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Memoir of Dr. Francis Wharton

Charles Petit McIlvaine

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This memorial, though printed solely for private use, is reprinted here, because the lapse of twenty years has probably caused its loss among those who first received it, and though names are here made public, it is thought few would object to the loving words with which they are connected, if indeed Teacher and taught have not ere this met in the presence of their common Lord.

With the admixture of evil with good which is too generally the case in this fallen world, there were some undesirable results following this period of religious interest, which called for notice on the part of the professors, and finally of a letter from Bishop McLlvaine himself. This letter we give in part, not only because of the signature thereto, but as showing the confidence and affection existing between Dr. Wharton and the writer.

... "As to its (the prayer-meeting) usefulness to the Students, I think that would be enhanced were it confined to them. The more they feel themselves to be the objects, and the less they feel as if a miscellaneous audience were aimed at, the more they will profit. I am always jealous of the influence of a meeting, on students, so secluded from society as ours, where there is the element of young ladies to draw their minds; and they are tempted to be going after girls to bring them to the meeting, or to take them home. Always at Colleges—the nuisances are the young women, unless they be very well taken care of at home. But woe is me if you let this idea be known as mine at Gambier! I have no doubt there is need of a watchful supervisor as to the officiating of students in the country places—that they may have such latitude as will be useful to them, without going beyond reasonable bounds, and begetting in them a loose idea of order, a contempt of wholesome restraint—and thus injuring not only themselves but the character of our institutions abroad. We must always expect to have among our young men seeking the ministry, a class of minds well disposed, but not well settled, as to modes and ways, as matters of order and expediency; persons who may be led to be all right—but on whom any extravagance, anything not easily defensible in point of order, anything that looks like dangerous tendency to irregularity is calculated to set them backwards towards stiffness and altitudinous churchmanship. We are not like congregations as usually situated—where the Pastor's influence is almost paramount. We have the Bishops and clergy, and divers others connected with the young
men, whose influence is on them, and we have special need of wisdom, of moderation as to modes, while as distinct and strong, and positive as possible in point of truth. With us, I have no doubt, it is much better to keep within the bounds of order and expediency, rather than run a risk of exceeding them, or of being thought by good men to do so. Now, I wish, at this time, to speak my mind more than I have ever done, as to the daily prayer-meetings what Gambier.

"When I first knew of them, they had been going on a good while, their order was established—differences of opinion calculated to do harm had arisen—good was being done—the feeling was up—I saw some things which I wished were not, and I saw what explained very easily why Mr. M. and Mr. K., etc., kept aloof, and which prevented me from thinking the less of them for it, and I had a severe question to settle. Shall I now disturb all this, and turn off attention to mere points of order and general expediency,—and create divisions—or is it better to turn in, and go along as far as I can, and say nothing to discourage any, and hope for the best? I adopted the latter, and said nothing. But now I can express my views without the injury then apprehended, but even now not for the general ear. These daily prayer-meetings were instituted as laymen's meetings after the example of such meetings elsewhere. I think there was an original mistake there. There is a question of difficulty to many earnest clergymen as to such meetings anywhere, so far (as generally is the case) as a clergyman, or the Pastors of the very people that meet are considered as having no more right to officiate than anybody else, however young or inexperienced. I confess I have always felt that, and when I have attended such meetings, I have had to get over it, only by saying 'I will officiate and take the proper place as an ordained minister, in consistency with the general order of the meeting.' But in the peculiar circumstances of Gambier, the difficulty was much increased. The meeting was lay, not merely as respects the equal rights and position therein of the lay brethren of the college faculty on one side, and the clerical brethren on the other; but of the lay brethren of the students in any department, with the lay professors on one side, with their Rector and all the resident clergymen on the other; so that on the theory of the meeting, a boy of eighteen had just as much right to get up and pray and exhort as his Rector. Though this theory was fundamental ideas elsewhere, pupils under an clergymen to lead meetings is of another laymen clergymen, relaxation of pupil such a theory, chiefly of person man, say Mr. A or exhort by a feel the position, young men, and meetings among pray together, as always recognize when he should."

"Again, I the at once to make dear boy, and other perhaps it did this to others—but it especially of your speak of it at G. hoped it would than was necessary."

"Now my idea the mode of its chial prayer-me cannot, have son character are fit hymns, and if he I have no object circumstances there prevent certain of prayer or address minor, or any su
this theory was modified in the practice, nevertheless it was the fundamental idea. Now, whatever its applicability to union meetings elsewhere, where the people attending are not chiefly minors—pupils under authority—and where there are plenty of experienced laymen to lead—the case is quite different when two-thirds of the meeting is of minors, boys—inexperienced, and two-thirds of the other laymen are their Professors, and many of the latter clergymen, related to them in a very peculiar relation. A congregation of pupils, and those young, is a very different sphere for such a theory, from one of miscellaneous laity, of all ages, and chiefly of persons long professing religion. Now when a clergymen, say Mr. A. or B., entered the meeting and was asked to pray or exhort by a student, it is not to be wondered at that he should feel the position to be very anomalous—calculated to injure the young men, and the reputation of the College, etc. I like prayermeetings among students, and like to see them meet together and pray together, and this as much as possible, but I would have them always recognize the presence of a clergymen or professor as such when he should be with them.

"Again, I thought it was not wise to encourage the young men at once to make a public declaration of embracing Christ, as my dear boy, and others did—not that I suppose it did them any harm—perhaps it did them good, and may in these cases have done good to others—but in the long run, with the evil natures of men, and especially of youth, it was not well, I think. I did not particularly speak of it at G., because it was all over when I got there, and I hoped it would not occur again, and I wished not to seem more than was necessary to take exception.

"Now, my idea of such a meeting, in such circumstances, is for the mode of it to be thus. Let the Rector institute it, as a parochial prayer-meeting, and when he can, preside over it;—when he cannot, have some clergymen, or some layman whose position and character are fit to preside; and let him select and give out the hymns, and, if he can, arrange beforehand who will speak and pray. I have no objection to the freer mode of prayer, but in the College circumstances there is need of some rule or public feeling that shall prevent certain of the College students from offering to take part in prayer or address a miscellaneous meeting. Anywhere, when a minor, or any such young person, has put himself forward to pray
in the presence of an assembly of elders, I have felt it was not a
favorable indication concerning himself. In such a meeting, for
such of the lay professors and teachers as well as the clericals to
take part in prayer and address—and the theological students also
(with discretion as to the last)—it is not only right, but desirable.

"C. P. McILVAINE."

The Bishop's own son being one of those first interested in this
revival, it is pleasant to think that his father felt that in his case
at least it was a genuine work.

"Before I sailed, and after leaving home, I wrote to him much
at length, especially as to reading and examining his heart. Now
all this I say in confidence to you, that you may know what to do,
and where to work for him and with him. Oh do be faithful with
him! Would it do him good to be engaged as a Sunday-school
teacher? Or had he better have the Sunday to himself? Here, in
my room in Bonn, right under the walls of the University, and in a
population of Romish superstition, my heart goes over to that dear
boy at Gambier, and all its anxieties concentrate in this one desire
and prayer that God in His infinite mercy will make a deep and
thorough work of grace in his heart, that he may be indeed a fol­
lower of Christ, in whom the power of His Spirit will be glorified.
The Lord be with you all.

"Yrs. very affect'ly,

"C. P. McILVAINE."

Again—

"RAGATZ, SWITZERLAND, Sep. 14th, 1858.

"My dear Bro.:

"I wrote you a few days ago concerning my dear boy. My mind
was too anxious about him. I wish now to say, and I do it with
great thankfulness and joy, that I received yesterday at Zurich a
delightful and most precious letter from him, entering sweetly into
his state of mind. It was dated Aug. 13, and had been much
delayed in reaching me. But it is just what I wanted, a sweet,
natural, humble, tender endeavor to make me understand his mind
spiritually. Blessed be God—for such a consolation! I could not
have a letter from him more to my mind. I have but a few
moments to write, as I wish before I go to bed to write to my son,
and have been travelling all day. I have now entire confidence in
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good-night.

"My dear

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