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(For the Covenanter.)

THE HEATHEN CLASSICS—DANGEROUS SCHOOL BOOKS.*

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Let no one be startled by this announcement. It may sound in the ears of some as the first assault of the missionary when he denounces the worship of idols in Hindostan, does in the ears of the Brahmin. To condemn the long continued and almost universal course of pagan literature in the learned institutions, and to repudiate the Shasters and Vedas of heathen Asia, are analogous enterprises. The mere antiquity and general prevalence of any system of either learning or religion, is no evidence of its accordance with the law of Christ.

Let us examine in detail the effects of the books used as text books for pupils in all the learned institutions.

I. *They produce a disrelish for the Holy Scriptures.* The great aim of the Bible is to make known "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," to teach us our fallen condition, our liability to eternal wrath, and our utter helplessness to discover the way of salvation through Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. Nothing of kindred import with this divine and heavenly doctrine is found in Cæsar, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Livy or Tacitus, Latin classics, or in Xenophon, Græca Minora, Græca Majora, Epictetus, Longinus, Demosthenes or Homer, of the Greeks. They are all, as their authors were, "without God; without Christ in the world." Their whole complexion is diametrically opposite to the gospel. They glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became vain in their imaginations. This is the estimate which the spirit of inspiration makes by the pen of Paul, (Rom. i. 21, 22,) of those pagan writers of whom the literary world boasts, as the venerable and godlike sages of Greece and Rome. The effusions of impious minds, the vain imaginations of darkened hearts, when read, re-read, conned over, treasured up in the memory, furnishing for years the pabulum, the daily bread of our sons in the academies, expounded to the pupils, and applauded by grave clerical professors, must, and always will, nourish a disrelish "for the pure milk of the word." All the fundamental laws

* This article consists of a portion of the opening address at the opening of the Theological Seminary in the city of Cincinnati, Nov., 1845, considerably abridged, and in other ways a little remodelled. It presents a strong view of one side of a subject that all must allow to be of no small interest. A few of the objections against the study of the classics have, perhaps, been in a measure obviated by means of expurgated editions, but the great bulk never can in our judgment be obviated in this way. The subject ought to attract attention.—(Ev. Cov.)

of mental culture and action must be changed, if the training of youth for years, when the mind is tender, in the vain imaginations of Virgil and Homer, does not turn them away from our Lord Jesus Christ and his pure and blessed evangel.

That there are many fine moral maxims adorned with the garniture of correct style and brilliant fancy, many noble traits of character, heroic sentiments and deeds of manly daring recorded by the historians, philosophers and poets of the academies, is freely admitted. But their worth is dimmed and soiled by their false position. Their best sentiments issue from corrupt fountains. The motives for these virtues were not only defective, but sinful. The most exalted aim of even Socrates is to procure, by merit, the favour of the gods. It vitiates, in the eyes of God, the best actions, when they are done to merit his favour. These portions of scholastic heathenism operate more efficiently to entice unwary youth from Christ, his Bible, and his holy religion, than do the grosser immoral sentiments that defile many of their pages. The poison of sin is disguised by an insidious tincture of goodness, vice arrayed in the robes of virtue. The mind that is formed altogether on the model of Xenophon, Cicero, Virgil and Homer, cannot but be alienated from the Bible, and for that reason they ought to be discarded. We have in the ancient languages enough of excellent Christian books without them.

II. *Were these works of the heathen less mischievous than they are, the time and money expended on them would still be sinfully wasted.* In England, and with little variation the same is true of this country, when a boy is designed to become a literary man, almost all his school hours from his seventh until he finishes his fifteenth year, and even later, are occupied with learning to read these pagan books. For eight years in his tender age, when his mental powers are in process of forming tastes and habits of action for time, and it may be for eternity, he holds intimate fellowship with unchristian—yes, with the *anti-christian* minds of unchaste heathens. Will any christian father or mother maintain that the time of a son, a son dedicated to God for the holy ministry, could not be appropriated to a course of instruction more becoming a child of the church? “Is there no God in Israel, that thou goest to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron?”

The annual expense of maintaining a youth at an academy from home, may be estimated at \$200. Eight years of mental training, costing \$1,600, surely ought to accomplish something to prepare a boy dedicated to God, for at least living a holy life and dying a christian death, if not to qualify him for preaching the everlasting gospel. Were your son, christian father and mother, to die at the end of his pagan course, and die in great mental darkness, the eyes of his understanding having been made dim, if not blind, by groping many years in heathenism, would you not mourn in the bitterness of sorrow over the sad misappropriation of the property which God gave you, and the misspending of eight years in the brief life of your child? Such an event would be deeply deplored by every godly parent. These occurrences are common, and yet, alas! they pass unheeded.

It is very true, “blessed be God, for his mercy endureth for ever,” that in answer to the prayers of believing parents, and by the influence of a well conducted christian education at home, antagonistic to the malignant influence of the heathen academy, some of the sons of the godly are plucked as brands out of the fire. Grace, in its saving and heavenly influence, is sometimes implanted in the infant mind before it

is exposed to the dangers of academical temptation. The love of God wrought in the soul, "many waters cannot quench, nor floods drown." But all this makes the guilt of the misappropriation of the time and property far more aggravated. To place this young and tender plant, early by the grace of God transplanted into the nursery for heaven, to place it for years "in a dry parched land, wherein there is no water," is a deplorable error.

Were God to reveal the fact that a boy must die at the age of sixteen, there is not a father or mother, who fears the Lord, in Christendom, that would employ eight years and expend \$1,600 in having him taught to read the pagan course of the academies. Why? Evidently because such study would *be felt* to unfit him for that holy heaven "into which nothing that defileth or maketh a lie can enter;" and surely that must be a bad qualification even for this life, and especially for a life occupied in the functions of the holy ministry, which disqualifies for heaven.

We have Christian authors in the ancient languages more than enough, in the reading of which our sons may be trained in the happiest modes of mental culture, preparing them for the most important professional duties, and advancing at the same time their growth in grace and preparation for heavenly mansions. Away, then, with pagan, corrupt trash, and let us appropriate the time and money even of literary culture to our holy Christianity.

III. *The heathen academical class books not only fail to improve, they corrupt morals.* They commend, in all the fascinations of elegant composition and tasteful imagery, nearly every vice that has ever debased our polluted planet. Their doctrines are all false, at least in the manner, connections, and purposes for which they teach them. Bad doctrine tends inevitably to evil practice. Edwards, in his treatise on the Will, demonstrates that it possesses no self-determining power or liberty of indifference. Its volitions are and must be determined by motives. Some object is before the mind which the will, in every act, intends either to gain or eschew. To act in view of a motive, is necessary to constitute an action rational. To will without a motive is to act, at least, as unreasonably as brute animals. It is the understanding or the intellectual faculty that presents the motive to the will or active power. The law of God prescribes the rule of action, and truth furnishes motives to obedience. Where the power of lust, impelling to sin, is strong, as it is in every unregenerate mind, truth must be clearly perceived in order to exert the power necessary to overcome the opposing force of corruption.

The truth of moral maxims, and the reasons for practising them, were obscurely perceived by the least immoral of the heathen authors. That homage is due to the Deity, they knew; but the duty was not enforced by motives strong enough to make them perform the worship in a truly devotional spirit. Even the supreme objects of their adoration is represented as themselves, weak, vicious and immoral. True, he is endowed with some great and excellent attributes. He is the *νεφεληγεστα* *Zeus*, the cloud-collecting Jove. He is Jupiter Tonans, Jove the Thunderer, but it is his personal enemies, not unchaste groves and cities that he smites with his thunderbolts. He is represented as just, weighing actions in his balance with a steady hand; but he is at the same time a feeble and a vicious god. The inferior deities unite to bind him with his own thunder. He temporises and is emancipated. He is made, by the entreaties of the inferior gods, to do what he thinks wrong. In all these respects he is finite and even weak: but worst of all he is vicious. He

is an infamous adulterer. One cannot go into the details of his infamous amours without trespassing against delicacy. When Juno upbraids him with his infidelity, he not only denies the crime, but swears a false oath to hide his shame from his offended wife. His character is so bad, that were he incarnate, no respectable family in any civilized country would admit him as a visitor. The reverence for such a god can furnish no operative motive to the practice of virtue. His worshippers must have thought themselves justified in their libertinism, perjury and other most scandalous immoralities, by the example of the god whom they adored.

It may be said that the minds of the pupils are not in danger of being corrupted by the examples of vice in the supreme god of the books they read, inasmuch as they do not believe in the existence of such a deity. To this it may be answered; (1.) We cannot be sure that the minds of young boys who have little knowledge of the living God of the Christians, do not at least partly believe in the being of Jove. (2.) He is a model which, at least in imagination, they contemplate with interest, and with which they become familiar. No one ever read the classics, and entered into their beauties, for they have beauties many and great, whose soul was not stirred with strong emotions when contemplating Jove as collecting the storm clouds, driving them on the wings of careering winds, casting forth his lightnings, and awakening the roar of mighty thunders. These descriptions, adorned with tasteful poetic imagery, charm the imagination of the learner. He more than half believes it all to be true. (3.) Whether he believes it or not, the effect on his mind is nearly the same. He is in habitual fellowship with a great and splendid, but grossly profligate being, and he is thus changed into the same image from vice to vice, even as by the spirit of paganism.

The schools of Greece, where Xenophon and Homer were read in the vernacular tongue, as we read in our primary schools the English version of the Bible; and the Roman academies, in which the present Greek classics were learned as a foreign language, and their own classics read, corrupted the morals, the former of Greece, and both, of Rome. These books were an effect of heathen immorality, and became, in turn, a cause, as they promoted the evil.

In another view, the morality of the pagan authors is inoperative. *The rule of duty is not referred to the authority of one Holy and Almighty Being who has a right to command.* Fate, expediency, enjoyment, or some other foundation of virtue, was assumed as the reason of moral obligation, and not the authority of One who has a right to command. All these are feeble motives. It is true, Christ Jesus, who, as Mediator, has governed the whole world, Christian and pagan, since the first promise, makes use of such motives as governed the heathen for the preservation of some degree of moral order in the social relations. But where the high and holy motives which Christianity presents to prompt to the performance of duty are unknown, the morals of the people always have been, are, and always will, and must be bad.

We might add other considerations. We might show that *the class books of our schools never rise higher in commendations of virtue than merely selfish considerations.* When they enforce charity to the poor and compassion for the afflicted, the motive is our own comfort. "Virtue is its own reward." A regard to the love and glory of God, and respect for his divine authority, are unknown to all the pagans.

We need not say that the argument in favour of virtue drawn from

the love of God, "in not sparing his own Son, but freely delivering him up to the death for us all," is, of course, no element in the moral code of the pagan world. Where that is wanting, the state is necessarily corrupt. Paul and the other apostles employ that as their chief argument to enforce the code of Christian morals. "The love of Christ constraineth us," and, alas! in this paganised age, even the public teachers of Christianity lay little stress upon this motive.

IV. *These books are grossly immoral and licentious.* The preceding argument may be clearly comprehended and produce conviction of the truth of this last assertion in the mind of a father or mother who never saw one of these pagan authors. They *must* be bad. It is impossible they can be good. Those who have read the class books of the colleges *know* that this accusation is true. The orators swear profanely. Mehercule, by Hercules, is the common oath of the most refined Latin authors, and *ὕψιστος*, by Jove, that of Xenophon and other elegant Greek writers. Would any Christian parent place a son or daughter in a common school where the class books abound with profane swearing? If not in English, what will justify the use of works in Latin or Greek which habituate the learner to such profanity?

Horace commends intemperance, and bestows much praise on harlots. Many portions of his poems are so grossly licentious that no professor suffers the pupil to translate them in the recitations; but there are few pupils who do not read them, and they are conned and talked over in the rooms.* Indeed, it may be safely affirmed that were the prince of Latin lyric poets, as Horace is justly called, literally translated, there is not a mother in Christ's church that would permit the book to lie on the parlour table. Yet mothers, ignorant of the evil, labour hard to pay the expenses of their sons for a full course in carefully learning to read pages so infamously polluted.

Virgil is termed, and truly, the most chaste of all the Latin poets, and yet he records without a blush his own infamy in being guilty of the crime against nature. "Pastor Corydon ardebat Alexis delicias." "The shepherd Corydon passionately loved Alexis, the darling." Who was Corydon? Virgil, himself; and who Alexis? A boy that belonged to Mæcenas, the prime minister of Augustus. One's face crimson with shame in recording abominations so loathsome, and yet boys, in learning Ross's Latin Grammar, commit that line to memory as an exemplification of a syntax rule. This book is brought into courts of Christ that it may be read in examining a young man who is in training for the holy ministry. Some ministers, knowing this and much more to the same effect to be part and parcel of the college, would not suffer, had they the power, any one to be admitted to the study of theology until his mind is filled with this detestable paganism. Proh, pudor! Oh, shame!

Bad as the above specimen from Virgil's 10th Eclogue is, the ode of Anacreon to *εἰς βαθυλλον*, read by every boy in his Greek course of academical education, is incomparably worse. The goddess Venus proclaims, in Dalzel's *Majora*, her own shame. All scholars know that the Latin and Greek lyric poets, read in all the academies, colleges, and universities, abound with the grossest licentiousness. What greatly aggravates the sin and danger of occupying the souls of our youth with these execrable books, is, that the style in which these loathsome lusts

* These are omitted in the later school editions issued in the United States.—(Ed. Cov.)

are clothed, is of surpassing beauty. The filthy sentiment is, like a harlot, attired in the most tasteful dress, and garnished with artificial colours. "Can a man take fire in his bosom and not be burned?" The youth must be either more or less than a human being in whose soul no unholy lusts are awakened by all these fascinations of vice. The good Lord have mercy on the sons of godly parents, who are for years exposed to these almost resistless temptations.

But in other respects the complexion, aims, and tendencies of these pagan books are most immoral. Sallust's history of Catiline's conspiracy, was written as a special pleading to prove that Cæsar was not *particeps criminis* in that conspiracy. It is a false narrative designed to shield from public indignation a man who afterwards did what Catiline intended to do—overturn the republic, shedding oceans of the blood of his countrymen to gratify his boundless ambition. Cicero, too, is praised by Sallust. But how did that eloquent consul discover Catiline's conspiracy? By his libertinism. Cæsar's Commentaries, as to style and arrangement, a finished model of historical composition, is a very dangerous book. Daniel's fourth beast, the Roman government, is "exceedingly dreadful, whose teeth are iron, and his nails brass, which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet."—Dan. vii. 19. This is well exemplified by the campaigns of Cæsar in Gaul; undoubtedly the Holy Spirit in that prophesy had that destroyer of nations and scourge of God in his eye. Cæsar wrote his Commentaries to justify the tearing of the kingdoms to pieces with his beast's claws, the devouring of them with his iron teeth, the tramping of them to pieces with his feet. The young reader is led by the fallacious narrative to sympathize with this wholesale murderer, and to detest the Gauls, who endeavoured, in self-defence, to resist the wanton and merciless destroyer of their country. The homage that many Christian ministers have rendered to the Roman government, calling it the ordinance of God to man for good, and applying to the beast out of the bottomless pit the 13th chapter of Romans, may be traced to the corrupting influence of Cæsar and other Latin classics read in the schools when their minds were young and tender. The Bible of Napoleon was Cæsar's Commentaries. He slept with it under his pillow. It lighted up in his great soul those mighty fires of ambition not to be quenched but in the oceans of blood that deluged all Europe, from Moscow to the Straits of Gibraltar, and from the mouth of the Rhine to the Euxine sea.

The "pious" Æneas, the hero of the Ænead, seduced Dido, the widowed queen of Carthage, after she had entertained him hospitably, and refitted his weather-beaten fleet; and when, seeing him about to abandon her basely, she reproached him for his perfidy, like a cold-blooded villain, he says, "aut hæc in federa veni;" "madam, I have not promised to marry you." He left her. She erected a funeral pile, stabbed herself, and the poet holds her up as a noble example to be followed by other suicides. Æneas next makes war on unoffending Italy, in the true style of a Roman marauder. In these deeds of iniquity Jupiter and his mother, the goddess Venus, sustain him with their approbation and power. Is this the model on which we must form ministers of the gospel? and have we not established our proposition? If what we have affirmed, or any considerable part of it be true, should not Christian parents, Christian ministers, and Christian churches, without delay, awake to its importance, and act with firmness and decision?