

No. 2

BACCALAUREATE

DELIVERED TO

THE SENIOR CLASS,

IN THE

Chapel of Indiana College,

ON

THE 25TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1836,

(THE SABBATH PREVIOUS TO COMMENCEMENT,)

by
Andrew Wylie
AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR REQUEST.

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1836.

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BACCALAUREATE

Delivered to the Senior Class, in the Chapel of Indiana College, on the 25th of September, 1836, the Sabbath previous to commencement, and published by their request.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN:

About seven years ago, when I commenced my labors here, some of you were entering on that course of studies which you have just completed. How different are your views and feelings now from what they then were! Seven years, which then appeared so long, have glided away, like so many moments; yet the period has elapsed, not without producing great and important changes on every thing. Nothing is what it was, except Nature and her unchanging Laws. The Institution, the village, the character of its population, the aspect of the surrounding country, have all greatly changed, and none of them, I believe, for the worse. Improvements, throughout the State, which nobody then supposed would be thought of for half a century, have not only been projected but actually commenced, with the certain prospect of being accomplished before another space of seven years shall have reached its period.

You yourselves are greatly changed. Neither in body nor mind are you what you were seven years ago. I too feel that I am not the same. Strange sensations come over us, as we review the past, and compare it with the present; and on the comparison endeavor to erect conjectures of the future!

Look around you, and ask, what have become of those who, seven years ago, were your companions? Some have left the circle of your acquaintance, and have gone, you scarcely know whither; some have engaged in the busy scenes of life; others have left the world, and the pla-

ces which seven years ago knew them, shall know them no more. Your own number has, within the past year, been diminished by the stroke of death. GEORGE MORTIMER COBB!—I can scarcely persuade myself that he is indeed gone from among us; so vivid is the impression he has left on the fancy! His vivacity of movement, mental as well as bodily, the lively turn of his genius, the apparent strength and soundness of his constitution—every thing in his person and character gave promise of long life and usefulness. But Power, whose mandate none can resist, has removed him—prematurely, according to our imperfect and erring conceptions—from the way and walks of men, just as he was prepared to enter them.

He was the oldest son of fond parents, who even from infancy, bestowed the greatest care upon his education: so that, at three years of age, he could read English; at six he had made considerable proficiency in French; and at twelve commenced the study of Italian. Nor, even at this early age, was his vigorous mind unacquainted with that severer kind of exertion which attends the acquisition of *science*.—Alas! for his untimely fate! Why was he not permitted to live, that he might repay the deep solicitude of his affectionate parents about his education, by reaching, in years of honor and usefulness, their fond and ardent expectations? Ah! vain are our enquiries and complaints on such a subject. Heaven is not of our counsel. We lay plans for the future, and prepare the means of their accomplishment: but, when we are just about to reap, as we suppose, the fruit of all our toils and anxious preparations, death, or some other calamity, comes, and in a moment all is blasted! “The flower nipt by an untimely frost—the grave has closed upon all my hopes!” Such was the exclamation of the bereaved father, in communicating to one of us the heavy and unexpected tidings of that event, which has called forth these reflections; and mini-

is not the philosophy which would find fault with the tears of those from whom the idol of their affections has been torn away. No, ye bereaved! You have seen the inexorable grave devour that arm around which so many tender recollections and pleasing hopes were wont to cluster, and it could be mockery to forbid your sorrow! Permit us, rather, to share in it, while, at the same time, we exhort you, in the language of inspiration, that "ye sorrow not as those who have no hope: for if we believe in Him who raised up Jesus from the dead, even so they also that sleep in Jesus, shall God bring with him." Cherish then the delightful sentiment so finely expressed in language of your own quotation:

"Now hush my heart!—Afflicting Heaven
Thy will be done; thy solace given;
For mortal hand can never raise
The broken column of my days."

Young Gentlemen, you will pardon this digression, when you reflect, that, just one year previous to that calamity which has caused a vacancy in your class by the death of Mr. Cobb, a similar visitation deprived me of a beloved son, who, in age and circumstances, precisely resembled him. Taught by experience to reverence the Voice of Nature speaking from the desolated shrine of a parent's heart, I have seemed to forget you, while lingered to converse a while with *it*. And now, that I have caught the spirit of the theme, I feel unable, for the present, to touch on any other.

I have often admired that saying of Burke in which he prefers the wisdom of the heart to that of the head: and I have often wondered how it has happened, that, while the intellect has been subjected to the most inquisitive search of the mental philosopher, the region of feeling has been disregarded, or contemptuously left to the poet. Thus it has happened that the latter has on such subjects actually, though unintentionally, discovered and taught more truth than the former. The intellect, with all its boasted powers

of intuition, generalization and induction, is more under the control of the sophistry of the will, than has generally been supposed. But the heart is more independent in its workings, and more under the control of that power—call it Nature, or spirit, or what you will, which, if properly understood and resolutely followed, will safely, in the end, conduct man to a happy destiny. Why did the wise man tell us that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting? And why is it that so few believe the truth of his declaration! It is because the heart of man, within which is enshrined the true oracle of his nature, never deigns to give utterance to the voice within, while we are too giddy to give a respectful audience. It requires the shock of calamity to hush the impertinent aid, which, in hours of merriment or business, incessantly resound in the courts and avenues of the inner Temple of the soul. And the reason why so few believe the doctrine of Solomon on this point, is, because they have acquired that dreadful hardihood which deprives even the shock of calamity of its awakening power.

Death—especially the premature death of a youth on whose training and education years of anxious toil have been expended, is calculated, and no doubt intended, to excite in the human heart, especially in the heart of the bereaved parent or friend, feelings which no other event can excite to the same degree; feelings from which we may derive lessons of the profoundest wisdom, and which, if consulted and interpreted aright, will be so far from depressing the soul into gloom and melancholy, that they will inspire it with new vigor and delight.

On many subjects, feeling is a safer guide to truth than reason. Perverse desire may mislead our reason; as on other subjects so on that of a future life: but our feelings—those instincts of our moral nature—cannot be schooled into the belief that, when our friends die, they exist no more.

The space which they occupied, by their bodily presence, is indeed vacant, but, in the region of the affections and the memory, their spirits are still present; and in that region our spirits hold converse with them still. In early life I contracted an acquaintance with one somewhat my superior in age, which, by degrees, grew into friendship of the most intimate kind. Our tempers, tastes, dispositions, feelings, pursuits, were perfectly congenial. Our seasons of relaxation and of study were spent together. An evening ramble over the hills, or a walk by moonlight on the banks of Chartiers often gratified our taste for the beauties of nature, and our love of speculation on subjects of "divine philosophy." The incidents of college life gave us interesting views of human nature, and sometimes furnished topics for jest and merriment. Severer study called into emulous exertion, our powers of investigation through the week; and, on the still and solemn hours of the Sabbath, we "walked to the house of God in company," mingled our devotions while there, and on our return, interchanged thoughts suggested by whatever we might have read or heard on the subjects which the preacher had discussed. Thus our intercourse yielded mutual satisfaction and improvement. We had difficulties and cares; but they served only to stimulate exertion and self-denial. Sorrows, in the common acceptation of the term, we had none; for as yet the sky had never lowered over our heads: and the dew glittering on the ground, the breezes perfumed with the breath of spring, the birds warbling beside our path, and the shadows of things thrown westward, all told us that life was in its morning, and that a long and pleasant interval was yet to be passed before the chilling shadows of the evening should be stretched out over us. With him, alas! these hopes proved fallacious. He lived to complete his college course; to study a profession, and to labor in it a year with honor and success; and, as if to complete the prospect of a happy life, which

was opening before him, a woman of more than common excellence had, at the altar, united her hand and destiny with his. How did my heart rejoice at the happy lot of one whose friendship I held so dear! How was it confounded and thunderstruck, by the stroke which suddenly laid him low! Since that event thirty years have passed away; other friends have shared by attachments and esteem; care and business and pleasure, success and disappointment, have shed their mingled influence upon me; yet, to this hour, that friend of my youth lives in my affections; I had almost said, in my company. His body, indeed, has mingled with the clay of his native mountains; but the spirit of the man lives in my presence, and I can scarcely believe, that our intercourse has sustained an interruption.

Conscious of such feelings, and knowing them to be from Nature, I must be sensible that to deny a future existence to man is to impute intentional deception to the Being that made him, and to maintain the monstrous position, that the Architect of his nature has based his work on the substratum of a lie.

Having considered the feelings proper to our nature which death awakens in the breast of surviving friends, and the proof which they afford of a state of existence after this life, let us now view the matter under a different aspect, and examine what indications of the same great truth are exhibited in those sentiments which the approach of death awakens in the individual who expects his coming. They are chiefly these two: a desire to be remembered with esteem and affection by those who come after us, and a lively concern for their welfare. That these sentiments really belong to man's nature—that they are no less a part of him than are his lungs, eyes and brain, cannot admit of a doubt: and that their operation on the general interests of the world are highly beneficial is equally unquestionable. But how unaccountable would they be, on the supposition that the indi-

viduals of the human race were destined to drop successively into non-existence! To suppose that these feelings have, and were intended to have, their fulfilment and end in the good of the species, while, as it respects the individual, they are deceptive, would be to suppose a prodigious departure from that beneficent analogy which characterizes the works of God, according to which the good of the whole, and of the several parts taken each by itself, are made to result from the operation of the same law;—and, moreover, that, the departure takes place in man's moral nature, which is precisely the place where we should expect the analogy to be maintained and carried out to the greatest perfection! But these sentiments are not only implanted in the nature of man; but they are seen to grow stronger and stronger, as he rises in moral excellence, and to decline only in proportion as his nature becomes debased with moral turpitude. The wretch who avowedly cares not what people will say or think of him when his breath departs, would be marked and shunned with abhorrence in any part of the civilized world. Nobody would choose him for a companion or confide in him. On the contrary, we know that all the great and good, all who have rendered their names illustrious in the history of mankind, by great and noble actions, have been actuated by a regard to posthumous reputation. Cicero, the noblest spirit of antiquity, distinctly avows this to have been his own motive in the exertions and sacrifices that he made for the good of his country.

It is, I think, a specific difference which distinguishes our moral feelings from those that are physical; that the former grow stronger, and the latter weaker, as the body declines towards its dissolution. You, of course, can, as yet, understand nothing of this from experience. But you may know it from observation. See the aged patriot. He feels a deeper concern for the good of his country in those shades of retirement into which he has been compelled to withdraw from

the toils of office, than he did while engaged in the full vigor of his faculties for the promotion of her interests. Observe the dying Christian. He spends his last breath, with an earnestness unfelt before, for the prosperity of the Church, and the salvation of the world. Contemplate the philosopher and philanthropist. As life declines, his heart throbs with a growing interest for the success of all those measures, whether originated by himself or others, on which he believes the future good of the human race depends.

No fact pertaining to the history of our nature is more firmly supported by experience than this, that the influence of the future grows stronger upon us as life advances towards its close; and that when "heart and flesh" sensibly fail—when all the appetites, propensities and passions which respect the individual alone, and which have their root in man's animal nature, have abated, or become quite extinct, those feelings of an higher order, which identify the individual with his species, merging his interests in those of the race, grow strong and flourish. Strange, that man should care more for the affairs of life, in proportion as he approaches the period when they must cease to affect him personally, and that, as that event draws near, which is to deprive him of his "portion" in "the things that are done under the sun," he should feel a deeper anxiety that they should go on prosperously;—that he should then sing, with more than tranquil resignation, his "Nunc dimittis," when his eyes behold the dawn of a day of glory and salvation breaking over the world! I speak of the good, in whose breasts the voice of Nature has not been stifled and suppressed by the turmoil of evil passions. As for the vicious, they have perverted their moral powers; so that the design of nature in forming them is no longer clearly legible in their mental constitution. Yet, even in the perverted tendencies of their character, may be dimly discerned the traces of an original dignity, which it has not been in the power of

evil habits totally to efface. The man who sets out in the world with the determination, at all events, to be rich, after having amassed a thousand times more than sufficient for his use, is, to his latest hour, harassed by the passion of adding to his accumulated stores. Death overtakes the ambitious in the midst of plans, which it would require ages to execute. No one, in short, whatever may be his character, fails to manifest tendencies in his nature, of a higher order and stronger intensity than the interests of the individual with regard to the present state, seem to require. What are we to think of this? Does nature mock her children, by giving them an order of feelings, and desires above their present condition, and which relate to objects placed, by the laws of fate, forever beyond their reach? Or, do we become conscious of such desires and feelings, through the blind force of habit, generating within us an attachment to existence, which we have found to be pleasant, and which, because we cannot render it in reality immortal, we love to perpetuate in the visions of hope? Or is man, as an individual, made, by means of these feelings, the unconscious and undesigning instrument of nature in promoting the good of the species, just as we see the poor insect careful to deposite its egg in a place of safety, though doomed to perish almost as soon as this service is accomplished? Of all such suggestions—(and the same is true respecting the entire scheme to which they belong)—it is a sufficient refutation, that they neither comport with just notions of the dignity of man, whose entire nature indicates a superior destiny to that of insects, nor with just conceptions of the character of God, who could have been under no necessity of making a dupe of the individual for sake of the species.

It has been far from my intention, in the foregoing remarks, to enter upon a formal argument in favor of the doctrine of immortality.

On this subject, I have therefore only further to remark, that Religion connects with the belief of a future state, the awful idea of a Rewarding Deity. It is this idea, and its counterpart, which has given to religion its unequalled power over the heart of man, whether to excite or appal. To appear before the judgment bar of the Eternal to await his final sentence—who can think of it and not tremble! When worthy opinions respecting the divine character and government become firmly connected in the minds of men with this fundamental, awakening truth, religion cannot fail to exert a purifying influence upon their heart and character, strengthening every virtuous principle, and weakening, I had almost said annihilating, the force of temptation. And, if perfectly realized, such would be its effect. For who would dare, for any consideration, to transgress a precept of the divine law, in the presence of its Author?

But a sense of religion, when, on the other hand, it is connected with false notions respecting the character and will of God and other cognate subjects, exerts an influence on the human character which is, in the highest degree, to be deprecated and deplored, distorting it into the hideous forms of bigotry, superstition and fanaticism. The purity and good order of society have been, in every generation, more or less molested and disturbed by these corruptions of religion; and, in some periods, their influence has been so wide-spreading, so devastating, so horribly debasing on the public mind and morals—men have, by it, been so completely metamorphosed into fiends and brutes, that such as escaped the general contagion were almost driven to seek refuge from such evils in a total denial and renunciation of all religion. Not a few, and those men of distinction, in our own age and country, unwilling to go into this ex-

treme, and terrified at its consequences as exhibited in Europe near the close of the last century, have suffered themselves to subside into a state of mind respecting religion not easy to be described or defined, since it is new and without precedent in former times. It is not indifference; it is not neutrality; it is not infidelity, nor even skepticism, much less Atheism. Yet few would be charitable enough to call it Christianity. It stands aloof from every visible form of religion actually existing, further than decency may seem to require. It honestly believes that religion—the religion of Christianity—is, or may be, true, but hesitates, as to the propriety of bringing it into our social relations. Let it be respected—this seems to be its language—let it be respected, so long as it is kept by each individual within the enclosure of his own bosom, or, at most, within the circle of his own family. Let there be Penates, but no temple. Let every one, in the privacy of his own heart, be a believer, and as pious and devotional as he pleases; but let him not trouble others either with his faith or his fervor. No church, no chapel, no sabbath, no public ordinance. Let things recede to the position in which they were before the call of Abraham, when whoever did not embrace the prevailing system of idolatry, was permitted to “walk with God” in the private meditations of the heart, or in such acts of personal devotion as he might choose to practice, without either seeking aid to his own pious feelings, by calling others to unite with him in any social religious act, or, by any such act, endeavoring to impart his feelings to them. And, so far as religion consists in the belief of truth, let the same negative rule prevail, each one being allowed to teach himself, but none being permitted to say to his brother or his neighbor “know the Lord.” If I might be allowed to plead an

apology in behalf of such as go upon this plan, I might say, "What else can we do? The day, of miracles is past. An inspired teacher is not now to be expected. Those who offer themselves in that character now-a-days, every body sees, are idiots. The world laughs at the pretensions of the Pope to Infallibility. We cannot waste our time and patience in investigating the foundation of those unprofitable and uncharitable disputations, in which the assailants and defenders of the several protestant creeds are perpetually engaged. Those who have been most deeply concerned in these things have lost most by it, as it respects comfort, character and usefulness. Why should we imitate them? Why should we put in jeopardy our own sense of religion, by involving ourselves in social relations, which, as the religious world is situated, must commit us on one side or the other of those questions—most of them beyond our reach—which still continue to vex and agitate it? Besides: we are not so blind as not to see that the more closely the social system of ecclesiastical relations is made to work; the more certainly it turns out upon the religious public, in the character of teachers, men, who, contrary to the Apostle's precept, ("Be babes in malice; in understanding men,") by the infantine imbecility of their understanding, and the virile strength of their malice, bringing into odium and contempt the sacred cause they profess to promote."

What I have just said is the best apology that I can invent in favor of those men, whose sentiments and conduct I have thus cursorily sketched. But it is insufficient. The truth is, that man is so entirely social in his nature, that he can hardly be trusted to go alone, even in matters of religion: and the opinions and conduct of men, in our day, must be strangely perverse, if none can be found whom a prudent man could not

take to keep him company on the way to heaven. He who is singular in his modes of thinking ought to suspect himself of insanity; and if he is so throughout, he may be sure of it. For a similar reason, whoever is so much afraid of the corruptions of religion, that he keeps *his* within himself, is more in a condition to corrupt than to be corrupted. The power of religious belief is too great to be laid aside as useless, were that possible. But it cannot be laid aside. Society cannot do without it: nor can the individual. It *will* work: and one of the very best things you can do for yourselves and others is to give it such direction that it shall work sweetly and advantageously. To confine my remarks to the point in view: the doctrine of a future life never can be banished out of the world, because it is founded in man's nature: but the belief of it will operate beneficially or otherwise, according to the direction that is given it. Let *superstition* direct it, and a man will spend his life, with zeal and assiduity, in going the prescribed round of silly observances, thinking that, in this way, he is preparing himself for his last account. How different will be the conduct of him, into whose habits of thinking and acting, *that view* of the matter has been wrought, which is contained in the Parable of the Talents. According to this view, whoever does what he can to make this world a better world than he finds it, or, in other words, makes the best use of the powers and faculties committed to his trust, fulfils the design of his Maker in placing him here. This is the work assigned us in this life. How we may best accomplish it, is the grand question. One thing in relation to it I would commend to your most serious and attentive consideration. It is this, that a man's own mind is the instrument he must use in every thing he does; and consequently

that its improvement is the first thing to be attended to. He who works upon lifeless matter, in any of the useful arts must first know the laws by which lifeless matter is governed.—Knowledge is the key which unlocks the vast magazine of Nature's agencies. Because the present generation possess this key, they exert a productive power over things inanimate a thousand times greater than was, or could be, exerted by the generation which lived ten centuries ago. In the intellectual world the same is true in a still higher degree. For *here* the man who has not improved his mind can absolutely do nothing at all. He cannot communicate a thought, for his mind is empty.

Whoever adds a single truth to the stock of knowledge inherited by the people of his generation, or gives it circulation, performs a service acceptable to God, because beneficial to man. Nay more: such an one confers a lasting benefit on all future ages. For truth never perishes: and all truth tends to good. The wisdom of antiquity has come down to us unimpaired. Nothing important has been lost. The very jests and witticisms of ancient sages have been preserved. Their more precious sentiments have been embalmed in their literature—embalmed in a style whose aromatic sweetness fills the inward sense with ecstasy.

The study of their works has been decry'd amongst us! It is waste of time to learn the languages which contain them.—It is an *unholy* attempt! It is a *vain* attempt! The truths, which Genius is inspired to utter, live—and shall continue to live, after rust has left nothing of the brazen monument to be consumed, and the slow wasting process of disintegration has dissolved the pyramid. Live! did I say? They preserve from dissolution the very integument in which they were first clothed, though composed of a material

as insubstantial as sound, as fleeting as breath! For you cannot take apart the thoughts of Genius from the language that encloses them. Can any but a fool suppose that Washington's Farewell Address—or the Declaration of our Independence—aye, or the language which embodies them, will ever cease to be studied?—that the odes of David, or the Parables of “the Root and Offspring of David,” will be lost? No! not though there should be a second Deluge! Nothing short of the universal extinction of *mind* could bring about such a catastrophe. Persuade us, in the 19th century, that it is a loss of time to learn the language of Cicero and Virgil and Tacitus! of Aristotle and Plato and Homer! of Moses and David and Isaiah! And to what would you recommend our sons to devote the time thus savaligeously saved? To learning the arts of making money? Or the books of your own production, whereby they may find the way to Science made easy? “O Seri Studiorum!” Traitors to the cause of Literature and Science, and Religion and Civil Liberty! What a condition are ye attempting to provide for the sages of the present day, the benefactors of their country and mankind? What, for yourselves? For, when the thoughts of the “Mighty Dead” have perished with their language—and they can be preserved in none other—what will become of *yours*? When Cicero and Burke, Tacitus and Xenophon, Homer and Milton, shall be neglected, what place will *you* hold in the estimation of mankind? Pardon me the oversight. I forget—No, no: ye are a sagacious tribe: and no doubt ye foresee, that when these, and such like, authors, shall lose their reputation, you and your works will be held in esteem:—and just so will it be!

I have said that the mind is the grand instrument to be employed in all our works. In it are concentrated the talents for the use of which we are held responsible. It must have already occurred to your reflections, during the course of these remarks, that the nobler and more important the work to be performed, the higher the state of improvement requisite in the instrument itself. The thought is just and highly important to be kept in mind. Now, as the interests of the moral world are of the highest moment to mankind, the great end of education is to fit the mind for operating upon them to good purpose. Of what avail is worldly greatness, or even the more honorable distinctions of science and literature, to a bad man, a man whose mind is the seat of evil passions, whose hands are polluted with crime and his conscience with guilt? What a sad spectacle does a community present, in whose character are to be seen no traces of moral beauty; a community destitute of justice and humanity, truth, integrity; honor, temperance, charity; and deformed by the opposite vices? Of what avail to such a community would be all the canals, railroads, and public works that the wealth of the Indies could construct? What would life be worth, if it must be spent among a people destitute of moral cultivation, and, of course, unwilling to submit to the restraints of law, virtue, or religion? Who, that has the spirit of a man, would not a thousand times rather endure the privations and inconveniences of a state in which science and art had bestowed none of their precious gifts, than consent to live in one enriched by them all, under the base condition of submitting to the dictation of lawless violence? Yet every one knows that to such a "Reign of Terror" a People may be rapidly ten-

ding, whose physical energies are, at the same time, exerted under the direction of Science and Art, with wonderful success, in accumulating the means of wealth and power. A vast amount of vice and misery may lurk under the show of national greatness: and a commonwealth may be, *then*, nearest its fall when, towering in the pride of its strength, it stands the envy and terror of the world. The true greatness of a nation consists in the amount of individual happiness which it contains: and this is always in proportion to the intelligence and virtue of its population.

Let it then be your determined purpose to augment these, by your example and influence; and, to this end, remember that your first care is to be employed in the improvement of your own mind in knowledge and moral excellence. Be growing wiser and better every day. Resolve to leave the world as much as possible in your debt. I do not mean, that you should think of doing this, by conferring personal favors on every one. The wealth of a Girard bestowed in this way, w'd scarcely be felt in the community, and it might, and probably would, operate to the injury, rather than the advantage, of the persons receiving it. The greatest good, or evil, you can possibly do to others, consists in the moral influence you may exert upon them. He who infuses into the mind of another, good sentiments,—enlightens his understanding, rectifies his conscience, strengthens his judgment by expelling prejudice or error—helps him to form and to execute good resolutions—or inspires him with an abhorrence of vice, confers on him a benefit indeed—one which, in its happy consequences, will indure forever, and one which may diffuse itself to an innumerable multitude.

