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# MOTIVES

TO

# PRAYER FOR COLLEGES.

*In Address*

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BY

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## ADDRESS.

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WE are assembled in the house of God to offer up our prayers, in concert with our fellow Christians of all denominations, that he would pour out the renewing and sanctifying influences of his Spirit upon the thousands of youth who are pursuing their studies in the various institutions of learning scattered throughout the land. If the union of Christians in prayer for the conversion of the human race is desirable, then their concert in supplication for a spiritual blessing upon one of the most interesting portions of that race is equally so. If the immortal nature and needs of a pagan are suited to waken in the heart of a disciple of Christ a profound interest in him, and to prompt an importunate petition that spiritual gifts be bestowed upon him, then surely the immortal nature and religious needs of a cultivated youth, born in the bosom of the Christian Church, dedicated to God in baptism, and passing through that process of liberal education which will make him a man of power and impression among his fellow-men, are an object of exceeding interest to the people of God, and one that should elicit their warmest and most believing supplications on his behalf.

Let us, then, that we may obtain a still more definite conception of the object that has assembled us, and of the specific blessing that we would ask from our prayer-hearing God, consider some of the *motives to pray for*

*all young persons engaged in academical and collegiate studies.* Yet in our remarks we do not confine ourselves to the highest institutions of learning. We have in view, as we suppose that the Church has in view, upon this day of general prayer, that entire system and concatenation of schools, by which the youth of the country are carried from the lowest to the highest grades of education; by which the child is conducted from the simplest rudiments of knowledge to the strain and life-long task of the learned professions. We are praying for a baptism upon all the educational agencies, and all the grades of culture in the land. It is no narrow field that lies before the Church upon such a day as this. If it is education that forms the common mind; if the young men and the old men of a nation are what they are, by virtue of the ideas and the discipline which they receive from the schools in which they are trained, during the period of training; then we are here in this temple to ask the great God to sweeten the very fountains of social, civil, and religious life; to make the very *tree* good, and so its fruit good.

While, however, our remarks will possess this comprehensive character, and will have a general reference to the entire system of education, and to all classes of students, the limits of the hour, together with other considerations that will readily occur, will lead us to speak with a prevailing reference to colleges and collegiate education.

1. The first motive that meets us, to pray for young men in a course of liberal education, lies in the fact that this class of persons is destined to exert more influence in society than any other one.

Educated men rule the world. Knowledge is power. The difference between the civilized and the savage man is owing to the superiority in information which

the former possesses over the latter. The one holds a secret of influence which the other lacks; and hence, in the contest between the enlightened and the barbarous nations of the earth, one man chases a thousand, and two men put ten thousand to flight. And the same fact appears when we narrow the circle, and look for the most powerful and influential class in a particular people. The "governing classes," as they are called, are the educated classes. Look at England, our fatherland, and see what a prodigious power is wielded by those who have been trained in her schools and universities. The reverence for birth, and blood, and wealth, is undoubtedly great in that aristocratic empire, with its descending orders of nobility, and its noble and royal lineages running back in straight lines for a millennium; but he is greatly mistaken who supposes that the influence of the two houses of Parliament, of those peers and commoners who from year to year administer the complex affairs of the British realm with a sagacity and ability that is wonderful, is due merely or mainly to the accident of birth or wealth. The legislature that sits in St. Stephens is the most severely educated, the most thoroughly disciplined political body upon the globe. The English earl, knowing that, by the constitution of England, his first-born must one day take his own place in the national councils and debates, subjects him to the strictest educational methods, and causes him to pass through all the curriculums, so that, like the English racer, he may be thoroughbred. And hereby power is acquired and kept by that governing class; power to think, power to write, power to speak, power to wield the fierce democracy by the sway of a superior intelligence, by the glance and sweep of an eye that sees further than that in the head of an illiterate man.

But this may be illustrated yet again, by remarking

the influence which a single liberally educated person exerts in any single community. He may be a teacher, a physician, a lawyer, or a clergyman. In this case, he is unquestionably a source and medium of greater impression upon the vicinity about him than any man of merely common education and ordinary information. The less favored members of society go to him for knowledge; they send their children to him for education; they follow his prescriptions in the hour of sickness and death; they entrust their property to his management before the courts of law; and they go into the house of God upon the Sabbath, to learn from him their duty and the way of salvation. When liberal education makes itself felt in this way, through the medium of a *profession*, the influence which it exerts is unquestionably second to none save that of divine truth and the Holy Ghost. And even when the educated man does not devote his powers and his culture in any direct and specific manner to the service of his fellow-men, he nevertheless inevitably exerts an indirect influence. How many a clergyman can testify to the great impression which a man of collegiate training, literary tastes, but skeptical principles, makes upon the society, and especially the youthful portion of society, in which he moves. So true is it that knowledge inevitably imparts a species of superiority to its possessor.

Now, it is for the sanctification of this knowledge, the consecration of these educated men to God, that we are here convened to pray. The conversion of any soul, be it in the heart of ignorant and degraded Africa, is a great and glorious event, and all the angels of God sing for joy over it, as they did when the material creation first burst like an explosion upon their vision. Certainly, then, the regeneration of an educated mind that is destined to be a power in society,

and a radiating centre of influence for scores of years, must be an occurrence that is witnessed with infinite rejoicings in both the third and the seventh heavens. And with what a thrill of pleasure does the militant Church upon earth, struggling with her two great foes, the ignorant superstition and the cultivated infidelity of the world, hear the tidings, that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, has entered a college, and subsidized its youthful talent, and its thorough discipline, to the purpose and work of human redemption. Lord Bacon, the most sagacious of Englishmen, has said that the destiny of a nation is decided by the complexion of the principles which its educated young men take with them into contemplative and active life. Every page of English history proves the truth of the remark. When the young men of England were imbued by their teachers and the educational methods that prevailed, with a firm confidence in the truths of natural and revealed religion, a glorious era in the annals of Great Britain was the consequence. In that grand period, when such high-minded and reverential men as Sidney and Raleigh were representatives of "Young England," the foundations of the English Church and the English State were strengthened and consolidated, as they never have been before or since. But when, from the speculations of Hobbes and Bolingbroke, and the semi-infidel educational methods that had crept into the English universities, the young nobles of the land had imbibed a bitter hatred of Christianity, and an utter indifference towards the first truths of ethics and natural religion; when "Young England" was represented by a Wharton and a Chesterfield, a shock was given to the foundation and fabric of English greatness which it required a century of civil commotion and foreign war, together with a revival of

the old evangelism of the Wickliffes and the Latimers, to recover from. The reign of licentiousness and barbarism began in ancient Greece, when the education of its young men fell out of the hands of Socrates and Plato into those of the Sophists, who substituted the denial and disputation of first principles for the clear and profound enunciation and defence of them. And not many years elapsed before Grecian society betrayed that inward consumption, and that hectic fever, which are the inevitable consequence of false principles, and the whole fabric of Grecian empire and civilization crumbled away before Philip and his barbarians, like some noble shaft that has been struck with the sap-rot.

The same causes will produce the same effect in the United States of America. A democratic form of government cannot prevent the operation of the law of gravitation; and neither can it prevent the operation of those moral laws by which God governs all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues. If the Church of God, by its watchfulness and its prayerfulness, retains the education of the land in its own hands; if the schools, academies, and colleges of the country shall continue to be penetrated by New Testament Christianity; if natural and revealed religion shall, as heretofore, be the stability of these educational institutions; and if, as the crown and completion of all, the Church shall, by its fervent prayer, this day, and every day, bring down upon all these educational agencies the blessed baptism of spiritual influences,—then all is well and all is safe.

2. A second motive to pray for the conversion of all young persons that are pursuing a course of liberal education, lies in the fact that they are favorably situated for religious instruction and impression.

The academies and colleges of the land, with but few



exceptions, are under a Christian regime. Their boards of managers are composed of persons of consideration and standing in the locality, and who, as a general fact, are characterized by a theoretical, if not a practical, belief in the Christian religion. We call to mind but one or two instances, in which a literary institution has had its foundations laid in unbelief; and these attempts have been saved from utter failure only by receding from the original plan. The university which Jefferson was the chief instrument in establishing, is now a thoroughly Christian institution; and the college for orphans founded by the late Mr. Girard, has discovered that it cannot live, severed from the Father of the fatherless, the God of the widow and the orphan. Through all our wide borders, we see the academy, the college, and the university built, at least, upon a theoretical Christianity, and in a multitude of instances upon a warm Christian evangelism.

These remarks hold true, in an eminent degree, of academical and collegiate education within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church. A system of education that is more immediately related to the character and wants of a particular denomination, can, of course, be brought more completely under doctrinal and religious influences, than one which, like the common-school system, is intended for all varieties of denominations. And we cannot but think it to be one of the felicities of the Church which is more particularly convened here to pray for the effusion of the Divine Spirit, that it has so many academies and colleges under its *presbyterial* watch and care. For these institutions are thereby brought into very warm and living contact with the individual Christian and the local church. Not being under the control of close corporations, who may appoint their own successors, and whose management of



the institution is entirely beyond the supervision of the churches that are to feel their influence, whether it be good or bad; but being subject in every respect to the religious bodies that appoint their boards of management, and thereby their corps of instruction, they stand in the most immediate and salutary connection with the Christian brotherhood itself, and the warm evangelical life of the people of God is transmitted through all their veins and arteries. Such institutions are eminently Christian, and respond most sensitively to all that is going on in the churches that support them and control them.

Now in all these facts we find a motive to prayer for these institutions. If they are built upon the general foundation of Christianity, and are managed by those who cherish at least a theoretical belief in the religion of the Bible, and impart an education that is in harmony with the principles of natural and revealed religion, every man who knows how to pray, may see in such an educational apparatus as this, a noble object to pray for. And if, in addition to this, the academy or the college is built upon the more special foundation of a particular type of Christianity,—a type that is dear to the heart of a particular Church,—then surely that Church, while it prays for a divine benison upon any and every institution that teaches any degree of biblical truth,—according to our Lord's principle, that he that is not against us is for us,—while the prayer of the Calvinist will go up warm and heartfelt for all who hold the head; for all the evangelism there is upon the planet,—certainly it will lose none of its warmth, and none of its heartiness, for those institutions that are founded upon his own ancestral faith and creed.

But not only are the youth who are gathered in the literary institutions of the land, favorably situated in

respect to religious instruction and impressions, by reason of the Christianity in which the foundations of these institutions have been laid; they are also most favorably situated by reason of the daily routine of discipline and study to which they are summoned.

There is moral power in any steady routine. The farmer, the mechanic, any man who, when the sun ariseth, "goeth forth to his work and his labor until the evening," receives an influence from his occupation that is wholesome and bracing. Nothing is more debilitating, nothing more demoralizing, than doing nothing. There is no feebler creature, and oftentimes no more wicked creature, than a man about town. It matters not so much what the species of labor shall be, as that it be performed with punctuality and uniformity—that it be a *routine*.

Now the youth that are assembled in the academies and colleges of the country are subjected to a species of influence, from the regular and systematic curriculum of these institutions, that is favorable to morality and religion. They are secluded from the busy world, and escape many of its temptations; and the power of those temptations which are peculiar to collegiate life is considerably broken by the steady occupation to which the young student is put. He rises in the morning, and the first act to which he is summoned is the worship of Almighty God. The preparation of lessons, the recitation before teachers, the scrutiny of examiners, fill up the waking hours. One duty crowds on after another, and, without being aware of it, the young man is really made to pass through a routine and a drill almost as exacting as that of the military school.

Besides all this, his mind is coming in contact with great truths and high principles. He is engaged in accumulating ideas. The whole tendency of his daily

occupation is elevating; for it brings him into communication with the noblest minds of the race, and the loftiest results of their thinking. The corps of his instructors is commonly a body of men of broad views, serious temper, perhaps earnest Christian character. Now, it is true that there is nothing regenerating in these influences. If there were, we should not be assembled here to pray for the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the colleges of the land. We well know, that no amount of mere instrumentalities can convert a proud intellect into a meek and lowly mind; can subdue a high spirit, and fill it with the gentleness of Christ. We well know that the acquisition of human knowledge, if unbalanced by a higher acquisition, tends to pride. Knowledge puffeth up. At the same time, it must be granted, that these thousands of youth of both sexes, for whose spiritual welfare we are offering up our prayers, are in a more hopeful condition, are in a more recipient moral state, than they would be, were they all of them bending their eyes to the earth in search of filthy lucre, like Bunyan's man with the muck-rake, or were they all of them whirling round and round in the giddy vortices of fashion and pleasure. God, even their God, hath caused the lines to fall for them in pleasant places, and they have a goodly heritage. How much more hopeful is the future prospect of the Church, from the fact that so many of her children are secluded, during their forming, plastic period, from the sordid and deadening influences of our hard colliding life, and are made more sensitive and recipient in the "still air of delightful studies."

3. And this brings us to the third and last motive that we shall mention, to pray for all young persons that are pursuing studies in the educational institutions of the land: namely, that this class contains in it a

greater proportion of baptized persons than any other similar class.

The rolls of our academies and colleges show that religion and learning go hand in hand. It is the *pious* parent who is most anxious that his child should obtain wisdom rather than rubies. It is the *serious* or the *pious* child that sets the highest estimate upon knowledge and instruction. How often does the conversion of a parent change the whole current, the whole future of the children's lives. Before, he was anxious mainly that they should grow up men of wealth, and women of fashion. Now he is anxious mainly that their minds should be developed by all good methods of education, in the hope and the faith that the heart will in this way be most likely to become changed by the renewing grace of God. How often does the conversion of a child deaden his interest in merely material pursuits and material wealth, and make a scholar of him. There is no more striking proof of the affinity between religion and learning, than in such facts as these, which strew the annals of our churches and our educational institutions. Would you see an utter indifference to liberal education; go into an earthly, money-loving, money-hoarding community; go into a family where greed is the ruling passion. Would you see a respect for culture, and a quick sensibility towards it; go into a Christian population; go into a religious household.

Hence it is, that that class of youth who are engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, contains a much larger proportion of baptized children, children of Christian parentage, than any other class of young persons. The irreligious parent places his son where he will accumulate wealth; the religious parent sends his child where he will accumulate ideas. The irreligious youth prefers the bustle and excitement of material existence;

the pious youth hungers after wisdom, human and divine. From the ranks of the *Church*, then, issue the great majority of those who are obtaining a liberal education. Infidelity, with all its professed respect for reason and truth, neither seeks education, nor imparts it. It founds no universities, it produces no literature. The utmost that it attempts, is to wrest to its own purposes the institutions and the literature that have come into being from a Christian source, and whose vitality flows altogether from Christian ideas.

In the encouraging fact, then, that so many of these youth have been sprinkled with the baptismal water, and have been consecrated to the adorable Trinity, in the covenant which He himself has made with his people, we find a strong and overcoming motive to fervent and effectual prayer for them. We surely need not enlarge upon this motive in such a presence as this. We are speaking to Christian parents, who believe that the promise of mercy is to believers and their offspring. We are addressing churches, to whom the covenanted mercy in the sacrament of baptism is precious as the apple of the eye; to whom it is a strong tower into which they bring their children, that they may be safe from the darts of the evil one, and the snares of the destroyer. All that you have ever heard from the Christian ministry; all that you have ever read in the Scriptures and the recorded wisdom of the Christian Church; all that you have ever observed in the dealings of God with his elect people and their children; all that you have ever known in your own personal experience of God's faithfulness to his covenant; all that bears in any manner upon the doctrine of covenanted mercy to believers and their offspring, applies with its fullest force to that class for whom we are met to pray. They are the children of Christian parents;

they are the children of prayers and tears; they are the children who have been taught the Scriptures from infancy; they are the children who have been guarded and watched over in reference to the habits they should form, and the company they should keep; they are the children who have been taught to prefer instruction to riches, intellectual to material advantages. They are the élite youth of the country, and we are here to pray that they may become the elect children of God.

Is it not plain that this annual union and concert of prayer for the outpouring of the Divine Spirit upon the educational institutions of the land, is second to none in importance? Recapitulate these motives to pray for the many thousands of youth in academies and colleges. This class is destined to exert a thousandfold more influence in Church and State than any other one of the same number. The learned professions are to be supplied from it, and the majority of our legislators will come from its ranks. This class is very favorably situated, by reason of its seclusion from the distractions and temptations of the world, the steady, exacting nature of its daily routine, and the theoretical, as well as practical Christianity under which it is trained, for the reception of distinctively evangelical truths and gracious influences. And lastly, this class of persons is most immediately related to the Church of Christ itself, by virtue of birth, blood, and covenanted mercy. Look at these motives one by one; then place them in combination, and ask what more interesting, what more promising object of prayer, can be presented to the minds of God's people, than this one?

An annual concert of prayer supposes an unceasing daily prayer. The monthly supplication for foreign missions implies that the Church goes every day into the closet, and prays for the great consummation.

These special seasons are merely the times when the steady and constant devotion of the people of God concentrates itself with an unusual intensity, that it may gather itself up for another and a stronger movement; they are like the knots in the grape-vine, which show that the living principle is so forceful, and so overflowing, that it accumulates upon itself, and bulges out in the growing wood. So should it be with the Church, in reference to all these monthly or annual unions for prayer and Christian coöperation. The daily zeal and the daily supplication should be so unceasing and cumulative, that these occasional opportunities should be the vents through which we discharge our surcharged and brimming souls; not the mere formal, and mechanical, and rarely-occurring seasons, in which we lash ourselves up to an unwelcome duty.

That, therefore, for which we pray now and here, should be, will be, if we are alive in Zion, the continual burden and the constant supplication of our souls. Let us bear through all the days and months of the coming year these educational institutions, and these thousands of young persons in them, upon our hearts, before the throne of God. Then this day will be the beginning of days to Zion, and she shall arise and shine, her light being come. Then all her children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of her children. (Isaiah liv. 13.)