

A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING,

AUGUST 17, 1845,

BEFORE THE

MILLS SOCIETY OF INQUIRY,

AND THE

THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,

OF

WILLIAMS COLLEGE.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

OF ALBANY.

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THE ministry of the gospel is the most important agency ever instituted among men. It originates in the benevolence and wisdom of the Highest. It is designed to carry into effect the purposes of everlasting love, by turning men from darkness unto light. It brings to its aid the mighty power of God ; or rather it is itself the power of God, operating through the breath of mortals. There are innumerable agencies established by *men*, some of which are not only the result of far reaching intelligence, but are decidedly of beneficent tendency ; and we venerate the great and good spirits, by whom they are projected and sustained ; but when compared with this *divine* agency, the greatest and the best of them are only as a rush-light to the sun. Our

world is the theatre of an *angelic* agency also: myriads of the native inhabitants of Heaven come hither on errands of good will to those who are training up to be their companions; but even they, with all their superior intelligence and bliss, have no treasure committed to them so valuable, as that which has been deposited in earthen vessels. I thank God when He sends his angels to watch around my pillow; I thank Him especially that He permits me to hope that some of these heavenly messengers may be present to take charge of my departing spirit; but I may say, without irreverence, that I owe Him a still greater debt of gratitude, for commissioning a mortal, like myself, to come and tell me that Jesus Christ has opened the door of Heaven to the repenting rebel, and that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

It might have been expected, anterior to experience, that so high and holy a work would have been assigned to a superior order of beings — beings whose purity and dignity might seem to designate them for the honour of being ambassadors of God. But infinite wisdom ordained otherwise — ordained that

the most important message ever delivered to man, should be delivered *by* man; that thus the power of the great Agent might be displayed and honoured through the weakness of the instrument. Nevertheless, the success of the ministry is far from being independent of its character; and in proportion to the amount of qualification which it possesses, we may expect will be, in general, the measure of good which it will accomplish. In accordance with this remark, we find that the character of the ministrations enjoyed by any community, usually furnishes a safe criterion, by which to judge of the prevailing tone of religious feeling and action — to say nothing of intellectual taste and acquirement.

If so much importance is to be attached to the particular character which the ministry may assume, it becomes a matter of vast moment to detect and shun all those influences which are unfavourable to its purity and efficacy. Much the greater part of these are comparatively remote — at least they lie as far back as the college course. We have institutions that we call appropriately “theological seminaries;” but the truth is, our

colleges partake, in no small degree, of this character; for even though theology as a science should scarcely be studied here at all, yet there are innumerable influences bearing with mighty power upon both the intellect and the heart, which are rapidly working out the character with which the sacred office is to be associated. Indeed, so decisive is the influence exerted here, that if I could know, at the close of a young man's college course, precisely what are his physical, intellectual, moral and religious habits, I should think I had the materials from which to form an estimate of the probable amount of respectability and usefulness in store for him.

In selecting a topic, young gentlemen, with which to occupy your attention this evening, I have felt at liberty to ask myself but a single question, viz: What would be most adapted to subserve your interests, as candidates for the christian ministry, and ultimately to subserve the interests of the ministry itself? With this single object in view, I have determined to direct your thoughts to **SOME OF THE DANGERS TO WHICH THE MINISTRY IS EXPOSED FROM THE TEMPTATIONS INCIDENT TO COLLEGE LIFE.** Both the

sacredness of the hour, and the claims of the occasion, forbid any thing like a mere literary exercise; and if the train of thought into which I shall fall, should bear a somewhat more monitory aspect than you had anticipated, I trust you will see the reasonableness of it, in the ensnaring influences which surround you, and the magnitude of the interests which are in jeopardy.

I ought, however, here to premise, that there is nothing in college life, that *necessarily* operates unfavourably to the formation of a character suitable for the ministry. Nay, it admits not of question that college furnishes many important *advantages* for this; and hence we actually find that, from the faithful use of these advantages, many a young man's college course is like the shining light that grows brighter to the perfect day. Still there is here, as every where else, a mixture of evil with good; and even those arrangements which are designed to secure the greatest benefit, intellectual and moral, may be perverted, by a wayward or even indolent spirit, to purposes of unmingled evil. It is the ordinance of God that, wherever in this world of probation

man is, there temptations in some form or other should also be — temptations which, being yielded to, may prove his ruin ; which, being overcome, may exalt his character and brighten his immortal crown.

Commencing with the humblest department of our nature, let me say that there is danger to the ministry from the temptations of college students to trifle with their *physical constitution*. Man, in his present state, exists as a compound being. If it is the mind that constitutes the glory of the man, elevating him far above all inferior orders of existence, still the man is not complete without the body ; and though we admit that the mind will act with greatly increased vigor when it shall have left the body, and that it may even look back upon it as a sort of prison house during this infancy of its existence, yet we are to remember that it will be introduced then to a new state of being, and that material organs will not be needed where material objects are unknown. Certain it is that we have no knowledge of man, either from observation or experience, except as consisting of the material and the immaterial, bound

together by some mysterious tie, and depending in no small degree for his faculties both of enjoyment and activity, on the healthful action of these two opposite principles upon each other. We sometimes speak of the body in a manner that is perhaps scarcely consistent either with the reverence due to it as an exquisite piece of divine workmanship, or with the dependance of the mind upon it for its materials of thought, and its power of successful exertion. I would not venture to speak of the body as a worthless thing, in any circumstances in which we can contemplate it—no, not while it is undergoing the loathsome transition from flesh to dust; for even amidst the horrors of that process, I recognize a seed that shall vegetate, and bloom, and ripen into a harvest of incorruption and immortality.

Now if the mind and body thus reciprocally act upon each other, if the corporeal supplies the organs by which the spiritual performs its appropriate work, then it becomes a matter of great moment that the bodily health should be preserved—of just as great moment as it is that the individual should grow in knowl-

edge and usefulness, and thus fulfil the legitimate end of his existence. And how is this object to be accomplished? Are not diseases God's ministers, that go and come at his bidding; and is not even the highest medical skill often overwhelmed in the conflict with them? Be it so — still it remains true that God has constituted each individual, in a great measure, the guardian of his own health: He has revealed to him the mysteries of his constitution, the laws on which its healthful action depends, so far as is necessary to enable him to watch over it — in short, He has, in respect to the body as well as the soul, set life and death before him, and commanded him to choose life. If he obey the voice of God thus speaking to him through the arrangements of his physical nature, he has a right to expect the blessing of health — if he disobey, infirmity and disease will inevitably wait upon his footsteps. I do not say that there are no exceptions to this order of things; and of course, as man in his present state is essentially mortal, the time must come when no degree of care or effort can any longer keep up the earthly tabernacle:

but during the period which Heaven has allotted to human existence, the amount of health that he enjoys, the length of days that he attains, depends, under God, greatly upon himself. It is because men violate those laws on which God has suspended the health of the body, that the world has so much the aspect of a hospital; and not a small part of the invalids who are either shut up in their dwellings altogether, or only occasionally come into the street, leaning upon a staff, — if they would inquire wherefore it is that they are thus taken out of the walks of active usefulness, and perhaps doomed to an indefinite course of suffering, — could meet no answer more satisfactory, than that they are reaping the reward of their own neglect and folly.

If we look into the ranks of the christian ministry, we shall find this painful result of which I have spoken, realized, to as great an extent, (and I fear the truth would require me to say more,) as in any other profession. Who does not know how frequently it has occurred that young men of high promise, have been obliged, from the apprehension of incipient disease, to relinquish their labours in the

ministry almost as soon as they commenced them; to say nothing of the fact that many, before they had become familiar with the pulpit, have been called to make their home in the sepulchre? Who needs be told how many of us have found it necessary temporarily to leave our charges,—possibly to leave them exposed to the inroads of error or fanaticism,—and to sojourn in foreign lands, for the sake of repairing an injured constitution? Has it not come to pass that there are many great minds in the ministry, who accomplish little for want of physical vigour—some whose whole life is little better than a lingering course of self nursing—who may indeed be retained by their charges, as a matter of compassion, but whose labours are only an apology for the legitimate discharge of ministerial duty? I know that cases like these may occur, and often do occur, in the providence of God, where there has been no culpable delinquency on the part of the individuals concerned; but it cannot be questioned that a large proportion of them have their origin in the neglect of those laws to which God has subjected our physical constitution—neglect

which either had its beginning, or became sadly confirmed, during the college course. Here — perhaps in excessive application — perhaps in the neglect of exercise — perhaps in irregular or imprudent habits of rest or diet, was laid the foundation of diseases which are now in the process of being developed, at the expense of the most promising hopes of ministerial usefulness. God's retributive agency is to be acknowledged in this result. The minister mourns, the church mourns; but where, alas, is the remedy?

Need I say, then, to you, young gentlemen, who have the ministry in view, the whole church has an interest, nay the Head of the church has an interest, even in the physical habits which you are here forming. To Christ and the church you have professed to consecrate yourselves; and in the act of consecration was included the promise that you would labour, to the extent of your ability, in the cause of truth and righteousness. But how will you come up to the spirit of this engagement, if you voluntarily, rashly, diminish your ability to labour, by the premature sacrifice of your health? Say not that you *must*

expose your health in order to maintain your scholarship. You would have no right to aspire to any degree of scholarship that should require such a sacrifice; but the truth is, a due attention to all those habits on which your health depends, is not only consistent with, but conducive to, the highest intellectual improvement;—for the mind will not continue to act with vigour, unless a healthful tone of the body be preserved. *Sana mens in sano corpore.* If, then, you would meet the wishes of your friends who are interested in your future prosperity; if you would answer the reasonable expectations of the church, which hopes ere long to rejoice in your light; if you would be saved from the pain and mortification of being marked as prematurely broken down ministers; nay, if you would secure the greatest amount of intellectual qualification for your work, be scrupulously attentive, during your college course, to whatever concerns your health, and consider it as a sacred duty to guard against every thing that would put it in jeopardy.

I remark, in the next place, that there is danger that the character of the ministry

may suffer from a neglect on the part of college students to cultivate *good manners*.

I am aware that there are those who regard this as of little moment; whose maxim is, "Only show us the substantial qualities of a good man, and it matters little with what manners they may be associated." But this maxim is utterly at war both with truth and wisdom. It is contradicted by the established principles of human nature—nay, even by the experience of those who profess to hold it; for, if you could find a man who was insensible to the influence of manners, you would find one who was at least an anomaly in the race. Believe me, it is not mere intellectual power or moral worth, in which the elements of one's usefulness consist; for if these qualities, noble and praiseworthy as they are, are associated with an offensive exterior, they lose, to the eye of the world in general, more than half their lustre. The reason of this is, that the manners are regarded as the outward expression of the character—an index to the workings of the inward man; and where, from any cause, the external does injustice to the internal, the individual concerned cannot

fail to be the loser. Besides, if the inward feelings give complexion to the manners, the manners in turn exert a powerful influence upon the feelings; and herein partly consists the process by which the mind trains itself either to good or evil.

To no class, I am confident, do these remarks apply with greater force, than to ministers of the gospel. To the cultivation or the neglect of their manners is to be attributed much of the good which they enjoy and accomplish on the one hand, and much of the embarrassment to which they are subjected — of the positive evil which often follows in the track of their efforts, on the other. Suppose a young man at the close of his theological course, to be a candidate for settlement over some intelligent congregation — they will inquire first no doubt concerning his intellectual and moral qualifications; but rely on it, they will not have finished their inquiries, till they have asked concerning his manners; and it is not improbable that what they hear of him in this latter respect, may actually decide the question — so nearly may other things be balanced — whether they will receive him as

their minister. Or suppose him to have become a settled pastor — whether he secures the affection of his people or is regarded by them with indifference or even with disgust — whether he has the ready access to them of a confidential friend in all circumstances, or is looked upon as a stranger who has little interest in their welfare, and whom they care not to approach — whether, in short, he has an agreeable ministry or is pressed continually with difficulties, will depend, if not chiefly, yet in no inconsiderable degree, upon the character of his manners. I will not say that a minister who is greatly lacking in this respect, may not be useful — even eminently useful; for he may possess other qualifications in such extraordinary measure, as to make up somewhat for his deficiency in this; but I do say that, whatever his other qualifications may be, the addition of this could not fail to render him far more acceptable as well as useful in any sphere of ministerial labour.

Now it is during the period of college life that the manners generally receive their fixed

and ultimate direction : what an individual is in this respect when he receives his diploma, he probably will be substantially through the whole period of his ministry. And you cannot reflect a moment without perceiving that there are influences here, adverse to the formation of good manners, on the right hand and on the left. The great familiarity that generally exists within the walls of college, the little responsibility that is felt in regard to personal appearance, the absence of a mother's watchful eye and of a sister's refined and gentle bearing, and I may add, of the influence of female society generally — all these circumstances expose the student to become careless in his manners, if not actually to contract the habits of a clown. And then, on the other hand, an extravagant fondness for mingling in worldly society, aided by excessive vanity and a lack of good taste, may cast the manners into such a mould, that they shall come out wearing the most revolting features of dandyism. I would not care to choose between a clerical clown and a clerical fop ; but if I knew a college student who

was bent upon being either, I would beg him to manifest his regard for the ministry by keeping out of it.

I am the more deeply impressed with the importance of this point, young gentlemen, from being able to contemplate it in the light of actual history; to trace the connection in cases not a few, between the manners of the college student, and the subsequent manners of the minister of the gospel. I remember an individual whose name, when he was in college, was the synonyme of whatever is coarse and clownish; who not only was utterly regardless of all decent usages, but actually gloried in his vulgar habits; whose presence in a gentleman's house was like the ingress of some filthy animal — that man, in an evil hour, resolved upon the ministry as a profession; and in due time he entered it; and he was far from being destitute of talents, and I know not that any one questioned his piety; but the habits which he had contracted and cherished in college, remained with him, till I believe he was actually driven from the profession before the withering frown of public indignation. I remember another whose

manners in college partook too much of worldly levity ; who carried his regard to the forms of polite society so far as to seem like an idolater of fashion ; who would be marked in the crowd for the extravagance of his dress, and his studied conformity to the most rigid etiquette — he, too, became a minister ; but his character in this respect never changed. He was always a clerical dandy. He dressed for the pulpit as another would dress for the ball-room. A portion of his charge congratulated themselves that they had a man of the world for their minister, while at least some of the better portion used to retire from the sanctuary to their closets and weep. Years ago he finished his course ; and I will only say that a thick cloud has gathered around his name.

Take warning, young gentlemen, by examples like these, and let your manners as students, be such as will not hereafter dishonour your character as ministers. Remember that the true source of good manners is right dispositions. Cultivate humility, as that which will lead you to keep your own place, and save you from ostentation and arrogance.

Cultivate self respect, as that which will raise you above every appearance of meanness, and throw around you an air of genuine dignity. Cultivate benevolence, as that which will dispose you to scatter blessings wherever you are, and give to all your deportment an irresistible attraction. Pay all due respect to the forms of society, but let not this be the only element in which you live. Let your intercourse with each other, be it ever so familiar, always be respectful and decorous, and worthy of your character as candidates for the ministry. If greater things than this are required of you, remember that this cannot be dispensed with, without jeopardizing vastly important interests.

I come now to speak of the dangers to the ministry from the temptations of college students to form bad *intellectual* habits.

None but the wildest enthusiasts, the pretenders to immediate inspiration, will deny the importance of a cultivated intellect to a minister of the gospel. It is with the intellect primarily that he has to do in the discharge of the duties of his office; for though his ultimate object is not attained, till the

heart is brought into subjection to the truth, yet the intellect must receive the truth before the heart can feel it; and surely no other than an enlightened and well disciplined mind can be supposed to possess the skill adequate to this high intellectual responsibility; — to leading the minds of men aright on subjects, in respect to which their hearts are naturally wrong. And it makes nothing against this position to say, that some individuals of very limited acquirements have been honoured with extensive usefulness in the ministry; for to say nothing of the fact that we are often misled by appearances in respect to the amount of good that is actually accomplished, we are to bear in mind that these are solitary cases; and that if there is here and there an untrained mind which, from its extraordinary powers or peculiar circumstances, breaks through all obstacles into a course of considerable usefulness, the mass of those who make this experiment prove, by their signal failure, the indispensable necessity of a thorough course of mental culture. And then, too, the general credit of the ministry is concerned in this matter. A weak minis-

try, an ignorant ministry, can never command the respect of the world: while it will paralyze the energies of the pulpit, and thus virtually nullify God's ordinance, those who look on and see how it is degraded, will have no conception of its legitimate power, if indeed they do not actually discredit its divine origin.

And is there not danger that the intellectual character of the ministry may suffer from the want of vigorous application on the part of college students? Temptations to an indolent habit in such a place as this, are, by no means, confined to the low and the vicious: they are shared in common by persons of all descriptions — not excepting even those of an elevated piety. You may be tempted to indolence from the fact of your possessing an unusually cheerful disposition, and becoming, before you are aware of it, the centre of too many social circles; or from having formed too high an estimate of your own powers, presuming upon your ability as a substitute for actual effort; or from yielding unduly to discouragement, because your standing as a scholar is less elevated than you had hoped. It may be said, indeed, that those who have

the ministry in view, ought to be above the influence of such unworthy considerations — and so indeed they ought; but that some of them are not, the college history of each successive year will testify. And the effect of yielding to any of these temptations, is not merely that there is a less amount of intellectual attainment to be carried into the theological course, and ultimately into the ministry, but that there is a habit formed adverse to subsequent application — a habit that will ere long stamp its possessor with the character of an indolent minister.

But it is necessary, in order to the successful prosecution of the ministry, that there should be a habit, not merely of diligent study, but of well directed study — the cultivation not merely of a portion of the faculties, but of all the faculties. The office of a minister puts in requisition the whole intellectual man — the judgment, the memory, the reasoning faculty, the imagination, each has an important part to perform, and if either be neglected, the ministry suffers proportionable loss. Some allowance must indeed be made for different intellectual constitutions; and some respect

no doubt should be had to this difference in the means employed to develop the faculties; but after all, no man is ever properly trained for the sacred office, whose mind has not been developed in something like due proportions;—much less he, whose education has consisted chiefly in the riding of some intellectual hobby. We have had, still have, preachers, who never open their lips in the pulpit, but to illustrate the case to which I refer. When they were in college, they were mathematicians, and nothing else; and now they are a sort of mathematical preachers: if their sermons are as clear, so also they are as cold, as a December night. Or else, during their college course, they eschewed all the more solid branches, and were never satisfied unless they were walking up and down Elysian fields; and now they are hanging wreaths of flowers around the pulpit, and those who go to listen to them, expect to sit and revel amid the sunbeams of a glowing fancy. I do not say that, in either of these cases, the ministry will be entirely powerless; for where divine truth is presented in *any* form, God's Spirit *may* give it effect; but it will certainly lose

much of its power — it will be quite another thing than what Heaven designed it should be.

As the most effectual security against the evil of which I have spoken, let me recommend to you, young gentlemen, to aim at the highest degree of perfection in all the branches that belong to your college course. Say not of one study and another, “I can afford to pass lightly over this, because it can have no bearing upon my success as a minister”— you may not say this of any kind of knowledge; for even though you should not be able *directly* to turn it to account in your future profession, yet there is no species of intellectual attainment but will add to your general weight of character, while the effort by which it is made will quicken and enlarge the intellect itself. The course of study which is here prescribed, has been drawn out by great and far reaching minds; and if you venture to take counsel of your own wisdom, or rather your own inclination, devoting yourselves almost exclusively to some branches, and passing over others as carelessly as will consist with remaining in your class, be assured you offend, not only against the dignity of this institution,

against your obligations to your teachers, but against your own best interests — against the claims of that profession to which you aspire. I would say to one and all of you, make it a matter of conscience to be thoroughly prepared for every recitation; and whatever leisure this may leave you, you may devote to any intellectual pursuits to which your taste and judgment may incline.

Perhaps this kind of delinquency in students is most frequently found in connection with a strong passion for general reading; and in too many instances I fear I must add, light reading. A student comes hither with the most thorough preparation, and at the outset gives promise of even eminent scholarship; but at no distant period, his teachers discover indications of halting, and gradually his standing becomes sadly reduced. And wherein consists the secret of the change? Is it that he is wasting his time upon his bed, or lounging in the apartments of his companions, or devising schemes of sensual gratification? Oh no; the whole secret of it is, that he has a taste for poetry, or novels, or some other species of

light reading — *that* is the leech which, unperceived by his teachers, is drawing away the life blood of his scholarship, his reputation, his usefulness. I have my eye upon an individual now in the ministry, (and no doubt there are hundreds of them,) whose case is exactly that which I have here supposed. Previous to his joining college, and for some time after, he ranked among the very first for talents, for diligence, for apparently sincere and earnest piety. But before the first year of his course was past, his attention to the prescribed studies began to give place to a habit of light reading; and here commenced a decline in scholarship, in devotion, in respectability, and I may add in enjoyment, which continued till he seemed to have become transformed into quite another man. Notwithstanding all this, he unfortunately adhered to his original purpose of entering the ministry; but he has never given out more than a dubious and feeble light. It is not too much to say that his very limited usefulness as a minister, is to be referred chiefly to the inveterate habit contracted in college, of

reading light productions. What young man who has the ministry in view, will venture deliberately to incur such hazard?

There is one more intellectual habit at which I must just hint, as being unfavourable to the prospect of success in the ministry — I mean a habit of intellectual affectation — a habit of thinking and writing darkly upon plain subjects — of conjuring up a fog in which established principles are mistaken for newly discovered truths, only because they are seen obscurely, and out of their right proportions. Think not that I would have the student satisfied to remain forever on the surface of things, or that I would not have him trained to patient and laborious investigation. I would bid him God speed, even in the remotest regions of philosophical inquiry, provided only he keep within the legitimate bounds of human knowledge. What I object to as putting at hazard his success as a minister, is a studied obscurity where the occasion for it does not exist — a love of mystery, if I may be allowed the expression, for its own sake. We have in the ministry at this day some fine examples of great minds that can

move with admirable grace as well as power, in the higher regions of thought ; and though they may sometimes task our faculties in an unwonted degree, yet we are glad to submit to it, for we are always the wiser for having listened to them. But the fact cannot be concealed, that there are others, who, if they do not task our faculties, task our graces — at least the grace of patience, in compelling us to listen to that from which the most earnest attention can elicit no meaning ; who, while they profess to be exhibiting God's truth in some of its remoter connections, are really wandering about in some field of chaos of their own forming, where the light has not begun to be divided from the darkness. If God ever works by such a ministry as this, it only shows his prerogative to accomplish good by evil. But wherever such a case exists, you will in all probability find that the evil had its origin in the cultivation of a false taste during the college course. If you will go to the institution of which the individual was a graduate, and inquire concerning the history of his career, it will be strange if you do not learn *that*, which accounts most satisfactorily

for all the profound and elaborate nonsense that he gives out from the pulpit.

I am sure, young gentlemen, I need not urge you to beware of this miserable affectation. Guard against it by habitually cultivating simplicity both of thought and expression. Ascend as high as you will; sink into the depths as far as you may; but do not get bewildered, especially do not attempt to bewilder others, by dreamy and unintelligible speculations. In the writings of Hall, and Mason, and Webster, and other of the great lights of the world, you cannot find a sentence that does not lie in sunbeams; and if you are ever tempted to imagine that there is dignity in obscurity, study the productions of these matchless intellects, and learn your mistake.

From the intellectual, let me pass to the *moral* and *religious*, habits of students; and if I mistake not, we shall find that the ministry is in greater danger at this point than any other. For it is here especially that its vitality, its power, is centered. An imbecile ministry is not so bad as a corrupt one: the want of proper intellectual qualifications may render it comparatively powerless; but the want of

suitable moral qualities will be likely to convert it into an engine of fearful evil. What then are some of those dispositions, by the cultivation of which college students are in danger of lowering the character, and neutralizing the power, of the ministry?

I may mention, in the first place, a spirit of worldliness, taking the place, it may be, of an elevated tone of religious feeling. That such a change often occurs, will not be questioned by any one who has made much observation on the characters of college students; — that it *should* occur, will not appear strange to any who have much knowledge of the peculiar economy of college life. There are various influences here favourable to the production of it; but I can barely hint at one or two of them. One grows out of the supposed want of time for the regular and faithful discharge of those private duties with which the life of godliness is more immediately connected. The student, at the commencement of his course, is oppressed with perhaps more claims upon his time than he had anticipated: possibly it becomes necessary for him even to trim the midnight lamp, in order

to maintain the standing to which he aspires ; and in these circumstances he finds an apology for relaxing a little from the strictness of his devotional habits, on the ground that his intellectual attainments are all to be consecrated to Christ in the holy ministry ; and with this as a salvo to his conscience, he proceeds step by step, till at no distant period, the scholar has completely thrown the christian into the shade. Another influence not less hazardous, results from the character of the society into which he is thrown. Perhaps, owing to some peculiar circumstances, his intimate associates may be from the ranks of the irreligious ; or else they may be professors of religion who have abjured its spirituality, and who wish to strengthen themselves by adding to their own number ; and as he mingles from day to day with either the one class or the other, how certain is it, unless his face is set like a flint to resist temptation, that he will gradually become undevout and worldly minded — will make shipwreck of both his consistency and his comfort. He flatters himself with the reflection that some allowance in respect to his strictly religious duties,

may reasonably be made for the peculiarities of college life ; and that when he shall have completed his academical course, he shall be prepared to return to his wonted spirituality and strictness ; little imagining that he is forming a habit, that will hold him afterwards, as with a cord of iron, even when he desires to escape from it.

Trace now the effect of a habit of worldliness thus acquired, upon his subsequent course. As the time of his graduation approaches, a question which had been considered as perfectly settled even before he entered college, now urges itself upon him anew — viz : whether he shall devote himself to the ministry or some other profession. He cannot indeed but remember his early vows, the deliberation and earnestness with which he once determined to give himself perhaps even to missionary life ; and possibly the cherished hopes of christian parents and friends, in respect to his future usefulness as a minister of Christ ; and these are reflections that cannot but sit painfully upon his conscience. But then on the other hand, in a self-pacifying spirit which he mistakes for conscientiousness, he reflects

that the ministry has such mighty responsibilities, that it may be unsafe for so feeble a christian as he is to encounter them; and perhaps he has found out that he is the subject of some constitutional tendencies that especially disqualify him for the profession; and on the whole, he arrives at the conclusion that he can serve God and his generation to better purpose in some secular vocation. The truth is, that his spirituality has all fled; and with it his desire to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; and all this perverted reasoning is designed only to conceal from himself the sad reality of his condition. After all, taking the case as it is, no doubt he chooses the better, or rather the least disastrous, side of the alternative. But it may be that he comes to a different conclusion — that, notwithstanding the great change that has come over him, he adheres to his original determination to enter the ministry. Perhaps he relies on the recuperative energy of christian character, taking for granted that when he is brought in actual contact with the duties of the sacred office, he shall become more spi-

ritually minded of course. Or perhaps his views of the ministry are lowered in accommodation to the change in his feelings, and he looks forward to it merely as furnishing a lounging place for indolence, or opening a race course to ambition. At any rate, the worldly minded student turns out to be a worldly minded minister. It costs him no effort to make himself at home in the circles of the gay. The more spiritual duties of his profession, even so far as respects the external act, he evidently regards as mere drudgery. He may be a gifted man; he may be an agreeable companion; he may be courteous and generous and high minded; but the spirit appropriate to the ministry — alas, where is it? and I may add, the *fruits* appropriate to the ministry — alas, where are *they*?

I must not omit to say in this connection, that there are instances in which students enter college with the ministry in view, who, in the progress of their course, not only contract a spirit of worldliness, but become absolutely abandoned, and renounce even the decencies of a christian profession. I know

of a young man who joined one of our colleges a few years ago, on a foundation provided by the charities of the church; and at the time, there was not, to my knowledge, a spot upon his character. As the college was situated in the neighbourhood of a considerable city, it was found at no distant period, that he was in the habit of making frequent visits to the city, and of now and then attending the circus and the theatre; and when some of his christian friends remonstrated with him on the impropriety of such a course, he justified himself on the ground that it was an important means of gaining a knowledge of the world. The several steps in his decline, it is not necessary that I should mark: suffice it to say that his ultimate profession was that, not of a minister of the gospel, but of a common tumbler in the circus; and at the date of my last information concerning him, he was associated with a herd of vulgar mountebanks who stroll about the country as a sort of circulating nuisance. At what a fearful price did that young man gain his knowledge of the world! He is indeed lost to himself, lost to his friends, lost to the

church ; but there is warning in his history which I hope may not be lost upon *you*.

There is danger, again, that the ministry will suffer from the indulgence, on the part of college students, of an unhallowed ambition. Not that I would discourage in the student a laudable emulation — even the desire to make large attainments in comparison with his fellows, provided only that that desire do not partake of a proud or envious spirit, and that it be itself subordinate to the paramount desire of doing good. But the danger is, that there will be kindled up here, even in the bosom of the christian student, a sort of emulation which the spirit of the gospel disowns — an emulation of which strife and vain glory are the leading elements ; and that thus it will come to pass that in the same process of intense application, by which he cheats himself out of some of his most precious privileges, he cherishes within, a viper that is preying continually on the very vitals of his spirituality. This unhallowed temper is perhaps less easily detected than almost any other by the individual who is the subject of it ; but to every other eye, its actings are

most visible; and it mars the beauty of christian character, not less than it lowers the tone of christian feeling.

But here again, see how this spirit which has been cherished during a four years' residence in college, comes out subsequently to curse the ministry. The student, has, perhaps unconsciously, been more than willing to see others sink, that he might rise; and do you think that there is no danger that the minister will be another Diotrophes, loving to have the præminence? Need I say that this spirit has multiplied itself into a legion in our day; and that we have had men all over the church, and in every communion, who have been examples of it? They have mistaken the love of influence for the love of Christ; and have done evil deeds, I had almost said desperate deeds, professedly for the sake of conscience, but really for the sake of fame; and the voice of expostulation has fallen powerless upon their ear, while they have dreamed that a Reformer's glory had already begun to encircle their names. I may say with confidence that the history of a large portion of the evils to which the church

has been subjected, is nothing less than a history of the ambition of her ministers. What candidate for the ministry will not tremble at the thought of contributing to swell this amount of evil?

Let me say further, that there is danger, not only that this spirit of rivalry in college will come to form a permanent element of the character, but that it will beget unkind feelings and unworthy prejudices, that may survive the college course, and be perpetuated to the reproach of the ministry. I have sometimes been surprised at what has seemed to me the unreasonably low estimate that one minister has expressed of another; but the mystery has been entirely cleared up, when I have come to know that they sustained to each other the relation of rivals when they were in college, and that the feelings incident to their rivalry had never worn away. Who does not know how much of the power of the ministry depends upon good fellowship — upon a kindly mutual appreciation — upon a fraternal cöoperation for the accomplishment of its benevolent purposes? How important that nothing should occur between students

that should be adverse to such a result ! And on what fearful responsibility does that student venture, who, during his residence here, receives into his heart seeds, that will yield only a harvest of poison, through his whole ministry ?

I only add, under this general topic, that college students sometimes do great harm to the ministry, by spiritual pride, discovering itself in sanctimonious airs, in extravagant pretensions, and even in an obtrusive officiousness. That no body here may suspect me of being personal, I will go back for my examples of the spirit to which I refer, about a quarter of a century. In a town in which is situated one of our most important colleges, there grew up, under the influence of a few individuals, an association of laymen, the business of whose members was to go forth into the neighbouring towns, and hold private interviews and publick meetings, with a view to rouse both the churches and their ministers to a sense of neglected duty. Many of the college students quickly became associated with the new enterprize ; and some of them, I know, in their zeal, forgot their wisdom,

and even their decency. One of them — a freshman too — I well remember, came on a sort of missionary visit to my own congregation; and the second sentence with which he greeted me was, “Sir, I have come to see what *I* can do towards building up Zion here among you.” Suffice it to say, that that state of things turned out to be any thing but propitious to the best interests of the church. Not a few of those who partook of it most deeply, were, within a moderate period, in the very frigid zone of christianity; while there were some whose later career has been still more dubious and distressing. I have always believed that that cloud, not bigger than a man’s hand, foretold the desolating tempest of fanaticism, that has since swept over many portions of our American church.

There are two points of view in which this spirit in students may be regarded as ominous of evil to the ministry. In the first place, it can hardly fail to subject the pastors of churches among whom they sojourn, to no inconsiderable embarrassment; and I know there have been cases in which its operations especially in the way of dictation, have seemed,

beyond endurance. And then again, if they are to carry this spirit with them into the sacred office, what must be the effect upon their own character and usefulness? What church will open her arms to receive them; or having received them, will be likely to remain satisfied with their ministrations?

Let me caution you then, young gentlemen, against the least approach to this unworthy spirit. Be serious and circumspect, but not sanctimonious or austere. When you begin to take airs of artificial sanctity, be assured that the simplicity and loveliness of christian character are deserting you. Be active in doing good; good to your fellow students; good to all whom your influence may reach; and be not satisfied unless each successive day shall behold some new monument of your fidelity in the service of Christ; but let all your efforts be put forth in the spirit of deference and subordination, of charity and a sound mind. Thus, while your college course will be directly fruitful of blessings to others, it will constitute the appropriate preparation for an honoured and useful ministry.

Having spoken thus at length of the dangers

to the ministry, from the neglect of college students in respect to their health, their manners, their intellectual, moral and religious habits, it might seem perhaps that every important point belonging to my general subject had passed under review. But there is yet one thing more that occurs to me, as too important to be overlooked — I mean the matter of *prudence*. I say, then, in the last place, there is great danger that the ministry will be subjected to reproach from that habit of heedless indiscretion, which there is so much in college that is adapted to foster.

The same general remark applies here that I have already had occasion to make in respect to manners — those who are assembled here are generally of nearly the same age; they have a community of pursuits, and are necessarily brought into intimate relations; and on some accounts they feel less accountableness in regard to what they say and do, than in almost any other circumstances in which they could be placed. How natural that, in such a state of things, they should acquire a loose habit of conversation — I do not mean a habit of uttering things positively wicked, but

things that do not consist with a considerate and delicate regard to propriety. But such a habit as this carried into the ministry, cannot fail to prove a fruitful source of harm, both to him who is the subject of it, and to those with whom he associates. In not a small portion of the cases in which the question is asked, what alienated the affections of a people from their minister, or what separated a minister from his charge, I fear the true answer would be, his own imprudence in respect to small matters.

There is one point connected with the general subject of prudence, to which I must be allowed to advert with a little particularity — I mean premature and indiscreet arrangements on the part of college students in reference to the matrimonial connection. Let no one say that this is a matter that comes only within the jurisdiction of impulse and accident, and that it is in vain to prescribe rules or even offer counsels, where the feelings, after all, will have their own way. Nor let it be said that, if it *must* be introduced, this is not the time or the place for it; — that all lessons touching a matter of so much delicacy

should be privately whispered in the ear, and not blazoned before a publick assembly. My answer to the first of these objections is, that an individual loses his moral agency no more in relation to this subject than any other, and that he is as truly bound to be governed by the dictates of wisdom in the choice of a wife as in the choice of a profession. My answer to the second is, that that would be false delicacy that should lead one whom you had asked to be your monitor on an occasion like this, to feel that his lips must be sealed on a subject of momentous bearing on your future usefulness, merely because it may be surrounded in some minds with light and gay associations. The best way of estimating its importance, is to contemplate some of the numerous facts by which it is illustrated.

A student in the midst of his college course, having the ministry in view, suffers himself to become strongly attached to some gay and fascinating young lady; and without taking counsel of any of his friends, or even of his own judgment, he makes proposals of marriage which result in a speedy engagement. The first visible effect of this movement is in

his declining scholarship; and the next in his declining piety; the secret of which is that there are claims upon his time, upon his thoughts, upon his affections, now, that formerly did not exist. But possibly it may turn out that this is only the beginning of evil. The engagement has reference to a future and somewhat distant period; and who can tell what some of the many days that will pass before that period arrives, may bring with them? Perhaps it may turn out that the feeling which originated the proposal was a mere paroxysm of youthful admiration, and not a settled attachment; and possibly in connection with this discovery is another — that the object of the supposed attachment is utterly unqualified for the responsible station of a minister's wife. And now mark the painful alternative to which he is subjected — he must either recede from the engagement, or he must adhere to it. In the former case, he violates a sacred obligation; he puts in jeopardy perhaps for life the happiness of one, who, however unworthy to be his companion, had deserved no such treatment as this at his hands; he incurs the censure of the commu-

nity at large; in a word, he brings a cloud over his prospects of usefulness; and if he is permitted subsequently to enter the ministry, still this early lapse is never forgotten — he is pointed at as the man, minister though he be, who once dishonourably and cruelly violated a matrimonial engagement. Or suppose he take the latter side of the alternative, and fulfil his engagement, as no doubt he is bound to do, irrespective of the evil consequences to which it may subject him — who can measure the injury to his usefulness, to his comfort, to every earthly interest, which such a step may involve? His wife may be a gay woman, and tempt him into scenes which a minister's presence should never justify; or she may be a weak woman, unable even to appreciate his own vigour of intellect, and subjecting him to mortification in every circle; or she may be an imprudent woman, having a tongue that is obedient to all sorts of impulses, and kindling up many more fires of contention than he can quench. But still she is his wife; and what he has to do is to make the best of those evils which, by his own folly, he has rendered inevitable. He moves from place to

place ; but to every place he carries the source of his trouble along with him. His spirits are depressed, his energies broken, his heart wrung ; but he may not speak of what he suffers even to his most confidential friend ; for what will not a man suffer rather than acknowledge that he is embarrassed, and plagued, and mortified by his own wife ?

You will not understand me, young gentlemen, as intimating that the case which I have now supposed, in all its painful and revolting features, is of very frequent occurrence ; much less that it is the ordinary result of what may be considered premature matrimonial arrangements ; nor am I at all disposed to question that such arrangements, however liable to objection, frequently result in a happy and useful connection. I would say, better, safer, no doubt, in all ordinary cases, that this concern should be postponed to a later period ; but where it is not, it should never be approached but with the most considerate caution. No student who is looking forward to the ministry, should select a companion for life, without a distinct reference to her qualifications as a minister's wife ; and no

attractions whatever should be allowed to stand in place of these for a moment. If it is a matter in which he is primarily interested, and therefore has a right to choose for himself, it is a matter in which the church has a deep interest also, and she has a right to demand that he should choose discreetly.

Nothing now remains, young gentlemen, but that I should suggest two or three considerations, with a view to urge my subject upon your thoughtful and earnest regard.

Allow me to say, then, that the same reason that induces you to think of the ministry as a profession at all, should lead you to aspire to the highest degree of usefulness in it; and of course to guard against all those influences which would interfere with such a result. What led you, my young friend, to form the purpose of giving yourself to this sacred work? I think I hear you answer, "If my heart does not deceive me, it was the desire to glorify God in promoting the best interests of my fellow men." Then, if you are sincere in this, you desire to glorify him to the extent of your ability — to glorify him by rendering your ministry the source of the greatest pos-

sible good. But in order to do this, you must aim at the highest perfection of character; and this you can never do, if you yield to those influences which have now been pointed out to you. Nay, this is not all; for in proportion as you yield to them, you have reason to question the honesty of your purpose in choosing the ministry as a profession — you have reason even to fear that you are a stranger to the renovating power of God's Spirit. But we hope better things of you, young gentlemen, though we thus speak. We will not allow ourselves to doubt that you will aim at the highest standard of intelligence and purity and usefulness. You will keep your eye fixed on Jesus Christ, as at once the pattern of perfection, and the fountain of grace and holiness. You will have no communion with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Remember, further, that the ministry is God's ordinance; and that it must be presumption in the extreme to do any thing, or be any thing, that will impair its efficiency. It is no light thing to pervert the good institutions of *men*, or to interfere in any way with

their success; and he who does this is justly marked as the enemy of his race. But here is an ordinance which God himself hath established, and into which he has thrown the energy of his wisdom, and power, and grace: it is emphatically *the* ordinance by which he designs to reconcile man to God, and thus carry forward the mediatorial work; and who is he that will venture to throw himself in the way of its legitimate operation? Remember that it is possible to do this carelessly, even ignorantly, as well as designedly. You are chargeable with this, if you allow yourselves to cherish dispositions, and form habits, that will unfit you, in any degree, for the ministerial work. You are chargeable with this, at least in a modified sense, if you fail to bring to your work that measure of physical, intellectual and spiritual energy, which is fairly within your reach. Let the thought that you are to be CHRIST'S ambassadors, ever be present to your minds, exciting you to the most thoughtful vigilance, to the most diligent effort. How can you stand up before your fellow men to plead God's cause with their hearts and consciences, how will you stand up

before your final Judge to render an account of your Heaven constituted embassy, if, by your own voluntary delinquencies, you have rendered yourselves incapable of wielding, as you ought, the sword of the Spirit?

Another consideration that deserves to be seriously pondered by you, is, that your ministry is likely to fall into a singularly eventful period — a period that will require ministers of more than ordinary intellectual and spiritual stature. We may not indeed venture to pronounce too confidently upon the future; for the events of the future are, to a great extent, secrets in the bosom of the Unsearchable. If, however, there be any light in prophecy, or any meaning in providence, it is not easy to resist the conviction that an age to be signalized by moral wonders is now opening upon the world. The conflict between the powers of light and of darkness waxes more fierce and terrible every hour; and there are those, and men too who have never passed for fanatics, who believe that Christianity will, before many years, be gathering her triumphs again, from scenes of martyrdom. And what sort of ministers,

think you, will be needed to meet such an exigency as this? No others surely will avail, but your men of might — men on whom a plentiful baptism of the Holy Ghost hath fallen, enriching them with all spiritual gifts — with firmness and greatness of purpose, with strength to suffer as well as to labour, with unshaken confidence in Immanuel's power and grace. But even, if no such exigency as this should arise, still the movements of providence will become more rapid and wonderful; Messiah will be travelling in the greatness of his strength toward his universal reign; and how much of wisdom, of fortitude, of patience, of zeal, of every grace, will be necessary to an intelligent and effective co-operation with him in the accomplishment of his glorious purposes! Suppose the students of our colleges — suppose you, young gentlemen, who are now in preparation for the sacred office, should yield to the temptations against which it has been the design of this discourse to put you on your guard, and in consequence should enter the ministry with comparatively unfurnished minds, with indolent and effeminate habits, with at best an

equivocal claim to christian character—where will be the men to whose wisdom the church in the next generation shall look for counsel, and under whose faithful and skilful teaching she shall be growing in knowledge and in grace—the men who shall stand erect in troublous times, and not count their lives dear to them, if their Master's honour should demand the sacrifice? But here again, I am supposing what I am sure, will not occur. You will take counsel of the spirit of the age, speaking in great events, and in the throes and heavings of Providence for the production of greater still, and will resolve, in the strength of God, to be ready for any difficult service, for any threatening danger, to which he may call you.

And may I not say, last of all, you owe it to this venerable seat of learning, this foster mother of the ministers of Christ, this cradle of the spirit of missions, that you admit this subject to your most considerate and practical regard. I venerate this spot, when I recur to the scenes and the events of which it has been the theatre. Your beautiful grounds seem to me clothed with a deeper enchantment, your

hills and vallies bear a brighter hue of verdure, the very air around me is perfumed with a richer fragrance, when I remember that here were those strugglings of faith, those prayers that could not be denied, in which originated plans of benevolent enterprize, that had the world for their field. And so also I would gratefully and reverently remember that here the arm of the Lord has often been revealed in the new-creating work; that genius and learning have, in instances not a few, come bending within yonder walls to the cross of Christ; and that there has sometimes been occasion in reference to what has passed here, to adopt the prophet's admiring exclamation, "Who are these that fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows?" Could I believe for a moment that this college was in danger of changing its religious character with the present generation of students — of losing that spirit of earnest piety and missionary zeal, for which it has hitherto been distinguished, I would beseech Heaven and earth to help me in an effort to prevent it. I would implore the ocean grave of the lamented Mills to speak. I would try to raise a voice from the

far distant and humble mounds, beneath which Hall and Richards and Harvey repose, and over which the shadows of a Pagan night still brood. I would invoke the shade of the venerable Griffin, whose fervid imagination never kindled into a brighter glow, whose eloquent tongue never gave forth sublimer thoughts, than when he was dwelling upon the past and the future of this institution. Nay, I would almost ask that these voiceless objects around me — these rocks and hills which time has not changed — might become vocal, and render their testimony concerning the lofty purposes, the holy aspirations, of the moral heroes of other days who have lingered among them. But why should I thus expostulate? I hear you say that inanimate nature shall not rebuke you — that the graves of the missionaries shall not rebuke you — that the great and the good whose names hallow your college catalogue, and shine out on the Lamb's book of life, shall be your teachers and guides, instead of your reprovers. Noble resolution! I see you in the strength of it rising up to higher and yet higher attainments in knowledge and holiness, and at length going forth

with complete and burnished armour, to do battle in the cause of Zion's king. I look down the vista of coming centuries, I linger amidst the glories of the millennial age, I plant myself in a vision of faith on yonder fields of light, and I behold your influence extending, till I have no measure with which to reach it; I behold your happiness increasing, till it has become an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

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