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James Carnahan
ART. I.—*An Address delivered before the Alumni Association of Nassau Hall, on the day of the Annual Commencement of the College, Sept. 25, 1833, by John Sergeant, LL. D.*

THE day which closes the college life of a young man, is highly interesting, not only to the individual, but also to his friends and to his country.

Having finished his preparatory studies, he is ready to select a profession or occupation for life. Released from the inspection and control of teachers, he is henceforth to follow, in a great measure, his own guidance.

On such occasions, the most heedless can hardly exclude from their minds serious reflections respecting the past, and painful solicitude respecting the future. At this moment, whatever directions, or warnings, or encouragements may be given, by men of distinguished talents and virtues, cannot fail to make a deep and salutary impression on the youth anxious to know which way to direct his steps. On this account we cannot too highly commend the custom which prevails of having addresses delivered on the anniversaries of our literary institutions, by men eminent in civil and professional life. When the subject is well chosen and when the speaker is adequate to the task which he has undertaken, the most happy results may be safely anti-

would *minister greatly to all the interests of the church.* On the one hand, it would keep out error; on the other, it would secure the prevalence of truth in all its greatness and power. On the one hand, it would make men earnest in defence of the faith once delivered to the saints; on the other, it would induce a spirit of gentleness and kindness towards those whom they regard in error. It would increase a deep, and earnest, and glowing piety, while it would banish inconsistency, irreverence and delusion. It would put out the wild-fire of fanaticism, while it would cause the fire of true devotion, of holy zeal, of genuine love to God and man, to burn with increasing fervour. It would render the church every where, one bright field of Gospel order, so that the eyes of the world could not be turned towards it without admiration. It would, more than any thing else, nourish the spirit of genuine revivals. It would set Christians to labouring and praying, and sinners to mourning and repenting, and the angels to rejoicing and triumphing. Away then with every standard that is not in accordance with the Bible, and let this be all in all. Take it, Christian, as the rule of your faith, as the rule of your conduct, as the rule of your experience; and you will have nothing to fear as it respects your influence or your destiny. But take any thing else than this, or adopt this but partially, and if you are not a mere cumberer of the ground, you certainly will not be a flourishing plant of righteousness; if you do not actually lose your soul, it will be saved only so as by fire.

Wm. Y. S. Hoag

ART. IV.—*Decorum due to Public Worship.*

THERE is not less of truth than beauty in the declaration of the poet, that "order is Heaven's first law." We see this every where exemplified in the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace. Whether we look at the grandest or the most insignificant of the works of creation; whether we observe the revolutions of the heavenly bodies as they sweep through the illimitable regions of space, or the motion of an atom as it is borne on the wings of the wind; whether we ascertain the laws of physical existence as applied to the formation of an insect, or the laws of mental existence as exemplified in the intellect of an angel; we cannot fail to discern evidence that it is all the production of a God of order. In contemplating the system of providence too, when we make due allowance for the derangement that is occasioned by sin, we arrive at the same conclusion: we find there

are certain fixed laws, agreeably to which the course of events is regulated. And in the kingdom of grace, we find God still working like himself, evincing design and contrivance in every thing. The scheme of divine mercy for the salvation of men which the Gospel presents, is complete in all its parts: the design which it contemplates, it accomplishes by the most simple, and yet the best adapted, means. And while the Gospel, considered as a system of doctrine, is characterized by perfect order, the same is true of all its practical bearings and results, its ordinances and institutions. In the worship of heaven we are taught that, though there is a fervour that mortals cannot conceive, and though there are ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands who join in it, yet there reigns the most perfect order; and as it is in this respect with the glorified inhabitants of heaven, so it ought to be with humble worshippers on earth. To illustrate the nature and importance of Christian decorum in connexion with the public worship of God, is the whole design of the present article.

Let no one imagine that this is an unimportant topic; for nothing is unimportant that relates to the worship of God, or that God has been pleased to make the subject of an express command. Let it be considered also that this subject has much to do with the *spirituality* of Christian worship; for not only is it essential to our religious improvement that we *observe* this divine institution, but that we observe it in the very manner which God has ordained; and hence it will always be found, other things being equal, that religion exists in the most healthful and flourishing state, where the ordinances of God, and especially this ordinance, are most faithfully and diligently observed. Not that any thing merely external can be substituted for purity and devotion in the soul, but these ordinances as God has given them to us, are among the most important means of awakening and cherishing spiritual affections; and just so far as, in our observance of them, we mar the simplicity, and beauty, and order, which bespeak their divine original, so far we must expect to come short of the advantage they were designed to secure.

There should be proper decorum on the part of *those who attend on social worship, without taking a direct part in its services*. When we speak here of social worship, we mean to include not only the public services of the sanctuary, but the more retired services of the lecture-room and of the prayer-meeting.

It cannot be necessary here to dwell upon the more gross violations of decorum in the house of God, and in other places appropriated to religious worship; such as jesting, and trifling, and unnecessary talking; for it is not to be supposed that persons

who so flagrantly offend, not only against Christian propriety, but common decency, will occupy themselves in reading these pages. There are, however, some other points concerning which it is more common to transgress, and in relation to which the error, though a serious one, is so frequent that it often passes unnoticed.

We mention particularly a habit which too often exists, of gazing over the assembly, with a view to ascertain who are present, or to make observations on the appearance of individuals. This is indeed generally considered a harmless matter; and the rather, as merely looking at a person does not, of course, ordinarily disturb him; but is it not manifest that this habit, to say the least, must greatly interfere with one's own religious improvement? We assemble in the sanctuary for the professed purpose of worshipping God and listening to his truth; and just in proportion as we fail of this, our attendance there is the merest mockery. But if an individual passes the hour in gazing over the assembly, with a view to ascertain the number or appearance of the strangers, or for any other purpose, it is utterly impossible that, in *his* case, the end of public worship should be answered: and we have only to suppose that a whole congregation should do this, (and certainly if it is right for one it is right for all) in order for the whole service of the sanctuary to degenerate into the merest formality.

But while this habit is to be reprobated as it respects *any* part of the service, it is especially worthy of reprehension as it respects public prayers. We will not say that it is not possible that an individual may acquire, in so high a degree, the power of abstracting himself from surrounding scenes, that external objects, and even objects fitted to awaken curiosity may meet his eye, without causing his mind to wander; but if this attainment is possible, it is manifestly one that few ever reach. And hence when an individual in prayer voluntarily suffers his eyes to wander over the assembly, fastening upon every person who happens to enter or leave the house during that period, there is great reason to fear that that individual's heart is wandering as well as his eyes: certainly if he really prays, he cannot blame others for suspecting that he does not. It is not uncommon for men of the world, who do not so much as profess to join in the devotions of the sanctuary, to express their surprise that many professed Christians apparently feel no more interest in this service than they do themselves; that their attention can be diverted, and their heads turned, by the most trifling occurrence. We would say to every Christian, even if this habit is consistent with the keeping of his thoughts and the keeping of his heart before God, it had still better be avoided; because it does leave on the minds of others a painful impression of insincerity; and there are those no doubt

who will take occasion from it to excuse their own listlessness and inattention in the house of God.

There is yet another practice which is even a still greater offence against the decorum that is due to public worship, than that which has just been noticed. We refer to the practice of making personal applications of the truth, by casting a significant look at the individual to whom it is supposed to be especially adapted. Persons who allow themselves in this habit, will be sure to hear preaching to little purpose; because, in their excessive concern for their neighbours, they entirely overlook themselves. They carve out large portions for those around them, and lest they should not have another opportunity, they serve them up on the spot; but they appropriate nothing for their own benefit; and even if others provide for *them* in the same way, it is all to little purpose; for it generally happens that persons of this class have so little self-knowledge, and so much self-confidence, that it is not easy by a look, however significant, to turn their eye inward upon themselves. We said that they who indulge in this habit are not likely to derive any personal advantage from the ministrations of the sanctuary: we go farther, and say that there is a great probability that they will prevent the spiritual improvement of others. You hear a reproof, or some exhibition of divine truth, from the pulpit, which you think must strike hard upon the conscience of a neighbour. Now then, if you will do your utmost to give it its effect, let your heart go up to God in a silent petition that he will accompany it by the influence of his Spirit; but do not turn your eye upon the individual to see how he bears it. For if you do this, and he observes it, whatever else you may accomplish, you have not aided the effect of divine truth upon his heart. You may have succeeded in awakening in his bosom mortification, or resentment, or some other evil passion, and you may have even sent him away from the sanctuary in the attitude of reflection; but then he will be reflecting not upon the truth of God, but upon what he at least will deem the impertinence of a fellow mortal. Let every one remember that his great business in the house of God is, not to watch the effect of divine truth upon others, but to see that it has its full effect upon his own heart; not to endeavour to read the operations of other minds in the countenance, but to commune with his own spirit on the one hand, and with the Almighty Spirit on the other.

But there is also a decorum to be observed in respect to *the manner of conducting public worship*. Our remarks under this article shall be confined to the exercises of devotion—to prayer and singing.

In respect to the first of these—viz. *prayer*, it is due to the

decorum of worship that it should be conducted with great reverence. We would indeed never have it forgotten that fervour of spirit is essential to this part of the service of God; and that however reverential may be the manner, if there be little or no feeling, there is an awful and radical deficiency. Still we maintain that mere fervour can never make amends for the lack of reverence; and that where the former exists without the latter, there is great reason to believe, either that it is mere animal excitement, or at best is associated with gross ignorance. The fervour which is inspired by genuine devotion is simple and child-like: it is the devout and earnest longing of a spirit that feels itself to be as nothing in the presence of the Almighty Spirit with which it is attempting to commune. But there is a fervour which is noisy and boisterous; which breaks out in extravagant and sometimes violent expressions; which descends to a degree of familiarity with Jehovah which would scarcely be considered decorous in the intercourse of one mortal with another; and we may even add, which sometimes discharges itself in a sort of holy trifling with the Highest, and in little short of imprecations on some of his creatures. We know there are those with whom this passes for prayer; and who, if there be an apparent earnestness in this exercise, think little of what there is, or what there is wanting, besides; but it is greatly to be feared that much that passes for prayer on earth, passes for mockery in heaven; and that many a man who takes upon himself the credit of wrestling with God, is actually chargeable with the guilt of insulting God. When you remember, Christian, who the Being is whom you profess to approach in your devotions,—that God in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and before whom even the angels do not bow without veiling their faces; and when you contemplate the examples of prayer which are left us in God's word, and observe by what deep and awful reverence they are marked; can you doubt for a moment that any approach to an irreverent manner in this exercise must be exceedingly offensive? This is an evil to be avoided even in our private devotions; and certainly it becomes greater in social worship, where its influence is felt not merely by the individual who conducts the service, but by those who wish to join in it.

Let us say one word, before dismissing this topic, in respect to the length of social prayers. The human mind is so weak, and in its best state so inclined to wander, that its powers cannot remain fastened in all their intensity, and without interruption, for a long time, even upon the most interesting and glorious of all subjects. Hence, that this service may be performed with the best effect, it must not be protracted beyond a proper limit; be-

cause, whenever the mind becomes fatigued with the exercise, it is worse than in vain to have it continued; for not only is all spiritual communion for the time at an end, but the wandering of the mind in such circumstances is fitted to produce a habit of irreverence, and to render the duty of devotion less welcome under more favoured circumstances. If the individual be only speaking forth his own desires to God in the closet, why then he may be governed, as to the time of his continuing this exercise, by his own feelings alone; but when he leads the devotions of an assembly, he is bound to keep in view their benefit as well as his own; and especially to bear in mind the fact, that if he wearies them by the length of his prayers, he actually defeats the end at which he is bound to aim; viz. their spiritual improvement. It is a fact which deserves to be carefully considered, that the specimens of prayer which are recorded in Scripture, and especially the form of prayer which our Lord gave his disciples, are short—very short; and though we may not infer from this any obligation on our part never to transcend these precise limits, yet we may reasonably conclude that God intended to inculcate in general the duty, that when we approach him, our words should be few as well as rightly chosen.

But we pass to consider the other part of public worship—viz: *singing*. No one who is at all familiar with the Scriptures, can doubt that the celebration of God's praise has always made part of public worship. The design of sacred music of course is nothing less than to awaken devotional feelings in the heart, while it serves as an expression of those feelings as they are directed to the heart-searching God. Most persons are capable of being wrought upon, and many in a high degree, by this peculiar exercise of the human voice; and though there may be a glow of animal feeling produced by it without any thing like genuine devotion, yet in a mind piously disposed, it cannot be doubted that it is eminently fitted to awaken and cherish a devotional spirit. The effect must, of course, be measured, in some degree, by the original capability of the mind to receive impressions from this source; but there are few minds so constituted that the impression made by devotional sentiments will not be heightened by their being appropriately expressed in music. If such be the design of this part of public worship, then it follows not only that it is of great importance that sacred music should be cultivated, but that that is the best style of music which is best adapted to cherish true devotion. That it should be conducted with propriety and with taste, certainly does not admit of question; because, otherwise, instead of being a help to devotion by falling in with an original current of feeling in the human breast, it be-

comes a hinderance to it by giving a shock to some of our finest sensibilities. There are indeed a few minds constituted in such a manner as to be in a good degree proof against the most exquisite melody on the one hand, and the most grating discord on the other; but in the great majority of instances, the devotions of the Christian will in the one case be greatly embarrassed, in the other, greatly assisted.

But while this part of public devotion ought to be performed with correct taste, and if you please, with a measure of elegance, it ought to be in a style of Christian simplicity. If the minister who should lead in the public prayers should assume the manner of an actor, and should seem to be praying merely to gratify the taste or amuse the fancy of a portion of his hearers, every one would regard it not only as unpardonable trifling, but downright impiety. And what better is to be said of that style of singing God's praise, which causes his praise to be forgotten, and the singing only to be thought of? God forbid that the church should ever borrow any thing from the stage—no, not even the parade and fascination of its music! We repeat, let every thing be done here in perfect simplicity! It matters little whether the devotions of Christians be hindered by awkward and discordant sounds, on the one hand, or by strains which only become the theatre, on the other: in the latter case, as truly as in the former, the decorum of Christian worship is violated.

If the preceding remarks are correct, it surely is the duty of every religious congregation to cultivate sacred music to such an extent as to secure in the best manner the design it is intended to answer as a part of divine worship: and if it is the duty of every congregation to do this, it is the duty of every individual who is endowed with the power of music to cultivate this gift, as God gives him opportunity. And we go farther and say, that it is the duty of all who are able, to aid, from time to time, in this part of public religious service. It was for this very purpose, of celebrating his praise, that God gave them this noble faculty; and if they never use it in this way, are they not chargeable with burying at least one talent in the earth? This is a duty which every individual who is thus gifted, owes to himself, his fellow-worshippers, and his God. He owes it to himself, as it is not only an expression of devotional feeling, but a powerful means of exciting and cherishing it. He owes it to his fellow-worshippers, as he thereby contributes to make melody in their hearts, and to deepen the current of their devotion. He owes it to God, as a reasonable expression of his homage for every good gift; and as one principal means which God himself has ordained for acknowledging his goodness and celebrating his praise.

I cannot forbear to remark in this connexion, that the course to which I have here adverted, would be an important security against the decline of sacred music in any congregation, as well as the most efficient means of effecting a revival of it where it has already declined. Let not this be a thing to be monopolized by persons of any age; but let all who have the ability regard it a privilege to render their aid. Even the tremulous voice of old age, if it does not destroy the harmony, will increase the solemnity and dignity, of this part of religious worship. Can you conceive of a spectacle at once more delightful and more sublime, than a great congregation all engaged, so far as they are able, in celebrating God's praise; in which the old, and the middle aged, and the youth, and even the little child—we had almost said the lisping infant, are mingling their voices in a common expression of thanksgiving to God and the Lamb? Let each one feel his personal obligation on this subject and act accordingly, and this blessed, thrice blessed result would be realized.

In illustrating the IMPORTANCE of the general duty which has been presented in the preceding pages, we would remind every Christian that he obeys God in the observance of his ordinances only in proportion as he attends upon them, or celebrates them, with religious propriety and decorum. In relation to the manner in which we are to celebrate his worship, he has given us as explicit directions as we need; and this not only by direct precept and instruction, but by recording for our benefit the example of those who have shared most richly in the influences of his Spirit. Just in proportion then as we depart from the scriptural manner of worshipping him, and substitute any invention of our own, we are chargeable with disregarding the Divine authority. No doubt there are some things in relation to this matter which are left to human discretion; but it is not left to human discretion whether or not all things shall be done decently and in order. We acknowledge too, that there may be some things that are wrong, very wrong, in the observance of this ordinance, when after all its substance is retained; but if we do these wrong things, we are without any apology; we may imagine that we are honouring God by adding to his institutions; but we are really dishonouring and disobeying him.

Besides, it is only as we maintain a proper regard to Christian decorum in our worship, that we have a right to expect that our service will be crowned with a blessing. The ordinance of religious worship, as God has established it, is adapted in the happiest manner possible to exert the influence it was intended to exert on the intellectual and moral nature of man. We know that it *must* be so, from the fact that it was appointed by a Being of

infinite wisdom, who made the mind, and who knows perfectly how to influence it; and we know that it *is* so from actual observation and experience. If then God's appointment is overlooked, and something else substituted in its place; if under the cover of great zeal and spirituality, public worship degenerates into a mere tumult of the animal passions, why then the blessings promised to those who wait upon God will be withheld of course; not only because God will frown upon the perversion of his own institutions, but because whatever is substituted in place of them, being a device of man, is not adapted, like the ordinances of God, to subserve man's religious improvement. If any thing better than these ordinances could have been devised, God no doubt would have devised it; and certainly his work will not be the more perfect for man's attempting to mend it.

But does any one ask, if this be so, how is it that in scenes of tumultuous excitement, where the common proprieties of public worship are all set aside, and there is groaning, and falling, and writhing, there are so many more converts, than where things are conducted with more coolness, and as *we* should say, decorum? We answer, this question takes for granted a fact which, to say the least, is of a most equivocal character;—the fact that the mass of individuals who profess to be converted in these circumstances are really so. If a man lives a Christian life, let it have commenced in as suspicious circumstances as it may, doubtless, we are to acknowledge his claim to the Christian character; but with our eye not only upon God's word, and the record of all past experience, but upon the very principles of human nature—we declare unhesitatingly, that all those supposed conversions which take place under powerful efforts to inflame the passions, amidst scenes of disorder and tumult—in short, where God's institution is in a great measure set aside, and the wisdom or rather the folly of man substitutes something in its place—that all these supposed conversions may be doubted—ought to be doubted, until their genuineness has been proved by a long course of holy living. It is hardly to be expected that men will be converted to God in the very act of disobeying God's plain commandments. We know that ignorance may sometimes be pleaded as an apology for fanaticism; but is not that ignorance which excuses fanaticism inconsistent with that knowledge of the truth which is essential to our sanctification?

Let it be remembered, moreover, that the manner in which these external duties are performed, must, from the very nature of the human constitution, powerfully influence the heart, and give complexion in a great degree to the religious character. It is a law of our condition that our characters are formed, to a con-

siderable extent, by external circumstances; and that the practical estimate which we form of any thing, depends much on the objects with which we find it associated, or the medium through which it is seen. Now then, if we are accustomed to associate religion with scenes of disorder, or to connect with its appropriate duties, extravagances which God's word does not warrant, admitting that there is a principle of grace in the heart, we shall inevitably in this way prevent it from a regular and vigorous growth. If there be true religion in this case, it will indeed live amidst all the rubbish by which it is surrounded; but it will not exist in fair and beautiful proportions. And on the same principle, just in proportion as we err habitually in respect to any of the parts of external worship, our Christian character must suffer loss; because, though the error relate to an external act, it is an act which is designed to influence, and which must influence, the inner man.

Let no one suppose that it has been the design of any part of this article to plead the cause of a formal religion. We have indeed exhorted Christians to a faithful observance of the ordinances of God; but we have done this not in the way of proposing a substitute for the devotion of the heart, but the most efficient of all helps to it; even that which God himself hath prescribed. We would that it might be distinctly impressed on the heart of every reader, that nothing that is merely external can ever be a qualification for entering heaven; and if there is no sincerity, no life, no spirituality in your religious services, however much of order there may be in them, however much to attract the eye and call forth the praise of man, they will be found to contain the elements of an aggravated condemnation. Be satisfied with nothing short of the religion of the heart, and let this be acted out, not only in your faithful observance of God's institutions, but in whatever is pure, and lovely, and of good report. Thus will your Christian character rise in goodly proportions, and you will be training up for an inconceivably glorious reward.

And that reward—oh! it will consist in no small degree, in worshipping God with the innumerable throng of heaven. Christian, *there* will be nothing of the frost of formality on the one hand, or the false fervours of animal passion on the other. *There* indeed will be burning zeal; devotion that never tires; joy that rises to higher and still higher ecstasy; but there also will be light without a cloud; order without interruption. All will rise and bow around the throne, and will shout together the praises of redemption; but there will be no discordant notes in their music: the song that will tremble on their harps and on their tongues will be one—the song of praise to the Lamb that was

slain. Christian, you will soon be there. Let your worship here be more like the worship of heaven. Let the inward feeling and the outward act be just as God requires. And while you are yet watching, and waiting, and worshipping, your Saviour will reach down from the heavens, and take you up into his presence, and the light of the throne will shine upon you, and you will know how to touch the golden harp, and all your worship will be pure and transporting, like that of the angels.

J. L. Strague

ART. V.—*Reflections on the Life and Character of Balaam.*

FEW men whose history is recorded in the sacred Scriptures, possessed a more extraordinary character than Balaam. He was, a famous diviner of the city of Pethor on the Euphrates. As the children of Israel were on their march to Canaan, Balak, king of Moab, in conjunction with the princes of Midian, became alarmed lest this vast multitude which were passing through their territories, should fall upon them in a hostile and successful invasion. With a view to impair the strength of the Hebrews and render them a more easy conquest, Balak despatched messengers to Balaam, with an urgent request and with powerful inducements to come and curse this formidable nation. Balaam, whose ruling passion was covetousness, was more than willing to comply with this request: but from some divine impression upon his mind, he was afraid to give them an answer, till he had had an opportunity of consulting the divinity: whether he meant the true God or an evil spirit it is not easy to ascertain. But be that as it may, the true God took the matter into his own hands, and commanded Balaam not to go on this malignant errand; assuring him that the people whom he was desired to curse, were blessed. Mortified and vexed with his ill success, he sent the messengers back to apprise Balak of the result. Balak thinking it possible that there was something lacking either in the character of the messengers or in the reward that was offered, which occasioned the reluctance of the enchanter, immediately sent more honourable messengers, and offered a larger reward. To this message Balaam replied, that for a house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more. Nevertheless, having his heart set upon obtaining the reward that was offered him, he besought them to remain till he could have an opportunity to consult the deity again, to ascertain whether he had changed his mind. The result was that God in judgment gave him liberty to go; declaring at the same time that in the