

HOME,
THE SCHOOL,
AND
THE CHURCH;
OR THE
PRESBYTERIAN EDUCATION REPOSITORY.

EDITED BY
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ARTICLE I.

THE FAMILY A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION.

[This article is taken from an interesting, able and original little volume, entitled "Heaven the Model of a Christian Family," by the Rev. Erastus Hopkins, formerly of Troy, N. Y.]

THAT the Church of Christ is a purely religious institution is unquestionable. But that the family is as strictly and solely so, is not a conviction that is generally and definitely prevalent. It is regarded as exerting a high moral influence, as being the proper nursery of the future man and of the undying spirit: but it is far from being invested in the popular mind with that high and heaven-derived religious character which properly attaches to it. It is the object of this article to show that the *Family is as strictly a religious institution as the Church*. Where the form of either exists without the indwelling spirit of piety, they are perverted and corrupt. The remark is equally applicable to both, for an irreligious family is as essentially an abhorrence in the sight of God as a soulless and corrupt church.

I. THAT GOD HAS ESTABLISHED THE SOCIAL RELATION OF THE FAMILY CIRCLE, is a full justification of the foregoing remarks. When He had laid the foundations of the earth, and fixed the bounds of the sea, and set in sure and lasting order all material things, He established the law of marriage also to regulate man, whom He had made a social and moral being. It was thus that in this institution He laid the foundation of society, on which the whole superstructure of morality and piety was to rest. Man was at that time a holy being, and all the circumstances and relations that were then ordered concerning him had reference to the holy end for which he was created. Therefore it is that this family relation, being established by God for the right regulation and development of holy man, is a purely religious institution.

Yea, and it has even a pre-eminence over the church in the fact of its pre-existence. It was the *first* religious institution. It was

With these remarks, we commend this whole subject to the most careful and devout attention of all such as think of dedicating themselves to the gospel ministry. We commend it to the fervent prayers of the Church; and record our earnest supplication, that the Lord would call, qualify, and send forth able and faithful ministers of the New Testament, to supply the great deficiency of spiritual labourers in his vineyard.

ARTICLE XIII.

HINDRANCES TO EMINENT PIETY IN CANDIDATES.

BY ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

[In a Letter to the Secretary of the American Education Society.]

SIR:—You inquire, "*What, in your judgment, are the principal hindrances to the cultivation of an eminent piety in young men preparing for the ministry; and how may they be most effectually overcome?*" I feel this to be a subject of immense importance, and one which deserves the profound attention of all candidates for the holy ministry, and of all who are already invested with the office; but especially, it imperiously demands the solicitous and unceasing attention of those who are engaged in the selection and education of young men for the ministry.

In the general, I would reply to your inquiry, that young men preparing for the ministry, are subject to the same hindrances in cultivating eminent piety, as other Christians. These are partly internal, arising out of the remaining depravity of their nature; and external, proceeding from the temptations of the world, and the devices of Satan. These obstacles are greater in some than others, and assume a peculiar shape from the constitution, habits, circumstances, and employments of each individual. No doubt, also, there are hindrances which peculiarly belong to whole classes of men; and concerning these, I understand you to inquire, as it relates to that class who are occupied with studies preparatory to the ministry. The question seems to imply, that the obstacles are such, as, in many cases, to prevent the attainment of a high degree of piety, in those who have turned their attention to the sacred office. Concerning the fact, I think there is no ground for doubt. Many do become preachers of the gospel who are not eminent in piety; and no doubt, a large part of the evils which afflict the Church of Christ may be attributed to this cause. It is no uncommon thing for a pastor to fall below that standard of piety which exists among the best of his own flock. It often happens, that obscure Christians are so much further advanced in the experience of religion than their official teacher, that he might profitably sit at their feet and

learn. I have often felt compassion for young men of small religious experience, who are obliged to be the teachers of fathers and mothers who were in Christ before they were born. But when the religious teacher is not only youthful—which is no fault—but knows very little of the various conflicts and trials of the hidden life of the Christian, he must be placed, indeed, in an awkward situation, in relation to eminent saints, who may happen to be in his flock. This, however, is a difficulty which I have seldom observed any young man to feel, when preparing for the ministry; and, therefore, very little pains are taken to provide against it, by an earnest examination of cases of conscience, and the methods of treating them, which may be found in books; and especially, by a close and honest inquisition into the secret recesses of his own heart.

But truth requires that I should state a fact, far more deplorable and fatal than the one mentioned above. It is, that many persons enter this holy office who are entirely destitute of piety. What the hindrances in the way of such are to the cultivation of eminent piety, it is needless to state. But perhaps some will be ready to think it uncharitable to suppose that this is a fact; and altogether improper to mention it in this public manner. I know, indeed, that there is a sensitiveness in many ministers on this subject; and while they admit and teach, that there are many hypocrites in the communion of the Church, they are not fond of hearing that the same is the fact in regard to the ministry; and to throw out such suggestions, they fear, will only lead the people to be suspicious and censorious. But if what has been stated be really a fact, it ought to be known, and very frequently brought forward to the view of ministers; for it seems to me, that of all men, they are, in some respects, in a worse condition for improvement in personal piety than any other persons. They are left, as it were, to themselves, and no one has it as his duty, to superintend their spiritual progress. If they are deceived, they commonly hug the delusion, until death breaks the fatal enchantment. As they are but seldom warned from the pulpit, they ought to be faithfully dealt with from the press. I do not wish it to be supposed, however, that I desire to become the censor of my brethren. I am truly very unfit for such an office, and would greatly prefer being a disciple to being a teacher.

But to return to the case of young men preparing for the ministry. If my observation has not deceived me, there are several classes of persons who seek the ministry, without possessing genuine piety.

There are a few—and I hope but few—who prepare for this office, precisely, with the same views and feelings with which they would prepare to be lawyers or physicians. They think that the office is useful and honourable, and affords a decent competency, with more leisure for literary pursuits, and more seclusion from the noise and bustle of the world, than most other professions; or,

actuated by ambition to appear as orators before the public, they imagine that the pulpit is a fine theatre to make a display of talent and eloquence. Such men never think of the conversion of souls, or the care of souls. They may, however, please themselves with the thought that they will be able greatly to improve the moral character of the people, and communicate much religious instruction which will be profitable to all classes.

The next description of those who are found entering the sacred office without piety, are such as have received what is called a religious education: who have been instructed in the doctrines of the Bible, and have been restrained from vice, and accustomed to the performance of all external duties. Young men of this class, are commonly strictly conscientious, and often more rigidly exact in attendance on outward services than many of the pious themselves. But they have never experienced a renovation of heart. They seem to suppose that regeneration takes place without any remarkable, or very perceptible change in the views and feelings of those who have been brought up with care in the Church. Such, at any rate, are the practical opinions of many who are correct in the theory of regeneration.

There is still another class, it is to be feared, who seek the office of the ministry without any real piety. They are persons who profess conversion, and often speak of their change as remarkable. They are confident of their own good estate, and usually are disposed to be severe judges, in regard to the character of other professors. It is not uncommon for such persons to pretend to possess great skill in revivals, and to think they know precisely how to treat such as are awakened; and, also, in what language careless sinners must be addressed; and they will set up their own judgment above that of ministers of learning and long experience, and despise everything which does not exactly accord with their own methods. I would not insinuate that all young men who fall into mistakes about the proper method of conducting revivals are destitute of true piety; but, that some persons of fiery zeal and high pretensions, are deceived, as to their own religion, is too evident to need proof. It is too often demonstrated by their apostasy to vice, or their fall into soul-destroying heresy. But when such indubitable proofs of hypocrisy are not exhibited, they often make it sufficiently evident to a discerning eye, that they are actuated by a spirit foreign from that of the gospel. They are filled with spiritual pride, and are ready on all occasions to boast of their attainments, and success in doing good. They are always wise in their own conceit, and therefore unwilling to take advice. Indeed, unless you yield to them in every thing, they will set you down, not only as an enemy to themselves, but to the cause of God. In time past, Satan opposed revivals by stirring up formalists and worldly professors to revile them; but now he seems to have changed his ground, and to aim at accomplishing the same end, by sending into the work, men, who by their

pride and imprudence, will be sure to bring a blot upon the whole cause.

Perhaps, in the selection of young men to be educated for the ministry, too much regard is paid to forward zeal, and too little to modesty and humility.

But I seem to be digressing from the appropriate subject of my letter—I am requested to express my opinion of the hindrances, which exist in the way of the attainment of eminent piety by young men preparing for the ministry. This seems to suppose, that they have the root of the matter in them. I will, therefore, direct my attention to this point. The small progress made by young men in piety, during their preparatory course, is owing to many distinct causes, a few of which may now be mentioned.

1. They too commonly commence their progress with a small stock. Their piety is feeble, and even sickly, from the beginning. Much, we know, depends on having a sound and vigorous constitution of body, at our birth; but when, instead of this, we come into the world diseased, or are crippled, or rendered rickety by bad nursing, there is little reason to expect a firm and active frame, when arrived at mature age. Somehow or other it occurs, that few Christians at this day, seem to have a deep foundation for their piety. In most, it seems to be an obscure and feeble principle, struggling for mere existence. In listening to the narratives of religious experience from many candidates for the ministry, I have been much struck with the want of clear views and strong faith in most of them. I know, indeed, that a feeble infant may become a thriving child, and a vigorous man; but commonly, there is a proportion between the incipient principle of life and the degree of future progress. A large portion of our most serious young men are perplexed with doubts of their own interest in Christ, during the whole course of their studies. To attain eminent piety, therefore, it seems necessary to pay attention to its commencement, and see whether any thing can be done, to radicate the principle more deeply, and to obtain a more vigorous exercise of faith from the first existence of spiritual life.

2. This leads me to remark, in the second place, that there is, in my opinion, much error in the common mode of treating persons under their first serious impressions of religion. They are too much in public, too much in society with each other, too much under the direction and influence of weak, hot-headed men, who push themselves forward when there is any excitement, from a belief that they can be of great service. In seasons of religious excitement, lest they should pass away without effect, there is commonly a sudden increase of external means, an unprofitable frequency of meetings, and all hands are set to work to bring home the concerns of eternity to the consciences and feelings of the people. By such means an excited state of feeling is produced in the public mind, during which, it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between those

who are merely affected with sympathy, and those who are really awakened by the Spirit of God. But all these come to anxious meetings, or occupy the seats appropriated to anxious inquirers. There is reason to fear that often, when a large number are spoken of as awakened, a majority of them are under no special operation of the Spirit, but experience the common feelings of natural conscience, combined with lively sympathy. But all these, when once numbered among the subjects of a revival, feel themselves bound to go forward, and do commonly enter into the full communion of the church. Hence, the sad declension and coldness observable after revivals.

But these are things which the wisdom of ministers cannot effectually prevent. There is one thing, however, which demands the attention of all who may be concerned in conducting revivals: it is the practice of bringing those seriously impressed, or recently converted, so much into public notice. Persons always accustomed to go along in obscurity, are now exhibited to view, as the subjects of something remarkable. The feelings of pride are so natural to every human heart, that they will rise, whenever an occasion is offered. Young people thus noticed, feel a self-complacency which is very repugnant to deep conviction of sin. There is an importunate desire in awakened persons to be much in social meetings, and too little time is left for serious reflection alone. It is well known, that in the vegetable world, if you would promote the germination of a seed, you must cover it up and let it alone; the husbandman who should be for ever raking up his seeds after they were sown, to see whether the work of vegetation was going on well, would not be likely to have vigorous and fruitful plants. The conclusion which I draw from these remarks is, that the spiritual health and vigour of many are injured by too great officiousness in those who attend on them as guides; and by injudicious treatment, the child of grace grows up like a sickly plant; or like a human being who has suffered by injudicious nursing, or unwholesome food and air. Now, as many of our candidates for the ministry come out of revivals of religion, it is of the utmost importance, that great care be taken that the work of God be not marred, by the interference of man, in its first commencement.

3. Serious young men are too soon put upon the performance of religious duties in public, and are often injudiciously pressed to turn their attention to the ministry, before a fair opportunity has been given to themselves, or to others, to form a correct judgment of their religious character. I have known several instances of young men apparently destroyed, in consequence of possessing a remarkable gift of prayer. They soon found out that their prayers were admired and praised, and their foolish hearts were puffed up with vanity. The greatest caution is necessary to guard against imposition, when youth in an obscure condition offer themselves as candidates for the ministry. The pros-

pect of rising from a low mechanic trade, to learning, eloquence, and respectability, is as powerful a bait as can easily be presented to the youthful mind. Ambition may give the first impulse, but it will lead the person to assume the character which it is judged will best answer its purpose. And when a young man is once taken up to be educated, you cannot easily dismiss him, unless he is guilty of some great delinquency. You have taken him from the business to which he was brought up, and changed all his prospects, and it would be cruel to drop him, without some urgent cause. The course of preparatory studies is begun too soon after conversion, by many young men. They should be left for months, if not for years, to prove their sincerity, and to evince that their piety is lively and progressive. During this period they should study their own hearts, and read those books, which most faithfully describe the work of grace in the heart, and furnish the most decisive marks for discriminating between true and false religion.

4. The hindrances to piety in young men, while engaged in classical and scientific studies, arise from the books which they are obliged to read, the company with which they are associated, and the emulation which is excited by the competition in which they are engaged. The heathen authors, which are read in all our schools, cannot well be dispensed with, and yet the reading of them has been injurious to the morals, and to the spiritual health of many. A preacher of the gospel cannot remain, and ought not to remain ignorant of the mythology of the pagan world, and of the state of morals among the most refined and civilized of the nations of antiquity; and it would not be easy to devise a method of arriving at this knowledge, less exceptionable than the study of the classics, under the guidance of a Christian preceptor. But still it is difficult for the susceptible minds of youth to pass through this course of study without suffering some injury. The case is like that of the young physician, whose profession requires him to come in contact with diseased subjects, and even with such as are infected with contagion; but he cannot avoid it; he must run this risk; and his only security is in fortifying his system against these impressions by strong antidotes. And the same must be the plan of the spiritual physician: he must endeavour to preserve himself in a high state of health; and must constantly have recourse to prayer, watchfulness, and the word of God. But I am persuaded, that much of the evil arising from the study of the Roman and Grecian classics might be prevented, by a proper course of teaching. I do not mean that the plan of making excerpts of the best parts of heathen authors, or causing the student to omit those parts which are indelicate or immoral, is of much importance. What I mean is, that if the teacher would combine Christian instruction and admonition, with every lesson; if he would take every occasion to point out the deficiencies of the religious and moral systems of the best of the heathen: and contrast with their loose morality and absurd

theology, the pure and beautiful system of the Bible, these lessons would, by contrast, be placed in a more striking light. And it deserves to be remembered, that occasional weighty remarks, out of their common place, and singly exhibited, often make a deeper impression on the memory and the conscience, than long and laboured discourses on the same subject.

The hindrance from associates destitute of the spirit of piety, is often sensibly felt; and with some of our candidates for the ministry, I know that there is so great a conformity to the manners and spirit of the careless part of the community, that the nicest observer can discern no difference between the professor of religion and the youth of decent morals; except, when the communion table is spread, the one is found seated among the people of God, while the other stands aloof. There is, in my opinion, much need to look after your young men who are preparing for the ministry, while within the walls of a college. If a faithful representation were given of many, during this part of their preparatory course, those on whom they depend for aid would not be likely to patronise them any longer. As a remedy, some propose that pious youth should be educated in seminaries by themselves: but, unless you intend to seclude them from intercourse with the world altogether—which would require them to go out of it—you must accustom them to withstand the temptation arising from the spirit and company of men of the world. And if your candidate cannot resist the current when in the small society of a literary institution, what reason is there to hope that he will faithfully withstand the torrent which bears almost every thing before it, in the society of the world? The way for men to attain to eminence, is not to remain ignorant of all temptation; but it is to meet and overcome it. If there were due vigilance and fidelity on the part of those who superintend their concerns, many who are in a course of education for the ministry, would never be permitted to proceed further than their *college commencement*.

5. I have already noticed the fact, that too much social intercourse is unfavourable to piety; and one of the greatest hindrances to the cultivation of an elevated piety in theological seminaries is, that the young men are too much in each other's company; that they are too little alone, and have too little provision made for retirement, and the performance of the duties of the closet. Persons fond of conversation, and those who are of an affectionate temper, can with difficulty resist the temptation to visit too often those with whom they are familiar, and to spend too much time in their company. This habit steals away the time which should be devoted to study, and consequently interferes with the seasons appropriated to reflection and devotion. For this evil no effectual remedy can be devised, as long as a large number of young men are nearly secluded from other society, and inhabit one edifice, where a few steps will bring them into the presence of each other.

In my judgment, the students continue in our seminaries for too great a portion of the year. It would be better to adopt the European arrangement of extending vacations through the summer months. During this period, the students, instead of posting from city to city, and from one anniversary meeting to another, ought to bury themselves in the recesses of the country, where they might enjoy health, be surrounded with agreeable scenery, and be much in solitude and reflection. Many of our young candidates have never had a proper season for deep and long continued religious meditation, since they made a profession of religion: and what is rather an unfavourable symptom, there are among them those who cannot bear such a state of seclusion. They have been accustomed to live in society so long, that they enjoy themselves nowhere else. Now, I venture to assert, that although these young men may be zealous, noisy, and active professors, and may take the lead in revivals, and in all benevolent enterprises, they will be found, on careful examination, to be shallow Christians.

6. But as far as my observation goes, no one thing more hinders the attainment of elevated piety, in theological seminaries, than a fondness for bold speculation on divine subjects, connected, as it always is, with an ardent spirit of disputation. And this is an obstacle difficult to be removed. All attempts to repress it are viewed by the parties to be efforts to prevent free discussion, and the unbiassed investigation of truth. In seminaries, where the students are homogeneous, and where the same theories, nearly, are adopted by all, this evil is less felt; but where students are brought together from the north, south, east, and west, and bring with them all sorts of varieties, which exist in what is called orthodoxy, there will be collision, and it is useful, if well regulated; but when contention becomes hot and fierce; when, with the zeal for a set of opinions personal pride is enlisted, the evils produced are great, and may affect the peace of the whole seminary. But there can be no doubt that both a spirit of bold speculation in theology, and a spirit of disputation, are unfriendly to progress in piety; so effectually is this the case, that no student will maintain, that while warmly engaged in either of these, his soul has flourished in grace. Composure of mind, and freedom from the passions excited by contention, are necessary to the exercise of pious affections. But the causes just mentioned are apt, after a while, to generate a secret skepticism, which is a worm at the root of piety. Its approaches are secret and insidious; and as the man does not yield to the doubts which are continually rising in his mind, he feels no guilt, and but little alarm; but if this process goes on long, faith will be more and more debilitated, and the soul will be like a garden without water, or a tree whose leaf is withered. And here is the real disease of many ministers of the gospel: the life of piety has been eaten out by skeptical thoughts, which, by degrees, bring the soul into such a diseased state, that it is capable of performing no religious duty with energy

and profit. When the man prays, these thoughts meet him, and he has to scatter them before he can offer a single petition; and while he is preaching, or preparing to preach, his soul may be paralysed with a succession of skeptical thoughts.

It is a real injury to young men to form their system of theology prematurely, as is done by many. Before they have had time to read the Bible once through, many of our speculative youth have their whole theory adjusted and firmly fixed; not that they have examined each opinion for themselves from a careful study of the Scriptures, but they have picked up the notions of others, whom they admire or respect; and what is once received, and especially what is once contended for by a young man, he will hardly relinquish, however strong the evidence against him. But when the opinions adopted are erroneous, the effect is necessarily unfavourable to piety. The intimacy of the connection between truth and virtue, and between error and moral obliquity, is not sufficiently understood; or at any rate is not sufficiently attended to by most men. I believe that no error is innocent; and that if we could trace the effects of erroneous opinions on the secret traits of human character, we should find that every shade of error had a counterpart in the moral feelings.

7. The strained and continued exertion of the intellectual faculties is unfavourable to a state of pious feeling. This is the fact from a law of our nature, which every man may, if he will attend to it, observe in himself. While a man's thoughts are on the stretch to invent reasons to support his opinions; or when his memory is intent on the recollection of what has been committed to it, the emotions corresponding with the subjects of our meditations are always low. And the case is the same, when we follow the reasonings of another through an intricate subject; and it does not materially alter the case, that we are studying theology; for the mind may be intensely exercised about the systematic relations of a subject, and yet those qualities, by which it is adapted to produce emotion may be entirely out of view. Moreover, close study of any science occupies so much of our time, that no more than small portions are left for devotional exercises; and whenever we are engaged in any pursuit which takes a stronger hold on our thoughts than devotion, there is very little gained by the time actually employed in this way; for the thoughts are for ever wandering off to those objects in which, at the present, the strongest interest is felt. A person who is visited by friends who have been long absent, and who are very dear to him, will be apt to have but few of his thoughts in his devotions on the first day after their arrival.

Hence we find, that it is a common complaint among pious students of theology, that their feelings are destroyed by their daily studies; and we may lecture to them, as much as we will, about the impropriety of suffering it to be so, the effect will continue to be felt, unless one thing is done, which ought always to have been

done; that is, that we make all other things small in our estimation, compared with a devotional frame of spirit. If the chief object aimed at in our seminaries was, not the acquisition of learning, but the cultivation of piety, then the student would not hurry over his devotional exercises to get to his lesson; nor would his thoughts perpetually wander from the objects of devotion to some speculative subject. And nothing of valuable knowledge would be lost by such a change. The intellect never performs its part so well and so pleasantly, as when sustained and directed by a tide of pious emotion. Thoughts rising out of the love of God, will be more pure and elevated, than those which enter the mind through any other channel. The plan of study then, ought to be, first, to get the mind into a proper state of pious feeling; and until this is done, not to think that the mere dry exercise of intellect is of any real value. If a student is destitute of the right frame of mind, he is disqualified for the contemplation of truth to any advantage. He is like a sick man in relation to labour; while this unhappy state continues, he is incapable of doing any thing effectually.

And what is now proposed will be found the only remedy to counteract all the hindrances to piety, to which young men are liable in preparing for the work of the ministry. Piety must be made every thing; the beginning, the middle, and the end of their course. And if our theological schools cannot be made effectual nurseries of piety, we had better dissolve them, and dismiss our professors. If our young men lose, instead of advancing in solid piety, while in a seminary, there must be something radically wrong in them individually, or in the system of education. I could easily multiply remarks on this subject, but room enough has already been occupied.

ARTICLE XIV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A THOROUGH AND ADEQUATE PREPARATORY STUDY FOR THE HOLY MINISTRY.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

WHEN I reflect on the importance of giving sound and judicious advice to *any* young man, just entering on the career of life, I can scarcely express my sense of the responsibility of one who undertakes the task. But, when I contemplate the greatly augmented importance of giving a correct impulse to the mind of a youth who is destined to be a leader and guide of others, on the most momentous of all subjects; who is training up to be a "watchman on the walls of Zion;" to be a ruler, teacher, and counsellor in the Church of