



WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON COLLEGE

HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS

Archive No. *VII B e 2*

Subject *Andrew Wylie - Address delivered
to the Graduates of Washington
College, 25 September, 1828.*

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE

GRADUATES OF

WASHINGTON COLLEGE,

SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1828,

BY A. WYLIE, D. D. PRINCIPAL,

AND

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST

WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA.

ADDRESS, &c.

PSALM 37, 3.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN—

NO period of life is so critical as that upon which you are about to enter. Hitherto you have occupied a quiet situation, in which you have found both employment and delight—a situation, resembling a harbor sheltered on all sides from the winds, where the most delicate pinnacle may ride in safety. Shortly you must launch forth into the open ocean, to encounter the fury of the elements,—not, I trust, without a chart and compass, or the guidance of a wisdom superior to your own.

When a man has made some progress in life, he has something more than conjecture to sustain his hopes. He has made trial of himself and has gained some acquaintance with the nature of those things of which human life is composed, and which constitute the materials on which he has to operate. He has learned how to ward off danger and surmount obstacles. This gives him a degree of confidence which one just entering into the world cannot feel.

There is, in the situation in which you are now placed, another cause of disquietude which none but those who have experienced it can understand. You are disengaged. The excitement of college exercises is past; and that of the great interests of the world is not yet felt: and the mind rolls idly, like a becalmed vessel, for the want of something to impel it forward. How unpleasant the situation! It is not rest: nor is it action, but possesses what is disagreeable in both, without the pleasures of either; the toil of action without its interest, the tedium of rest without its refreshment.

You stand upon the verge of the great world which you are about to enter, with feelings like those of a traveller, who at night-fall approaches some populous city, of which he has heard much, but as yet knows nothing and in which he designs to fix his future residence. He halts upon an eminence to meditate on the scene before him. Nothing distinctly meets his eye except the numerous lights which, one after another, strike through the darkness. The hum of a crowded population, each putting the last hand to the business of the day, comes gently on his ear. Solemn thoughts, inspired by the scene itself and modified by his own hopes and fears, rise in his mind. He reflects upon the lively interest which every one of the many myriads before him is feeling in relation to the concerns of his own particular sphere—upon the varied states and characters—good and evil, of joy and grief, age and fortune, into which they are all distributed; and he says with himself, how soon shall all this bustle and interest be extinguished in the grave, and all these varieties of condition be lost in the uniformity of death. At length he awakes from his reverie; hastens to descend the hill that he may partake of the accommodations which the city may afford and share the fate of its inhabitants.

It is a fact calculated to excite melancholy reflections in the mind of one in your circumstances, that of those who obtain what is called a liberal education, so many, certainly more than one-fourth, spend the remainder of life to no valuable purpose. Their education, with all the hopes which were built upon it, proves to be a complete failure, both as to comfort and usefulness. Their life is thrown away; an experiment cannot be repeated! Nor is this the worst of the case.

is a failure for eternity. For a bad life will lead to a bad end, and be followed by a miserable futurity.

Do you ask what is a bad life? I answer, it is a life constructed on any other plan than that which is laid down in the text; which, though it may seem to regard the present state of existence only, will be found, on the principle just stated, to take within its scope the permanent interests of our being. The first thing observable in it is,

The limitation which it affords to our desires. It promises a dwelling, and the means of subsistence, "in the land." Gods promises ought to be the measure of our wishes: What he promises absolutely we may absolutely desire. Every thing else, which is lawful, we may desire only with submission. There are situations in life which demand not only the means of subsistence, but of an easy and comfortable subsistence. And these situations are necessary to the good order and prosperity of human society. There must be persons to fill them. But it is not necessary that you should be the persons.

You may serve God and your country in an inferior station and in the vale of obscurity, and if you acquit yourselves well there, and your qualifications be such as to render you deserving of promotion, and it should be expedient for you to be promoted, you may expect, in due time, to hear the voice of Him who governs the world and has all things at his disposal, saying to you, "Come up higher." And this promotion you may expect the sooner, the less anxiety you feel on the subject. No man who is fond of elevation can bear it, or gain it, with a good conscience. Whoever expects to rise in the world by personal merit will, to say the least, be liable to be disappointed. And whoever, on the other hand, expects it by the favor of those who have power, whether they be princes or people, will not only be liable to disappointment, but, if successful, it will probably be at the expense of virtue. For the arts and qualifications by which success is won in the contests of ambition are incompatible with Christian principle: such as an honest man cannot, and a highminded man will not, exercise. The great English Moralist describes them thus: "To profess what he does not mean, to promise what he cannot perform, to flatter ambition with prospects of promotion, and misery with hopes of relief, to soothe pride with appearances of submission, and appease enmity by blandishments and bribes—a mind devoted to its own purposes, a face that cannot blush and a heart that cannot feel." If you, therefore, my young friends are determined to set out in the career of ambition, and to make its objects, the objects of your pursuit, I do not say that you will have to sacrifice your virtue—religion and a good conscience—at some point in the line of your future progress; for, in principle you have made the sacrifice already. Christian principle cannot have the ascendancy in that heart where the love of these things prevail; and if not ascendancy, then, not existence. In the affairs of life a man is often brought to the point of practically deciding between the calls of duty and ambition; and when he decides he is not forming a new character. All such decisions are but the evolutions of the principle on which his character is constituted; and whether they lead to the perpetration of crimes of that atrocious and flagrant kind which strikes us with indignation and horror, or those of a milder and more mitigated cast, such as are readily tolerated in society, is a matter which will be determined wholly by the circumstances of the agent. Great talents and rare

occasions must concur with great temptations, in order to the perpetration of those crimes which attract the notice of the historian: but in the book of Gods remembrance there may be transcribed, from the heart and life of many an obscure individual, crimes which, for turpitude of principle, may rank with those of the mighty spoilers who have filled the world and time with their infamy. Devotion to the world is such a principle, and whoever has his heart bent on acquiring more of it than what is promised in the text needs only opportunity and an adequate temptation to lead him to the furthest extremes of wickedness. A regard to character—which in such an one is nothing more than a *prudent* regard for worldly advantages—is the highest motive on which he can act. And, there are duties which we owe to God and man which cannot spring from such a source; and crimes which such a principle will not restrain.

That the attainment of greater worldly advantages than those which are specified in the text is not necessary to *happiness*, is manifest from this, that they are no where promised in the word of God. This contains promises of all good things to them that love God. Since these are not promised we conclude, therefore, that they are not absolutely good. That they *may be* good for us, I do not deny. Whether they shall be or not, is a point which we are not competent to decide, and which it is our wisdom to leave to the Supreme Disposer of all events, in the course of his providence to decide for us. To act otherwise is as foolish as it is sinful. "They that *will be rich*" says an apostle, "fall into temptation and a snare, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows." The same remark will be found to hold good in reference to all other objects of cupidity. The plan of life which is directed towards them, as the great objects of pursuit, lies exposed, at every point, to annoyance from accident and disappointment, from the rivalry of competitors, from the haughtiness of those whom fortune has placed above us, and the envy of those below. The projection and prosecution of such a plan imply a state of mind to which peace is a stranger, and fear and care and unsatisfied desire afford continual torment. I make no account now of the many and grievous disappointments incident to all human pursuits; but, supposing the course of life to be the most prosperous, yet acquisition can never keep pace with desire, nor enjoyment satisfy the cravings of appetite, nor caution extract the stings of anxiety. Possession seems to divest of its beauty and value, the object once so ardently desired; so that, in point of happiness, we are often not the gainers by what we acquire. And, yet, as if by some fatal and malignant ingenuity, the tenor of our wishes were at every point set in opposition to the order of events, the acknowledged emptiness of our possessions does not prevent the fear of losing them: but as their intrinsic worth appeared to forsake them as soon as they came into our hands, so it seems to return into them again, when they are about to be wrested from us forever. Never does the miser cling to his hoarded treasures with so eager a grasp as when he hears the robber at the door, unless, indeed, when he is maintaining the last desperate struggle with the robber death. The voluptuary then puts the highest estimate upon his pleasures when he begins to feel that he can enjoy them no longer: and the ambition of the aspirant after power gives the highest importance to its object when he is about to bid "farewell, a long farewell to his greatness." Such is the nature of all human things considered in relation to our capacities for

"happiness : in prospect, desired ; possessed, insipid ; and lost, regretted.

Neither is the possession of more of this world than what is promised in the text necessary to our *usefulness*. That they afford no advantages in this respect I do not affirm. But these advantages are usually greatly overrated. The poor, and those in the humble walks of life, cannot be useful in the same way as the rich and the eminent : but which shall be useful in the highest degree depends more upon the disposition than the outward circumstances. If we consult experience on the subject we shall find that of those who have been justly reckoned the benefactors of the human race, the greater number were neither distinguished by the gifts of fortune nor by the favor of their contemporaries. They were men in the middle ranks of life, whose faculties were neither enervated by luxury nor cramped and benumbed by want. And of those who stood on the two extremes, as many who might be justly styled illustrious have been found on the lower as on the higher. The poor man, by his wisdom, has often saved the city—and left the glory of the deed to his more wealthy neighbors. To whom is the world so much indebted as to the apostles of the first, and to the reformers of the sixteenth century ? Yet there were "not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble" among their ranks. The instructors of mankind have always been poor. Poets proverbially so ; and they have taught more truth, and certainly in a more engaging manner, than philosophers. Where will you find a more useful class of men than the teachers of our common schools ; yet mountebanks and stage actors and dancing-masters are better paid and in many places more highly respected ! Shall I single out individuals, and tell you of Saunderson, who, though blind as well as poor, made such great proficiency in the exact sciences, as to raise himself to a professorship in the first University in Europe,—of Gioia, who invented the mariners compass,—of Columbus, who employed it as his guide to this new world—of Johnson, the majesty of whose genius has invested our literature with more than Roman grandeur—of Franklin, whose agency in the glorious work of establishing the independence of these United States, was second to that of but few of his coadjutors in that illustrious enterprise.—But time would fail should I attempt to suggest even in the most summary manner the services which in different ages and nations have been rendered to the cause of religion, literature and humanity, by men who enjoyed no advantage of birth or fortune and who made the world their debtor to an amount which its gold & silver can never equal.

More than a competence of this world's goods is, therefore, requisite neither for virtue, happiness nor usefulness. To desire more—to lay and prosecute plans of life as if with a determination to acquire more, is the grand practical error of all worldly men, and proceeds from that love of the world which is so pointedly condemned in Sacred Writ, as being incompatible with the great duty of love to God, and the character and hopes of a disciple of Christ. It is the source, also, of all those crimes by which the good order of society is violated, and of those cares and perplexities, fears and extravagant desires which banish peace and contentment from the soul.

Let me, then, beseech you, my young friends, not to set out in life on this pernicious principle. It is founded in the alienation of the heart from God ; it contravenes the eternal laws of his moral government ; and it must, therefore, lead to disappointment and misery.

That plan of life, on the contrary, which is laid down in the text ensures success : " thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." The arrangements of Divine Providence make the result certain. They cannot be disturbed, like the plans of men, by accident or human interference. As well might puny mortals arrest the sun in his course or put an extinguisher upon his light—as well might they bottle up the clouds of heaven, so as to prevent the former and the latter rain from descending in their season upon the earth, as cut off the man who trusts in the Lord and does good from his interest in the promise contained in the text. "The wicked shall see" its fulfilment, "and be grieved, he shall gnash with his teeth and melt away."

But it is proper here that I should call your attention to *the way* in which we may arrive at this confidence in God for our temporal support. Our text marks it out by two lines which limit it on either side: "Trust in God" and "do good." They are both necessary: They must be united in our practice. To trust in God, without doing good, is presumption. To do good without trusting in God, is impossible.

Trust in God implies reconciliation to him. All are by nature the children of wrath—exposed to punishment at the hands of God, the moral Governor of the Universe. The course of Providence and the reports of conscience and every days observation of the conduct of men prove this. And a serious consideration of it excites a dread in the bosom of the guilty which forbids the exercise of trust in God. For we cannot trust a being whom we consider indifferent to our interests; much less an enemy. To cast out this dread is the business of religion. Now, there are but two ways in which this has ever been attempted, or proposed; by the merit of personal righteousness, and by atonement. All the religion that have ever been in the world have rested on the one or the other of these two principles. On the former—the merit of good works—rests the religion of philosophers; on the latter—atonement—the religion of the people. Since the days of "righteous Abel" to the present hour the latter has been the prevailing religion of the world. The absurd rites of Paganism—and I must add Popery—are corruptions of it. It is taught, in its purity in the Holy Scriptures. The atonement accomplished in the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest of the Christians profession, is its foundation. And it is the only safe foundation of a sinners trust. Human merit may sustain hope so long as nothing occurs to excite enquiry and investigation. But the light of truth dissipates it: the shocks of adversity shake it: death mocks it; and the last trial will annihilate it forever. But the "one offering" whereby Jesus Christ has forever perfected them that are sanctified, furnishes the believer a plea which is seen to be pertinent the more clearly it is examined; which is felt to be more solid the more stress is laid upon it which supports the soul in poverty, calamity and death; and which will hold good in the process of the final judgment. Now, as the greater implies the less, if on the foundation of this plea we can trust the Lord for our eternal salvation, we shall surely not find it difficult to trust him for all things pertaining to our temporal condition. In neither case, however, be it remembered, does our trust in God supersede the necessity of our own exertions. It is our privilege to confide in his mercy through Christ for our eternal salvation; yet we are required to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" and to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." So, it is

the privilege to trust in the good providence of our heavenly Father, for our temporal support; and yet we are told that it is "the hand of the diligent that maketh rich" and that "idleness will cover a man with rags." There is no condition that can give allowance to idleness. Were the wealth of the Indies at your command it would only increase your obligation to be doing good. Man was made for action. He must and will be employed, in doing evil, if not in doing good. The *unprofitable* servant was condemned to be cast into "outer darkness." Indolence is a state as remote from real enjoyment as from duty: it brings its own torment along with it. It is a privilege to be engaged. It is the highest privilege of which our nature is here capable, to be engaged for God.

The good which we may do for ourselves and others terminates either on the body or the soul. The necessities, comforts and innocent refinements of life result mostly from bodily labor expended in the cultivation of husbandry and the other useful arts. This is a sphere of usefulness for which your education has disqualified you. Your power of doing good has not been for this reason diminished but increased. For even the arts which produce those enjoyments that tend merely to the comfort of the body depend chiefly for their existence on the exertions of the mind and the lights of science. The houses and clothing which defend, and the food which sustains us could not be produced without that skill which derives its origin and the rules by which it operates from the cultivation of the mind; and if produced they could not be enjoyed without the protection of those institutions in the construction of which bodily labor has no share. I do not mean to disparage the occupation of those very useful, and, in our country, respectable classes of men who do good by the labor of their hands; but I ask them in turn not to disparage the labor of the head. What would avail all the good things which the hands of men ever labored in producing, without law and social order? And how could law and social order exist or be maintained without the intellectual labors of men whose time and attention have been devoted to the pursuit of knowledge? The grand improvements which are made from year to year on the condition of the arts and of the earth's surface itself, for the purpose of facilitating intercourse and increasing the productive power of manual labor—whence are they derived? Literature, morality and religion which refine, exalt and save the *soul* are to be maintained and promoted in the world by the exertions of the mind.

Here then, my young friends, is a wide and noble field of labor presented before you. For doing good in it, it is not arrogance in you to suppose that, during the course of your past studies, you have gained some important qualifications. To aspire after the honor of laboring in it will not therefore be deemed presumption in you. If to do good be your object you will not rest in past attainments, remembering that the service of God and the condition of the world demand your best as well as most zealous efforts. Persons do evil and not good who thrust themselves into situations to which their talents and acquirements are not equal. They soon find themselves unable to answer the reasonable expectations of those who have a right to be benefitted by their labors and are under a strong temptation to support their popularity by expedients which, though successful for the time, are in the issue productive of serious and lasting injury to the community: In the mean time, their powers being strained beyond the point of

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healthful exertion give away, their factitious consequence forsake
them, and they sink in public estimation as far below the point at
which their real merits would have placed them as their unnatural
efforts had raised them above it. Well had it been for the world—
well had it been for the church, if instances of this kind had been less
numerous. I beseech you, young gentlemen, not to increase their
number. Whatever profession or occupation you may choose, let your
object be to do good in it. Examine again and again the state of your
own mind; and form a just estimate—better too low than too high—
of your own powers—

“*Quid ferre recusant
Quid valeant humeri.*”

Acquire, as speedily as possible, a thorough knowledge of your in-
tended profession—at least such a knowledge that you shall have not
its outlines merely but the leading facts and principles which constitute
the filling up, clearly under the eye. Then you will always know where
you are, and will not be liable to surprize.

The several points contained in the text have now been placed be-
fore you. Their connection, also, deserves your particular attention.
The command to trust in the Lord is placed first; that, to do good
stands second in order. The collocation is by no means fortuitous: for
so these duties are uniformly placed throughout the Scriptures; and
such is the order in which they must stand in practice. Whoever goes
out into the world to do good, on the mere impulse of generous feel-
ings not sustained by religious principle, goes into battle without
his armour. He will desert the cause or sustain a defeat. In his in-
tercourse with mankind he will soon meet with those who, under the
pretence of doing good, are aiming to promote their own selfish ends.
Every effort will be made to draw him into their measures. Compli-
ances will be exacted which cannot with a good conscience be yielded.
Numbers, zeal and management may render the party powerful. The
“*civium ardor prava jubentium*” may be as formidable to his interests
as the “*vultus instantis tyranni*” ever proved to the trembling slave
that cringed beneath the sceptre of an eastern despot. Here then, he
is at a point where trust in God is the only principle which can enable
him to hold fast his integrity. It enabled Daniel and his companions
to stand firm in their religion, in defiance of a proud monarch accus-
tomed to the most implicit obedience to his arbitrary mandates. It
supported the apostles and primitive Christians against the persecut-
ing rage of both Jews and Pagans. It enabled the protestant reform-
ers to brave the fury of a power that kings and emperors could not
withstand, and that, with blasphemous presumption, claimed to con-
troul the entire destinies of men, both in this world and the next. And
we deceive ourselves if we imagine that the condition of the world and
the character of the human race are so far amended that there shall be
no further occasion for the exercise of this virtue on the part of those
who in the present day are called to do good on the great theatre of hu-
man life. The conflict between good & evil still goes on, and in the world
at large the latter still holds the ascendancy. And no man can tell
who engages on the side of the former what sacrifices it may cost him.

This has frequently been styled the age of benevolent exertion, and
the calls upon public charity have become so frequent and urgent as to
excite an alarm in many, lest their funds should at length become ex-

hausted and they or their families be reduced to a state of dependence. But what if, as the glorious cause advances, these calls should become still more and more frequent and pressing; and what if the signs of the times should assume, in the eyes of enlightened christian charity, such a commanding aspect as to make it evident that every one of these calls must be answered, even though the rich mans active resources should be drained to the very last cent; and he should find himself under the necessity of depending, no less than the poor, upon the promise and providence of God for his daily bread? Is it not evident that, in such a state of things, trust in God is the only principle on which such expenditures can be made?

What his pecuniary resources are to the irreligious man of wealth, his intellectual attainments are to the irreligious scholar—the means to which he exclusively looks for support in future life. Now this is contrary in both cases to the spirit of the text and to the whole tenor of the word of God. The Bible says to the man of wealth “Trust not in uncertain riches” but make to yourself friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. Give up your wealth to God. Consecrate it to the purpose of doing good; and in whatever way you conscientiously believe you can employ it to the best advantage in doing good, in that way let it be employed, but let not a cent of it be put to any useless, much less any pernicious use. And the Bible holds the same language to the youthful graduate. His talents and knowledge it commands him to give up wholly to God to be employed for the benefit of the world, and to be employed in whatever station and way it may produce the greatest amount of good. Nothing must be reserved, nothing must be considered in the light of a treasure stored up for future use and made the subject of trust in the mean time. Now, nothing can enable us to live and act in this manner but trust in God.

A scriptural trust in God, joined to a spirit of active benevolence, I would observe, in the last place, is a sure defence against those vague and dismal apprehensions to which persons of refined and cultivated minds are unhappily so liable. The greatest share of all that uneasiness which is usually felt by persons of this description proceeds, not so much from inconveniencies in their present condition, as from those that are anticipated. There may be nothing in the present circumstances of the sufferer—for so we must denominate the person whose mind is harrassed by these apprehensions—which ought, in reason to justify his fears. Forms of imaginary woe sit before his eyes. Fear makes them real, and gives them “a local habitation” in his mind and “a name” in the catalogue of his ills. These ideal sufferings are the plagues of the student. There are sources of consolation in the case of real calamity which can afford no relief from these self-created horrors. Attacks from without have a tendency to brace the mind; but it has no natural means of defence against these assailants from within. Nay, it not unfrequently happens that the internal enemy becomes the more formidable in his power of annoyance, in proportion as the bulwarks of defence against the outward foe are seen to rise higher and to frown with a bolder front of defiance. How often may we see that happiness which is protected by all the outworks of fortune fall a prey to inward grief, and the man sinking into the deepest gloom of despondency at the very time when the sun of prosperity is gilding his habitation with its brightest rays. From these horrors of a dis-

tempered imagination trust in God and the spirit of benevolent exertion afford a sovereign remedy.

Young gentlemen, I shall now draw this discourse to a close, by earnestly intreating you to lay the plan of your future lives on the principles contained in the text. "Be ye reconciled to God." Trust in him and be doing good and doubt not of the care and protection of Divine Providence. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Trust in God, will deliver you from the "fear of man which bringeth a snare." Depend not on the patronage of any beneath Him that made you. Trust not in man whose breath is in his nostrils. Let your mind be enlightened, and determined to the right point, and from that point be not turned aside by any disturbing force. Enter into no combinations for sinister purposes and dread them not when formed against you. Suffer not the energies of your minds to waste themselves in solicitude, or in vain regrets, but lay them out in prudent counsels and vigorous efforts. Do not expect to avoid trouble: but if truth be in danger of falling in the streets, support it; if innocence is oppressed, vindicate its cause; and if suffering is before your eyes, pass not on the other side. Commit yourselves to God, in well doing, as to a merciful Creator, and you must be cheerful and "safe from the fear of evil." So may your lives be spent—and then, though now we must separate, we shall meet again—in heaven. God grant it, for Christ's sake, Amen.

FINIS.