

WHICH IS THE LIBERAL MAN?

It was a beaming and beautiful summer morning, and the little town of V. was alive with all the hurry and motion of a college commencement. Rows of carriages lined the rural streets, and groups of well-dressed auditors were thronging to the hall of exhibition. All was gayety and animation.

And among them all what heart beat higher with hope and gratified ambition than that of James Stanton? Young, buoyant, prepossessing in person and manners, he was this day, in the presence of all the world, to carry off the highest palm of scholarship in his institution, and to receive, on the threshold of the great world, the utmost that youthful ambition can ask before it enters the arena of actual life. Did not his pulse flutter, and his heart beat thick, when he heard himself announced in the crowded house as the valedictorian of the day? when he saw aged men, and fair, youthful faces, ruddy childhood, and sober, calculating manhood alike bending in hushed and eager curiosity, to listen to his words? Nay, did not his heart rise in his throat as he caught the gleam of his father's eye, while, bending forward on his staff, with white, reverend locks falling about his face, he listened to the voice of his pride--his first born? And did he not see the glistening tears in his mother's eye, as with rapt ear she hung upon his every word? Ah, the young man's first triumph! When, full of confidence and hope, he enters the field of life, all his white glistening as yet unsoiled by the dust

of the combat, the unproved world turning towards him with flatteries and promises in both hands, what other triumph does life give so fresh, so full, so replete with hope and joy? So felt James Stanton this day, when he heard his father congratulated on having a son of such promise; when old men, revered for talents and worth, shook hands with him, and bade him warmly God speed in the course of life; when bright eyes cast glances of favor, and from among the fairest were overheard whispers of admiration.

"Your son is designed for the bar, I trust," said the venerable Judge L. to the father of James, at the commencement dinner. "I have seldom seen a turn of mind better fitted for success in the legal profession. And then his voice! his manner! let him go to the bar, sir, and I prophesy that he will yet outdo us all."

And this was said in James's hearing, and by one whose commendation was not often so warmly called forth. It was not in any young heart not to beat quicker at such prospects. Honor, station, wealth, political ambition, all seemed to offer themselves to his grasp; but long ere this, in the solitude of retirement, in the stillness of prayer and self-examination, the young graduate had vowed himself to a different destiny; and if we may listen to a conversation, a few evenings after commencement, with a classmate, we shall learn more of the secret workings of his mind.

"And so, Stanton," said George Lennox to him, as they sat by their

evening fireside, "you have not yet decided whether to accept Judge L.'s offer or not."

"I have decided that matter long ago," said James.

"So, then, you choose the ministry."

"Yes."

"Well, for my part," replied George Lennox, "I choose the law. There must be Christians, you know, in every vocation; the law seems to suit my turn of mind. I trust it will be my effort to live as becomes a Christian, whatever be my calling."

"I trust so," replied James.

"But really, Stanton," added the other, after some thought, "it seems a pity to cast away such prospects as open before you. You know your tuition is offered gratis; and then the patronage of Judge L., and such influences as he can command to secure your success--pray, do not these things seem to you like a providential indication that the law is to be your profession? Besides, here in these New England States, the ministry is overflowed already--ministers enough, and too many, if one may judge by the number of applicants for every unoccupied place."

"Nay," replied James, "my place is not here. I know, if all accounts are

true, that my profession is not overflowed in our Western States, and there I mean to go."

"And is it possible that you can contemplate such an entire sacrifice of your talents, your manners, your literary and scientific tastes, your capabilities for refined society, as to bury yourself in a log cabin in one of our new states? You will never be appreciated there; your privations and sacrifices will be entirely disregarded, and you placed on a level with the coarsest and most uneducated sectaries. I really do not think you are called to this."

"Who, then, is called?" replied James.

"Why, men with much less of all these good things--men with real coarse, substantial, backwoods furniture in their minds, who will not appreciate, and of course not feel, the want of all the refinements and comforts which you must sacrifice."

"And are there enough such men ready to meet the emergencies in our western world, so that no others need be called upon?" replied James.

"Men of the class you speak of may do better than I; but, if after all their efforts I still am needed, and can work well, ought I not to go? Must those only be drafted for religious enterprises to whom they involve no sacrifice?"

"Well, for my part," replied the other, "I trust I am willing to do any

thing that is my duty; yet I never could feel it to be my duty to bury myself in a new state, among stumps and log cabins. My mind would rust itself out; and, missing the stimulus of such society as I have been accustomed to, I should run down completely, and be useless in body and in mind."

"If you feel so, it would be so," replied James. "If the work there to be done would not be stimulus and excitement enough to compensate for the absence of all other stimulus,--if the business of the ministry, the saving of human souls, is not the one all-absorbing purpose, and desire, and impulse of the whole being,--then woe to the man who goes to preach the gospel where there is nothing but human souls to be gained by it."

"Well, Stanton," replied the other, after a pause of some seriousness, "I cannot say that I have attained to this yet. I don't know but I might be brought to it; but at present I must confess it is not so. We ought not to rush into a state and employment which we have not the moral fortitude to sustain well. In short, for myself, I may make a respectable, and, I trust, not useless man in the law, when I could do nothing in the circumstances which you choose. However, I respect your feelings, and heartily wish that I could share them myself."

A few days after this conversation the young friends parted for their several destinations--the one to a law school, the other to a theological seminary.

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It was many years after this that a middle-aged man, of somewhat threadbare appearance and restricted travelling conveniences, was seen carefully tying his horse at the outer enclosure of an elegant mansion in the town of ----, in one of our Western States; which being done, he eyed the house rather inquisitively, as people sometimes do when they are doubtful as to the question of entering or not entering. The house belonged to George Lennox, Esq., a lawyer reputed to be doing a more extensive business than any other in the state, and the threadbare gentleman who plies the knocker at the front door is the Reverend Mr. Stanton, a name widely spread in the ecclesiastical circles of the land. The door opens, and the old college acquaintances meet with a cordial grasp of the hand, and Mr. Stanton soon finds himself pressed to the most comfortable accommodations in the warm parlor of his friend; and even the slight uneasiness which the wisest are not always exempt from, when conscious of a little shabbiness in exterior, was entirely dissipated by the evident cordiality of his reception. Since the conversation we have alluded to, the two friends pursued their separate courses with but few opportunities of personal intercourse. In the true zeal of the missionary, James Stanton had thrown himself into the field, where it seemed hardest and darkest, and where labor seemed most needed. In neighborhoods without churches, without school houses, without settled roads, among a population of disorganized and heterogeneous material, he had exhorted from house to house, labored individually with

one after another, till he had, in place after place, brought together the elements of a Christian church. Far from all ordinances, means of grace, or Christian brotherhood, or coöperation, he had seemed to himself to be merely the lonely, solitary "voice of one crying in the wilderness," as unassisted, and, to human view, as powerless. With poverty, and cold, and physical fatigue he had daily been familiar; and where no vehicle could penetrate the miry depths of the forest, where it was impracticable even to guide a horse, he had walked miles and miles, through mud and rain, to preach. With a wife in delicate health, and a young and growing family, he had more than once seen the year when fifty dollars was the whole amount of money that had passed through his hands; and the whole of the rest of his support had come in disconnected contributions from one and another of his people. He had lived without books, without newspapers, except as he had found them by chance snatches here and there,[1] and felt, as one so circumstanced only can feel, the difficulty of maintaining intellectual vigor and energy in default of all those stimulants to which cultivated minds in more favorable circumstances are so much indebted. At the time that he is now introduced to the reader, he had been recently made pastor in one of the most important settlements in the state, and among those who, so far as worldly circumstances were concerned, were able to afford him a competent support. But among communities like those at the west, settled for expressly money-making purposes, and by those who have for years been taught the lesson to save, and have scarcely begun to feel the duty to give, a minister, however laborious, however eloquent and successful, may often feel the most serious embarrassments of poverty. Too often is

his salary regarded as a charity which may be given or retrenched to suit every emergency of the times, and his family expenditures watched with a jealous and censorious eye.

[Footnote 1: Those particulars the writer heard stated personally as a part of the experience of one of the most devoted ministers of Ohio.]

On the other hand, George Lennox, the lawyer, had by his talents and efficiency placed himself at the head of his profession, and was realizing an income which brought all the comforts and elegances of life within his reach. He was a member of the Christian church in the place where he lived, irreproachable in life and conduct. From natural generosity of disposition, seconded by principle, he was a liberal contributor to all religious and benevolent enterprises, and was often quoted and referred to as an example in good works. Surrounded by an affectionate and growing family, with ample means for providing in the best manner both for their physical and mental development, he justly regarded himself as a happy man, and was well satisfied with the world he lived in.

Now, there is nothing more trying to the Christianity or the philosophy which teaches the vanity of riches than a few hours' domestication in a family where wealth is employed, not for purposes of ostentation, but for the perfecting of home comfort and the gratification of refined intellectual tastes; and as Mr. Stanton leaned back, slippered and gowned, in one of the easiest of chairs, and began to look over

periodicals and valuable new books from which he had long been excluded, he might be forgiven for giving a half sigh to the reflection that he could never be a rich man. "Have you read this review?" said his companion, handing him one of the leading periodicals of the day across the table.

"I seldom see reviews," said Mr. Stanton, taking it.

"You lose a great deal," replied the other, "if you have not seen those by this author--altogether the ablest series of literary efforts in our time. You clerical gentlemen ought not to sacrifice your literary tastes entirely to your professional cares. A moderate attention to current literature liberalizes the mind, and gives influence that you could not otherwise acquire."

"Literary taste is an expensive thing to a minister," said Mr. Stanton, smiling: "for the mind, as well as the body, we must forego all luxuries, and confine ourselves simply to necessaries."

"I would always indulge myself with books and periodicals, even if I had to scrimp elsewhere," said Mr. Lennox; and he spoke of scrimping with all the serious good faith with which people of two or three thousand a year usually speak of these matters.

Mr. Stanton smiled, and waived the subject, wondering mentally where his friend would find an elsewhere to scrimp, if he had the management of

his concerns. The conversation gradually flowed back to college days and scenes, and the friends amused themselves with tracing the history of their various classmates.

"And so Alsop is in the Senate," said Mr. Stanton. "Strange! We did not at all expect it of him. But do you know any thing of George Bush?"

"O, yes," replied the other; "he went into mercantile life, and the last I heard he had turned a speculation worth thirty thousand--a shrewd fellow. I always knew he would make his way in the world."

"But what has become of Langdon?"

"O, he is doing well; he is professor of languages in ---- College, and I hear he has lately issued a Latin Grammar that promises to have quite a run."

"And Smithson?"

"Smithson has an office at Washington, and was there living in great style the last time I saw him."

It may be questioned whether the minister sank to sleep that night, amid the many comfortable provisions of his friend's guest chamber, without rebuking in his heart a certain rising of regret that he had turned his back on all the honors, and distinctions, and comforts which lay around

the path of others, who had not, in the opening of the race, half the advantages of himself. "See," said the insidious voice--"what have you gained? See your early friends surrounded by riches and comfort, while you are pinched and harassed by poverty. Have they not, many of them, as good a hope of heaven as you have, and all this besides? Could you not have lived easier, and been a good man after all?" The reflection was only silenced by remembering that the only Being who ever had the perfect power of choosing his worldly condition, chose, of his own accord, a poverty deeper than that of any of his servants. Had Christ consented to be rich, what check could there have been to the desire of it among his followers? But he chose to stoop so low that none could be lower; and that in extremest want none could ever say, "I am poorer than was my Savior and God."

The friends at parting the next morning shook hands warmly, and promised a frequent renewal of their resumed intercourse. Nor was the bill for twenty dollars, which the minister found in his hand, at all an unacceptable addition to the pleasures of his visit; and though the November wind whistled keenly through a dull, comfortless sky, he turned his horse's head homeward with a lightened heart.

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"Mother's sick, and I'm a-keeping house!" said a little flaxen-headed girl, in all the importance of seven years, as her father entered the dwelling.

"Your mother sick! what's the matter?" inquired Mr. Stanton.

"She caught cold washing, yesterday, while you were gone;" and when the minister stood by the bedside of his sick wife, saw her flushed face, and felt her feverish pulse, he felt seriously alarmed. She had scarcely recovered from a dangerous fever when he left home, and with reason he dreaded a relapse.

"My dear, why have you done so?" was the first expostulation; "why did you not send for old Agnes to do your washing, as I told you."

"I felt so well, I thought I was quite able," was the reply; "and you know it will take all the money we have now in hand to get the children's shoes before cold weather comes, and nobody knows when we shall have any more."

"Well, Mary, comfort your heart as to that. I have had a present to-day of twenty dollars--that will last us some time. God always provides when need is greatest." And so, after administering a little to the comfort of his wife, the minister addressed himself to the business of cooking something for dinner for himself and his little hungry flock.

"There is no bread in the house," he exclaimed, after a survey of the ways and means at his disposal.

"I must try and sit up long enough to make some," said his wife faintly.

"You must try to be quiet," replied the husband. "We can do very well on potatoes. But yet," he added, "I think if I bring the things to your bedside, and you show me how to mix them, I could make some bread."

A burst of laughter from the young fry chorused his proposal; nevertheless, as Mr. Stanton was a man of decided genius, by help of much showing, and of strong arms and good will, the feat was at length accomplished in no unworkmanlike manner; and while the bread was put down to the fire to rise, and the potatoes were baking in the oven, Mr. Stanton having enjoined silence on his noisy troop, sat down, pencil in hand, by his wife's bed, to prepare a sermon.

We would that those ministers who feel that they cannot compose without a study, and that the airiest and pleasantest room in the house, where the floor is guarded by the thick carpet, the light carefully relieved by curtains, where papers are filed and arranged neatly in conveniences purposely adjusted, with books of reference standing invitingly around, could once figure to themselves the process of composing a sermon in circumstances such as we have painted. Mr. Stanton had written his text, and jotted down something of an introduction, when a circumstance occurred which is almost inevitable in situations where a person has any thing else to attend to--the baby woke. The little interloper was to be tied into a chair, while the flaxen-headed young housekeeper was now installed into the office of waiter in ordinary to her majesty, and by

shaking a newspaper before her face, plying a rattle, or other arts known only to the initiate, to prevent her from indulging in any unpleasant demonstrations, while Mr. Stanton proceeded with his train of thought.

"Papa, papa! the teakettle! only look!" cried all the younger ones, just as he was again beginning to abstract his mind.

Mr. Stanton rose, and adapting part of his sermon paper to the handle of the teakettle, poured the boiling water on some herb drink for his wife, and then recommenced.

"I sha'n't have much of a sermon!" he soliloquized, as his youngest but one, with the ingenuity common to children of her standing, had contrived to tip herself over in her chair, and cut her under lip, which for the time being threw the whole settlement into commotion; and this conviction was strengthened by finding that it was now time to give the children their dinner.

"I fear Mrs. Stanton is imprudent in exerting herself," said the medical man to the husband, as he examined her symptoms.

"I know she is," replied her husband, "but I cannot keep her from it."

"It is absolutely indispensable that she should rest and keep her mind easy," said the doctor.

"Rest and keep easy"--how easily the words are said! yet how they fall on the ear of a mother, who knows that her whole flock have not yet a garment prepared for winter, that hiring assistance is out of the question, and that the work must all be done by herself--who sees that while she is sick her husband is perplexed, and kept from his appropriate duties, and her children, despite his well-meant efforts, suffering for the want of those attentions that only a mother can give. Will not any mother, so tried, rise from her sick bed before she feels able, to be again prostrated by over-exertion, until the vigor of the constitution year by year declines, and she sinks into an early grave? Yet this is the true history of many a wife and mother, who, in consenting to share the privations of a western minister, has as truly sacrificed her life as did ever martyr on heathen shores. The graves of Harriet Newell and Mrs. Judson are hallowed as the shrines of saints, and their memory made as a watchword among Christians; yet the western valley is full of green and nameless graves, where patient, long-enduring wives and mothers have lain down, worn out by the privations of as severe a missionary field, and "no man knoweth the place of their sepulchre."

The crisp air of a November evening was enlivened by the fire that blazed merrily in the bar room of the tavern in L., while a more than usual number crowded about the hearth, owing to the session of the county court in that place.

"Mr. Lennox is a pretty smart lawyer," began an old gentleman, who sat in one of the corners, in the half interrogative tone which indicated a wish to start conversation.

"Yes, sir, no mistake about that," was the reply; "does the largest business in the state--very smart man, sir, and honest--a church member too, and one of the tallest kinds of Christians they say--gives more money for building meeting houses, and all sorts of religious concerns, than any man around."

"Well, he can afford it," said a man with a thin, care-taking visage, and a nervous, anxious twitch of the hand, as if it were his constant effort to hold on to something--"he can afford it, for he makes money hand over hand. It is not every body can afford to do as he does."

A sly look of intelligence pervaded the company; for the speaker, one of the most substantial householders in the settlement, was always taken with distressing symptoms of poverty and destitution when any allusion to public or religious charity was made.

"Mr. C. is thinking about parish matters," said a wicked wag of the company; "you see, sir, our minister urged pretty hard last Sunday to have his salary paid up. He has had sickness in his family, and nothing on hand for winter expenses."

"I don't think Mr. Stanton is judicious in making such public

statements," said the former speaker, nervously; "he ought to consult his friends privately, and not bring temporalities into the pulpit."

"That is to say, starve decently, and make no fuss," replied the other.

"Nonsense! Who talks of starving, when provision is as plenty as blackberries? I tell you I understand this matter, and know how little a man can get along with. I've tried it myself. When I first set out in life, my wife and I had not a pair of andirons or a shovel and tongs for two or three years, and we never thought of complaining. The times are hard. We are all losing, and must get along as we can; and Mr. Stanton must bear some rubs as well as the rest of us."

"It appears to me, Mr. C," said the waggish gentleman aforesaid, "that if you'd put Mr. Stanton into your good brick house, and give him your furniture and income, he would be well satisfied to rub along as you do."

"Mr. Stanton isn't so careful in his expenses as he might be," said Mr. C., petulantly, disregarding the idea started by his neighbor; "he buys things I should not think of buying. Now, I was in his house the other day, and he had just given three dollars for a single book."

"Perhaps it was a book he needed in his studies," suggested the old gentleman who began the conversation.

"What's the use of book larnin' to a minister, if he's got the real spirit in him?" chimed in a rough-looking man in the farthest corner; "only wish you could have heard Elder North give it off--there was a real genuine preacher for you, couldn't even read his text in the Bible; yet, sir, he would get up and reel it off as smooth and fast as the best of them, that come out of the colleges. My notion is, it's the spirit that's the thing, after all."

Several of the auditors seemed inclined to express their approbation of this doctrine, though some remarked that Mr. Stanton was a smarter preacher than Elder North, for all his book larnin'.

Some of the more intelligent of the circle here exchanged smiles, but declined entering the lists in favor of "larnin'."

"O, for my part," resumed Mr. C., "I am for having a minister study, and have books and all that, if he can afford it; but in hard times like these, books are neither meat, drink, nor fire; and I know I can't afford them. Now, I'm as willing to contribute my part to the minister's salary, and every other charity, as any body, when I can get money to do it; but in these times I can't get it."

The elderly gentleman here interrupted the conversation by saying, abruptly, "I am a townsman of Mr. Stanton's, and it is my opinion that he has impoverished himself by giving in religious charity."

"Giving in charity!" exclaimed several voices; "where did he ever get any thing to give?"

"Yet I think I speak within bounds," said the old gentleman, "when I say that he has given more than the amount of two thousand dollars yearly to the support of the gospel in this state; and I think I can show it to be so."

The eyes of the auditors were now enlarged to their utmost limits, while the old gentleman, after the fashion of shrewd old gentlemen generally, screwed up his mouth in a very dry twist, and looked in the fire without saying a word.

"Come now, pray tell us how this is," said several of the company.

"Well, sir," said the old man, addressing himself to Mr. C., "you are a man of business, and will perhaps understand the case as I view it. You were speaking this evening of lawyer Lennox. He and your minister were both from my native place, and both there and in college your minister was always reckoned the smartest of the two, and went ahead in every thing they undertook. Now, you see Mr. Lennox, out of his talents and education, makes say three thousand a year. Mr. Stanton had more talent, and more education, and might have made even more; but by devoting himself to the work of the ministry in your state, he gains, we will say, about four hundred dollars. Does he not, therefore, in fact, give all the difference between four hundred and three thousand to the cause

of religion in this state? If, during the business season of the year, you, Mr. C., should devote your whole time to some benevolent enterprise, would you not feel that you had virtually given to that enterprise all the money you would otherwise have made? Instead, therefore, of calling it a charity for you to subscribe to your minister's support, you ought to consider it a very expensive charity for him to devote his existence in preaching to you. To bring the gospel to your state, he has given up a reasonable prospect of an income of two or three thousand, and contents himself with the least sum which will keep soul and body together, without the possibility of laying up a cent for his family in case of his sickness and death. This, sir, is what I call giving in charity."