

MEMOIR
OF
JOHN. CODMAN, D. D.

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN, D. D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF BOWDOIN COLLEGE:

WITH

REMINISCENCES,

BY

JOSHUA BATES, D. D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE.

*To which are added Testimonials
by Dr. Codman.*

BOSTON:
T. R. MARVIN AND S. K. WHIPPLE & CO.
1853.

defended ; it was to maintain the faith of the Puritan fathers and their descendants, the Warhams, the Mavericks, and the Mathers, who had preceded him in this fair field, that he strove ; it was to win souls to Christ and prepare them for the heavenly city, to the exclusion of every personal consideration and private interest, that he hazarded reputation, endured reviling, and emulated in fortitude the martyr at the stake."

Beyond all doubt, this was a very important controversy in respect to the interests of truth, the honor of the pure gospel, the character of the evangelical ministry, and the rights and the welfare of the churches. It was so felt beyond the bounds of New England, as is evinced by the following letter, written in the period of this controversy, by the Rev. Dr. Miller, who, after the lapse of nearly forty years from its date, recently died at Princeton, where he had long been one of the eminent professors in the theological seminary there established.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 19, 1810.

MY DEAR BROTHER :—I have heard of your troubles. Strange that a set of men who profess to cultivate the spirit, which *may* be called *liberality* itself, should be so illiberal and intolerant towards an orthodox brother ! But we may cease to

wonder. If it were not so, neither the conclusion of reason nor of Scripture would be fulfilled.

I hope and believe, my dear brother, from what I hear, that you are determined, whatever may occur, to adhere to your original resolution respecting EXCHANGES with ministers of heterodox or doubtful sentiments. I am as firmly persuaded that it is your duty to do so, as I am that it is your duty rather to suffer martyrdom, than to deny the Lord that bought you. I know that some good men are of a different opinion, or at least feel doubtful on the subject. But the more I have reflected on it, the more my mind has become fixed in the conclusion, that no minister, situated as you are, can possibly recede from the ground you have taken, without yielding a most important advantage to the enemy, and without inflicting a deep and lasting injury on the cause of truth.

Exchanging with ministers of known or suspected heterodoxy, appears to me inconsistent with fidelity to our Master in heaven. With the principles which we hold, we should not dare to preach to our people a *false Gospel*. We should consider ourselves, in this case, as falling under the awful denunciation of the Apostle, Gal. i. 9: "If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." But if we dare not preach another Gospel ourselves, can we be innocently accessory to this sin being committed by others? And is not deliberately sending a man into our pulpits, whom we suspect and more than suspect of heresy, fundamental heresy, something very like being accessory to the propagation of that heresy? It is by no means a sufficient answer to this argument to say, that the persons thus sent to our pulpits, may not openly preach their peculiar sentiments. Even if the *fact* were so, it by no means relieves the difficulty; because the very circumstance of our people seeing us receive a heretic and practically bid him God-speed, will tend

exceedingly to diminish their abhorrence of his heresy, and to make them suppose, either that we consider it to be a very small evil, or that we are very inconsistent if not dishonest men. But the *fact* is not commonly so. These men generally preach in such a way, that attentive hearers may readily perceive that they reject every fundamental article of evangelical truth. They are not only betrayed by their omissions, but also, at every turn, by their phraseology and by their theological language ; so that, in fact, they seldom enter our pulpits without holding out to our people false grounds of hope. And is this a small evil ? I must conclude that the minister, who views it in this light, has not well considered the subject.

But solemn as this consideration is, there is another, which appears to me in every respect equally solemn. It is the tendency of the system of exchanging with heterodox ministers, to banish the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel from our own sermons and our own pulpits. I assume, as the basis of this argument, that preaching the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel in a plain, pointed and pungent manner, is the duty of every Christian minister ; and that, without this, he cannot expect the divine blessing on his labors, or hope to see real religion flourishing among the people of his charge. I verily believe, that if an orthodox minister could, in conscience, leave out of his sermons all the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of the Gospel ; if, without preaching anything contrary to them, he were silent respecting the total depravity of our nature, regeneration, the divinity and atonement of Christ, &c. &c. ; or if, to put the case in the most favorable light, he sometimes advanced those doctrines, but always did it in a *concealed, wrapped up* manner ; I verily believe, that by pursuing this course for twenty years, he would banish religion from his church and prepare his people for becoming Arminians, Arians, Socinians, Deists, or any thing that the

advocates of error might wish and endeavor to make them. If I wished to banish religion from my church in the most effectual manner, I certainly should not come forward openly and preach heresy. This would excite attention, inquiry, and opposition. But I would endeavor to lull my people asleep by simply withholding the truth; and should expect to succeed, by this method, with the least trouble and in the shortest time possible. Now this negligent, spiritless, smooth kind of preaching, is precisely that which frequent exchanges with the heterodox is calculated to produce. The most pious and faithful minister living, when he goes to the pulpit of a heretical brother, is under the strongest temptation, if not absolutely to *keep back* truth which he supposes would be offensive, at least in a considerable degree to soften and polish it down, that it may be received with as little irritation as possible. Accordingly, he will be apt to take with him to such a place, a discourse prepared upon this plan. If his exchanges be frequent, he will often prepare such discourses. If they become habitual, he will habitually preach those. The consequence is as evident, as it is dreadful. To expect that a man who prepares *many* such sermons, will preach none of them to his own people, is an expectation not to be entertained. And to hope that the mind of that man who preaches frequently in this strain, will suffer no diminution either of evangelical zeal or of ministerial faithfulness, is certainly an unreasonable hope. I think there can be no doubt, that the Apostle Paul, with all the ardor of his zeal for the truth and with all the tenderness of his love to the souls of men, could not, without a miracle, have withstood the influence of such a habit; and that, if he had indulged in it for one or two years, he would have been found at the end of that time a less pointed, a less faithful, and less successful preacher, than before.

You will perceive then my impression to be, that exchange in

ministerial services with the heterodox, is not only unfaithfulness to our Maker and his cause, but that it also tends to produce the most unhappy effects on the mind and in the strain of preaching of the orthodox themselves; that, if habitually practiced, it can scarcely fail to lower the evangelical tone of their ministry; to destroy that sacred unction from the Holy One, which can only attend the simplicity that is in Christ; and to produce such an accommodation of their discourses to the tastes and feelings of their heretical hearers, as to render them, in fact, no longer preachers of the Gospel. I think it would not be difficult to point out living examples in conformity to these remarks.

The question has often been asked, What has led to that awful degeneracy of Boston with respect to evangelical truth, which the friends of the faith once delivered to the saints have so long observed and deplored? Various reasons have been assigned for this phenomenon, which has been nearly if not entirely unparalleled in ecclesiastical history; but I acknowledge, that none of these reasons have been satisfactory to me. The licentiousness and derangements of the war were known, and exerted an influence in other places, as well as in Boston. The literary character and inquiring spirit of the clergy have been quite as much distinguished in some other places, as in that town. The same remark might be made with respect to several other considerations usually offered to assist in solving the difficulty.

I have scarcely any remaining doubt, that the principal cause of the effect in question, is to be sought in the subject of this letter, viz: indiscriminate exchanges with all classes of heterodox ministers. And there probably never was a place, in which this system has been carried to such a length, as in Boston. I certainly know of none. These exchanges have almost unavoidably led to a strain of general, pointless, inoffensive preaching, in which all may be disposed to agree. This strain of preaching

has of course banished the knowledge and the life of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel from the churches. The greater part of the present race of clergy, bred under such ministrations and finding them most popular, have become their friends and advocates. And the great body of the people, as might have been expected, are distinguished, not so much by their adherence to any distinct, avowed form of heresy, as by a general belief of the innocence of error, and of the almost equal excellence of all modes of faith. The more I reflect on the subject, the more I am persuaded that this has been the principal cause and the natural course of the Boston apostasy; and the stronger conviction do I feel that, wherever the same practice is admitted, similar effects will follow.

Believe it my friend, that practice, whatever it may be, which induces ministers to preach seldom, or superficially, on the peculiar doctrines of the blessed Gospel,—which places the ambassadors of Christ in circumstances in which they consider delicacy as forbidding them to speak often, fully and pointedly, on the great, distinguishing truths of the word of life,—will never fail to have a most unhappy effect on their own souls, and to lay a foundation for irreparable mischief among the people of their charge.

The man who feels willing, or allows himself to be compelled in the composition of every discourse, and especially in those which he is preparing for exchanges, to inquire and balance in his own mind, how far a gay and polite world will allow him to go in declaring his Master's message, degrades his character, dishonors his Master, is treacherous to his trust, and will soon find himself to be left to be filled with his own devices.

I know that there may be a rash and indelicate mode of declaring the truth. I know that a man may be rude, boisterous and violent, in the sacred desk, and call it fidelity. I consider

it as the duty of every minister to endeavor to find out acceptable words, by means of which to convey the truth as it is in Jesus. But I would not, for my life, put myself into a situation in which I should habitually or often be tempted to keep back, or accommodate to human prejudices, those great and essential truths which I dare not alter or modify to please any man. I hope, therefore, my dear brother, that you will adhere to your purpose with unalterable firmness. Let neither the frowns nor smiles, the threats nor persuasions, of opponents move you. I know that it is a trying thing, to resist the wishes of those whom we respect, and who respect us. But, in this case, it really appears to me that the cause of truth and righteousness, for generations to come, is involved; and in such a cause, I take it for granted, you are of the opinion that a minister ought to be willing to make any sacrifice, rather than turn to the right hand or to the left. It would afflict me more than I can express, to hear that my friend had become an Arian or Socinian. But, believe me, I should be little less distressed to hear that you had abandoned your original ground with respect to the subject of this letter, and had consented to exchange with the advocates of fundamental error. I should really consider you, in one sense, as having delivered your God to the enemy. I am more and more convinced, that the friends of evangelical truth in Boston and its neighborhood must consent, at least for a time, to be a little and comparatively a despised flock. They must form a little world of their own, and patiently bear all the ridicule and insults of their proud and wealthy foes. If they do this; if, instead of despairing or being impatient in the day of small things, like a band of brothers they humbly wait on God, and, when he tries their faith, instead of being discouraged, still trust in him; if, in short, they take for their model the conduct of the Apostles, when all the wit, and learning, and wealth, and

power of the world were leagued against them, they will as certainly finally triumph over the enemies of Christ, as there is a King in the holy hill of Zion. But if they suffer themselves to be distracted and divided; if they are impatient under abuse and contumely; if they are discouraged when difficulties arise; and, especially, if they suffer the desire of emulating their opponents, in worldly wisdom and worldly grandeur, to gain the ascendancy in their minds, it is certain that they will be scourged and depressed, if not, as a body, ruined.

My dear brother, I have written in extreme haste. I have not time to be shorter, and scarcely to read over what I have written. I have poured out, however, the feelings of my heart on the subject; and if what I have said should tend, in the least degree, to strengthen your hands, it will afford unfeigned pleasure to your sincere friend and affectionate brother,

SAMUEL MILLER.

There were other friends of Mr. Codman who took a different view of this affair, and who were disposed to say to him: "You are an orthodox preacher; you know and love the truth; you are set for the defence of the gospel. Then preach the gospel honestly, pointedly, and with all the energy of Christian zeal in every sermon, in every pulpit. You are placed in circumstances of peculiar advantage for accomplishing the great work of staying the progress of declension, perhaps of reforming our corrupted and declining churches. You are a native of Boston, of a most respectable