

**THEOLOGICAL STUDY TODAY:
ADDRESSES DELIVERED AT THE
SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL
SCHOOL, JUNE 1-3, 1920**

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FOREWORD

The addresses which follow were given at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Meadville Theological School, June 1, 2, and 3, 1920. They are now put into permanent form both as a record of this anniversary and as a landmark in the history of theological science and theological teaching. The School was founded in 1844 to train ministers for the Unitarian churches of the West. During its early years it was also used as a ministerial training-school by the churches of the Christian connection. It has played a not insignificant part in the teaching of theology in America, in spite of obstacles which might now be considered insurmountable. It was for years without endowment and without a library worthy of the name. Only one of the two young professors who constituted its first faculty had been settled over a church. It was located in a small village of strong Calvinistic tendencies, many miles from any important cultural or educational center. The nearest Unitarian church was one hundred and forty miles away. The minister of this church, who served the School as a non-resident professor of pastoral care, was compelled to make a journey of forty miles by stage at the end of a hundred-mile journey by water. Access to Meadville from the south meant a stage journey of one hundred miles from the Ohio River.

The School was founded in an era of theological controversy, and the members of its faculty were debarred from the fellowship of the theological world, with the single exception of the Divinity School of Harvard University. They were eligible to membership in no theological society. The standard of admission was at first necessarily low. Applicants were expected to know something about English grammar, geography, arithmetic, and the elementary principles of natural philosophy; but even this modest requirement was not insisted on from men already in the ministry.

In spite of these obstacles the seventy-five years of the School's life are years of which it need not be ashamed. Its graduates have penetrated to every corner of the United States and Canada where there were churches which they were eligible to serve, or missionary outposts in search of ministers animated by a spirit of adventure. They have acquitted themselves with distinction in positions of influence, and they have not been ashamed to serve in lowly places. No better service was ever rendered to the cause of pure religion by Meadville graduates scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific than is being rendered at the present time. Never have they been in charge of more important posts, and never have these posts been more effectively manned. A tree is known by its fruits. Meadville is content to be thus known and judged.

Why is it that, considering the crudity of the tools with which the School was for many years compelled to work, its output has been of so high a quality? The answer is threefold. In the first place, though admission to the School was at first easy, as it was indeed in other seminaries of three-quarters of a century ago, the classroom standard was exacting and the erudition of its professors was, considering the time and place, amazing. The quality of the work done in the classroom compared favorably from the very beginning with that which was done in the most highly favored institutions of the East. In the second place, the founders of the School were men of God. Harm Jan Huidekoper, coming to Meadville from Holland at the beginning of the last century, put into the founding of the School the spirit which had animated his life, the spirit of devotion to the living God. That was the spirit which animated his son, Professor Frederic Huidekoper, and the first president, Rufus Stebbins. The teaching of the School was infused from the beginning with an atmosphere of manly and earnest piety. In the third place, the founders of the School were men of vision. Though they believed intensely in the conclusions at which they had arrived, they believed even more strongly that theological study should be prosecuted in the freedom of the truth. This proposition was written at the beginning into the charter of the School. From the day of its foundation all its privileges were open to students of good character

and high ideals, regardless of theological opinions. And thus the foundation of the School was laid not only deep but broad.

Some of the views which were set forth in the classroom concerning the Old Testament by President Stebbins, and concerning the New Testament by Professor Huidekoper, have been outgrown and rejected even in strongholds of orthodoxy. But the high standards of scholarship and the fine consecration which they brought to their tasks, along with the clear vision demanding devotion to the truth at the expense, if necessary, of any previous formulation of truth, which has characterized the School for seventy-five years—these constitute its distinctive quality and its distinctive contribution to theological education.

By means of increased resources the opportunities of the School have been greatly expanded. It now possesses an adequate faculty and a large and growing library. By non-resident lectureships it is kept in contact with the outer world and brought into touch with modern problems. Admission to the theological course now demands previous college preparation. The School is affiliated for a quarter of the year with the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and is taking steps to erect a building of its own near the gateway of that University.

No longer in a spirit of barren and unfruitful controversy, or in a spirit of voluntary isolation from the other institutions which are training ministers of

religion in other fellowships, is the work of the School to be carried on. It is significant that a goodly number of such institutions were represented at the seventy-fifth anniversary and that professors from several of these have taken part, with our own faculty, in giving the addresses printed in this volume. All this is a foreshadowing of the time when the intrusion of the sectarian spirit into theological teaching will become a sin against the Holy Ghost, and when the pure devotion to truth, which characterizes the university at its best, will characterize the intellectual processes of the seminary as well.

F. C. S.