the responsible duty of examining and recommending beneficiaries to the

Board. For some years, the Board have, very properly, devolved the whole responsibility of receiving beneficiaries on the Presbyteries, and have resolved to take all who are thus recommended, and they will receive none but such as are under the care of some Presbytery. Here it may be remarked, that when a youth is once put on a course of learning, with a view to the ministry, it is extremely hard to drop him, unless he should be found guilty of immoral, or very imprudent conduct. When he has been induced to relinquish the business for which he was preparing, and has been encouraged, and perhaps, *persuaded*, to turn his attention to the ministry, to drop him is not only cruel, but a severe injury, which none are willing to inflict unless the unfitness of the person is most manifest. And, indeed, with every degree of caution, it is impossible to judge certainly of the capacity of candidates, in the commencement of their course; for while some are so dull, that they never can be made any thing of, there are others whose minds are developed very slowly, and who improve under culture, to a degree far above what was anticipated. The fact is, that in all cases, the education of youth is an experiment. What any individual will be, cannot commonly be known, prior to the trial. In all institutions of learning, it will often happen that many who enjoy the advantages of instruction do not profit much, either for want of capacity, or habits of study. We must educate a multitude in our schools and colleges, in order to bring out the talents of a few.

In regard to moral delinquency, the cases have been so few, that it is a matter of sincere thankfulness, that out of the hundreds of youth educated for the holy ministry, so few have acted in such a manner as to render it necessary to cast them off. In general, the beneficiaries of the Board have exhibited an exemplary behaviour during the whole course of their education.

Some time ago it was a matter of serious consideration, whether young men educated on the funds of the church, should not be brought under obligations to repay all that they receive. Our Church determined that this was not expedient. To send out our young ministers under a heavy load of debt, is surely to place them in a very undesirable situation; and although they have personally received a rich benefit in their education, yet it should be remembered that they were aided in acquiring learning, not for their own benefit, but for the service of the Church. Every man of right moral feelings, will be sensible, however, of an obligation, which he will be

disposed to discharge in some way, whenever Providence shall put it in his power; and we do find, that, frequently, pecuniary returns are made by some who have been the beneficiaries of the Board. Most of our young ministers receive so meagre a support that it should not be desired, if they were willing, that they should think of repaying what they have received. And there are some who, though they have not repaid the Church in kind, have more than done it by services rendered to this cause, and, especially, by aiding other young men in obtaining an education.

It is true, however, that there are persons in affluent circumstances, who were aided through their whole course by the funds of the Church, who have never made any return, or even acknowledgment, of their obligations. Concerning such, we would only say that their moral sensibilities are not as strong and delicate as they might be. But what would be thought of the man who after having been essentially aided by the Board of Education, should refuse his aid and co-operation in its benevolent exertions?

There is also another case, in which real injustice is done to this Board. It is, when a young man, after receiving aid from its funds, through his whole course, as soon as he enters the ministry, leaves our connexion and joins some sister denomination. Now we do not censure the young minister for entering a field more important and more inviting than he can find in our Church; but it is our deliberate and we think impartial judgment, that in such a case, he is bound in conscience to repay all that he has received.

In conclusion, we would address ourselves to the ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church. We entreat you, dear brethren, to look at this subject seriously, and you will find that there is no institution more vital and more necessary to our prosperity, as a Church, than the Education Board. It has been said, that compared with our other Boards, this is unpopular with many of our churches and with many individuals, who are able to aid it. But why so? Whence this prejudice? Do you wish our churches to be furnished with able, well educated pastors, and how are they to be obtained? Perhaps, your opposition is to a public education in theological seminaries. Well, propose some better plan, and we shall rejoice to adopt it; but the Church has been fully persuaded that such institutions were necessary to the best preparation of the greatest number of candidates for the ministry. But there is no compulsion in regard to this matter. Any who choose to pursue their studies in private, or with

private pastors, are at liberty to do so: only we ask you to give your aid to enable poor and promising youth to acquire the requisite training to become useful ministers of the gospel. The place of study is a secondary thing. The work of missions, foreign and domestic, is becoming every year, more important, and pious, faithful men are demanded for this service; and where will you find them, unless you assist young men who are willing to devote themselves to this important work? Nearly all the missionaries in the foreign and domestic field, have come out of your theological seminaries; and the fact is, that most of them imbibed the missionary spirit while in these institutions, and a large proportion of them were educated, too, on the funds of the Church. If this department is neglected, or should become unpopular, one of two things will be the consequence; either, there will be a deplorable deficiency of labourers in the vineyard of the Lord; or, the Church will be filled with imperfectly educated men. In either of these cases, the cause of our Zion must decline. Other denominations will reap the harvest; for they are becoming more and more attentive to the education of their ministers. Yea, several large denominations, which some years since seemed to entertain a very low estimate of the necessity of learning in the ministry, are now straining every nerve to promote a liberal education among their ministers. If we do not come forward liberally, and vigorously, in support of this scheme of benevolence, we shall undoubtedly fall into the back-ground, in comparison with our sister denominations. While we sincerely rejoice in the more correct views which some of them entertain on the subject of ministerial qualifications, we do not wish to see our own beloved Church retrograding in this matter. If the Presbyterian Church has been more distinguished for any one thing than another, it is the uniform zeal which she has cherished for the education of her ministers, and her unceasing exertions to bring promising and pious men into the ministry, who were destitute of the means of obtaining a thorough education.

It will not be a matter of surprise, that if our Church neglects her duty in relation to this matter, God, in righteous judgment, may so order things that we shall have few pious young men to educate. Already, the number of candidates is said to be diminishing. Let us beware of incurring the displeasure of the Lord of the harvest.

It may be proper to say a word respecting the way in which this business has been managed by the Board of Education. The writer, while he seldom ever meets with the

Board, has been in a situation to observe its proceedings, and he is free to declare, that in his opinion, much zeal, wisdom, and diligence have uniformly characterized the management of the Board, and their Executive Committee. And our Secretaries and Agents, have been indefatigable in their exertions. The Presbyterian Church is under unspeakable obligations to a few working-men, in Philadelphia, who have for years served on her Boards and her Committees. The sacrifice of other benefactors of the Church is small when compared with the weekly labours of some of these devoted men. I know that some jealousy exists in other parts of the Church on account of so many of our Boards having their seats in Philadelphia, as though the power of the Church was too much concentrated in a few persons. And if it were not that the true interests of the Church would suffer by their removal, it would be desirable to have them distributed among the principal cities, included in our bounds. This is desirable not for the reason hinted at, but because a disproportioned requisition is made on a few benevolent men, for their time and labour. These men can have no other than benevolent motives for their long continued, and faithful services. They attend to the business of the Church weekly without any compensation, except the satisfaction of doing good. And as to honour or applause, they neither seek it nor receive it; their names are scarcely known to the Church, for which they so assiduously labour. Though equally faithful men might be found in other cities, yet I am persuaded, that there is a great advantage in having the business of the Church, concentrated in the place where the General Assembly generally meets.

If it were in my power to suggest any improvements in the system pursued by the Board of Education, I would willingly do it; but on an impartial survey of the rules of the Board, I am of opinion, that they approximate as near perfection, as can be expected in any affairs conducted by fallible men. If every Church in our connexion would do its duty in regard to this matter, we should not only have funds enough, but candidates enough; for then every Church would feel the obligation not only of contributing money to support indigent students, but of endeavouring to supply the Church with a succession of pious youth, to be educated for the sacred work of the gospel ministry.