

JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Presbyterian Historical Society

---

---

VOL. IX.

JUNE, 1918.

No. 6.

---

---

SHAKESPEARE AND THE METRICAL PSALMS.

BY LOUIS F. BENSON, D.D.

I.

To a student of English poetry whose mind is preoccupied with its æsthetic interpretation, one could hardly propose an enterprise more futile, not to say vexatious, than the attempt to seek any points of contact between the works of the great dramatist who holds us all beneath his spell and those crude metrical versions of the Scripture Psalms bearing the names of Sternhold and Hopkins, which in Shakespeare's time were bound in at the end of Bible and Prayer Book and sung by the people in the parish churches of England.

To a student with his mind so bent any attempt to bring the dramas and the Psalms into conjunction would seem as irrelevant as to remark that Mount Washington and some little Scotch-Irish Presbyterian church both happened to lie within the bounds of the State of New Hampshire. We know quite well what the literary critics used to say of "Sternhold and Hopkins," when the peculiar motive that originally gave them birth had begun to wane, while yet the rude strains of the Psalms continued to afflict their sensibilities as often as they went to church. We know how the progress of culture has gradually exalted the old playwright into literary supremacy and relegated the old Psalm writers into the obscurity of the Dunciad.

## HOW PRINCETON SEMINARY GOT TO WORK.

BY PROF. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, DD., LL.D.

The "Plan" under the provisions of which Princeton Theological Seminary was founded a hundred years ago, is a great document. With comprehensive sweep it draws the outlines of a great institution, and it fills in the details with the firmest of modeling. The Seminary has been trying to grow up to it ever since; and has not yet quite accomplished it. At first, of course, it was all on paper. The beginnings of the actual Seminary were necessarily very small. And the first steps by which it worked its way upwards toward the fulfillment of its ambitious "Plan" were slow and tentative. Some of them are even a little puzzling as we look back upon them after the lapse of a century.

It is already puzzling, for example, why the Seminary should have opened its doors and begun its work on August 12 of that fateful year of beginning. The "Plan" under which it was established provided that the scholastic year should begin in November and should consist of two sessions, a winter session six months long and a summer session three. "There shall be two vacations in the Seminary, of six weeks' continuance each, in every year. The spring vacation shall commence on the Monday immediately preceding the third Thursday of May. The vacation in the autumn shall commence on the first Wednesday of October." The first session of the year was to run, then, from the middle of November to the middle of May, and the second from the first of July to the first of October. Why, then, the founders of the Seminary did not wait quietly until the middle of November to begin—it was not so far off—but actually opened the Seminary on August 12—in the middle of the last session of a normal scholastic year, according to their Constitution—is something of a riddle.

The effect of this premature opening, naturally, was very confusing. And this confusion was greatly increased by the habit which was at once formed of receiving new students at

the opening of every session, that is to say, twice a year. The admission of students rested in the hands of the Board of Directors; and the Board (after the first year) acted through a committee which it created May 18, 1813. Among the "Standing Rules" adopted on that day are these: "15. The Board shall triennially choose a committee of three of its members, namely, two ministers and an elder, which shall be styled the committee of admission. 16. It shall be the duty of the committee of admission to receive all applications from students for admission into the Seminary, during any session of the Board; to examine the testimonials of such applicants; and to lay before the Board a faithful account of everything pertaining to them and bearing on the question of admission which they may judge expedient." The committee thus appointed did the work assigned to it up to the summer session of 1815, when the matter of admissions was delegated to the Faculty.

At the opening of the first session, August 12, 1812, the Board acted directly in the matter of the admission of students, and records in its Minutes: "The following persons, viz., William Blain, John Covert, and Henry Blatchford, applied to be admitted as students in the Seminary. The Board, having received the testimonials in their behalf required by the constitution, agreed to receive them." The following resolution was also passed: "Whereas there may be a number of students desirous to participate in the benefits of the Theological Seminary, who may already have made considerable progress in their Theological Studies under the care of Presbyteries, or whose circumstances may be otherwise peculiar, it was on motion resolved that the consideration of these cases be referred to the committee appointed to assist the Professor." This is the only provision that appears in the Minutes of the Board, which could even seem to touch on the admission of students in the intervals between the meetings of the Board. From the beginning, however, students were admitted in these intervals; and, indeed, after the first admissions of August 12, 1812, only in these intervals. For the Board met stately at the close and not at the beginning of the sessions; and

students were admitted normally, of course, only at the beginning of the session. The work of admitting them was also apparently done by the committee of admission, and not by the committee to assist the Professor. A straggler was admitted on August 22 (Leverett I. F. Huntington) and, then, at the opening of the winter session, November 18, William A. McDowell; 21 James H. Parmele; 26 Henry R. Weed and Halsey Wood; 27 Benjamin F. Stanton.

During the winter session of 1812-1813 there were nine students in attendance. Four of these had been admitted at the opening of the summer session (middle of August), and five at the opening of the winter session (middle of November). Yet they were all in one class and received their instruction together. One of those who had entered in November, to be sure—William A. McDowell—had been admitted, in accordance with the resolution of August 12, to advanced standing. He had been graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1809 and had passed a large part of the intervening time in the study of theology. He had been licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Brunswick and had left the Seminary before the end of the session (May, 1813). His presence in the class was scarcely calculated to mitigate the difficulty of welding the two groups of students of which it was composed into a scholastic unit.

This difficulty was materially increased by the introduction into the class in the summer of 1813 of yet a third group of students. For the summer session of 1813 was counted a part of the first year. We read in the Board's Minutes of May 25, quite simply, "of that part of the first year which is past." The five new students who were matriculated June 28, July 1, 5, 9, were simply incorporated into the existing class, the Professor merely reporting to the Board (Minutes of September 30): "Those who entered the Seminary this session have been added to the class previously existing and have pursued the same studies with them, except that, in the Hebrew, it was necessary to form a new class." When this first class had completed its first year, therefore, there were some of them who had pursued their studies for three sessions, aggregating eleven

months; some of them for two sessions, aggregating nine months; and some of them for only one session, of only three months. They all, however, appear to have had good standing and they certainly were advanced together to the next class. It seems, however, that no student was "graduated" who had not remained three full years in the Seminary and had not completed the full course offered to the students. That was the provision of the "Plan," and was apparently lived up to in practice: at least all the early "graduates" belonged to the group of students who had attended the Seminary for two sessions in their first year.

This confusing jumbling of men of differing attainments in one class, it will be observed, was not (or only partly) due to exigencies attending the putting of the enterprise on its feet. It was inherent in the absurd provision by which students were received into the Seminary regularly twice a year—at the opening of both winter and summer sessions. Not only the first class that entered the Seminary but every class that followed it was, therefore, affected by it. Every first-year class consisted of two groups, one of which received nine and the other only three months of instruction. This might be interpreted as treating six months of the first year's residence in the Seminary as negligible. We feel little wonder when we find the Professors complaining that the students exhibited a tendency to treat the remaining three months as negligible, too. Many students, they report, spent only a small portion of that session at the Seminary. That such a scheme could be worked at all is probably due to the very miscellaneous character of the curriculum administered in the first year. Dr. Alexander taught the students the first year of the Seminary's existence, the Hebrew language, Patriarchal and Mosaical Institutions, Jewish Antiquities, Scriptural Chronology and Geography, Biblical History, Connection between Sacred and Profane History, and between the History of the Old and the New Testaments, the Greek of the Gospels, with a select number of Campbell's Critical Dissertations, along with much analytical study of the English Bible. He met his class only once a day, and it is likely that this long list of sub-

jects was so strung out through the succession of weeks that any section or sections of it could be separately studied without prejudice to any whole.

The process of simply incorporating newly entering students into the existing class could not go on indefinitely; and it was, indeed, contemplated from the beginning that a progressive course of study of three years' length should be developed. When the new matriculants of the winter session of 1813 came upon the scene, therefore, eleven in number (the whole attendance at the end of the session was nineteen, against thirteen of the preceding summer session), they were formed into a second first-year class. The Professors simply report to the Board at its spring meeting (May 17, 1814): "It was found necessary at the commencement of the present session to form a second class, which was made up of such students as yet had made no progress in theological studies." The way the matter is phrased in the order of the Faculty itself is this: "All those who had entered the Seminary previously to the commencement of the present session"—that is, the winter session of 1813-1814—"shall be considered as belonging to the First Class; the remainder to the Second Class." The First (upper) Class devoted itself to the study of Biblical Criticism, Didactic Theology, and Ecclesiastical History. The Second (lower) Class was employed in the study of the Hebrew and Greek Languages, Jewish Antiquities, Biblical History, and Scriptural Chronology, "and in reading and analyzing the Scriptures in regular order," that is, what we should now call "the English Bible."

At the meeting of the Board at the end of this (the second) year, September 27, 1814, the Faculty—for Dr. Miller had been working at Dr. Alexander's side, though not at his full strength, since near the beginning of this year (to be exact, since December 30)—memorialized it as follows: "If any considerable number of students should enter the Seminary at the commencement of the next session"—that is, of the winter session of 1814-1815—"it may become necessary to form a *third* class, consisting of those who have made no progress in the course of study pursued in the Seminary"—that is to say of

the new entrants with the exception of any who might enter to an advanced standing. "In this case, it will not be practicable for each class to recite every day, without great disadvantage both to the Professors and pupils. Under these circumstances the Professors take for granted that the Board will approve of their making such arrangements with regard to recitations as may be found in practice most conducive to the benefit of the pupils until the choice of a third Professor shall render it practicable to afford to each class a recitation every day." In response the Board resolved that "an increase of the classes in case of an increase of Theological Students will be indispensable"; but left "the arrangements as regards recitations" "to the discretion of the Professors." The third class was, therefore, duly formed, and (we read) "the classes are now denominated First, Second, and Third," the order of enumeration being from the highest downward.

The distribution of the studies between the three classes was as follows. During the winter session, the First (highest) Class studied Didactic and Polemic Theology, Ecclesiastical History, and Church Government; the Second (middle) Class, Scriptural Chronology, Sacred Geography, Biblical and Ecclesiastical History, and Didactic Theology; the Third (lowest) Class, the Hebrew Language, Scriptural Chronology, Biblical History, and Jewish Antiquities. During the summer session, the First Class studied Pastoral Care and the Composition and Delivery of Sermons; the Second Class, Didactic Theology and Ecclesiastical History; and the Third Class, the English Bible, Biblical History, and the Original Languages of Scripture, with some of Campbell's Dissertations. In subsequent years this general schedule was generally, although not precisely, repeated. There were thirty-six students in attendance during the winter session, thirty-two of whom held out to the end, and the attendance in the summer session was approximately the same.

It will have been observed from the Faculty's memorial to the Board which has just been cited, that each class had been accustomed to have just one class exercise a day: an arrangement which gave to each of the two Professors also just one

classroom exercise a day. This was evidently held to be the ideal arrangement. It was feared that it could not be maintained with three classes and only two Professors. A third Professor had been contemplated from the beginning, and it is not impossible that the Professors' memorial was in part intended to hasten his advent. It was not until some years later (1820), however, that this additional instructor came, in the person of young Charles Hodge. Meanwhile the two Professors on the ground adjusted the work for the enlarged number of classes so as not to wound their ideal of the proper measure of a Professor's labors. They maintained the principle of just one hour a day for each Professor, and in order to maintain it reduced the classroom work of the students to four hours a week apiece—instead of six hours as heretofore—assigning each of the three classes to each Professor two hours weekly. Here is the schedule of the classroom work for the year 1814-1815 (and later)—the symbols A and M standing for Drs. Alexander and Miller, respectively:

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
First Class.	M	A		A	M	
Second Class.	A		M	M		A
Third Class.		M	A		A	M

We receive a very strong impression that the students of the opening years of the Seminary were in no great danger of being overworked.

There were distractions, to be sure, which interfered with their labors. When an epidemic of sickness broke out in the college, one of the Seminary students gave himself with such assiduity to nursing the sick, that Dr. Alexander expressed doubt whether he really remained a student in the Seminary. It was war-time; and students were called off by the authorities to receive military training and stood in danger of being summoned to actual service. The Faculty complains of this in 1814 and joyfully reports in 1815 that the legislature had passed an exemption act. It proved difficult to keep the students through their final year. Presbyteries had an irri-

tating way of licensing them to preach in the latter part of the winter session—and off they went to charges and left the latter part of their final year unaccomplished. The Faculty report to the Board, May 15, 1815: “Within a few weeks eight of the pupils of the Seminary have been licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbyteries to which they respectively belong. How many of them will continue in the Seminary until they shall have finished the prescribed course is yet uncertain.” Next year they had nine to report and they enter a strongly worded protest against the Presbyteries’ doings and beg that the evil be abated; in response to which the Board merely says nothing can be done.

We do not know whether we may properly speak of those who thus left the Seminary prematurely, as failing “to be graduated.” There does not seem to be anything in the Minutes of either the Board of Directors or the Faculty about “graduation.” We read only such language as this, in the Faculty’s report to the Board at its meeting of September 26, 1815: “A part of that class”—that is of the First Class—“having passed through the whole course of study, and having remained through the whole length of time prescribed for such a course in the constitution, will be ready to undergo their final examination at the present meeting of the Board.” We hear of these students being examined, as we hear of the other students being examined; and we hear of their examination being approved, as we hear of the examinations of other students being approved. We hear of the Board’s dismissing the students for their six weeks’ vacation as usual. This was always a somewhat formal function. Thus we read in the Minutes of the Board for September 29, 1813, at the close of the first academic year: “The students of the Seminary appeared, and after an address and prayer by the President of the Board, were dismissed and required to return in six weeks from this time.” We hear, however, of nothing more than this at the close of the third academic year. If there were any “graduating exercises” they have not been recorded. Surely something took place which amounted to a “graduation.” The students who had accomplished the prescribed work of three

years' study must have received in some way or other the "certificate of approbation" which the "Plan" expressly requires should be given to them; and which indeed the Board reports to the General Assembly had been given to them (Minutes of the Board of May, 1816, and again of May, 1817; Minutes of the General Assembly from 1818 on). But there does not seem to be any record of their being given. Perhaps they were put under the plates at breakfast time on "graduation" morning; or Dr. Alexander handed his informally to each student when he called to say good-by—or Dr. Miller, since he was the Clerk of the Faculty. There is no record whatever of a formal "graduation" scene; the curtain drops silently down as the first class which completed its full course of study in the Seminary (there were four members of it) made its exit.

There is an odd phrase in the Faculty's report to the Board of their granting certificates to the first "graduates" which may or may not be significant. "And through the year," it says—"through the year the following students, having finished the course prescribed in the Plan, have received certificates from the Professors of their having finished the regular course, viz., John Covert, Jun., Henry R. Weed, Halsey Wood, and Leverett I. F. Huntington." Does the phrase "through the year" mean that the certificates were not all given at one time? One would scarcely think so, as these men all "completed their time" at the end of the summer session of 1815. Yet we know so little of the minor facts! One thing we do know, however, from this and other notices—the conferring of the certificates was a matter that belonged to "the Professors"; the Board did not meddle with it except to serve as the medium for communicating the fact to the Assembly. The examinations were held, however, by the Board. There has been a precise reversal of this in later years.

There is one item in the Faculty's report to the Board in the spring of 1816 which we must mention on pain of leaving our account of how the Seminary got to work fatally incomplete. It is given in the following words: "Since the last meeting of the Board"—that is, the meeting of September,

1815—"the Professors, besides the Sabbath Evening Lectures which they have for a considerable time maintained for the benefit of the pupils, have thought it their duty to employ a part of each Sabbath afternoon in serious conference with the students on subjects relating more immediately to experimental religion." There is recorded here the origin of the famous Princeton "Conferences" which for a hundred years maintained their place as the center of the religious life of the Seminary. There was from the beginning a preaching exercise on Sabbath forenoon in "the College Hall," which the students of both institutions attended, the preachers being drawn in rotation from the Faculties of both. This joint preaching service was maintained until 1826, when the Seminary set up a separate Sabbath-morning service of its own, at first in "the Oratory" of the "Seminary Building" and, after a chapel had been acquired (1834), in it. The "Sabbath Evening Lectures" spoken of in the Faculty's report were those remarkable sermons inaugurated by Dr. Alexander, as it seems during the first year of the Seminary's life, which set the whole town on fire with religious enthusiasm. They were delivered first in Dr. Alexander's own house to the students of the Seminary and a few invited guests—as many as could find place in the restricted space. They were then removed to a room fitted up for the purpose in the College Building and thrown open to the public—whereupon they were driven by the crowds pressing in to the Refectory, the largest room in the College. After a few years they were given up and so far as the Seminary was concerned absorbed into the "Conferences."

These "Conferences" were instituted, it will be seen, in the fourth year of the Seminary's life—not in time to benefit the first class which it sent out. They kept the fire burning on the altar for a hundred years. The same zeal was not shown, we are sorry to report, in the matter of daily prayers. The "Plan" prescribed prayers morning and evening, both to be conducted by a Professor. Prayers were at once instituted morning and evening—both conducted by a student. Shortly afterwards the Professors undertook the conduct of evening prayers in rotation, while morning prayers were committed

to the care of the students; and so it remained for a hundred years. Recently evening prayers have been abolished and the Professors conduct in rotation morning prayers. In so simple a matter, the Professors have never found it convenient just to obey the "Plan": "what is the Constitution among friends?"

The Seminary was obviously still in its infancy when its first class left it. We cannot say, "left its walls," for the Seminary as yet had no walls. It was still doing its work in the classrooms of the College in accordance with the engagement by which it was induced to come to Princeton. Its Faculty even as at first projected was still incomplete. Its proposed curriculum was still taught only in fragments. Its students were growing in number—they were now running in the thirties—and let us hope, also, in diligence, though they were still unhappily attending the instructions of the Seminary with a certain desultoriness. But its machinery had been set in motion and was now running smoothly with a directing energy throbbing through it which promised everything for the future. It had as yet done no more than get to work. But it had got to work.