

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

NO. 40.—APRIL, 1897.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

“WHATSOEVER is spoken of God, or things pertaining to God, otherwise than the truth is, though it seem an honor, it is an injury. And as incredible praises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed, lest, in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it hath most abundantly to be less reverently esteemed.”¹

Thus wrote wise old Richard Hooker some three hundred years ago. And multiplied experience since his day has fully endorsed his observations. Nothing has ever been gained by the friends of the Bible by the assumption of false or unnecessary positions, and at the present critical stage of the battle for and against the supremacy of God's word, much, very much, is to be lost by such manœuvering. History abundantly shows how bad tactics, the deep and continuous error of Christian apologetics, has once and again compelled retreat before the sharp onslaughts of the foe, with confusion, and doubt, and dismay as the results. Inexcusably, often, has the Bible been put in a false place by “attributing to it more than it can have.” Subsequent defenders have always felt the serious disadvantage of the well-meant but ruinous policy. Finding themselves at the very outset in an untenable position, their first move was necessarily a retreat, to their own discomfiture and the jubilation of their opponents. We are even now learning something of the risk involved in relying upon argu-

¹ *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book II., Section 8.

III. THE DECLINE OF MINISTERIAL SCHOLARSHIP.

It has been often and justly said that next to our scriptural creed and the spiritual energy diffused among us by the Holy Ghost, the chief glory and power of the Presbyterian Church are in its educated ministry.

This prestige we are losing. One general cause of this deterioration is an unwise eagerness to increase mere numbers, and thus to overtake our destitutions. As to this increase, our presbyteries look too much at the *quantum* and too little to the *quale*.

This weakness appears in two ways, of which one is too much facility in adopting unfit candidates; and the other is the frequent licensure and ordination of men without the education required by our laws, under a supposed provision for "extraordinary cases."

I. The prevalence of this illegal practice cannot be better described than in a recent essay in this QUARTERLY by the Rev. Prof. T. C. Johnson, of Union Theological Seminary, in Virginia. His portraiture of the abuse is equally trenchant and just. It asserts that the instances disapproved by him are becoming numerous, and are illegal and causeless. Their general aspect may be thus stated: That the brief provision for extraordinary cases in our constitution is perverted to cases which are not extraordinary in either native talent, mental culture, or Christian devotion, for remitting to them nearly all requirements of the law as to general education, knowledge of the classics and knowledge of the original languages of Scripture. The conception on which the presbyteries are acting is this: That our constitution means to provide for introducing into our ministry any men of zeal and fair Christian character without requiring of them the education and mental culture demanded of our other ministers by the law, because such candidates deem it difficult or impracticable for them to acquire such scholarship; and all this upon the supposition that diligence, zeal, practical good sense, and some gift of fluent speech are to supply lack of learning in this class of ministers, most distinctly not ex-

traordinary. It is the purpose of this essay to give an absolute denial to this conception. We assert that it has no place whatever in the meaning and intent of our constitution, but is a sheer perversion of it.

A very brief and simple, but sufficient, proof of this position appears in this fact: that all "extraordinary" things must be rare in their several classes. Julius Cæsar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Stonewall Jackson were extraordinary commanders; but there were very few Cæsars, Napoleons, or Jacksons. King David, Homer, Shakespeare and Milton were extraordinary poets; there has been but one of each. Now, it is manifest, that upon the system our presbyteries are pursuing in these licensures, this class of ministers will be numerous, and therefore not extraordinary. The path into our ministry opened by this perversion of the law is easier than the legal path; and there is nothing to prevent its being more numerously trodden than the right, strict way. But since the provision found in our law is for "extraordinary cases," it can be properly applied only to a few.

The usage of our church at and after the days of its great law-givers condemns the present abuse. The men licensed and ordained by them under this clause were totally different from those in whose favor it is now extended. A fair instance may be found in that eminent pastor, Dr. James Wilson, who was a cotemporary of Dr. Archibald Alexander, in the early part of this century, in one of the city churches of Philadelphia. He had been an eminent and learned lawyer in that city. When a married man, and approaching middle life, he forsook his lucrative profession to preach the gospel. Here was an extraordinary case. He was already a man of liberal, classical education. He had also gained special mental culture in the study and mastery of another great science, the law, very analogous to the science of divinity as an organ of mental discipline. In the practice of this profession he had acquired practical wisdom, knowledge of men, and the talent of command. His trained intellect speedily added to his acquirements the special learning of the theologian, by a course of private study. Therefore, the Presbytery of Philadelphia properly made his an extraordinary case, because he already had either the

identical acquirements of the educated pastor, or the full virtual equivalent thereof, not because they would have entrusted the ministry to any common man, devoid at once of those acquirements and of every fair equivalent for them.

But let us examine this provision, as it lies in our constitution. I shall proceed upon that principle of exposition which all jurists admit, that each article of a law must be interpreted in accordance with that purpose and scope which the law announces for itself. The only allusion to extraordinary cases is found in our *Book of Church Order*, Chapter VI., Section VI., Article VI. It is in these words: "No candidate, except in extraordinary cases, shall be licensed unless he shall have completed the usual course of academical studies, and shall also have studied divinity at least two years under some approved teacher of theology; and whenever any presbytery shall see reason to depart from this rule, it shall always make a record of the fact upon its minutes, with the reason therefor." And this little exception is absolutely all which our constitution contains giving seeming authority to the present licentious usage! Here is an inverted pyramid with a vengeance, a large practice resting upon a very narrow apex. It lies upon the face of these whole fifth and sixth sections (for the trial and ordaining of ministers, and for the trial and licensure of probationers) that their design is to exact of all Presbyterian ministers thorough education both in classical and academic literature, and in the special dead languages and sciences of biblical theology. No particular article, therefore, should be so interpreted as to exempt any minister from these requirements. Particulars are designed to *define* the general scope of the law; they cannot, with honesty, be so interpreted as to *contradict* it. But let us look at Article IV. of Section VI.: "The presbytery shall try each candidate as to his knowledge of the Latin language and the original languages of the Holy Scriptures. It shall examine him on mental philosophy, logic and rhetoric; on ethics; on the natural and exact sciences; on theology, natural and revealed; and on ecclesiastical history, the sacraments, and church government." The law is imperative, and its application universal—to "each candidate."

Now, let us add another principle of our constitution, the parity

of the ministry. This is, perhaps, our most fundamental trait. We recognize three orders of scriptural church officers, ministers or preaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons; but between different ministers we jealously deny distinctions of orders. Must not this equality of powers and functions imply substantial equality of qualifications? Does it bear telling that such a constitution designs to provide for two different orders of qualifications; and, worse than this, to provide the greater privilege for the less qualified? Another fatal objection to such a construction is found in Section V., which provides for the trying and ordaining of ministers. According to our constitution, a licentiate is not a minister, nor even a presbyter, he is but a layman, on whom the presbytery has seen fit to bestow, in the exercise of its discretion, a temporary probation in the sacred art of preaching, which probation is not a franchise, but a mere privilege, vesting no right in the candidate, which the presbytery may not withdraw without judicial process at its own discretion. Such licensure is but a preparatory step of a humbler and inferior grade, leading towards ordination, which is the high and all-important process creating the presbyter and minister, and solemnly vesting in him the franchises and rights of the offices. Surely, if our constitution designs to make two classes of ministers, equal in right but created by two different processes, a higher and a lower, it must have introduced this provision into this supreme place in its laws, its rules for ordination. But in the whole section there is neither jot nor tittle of such provision. All reference to the extraordinary cases has dropped absolutely out! Presbyteries are not advised, but commanded, to examine all applicants for ordination upon the same list of qualifications. And this list is substantially the same with that required of fully qualified licentiates in Section VI. It is to be noted that the rules of ordination expressly require of all applicants a knowledge of the Latin, New Testament-Greek and Hebrew, which are the very branches of learning which our presbyteries now remit, under their abusive construction, to their "extraordinary cases."

We claim that this exposition of the law is conclusive against the present usage. What, then, is the amount of privilege which

the law really designs to extend to the extraordinary cases in Section VI., Article VI.? We strenuously affirm that it is only this: The candidate who possesses the extraordinary intellectual and spiritual qualifications, acquired in a secular career, is allowed to stand his examination, and if qualified, to receive immediate licensure, without being required to study divinity two whole years under some approved divine. But the presbytery is commanded to examine him upon all the studies which are required of inferior and younger students. Such is the whole extent of the provision. Its *rationale* is simply this: If a godly man has already gotten all the qualifications which are required of younger and inferior men by reason of extraordinary talents, diligence and mental culture; *i. e.*, if he already has the classical knowledge, the philosophy and logic, the ethics, the sciences, physical and exact, the New Testament-Greek and Hebrew, the didactic theology, the church history, sacraments and church government, which ordinary men can only acquire in college and seminary, then to this gifted man presbytery shall remit the requirement of spending these years over again in college and seminary to acquire what he already possesses, lest it should make a useless waste of precious years out of an already matured life. Because the law aims at the substance, and ceases to demand the form after this form has become useless. That is all! And even this small concession is so jealously guarded that the presbytery is required to make a special record of that small concession and of the grounds which justified it.

That the present usage is erroneous will be equally proved by the argument from experience. This evidence will be found in larger part, in the future, because the usage has grown so much in recent years that the full harvest of its bad effects has not yet had time to ripen; but an honest examination of the cases will show that the usage is lowering the credit of our ministry. It is partially spoiling the career of good men as pastors, who, if firmly and kindly required to make full preparation, might have had a life-long tenure of good credit and usefulness. But as it is, these are half spoiled. Their popularity and influence speedily fail, because based upon superficial foundations; they pass frequently

from charge to charge until some of them become virtually "dead heads" and others drop back out of the ministry.

Here I wish to bear the emphatic testimony of a long experience to that result which Dr. Johnson's sagacity foresees from this and all our other relaxations of strict and honest trials for office. The spectacle of all this looseness discourages, disgusts, and alienates from the ministry young men of high aspiration and principle and honest purpose; but this is precisely the kind of young men we need in our ministry. To those who do not know human nature it may seem paradoxical that the prize whose winning is arduous should excite and attract many aspirants, and these of the noblest mettle, while the prize which is too easily won appears to them valueless and paltry. But facts prove that this is a fixed law. Archbishop Whately held for a number of years a professorship of logic in the University of Oxford. There were annual examinations upon logic, to which a university honor was attached. For a long time this examination was so loosely held that nearly all who stood it won the honor. What was the result? The honor became contemptible in the eyes of the Oxford students, until scarcely anybody cared to stand for it. Then, under Dr. Whately's impulse, the University senate reversed its plan; the examinations were made thorough, and the grade was fixed so high that only a few of the best logicians could win the honor. At once the number of applicants began to increase! When I was a young college student, the University of Virginia had this just reputation, that its courses of instruction were thorough, its examinations full and long, and their grades so strict and high that only the best scholars won through. The consequence was, that the students of the college who cared anything for scholarship cherished the most eager desire to get into that University and to win its degree; and I do know that the fact that its honors were so hard to win was the very thing which piqued this aspiration in us. The year I took my degree of M. A., four out of two hundred and fifty students won this distinction; some years there was only one. When I was elected professor of church history in Union Seminary (May, 1853), it had eleven students. In 1860-'61 it had thirty-eight students; and

some years after the war it had more than seventy. The improvement in the grade of students was almost equal to that of the numbers. These were the years which put into the field that body of ministers which has given the splendid impulse to the synods of Virginia and North Carolina which they still enjoy. This powerful attraction of better material into our ministry was synchronous with the following well-known change in the Seminary, that its courses of instruction were made more extensive and difficult, that a system of strict examinations was enforced, that a seminary certificate meant more, and that most of the presbyteries became more exacting in their trials for licensure. What does this coincidence mean? Let the seminaries and the presbyteries have but the nerve and integrity to practice on this principle, and they will see the ranks of their candidates filled by young men as much better as they will be more numerous.

II. The second means now fashionable for deteriorating the true education of Presbyterian ministers is the multiplication of courses and professors in some of our theological seminaries. This will strike many of our readers as paradoxical. They will exclaim, Surely more workers will give us a more finished work! Surely, when the professors are multiplied there is more division of labor, each professor is able to specialize and enrich his course more than when there were fewer laborers, the *curriculum* of studies must be extended and improved, and the result must be better and wider scholarship in the students. This hope is plausible, but it is fallacious. The general scholarship and true mental culture of ministers is declining just in proportion as seminary endowments and faculties are growing. We assert that we have here a true case under the old adage: "Too many cooks spoil the broth." Seminary education is expanded upon the surface; but it becomes correspondingly superficial. Its result is an ostentatious smattering of many specialties, with a temper more conceited and less humble and manly, without any deep acquaintance with the great masters of theological thought of previous generations and the great problems of theological science. The church's board is seemingly decked for the intellectual feast with a larger array of plate, in broader and more glittering pieces; but there is

little solid silver; they are mainly cheap German silver electrotyped with a thin film of the precious metal. The motives which have prompted Presbyterian millionaires to give huge endowments to seminaries, and boards of trustees to multiply professorships, are plausible and pious. They say to themselves: It must be right to serve Christ with our most precious things. His providence has given us this large wealth; we dedicate large parts of it to these schools for training his ministers. The great schools of secular learning in this and other countries are receiving huge endowments, have numerous faculties and numerous and specialized courses. Our schools of sacred learning shall keep pace with them; our Lord's spiritual commonwealth shall be adorned with all the same glories which magnify the secular sphere. These men forget there is a reason which partly justifies large endowments and numerous professorships in a university which has no application to a theological school; the university (*universitas*) by its very name engages to give instruction in all the varied branches of mental culture requisite for a highly civilized society; the theological seminary undertakes to instruct only in one sharply-defined department of the general culture. They make a mischievous mistake just parallel to that which they make in ostentatious church architecture. They exclaim, Surely Christ deserves to be served with our richest gifts! So they build a city church at the cost of a quarter of a million of dollars, overloaded with pretentious ornamentation, entailing after a little, very expensive repairs, loading the congregation with a debt which is a millstone around its neck for a generation; while their building is found to be really in very bad taste, as soon as the vulgar craze of the day has gone by. Whereas, if that company of Christians really had the quarter of a million for the Lord, this is the thing they should have done: They should have given the two hundred thousand to missions and church extensions, where money is so sorely needed; and with the remaining twenty-five thousand they should have done what the Tabb-street Church of Petersburg, Va., did, viz.: built themselves a large, solid, seemly, tasteful church, with the best acoustic properties of any auditorium in America. This admirable sanctuary cost just twenty-three thousand dollars. Surely

it ought to be good enough for any true followers of the "carpenter's son," however rich.

I have said there is a close analogy between the professional preparation of the lawyer and the theologian. Both courses of study are special and professional, being supposed to follow the acquisition of a good general education. Law and theology are both high, moral sciences. The thorough mastery of them requires also classical learning and a good acquaintance with history, logic, and ethics. Now, the greatest law schools in America have never thought that they needed more than two or three professors; many of them have only one. The law school of Harvard had perhaps two, when, under Justice Storey, its reputation was greatest. The law school of the University of Virginia had for thirty years one professor, but those were the days when, under John A. G. Davis and John B. Minor, it won its grand reputation, and gave to the South its profound jurists and statesmen. It now has two law professors and an adjunct. The law school of the University of Texas has the same number; but this institution is projected upon the most pretentious scale of any in the South. Let the reader make the just application.

We have indicated that this new fashion of seminary education is an attempt to imitate the great secular universities in their divisions of labor and specialization of courses. The model which the new seminary professes to follow is a bad one. Its fruits are bad in secular education. We have admitted that a school which professes to teach all things has a fair pretext for multiplying its courses, which a theological seminary has not, seeing it professes to teach one definite thing. But in the secular universities, also, this multiplication of courses is bearing bad fruits. It is true that some dexterities in the arts and applied sciences are promoted; but it is at the expense of thorough general education. The minds of so-called educated young men are one-sided and given to some hobby. A knowledge of superficial details in some narrow quarter of the field banishes a profound knowledge of the field as a whole; sound judgment is weakened, and extravagance and puerility are as prevalent in the discussions of these so-called educated men as among the ignorant. We presume that most

observing men have concluded, with us, that as modern education is specialized, true and deep culture is diminished.

We proceed to a more practical and convincing view of the matter. The seminary at Princeton has had the most enviable reputation among Presbyterians. We believe that its faculty now contains about eight professors and instructors. Its full course of study occupies three years of eight months each, giving a total of twenty-four months. These professors are official equals; each one claims that he is both entitled and expected to magnify his own office. If the new one asks, Why were we put here? the church replies, In order that you may extend and enrich the courses of instruction assigned to you. Then, they rejoin, we claim our fair and equal share of the student's time and labor. Is not this the tendency in the enlarged faculties? We challenge their members to deny it. But twenty four months divided into eight parts give three months to each professor. Take now the important department of didactic theology. The result now to which division of labor tends is to give the learned and orthodox professor but three months of the student's time (say six weeks in the middle and six in the senior year) in which to go over the whole of that all-important field! What can he do? Will he have the time to take his classes in regular and thorough recitation over any one, not to say two or more, of the great masters, older or more recent; over Augustine, or Calvin, or Turretinus, or Witsius, or John Howe, or Dick, or Hill, or Cunningham, or Hodge, or Shedd, or the Arminian Watson? The hope is absurd. We learned from a publication of Bishop McIlvaine, and from the personal statements of Dr. Samuel Beach Jones and others of the older alumni, that this is the way didactic theology was taught by Archibald Alexander, in the days when Princeton had three professors and one tutor: twice a week, at least, lessons of thirty pages each in the Latin text, quarto, of Turretin's elenctic theology were assigned, on which close recitations were held; and once in two or four weeks an English theological thesis was required of each student, upon a topic selected for him by the professor, with a list of leading authorities which the student was required to study, digest, and discuss. Dr. Beach Jones told us that, for instance, "As I was

leaving his lecture-room one day, Dr. Alexander thrust into my hand a slip of paper, saying, 'Mr. Jones, you must write upon that.' When I opened the slip, it contained these words: '*An sit justitia vindicatrix essentialis in Deo?*' with a list of authorities." Dr. Jones added, "Sir, I worked upon that question for a fortnight, like a beaver, and that work made me a Calvinist for life." Is such text-book work done in Princeton now? Can it be done now? Does the six weeks' time of the middle or senior year allow it? It seems obvious that the only method possible for the professor is this: he must prepare and read to his classes a comprehensive, but brief course of lectures upon the heads of divinity. He, on his part, may put large and faithful labor upon these lectures; they may be crowded with what would, to a learned eye, be marks of learned research and deep thought. A few of the students who listen, who have capital memories, or are good note-takers, may get part of these lectures. The major part will get slim glimpses and smatterings of them, and that will be all. The learned professor may recommend large parallel readings in the best authors; his students will not have time to read them, because there are seven other professors, each claiming his one-eighth of their time, "after them with a sharp stick," urging that they must not rob them to favor a rival professor. It is the fixed conclusion of able teachers that the best method of instruction for adult and educated minds is a judicious combination of extensive and laborious reading and recitation in the most thorough text-books, followed by well-matured lectures which give a resumé and summation of the various arguments. The student who has not done the reading and recitation is not fitted to profit by the lectures. He does not know enough of the wide range of previous discussions, and of the deep questions mooted, to be aware of what his professor is aiming to say and decide, when he hears his resumé. Precious truths, so often and so strongly controverted, can only be established by controversy. Those who are to instruct God's people should have access to the best arsenals for defence, the works of the great masters of the Reformation theology and exposition. But the candidates in the seminaries described are likely to receive some weak, homœopathic dilution of the strong logic of these masters, through the so-

lution of some German lecturer into those of some Scotch or Yankee imitator, and thence into his professor's lectures, "fresh, and abreast with the progress of the most recent thought." The most recent is usually the most diluted. In short, if we are to have seminaries with eight professors, we should have theological courses of not less than six or seven years.

Some Presbyterians have reasoned that it would be best for our church to have only one or, at most, two large and richly endowed seminaries; and that one would be better than two. They argue that the rich and large seminary could give to all our candidates more extensive instruction by more eminent scholars, and that our ministers, being all educated in one place and under one set of influences, would have more harmony and homogeneity. The first part of this reasoning is already refuted. What more homogeneity does the Presbyterian Church need than that which will result when the different faculties at different places all have that thorough orthodoxy which it is the first duty of our church courts to enforce on all her ministers? Under this orthodox unity slight variations will appear in the mental idiosyncrasies of leading professors and the social phases of different localities. This will not lead to disunion, but to better adaptations of young ministers to their different fields of labor. Has the church ever found any friction between the *alumni* of Union Seminary under the saintly Peck, and those of Columbia Seminary under a godly Girardeau?

But there is in every overgrown seminary a deadly probability that the church will have to lament a fatal homogeneity in its numerous alumni; namely, a unity in rationalism and heresy. Well may we imitate the prudence of the Scotch woman who said that "when she went to market she never put all her eggs into one basket," for if one basket fell many of her eggs were still unbroken. If church history teaches anything, it is that large and rich schools of theology show an innate tendency to heresy. Where is that of Geneva, founded by Farel and Calvin themselves; that of Lausanne, once graced by the saintly Vinet; that of Göttingen; that of Jena; that of Tübingen; that of Leipzig; that of Tholuck's Halle; that of Berlin; of Utrecht; of Leyden;

of Oxford; of Cambridge? What is to-day the state of the Free Church College of Edinburgh, in which the grand voices of Chalmers and Cunningham have scarcely ceased to echo? Where are Cambridge, Yale, and Andover, each founded in the interest of the strictest orthodoxy? Where is Union, New York? This fated list shows us that the dangers of inflation by too much wealth, power, and fame are too strong even for converted human nature. It seems to be the destiny of such institutions when too much enriched to get the "big head." But the Holy Spirit tells us "that with the lowly is wisdom," and "that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Now, this specializing, multiplying and pretended enriching of courses is a distinct and direct provocation to rationalism and heresy. Thus: the new professor of the subdivision is young in office; he is ambitious; he is eager to make a reputation for himself and his chair; but how shall he do this when his sphere of instruction is relatively restricted and unimportant? He must make a sensation! To do this he must ventilate some novelty; but all the important tracts of divine science have been so thoroughly trodden that the thing which is new can scarcely be true. Here enters the poisonous temptation to the young aspirant. Just here will be Satan's entering wedge, whenever he begins to cleave a theological seminary from the old body of orthodoxy. The theological vagaries of the German universities have become the poison and plague of Christianity. The main causes of their unfaithfulness have been this over-specializing of studies and this demand upon their teachers to "do new work."¹ Let us take warning!

Hence, our policy for our beloved church should be, not to seek any overgrown or over-endowed school of theology; not to suppress any that now exist; but to add prudently to the number as our church expands. Our students do not need overgrown faculties, rich endowments, or huge libraries. They need, for each school, three or four able and faithful professors, enough good books for practical use, and thorough-going sources of deep read-

¹ See the essay in my collected *Discussions* upon the theological tendencies of the German University system.

ing, strict recitation, frequent writing, and well-considered lectures upon the leading lines of sacred science. Then, the specialties will take care of themselves, and such students will find that this plan will give them abundance of hard work for three scholastic years. And when they come to preach, they will find this work unspeakably better for them than the building upon a flimsy foundation of a cluster of pretentious specialties. We would say to men of Christian wealth, your Presbyterian colleges need your help far more than your seminaries need great endowments. Your colleges are struggling with poverty, meantime your seminaries tell us that an increasing number of our candidates seek admission at their doors with most defective collegiate preparation. The sons of our church are enticed away from our struggling, impoverished colleges by the free tuition and the pomp and glitter of the large secular institutions. Under their godless influences they forget the religion of their fathers and are lost to the pulpits of your church. Provide, then, decently for your seminaries, and do not forget your poor colleges, without which your rich seminaries would be costly mills without grist to grind.

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