

Samuel

INAUGURATION

OF

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JAMES M^cCOSH, D.D., LL.D.,

AS

PRESIDENT OF

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THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

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CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS

TO THE ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE COLLEGE,

BY THE

HONORABLE WILLIAM C. ALEXANDER, LL.D.

BROTHER GRADUATES AND OTHER FRIENDS OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,---It is only within a few days that I have been advised that the duty had been assigned me of tendering to the assembled graduates of the College, and such other friends as have honored us with their presence, the warm and cordial congratulations of the College on its present condition and prospects, and on its good fortune in having at this juncture secured as its President one so capable, honored, and distinguished as the reverend and learned gentleman who is this day to charge himself with the conduct of its affairs. I could have wished that this duty had fallen upon some one better qualified for its suitable and acceptable performance; and now under the embarrassments which surround me, I am even at this moment tempted to shrink from the undertaking of a task which the flattering preference of the guardians of the institution has so kindly and unexpectedly devolved upon me. I am constrained, however, in all my weakness, to enter on that task, and hope to find my strength in the spirit of the cause

which animates me. And here, in these circumstances, I may not inappropriately use the words of a distinguished speaker in another land: "Here, where every object springs some sweet association, and the visions of fancy, mellowed as they are by time, rise painted on the eye of memory; here, where the scenes of my childhood remind me how innocent I was, and the graves of my fathers admonish me how pure I should continue; here, standing as I do among my fairest, fondest, earliest sympathies, oh, believe me, warm is the heart that feels, and willing is the tongue that speaks; and yet I cannot by shaping it in my rude and inexpressive phrase, but shock the sensibility of a heart too full to be expressed, and far too eloquent for language." It is an interesting fact, and not without significance, that when the graduates of an ancient College assemble together as we do now, in circumstances of peculiar and unwonted interest, the thoughts of each one immediately revert to the days of his own novitiate. The days of our youth, in every worldly sense our happiest days, come back upon us in such gatherings, and we would fain live over again the hours when we were as yet untainted by the earthy handling of business and of care; and when our models of statesmen and patriots were those stern, impracticable old Greeks and Romans, concerning whom we were accustomed to read with our masters. Such a return of thought is both natural and pleasing, like the coming back of some war-worn soldier, after the vicissitudes of years, to the green quietude of the lap of

earth where he had spent his childhood among the hills. Therefore it is that on such occasions our thoughts run back to the days of academic discipline. They were our days of impression. Later traces have been superficial in comparison. Then the seal was set on melted wax, which presently grew hard as rock. What a tribute to the power of academic education! Great men and great scholars have no doubt been made in privacy. But these must forever want the high and almost festive association of joint pursuit, the remembrance of enthusiasm caught from soul to soul in the common race for knowledge and reputation.

There is no literary institution in America around which so many interesting and even romantic memories and associations cluster, as the venerable College in whose behalf we are this day assembled; and the contributions she has made to the cause of the country, of education, and to the church, have never yet been duly recorded and properly estimated and appreciated. Brought into existence at a period anterior to the Revolution, her history during the years of that memorable contest is inseparably interwoven and intertwined with the history of the country. At the breaking out of the Revolution her graduates numbered but four hundred and eighty-three, a large proportion of whom, with many of the students in attendance, passed from her walls to the ranks of the Revolutionary army; and not one single instance can be discovered, after the closest scrutiny, of any one

son of the College, during that eventful struggle, having proved recreant or apostate to the cause of liberty and the country, while their blood moistened every battle-field from Quebec to Savannah. If time permitted me (for I am limited in the number of minutes I can occupy) I could point to authentic records in history showing graduates of this College, who, filling the place of humble ministers of the gospel, when the storm of war rolled over the land, assembled together the male members of their congregations, raised a standard of defence, reiterated the old Puritan maxim, that "resistance to tyrants was obedience to God," and placing themselves at the head of their people, were soon found charging at the head of cavalry regiments in front of Savannah, at Guilford Court House, Eutaw Springs, and the Cowpens. (Applause and cheers.) It has been well said that this College literally gave up her staff and stay when her sixth President wended his way to the first Congress in Philadelphia, there to pledge life, fortune, and sacred honor in behalf of the land of his adoption, and at the same time she gave the first fruits of her academic labor when a member of the first class ever graduated affixed his name to the same glorious instrument, the great Magna Charta of our sovereign and separate existence. (Applause and cheers.) From the establishment of the College in 1747, down to the period when America rose "to repel her wrongs and to claim her destinies," and the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies resolved upon the haz-

ardous step of taking a last stand upon the adamantine rock of human rights, God, in his providence, was using this college as an instrument for the preparation of the men who were to perform no unimportant part in that struggle for empire. I have said that the associations which cluster around this College are memorable. I will mention but one or two. There was no darker period in the Revolutionary struggle, none more pregnant with great events and the fate of the country, than that in which Washington made his famous and masterly retreat across *The Jerseys*, closely pursued by the enemy under the command of General Howe, from whom he escaped, by taking a position on the right bank of the Delaware. It was not until, having determined to put all upon the hazard of the die, he had recrossed the Delaware, encountered and defeated the Hessians at Trenton, marched upon and obtained his victory at Princeton, that from within the walls of the then infant College of New Jersey, he was first enabled to give assurance to the world that the cause of liberty was safe. (Applause.) And it is from this spot, where Washington triumphed and where Mercer fell, that this institution continues to diffuse her benign and hallowed influence over the land; and it is upon this ground, rendered sacred by the blood of Mercer, that the sons of the College have assembled from all parts of the country to greet, and welcome, and honor a countryman of that hero and early martyr in the cause of freedom.

In 1783, the Continental Congress, driven by the

enemy from Philadelphia, adjourned to Princeton, and met in the library of the College. The commencement exercises of that year were honored by the presence of General Washington, who sat upon the stage, and was specially addressed by the valedictory orator of his class, himself a soldier of the Revolution, one whose name has within a few years been added to the list of illustrious and departed Presidents of Nassau Hall, and whose mortal remains repose in yonder house of silence.

There have been two remarkable eras in the history of the College. The first was one hundred years ago, in 1768. On the death of Dr. Finley, the president, the trustees, anxious to extend the fame and enlarge the influence and usefulness of the institution, cast their eyes across the Atlantic, and in the person of Dr. John Witherspoon, of Scotland, saw one who was eminently fitted to supply the wants of the institution. They brought him here to preside over the college. He added to European education and great theological and scholastic attainments, a profound knowledge of the science of government. He had a strong sympathy and affection for popular rights, which had been engendered, fostered and cultured in the wars and contests waged by him against the claims of privilege and patronage in his own Church. No man can carefully examine the history of the College and the times without being impressed with the wonderful influence which that extraordinary man exercised on the cause, progress and success of human liberty and the des-

tinies of the country. He seems to have imbued the mind of every pupil with an ardent love of liberty, and to have moulded the minds and characters of the future men of the country, and prepared them for the proud and distinguished part which many of them were destined to perform in the great political drama then about to be enacted. It is a satisfaction for me to observe to-day in the audience several direct descendants of that president of the College; and what is a more extraordinary fact, and more interesting, is, that we have upon this platform two venerable and distinguished men educated under the presidency of Dr. Witherspoon.—(Loud applause and cheers.) They graduated five years before our retiring president was born, and with the frosts of more than ninety winters pressing upon their brows, but with spirits as unquenched, and with a love of their *Alma Mater* as unquenchable, as when, seventy-three years ago they received their first degree at this College, they have this day come up to mingle their congratulations and acclamations with those of their younger brethren, on the accession to the presidency of a distinguished countryman of their illustrious preceptor.

[At this point of Mr. Alexander's remarks the applause was loud and almost impatient, and, anticipating the desire of the audience, gentlemen on the stand assisted to raise Colonel J. Warren Scott, of New Brunswick, and Hon. Elbert Herring, of New York, the two alumni referred to. Their extreme old age and the emotion they exhibited caused the applause

and cheers to be renewed, which were continued for nearly a minute. When it had subsided Mr. Alexander resumed :]

The second era in the history of this college is the present. In 1868, one hundred years from the one I have mentioned, the presidency of the College again became vacant by the retiring of that President who for fifty years has devoted all the energies of mind and body, with a zeal unparalleled, to the interests of the institution and to the more enduring interests of the pupils committed to his charge. (Loud cheers and applause.) I have not time, nor is this the place for me to speak of that officer but I will never consent to pass by his name, however casually, in any public assembly, without tendering to him, the friend of my boyhood, the instructor of my youth, the faithful and unwavering friend of my riper years, the homage of my gratitude, warm esteem, profound respect, and most tender affection.—(Prolonged cheers).

The presidency of the college, again becoming vacant, the trustees, animated with the same feeling that governed their predecessors one hundred years ago, desirous to extend the fame and enlarge the influence of the College, again cast their eyes across the same Atlantic to summon to the presidency of the College one, I was going to say of European reputation, but I will say a reputation not confined to countries where the English language is spoken, but extended as far as mental science is known. Indeed his reputation is co-extensive with the scientific world. He

has obeyed that summons, and has come among us, and by trustees, faculty, and students, and citizens—the whole population—he has been received with a unanimity and intensity of welcome—with a wild enthusiasm—which it has never before been my lot to witness. And, surely, with regard to that call, we may believe in this case, that the voice of the people will prove to be the voice of God. (Applause and cheers.)

Brother graduates, while we sons of the College are proud of our academic lineage, and consider that the position of president of the College is inferior in point of honor and responsibility to none other in the land, yet remember that in accepting the call, and in obeying your summons, your new president has severed ties of no ordinary character—ties which bound him to the land of his nativity, to his kindred, to the scenes of his childhood, youth, education, and subsequent usefulness, to the graves of his fathers, and to scenes endeared by a crowd of gentle and attractive associations. He has come a stranger to form new ties and new acquaintances and friendships. What claim has he not to the sympathy, countenance, support, co-operation, and prayers of every son of this College? Remember that it was only when Aaron and Hur held up the sinking hands of the greatest ruler and lawgiver the world ever saw, that the armies of Israel prevailed against the hosts of Amalek. Let your prayers then be that the God of our fathers—that covenant God who for more than a century has blessed this institution, may still continue to guide, and

protect, and bless, and send down increased blessings upon her incoming president. (Applause.)

I have strange visions of the future career and grandeur of this College—strange feelings, emotions, and anticipations, as looking down through the long avenue of time, I in imagination see the dawn of a more brilliant day, and feel and believe that the light which even now illumines the path before us will prove to be the precursor of a brighter glory. These feelings, as I stand before you, I have been endeavoring to chastise—to suppress and drive back the emotions and anticipations which have poured in upon me like a flood, and almost incapacitated me for the performance of the duty which I have, perhaps unwisely and weakly, undertaken. That duty is now performed; and it only remains for me to say, in regard to this college under this new administration, may her former glory be equalled and excelled! May the zeal of her guardians and the fidelity of her instructors know no abatement; the affection, devotion and loyalty of her sons suffer no diminution; and amid the numberless literary institutions now scattered throughout the length and breadth of this great confederacy, may no classic steeple point more proudly to the skies than the much loved spire of our own Nassau Hall!