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PROSPECTUS.

The Literature of our country, every one interested in it must observe, is fast maturing its strength, for the high and long career it is destined to run. That it has been hitherto, in a very considerable degree, nurtured and trained in independence of Christian principle and influence, cannot have escaped the notice of any serious and reflecting man:—And the expediency of additional efforts, however small, to check its tendency toward the formation of an infidel character, must be readily discerned.

The time, moreover, is come, when Christianity—if this land is to continue favoured with its benefits, must begin to put forth an operation, far more effective and diffusive, than that with which it is now seen endowed. The unparalleled increase of population among us, advancing immeasurably beyond the reach of our Religious Institutions, together with the quickening growth of National prosperity, fraught, among its undoubted advantages, with incalculable danger to the purity of public morals, and social character, furnishes, it is well known, ground of the most sober apprehension, for the safety of that Religion in our Country, which lies at the foundation of all its prosperity.

If, then, we are in any degree to profit, on the one hand, by one of the most impressive lessons of modern history; and rescue our rising Letters from the wide-spread infusion of Atheism which shall bring upon us all those monstrous and baleful productions of immoral sagacity, and irreligious intellect, to which in a refined and cultivated age, it is sure to give birth: and if on the other hand, we are to take warning from all human records; and as the only method of preserving Religion in the land, aim at once to raise it to its proper eminence and to maintain it

A

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

Outline of the Introductory Lecture, delivered at the opening of the present Session. By PROFESSOR MILLER.

‘The question has often been asked, *Why there are, at present so few Ministers of the Gospel, really eminent in their profession?* And by *eminent* here is not meant men of GREAT GENIUS; for these, in all ages, and in all countries, have been very few. Neither is meant men of extensive and profound LEARNING; for this accomplishment also, requires such an assemblage of talents, opportunities and diligence, that it has never been very common in any community—Nor yet, again, does this question contemplate the possession of distinguished ELOQUENCE in the sacred desk; for eloquence of a high character has always been one of the rarest attainments among men.

But by the question before us is meant to be asked, why it is that there are, at this time, in our country, so few ministers of the Gospel of that real, commanding professional eminence which is within the reach of multitudes; nay, which is humanly speaking, within the reach of EVERY MAN of GOOD SENSE, of FERVENT PIETY and of PERSEVERING DILIGENCE? Why is it that we so seldom see a clergyman who is, at once, a good *Scholar*, an able *Theologian*; an instructive, interesting and impressive *Preacher*; a faithful, laborious *Pastor*; and a meek, humble, fervently pious, polished and benevolent *Christian Gentleman*? Why is it, in short, that we so seldom meet, in the sacred profession, with “workmen that need not to be ashamed”—qualified “rightly to divide the word of truth, giving to each his portion in due season”—able to direct the anxious inquirer; to convince the learned and ingenious “gainsaver;” to be a prudent “watchman” and counsellor to the church in times of difficulty; and efficiently to help forward that cause which is destined speedily to fill and bless our world?

That such ministers are MORE RARE, now, in proportion to our whole number, than they were 70 or 80 years ago, when our clergy did not amount to more than a *tenth* or *twelfth* part of our present catalogue; when the facilities in pursuing professional study were greatly inferior to what they now are; and when *Dickinson, Burr, E twards, Davies, the Fennents, Finley, Blair,* and others of similar stamp, all lived and acted together;—will here be taken for granted. To endeavour to assign some REASONS for the fact, is the object of the present Lecture.

And, in searching for the principal causes of the PREVAILING

MEDIOCRITY OF MINISTERIAL CHARACTER,* it is confidently believed that,

I. The first place ought to be assigned to a PREVAILING MEDIOCRITY OF PIETY in the sacred profession.

The importance of sincere piety in a minister of Religion, has been generally acknowledged in all ages, and by the profane as well as the pious. The infidel and the believer concur in maintaining that the teacher of Christianity ought to be a *real christian*, in heart as well as in life. But it may, perhaps, be doubted whether either the extent or the importance of the bearing of this principle, is fully seen by the most even of those who cordially believe its truth. It may be doubted whether some, even of the clergy themselves, while they admit and assert the principle, are adequately aware of the elevating influence of ardent piety on the whole character of a minister—on his life, his studies, his pastoral diligence, his pulpit eloquence, his manners, and the adaptedness of all his official efforts, to promote the benefit of his species.

Now, very ardent piety is not *common* among professors of religion, when the Church enjoys a large share of outward prosperity; when it is fashionable to be connected with her; and when many of the wealthy and honoured are within her communion. Individual piety flourishes best in the vale of affliction; and the church has, in all ages, had most of the “beauty of the Lord her God upon her,” when she has had least to do with those unhallowed ornaments with which the wealth and honours of the world have ever been ready to load her, when she enjoyed their smiles. But it has pleased God to cast the lot of the great body of American Christians, in our day, in circumstances of great external ease and prosperity. Religion is popular. Its professors, in becoming such, have no special sacrifices to make. For all this, we have reason to be thankful. Yet we ought not to be unmindful of the perils with which this mercy is connected. Very elevated piety is not often found in such circumstances. And the standard in piety among ministers is generally proportioned to that of the great mass of private christians around them. But mediocrity of piety in clergymen, will generally be found connected with mediocrity in all those characteristics which are wont to command and to fix the confidence and affection of the publick. Allowing then, what I am by no means disposed to deny or doubt,

* The Lecturer gave notice that, in all his remarks, he wished to be understood as having a reference to the clergy of *his own Church*; not only because he was best acquainted with them; but also because obtruding into other denominations might have been deemed both impertinent and invidious.

that the great body of the ministers of our church, are converted men, and, of course, sincere disciples of Christ; yet if there were prevailing among them as high a grade of piety as has been known, in some periods, extensively to adorn the church, we should see them more studious, more profound theologians, more eloquent preachers, more devoted pastors, more beloved, and far more useful. What was the great characteristic which distinguished *Eliot*, and *Brainerd*, and *Buchanan*, and *Martyn*, and gave them so precious a place in the esteem and affections of the pious of all countries? It was not that either their intellectual talents, or their theological learning, so greatly transcended those of other men. But it was their FERVENT, ACTIVE PIETY, which fired them with an inextinguishable ardour in seeking the honour of their Master, and the salvation of the souls of men. This directed their course. This animated them at every step in their way. This poured a heavenly lustre over their career; and, it may be safely added, with *their piety*, any minister of the Gospel, with moderate powers and attainments, may be a blessing—an eminent blessing—not only to a congregation, but to a CONTINENT. Oh, IF WE HAD BUT ONE HUNDRED MINISTERS OF THEIR SPIRIT IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, at this hour, we must suppose either that the connection between means and ends in the kingdom of grace is dissolved, and the divine promises made null; or that the clerical character would immediately rise in public esteem and confidence, and the church shine forth in beauty and in fruitfulness, like “the garden of the Lord.”

II. Another cause of the prevailing mediocrity of ministerial character is found in the PREVAILING IMPERFECTION IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOLARSHIP OF THOSE WHO ENTER THE SACRED PROFESSION.

Three-fourths of a century, or even half a century since, a large portion of the Presbyterian ministers in *America* were sound and thorough scholars. Some of them had been well educated in Europe, and most of the others were trained under European Masters. But for fifty years past, the classical attainments of a large majority of our clergy, have been almost constantly declining, both in extent and accuracy. Nor has this been the case with respect to the learned languages merely, but with respect to almost all the branches of study attended to in our colleges and more respectable academies. A mature and accurate acquaintance with any of them, is by no means as common as it formerly was in proportion to the number of those who go through what is called a regular course of education.

Now, although it is undoubtedly true that a man may be a pious and faithful preacher, who knows very little of Latin,

Greek, or Hebrew ; and although it is equally certain that another man may be very critically and profoundly skilled in all these languages, and yet be a very miserable, cold hearted minister of the Gospel ; still it is undeniably evident, that no man who is not a good classical scholar, and at least tolerably versed in the elementary sciences, can possibly be a profound theologian, or a well furnished Biblical critic. Without being familiar with the languages just mentioned, he cannot even *read* many of the most important theological works extant ; and without an accurate acquaintance with Natural and Moral Philosophy, the Science of the Human mind, Astronomy, &c. he cannot so much as *enter* on the study of a number of subjects which properly belong to a theological course. This is so obvious to every reflecting mind, that the illustration of it in detail is superfluous.

Yet is it not a lamentable fact, that a very small proportion of our Theological students do really enter on their professional studies thus furnished ? Are not many of them, on account of the extreme imperfection of their academical attainments absolutely precluded from the pursuit of many kinds and sources of knowledge ? Can we wonder, then, that so many of them appear to extreme disadvantage, not only in the course of their preliminary studies, but through the whole of their ministerial lives ;—that they are obliged to proceed with tardiness and embarrassment in almost every department ; and that in some, they cannot proceed at all ? Truly there is little hope that any great elevation in the standard of ministerial character will take place, until there previously be effected an elevation in the standard of ELEMENTARY SCHOLARSHIP among the candidates for the sacred profession.

III. A third cause of the present striking deficiency in the number of eminent men in the clerical profession, is THE WANT OF MATURE AND ADEQUATE PROFESSIONAL STUDY.

No one supposes that the elementary professional studies of a candidate for the ministry, any more than those of a candidate for the Bar ; or the practice of medicine, include the attainment of *all* the professional knowledge which the individual may need in after life. He ought to calculate on being a student and a learner as long as he lives. But the elementary studies in question *ought* to include, and, if they are to be a real preparation for entering on the duties of the Sacred Office, they *must* include a comprehensive and accurate view of all the principal subjects belonging to Theology. It cannot be expected that during the three years course of elementary study, the professional structure should be completed ; but the least that can be demanded is that the *foundation* be laid, and

well laid; and if this be not done, it will be found a deplorable delinquency, for which an adequate compensation is scarcely ever made.

Accordingly, in all the best periods of the church, under both dispensations, the preparatory studies for the sacred office have been long, leisurely and careful. In the ancient Jewish church, no Priest could enter on the duties of his office, till he was 30 years of age; and of the preceding years, the last ten, at least, were devoted to diligent study and preparation for his official work. In the primitive church, under the New-Testament form, immediately after the close of the reign of miracle and inspiration, from five to ten years of laborious preparation were not thought too much to be submitted to for this important object. Among the early Reformers, the same general principle was acted on with the most unrelaxing vigor; and the most eminently useful of those Reformers were, in common, the most studious and the most learned. And, it may with confidence be added, that those Reformed churches which have been most distinguished for the maintenance of Gospel truth and order in their purity, have been most strict and uniform in exacting a long and laborious noviciate from all their candidates for the ministry. How instructive on this subject, is the fact recorded of *Calvin*, who, after he had prepared for the press his celebrated *Institutes of Religion*, and some time after the age at which he had been pronounced, by *Scaliger*, to be one of the most learned men in *Europe*—was unwilling to settle in the pastoral office, under the impression that he needed time for *more mature study* before he could properly undertake such a charge!

But it is truly mournful to think how small a portion of our theological students can be prevailed upon to act in conformity with this principle, or to complete even the moderate course of three years prescribed by the Plan of our Seminary. And this disposition to slight their preparatory course seems rather to be increasing than diminishing. Into the short space of eighteen months or two years, many seem to think it quite practicable to embrace all that is necessary of the Original Languages of Scripture, Biblical Criticism and Antiquities, Ecclesiastical History, Didactick and Polemick Theology, Church Government, the Composition and Delivery of Sermons, the Pastoral Care, and all the auxiliary branches of knowledge! Is it any wonder that such persons, when they actually enter on the sacred office, should be found indifferently qualified for their work? Is it any wonder that in publick and in private, they should so frequently manifest superficial acquirements, and immature training?

Nor are the pleas by which candidates for the ministry attempt to justify their hurrying into the pulpit, before they are prepared for it, by any means sufficient. Is their health delicate, and incapable of sustaining the burden of severe study? Then let them, by all means study with less severity, and take *more time* for it. Are their pecuniary circumstances so narrow that they cannot furnish the means of support? Let them borrow, or even beg, what is requisite, rather than draw a cloud over all their future professional prospects by stinting their early preparation. Do they hope to make up for deficiencies in early study, by greater diligence after they enter on the work of the ministry? In some very rare cases of thirst for knowledge, and decision of character, this hope has been realized; but in nineteen cases out of twenty, it has proved totally illusory, and certainly will do so to the end of the world; because in the present state of the Church, and of the world, every minister who is disposed to do his duty, will have his hands and his heart completely full; because, the more acceptable and useful he is in the ministry, the more incessant will be his labours and interruptions; and, of course, the less time he will have for retired study. Do any imagine that they possess those uncommonly prompt and powerful talents which may supersede the necessity of laborious study, and enable them to appear well in the pulpit and serve the church both reputably and usefully, with but a small amount of professional knowledge? On this plea, two remarks only will be offered. The *first* is, that those who are most ready to offer such a plea, are more likely than most others to be the dupes of a miserable vanity. The *second* is, that, however paradoxical the assertion may seem, it may, without hesitation, be said, that in many cases, at least, a young man of remarkably active and sprightly talents, is in more danger, with slender furniture, of betraying his ignorance, and of falling into indiscretion, than one of more moderate, slow and humble powers; just as of two vessels, both of which agree in carrying *little ballast*, that will always be most in danger which carries *most sail*.

If candidates for the ministry then, enter on the sacred office with a mere smattering of knowledge; with a very small and imperfect foundation laid; the probability is, that they will go through life, and to their graves, with very little more. The superstructure will be very likely to be of the same scanty, feeble and insufficient character.

IV. A fourth cause of the present undoubted deficiency in the amount of clerical eminence, probably is, the WANT OF THAT OPPORTUNITY OF FORMING THE CHARACTER AND MANNERS, which is not less important to a Gospel minister than theological learning.

Many seem to imagine that the only use of a long and leisurely course of training for the holy ministry is the attainment of knowledge. But such persons forget, that if the requisite amount of facts and principles, that is of *mere knowledge*, could be crowded into the mind, by some compendious process, in six months, or even in six weeks, still one most essential object of professional training would be unattained; which is, the correction of bad habits; the formation of new and better ones; the gradual opening, mellowing and softening of the mind; bringing down high thoughts; unlearning many things which have been learned amiss; and correcting many erroneous views, and serious faults, which nothing but time, and good society, and that fraternal attrition which good society, and especially christian society, brings with it, can be expected to effect. Hence it is, that many a man of vigorous talents, and of no mean acquirements, for want of that fraternal comparison and competition, and that mental discipline, which a long and leisurely training is apt to bring with it, has been liable, with all his powers, continually to expose himself to ridicule and to destroy both the dignity and the usefulness of his ministry, to the end of life. There can be no doubt that, in many cases at least, the discipline of the temper, and the formation of the manners, are quite as important to the acceptance of a minister, as theological learning; and that many a minister would have occupied a far higher station in public esteem and confidence, if he had been willing to afford himself a more ample opportunity to become acquainted with himself, and with the world, as well as with his Bible and his God, before he assumed the high office of a spiritual guide among his fellow men.

V. Another probable cause of the reduction of ministerial character in our Church, is that candidates for the ministry do NOT POINT HIGH ENOUGH IN THEIR AIMS—DO NOT SET BEFORE THEM A STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL EMINENCE SUFFICIENTLY ELEVATED.

It is not uncommon to find candidates for the ministry deliberately justifying their plan, of cutting short their studies, and contenting themselves with small mental culture and small acquirements, because they expect to serve the church in some retired corner, where humble powers and attainments may suffice. Now, not to say, that no man knows where the Head of the church may cast his lot, and, of course what powers and attainments he may need; is it not as ignoble as it is criminal, for any man to resolve, upon principle, that he will cultivate his faculties less carefully, and store his mind less amply than it is in his power to do:—in other words, that he will not avail himself to the utmost of all the opportunities which his

Maker gives him, to serve the Redeemer's kingdom in the best possible manner; but will deliberately prefer having *less power* to serve God, and his generation? When such a resolution is put into words, does not every mind revolt from it as equally base and mean?

Let every candidate for the ministry, indeed, be willing to labour for his Master in whatever station Providence may place him. The more of this willingness, the better. It is the only proper temper for a servant of Jesus Christ. But there is a wide difference between this, and *choosing to be unfit* for more than one kind of station; choosing to resign the power of being more extensively useful. The unfaithful servant in the parable, who wrapped his talent in a napkin and buried it, was not more manifestly worthy of condemnation. We shall not have many eminently endowed Ministers of the Gospel, until it becomes more common for candidates to aim at the highest qualifications which it is possible for them to attain, and for this purpose to tax their faculties and their diligence to the utmost extent of their power.

VI. A sixth reason why there is not a larger amount of professional eminence among the clergy of our Church, is, that THE ATTENTION OF SO MANY OF THEM IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THEIR MINISTRY AND SECULAR EMPLOYMENTS.

Next to that which enjoins upon us as Ministers to *love* our Master's work, there is no precept of the Bible more important than that which requires us to "GIVE OURSELVES WHOLLY TO IT." The Minister's head, and heart, and hands, and tongue ought to be every hour filled with his official labours. Studying, preaching, conversing, visiting from house to house, praying, and planning for Christ, ought, every day, to form the sum total of his occupations. He ought to have but ONE OBJECT constantly before him, "in going out and coming in, in setting down, and in rising up"—the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom. The question, how far a clergyman's attention being drawn off to his *Farm* or his *Academy*, is a *necessary* evil, is foreign to the present inquiry. That it is an EVIL—a deplorable evil, is all that is maintained; and just in proportion to the degree in which it prevails, will be its interference with professional eminence and usefulness. And that people who, by their parsimony, render these secular attentions of a Pastor necessary, labour under a blindness to their own interest, and an infatuation, truly deplorable.

VII. The last reason which will be assigned why there is not, at present, a larger amount of professional eminence among the clergy of our church, is that for the last 20 years, their lives have been LESS STUDIOUS AND CONTEMPLATIVE, AND MORE ACTIVE THAN FORMERLY.

We have reason to be thankful, that, within the period just mentioned, many new forms of ministerial labour, and new means of ministerial usefulness, have been introduced into the church, and have occupied a large portion of the time both of Pastors and Missionaries. A minister who would keep pace with the insitutions and demands of the day, must devote four-fold as much of his time to publick engagements, as was called for 20 years ago. Now, while this fact furnishes a most important argument in favour of candidates PREPARING THOROUGHLY before they enter on the work; it also furnishes a reason why so few ministers, during the period in question, have found time enough to attend to their OWN PERSONAL CULTURE AND IMPROVEMENT. Never was it more necessary for the Ambassador of Christ to cherish that decision of character which WILL find or make time for study, amidst all the pressure of publick engagements. To those who wish to learn their duty in this respect, the example of the celebrated *Ambrose of Milan*, furnishes at once, an admirablé model, and a most instructive lesson.

The foregoing enumeration of reasons, suggests to Candidates for the Ministry the following Counsels, with which the Lecture will be closed.

1. Cultivate deep, enlightened PIETY, first of all, and above all. Make every thing subservient to this, for every thing depends upon it. If you be flourishing here, you will be flourishing in every thing: but if you be declining here, nothing can really prosper with you. Solid, enlightened, ardent piety is the best auxiliary to deep theological study. It is the soul of pulpit eloquence. It is the sweetest cement of love among Brethren. It is the best pledge of professional usefulness. And it is the surest foundation of that popularity which alone is worth possésing.

2. Make a point of retaining and cultivating your Academical literature and science to the end of life. As often as you can, review your college studies. Read a portion of Latin and Greek carefully every day. If your elementary scholarship be not such as you could wish, labour to improve it; and endeavour to impress upon every other candidate for the ministry with whom you may have influence, the duty of laying a good foundation in this respect, before he enters on theological studies.

3. Let every candidate for the ministry resolve that he will spend at least three years in as close and devoted theological study as he possibly can. No longer think of deluding yourselves, or of deluding the church with half a course, and even that clipped and abridged. Take time. Dig deep. Lay a good foundation. It is always the best economy, even of time, in the end.

4. Pay daily and hourly attention to the discipline of your temper and manners. If this matter be neglected, all your other attainments will be of little value. Coarse or vulgar manners may, and doubtless will, in many situations, totally interfere with clerical usefulness. A clerical disciple of *Chesterfield* is to be despised and detested. But a clergyman who is not a CHRISTIAN GENTLEMAN ought to be remitted to his instructors.

5. Let your AIMS BE HIGH ; not for the attainment of places or titles ; but of the most exalted *ministerial excellence*. Say not—"I can never be a thorough divine ; I can never make a good speaker." If you will really aim high in this respect, and will take time and pains enough, you will gain your object. Be not discouraged though the way to that object appear to rise before you as a mountain. Before *patient toil*, with the Divine blessing, it will "become a plain."

6. Study to make the best use of the SOCIETY which you enjoy here. He who does not derive great advantage from the fraternal intercourse of a number of theological students, must be grievously wanting to himself. If the *collision* and *competition* which it affords, do not kindle up many a latent talent, and excite many a feeble affection, there is certainly sin somewhere.

7. Let perfect PUNCTUALITY in attending to all your plans and engagements mark your course in the Seminary. In every publick Institution there must be A PLAN of study. We have a plan here. Now, unless every student can bring himself habitually and rigidly to act upon a plan, and upon *our* plan, he had better study in private than in this place.

8. Suffer yourselves to make no engagements while here, which will interfere with close and effectual study. You have come hither to pursue your studies with a view to the Gospel ministry. Never lose sight of this for a moment. And while you embrace every suitable opportunity of doing good to all around you, never engage, even in plans for doing good, in a way, or to an extent, which will materially interfere with the great purpose for which you have resorted to this school of the Prophets. Many things may be your duty in other places, and at some future time, which are not your duty *now* and *here*.

9. The object of this lecture will not be gained, unless *some* of your number shall resolve, not only to go through a complete course of three years in this Institution ; but also to *extend the time* of your remaining here, one or two years longer, for the purpose of making far higher attainments than are common. If the religious publick could see a *few* of our youth taking this course, and apparently resolving to be THOROUGH DIVINES, they would, no doubt, be excited to establish in our Seminary,

what seem not yet to have been thought of—I mean THEOLOGICAL FELLOWSHIPS. We have *Scholarships* in considerable numbers, for the use of those who are pursuing what may be called the *ordinary course*; but no *Fellowships*, for the support of such as wish to remain longer and go further. Let the Church only see that such Foundations are *desired and needed*—that is, that some ingenuous and pious youth are disposed to avail themselves of them—and we shall soon have them established.

10. If you wish to serve the Church with either acceptance or comfort, TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH. It really appears as if the health of a greater portion of young ministers failed them now, than half a century ago. Perhaps I ought to have mentioned this among the reasons of the recent depreciation of ministerial eminence and usefulness. However this may be, make conscience of taking care of your health. And no diligent student can expect to preserve his health in any tolerable degree, without strict temperance;—rigid attention every day to the state of his body;—a large amount of gentle exercise in the open air; and constantly guarding against pursuing study, at any time, and especially at night, to the point of fatigue, much less of exhaustion.

11. Finally; Let every candidate for the holy ministry resolve that, by the grace of God, he will, for himself, do all in his power for raising and adorning the ministerial character. Let each one, henceforth resolve thus, and act accordingly, and all will be well. And may He who has the hearts of all flesh in his hands, so govern and guide your minds, and so preside over your studies, as that you may all be “workmen that need not be ashamed.”

ON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF INFIDELS.

No one at all conversant with the productions of infidel writers, can have failed to observe in them, a most amusing affectation of intellectual superiority, and of dignified freedom from vulgar prejudice. They seem to imagine that they alone have divested themselves of all propensity to error, and that in the calm light of an elevated and dispassionate philosophy, they have detected the impositions of priest-craft, and learned to condemn the credulity of faith, and the bigotry of religious zeal.

On this superiority, I have two remarks to offer. First,