

ness. First the Cynic John with hair cloth and fasts, then the God-man Jesus with the bread of life.

Meanwhile the scholar has his function, too, in this baptism of repentance. For him, too, the age has its problem and its task. What other reformers are to the moral culture, he must be to the mind of his age. By taste averse, by calling exempt, from the practical movements around him, to him is committed the movement of thought. He must be a radical in speculation, an ascetic in devotion, a Cynic in independence, an anchorite in his habits, a perfectionist in discipline. Secluded from without, and nourished from within, self-sustained and self-sufficing, careless of praise or blame, intent always on the highest, he must rebuke the superficial attainments, the hollow pretensions, the feeble efforts, and trivial productions, of his contemporaries, with the thoroughness of his acquisitions, the reach of his views, the grandeur of his aims, the earnestness of his endeavor.

It is to such efforts and to such men that we must look for the long expected literature of this nation. Hitherto our literature has been but an echo of other voices and climes. Generally, in the history of nations, song has preceded science, and the feeling of a people has been sooner developed than its understanding. With us this order has been reversed. The national understanding is fully ripe, but the feeling, the imagination of the people, has found as yet no adequate expression. We have our men of science, our Franklins, our Bowditches, our Cleavelands; we have our orators, our statesmen; but the American poet, the American thinker is yet to come. A deeper culture must lay the foundation for him, who shall worthily represent the genius and utter the life of this continent. A severer discipline must prepare the way for our Dantes, our Shakspeares, our Miltons. "He who would write an epic," said one of these, "must make his life an epic." This touches our infirmity. We have no practical poets, — no epic lives. Let us but have sincere livers, earnest, whole-hearted, heroic men, and we shall not want for writers and for literary fame. Then shall we see springing up, in every part of these Republics, a literature, such as the ages have not known, — a literature, commensurate with our idea, vast as our destiny and varied as our clime.

LETTER TO A THEOLOGICAL STUDENT.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I WAS somewhat surprised at the information, that you had commenced the study of theology; but not sorry, I assure you. I supposed that you had looked at all the attractions which the study holds out, and had found that you were made for something else. On that account, I always avoided saying anything which might look like tempting you to engage in it; being persuaded that a taste for our profession must be born in the heart, and not awakened by any external persuasion or influence. But now that you have made up your mind to devote yourself to its duties, I cannot but rejoice with you in your determination, and wish you the blessing of God on your prospects. You enter on the study with the advantages of an ardent temperament, a vigorous will, no slight experience of the world, and, I trust, with a pure purpose of yielding to the inspirations of your higher nature. With a spirit of earnest and glowing piety, with a true sympathy with Christ and with your fellow-men, and with a rational zeal for the progress of Humanity, the promotion of light, truth, and joy in the world, (and all these qualities will be more and more developed, as you go on, if true to yourself,) you cannot fail of being happy in your studies and in your profession, should it please God to spare your life to enter it. I need not tell how sincerely my best wishes are given to you at this moment, how earnestly I pray that you may be a faithful student and a happy pastor.

Let me guard you against one almost fatal error, into which I have observed our young men are too apt to fall, and that is, the habit of studying in order to find supports, wherewith to maintain prevailing opinions, rather than to attain to a clear and living system of truth, which shall be to the soul what the blood is to the body, — a flowing fountain of inward strength, and giving beauty, activity, and the glow of health to every outward manifestation. You may think the day is past for any fear of this error. You may suppose that our age and our community are too free and independent, to present any temptations to such a course. But I am compelled to believe, that this is

not yet the case with us. A young man commences study with a view to the Orthodox ministry. But he is well aware of what he is expected to learn, to believe, and to preach. He knows that, if he deviates by a perceptible hair's breadth from this established line, he will gain neither a parish nor a hearing. He must either change his plan of life altogether, or take good care to see no truth and listen to no arguments, (except to refute them,) which could tempt him to swerve from the old path. You may say that you are in no danger from this, because you have your eye fixed on the liberal ministry. But let me here tell you a secret, — which on second thought is no secret. after all, — young as you are, I dare say, you have long ago found it out for yourself. I allude to the fact, that although, as liberal Christians, we have renounced the Orthodox doctrines, we still cherish too much of the exclusive spirit. We are too desirous of uniformity of faith, too fearful of future progress, too anxious for the success of our party. We do not maintain, as we should, a generous confidence in Truth, and in Humanity. Now this spirit easily gains possession of the soul. It grows upon it while we are asleep. It creeps over a character, which, in other respects, is bright with many virtues. But call it Orthodox or what you will, this spirit in its worst form is more at war with the spirit of Christ, with the essence of Protestantism, and the noblest interests of piety, than the darkest doctrines of Orthodoxy. A bad doctrine is often sanctified and made harmless by a true spirit; whereas a cowardly, time-serving, selfish spirit cannot be redeemed from its intrinsic degradation, by an alliance with the purest doctrines that ever fell from mortal lips. God preserve us from the most distant approach to such a spirit, or we are as good as dead. But we are too much exposed to this in our present state of society. A young man commences study with a view to the liberal ministry. But here, too, he knows what is expected of him. A strait path is marked out for his feet; but while he is told to use his freedom, and think for himself, woe to him if he dare to choose any other. He must avoid, as he would the gates of Hades, everything like the old dogmatics. He must take care not to speak too much of sin, or of the need of a new heart, not to use too frequently or too fer-

vently the name of Christ or of the Holy Ghost, not to press too warmly the reality of religious experience, and the heights and depths of the Christian life, lest he should be accused of too much zeal, lest he should be thought not to be sound, lest he should be suspected of some faint shadow of approach to the gloom and darkness of Orthodoxy. But then he must also take good care not to fall into the gulf on the opposite side. He must hold on to all the ideas which, by a sort of vague, unwritten common law, have become part and parcel of liberal Christianity. If he venture to differ much from his teachers, if he wishes to wipe off the dust of centuries from some dark nook in the Gothic temple of our faith, if he speak out from the fulness of his own heart and in the strength of severe conviction, in dissonance with the prevailing echoes of departed voices, — he will be certain to raise a cry, by no means musical, against his presumption and independence. He will be thought to compromise the interests of his party; and of course perils his own reputation. A man must have uncommon moral courage, united with a truly ingenuous and transparent mind, to consent to run such a risk. He therefore seeks for a safe and approved path, rather than one which suits his own ideas; he loves rather to ride in a troop on the dusty highway, than to search out for himself those green and shady avenues of truth, which are "so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming." Hence the dulness of sermons which is so much complained of. No man can preach well, unless he coins his own flesh and blood, the living, palpitating fibres of his very heart, into the words which he utters from the pulpit. If he speaks what he has learned from others, what he finds in books, what he thinks it decorous and seemly that a man should say in his place, he may indeed be a good mechanic in the pulpit, he may help to hand down a worm-eaten, stereotyped system of theology, to those who have no more heart for it than he has himself; but a true prophet of God, a man baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, he can never be. And for the want of such men how much are religion and the Church now suffering. Compare the science of Theology (for it is a science) with that of Astronomy, Chemistry, Political Economy, even with pure Mathematics, in short with any science that pre-

tends to go alone; and see the decrepit, the worn and withered figure of the one, in contrast with the fresh and buoyant movements of the others. The latter breathing the free mountain air, where all the winds of doctrine are let loose, with health in every feature and life in every motion, inspired with the joy of youth and the consciousness of power; the former lagging behind the magnificent procession, in which all Sciences and Arts are pressing forward to truth, clad in the weeds of widowhood and poverty, with sunken eye and wasted brow, and no hope, but that of decent burial, when the last asthmatic breath shall have been sent forth.

In Europe a new life has sprung up from the ashes of a departed faith; a hag-like, scholastic theology has given up the ghost, upon being brought out of darkness into daylight; and a virgin form appears radiant with beauty, and already uttering the same words with which angel voices heralded the birth of Christ. It is for our young men to welcome this glorious visitant to their bosoms. It is for them to naturalize a truly liberal and generous theology on our own blessed soil. Their mission is arduous, but it cannot fail of its completion. I rejoice that you have commenced the study of theology, just at this epoch in our progress. I know you have a free mind which will never blench from inquiry, and a bold one, which will not fear to utter its thoughts. Let it be filled and consecrated with the heavenly spirit of Christ, let your youthful energy be blended with the meekness and gentleness and wisdom of your Divine Master, and you will have everything to hope and little to fear.

I sincerely congratulate you on the advantages you will enjoy, under the guidance of so frank and healthy a mind as his, whom you have chosen for a teacher. I am certain (for I know him well) that he will never prescribe to you articles to be believed, but will only direct you to the great lights above and within, which you must see for yourself. You will do well to imbibe his spirit of perfect tolerance. A minister must be wretched without this. It will secure him from all the little disgusts, which a various intercourse is apt to engender; it will enable him to bear with every diversity of expression and of character, as well as of faith; and to enter with strong heart and hope into all the practical

details of his profession, which are usually so irksome to the man, whose dainty fastidiousness has no sympathy with what he deems vulgar or common-place.

If you read German, let me recommend to you "Herder's Letters on the Study of Theology." You will find them a fruitful source of noble and glorious thoughts; and can never read them without feeling your heart elevated and made better, though they may not impart much positive and exact instruction. If you do not read German, the perusal of that book alone, would repay you for the six months' study of leisure hours, which it would cost to acquire the language.

I am sure you will not take ill of me the freedom with which I have answered your letter. I have no fancy for giving advice, and I do not intend for such what I have now written. It is rather the expression of sympathy, which I know from experience is always welcome to a young man, from those who are a few years in advance of him, in the path which he is about to enter.

December, 1836.

R.