

**THREE DISCOURSES UPON THE
RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF BOWDOIN
COLLEGE, DURING THE
ADMINISTRATIONS OF PRESIDENTS
M'KEEN, APPLETON, & ALLEN**

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Three Discourses Upon the Religious History of Bowdoin College, During the Administrations of presidents M'keen, appleton, & allen by Egbert C. Smyth

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EGBERT C. SMYTH

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OF
BOWDOIN COLLEGE,
DURING THE ADMINISTRATIONS OF
PRESIDENTS M'KEEN, APPLETON, & ALLEN.
BY
EGBERT C. SMYTH,
COLLINS PROFESSOR OF NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION.

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1858.

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, JULY 26, 1858.

TO PROF. E. C. SMYTH.

SIR:—In behalf of the students we respectfully solicit, for publication, a copy of your very interesting and valuable Lectures upon the Religious History of the College. Deeming them a treasure well worth our possession, and being desirous that the benefits arising from them may not be confined to ourselves, but extended to all the friends of the College, we earnestly hope you will comply with our desire.

Yours, respectfully,

C. H. HOWARD, }
W. L. HASKELL, } *Committee.*
C. O. HOWAR, }

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BOWDOIN COLLEGE, JULY 31, 1858.

GENTLEMEN,

The Discourses which you request for publication are cheerfully placed at your disposal. Any labour they may have cost has been abundantly rewarded by the generous interest with which they were listened to, and by the kind appreciation so pleasingly expressed in your note.

Allow me to add a word of explanation,—not necessary for you, perhaps,—but for others into whose hands they may come.

My original design simply was to prepare a brief account of some past seasons of religious interest in the history of the College, to be read at the Concert of Prayer for Colleges in February last. The materials gathered with this end in view, demanded, it was thought, ampler treatment; hence the method adopted. The principal object, however, has still been an immediate and practical one; and the course of thought pursued has been determined, in some measure, by the existing religious condition of the College.

In the statement of facts I have studiously endeavored to be accurate. In the sketches of religious character which have been introduced, my aim has been to draw attention to the sources of Christian usefulness, and to indicate personal traits at once real and worthy of emulation. I have accordingly dwelt upon excellences, and have only hinted at defects. The circumstances, moreover, in which the discourses were delivered, rendered this the most secure course; as they have also limited my allusions to those who were active in some of the scenes described. Some of those here referred to are still officers of the College. For obvious reasons their connection with the past has been scarcely noticed. Yet I may not refrain here from assuring them, upon the evidence contained in many letters from their earlier pupils to the author, that the memory of their religious activity and fidelity is warmly cherished by many grateful hearts.

Hoping, Gentlemen, that these discourses may prove a not unworthy contribution to the history of our beloved College, and especially that they may be blessed to the highest good of those forming their characters under its fostering care, for whom they were prepared,

I remain, very truly yours,

ROBERT C. SMYTH.

Messrs. C. H. HOWARD, and others,

Committee.

FIRST DISCOURSE.

DELIVERED SABBATH EVENING, FEBRUARY 24, 1854.

Life within College walls is usually a counterpart to life without; the College is "society in miniature." In order to a just appreciation of the character and spirit of the smaller community, it is necessary to know something of the prevalent principles and sentiments and habits of the larger society from which the former receives its members.

The period in which Bowdoin College was incorporated and established, was one marked by general religious declension. The second quarter of the last century was marked by wide spread and powerful revivals of religion. They extended over New England and Eastern New York, and other States. Then came the French and the Revolutionary wars, and the formation of a new government. The public mind was engrossed with civil, domestic, and political interests. The moral energy of the people was absorbed in the excitement of the struggle for national independence, and in the stormy political contests that followed. War, moreover, even when waged for the most worthy ends, tends to unsettle and corrupt the public mind. This has twice been demonstrated in the course of our history,—in the period which we are considering, and in that which nearly corresponds in the preceding century,—the period of the Indian wars and of the violent civil contests in the mother country. The struggle for civil freedom, we may be assured, has *not* upon the whole proved injurious to the interests of religion, for religion can only thrive best where such liberty is enjoyed.

But the immediate results were bad. Soldiers learned the vices of the camp and brought them home when they were discharged from service. Ministers gradually forgot their great message in their interest in the prominent questions of the day. The aid afforded by France in our time of need bound us by strong ties to that brave nation. French refugees came over in great numbers. They introduced new and popular amusements, and principles utterly subversive of religion and morality and social order. They came as friends. Men greedily caught up their infidel notions. They spread like wildfire over the land. President Dwight encountered them at Yale. "At the time he became President," writes Judge Roger Sherman, then himself a Tutor in Yale College, "infidelity, the offspring of the French school, was extensively prevalent among the undergraduates, and throughout this State. Laymen of distinction generally and our most eminent lawyers, especially, were its advocates."^{*} "French liberty and French philosophy," writes an early member of Williams College of the state of things there at the same time, "poured in upon us like a flood, and seemed to sweep everything serious before it."[†] That it reached the villages and towns in this vicinity, is evident from the publication, in 1802, of two sermons designed to resist the ingress of French infidelity and licentiousness, by the minister of Yarmouth, a brother-in-law of President M'Keen. From all that I can learn, I should infer that there were not many persons in this region who so far yielded to the Anti-Christian influences which were imported from France, as to become settled infidels. But there was a general paralysis of faith. The pulpit often gave an uncertain sound, and ceased reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come. Sinners, if they attended the sanctuary, in very many of our parishes could sit Sabbath after Sabbath and hear nothing which touched the conscience. One

^{*} Sprague's Annals of the American Pulpit, vol. 2, p. 164.

[†] See Prof. Hopkins's instructive narrative of revivals of religion in Williams College. Am. Quart. Regt. 1841.

good man who preached here, as a candidate, so that a sense of sin was awakened in the bosoms of some of his hearers, was refused a call for this reason alone. The degeneracy in doctrine was nearly as marked as the corruption of morals. And this was fearful. In several parishes in this vicinity the ministers were notoriously intemperate. Rum flowed down our streets. Sabbath breaking and profaneness were greatly prevalent. The population had outgrown the means of education. There was little religious instruction afforded the young,—they were seldom catechised. There were no Sabbath Schools. Moral restraints generally were deplorably relaxed. It was a rare spectacle if a young man confessed before men his Redeemer. Very few of the young were members of the churches.

Such was the state of things when the friends of education and religion embarked in the enterprise of establishing here a seminary of learning. In 1788, the Cumberland Association of Ministers and the Court of Sessions for this county, severally petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for a charter upon which to found a College in the County of Cumberland. In 1791, an Act incorporating a College to bear the name of Bowdoin, and to be located in the District of Maine, passed both houses of the General Court and received the signature of Samuel Adams. In 1802, President M'Keen and Professor Abbot were installed, and eight applicants were examined and admitted as Freshmen.

In the first eight classes I can learn of but one who may have been deemed, at the time of admission, hopefully pious; and it is doubtful whether he had made a public profession of religion.

During the first four years of Dr. M'Keen's presidency, though some of the students were thoughtful, upright, and possessed of fine intellectual abilities and social qualities, there was not one, it is believed, who was a member of any church or who believed and hoped in Christ as his Saviour. "Religion," writes one who was then a member of College,