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Letter to Rev. Noah Hunt Schenck

Charles Pettit McIlvaine

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O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succor us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

APPENDIX.

I.


Rev. and Dear Sir:

By a very joyful account from Gambier, received the day before yesterday, I have learned still further of the work of the Spirit of God in the College, and I trust elsewhere in Gambier. The Lord be praised for his mercies. The Lord give us all faithfulness and wisdom and grace to profit by this manifestation of his power. If I could, I would hasten to Gambier and assist you in the delightful, and yet most difficult, work which you have now to do—in which so much wisdom from above, so much prayer, so much unweariedness of watching for, and with, souls, are needed. But it is impossible. After so much absence, I cannot leave home again till Convention; and even then I fear I must leave it much unprovided for. It is a sad thing for the head of a family to be so much away from it. Not being able to go to you, I can pray for you—and for all under your ministry—and I can write to you such counsel as I trust will aid and comfort you.

* * * * *

In your personal dealings with minds recently affected by the truth and seeking God, I counsel—

1. That you aim at a deep and broad foundation, in a thorough conviction of sin and ruin and condemnation. “To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.” He who feels that he is very sinful will feel that Christ is very precious. We see the Saviour through our necessities. We can know him only as we know our need of him. Defective conviction is defective conversion. It is the office of the Spirit to convince of sin—and thus to lead souls to Christ. Seek therefore to bring the mind into such a state of self-abasement and self-reuunciation, under a sense of
utter sinfulness and condemnation, that the way of the Lord may be prepared, the mountains of self made low, and the preciousness of Christ, as a refuge and only hope, exalted.

2. Aim at drawing away the mind from seeking comfort and hope in its own experiences and feelings, and at centering it in Christ. Seek such a frame as will desire, not so much to get hope and consolation, as to be a Christian—and to be a Christian simply as that consists in coming to Christ, and being his, and striving to be his more and more. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Just as we are to lift up Christ before the world, so must he be exalted in each heart. All affections, hopes, desires, motives must center there.

3. Display the freeness of Christ—his tender and boundless love—his perfect salvation—that is the heavenly strain that draws the stony heart, and in which is manifested the power of God unto salvation. "We preach Christ crucified"—nothing else will do. The heart knows that preaching to come from God, just as the demoniac could not help recognizing Christ.

4. Be careful to keep out topics of doctrinal discussion not intimately involving the work of grace in the soul. Satan takes advantage of such side issues to lead the mind from the great question, What must I do to be saved?

5. Be careful of the proneness of those recently awakened to lay too much stress on obtaining a hope. I mean—not that a good hope is not very precious, but that great care must be taken lest the object be more valued than the evidence—the consolation than the basis. It is good to be self-distrustful—to suspect one's feelings—to be afraid of self-delusion—to feel how deceitful the heart is, how natural sympathies and emotions, under certain excitments, may easily seem like religious affections. Urge self-examination, walking carefully.

6. Lay great stress on private exercises of mind, in quietness, in reading, in prayer, in seeking solitary communion with God. Mistakes are often made in having too many meetings. When meetings are so many that they encourage and produce a dependence on them, as if their social excitement were necessary, and religion can get its food no where else, and so private exercises are made subordinate, and seem dull in comparison, and the mind expects nothing till it can be brought under the influence of company,—then meetings have got into their wrong place.

7. Be careful to institute no means which, in case the work should go on as a permanent work, could not be continued.

When means have to be given up because they are too many and too exacting to last, the feeling is that the work is declining, and then it does decline, and reaction takes place, and coldness ensues. The less excitement, and the less of extraordinary means, and the more faithful, spiritual, believing use of the great permanent means—viz: the simple use of the Word of God and prayer—the less danger of reaction, because the more reality of life.

8. Exalt the office of the Holy Ghost. Great is the truth involved in the text, "By grace ye are saved." Grace to make alive—grace to continue life—grace to consummate life—grace to send a Saviour and a Sanctifier—grace to enable us to receive them—and what else?—all of grace!! beginning and ending, every step of the way;—and in the administration of that grace—"the Spirit of God!! We must exalt his work in us, for Christ, just as much as we must exalt Christ's work for us, with God. The Spirit will enrich the soul that makes much of Him as the author and sustainer of all spiritual life. He testifies of Christ to the soul. He takes of the precious things of Christ, and shows them to the soul that cries, "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator, come."

9. Avoid urging or encouraging a profession of religion before time has been had for self-knowledge.

10. Consider that the duty of watching over, admonishing, exhorting those who hope they have been converted, that they may grow in grace—that they fall not back—that they may walk circumspectly and honor God in their conduct as much as we must exalt Christ's work for us, with God. The shade is the place for tender growths, just transplanted. The roots must make good growth before they can bear the hot sun. The best growth at that age is unseen, in the ground of the heart. What a long shoot the seed of good grain strikes downward in the soil, before it puts out any leaf.

11. Avoid whatever may tempt those newly converted, as may be hoped, to a want of humility, to a seeking of notoriety. The shade is the place for tender growths, just transplanted. The roots must make good growth before they can bear the hot sun. What a long shoot the seed of good grain strikes downward in the soil, before it puts out any leaf.

12. Inculcate the love of the Scriptures.

13. Seek that the work may reach with great power among all former communicants—to lead them to search their foundations—to begin anew to live to God. I earnestly hope it will reach into the hearts of all students that have previously professed Christ—especially theological, and those seeking the ministry in any degree. I pray they may obtain a measure of life and light and earnestness—a strength and depth of experience in
Christ far beyond what they have known before. This I look upon as of the very greatest importance. May God grant it.
I have not time for more. The Lord uphold and direct you.
The Lord fill your heart with prayer and faith and wisdom. The Lord revive all hearts around you that have ever had life with God.

Yours very affectionately,
C. P. McILVAIN.

II.

From the Western Episcopalian of June 6th, 1856.

The Confirmation at Gambier.—Seldom has there been seen in this Diocese a sight of more affecting and delightful interest than that witnessed in Rosse Chapel, on Wednesday evening last. A large class for Confirmation is always looked upon, by the true Churchman, with a full heart; and most of all, where that class has been gathered and prepared under a faithful, discriminating ministry. A class in which a large proportion of the recipients consists of the young, may be rejoiced over with peculiar joy; for as to such we may hope that they will, by God's grace, escape the vain regrets that follow, even where repentance is at last vouchsafed, a misspent life. A class in which the greater number is of males, gives reason for gratulation; since throughout our Churches there is such a prevalent complaint of the negligence of the means of grace—if not of positive unbelief—on the part of men. But in Rosse Chapel, there were gathered around the commodious chancel no less than fifty-eight precious souls, for whom the Rector of the Parish could vouch that after faithful instruction and due personal examination, he believed them to be truly "born again," not only of water, but also of the Holy Ghost. Thirteen of this number were females: little children, maidens and matrons, happy thus to renew the vows of their Baptism, and to consecrate themselves afresh to Christ. Forty-five were of the other sex: lads, young men, men of riper years; ready, whether in the fulness of manhood's strength, or in the freshness of boyhood's zeal and purpose, to avouch the Lord to be their God, and to enlist themselves anew as good soldiers, to fight manfully under Christ's banner, against the world, the flesh and the devil. Of these, thirty-six were Students in the Institution. The whole number added to the Communion was sixty-three.

This fact is that which gave the highest possible interest to this Confirmation. These young men are emphatically, under God, the hope of the Church. From amongst them we are to have our active Laymen. From amongst them we are to have, we trust, many who shall serve in the sacred ministry. We praise God, then, with devoutest gratitude, for what He hath here wrought. We look to Him, and we trust that our readers will join us in looking to Him for the continuing outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon those who as yet have not come out on the Lord's side. We know that in many hearts there is a struggle still going on, and we do hope that they will soon experience that peace which belongs to the man justified by faith in Christ.

The Bishop's address, which we shall give next week in full, will, we are sure, awaken in behalf of these young men an earnest interest in the heart of every true Christian amongst our readers. Those who have professed Christ need our prayers that they may be faithful and steadfast: those that are thoughtful, but undecided that they may choose the Lord to be their God; and those that are yet hardened, that Divine Grace may convict, subdue and convert them.

III.

Extract from the last Annual Address of the Bishop of the Diocese.

—But my brethren I must advert to another particular in our present coming together. You are here, at the seat of our Literary and Theological institutions at a time of great religious interest among the young men pertaining to them. At the period of our Church-year when we commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost in the first Christian Church, and when we are led especially to pray for a like blessing on our own souls and on all the present Christian Church, and when God's people were here moved to unwonted earnestness of prayer for that blessing of all blessings upon the means of grace in this place, the promise of the Father came—the power of the Holy Ghost was received; he who ascended on high and received gifts for men, bestowed of those gifts upon many hearts in this place. Where are such gifts bestowed with such promise to the future spiritual welfare of the Church, as when given for the conversion of young men in our College? Many of you were present in the