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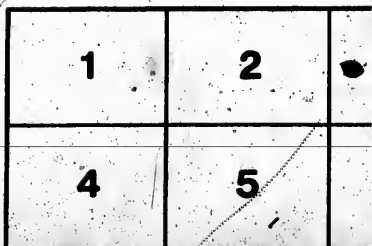
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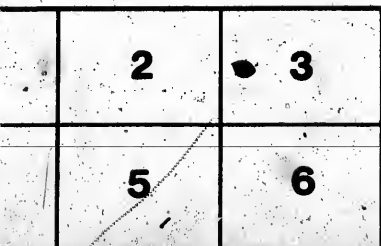
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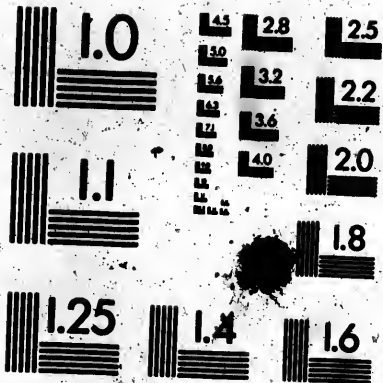
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January 190

THE FIFTH

CIRCULAR LETTER

OF THE

Ottawa Baptist Association.

BY THE REV. DR. DAVIES.

The Ministers and Delegates, assembled in Association at St. Andrews, on the 22d day of January 1840, to the Churches which they represent, send greeting.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,—As it has pleased Him, who has been made head over all things to the church, to bring us together at this yearly season, when it is our privilege to hold fraternal intercourse, and our duty to devise measures for promoting the peace and usefulness of our religious community, we think it meet to call your attention to a matter of great moment, as it regards the success and stability of the sacred cause.

We pray you then to give your candid and Christian consideration to the subject of this year's epistle, viz :

The Importance of Education for those who undertake the Work of the Ministry.

This may seem to many not a suitable subject for a Circular Letter; yet our present circumstances justify the selection. There are doubtless many among us, who have not hitherto considered this matter and felt its importance, and it is to be feared there are some, who look upon it with jealousy, if not with hostility. But at the same time there is among us a Theological Institution which cannot be adequately supported, without the countenance and liberality of the fraternity in general. How then can such a support be secured, unless the indifference of some and the opposition of others

be removed? When therefore we endeavour to effect the removal of these evils, it cannot be deemed foreign from the design of the annual epistle. As the object of every Christian confederacy, whether of individuals in churches, or of churches in associations, should be the advancement of religion, it cannot be inconsistent with the purpose of the present yearly meeting of the churches, to invite the attention of the members to the importance of securing a well-informed ministry.

As the present subject is novel to many, it is necessary, in order to prevent misapprehension and to remove some common mistakes and prejudices, to state distinctly, before we attempt to show the importance of education for ministers, what we mean by education, and also what we do not contend for, while urging its importance.

By education then we mean literary training in various degrees, from the lowest, which consists chiefly in the ability to speak and write the English language with propriety, to the highest that can be reached by the human mind. No Minister in the present day deserves to be called educated, unless he is at least master of his own language. The epithet cannot be properly applied to one of less attainment; and even this application of it is not customary, for it generally implies extensive and varied attainments. The education, which we think it desirable for ministers in general to possess, consists in a knowledge of the original languages of the Scriptures (in addition to a good command of their own), in a familiarity with the principal branches of Biblical Literature, and in mental discipline as the result of studying Mathematics, Logic, and other scientific subjects.

It is then for education in the sense now explained that we wish to plead; but in doing so, we desire to disclaim certain extravagant and erroneous opinions, that are held by some advocates of an enlightened ministry.

1. We do not mean to contend, *that none can be worthy and useful Ministers without Education.*—This we cannot assert, because numerous examples both in ancient and in modern times show the contrary. The first preachers of our faith are well known examples

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of this kind; for many of them were destitute of literary culture, though they were made ambassadors for Christ, who honoured them with his confidence and counted them faithful, putting them into the ministry. The apostles cannot however be compared with common illiterate men, because they had the gift of inspiration, which served as a miraculous substitute for learning, to remove their ignorance or to counteract its effects. A special assurance was given to them, that the Spirit should lead them to all the truth, which was also fulfilled in a supernatural manner. Under the influence of this divine guidance and impulse, several of them composed well written epistles or treatises, and that too in Greek, which was not their mother tongue. Both Peter and John, the very men whom the Jewish rulers pronounced (Acts iv. 13.) unlearned and ignorant, became afterwards Greek authors; and of the other Galileans, Matthew, James, and Jude, and perhaps some besides, wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Hence it may be seen that the want of literary attainments in many of the apostles cannot be justly urged as an argument against an educated ministry. It is often inferred by the opponents of education, that as the apostles could succeed without it, so may the religious teachers of the present day. But it must be evident to any considerate person, that such an inference is unjust; because the gift of inspiration is no longer dispensed. If indeed our pastors and missionaries enjoyed the same special and miraculous assistance as the first teachers, then it is very possible that they too might excel without possessing the advantages of human tuition. But it may be questioned, whether education would not have been of some value even to the apostles, highly favored as they were. Is it not at least a remarkable fact, that much more than half the New Testament was composed by learned men, viz. Paul and Luke; the former of whom was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and the latter educated for the medical profession? Is not this fact a plain indication, that even in the case of inspired men, literary training contributed not a little to increase usefulness? Why else should the apostle of the Gentiles and the beloved physician have excelled as sacred penmen? Why should they have done more than all the

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others put together, for the instruction and stability of the church in every subsequent age; except because their erudition proved a useful handmaid to their spiritual gifts?

But not to dwell longer on the case of those extraordinary men, it is cheerfully and thankfully admitted, that many, who could lay claim to neither inspiration nor education, have proved great blessings in the ministry. There is a goodly number of such men, well known and deservedly esteemed, among us. Even some of the very Fathers of our community belong to this class. Far be it then from us to detract from the worth and services of these honoured men, whose praise is in all the churches. But yet it will always be found on examination, that the usefulness of such individuals is owing either to their possessing genius, or to their laboring among people as uncultivated as themselves. A few may become eminent in consequence of possessing genius, which can amply compensate for the want of education; as was the case with John Bunyan, whose natural powers of mind made the untutored Tinker, a mighty preacher and an immortal author. But the generality succeed in the ministry, chiefly because the persons, whose good they mostly seek, are too uncultivated to detect and dislike their improprieties of speech and their crudities of thought. They never can collect and edify an intelligent congregation, who require in the teachers at least as much cultivation as they themselves possess. Illiterate preachers may be exceedingly useful among illiterate people; perhaps even more useful than some others could be, who are eminent for learning. But yet the acknowledged worth of many unlettered ministers cannot be a reason for withholding literary culture from devoted men who wish to serve God in the Gospel of his Son; because these very ministers are often heard lamenting their deficiencies, and coveting learning as a help for them in their work, and many of them have been known to toil hard for years in order to inform and improve their minds, till at length by self-teaching they became capable of interesting the most cultivated hearers, and of distinguishing themselves as Theological writers. Of this we have a bright example in Andrew Fuller, of blessed memory, who

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began to preach when very unlearned, but who was so sensible of his disadvantages that he used great diligence to acquire that knowledge, without which he could never be, what he at length became, one of the most valuable men of his time, and decidedly the most useful minister in our religious community.

2. We do not mean, on the other hand, *to contend that Education alone, apart from moral adaptation, can qualify for the Ministry.*—There are indeed multitudes who speak of training for the sacred office, in the same terms as they do of any other professional education, vainly supposing that as learning may make a lawyer, so it may also a minister. It is a notorious fact, that in all secular or state churches, young men are raised to undertake 'the care of souls,' without any regard to their religious feelings. We however utterly reprobate such a notion and such a custom. Much as we desire a *learned* ministry, we desire a *pious* ministry more. The first and most essential qualification, which we look for and demand, is godliness, while we seek learning only as a secondary, though not unimportant preparation. It is our solemn conviction that no literary attainments, no powers of *erudition*, can give fitness for the work, if the heart be not engaged in it. This preparation of the heart in man must come from the Lord, before any other preparation, whether of erudition or of eloquence, can qualify him for the ministry. Let no one then charge us with the sacrilegious intent, of making learning a substitute for piety, in the teachers of our churches.

3. We do not mean *to contend for Education in a Theological Institution, to the exclusion or disparagement of that which may be obtained in any other way.*—We desire intelligence and cultivation in general, without laying much stress on the place or manner in which they may be acquired; though we feel a preference for the training given in, what may be called, 'the schools of the prophets,' since it is likely to be more suitable and valuable, as having a more special and direct bearing on ministerial duties. But if the learning itself be sound and to the purpose, we care not much whether it has been gained at home, or in the Collegiate seats of

liberal education, or in the Halls of Divinity. A multitude of honored names might be mentioned of self-taught men, who forced their way to literary eminence, and commanded the admiration, if not provoked the envy, of the more favored cultivators of letters, who could boast of the advantages and honors of renowned Universities. Who does not know the history of our illustrious Carey, how he became a prodigy of learning, without having ever frequented the groves of Academia? How happy a circumstance would it be for the cause of truth, if unlettered ministers generally were to follow the bright example of Carey, Fuller, Booth and others, by struggling through their difficulties and placing themselves on a level with the well instructed and enlightened! But alas! this is too much to expect. Some indeed are known to be making most praiseworthy efforts for this purpose; yet while we heartily wish them success, we feel persuaded, that under existing circumstances, an educated ministry cannot be secured among us, without the aid of an Institution, in which men of God may have special facilities for improving their minds. And hence we may justly infer the importance, if not the necessity, of the Theological School, recently opened among us, in which all, who are called to the work, may find education at their own expense, and many even at the expense of the benevolent, when they have no private resources.

Having made the foregoing remarks, in the hope of correcting the misapprehensions of some, and of silencing the cavils of others, we shall now proceed to prove and illustrate the importance of education for ministers of the Gospel.

All must grant that the chief endeavors of a minister should be, first, to understand the Bible himself, and secondly, to teach it to others. On this view then of ministerial duties we ground our proofs, which must accordingly be arranged under two heads.

I. Ministers need Education, because it will greatly assist them in studying and understanding the Scriptures.—It is often said that the Bible is an easy book; and so doubtless it is in a certain sense. It is easy to be understood as to things most desirable to be known,

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for no scholarship is required in order to make out the way of salvation, and the principal duties incumbent on man. Yet even the way of life is so intelligible, not because it is always expressed with clearness, but because it is stated so often and in so great a variety of terms, that a person of the commonest apprehension cannot fail, as we may say, to catch the idea. For instance, it is possible that an ignorant man may not comprehend what is meant by 'being born again;' yet he will, almost without fail, know what is meant by 'repenting' and 'believing,' which are only different expressions for the saving change intended by regeneration. So also the declaration that 'the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin,' though quite intelligible to a Jew or any one conversant with the law of Moses, can scarcely suggest the proper idea to an ignorant mind; yet the very truth here taught is elsewhere stated in the plainest manner, as when it is declared that God forgives sin for the sake of Christ. But while it is thankfully admitted, that 'he who runs may read' the things which belong to his peace; yet all must allow that there are 'some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction' (2 Pet. iii. 16); and many will be ready even to confess that the Bible is a difficult book. And who, that knows the history and contents of the Sacred Volume, can wonder at its difficulties? A collection of writings, that are of such high antiquity, several of them being the most ancient in existence, that were composed by Orientals for the use, in the first place, of people whose mode of living, thinking, and speaking differed widely from our own, that treat on the most sublime and abstruse subjects, and that too in languages which have long since ceased to be spoken, and therefore not easily mastered, and that have been handed down for many generations by the labor of the pen, which is a process far less favorable to correctness than printing;—surely a Collection of such a character, must be expected to contain parts, exceedingly obscure to us, however clear they may have been to the first readers.

How then, we ask, can an untaught preacher understand these obscure and seemingly unintelligible portions of the Divine Oracles? Will commentaries suffice to

instruct him? We think not. Some of these may doubtless often help, but they seldom satisfy, a person that is intent, as every minister ought to be, on discovering the sense of every part. A sensible and inquisitive reader of a commentary always feels desirous of forming an opinion for himself, as to the soundness of the critical remarks and the various attempts at explanation, which abound in such a work; but this he cannot do, without possessing a considerable knowledge of the original languages of the Scriptures, not to mention other aids to Biblical interpretation. It is a fact that many have been induced to learn Greek and Hebrew, in consequence of meeting with some words in these languages, in an exposition or critical remark. But while it must be the desire of every intelligent reader, to form a deliberate judgment on the sense of Holy Writ, how much more ought every professed and public expounder of the lively Oracles, both to desire and to be able to form an enlightened and matured opinion. He at least should never be under the necessity of believing implicitly, what this or that expositor asserts. He ought to be scholar enough to put to the test the correctness of the criticisms of others, and to discover some of the shades of meaning and valuable hints, which the original words often present, but which commentators seldom point out. We have, for example, a word of this kind in Phil. iii. 20, where the Greek term *κοιτίσμα*, which is rendered *conversation*, may suggest that heaven is the Christian's country—that his conduct is ruled by heaven's laws—that his desires and affections centre in heaven—and that his permanent abode will finally be in heaven. We must then maintain, that notwithstanding all the common helps which exist for explaining the Bible, a minister is not likely to gain a competent understanding of its meaning, without possessing himself a good degree of learning and information. Can it be expected that an unread person, however good his natural abilities may be, will properly comprehend the prophetic writings? As to unfulfilled prophecies, it is generally admitted that they are often too difficult for even the ablest interpreters; as was strikingly exemplified in the case of Calvin, who, in his Commentaries on the New Testament, omitted the book of Revelation;

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because he could not, with all his matchless penetration and excellent erudition, discover its meaning. But even predictions that have been accomplished, such as those relating to Babylon, Tyre, and other places in the East, cannot be thoroughly understood and turned to good purpose, as evidences of a Divine Revelation, except by one who is conversant with the ancient and modern history of the nations and countries spoken of by the prophet, as well as with the original language. Can any one, for instance, make out a striking and convincing meaning in the promise (Isaiah xlv. 1,) 'to open before Cyrus the two leaved gates,' unless he is aware that such gates were actually left open in Babylon, at the time when the city was taken by that conqueror? Also in other parts, in which precepts or doctrines are laid down, obscurities occur, which cannot be readily and satisfactorily removed without a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek. Thus in 1 John iii. 3, 'every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself,' the words *in him* are often taken to signify *within himself*, while they in reality mean *on him* i. e. Christ, as a mere glance at the Greek will show beyond dispute.

II. *Ministers need Education, because it will enable them more effectually to explain the Scriptures to others.*—When a minister of the word acquires sacred knowledge, it is not so much that he may enrich himself, as that he may dispense it to those who are ignorant and out of the way. 'Therefore every scribe, intructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like to a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.' But to communicate truth to others, is often difficult even for some, who find it easy to investigate and discover it for themselves. It is therefore one of the main objects of good literary training, to obviate this difficulty, by imparting a facility to express whatever useful ideas the mind has acquired. There are two modes of communicating instruction, viz. speaking and writing; and in both these, it is desirable that a religious teacher should be competent to explain and enforce the truths of revelation. The education then for which we plead will teach him how to express, in an intelligible, if not attractive form, his own discoveries and views to his hearer or reader. For it will teach him how to

define terms, and so to distinguish accurately between them. Inability or negligence in this particular, is well known to be the cause of much confusion and many hot disputes in Theology. Thus a preacher once maintained that the atonement of Christ is made in heaven for sinners as they repent, and consequently scandalized many of his hearers, who believed that it had been already completed on the cross. Now had he stated exactly what he meant by the term 'atonement,' which was evidently an actual reconciliation to God, none of his hearers could object to his opinion, though they might to his language.

Proper mental discipline will also tend to make a minister observe sequence and method in his remarks, so that his discourses will not present a confused mass of ideas, jumbled together without connection and without design. Good arrangement or method is as necessary in a sermon, as sound tactics in the marshalling of an army for battle. What prudent General would ever bring his forces into conflict without order and design? No more should a preacher advance a multitude of remarks, that are loose and have no common bearing; for if he be without aim, the hearer must be expected to feel no interest, and consequently to receive no instruction. If the ambassador of Christ has no specific message, but speaks altogether at random without having a definite object to accomplish, how can he expect to be heard with attention and respect? Can any minister excel to the edifying of the church, who does not seek out 'acceptable words,' and who is not prepared like Paul, 'to reason of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come?' All sensible men would scout a public Lecturer on any literary or scientific subject, who should talk incoherently, without either sound reasoning or lucid arrangement. But are not coherency and cogency in discourse, as much to be expected from a teacher of heavenly truth? or has he a special privilege, seeing that his themes are so sacred and momentous, to express his thoughts in a confused and unedifying form? God forbid. Rather as the truths which he has to propound transcend all others in importance, so he ought to excel in clear and convincing discourse. He ought to be able to discuss an article of

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our holy Faith, in a style as methodical and cogent, as that in which the great apostle has treated the doctrine of the resurrection in 1 Cor. xv. Now all these qualifications for public teaching, are more or less the results of the intellectual discipline, which must always accompany a good education. There are various branches of study, which directly tend to impart these benefits, especially Philology, Mathematics, Logic and Metaphysics. It is scarcely possible for a person of good understanding to pursue these studies, without acquiring a habit of thinking and speaking with clearness and precision, if not with elegance.

With the ability to explain the truths of Scripture, is closely allied the power to defend them. A minister should, above all men, 'be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him.' But in numerous instances he cannot do this, without the aid of education. As learning has often been employed to propagate error, and even to assail the Bible, learning must also be needed to advocate the truth. Who does not see the necessity, that a professed teacher of religion should be sufficient scholar, to explode the learned criticisms with which many endeavor to bolster up errors? For instance, our distinguishing practice as Baptists often needs a learned advocate; not indeed because a plain reader of the Bible cannot discover his duty, but because there is often a great boast of learning on the other side. There are too many disputants who, as the erudite and candid Dr. G. Campbell remarks,* 'maintain in defiance of etymology and use, that the word rendered in the New Testament *baptize* means more properly to sprinkle than to plunge, and in defiance of all antiquity, that the former method was the earliest, and, for many centuries, the most general practice in baptizing.' Ought not our ministers then to be prepared, to expose the ignorance and temerity of such disputants?

Need we advance more in proof of the importance of an educated ministry? Then we would appeal to facts. Have not all the eminent Reformers of the church in every age been learned men? Have not all

* Pulpit Eloquence, 10th Lecture.

the ablest expositors and advocates of the truth as it is in Jesus, been men of learning? Are the best missionaries ignorant persons, who know neither Greek nor Hebrew? Are not educated ministers in our churches found in general more acceptable, efficient, and successful, than those who neglect and despise literary culture?

Having thus, beloved brethren, laid before you the subject of Ministerial Education, we cannot close without affectionately urging you to support the Theological Institution, now established among us. Will you permit it to decline and fall, by withholding from it your prayers and contributions? Will those who have the means to provide education for pious and gifted young men, who thirst for improvement, deny them any assistance? Unfaithfulness in this matter must be positive treachery to the cause. But, brethren, we hope better things of you. And may the love and mercy of God, through Christ Jesus, be with you all continually and abundantly.

Signed in behalf of the Association,
WM. FRASER, Mod.

