

BACCALAUREATE.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED TO THE SENIOR CLASS IN THE COLLEGE OF
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ON THE SABBATH PRECEDING

THE

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1829.

A

DISCOURSE,

&c.

ACTS IV. 19.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

THE circumstances which called forth this magnanimous answer were briefly these.—After the day of Pentecost, as Peter and John were entering the temple at the usual hour of evening worship, a man, who had been lame from his birth, asked of them alms, as he was accustomed to do, of others. Having neither silver nor gold to give, the Apostles bestowed on him a greater charity than he had ever before received. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, they commanded him, *to rise up and walk*. The power of God attended their word; so that the man who had been a cripple forty years, arose and followed them *into the temple, leaping and praising God*. The people, to whom this lame man was well known, astonished at the sudden and miraculous change, collected together and gazed at Peter and John as if they were supernatural beings. The Apostles, so far from encouraging the admiration which the people seemed disposed to bestow upon them, disclaimed any power or

holiness of their own from which this miracle of healing had proceeded ; and ascribed the efficacy that attended their words, to the name of their risen Master, whom these people and their rulers had caused to be crucified : affirming and proving from the Scriptures, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised to their Fathers, they exhorted their hearers, in the most earnest and solemn manner, *to repent and be converted that their sins might be blotted out.* The Jewish Priests and Saducees grieved to hear the resurrection from the dead preached through Jesus, by means of the Roman soldiers who guarded the temple, arrested and confined Peter and John in prison during the approaching night. On the day following they were brought out, examined before the High Priest, and Rulers and Elders of Israel, and asked *by what power or by what name they had healed the impotent man on the day previous, at the gate of the temple.* Peter, not daunted by the presence of those high in authority, boldly replied, that it was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom those he addressed had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead, that the lame man stood before them in the perfect use of his limbs, Astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, and unable to deny the miracle performed by their means, inasmuch as the man who had been healed now stood before them, they caused the Apostles to withdraw, so that privately they might have an opportunity of devising means to prevent the effects of the undeniable miracle that had been performed in the name of Jesus. The result of their deliberation was, that as they could not deny the reality of the miracle wrought, it was expedient severely to threaten the Apostles, and to forbid them any more to teach in the name of Jesus. When this order was announced, Peter and John made the reply in our text. *Whether it be*

right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

It will be recollected that this was the first time that any of the Apostles were called before a civil or ecclesiastical tribunal, to answer for teaching in the name of Jesus, and working miracles in confirmation of their testimony, that he had risen from the dead. When we consider that Peter and John were men of obscure origin, natives of a remote and unpolished part of Judea; it is remarkable that they were not awed into silence before a council of Priests, and Rulers, and Elders assembled in the most splendid hall belonging to the capitol of the Jewish nation. From the justice and clemency of this council, the Apostles had nothing to hope as long as they affirmed a fact, which fixed on their judges the guilt of the most atrocious crime.

In the answer of Peter and John respecting the matter in question, there was nothing rude, or insolent, or calculated to provoke persecution, except the simple and unwavering affirmation of the truth. And the threats of the council, of whose power and malice the Apostles were well aware, had no other effect, than to call forth an appeal to the decision of these interested judges, implying at the same time that their own minds were fully decided. From this resolution, the Apostles never afterwards swerved. For when they had been imprisoned and threatened a second time, they expressed in similar language the same determination—*We ought to obey God rather than men.* With this declaration the whole of their future lives was consistent. The labours and sufferings, they endured in consequence of making this principle the rule of their conduct, abundantly testify their sincerity. What, except the full persuasion that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that in his name they were endowed with the power of working miracles,

could, in the course of a few weeks, have produced so entire a change in the character and conduct of these two men? Recently both of them were fearful; and especially Peter had manifested the most criminal timidity; trembling in the presence of a maid-servant, and denying he had any knowledge of Jesus. Now he, as well as John, was prepared to suffer martyrdom rather than disobey the clear and unequivocal command of God. And they appealed even to the prejudiced council to judge respecting the propriety and reasonableness of their conduct; *whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

From this declaration of the Apostles, we derive this general rule of conduct, which we purpose at this time to illustrate and recommend, viz. THAT IN ALL CASES NEITHER THE THREATS NOR THE PROMISES OF MEN, OUGHT TO INDUCE US TO DISOBEY THE COMMANDS OF GOD; OR IN OTHER WORDS, THE WILL OF GOD, AND NOT THE OPINIONS OF MEN, OUGHT TO BE THE RULE OF OUR ACTIONS.

The truth of this proposition is so evident that it scarcely admits of proof or illustration, yet we see it every day disregarded. While every man, who believes there is a God, must without hesitation assent to the abstract proposition that the will of God, and not the opinions of men ought to direct the conduct of rational and accountable beings; in practice the rule is reversed, and men act as if it were more desirable to secure the approbation of mortals, than of God. We see this remark verified, not only in the conduct of those who profess to be men of honour, that is, to observe those ever-changing and often absurd rules which men of a particular class have prescribed for the government of their conduct; but also in the deportment of those, who make the approbation and applause of their own age or of posterity the ultimate object of pursuit. To endeavour to please men

more than God is not confined to any one class of men. The high and the low, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, are alike prone to take the estimation of men as the standard of their actions. The man who aims at supreme power, who tramples on the rights and liberties of nations, who seems to regard neither the sufferings nor the opinions of men, is in reality, influenced by the admiration and applause he expects to receive from his fellows. He imagines the present or future age will do homage to his greatness, his prowess, his success. What pleasure, let me ask, could any human being have to be lord of a depopulated world, to reign in gloomy silence over the desolations he had caused, to see no eye gaze at his splendor, to hear no voice applaud his actions? In the acclamations of those who survive his ravages, he expects a compensation for the indignation and curses of the oppressed and the dying.

In the acquisition of wealth, men are influenced in a great degree by the notice and distinction which they expect to receive from those around them. None except the miser, hoards up gold and silver for the mere pleasure of seeing his coffers full. After the necessities, which nature demands, are supplied, the most common motive to accumulate wealth is to excite the admiration and respect of others. And if the desire of human applause be so great in cases where it imparts no substantial benefit; how strong must be our tendency to comply with the wishes, and to follow the guidance of those on whom we are dependent—whose word carries with it honour or disgrace, riches or poverty, life or death? If the opinions and commands of men were always correct—if, in every instance they coincided with the will of God, there would be no danger of being led astray through the influence of others. We

might then consider the approbation of men as an infallible indication of the approbation of God. And the truth is, many reason and lay their plans and direct their actions solely in reference to the opinions men may form respecting them. In doing so, they justify themselves by taking a partial view of the subject; and because it is consistent with the will of God in particular circumstances, and to a certain extent, to regard the wishes and to submit to the authority of men, they infer, that it is right in all cases whatsoever. A few exceptions, occurring in our daily intercourse with men, are magnified into a general rule; so that we imperceptibly forget our responsibility to a higher tribunal and feel perfectly satisfied with ourselves when we receive the approbation of our fellow men. Hence it is that general declamation against seeking the favour of men—against the love of fame—against worldly honours and distinctions, is utterly vain and useless. Because it is seen at once, that in some cases, a regard to the opinions of men is not only innocent, but a most sacred duty; and that honour is sometimes the reward of the most exalted virtue. It is necessary then to discriminate—to distinguish those cases in which we may innocently comply with the wishes, and seek the approbation of men, and those in which a compliance, whether real or pretended, would be treason to the majesty of heaven.

We are so constituted that the good opinion and respect of our fellow men is agreeable and productive of high enjoyment. And we cannot think that this desire to be thought well of by others, results from the corruption of human nature, because it has a tendency to lead to acts of kindness and charity; and to withhold honour from those to whom honour is due, is a violation of the positive command of our divine Master.

The Gospel every where inculcates that benevolence

towards men, which is calculated to conciliate their good will ; and we see no reason why gratitude and respect may not be considered as a subordinate motive to those noble actions, which promote the interest and happiness of human kind. Public sentiment has also a powerful tendency to restrain men from crimes, injurious to the peace and interest of human society. And when an individual has lost all regard to the good or the bad opinion of others, we may be assured, he is sunk into the lowest state of moral degradation, and is prepared to perpetrate the basest and most atrocious crimes. It is then unwise as well as inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, to break down the barriers arising from the dread of disgrace, which tend to preserve the decorum and decencies of social life. Deference to the opinions of age and virtue ought to be cultivated with the most sedulous care ; and submission to the lawful commands of those in authority, is demanded by the interests of society as well as by the explicit injunctions of heaven.

Having made these concessions, in order to prevent misapprehension, we by no means admit that human opinion, or human authority is the supreme and ultimate rule that should direct our actions. There is a higher tribunal to which we are amenable. There is a Judge, whose decisions are of more value than those of all the world besides. He, who made and endowed us with all our powers, knows what, in all circumstances, we ought to do. He is just, and requires nothing unreasonable and inconsistent with our ultimate welfare. He is all-powerful, and able to reward or punish to the full extent of his declarations. His claims to obedience are founded, not merely on arbitrary enactments and irresistible power. He is just, and good, and merciful. Our heavenly Father, our Benefactor and Redeemer.

The Holy Scriptures utter the severest denunciations against a time-serving and men-pleasing spirit; not because it is criminal to merit and receive the approbation of men, but because it is often purchased at the expense of moral principle, and in violation of the allegiance we owe to the majesty of heaven. It was the consideration that they would displease God, that induced Peter and John to disregard the commands and threats of the Priests, and Rulers, and Elders of Israel. Liberty, and life, and exemption from pain and disgrace, were as dear to these Apostles as they are to other men, and if, with a good conscience, they could have ceased speaking in the name of Jesus, they, no doubt, would have complied with the wishes of the Jewish Rulers. It was not obstinacy and recklessness of consequences, but a sacred regard to the authority of God and a full conviction of the truth and importance of their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, that induced them to persist and hazard imprisonment, and scourging, and death.

As our immediate interest, as well as our inclinations dispose us to cherish a regard to the feelings and wishes of mankind, it is a sacrifice, when constrained by a sense of duty, we are led to expose ourselves to censure and disgrace. Those who have no regard to the authority of God in their own actions, often artfully insinuate that the conduct of such as have suffered persecution for conscience' sake, arose from a peculiar perverseness of disposition, which led them to take a strange and unaccountable satisfaction in thwarting the opinions and incurring the displeasure of the rest of mankind. To this cause, the conduct of the primitive Christians, and of the noble spirits, who, in every age, submitted to martyrdom, rather than abjure their allegiance to the God of heaven, has often been attributed. The most

elegant and polished histories in the English language, abound with misrepresentations of this character. And I take this occasion to warn the young and unsuspecting to beware of this deception. It is natural enough, that men who do not feel the restraints of conscience, and of duty to God, should wish to represent others as destitute of moral and religious principle, as they are themselves. To be explicit, we point you to the histories of Hume and Gibbon, in confirmation of the remark now made. These polished and compliant historians, who, if circumstances had required, would have bowed with the same reverence before the crescent as the cross, have, with sneering and cold blooded malignity, artfully insinuated, that our holiest martyrs perished, as much through their own folly and perverseness, as through the bigotry and malice of their enemies. Yet they are lauded by many, as impartial historians; because they were equally indifferent, or to speak more correctly, equally hostile to all religion. Beware we say again of the deadly poison concealed in these smooth and delicious pages.

But to return. Whenever the opinions, or wishes, or commands of men, how high soever they may be in authority, or distinguished by intelligence and influence, do not coincide with the commands of God, we should not hesitate a moment what course to adopt. No matter how formidable the opposition, or how dazzling the prospects of worldly distinction and glory, like Moses, we should *esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and obey God rather than men.*

It must be obvious to the most superficial observer, that there are innumerable cases occurring in the daily walks of life, in which the opinions of men are at variance with the plain and positive commands of

God. We are not discussing an abstract speculative question, having no direct bearing on actual conduct. We are, all of us, called on daily, each for himself, to decide whether we will hearken unto God or unto men. Our world has not yet become so pure, public sentiment is not yet so reformed and sanctified, that there is a perfect coincidence between what the world calls honourable and praise-worthy, and what God commands as duty. It is true, in our happy country, we are not liable to scourging, and imprisonment, and death, on account of our belief of the doctrines or performance of the duties enjoined in the Bible. But there is another authority, not less dangerous and difficult to be resisted. We mean the authority of public opinion, the influence of our companions, the solicitations, and threats, and sneers of those whose friendship we wish to cultivate, or of those on whose favour we depend for wealth and distinction. When influence of this character is brought to bear against the authority of God, it requires nothing less than the faith and exalted piety of a martyr to make a successful resistance. In some respects, the temptation to be unfaithful to God in these circumstances, is more dangerous than open persecution : because the attack is made under the guise of friendship, enlisting all our social sympathies, appealing to all our love of character and reputation, presenting, as the alternative of non-compliance, disgrace, contempt, exclusion from the society of men, of fashion, of polished manners, of political influence, or of high official station.

In such circumstances, how few resist ? How many move with the current, forgetful of the authority of God, and guided solely by the opinions of men, or if they think of the commands of their Maker, plead imperious circumstances as a justification of their conduct. Sup-

pose a young man of generous social feelings, placed in a circle of dissipated companions. It is evident that his only chance of safety is a speedy separation; for he is breathing an atmosphere charged with moral pestilence and death. A voice from heaven is not necessary to inform us what will be the consequence, if he maintain his present connexion. He cannot long hear with indifference the maxims repeated and practised in such a circle—that to drink freely—to hazard largely at the gaming table or on the turf—to be first in all places of expensive amusement, are indications of a generous and noble spirit. On the contrary, to withdraw from the profligate circle—to avoid the haunts of the dissipated and licentious—to respect the unbending moral rules of the Gospel, is represented as an infallible proof of moroseness, of penuriousness or of stupidity. Where is the youth, who, in such circumstances, will dare to say to his companions—*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye?*

Do you wish to see the influence of human opinion, and observe how it triumphs over reason, and humanity, and even the authority of God? Go to the apartments of the duelist, and notice the reflections that arise in his mind, while he is adjusting his worldly concerns, and preparing for the fatal combat. Perhaps he has a father, or mother, or wife, whose grief and unutterable agony present themselves to his mind. Perhaps he thinks of the aged mother, the frantic widow or orphan children of the antagonist, whom he is preparing to lay low. And if he has any humanity in his nature, his heart must relent and lose the desire of revenge, which impelled him in the moment of irritation, to give or accept the challenge. What now prevents him, if he has been the aggressor, from making fair and honourable

concessions? Or if he has been insulted and injured, why expose his life, and hazard the peace and happiness of his friends, to gratify an individual who has already had the meanness falsely to charge him with foul dishonour? Why does he persist, when actuated as he professes to be, by no vindictive feelings or desire to shed his brother's blood? If he feels any misgivings, if his purpose falters, a professed friend is at hand to whisper in his ear, that his word is given, his honour pledged, and survive or fall, live or die, he must proceed; and prove not his innocence, but his courage at the hazard of every thing sacred on earth and awful in eternity. And what is this, but to hearken unto men more than unto God—to regard the opinion of the world more than the approbation of heaven? In the fury of passion, or under the influence of revenge, for a real or supposed injury, it is very possible a man may seek to destroy his fellow man alone, where no human eye sees the horrid deed. But to fight for honour alone, without witnesses of the intrepidity displayed, is impossible. Indeed a regard to reputation, that is, a regard to the opinion of their equals, is the only motive which men of intelligent and liberal minds, dare avow in vindication of a practice, as abhorrent to reason and humanity, as it is contradictory to the law of God. It results from fear or the want of moral courage, to brave the sneers and the frowns of feeble erring mortals in obedience to the voice of conscience and of God.

Unless the duelist is actuated by revengeful and malignant passions, as in many cases is no doubt the fact, he is guided, not by his own ideas of what is right, but by the supposed opinion of those in whose society he wishes to maintain a standing. Like the Hindoo widow who devotes herself on the funeral pile of her departed husband, he is led to the place of combat, contrary to

the feelings of humanity manifested on other occasions, solely in obedience to an absurd and sanguinary custom. Under the apprehension of disgrace in the estimation of his fellows, he is hurried on to perpetrate the double crime of suicide and murder. How many noble victims have been sacrificed in this land, called Christian, on the altar of false honour, a demon more relentless than the ancient Molock? And rash and inexperienced young men, seduced by the example of those eminent in talent and high in station, are in danger of adopting the opinion, that by following footsteps which they see marked with blood, they too shall reach the pinnacle of earthly greatness.

It is full time that a more perfect, as well as a more elevated standard of human action were adopted, than that sanctioned by the opinions and example of distinguished men.

But if we descend to cases more common and embracing a greater number of individuals, we shall find the same opposition between the opinions of men and the commands of God; so that each one in his daily conduct must make his election whether he will obey God or men.

Our time will not permit us to specify numerous instances that might be adduced. We notice only one common, in some degree, to all classes of men. In the Holy Scriptures God speaks of all men as sinners, in a state of moral degradation, and condemned by the divine law. Under a dispensation of mercy he commands them to repent, to reform, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the propitiation for sin, to glorify God by doing whatever he requires.

In a Christian community, perhaps there may not be an avowed opposition to the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, especially if they are not brought to bear

in their practical influence on the heart and conscience. Perhaps also there may be no open hostility to the moral precepts of the Gospel, particularly those which prohibit crimes injurious to the welfare of society. But let any one begin to feel the full force of Gospel truth, and to inquire with deep solicitude what he must do to be saved ; let him begin to serve God in good earnest ; and with a heart warmed with gratitude for redeeming love and mercy, let him speak and act as if he were *not his own, but bought with a price*, and we will answer for it, he will soon perceive a difference in the feelings, and looks, and conduct of those around him. He is indeed happily situated, if he be not exposed to the taunts, and sneers, and criminations of his companions, if his change of conduct be not imputed to sinister motives, and if his zeal in the cause of his Lord and Master be not regarded as the result of mental alienation or enthusiastic weakness. The least, he can expect from those who are not sincerely pious is, gentle intimations that he carries these matters too far, that there is danger of being righteous overmuch, that he spends too much time in the exercise of devotion, and in attempts to benefit others. However silently and unobtrusively this opposition may be exhibited, it is difficult to be resisted. And many seeing their apathy and indifference on the subject of religion, sanctioned by the example of others, disregard the command of the Redeemer to *seek first the Kingdom of God, to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to flee from the wrath to come.*

Our blessed Redeemer, who perfectly understood human nature, knowing how prone men are to be deterred from the performance of their duty through fear of disgrace, has given this solemn warning, as remarkable for the mildness of the language, as for the awful-

ness of its import. *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* It is possible then that we may be ashamed of that which is our greatest glory; that we may blush to avow the honest convictions of our own hearts, and neglect to perform unfashionable duties, at the hazard of incurring shame and contempt amidst the splendours of the last great day. Think ye, who would blush to be seen on your knees in your closet, or to have it known that you read the Bible with a devotional spirit—Oh think of the dazzling splendour of the Lord Jesus, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

How strange and inconsistent is the conduct of men in this concern, more important than all others! To obtain the approbation of feeble erring mortals, whose voice must soon be silent, they will sacrifice health, and ease, and domestic comfort, and life itself, and hazard the frowns of Almighty God and the retributions of eternity. But to be honoured in that great day “for which all other days were made,” to be applauded by angels, and the wise and good of all ages and of all nations, to receive an unfading crown of glory, to secure the benediction of God, the judge of all, no sacrifices are made, no dangers, braved. And what are all the honours of earth, compared to the glories of heaven? What the approbation of the world, if all human voices were united in one loud peal of applause, compared to the significant and joyful sentence—*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* The one cannot, in its full extent, be obtained by obeying men; the other, most assuredly, will be obtained by obeying God.

I must ask the indulgence of the congregation, while I say a few words to the young men who are this week to leave us.

MY PUPILS AND FRIENDS,—You now stand before me in an interesting attitude. I see you on the eve of your departure from the place of your education, waiting to receive the last advice of those who have directed your studies. And if this were the time and place to express personal feelings, I could say in the name of my colleagues, we sincerely regret your departure. The diligence in study, the good order and the moral conduct that have characterized the College during the past year, are, in a good degree, to be attributed to the example and influence of the Senior Class.

And if your past conduct be any presage of the future, we may cherish the fond hope, that you will not hereafter dishonour the place of your education. But we cannot forget that you are going forth into a world full of dangers, and we know not what may befall you. We have thought of the dangers, which lie before you, and of the means necessary to avoid them; and believing that correct principles are of vast importance in directing human conduct, we recommend to you as our parting advice, to adopt the general principle which we have endeavoured this morning to explain and establish: viz. **TO REGARD THE WILL OF GOD, AND NOT THE OPINIONS OF MEN, AS THE RULE OF YOUR CONDUCT.** A young man going forth into the world destitute of moral and religious principles, is like a vessel on a trackless ocean, without chart or compass, tossed about with every wind and carried in the direction of every current. The beacon which casts its glimmering light on the rocky shore, is oftentimes no less useful to the mariner, than the polar star which guides him in the open ocean. So we

would point you to the dangers you ought to avoid, as well as to the rule which should govern your conduct.

In the first place, we caution you to beware lest you be led astray through the influence of those with whom you may associate.

To this cause the ruin of many young men, who commenced life with flattering prospects, is justly attributed. We do not mean that there is no danger if you be left to your own guidance, and permitted to follow your own inclinations unswayed by foreign influence. Your own hearts undoubtedly must be carefully guarded; because there are the seeds, which the breath of corrupt associates forces into a premature and poisonous growth. Let no supposed firmness of purpose, no previous resistance of temptation, induce you to hazard the influence of vicious companions. Remember Peter, after his honest affirmation of a determination never to forsake his Master, basely denied him when in company with the servants of his Lord's enemies.

Again, let me caution you against taking the opinions of men, however high in station or distinguished for talents and influence as the ultimate standard of moral excellence.

On this subject, I am aware, it is difficult to give directions not liable to be misunderstood, and at the same time I am persuaded that on no other point, are young men of liberal minds and warm hearts so likely to fall into a fatal error. During the course of your studies, a spirit of generous emulation has been cherished, the examples of great and distinguished men have been presented for your imitation; your own hearts burn to follow the luminous footsteps of those you have been accustomed to admire. You are aware also that the highest acts of benevolence cannot be accomplished unless you have the confidence of the community. Some-

of you are destined to act in public life, and you know that reputation is connected with usefulness as well as private interest. And I may add, there is something in our form of government, where office from the lowest to the highest, depends on the favour of the people, peculiarly calculated to foster the same spirit. From all these causes and others that might be mentioned, the desire of the approbation of the community in which you live and act, is likely to become strong, if not predominant. Now if this desire to be held in estimation were always accompanied with a determination to seek distinction only by fair and honourable means—if the applause sought were only for actions tending to promote the honour of God and the happiness of mankind, the most rigid moralist could hardly find fault. But when the approbation and applause of a particular circle, and sometimes of a large portion of the community may be obtained, as we have shown in the preceding discourse, by actions at variance with the positive commands of God, there is awful danger in regarding the opinions of men as the guide of your conduct. There is danger you may be tempted so to bend to circumstances, so to shape your course, in order to catch the breath of popular favour, that you may finally descend into the gulf of perdition.

You will certainly not understand me as recommending a perverse opposition to the wishes of others, in cases where the violation of no moral principle is involved, and much less, that I advocate an austere, unaccommodating, and offensive deportment in your ordinary intercourse with mankind; because such a course would prevent the salutary influence of your example in cases where you must conscientiously differ in sentiment and conduct from those around you. The Bible is the standard of duty with which you ought to com-

pare the opinions and actions proposed for your adoption and imitation. If there be a correspondence with this rule, regard the approbation of men as an incentive and encouragement in the performance of your duty. But if a departure from the pure and elevated standard of virtue and piety established by God, promise, as is often the case, to save you from reproach or to secure worldly honour and applause—be firm and unyielding. Here is an opportunity to exhibit real magnanimity. Let the ignorant and corrupt sneer—let those in power threaten and wield their engines of torture. *Greater is he that is for you than they that are against you. Obey God rather than men.*

Decision and firmness of character even in an iniquitous cause, are captivating to youthful ardour. How much more ennobling is that decision, which founded on eternal and unchangeable truth reposes with confidence on the arm of Omnipotence for ultimate safety and success? But if your first and chief aim, be to secure the favour of men, you can have no fixed rule of action imparting uniformity and consistency to your character. Your course must be shaped, so as to harmonise with the views and feelings of those in whose society you happen at different times and places to fall. And what is more common, than to see those, who have gained applause by accommodating themselves to the prejudices and criminal passions of those around them, fall into insignificance and contempt, before the short period of life has closed? Who are the men, whose memories we venerate, and whose examples stand on the page of history as models of imitation to succeeding ages? Are they not such, as by devotion to the public welfare, or by acts of philanthropy and pious zeal, have pursued their unbending course, amidst obloquy and reproach and not unfrequently at the risk of imprisonment and

death? Accustom yourselves, my young friends, to value no reputation except that which is acquired by virtuous and benevolent actions. Any other is light as chaff and uncertain as the wind.

But it is obvious you must have some rule, independent on the opinions of erring mortals, to direct your steps. We point you to the BIBLE as the only safe and infallible standard with which to compare your own conduct and the opinions of others. Be not deterred from making the attempt by the trite and unsubstantial objection, that this book is no certain rule, because those professing to follow its guidance are not agreed respecting what it teaches—Believe me, the fault is in men and not in our standard of faith and duty. It requires only to be read with an honest desire to know and believe the truth, in order to secure you against essential error. If truth be not here, it is nowhere—you know it is not in the jarring opinions of ancient Sages—and be assured, it is not in the speculations of modern Skeptics—If truth be not here, this world is a chaos—eternity, a blank. And I honestly assure you I know of no other light that can safely guide your steps amidst the dangers that surround your path in life—I know of no other hope that can sustain you in the hour of death. Let this book then, be your constant companion—meditate on its pure precepts—believe its holy doctrines—imbibe its Spirit—It is the Spirit of heaven. But let it be your determination to *follow the Lord fully*—Attempt no compromise, hoping that by complying with one part of the divine will to purchase a dispensation from another.

We have no hesitation in saying that a strict observance of the moral precepts of the Gospel is the surest path to usefulness, respectability, and real enjoyment in this life. But beware you do not substitute a decent moral deportment for *repentance towards God, and*

faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. You are sinners, and need forgiveness through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—You are sinners and need to be sanctified through the renewing of the Holy Ghost. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The impression we wish to leave on your minds is your high and paramount responsibility to God—Regard his authority as supreme—Secure his *favour which is life, and his loving kindness which is better than life.*

We would not intentionally diminish your sense of obligation to your friends, to your country, and to the world. Much is justly expected from such as have had the advantages of a liberal education; and severe and justly merited will be the reproach cast upon you, if you act unworthy the privileges you have enjoyed. To fulfil these obligations is also a part of the duty you owe to God. To you he has committed talents of high value, for the improvement of which you must give an account. But remember life is short, and the censure or applause men may bestow, whether just or unjust, will soon pass away. The decision of the Judge eternal remains unchanged forever; and let me remind you that the earthly career of some of you may be short. Of the six classes that I have previously addressed from this place; nine individuals, within my knowledge, have closed their mortal course. Within a few weeks, three who recently stood where you now are, have died in this village; the probability then is, that within six years to come, one or more of your class shall have rendered up his last account. And are you all prepared for that event? Oh precious youth, souls immortal, be wise—secure *the one thing needful*—delay not to make your peace with God, if you have not done so already. Begin now, and if your life should be prolonged to a good old age, let it be your first and last care to please

Him in whose hands are your life and your eternal destiny.

We now commit you, Beloved Youth, to his protection, *who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—And to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever, AMEN.*