

Mursell's Preparation for College.

JAMES MURSELL was born at Lymington on 7 September, 1799, where his father, William, earned his living as an ironmonger, and was also pastor of the second Baptist Church, till he resigned in 1809 that the two churches might be united under William Giles. William Mursell opened preaching stations at Boldre, Battramsley, Beaulieu, Downton and Sway, and his son James was presently told off to superintend the work at the last place, where a chapel was erected by the people. These labours were so successful that the father applied to Dr. Ryland to find if he could be trained at Bristol. This letter is the reply, and shows that even then it was often needful for time to be spent in study before entrance: a lack of secondary education has always been a weak point with Baptists. The books recommended were duly obtained, and James went to study under William Gray, and while preaching in the "villiages" around, bring his spelling and grammar up to such a pitch that Dr. Ryland would be satisfied. The books have been given by his son Arthur to the Harvey Lane Church in Leicester, where James Phillippo was pastor from 1826 to 1845. Also between two sheets of glass at Harvey Lane is this letter itself, which has been copied by the kindness of Mr. E. J. Cooper, the secretary.

My dear Friend

I rec[eive]d your letter, and w[oul]d gladly give you any advice, or do you any service in my power, We have at this time 5 or 6 Applications for admission into the Academy, from young men who are well recommended, but what we can do for them I know not; as we are about immediately to sell out a part of our funded property, to pay off the remaining debt on our building.

One young man was recommended by the Ch[urch] at Wooton und Edge, whose Father was willing to pay, for him for a time. He came over, for about a week, and I was well pleased with the hopeful evid[en]ce of his piety, but finding him extremely deficient in the knowledge of his own language, to such a degree so that his spelling was intolerably bad, and that he had little or no Inclination to apply to the study of other languages, I recommended him to spend a year or two with Mr Gray of Chipping Norton, who might instruct him in English Grammar, put him on a Course of Theological reading, employ him occasionally in the villiages, and look over the sketches of his sermons and correct them. He wished me to write Mr Gray for him, which I have done accordingly, & I suppose he will go thither.

I think learning is in some respects like riches; it may be a great advantage, or it may, thro' the evil propensities of our fallen nature, become a snare. To be sure many professors, who are afraid of Ministers running the hazard connected with the former acquisition, are not much afraid of the latter for themselves. But as we could not do well without some rich men in our churches, so not without some learned ministers. And while I have known many excell[en]t ministers, who have had but little advantage from their Education, so I have generally found those who c^d do best with^t it, most sensible of the disadvantages connected with the want of it; while I have known some of a very different order, who seemed quite as proud of their being unlearned, as ever I knew any one to be of being learned.

The increase of Educat[io]n among our hearers, also rend^{rs} it more needful than in former times, that our Ministers sh^d have a good degree of learning: lest if the young people who rise up in their Congregations sh[oul]d find the Min[i]st[er] ignorant of other subjects, with which they have obtained an acquaintance, they

sh[oul]d under value the knowledge they may really possess, of divinity.—

I cannot pretend positively to judge for another, w[i]th whom I have so little acquaint[an]ce, but I pray God to direct your mind, in the pres[en]t Crisis, and hope that earnest prayer and diligent study of the S[cri]pture[s] will fit you for considerable usefulness in the Church, th^o you sh[oul]d decline acquiring the knowledge of the Languages in which they were originally written. I think you w[oul]d find the larger edition of M^r Scotts Essays the best Body of Divinity of its size in our language; and if you could get his family Bible, it w[oul]d be more suited to answer the most important ends of the S[cri]pture[s] than any Expositor I know. There is in it such a constant connection between evangelical Doctrine & its practical Tendency, as makes it highly valuable in my estimation. Your good Father merely wrote to me to enquire if we had room, I was obliged to tell him that tho we had plenty of room, yet we had a sad scarcity of money; but that if you came we must have a regular recommendation from the Church to which you belong. I can only pray God to direct and bless you, and w[ith] kind respects to your Father &c

I remain

Yours cordially

John Ryland.

April 14th 1820.

M^r James Mursell

Lymington

Hampshire.