

Capers - Family

A Father.. A Family.. And a Freshman

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SON TO FATHER, "Where shall I go to school?"
Father to Son, "The more important question:
What will you do when you go to school?"

These are but extracts from a century old correspondence between William Capers, a bishop of the Methodist church, and his youngest son, Ellison, who later became a bishop of the Episcopal church.

There is a Chinese proverb to the effect that if you want to know people read their family letters. This correspondence between father and son is of interest not only because this family was and is worth knowing but the letter especially of the father to the son is the delivery without dross of a great intellect and great heart to one who in time developed an outstanding mind and an understanding heart.

William Capers entered South Carolina College (now University) in 1805 and left in his senior year to study law. Just before entering the practice he took a journey with a Methodist preacher which wound up with his becoming a Methodist minister. At the famous Baltimore Conference in 1844 the Methodist church was divided and William Capers became a bishop of the Southern branch.

Bishop William Capers lies buried in the Washington Street Methodist church graveyard at Columbia. There followed him a line of descendants with such vocations and positions as: six ministers, mostly Episcopalians, three bishops, a head master at The Citadel, a member of the faculty of this same school, a secretary of state for South Carolina, a bank president, a commissioner of Internal Revenue for the United States, a postmaster, a business manager of Columbia hospital, president of the University of the South, head of the archives department of the State of Mississippi, numerous descendants and husbands of women descendants fighting with distinction in the Confederate army in the Civil war and in the United States fighting forces since the Civil war up to this very date and including many officers, four of whom rose to the rank of brigadier general. Two of the women descendants married ministers of the Gospel and one of these husbands became a bishop in his church.

While Bishop William Capers was holding an annual conference at Sumterville, in 1853, his youngest son, Ellison, wrote and asked him this question: "Where shall I go to school? This was the bishop's answer:

"My dear Ellison:

I, too, was sorry enough that I could not meet with you with your mother and take a day or two at home before coming hither to Conference; but it is now past, and being so, only serves to add one little instance to the thousands which had gone before it, to show that we had always better be content with only so much pastime as may be consistent with duty than sacrifice the least mite of a positive obligation to pleasurable indulgences. As far as you are individually concerned, I do not know that I should have found more pleasure in seeing you at home than I have felt in getting the present letter from you; and I answer it in the midst of the business of a conference session that you may have some proof of my appreciation of it. Only don't write so fast, but take more pains with your penmanship till you have, by use, acquired a fixed hand.



You ask me where you shall go to school. My dear son, the more important question. 'What will you do when you go to school?' You say, and you put it in large letters, that you were never born to learn Latin and Greek. How do you know? I am sure you were as well born as any of my children, and I have no doubt born for as much. Your difficulty in learning Latin and Greek proceeds wholly from a want of attention. You have not fixed your mind attentively on this word or that, this rule or that (necessary to be known), to retain them fixedly in your mind, but it is the result of habit, and this habit you must correct, or you will neither learn Latin and Greek, nor anything else. You are capable, Ellison, of learning anything, without this simple impediment.

Discipline is indispensable to knowledge, and when you have acquired the power over yourself to stand still when you want to run, to be silent when you want to talk, to rise early when you choose to lie late in bed, you will have gotten on the way to fix your attention on any subject which may be presented to you for study. And in this way, as in most all others, the advantage will be found to increase with the line of progress. You will find a high satisfaction in the knowledge you gain, and scarcely less in finding out that you have only to try and keep on trying to accomplish just anything you please. You may become at the age of your brother Frank (and

I say it with the greatest regard for his talents and learning) as able a scholar and as smart a man in every respect as he. Go where you may or to whom you may, it is not in school or teacher to do anything of any account for you without yourself.

And this is what you have to do for yourself: You must discipline yourself to do what you dislike, and to do it with attention, for the sake of the benefits to be derived from the unpleasant and irksome duty. You must learn to study by learning to deny yourself. Fix your hours (not too many, but a few in a day at first), and use today for what it shall produce tomorrow. I would feel confident of your making an able man, and an honor to all about you, if you would but do this with respect to books and study. May God bless you, my son. Let Oddy read this letter. Much love and kisses to mother, sisters and all.

Your affectionate father,
W. Capers"

What a wonderful thing for a son to have a father capable of such clear insight to training and willing to take the time from arduous duties to sit down and write such a letter and that in long hand.

What a wonderful thing it would be to be a teacher of students coming to college with such judgment and advice ringing in their ears!