

THE COVENANTER.

JULY, 1848.

THE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE.

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THE training of youth for the learned professions, is an affair of deep interest to the Church of Christ, and to civil society. The literature of the Church guides the course of social life. It gives the impulse that puts in motion the intellectual and active powers of the human mind. If the system of education is holy, it purifies and invigorates our principles of action: but if corrupt, it defiles and cripples them.

The best plan of education is that which embraces the theory and practice of Christianity. Where the religion revealed by the Son of God is not the foundation, the structure and the chief corner-stone of the college edifice, the defect is vital. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The negative is as true. Train up a child in the way he should *not* go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. In the sovereign grace of God there are exceptions, of the former, as in Esau, and of the latter, as in Saul of Tarsus. But Solomon by the Spirit asserts the law of our social nature.

There is a two-fold training—one in the nursery, the other in the school. The latter often defeats the good tendency of the former. The efficacy of family instruction and prayer, sometimes, prevents the evil of the bad school, from working the total ruin of the child. This blessed result is more frequent in relation to the common schools, than in the learned seminaries. When a pupil is studying Latin and Greek in heathen class books, it is a rare occurrence that he is a godly man. It is true, other causes in the colleges concur with immoral class books, in producing the baneful effects, which now do, and which always spread moral and spiritual ruin over the republic of letters. Professors and tutors are often heretics, and generally erroneous. The pupils are generally without God and without hope in the world.

These evils must be removed before we can succeed in the practical and extensive diffusion of the testimony, by a holy and able ministry. On this topic, the following suggestions are respectfully submitted.

1. *That the Holy Scriptures, in their divine originals, shall be made the class books for pupils, at the commencement of their academical studies.* By the adoption of these works of the Holy Spirit, the tender mind will be brought into fellowship with the greatest and best minds that have ever adorned the Church. What is incomparably better,—

“Their fellowship in thought and sentiment, will be with the Father and with his Son Christ Jesus. They will, as in a glass, behold the Lord and be changed into the same image, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Cor. iii. 18.

The intense application of the mind necessary to learn a foreign language, imbues the soul with the spirit of the author of the class book. If this be admitted, and no scholar can question its truth, can any books be compared with the Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament? We can confidently rely on the Spirit of the Lord to render truth effectual in the sanctification of the learner.

To this it is objected that the style of the sacred penman is rude. To this, it may be answered, That were the assumption granted, the argument is not weakened. The Spirit of God knows what kind of style best conveys into the mind a knowledge of his doctrine, laws and works. This style must be the best adapted to the end. The denial of this impeaches his wisdom. 2. If the literary finish be inferior to that of the pagan class books, the moral and religious effect more than countervails the lack of fine taste in writing and speaking. 3. The assumption is not granted. The man who makes it, demonstrates that he is utterly incompetent to appreciate the beauties of literature. The objection “does despite to the spirit of grace.” What? the Spirit of the Lord that garnishes the heavens, and adorns the earth with all its countless beauties, does not write so elegantly as the profane and drunken Horace! This is monstrous. An infidel speaks in character, in giving utterance to such an impeachment of the Spirit’s work, but it ill-befits the tongue of Christ’s disciples. But passing this; was Moses not so elegant a scholar as Herodotus or Livy? Is the taste of Isaiah or Paul inferior to that of Demosthenes? Was David’s scholarship rude, compared with Anacreon or Euripides? Was—but hold. The pen refuses to write such impiety. “The word that cometh out of thy mouth is sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb.”

2. *Uninspired Christian books, in Latin and Greek, must be substituted in a Christian college, for the effusions of corrupt heathen pens.* Selections from John Chrysostom and Eusebius in Greek, and Lactantius and Calvin, in Latin, will promote all that is valuable in mental culture, by the farther prosecution of study in the learned languages. The style of the Septuagint in many of the sacred books, especially in Job, the Psalms, Song and Proverbs, is exquisitely beautiful. Indeed that venerable version, which has diffused a saving knowledge of God more extensively than any other translation of the Old Testament, is every where redolent of the heavenly fragrance of the Hebrew. “Its garments smell of aloes, myrrh and cassia.” The Greek scholar who does not greatly admire its beauty, is either devoid of a refined taste, or of spiritual discernment.

It is true, there are words, phrases and idioms in these Christian books, that do not occur in the Heathen, Greek and Latin authors. What then? They are mostly found in the inspired originals. Surely that is proof they are more refined than the phraseology of Hesiod or Terrence. Admit the books written by the fathers of early ages, and by our reforming ancestors, are not so elegantly adorned with the garniture of diction, what then? Are we to prefer for our associates elegantly dressed harlots, to the simplex munditiis (if I may quote once the filthy Horace,) of the daughters of God. Away with such profane dogmas.

3. *Godly professors, orthodox, wise, able, and fearers of God are requisite.* The mind of the scholar is imbued with the spirit of the teacher. Every honest tutor carefully reviews preparatory to the hearing of recitations, what he is to teach. If the books are irreligious, as all heathen books are, the preceptor's mind is turned away from Christ to vanity, and his instructions savour of the world only. For a lifetime, he teaches the young immortal mind, of the Church's sons and daughters, without one hint of divine things. An angel from heaven could not know from all that he utters, whether he is in the school of Quintillian or at Rome, in Nero's reign.

4. *The pupils in the learned institutions ought to be, at least, what is called moral.* "Evil communications corrupt good manners." This is most emphatically true of the social intercourse of youth in the colleges. Their associations especially, where they board in students commons, are chiefly with one another. Their manners and habits of thought are commonly formed for life in the boarding rooms. The greater part of our under graduates are notoriously ungodly, and very many of them most grossly. Some years ago the President of Jefferson College (Pa.) stated in the Synod of Pittsburgh, as ground of great rejoicing, that out of 250 pupils, 50 were as he expressed it, "*hopefully pious.*" This is probably among the most moral colleges in the United States. A ground of great gratulation that, only one-fifth of the pupils were on Christ's side! Four in the ranks of the enemy, for one on the side of the church—friends of the Lord Jesus! The Spirit in the book of Proverbs, commands us "not to enter into the path of the wicked." Pro. iv. 14. Were youth, reputable for Christian morality, all reading as their employment daily, the pure Hebrew and Greek fountains, and other works of the great and good men, "who being dead yet speak," they would be furnished with divine topics of conversation, by all which they would grow in grace and in the knowledge of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

5. *Their mental culture by the reading of the Bible, Chrysostom and Calvin, in company with godly fellow-students, under the care of orthodox and exemplary professors, will be promoted much more felicitously, than it is now in Paganism.* God will smile on such a system of education. Sin enfeebles the soul in all its faculties, virtue invigorates. Such a book as Horace, demoralizes and debases, and enfeebles the mind of the pupil. To this it is objected that Luther and Moses were great men and good men. Very true. Paul was greater than either of them. Shall we educate our sons Pharisees, because Paul was educated thus. Shall we educate them monks, because Luther was nurtured in a monastery? God in a few rare instances, converts men who are taught when young in all evil, not only to make them illustrious trophies of his saving grace, but that knowing vice, they may when converted combat it more efficiently; are we therefore to nurture our children in vice? How preposterous this folly.

6. *Christian class books replenish the mind of the pupil with knowledge.* It is not denied that the heathen furnish some information, which a pure mind may employ in the service of the Church. Zenophon's Life of Cyrus, Cæsar's Commentaries, Livy and Tacitus, contain records of events of interest and magnitude. But surely no Christian man will plead that these facts referring wholly to the heathen world, are as valuable as those which are recorded by the pen of inspiration, in the

Old Testament, and in the New, or in Eusebius's Church History. The laws of God are the rule of our duty. They can be better learned in the Bible than in Cicero de Legibus. The doctrines of divine grace and salvation through the crucified Saviour, imbue the mind of the pupil, with what every good man will admit is infinitely better than all pagan philosophy. "Seek that wisdom which cometh down from above." Wisdom is "better than rubies." Who can know that his son will not die in the midst of his heathen studies? Are the books which he cons over from day to day, a suitable preparation for entrance into that city where nothing that defileth or that maketh a lie shall enter.

7. *The study of Christian books is a divinely appointed means of producing and nurturing saving faith in the Redeemer of those who are "ordained to eternal life."* None will pretend that this blessed end can be attained by the study of Homer, Epictetes and Seneca, by the poems and moral disquisitions of heathen writers. We are here but for a few days, and the great object for which we are continued in the church militant, is to cultivate faith and holiness, in order that we may be prepared for the church triumphant. These ends cannot be attained by a course of youthful training, that leads the thoughts of the learner away from Christ our only hope.

8. *The study of those books that contain the truths of the gospel, preserves the children of the Church from temptation.* We are taught to pray:—"Lead us not into temptation." Can any one pretend that the literary course of our learned institutions does not expose our children to all the seductions of vice. The vices of the heathen world are garnished in our collegiate class books, with all the adornments of poetic and other beauties of style. With these, the youthful mind is fascinated. It drinks of the poisoned chalice with which the mother of harlots and abominations intoxicates the nations of the earth. A taste for paganized poetry, history, and philosophy, is acquired, and it must be gratified at the expense of everlasting perdition. This and this only accounts for the irreligious complexion of our current literature, with which the press now groans. The periodical works that furnish almost all the reading of this age, are as devoid of true and undefiled religion, as books read by Thucydides and other competitors, for fame in the Olympic games. The Lord is not in all the thoughts of our journalists. They are the streams flowing from pagan fountains, which diffuse spiritual disease and death over the whole earth.

"Let us cease to do evil, and learn to do well." It is time for the friends of the Church to unite their energies for the reformation of literature. The world cannot be reclaimed until the fountains of learning shall be purged, and the bitter waters sweetened. Let a few, even very few friends of God's covenanted Reformation, take the work in hand, relying by faith on the God of the Bible, he will bring judgment unto victory. It is not of God to save by many or by few. In the holy providence of our Redeemer, the way is opened for us by great, efficient and growing Bible and Missionary efforts—arise and build—God, the Lord of Hosts is on our side.—Amen.