

## CO-OPERATION!

SOMETHING FOR VIRGINIANS TO READ.

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OF the trite maxim that "union is strength," the Presbyterians of Virginia seem often to be ignorant. There is scarcely a public interest or institution belonging to them which has not suffered from the want of steady co-operation. Independence among us has become a vice, for it is often carried so far that one man will surrender no opinion, liking, or prejudice, in order to unite his strength with others in the support of an enterprise of admitted and fundamental importance. Is the matter in hand the founding or sustaining of a school, academy, college, religious paper, theological seminary? Is it urged, or even demonstrated, that its success will be most favorable to the cause of Presbyterianism? Is it correctly inferred, thence, that each individual ought to give it the support appropriate to his condition? All this is admitted in the general and in the abstract; but in the particular a sufficient number will usually be found preferring some similar project, so as effectually to mar its complete success. One says, "This school, college, seminary, periodical, whichever it may be, is not so perfect as some other similar ones abroad, therefore I shall not sustain it." Says another, "This teacher, or editor, is not the man of my choice; replace him with Mr. A. B., and I will sustain you heartily." But says a third, "If you do remove him, to make room for Mr. A. B., I promise you, you shall never have another iota of my support." Indeed, it often seems that you have but to make an enterprise a Virginia cause, and convince our people that it presents a special claim for their support, to create a motive to neglect it; our darling independence must be vindicated from the notion that we are bound to do anything regularly any longer than it pleases our sovereign selves.

The State pride also, of which Virginians are usually supposed

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<sup>1</sup> An editorial article in *The Central Presbyterian* of October 31, 1857.

to possess a fair share, often exhibits itself in very strange fashion. Let any one from abroad disparage our things, we are bold enough in resenting it, and meanwhile we practically disparage them ourselves. The privilege of slighting or depreciating them is one which we jealously reserve for our own gratification. If any of our neighbors abroad pick up a Virginia idea, invention, or man, and make it great or famous, we are quick to claim and glory in our ownership; but if this invention or this man had remained on Virginia soil, we should have taken very effectual means to keep him or it from becoming great. Our intellectual estimates invert the rules of perspective: things at a distance loom largely in our admiration, and things close to us shrink to pigmy dimensions. Virginia is the hardest and most unjust of all stages upon which to sustain a reputation. The very fact that we possess a man, that he is ours, that he is close to us, is sufficient reason for our concluding that he is no great wonder after all. Hence, Virginians have ever been found supporters and patrons of enterprises whose prosperity was useless to them, and extravagant admirers of men and things afar off, just by reason of the fact that they knew little about them. What literary institution on foreign, or even hostile, soil has not been enriched with Virginia patronage, while our own have languished? How often has it been seen that Virginians have become famous in Virginia by going abroad, and have received from our people inordinate admiration and patronage, unjustly abstracted from home talents, to which these men would have held a subordinate place if they had stayed at home. The way to be honored *in* Virginia is to go *out* of it. The reward which we give to a faithful and self-sacrificing consecration to our service is depreciation. Desertion of the State is the thing which wins our applause.

Now, how unlike, how much wiser, is the policy which has been pursued by the Christians of New England, and of other sections of our country? You never found them depreciating or deserting their own institutions and interests, or "damning them with faint praise," by way of evincing their liberality and independence; you found no flocks of New England youth migrating to Southern or Western schools, and thus practically asserting the worthlessness of similar schools at home. And when New England men differed, as they naturally did, about the policy of their public institutions, they did not carry their dif-

ferences to the preposterous and suicidal length of killing, by neglect or opposition, their own enterprises, because they were not as prosperous as their sectional pride might desire. No, they sustained them *because they were their own*. They sustained them manfully though conscious that they might be at the time inferior, because common sense told them that this was the only way to make them superior. They sustained them while they admitted their defects, in order by vigorous support to make them perfect. They stood firmly by their own until others learned by their conduct to value them. People in all other sections of the Union naturally concluded that institutions so appreciated at home must be meritorious, and thus New England schools and presses were flooded with patronage from abroad. Does any one dream that this patronage would ever have been bestowed if those institutions had not been thus sustained by their own friends? Again, when these far-seeing, sensible people felt that any press was encumbered with an unsuitable editor, or any public school with an unsuitable teacher, they did not adopt the policy so fashionable in Virginia, they did not say, "As long as that man stays there the enterprise shall not have one iota of my support." They plainly saw that, on the supposition this incumbent was an unworthy man, he would be least affected by this withholding of their approbation, and would care nothing so long as his position and salary were secure. So that this line of policy on the part of the friends of the enterprise would be the feeblest, most indirect, and uncertain of all means to procure the removal of the unworthy incumbent, which should have been the object, while it would be the most direct and fatal means to destroy the enterprise. They saw that such policy would amount exactly to this, to stab the enterprise *which they loved* through and through the vitals, in order to render the obnoxious incumbent behind it uncomfortable, as they supposed he deserved to be made, by pricking his skin with the points of their swords. They did no such absurdity. If the unsuitableness of the incumbent was unbearable, they openly assaulted him, and not the enterprise, and honorably demanded his removal. If he was bearable, they sustained the institution firmly, not for his, but for Christ's sake, and covered the defect with a prudent silence, as a family secret which must be kept for their own honor and interest. Thus

their institutions and enterprises, instead of being kept starvings, so unlucky and depressed that none but unworthy, third-rate men would condescend to them, were nurtured into a strength sufficient to throw off defects by their vigorous growth, and to purge out unsuitable incumbents by becoming attractive to the most deserving.

Too long have Virginia Presbyterians indulged the opposite policy. Their Synod has lagged behind in numbers and influence; their vacant churches have increased; their enterprises have been choked by neglect; the very presses and other means intended to present our wants and urge the proper way to remedy them have remained unknown, while all the interest of many has been expended in reading and talking about the enterprises of other people, in which we had no direct concern. We would sadly and solemnly testify against this fatal policy. We would urge our brethren to a wiser co-operation. Unless we awake universally to our error, the sorrowful result will not be uncertain nor distant. Presbyterianism in Virginia will become a lame, scattering affair, a sort of provincial dependency on some more prosperous, because more rational, section of our church, and will drag its slow existence along, fed by such crumbs of refuse as the more favored sections find it convenient to spare from their own sustenance. In the first place, able and efficient men will not come among us from other sections. They will not leave places where their toilsome exertions can be efficient and appreciated to expose themselves to the mortifying torture of a depreciating jealousy following close on the heels of an extravagant admiration of neglected, stunted institutions, and of an uncertain, stingy and capricious patronage. We solemnly assure our brethren that this matter is already well understood by sensible men abroad. We have already acquired a character nearly fatal, and the opinion which prevails is, that the Virginia church is at the same time a field in which only the scantiest fruits can be reaped, and in which it is more difficult to sustain a reputation than in the more prosperous enterprises of other sections, where liberal results and a national reputation can be secured with half the toil. We tell our brethren that the prevalent idea abroad is, that Virginia institutions have become, in consequence of our peculiar temper, a sort of Sisyphus' stone, which are *fated to roll back*, even though propelled by giants.

And this opinion of us is clearly manifested in another form, the mention of which leads to our second remark. This melancholy state of affairs in Virginia is so well understood by our brethren abroad, that they perpetually act upon the supposition that every efficient man among us must of course be anxious to get away. How else can we account for the fact, that the ministry of Virginia, scantily as it is recruited, is the common *poaching ground* for churches, presses, and colleges, all around us which need supplies? Why else is it that every young man in the Virginia church who has shown capacity is chased with semi-annual, and almost monthly, "calls" to positions abroad? Our neighbors take it for granted that such men, sustained as they are at home, must naturally desire to emigrate. And there is, at this very day, scarcely a man of efficiency in the Virginia church, who has not had repeated opportunities to exchange his home position for one abroad, where he would be better paid and enjoy more generous co-operation. We owe their continuance among us only to their State patriotism, or to accident. The second consequence of our policy, then, must be to drive away our own men perpetually as fast as they become capable of usefulness. Alas, how widely has this result been already realized? What part of the church, north, west, south, is not now triumphing over us in a success and prosperity earned in part by the talents and reputation of Virginians, who would have been only too glad to labor thus for the Old Dominion if we had let them.

Yet there is a brighter side to this picture. Virginia Presbyterians are not all unwise and ungenerous towards their public servants. The history of *The Central Presbyterian*, while far from exhibiting that general co-operation which we believe *the cause* among us demands, yet presents cheering evidence that many of our brethren have another spirit. And the more hearty appreciation and general support now enjoyed among us by our beloved seminary in Prince Edward, is another instance which encourages us to hope that a better day is coming. There are members among the Virginia ministry and laity than whom no public servant ever had constituents more generous, magnanimous and affectionate. We, for our part, should be ungrateful if we failed to honor with the most glowing acknowledgments their liberal support. The thought of them is the bright spot,

next to the thought of our Master on high, which helps to cheer us amidst the mortifications and discouragements which all the occupants of public station among us experience from lack of co-operation. And if we may judge of other public servants by ourselves, the thought of these generous spirits is the thing which, next to a sense of duty, keeps them at their posts.