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**PUBLIC PRAYERS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.**

BY PROF. F. D. HUNTINGTON.

In all the principal seats of learning in the United States and Canada there is a daily social service of devotion for the students. We are not aware of a single exception to this religious usage. Whatever the notions or doubts of educators may be, it seems to be practically felt that some sort of moral power is lodged in such an observance. An indistinct sense lingers in the mind that somehow the interests most sacred and most prized, in these assemblies of youths, are at least safer with it than without it. Whether its essential spiritual comeliness and dignity are generally recognized or not, the venerable traditions of Christendom sustain it and demand it. To a literary institution wholly renouncing it, the community would find a grave difficulty in continuing its confidence.

With the right-minded guardians and officers of education it becomes a vital and important question, how to conduct these exercises so that they shall fulfil the manifest purpose of their appointment; have a spirit as well as a shape; bring a devout sacrifice as well as a bodily attendance; diffuse a hallowing influence over the restless and eager life congregated there; awaken strong resolves and pure aspirations, call down the answer and benediction of Heaven. In many instances, as we have abundant reason to believe, the method is far from satisfactory either to those that listen or those that lead.

Perhaps the first condition of any adequate benefit from the service is that it be treated by all that are responsible for it as a reality; as what it pretends to be; as real prayer. After all, to a striking degree, the tone and manner of a whole institution will insensibly take their character from the manifest spirit and bearing of its principal conductors. Let it be plain to every hearer and witness that in these gatherings there is more than a pretence of praying. Let it be seen that in one at least, in him who is speaking, and in as many as do truly accompany him, man is verily speaking to his Maker, and speaking in an humble expectation that he shall be heard;—telling his real wants, acknowledging sins that he really deplores, breathing requests for helps and blessings that he really desires. A nameless power and impression will inevitably go with such devotions. Artifice will be driven out. The ingenuities of invention, in thought or phrase, will never so pass the line of simplicity as to trespass on the awful sanctity of the Ineffable Presence invoked. Excess of human elaboration and indolent neglect are equally alien from a veritable intercourse with the Father of spirits. And nowhere is either error more likely to be seen through and despised than in an auditory of young men. Their quick moral instincts, and their yet unperverted habit of judging without the bias of a mere current and institutional propriety, render them accurate and searching critics of sincerity.

The particular circumstances of a literary institution will naturally impart a somewhat local and special character to the petitions and thanksgivings offered before its members. Young men are not insensible to this direct and peculiar reference to their wants. It touches their feelings and carries them more easily up to the Mercy-Seat. Thorough and relentless despisers of every species of cant, and commonly sensitive to sentimentalism, no class of persons will be found more readily and cordially to appreciate a kind word or a considerate desire in their behalf. Whatever the negligence of that external air which, in youth, is so often found to be the uncomely and graceless mask of honest gratitude and trust, they still like to know that their teachers care enough for their best welfare really to pray for it. Thoughtless and impulsive in their hours of social amusement, they are yet bound in esteem and affection to those set over them, who remember their troubles, sympathise with their conflicts and discouragements, and entreat God to bless their life, their homes, their friends, their studies, their reciprocal relations with their instructors, their bodies,