

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

agent which is of little use in small quantities, and is hurtful in large, . . . . but the argument though strong is not conclusive; and unfortunately we know that in human affairs no extension of belief, however wide, is *per se* evidence of truth.”<sup>1</sup>

Inasmuch as alcohol, so far from being proved to be a necessity of the race, is admitted by the most dispassionate authorities to be the active cause of evils so great “that if it were unknown half the sin and a large part of the poverty and unhappiness in the world would disappear,”<sup>2</sup> all just efforts to promote a practical abstinence from its use have a solid ground in fact and reason.

---

## ARTICLE VII.

### THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

#### NO. VIII.—ADVANTAGES OF PRIVATE INSTRUCTION.

In the April number of the *Bibliotheca* we traced in a brief and rapid way the history of ministerial education in New England, from the founding of Harvard College in 1638 down to the establishment of theological seminaries in the early years of the present century. It was shown that the college itself for a long period from the beginning was regarded and used more as a theological seminary than as a college, according to our modern understanding of these names. The daily drill consisted largely of biblical exercises and a close study of the ancient languages in which the Bible was first written. In those early years it was considered that the work of preparation for the ministry was chiefly accomplished when the candidate had reached his graduating-day. Whatever studies might intervene between the end of the college course and the day of his ordination for the ministry were regarded rather as miscellaneous and optional than prescribed. Sometimes the young graduate remained a

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Practical Hygiene*, by E. A. Parkes, M.D., p. 277.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

year or two longer about the college, pursuing post-graduate studies under the general supervision of the president and fellows. Sometimes he entered upon a course of reading and study under the guidance of his parish minister. Still more frequently, as we judge from the records which have come down to us, he studied and read according to his own taste and pleasure. There was no fixed and digested plan of training laid down by custom or public opinion to cover the period between the close of the college course and the public work of the ministry.

It was shown also in our former Article that about the middle of the last century, when Harvard College was more than a hundred years old, and Yale about fifty, there began to grow up in New England private schools of theological instruction. The first of these of any considerable note was that of Dr. Joseph Bellamy of Bethlem, Conn. Soon after they were established in various parts of New England, and became popular. They were places of resort for almost all candidates for the ministry after they had ended their college course. These private schools held their place for some seventy or eighty years of our New England history, until they were superseded by our theological seminaries. After the founding of Andover Seminary, in 1808, these private schools for some years divided with the seminary the work of theological education. For example, Dr. Jacob Ide of West Medway was not settled in the ministry until 1814, six years after Andover had begun its work. By his location at West Medway, and by his marriage, as also by his dignity and wisdom, he inherited in some good degree the traditions of his father-in-law, the famous Dr. Emmons of Franklin. No one of these private schools had been more noted and popular than that of Dr. Emmons; and when he rested from his public labors not a few young men in that particular region, and others whose theological affinities would naturally have led them to him as their teacher, resorted to Dr. Ide. Though he did not seek to become known as a theological instructor, yet in the course of his long ministry he superin-

tended the education of some twenty or thirty candidates for the ministry.

In attempting to point out some of the advantages which these private schools of theology had over the present methods of our seminaries, let it be conceded at the outset most fully and freely that in respect to wide ranges and varieties of culture, to large and learned acquisitions, to the refinements and felicities of sacred literature, the former system was far inferior to the present. The whole course of instruction in these private schools was usually comprehended within a year, often within six or eight months. The teacher himself was busy with the cares of a parish and in the preparation of sermons. Under such conditions it would be simply preposterous to suppose that fields of varied study could be traversed like those which are gone over in the seminaries, with a full corps of instructors, each making a speciality of his own department, and with a period of three years in which to complete their rounds. Back in the days of this private instruction it occasionally happened that some young man, having more time or money on his hands than his companions went from one school to another, so as to secure for himself the plans and suggestions of different teachers. But these cases were rare. The great majority of students resorting to these schools completed their studies in one year or less.

It is also in justice to be granted that one hundred years ago, when these private schools were in full activity, their success depended not a little upon the fact that the age was a theological rather than a literary one. The minds of men and women generally in all parts of New England were more occupied than now with questions of divinity, and with disputed interpretations of Scripture passages. It was the age, too, of homespun and plain living. People of all classes were satisfied with things simple and solid. The passion for luxury and show had not yet become dominant. The young man going from his college to reside in the family of Dr. Emmons of Franklin, or of Dr. Burton of Thetford, Vermont, or in almost any other of the New England schools, would find

himself in a quiet country town, composed chiefly of the families of farmers. In all ordinary cases the most conspicuous person in the town would be the minister, and the most exciting incident of the week was the gathering of the people on the Sabbath to look in each others' faces, and hear the sermons. The most stirring conversation in the scattered households was likely to grow out of what had been seen and heard on the Sabbath. No tides of periodical literature were pouring into the place. Monthly magazines and ponderous quarterlies, newspapers sorted and suited to every calling, and to every age and condition of life, were then unknown. Once a week a solitary post-rider might have been seen making his rounds among the scattered farm-houses, to drop here and there some small weekly paper containing a few items of foreign and domestic news. The age was sober and serious, and questions of theology had for the people an intellectual as well as a spiritual interest. The doctrines of different schools and systems were discussed for the pleasure of a keen debate, as well as for the religious importance attached to them. The theological student coming to reside in such a community was not an unwelcome visitor. He brought with him a certain quickening and refreshing influence from the outside world, and by his youth and his culture added an important element to this simple and quiet country life.

With these concessions made, let us consider now what were the chief forming and educating influences under which the student of theology was placed in these private schools, and what were the advantages of this system over our modern way.

1. He had come to put himself under the direct personal care of one for whom he had a profound respect and reverence. He would not else be here. For years he has heard of this man as one of the leading ministers of his generation, and it is with a certain sense of awe that he comes now to sit at his feet as a learner. He is to be placed in much closer and more intimate relations with this man than he would ever have had with any one of the professors in a theologi-

cal seminary. He is to sit at his table, be with him "in the house and by the way," partake in the evening conversation, share in the companionships of the study and the family. With the high admiration which he carries with him, his mind and heart will be alive and open to all influences, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, which his instructor can bring to bear upon him. He will appropriate these influences for his own mental and moral growth as quickly and naturally as a healthy body appropriates its proper food. It is an immense gain in respect to the ease and rapid progress of a young man's education when he brings with him to the task a thorough confidence in and reverence for his teacher. He has consequently a joy and an enthusiasm in his daily work. He takes on growth and culture by a kind of insensible absorption.

Of course when such a relation as this is established there may be danger that the student will copy too minutely the thoughts and ways of his teacher, and become simply an imitator. But this will depend mainly upon the question whether he has or has not an intellect of his own. If he has a good native strength of understanding this daily intercourse will serve like refreshing rains upon a thirsty field. His whole intellectual and spiritual nature will be thoroughly quickened and enlarged by such an experience.

One of the objects for which this young man is brought into these intimate relations is to be made acquainted with himself, as well as to learn the thoughts and ways and systems of other men. Almost every young man in this stage of preparation will be likely to have faults of manners, of speech, and of character that need correcting. He is now under an experienced eye that will easily detect the ruling bent of his mind and heart. All weaknesses and defects will be exposed to view, at the same time that all good qualities will be recognized and approved. In the daily intercourse of the family, in the presence of wife and children, in the passing words with neighbors and friends, in the social prayer-meeting, in his habits of thought and of study, this young

man is under a kindly instruction, both of the minister and his wife, where the predominant qualities of his mental and his moral nature will be thoroughly searched out. Daily hints, wisely and kindly given by one whom he so thoroughly respects, and who stands in such peculiar relations to him, will fall upon his ear very differently than if they were sarcastically shot at him by fellow students, or delivered solemnly by the professor in the public recitation-room. They will come like the wise counsels of a kind father to a conscientious and obedient son.

Some of these teachers had effective ways, or "short methods," of reaching their ends when gentle hints did not avail. "The words of the wise are as goads," and these "masters of assemblies" knew how, when necessity called, to "fasten a nail in a sure place." "Why is it," said a young man to Dr. Emmons, "that young ministers feel so small after talking with you?" The reply was, "Because they feel so big before coming here." Dr. Bellamy, who, as we have said, may be regarded as the originator of these schools, was a man who spoke at times with a tremendous authority. While he had great power as a teacher, and drew young men to himself by the total assemblage of his qualities, he was extremely rough upon occasions, and struck at all shams and pretences with the force of a trip-hammer. Other men, like Dr. Ebenezer Porter, Rev. Asahel Hooker, Dr. Alvan Hyde, and others, were far more equable and gentle in their words and ways, but able also to criticise and administer reproof when it was needed.

The relationships formed between these private teachers of theology and the young men who resorted to them for instruction were often of the most intimate and enduring character. It cannot in the nature of things be expected that a professor in a theological school, under the conditions of his life, will ever become so personally and individually interested in the young men whom he instructs as did one of these private teachers. He had a few young men all to himself in all departments of study. When they left his house

to enter upon the public work of the ministry he had so thoroughly identified himself with them, the work of his mind and heart was so wrought upon them, that he and they had become to each other like a father and his sons. He would look after them with a kind of paternal interest, and they would look back to him with filial gratitude. These relationships were not without their mutual uses in all subsequent experience. They contributed to those Christian amenities which are not merely graceful, but in the best sense useful.

2. In these private schools the candidates for the ministry while pursuing their studies were kept within the fold of the churches, and in close and living relations to human society.

In our present method of theological instruction it is not to be denied that while we are educating young men *for* the ministerial calling we are also in some sense educating them *away* from it. For three years they are separated from the ordinary on-goings of life, and are shut up to a severe scholastic exercise and drill. Their intellects are trained, and made quick and bright, but it is apt to be at the expense of their hearts. Young men themselves passing through this public course of theological culture are made sensible all the while of a certain discordance between their present tendencies and their ultimate aim in life. Their emotional nature is suffering loss. The ardent hopes, the warm Christian impulses, with which they set out upon their chosen way die down by degrees. Their daily round of life becomes cold and perfunctory. It was so to some extent in the college; but now they are nearer to the end, and their studies are shaped more expressly toward their life-work, and so the discrepancy between what they are and what they ought to be becomes more apparent. When their education is ended, though their minds may be thoroughly disciplined and well stored with knowledge, they often find themselves morally and religiously farther away from their chosen profession than when they set out. The love of souls, which once burned strongly within them, and which must be the animating principle in every great and successful ministry, has grown low and dull under



the habitual routine of the study and the recitation-room. Many a young man finds himself upon the very threshold of the ministry, his long course of study ended, and yet a kind of moral chasm seems to yawn between him and that high calling to which he has devoted these long years of preparation. Before he can engage lovingly and efficiently in that work this chasm must be bridged over.

In the school of private theological instruction the influences surrounding the candidate for the ministry were altogether different. Having finished his college course, he finds himself now restored again to society. The warm currents of ordinary human life are flowing around him. He is associated with a man who has the present care of souls on his hands, one who goes out among the scattered households day by day to minister the consolations of the gospel to the sick and dying. All classes and conditions are looking to him for guidance and comfort,—the aged and infirm, those who are in the strength and activities of life, and the little children just coming upon the stage. The daily thoughts of the teacher become the daily thoughts of the student. He is in a world of practical work as well as in a world of study. His mind and his heart are trained together toward that sacred calling which lies just before him. Daily he feels all around him the throbbing of human souls. If the old Latin adage, "*Bene orasse est bene studuisse*," be true it must certainly be equally true that he will learn most effectually how to apply the comforts and consolations of the gospel to human hearts by living where the work is done daily before his very eyes.

3. If the student in these private schools did not range over so large fields of study, or become possessed of such rich storehouses of sacred learning, it may be that he caught the gist of the whole matter quite as effectually as do our modern students in divinity.

There are many things pertaining to the culture and growth of the human mind which always strike us as half paradoxical, and yet they are strictly and strikingly true.

The age of great scholars is not necessarily the age of great men. Indeed, by a kind of uniform law that period in a nation's history when its greatest men, — its grandest thinkers, its loftiest poets and orators and philosophers, — are upon the stage is a period considerably earlier than that of its ripest and fullest scholarship. It is when books are comparatively rare, and when original minds, waking into activity, are thrown back to a large extent upon their own thoughts rather than upon the thoughts of others. The Homers, the Shakespeares, the Miltons, of our race almost always come and go before the gigantic libraries are gathered, and before the great universities flower out in a kind of universal scholarship. Or, to come nearer home, and take a more familiar illustration, the New England college one hundred and fifty, a hundred, or even seventy-five years ago was a very plain and simple affair compared with the present. The teachers were few in number, and the range of their learning was small. In the early years of Harvard and Yale and Dartmouth the whole course of study was different, indeed, but hardly larger or more extended than that established to-day in our leading academies and high schools. Consider, too, that in those primitive days the classes were small, the population was thin and scattered; while now every department of our great colleges swarms with students. If we are searching after men of great parts we have an immensely greater number to select from now than in those ancient days. And yet we may safely affirm that a young man came forth from Yale College a hundred and sixty years ago, in the person of Jonathan Edwards, greater by many degrees than any one likely to be graduated there for long years to come. Dartmouth probably will not soon see another Daniel Webster, and Harvard will look in vain for orators, historians, divines, superior to those she sent forth from her college gates in the ruder generations gone by.

Let us take a still more simple and humble example. The common school of New England fifty and a hundred years ago was very small and inexpensive compared with the

present. In the winter some forty or fifty children and youth, ranging from four to twenty years of age, were brought together in some little red or brown school-house, under a teacher who cost eight or ten dollars a month, and was boarded around the district; in the summer the smaller portion of this same flock was, at the same place, under some young lady teacher, costing a dollar or two a week, and boarded after the same manner, while the larger boys and girls were hard at work on the farms and at the farm-houses. Yet that cheap and simple school of the ancient days made strong men and women, who acted well their part, and gave dignity to human life. Those who compare the district schools of to-day with those of the earlier New England, while they will easily see many improvements, will not probably discover in the total results anything exactly corresponding to the greatly increased fuss, philosophy, and expense centring about our modern institution.

And so the private school of theology, plain and unpretending as it was compared with the apparatus and working force of our modern theological seminaries, did somehow find out what the student wanted, and put him in possession of it. These private schools served to gather up in a concentrated way the results of vast thought and experience in the older generations, and pass them on to the new. They were channels through which, as one has well said, flowed the combined wisdom of the fathers.

While it would be foolish to decry human learning and the broadest culture, yet it has been a noticeable fact in the history of the Christian church that some of the men who have preached the gospel most effectually, and wrought the largest changes in human society, have not been known as men of great learning. They have been thoroughly instructed in the Scriptures, and have known how to wield powerfully and skilfully "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Certainly it cannot be urged with much show of reason that the great preachers and leading divines of New England in the early years of the present century, formed and educated

under the old system of instruction, were not on the whole as well furnished and prepared for their work as their successors, who have been trained in the new ways. It would be easy to present a catalogue of men among those who occupied the New England pulpits sixty and seventy years ago, who for strength of understanding and commanding power over their audiences have not been surpassed in these later days. It is not to be questioned that among the clergymen of the present time there are far more who can write able articles for our religious periodicals illustrating every department of Christian learning than were to be found at the beginning of the present century. As students and scholars they are superior; but this does not imply that they are superior as preachers. We know the danger of judging by remembered impressions. The mind of the person judging has undergone such changes, as the years have been passing on, that he must look well to his conclusions, that they do not rest upon deceptive foundations; he must bear in mind that the age is a new one, and that the audiences now are quite different,—not so open and receptive to gospel truth as they were then. But after all the conditions have been considered, and all allowances made, we believe that the preachers of the old school knew the secret of the gospel power, and where their strength lay, as fully as do their successors.

The theological system taught by a man with a pulpit to fill Sabbath after Sabbath, with a waiting people to be cared for in all their spiritual interests, will very naturally be a different system—simpler, more condensed, more direct and practical—than the one which is shaped in the seminary by the professor of dogmatic theology. The latter has time and opportunity for a broad and discursive presentation. The former is shut up to narrower limits, and by the most speedy path must reach “the conclusion of the whole matter.” His system will be more compact and energetic; better fitted to grapple at once with the wants of the mind and heart.

4. This system of private instruction conduced greatly to beget studious habits among the settled ministers.

In our former Article it was shown that these private schools of theology in New England became in time quite numerous. By the closing years of the last century, and during the early portion of the present, there were five or six of these schools in Massachusetts, four or five in Connecticut, New Hampshire had two or three, and Vermont, then a new state, had one that was quite famous, that of Dr. Burton of Thetford. But it was also shown that in addition to these more common places of resort, which had grown to such proportions as to be called schools, a large number of conspicuous ministers in various parts were accustomed to receive occasional students into their families, and give them instruction. This general fact implies, of course, that all these ministers to fit themselves to become teachers had to make a careful and thoughtful review of their scriptural and theological studies. This kind of research would be different, more close and critical, than that which belonged to their ordinary preparations for the pulpit. The men thus engaged in every part of New England would, as has been suggested, be the leading ministers in their several localities. They would carry into the meetings of the district associations with which they were severally connected the fresher thought derived from these special studies. And so by causes direct and indirect, by the action and reaction of mind upon mind, the ministry at large would be kept brighter, more active and wakeful, more thoughtful and cultured, by reason of these little schools of theology, each busy with its local work.

We have men among us who are all the while yearning after a great national university, into which all smaller universities and colleges may be absorbed, as comets are supposed at last to be drawn into the sun. They argue, plausibly, as it might seem, that if we could have all the learned professors in the land, all the libraries, and educational apparatus thus concentrated, and then have the thousands and tens of thousands of students from every part of the country brought into the very focus of this light and heat, we could give such an education as would be worthy of the name.

But experience and common sense teach us that this is nothing better than the dream of visionaries, that smaller institutions, placed at frequent intervals, and dotting the whole domain by their local lights, serve for the growth and intellectual culture of a nation in a far higher degree than could ever be secured by a single institution. As well might one propose that all the lamps, candles, and gas-burners which nightly make the homes of the nation cheerful from the Atlantic to the Pacific should be combined in one great light planted upon some mountain-top for a general illumination. God can, indeed, hang a central sun in the heavens high enough and strong enough to give light and heat to all parts of a planetary system. But when man attempts anything of the kind his work is apt to be found puny and contemptible. And so it happened that these private schools of theology in the olden days, planted at frequent intervals over all New England, had a quickening and educating influence, first of all upon the whole body of the ministers, and through them upon the whole body of the people.

5. The law which applies to other professions and callings in life applies with equal strength to the ministry.

The student in medicine cannot receive a full education at the medical school. After the lectures are ended, and the books have been read, and the dissecting-room closed, he needs to study *practically* under some wise and experienced physician. He must learn to detect the signs of disease in the living organism, and can only learn this safely and successfully under the eye of one who can quickly separate the true from the false. Hence the young man who seeks to make himself an accomplished physician often resorts to the great hospitals of Paris, where he may look upon every form of disease in the various stages of its development, and by the help of men of great experience learn how to call each disease by its right name, and apply the fitting remedies. No amount of science gathered from books and lectures can obviate the need of this study at the bed of the patient. Forty years ago, connected with one of our medical schools

as professor, was a man of the most unbounded learning. The whole realm of the *materia medica* was as familiar to him as the alphabet. On the scientific side of the subject he was a kind of walking encyclopaedia; but he was not regarded as a good and safe physician, and his services were seldom asked at the bedside of the sick. He was too exclusively theoretical; he had never bridged over the gulf which separates the theory from the practice of medicine. Many men without a tenth part of his learning by close practical study and observation became eminent physicians.

The law school and the library do not alone make a good lawyer. Common sense still teaches that after the lectures are ended, and all the learned treatises have been read, an important part of the student's education is still to be acquired. He must go into the office of some busy practitioner, and learn what may be called little things, but which are really great things in their bearing upon the work of his life. There are many technics to be mastered. Law terms and definitions and modes of expression must be thoroughly comprehended. The daily drill of the law office; the common talk which goes on with clients as they come in with their several cases; a thousand *ins* and *outs* not laid down in the books; these things are indispensable to make an able and successful lawyer.

The same general principle prevails in respect to many other professions and callings in life. The young man who discovers a genius for painting or sculpture or architecture does not trust to his own genius, or to such information as he can gain from books. There is a body of tradition on these subjects, accumulating as the years pass on, which is handed down from one generation of artists to another in their places of work. The greater the talent and native ability of the young student the more strongly will he desire to visit the lands made famous by art, and put himself in living communication with those who have already achieved greatness in these pursuits.

Can any good reason be shown why the candidate for the

ministry should be exempt from this law, which is so wide-reaching and so practically useful in the other professions? Does he not need that wisdom of the fathers which is handed down in example and daily conversation as well as that which is stored up in ancient books? Would it not be wise and fitting to bring back, in part at least, the earlier New England custom, and make our education for the ministry more personal and practical? We shall not, of course, forego the superior culture afforded by the theological seminary. No private teacher can hope to compete with its corps of instructors, with its library, and with all its various aids to ripe learning. But the time of the student can at least be divided between the severe drill of the school and the practical education of the parish and the pastor's household. Some of our seminaries by their long summer vacations have designed to open the way for these mingled influences. But so far as our observation has extended, the theological student in the long summer recess is more apt to seek some field of remunerative labor than to put himself as a simple learner into the family of a pastor. We have in fact done little as yet to reproduce the advantages of the former methods. We shall not probably realize that culture for which we are seeking by simply opening a place for it in the long vacation. More and more the holiday spirit fills the summer months. If the practical part of a minister's education is consigned to that period of the year alone there is a kind of dishonor put upon it at the outset. The student needs to enter upon that part of his education with as much system and as much seriousness as upon the other.

If the old order of personal and private education for the ministry were in some form restored there are certain candidates who by reason of age and previous experiences would find that specially suited to their want, without the severer drill of the school. The two parts of the one system might adjust themselves to the differing needs of the several candidates.