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GRADUATION—WHAT NEXT?

BY

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GRADUATION—WHAT NEXT?

To many a pair of eyes scrutinizing this page there never was a June like this—greener grass, richer leafage, air more bracing, birds of the sky singing more blithely, the polished heavens an intenser hue. It is all on John’s account. He has passed his final examination, his Commencement oration is ready—he is going to graduate. The hilarious brooks, the murmuring waves, and the whispering winds know and tell of it. It is meet that all his friends should rejoice, for the hour of a real victory draws nigh. John’s parents are not rich—they are desperately poor. I am not quite sure that his mother (as the mother
of a now distinguished Massachusetts judge did twenty-five years ago) has actually taken in washing to help him through, but I know that her devotion to him, and her determination that her son should be educated, would not shrink from any sacrifice. And the boy himself has made a brave fight of it. He has faced the terrors of a peripatetic book agency, he has sawed wood, worked on a farm, has been waiter at a summer hotel, has taught school, has done what else I know not, and he would not like to tell, but as a result of it all he has got through. Nor have the sacrifices made for him and by him been amiss. He is not what he was when he began. His college course has given him the intellectual stature of a man. He has been disciplined in the art of thinking; a fact which destines him to have immeasurably greater influence in the world than he could have had without such mental development. He has that thirteenth chance Bishop Warren tells of in his educational statistics. With his college education he gains “one chance in thirteen—for the highest
success in whatever department of life he may enter. Without it he would have but one in thirteen hundred.” Yes, reader, whether your interest in the graduate be that of parent, pastor, brother, sister, or that of “another, not a sister,” your Commencement Day joy is altogether reasonable. It is a great day for John.

And what next? John has a call to preach. The Lord be praised! The joy of his little knot of friends is thereby widened out into a circle that numbers tens of thousands, if the attendants on his future ministry be included. Thanks to his four years’ course, there is a clearer head for the close and deep work of the study, and a heart not a whit less warm for pulpit, prayer-meeting, and revival meeting. But after graduation—what? A simple question to John’s room-mate. The law school, He thinks of no alternative. The profession of the law is one that must finally be learned by actual experience, indeed, but all are agreed that time spent with legal specialists, looking over the whole field
of jurisprudence through their practiced eyes, is time saved. Indispensable as college is as a preparation for the law school, it is not a school of law. A simple question, too, to John's other intimate friend and classmate, the Latin salutatorian. A medical school. But has he not in college studied physiology, chemistry, botany, Latin? And is not practice what a doctor needs? Yes, but the old physicians tell him that the time he spends in getting, with the aid of specialists, a bird's-eye view of the whole round of medical science, will prepare him to make the wisest use of his actual practice and best serve the interests of his future patients. And John? Does his allotted work call for less skill than that of either of his friends? Has he not a Book of law to interpret grander in the sweep of its principles, profounder and sublimier in every respect, than that which is expounded by the occupant of the legal bench? Is he not charged with a ministration to something more intricate, and fraught with a finer and more mysterious life, and demand-
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ing more intelligent skill, than ever did circulatory, nervous, or muscular systems;—namely, the human soul?

John is a Methodist. His Church has never been without methods of special preparatory training for her ministry. Where was there ever, since the time when Paul took Timothy with him, a better training school for preachers than that which her junior preachers enjoyed under the circuit system? What ideal union of precept and example, what close personal dealing with one's faults, what unselfish communication of all the hoarded secrets of ripe experience, what rapid and effectual initiation into approved methods of church work, what delightful absence of the full responsibilities of the pastorate, and what incentives to thorough application in the intellectual and spiritual fellowship of a superior mind! The world will never see a better theological seminary than Methodism had in the days of her mightiest aggressiveness. But how inferior the method of pastoral training that followed the downfall of the circuit.
system! A little pile of books, a hasty four hours' examination once a year, the solitude of a station and the multifarious interruptions and distractions of full pastoral cares. Methodism was wise enough to see the gravity of the change for her young ministers, and her provision for the new régime is the theological school. Methodism thinks these schools offer John peculiar advantages, and consequently in her Discipline instructs her bishops, presiding elders, and pastors to acquaint him with the fact. Her standard-bearers are agreed that although souls are perishing for the want of the Gospel, yet it is actual economy of time and increase of efficiency for the future winner of souls first of all to calmly study that Gospel and the best methods of its presentation under the guidance of thorough and consecrated scholarship. Every day of the year in every great city surgical patients lie wounded and bleeding in imperative need of treatment; but the Latin salutatorian knows that his shortest cut to the skill that can impart the needed treatment is through
lecture-room and clinic. There are a half-dozen churches that need the graduating John of this June, but there will be two dozen that will need the keener, broader, wiser, more eloquent John of a June three years hence. And if he takes the Disciplinary hint the Lord will somehow provide for the churches meanwhile.

The man with the broken leg needs not the to-day's Latin salutatorian, but him of fifteen years ago. The pulpit in the mining-town is small, but there is plenty of room in it for a Greek Testament and a Hebrew Bible. To catch yonder grizzly miner in the Gospel net and to feed this lawyer will lay under contribution all that the preacher knows of men, of books, and of God's word. Well did the far-seeing and now sainted Simpson say: "What the Methodist Church needs now is not more ministers, but better-trained ministers;" to which may be added the saying of Bishop Foster: "A call to the ministry means a call to the most thorough preparation for the ministry."
John will speak well on Commencement Day, no doubt, but it is plain to all, except, perhaps, to his mother and one other, that he has obvious defects as a public speaker which ought to be, and could well enough be, removed by careful training. If he enters the pastorate now, none of his congregation will ever venture to give him the benefit of their criticisms on his peculiar faults of delivery, though they will involuntarily discuss them in his absence. These defects are not, of course, obstacles fatal to success, but they are weights which ought to be laid aside. In a theological school his classmates and his professor will tell him some plain and true things about himself—things that nobody could tell him by and by—things very humiliating, but most wholesome to hear at the very outset of his course. None of his future hearers will say to him what they will say to one another on the way home from church, that his sermon and his text do not belong together—but his keen-eyed professor will. John has never been a pastor, and there are delicate
and vital details of administration in that unique and influential office which he has never thought of, but the mere suggestion of which by his instructor in advance would instantly make him possessor of many a golden hint for future action. He will have to learn enough from his own mistakes at best; he had better learn as many things in advance as possible.

John has read a little of his New Testament in Greek, and he has had one term in Hebrew in college or in a summer school. But, if the truth must be told, he reads both with a hesitation not born of reverence for the sacred text. A thorough drill under a skillful instructor would make the reading of either Testament in the original for the rest of his ministerial life a matter of ease and delight. It would seem as if, inasmuch as the Bible is the book he is to expound three or four times a week during his entire effective ministry, such facility would be not only desirable, but almost indispensable. John has preached. He had a text, of course. It was an odd text,
whose sound had fascinated him. He built a whole sermon upon it without studying its connections. John does not know it, for nobody has told him, but what he gave the people of God was not the inspired thought of the word, but his own thoughts about men and the kingdom of heaven in general. It is true he showed no neglect of the letter of his text. He made as many divisions as there were separate words, gave equal emphasis to each in its turn, and at the close spoke feelingly about the fullness of Scripture. John is not trammeled by the context; he simply ignores it—it is too apt to be hostile to the plan of his sermon. He has studied logic, but he has never taken the trouble to follow Paul straight on through one of his epistles. He has studied them piecemeal, as he would the Proverbs. And yet there is no flaw in John’s reasoning powers. He simply has had no training in exegesis. It would seem that if he is really called to preach the word he could well afford the time for mastering thorough and fruitful
methods of studying and preaching the word. It is more than doubtful, however, if, in the pressure of always having two sermons to get ready for the next Sunday, he will, after he has entered the pastorate, train himself in habits of careful exegesis, or even in those well-known principles of sermonic construction which have been more or less consciously obeyed by all successful preachers. The humblest of his readers can pick out a text, but they cannot follow the intricate and brilliant argument of an epistle. They think a college graduate like him, however, ought to be able to do so. John needs training, too, in systematic theology. If he goes into his work without it, the lawyers and doctors will now and then wonder why he don't give in a plain sentence or two the gist of a book or a comprehensive statement of a doctrine. They have been trained to make comprehensive statements in their sciences, why should not he in his?

John has studied secular history; he took a prize in Roman history, in fact. He has a
taste for it. But what a deep impression an able lecture course in Church history would make upon his trained mind now! How he would ply the professor in private with inquiries and discussions about Jerome, Origen, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas; about the beginning and progress of Christian art in catacomb, basilica, and storied cathedral, and the not less imposing, harmonious, and slowly rising edifices of Christian doctrine! What large proportions the fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil would take on as his trained instructor should lead him to successive strategic pinnacles of observation commanding the battle-fields of the centuries!

Is it said that John's ministry will be for the most part to plain people? Then it must be replied, that he particularly needs a special training. It was to a critical edition of the New Testament that John Wesley prefaced the words, "I design plain truth for plain people." "It takes all our learning," said Archbishop Usher, "to be simple." It was our own Bishop Simpson who said he
would rather preach ten years with an education than thirty years without one.

Nor can it be said that John cannot afford a theological training. Each one of our theological schools offers him, free of charge, advantages in tuition, rooms, and libraries, which cost them not less than $1,000 in cash for the three years' course, and so reduce the cost of board as to make it actually cheaper for him to attend a theological school than to stay at home.

O, you, who gave unutterable thanks to God for an unspeakable gift when John was born to you; and you, man of God, who led him to Christ; and you, college professor, who disciplined his mind; and you, leaders and stewards, who voiced to him your part of the threefold call to preach and gave him his first license; and you, brother presiding elder, who know what the churches today need; and you, fair-eyed maiden, who have seen a light in John's eye no other woman ever saw, to whom John's future success is as precious as life itself to you, is it
not practicable for John to lay at the feet of his Lord the fruits of three years' study and training in one of our Methodist theological schools—by the expanse of waters at Evanston, in the classic shades of Drew, or on Beacon Hill in the heart of Boston? If so, ye shall see a June more notable and jubilant than even this.

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