

AN

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED NOV. 9, 1830.

BY

THE REV. DAVID ELLIOTT, A. M.

**PROF. OF MOR. AND MENT. PHIL. AND POL. LIT. AND ACTING
PRINCIPAL OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE, PA.**

Washington, Pa.

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November, 1830.

To the Rev. DAVID ELLIOTT,
President of Washington College.

DEAR SIR,—

The Board of Trustees of Washington College, amidst their congratulations upon the hopeful and happy auspices under which our institution has re-commenced its operations, have instructed us, their committee, to tender you their sincere thanks for the very interesting, lucid and able views presented in your Inaugural Address.—Your ideas, although evidently the result of deep reflection on the subject of education, are, when presented, so clear and so obvious to every capacity, that the Board are persuaded the publication of the address would tend much to the awakening and enlightening the public mind on the subject.—They, therefore, request that you will have the goodness to furnish them with a copy for that purpose.

We have the honor to be,

With sentiments of respect, &c.

Yours,

ALEXANDER REED,
WILLIAM BAIRD,
JOHN K. WILSON, } Committee.

Nov. 2, 1830.

November 2, 1830.

GENTLEMEN,—

In compliance with the request of the Board of Trustees of Washington College, communicated through you, the address delivered this morning is herewith placed at their disposal.—If the wishes of the Board shall, in any measure, be answered by its publication, I shall feel myself amply rewarded.

Believe me to be, Gentlemen,

Respectfully Yours, &c.

D. ELLIOTT;

To Messrs. ALEXANDER REED,
WM. BAIRD,
JOHN K. WILSON,

Committee.

Address, &c.

GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,—

The occasion on which we are assembled is one of some importance, not only to you, but to the community—It is the resuscitation of a literary institution whose functions have, for some time, been suspended. Whether this resuscitation shall ultimately prove honourable to those immediately concerned in it, and profitable to the community, will depend much on the manner in which the institution shall be conducted—For it is not more palpable that education wisely regulated and properly applied and improved is a blessing, than that a lawless education, badly conducted and indiscreetly applied is a curse, both to its possessor and to society.

It would have accorded with my own views of propriety, as well as with common usage on an occasion of this kind, to have gone at some length into an exposition of the principles and details involved in a liberal education,—But providential occurrences with which the greater part of you are acquainted, have afforded me only a few moments of occasional and interrupted thought, wholly insufficient for extended preparation or discussion—A very few remarks, therefore, upon what I conceive to be the leading object of education, and the manner in which it should be conducted, are all that I can attempt, at present, to offer.

With regard to the leading object of education, I conceive it to be *the formation of character*; and that with a view to benefit society and illustrate the glory of the Creator. Man has not been formed for solitude—In the constitutional principles and instincts of his nature, he is a social being. Agreeably to these indications of his Creator, he has been placed in society.—Thus situated, he is called to the fulfilment of important duties and obligations, and to the exertion of an influence, corresponding in its results, to his high destination as an intelligent and moral being. To meet these demands of his condition, attention must be paid to the formation of his character—Because the moral value of his influence, and the efficiency and success with which he will discharge his duties and obligations, will be graduated by the amount of solid, well-formed character which he may possess. Let a man possess an elevated character for literary, moral,

and religious worth, and he will possess a proportional degree of moral power for the promotion of his Creator's glory, and the benefit of his fellow men.—And the healthful action imparted to society by the influence of one such man, is not to be estimated by any principles of numerical calculation.—For as his character can neither be weighed nor measured by such rules, neither can numbers tell the vast extent of power which that character will exert on those who shall be brought within the range of its influence.

Character, then, according to this view of the subject, is power.—And the possession of a good character, is the possession of a corresponding power for the accomplishment of the great ends of our creation. The formation of such a character, is the leading object of education—Not the improvement of one faculty alone, but of all—Not simply the cultivation of the intellect, but the amendment of the heart, and the moulding of the whole man into such a form as will best fit him for thought, and action, and influence in the station where Providence may place him, and in the attainment of the high ends to which he may be destined in the arrangements of infinite wisdom.

Viewing education, therefore, in this extended point of light, as having for its object the formation of the *entire character*, it will not be difficult to perceive that, in reaching this end, it must be so conducted as to embrace the following particulars:—

I. It must improve the intellect, by eliciting thought. We are not required to originate either the objects or powers of thought. These have been furnished by the Creator.—He has formed man with capacities for thinking, and in his own infinite perfections, in the character and relations of man himself, and in the boundless variety of the works of God, he has presented, a countless succession of objects to give employment and expansion to his intellectual powers—Hence, the creation of any amount of original mental vigour, or of any of the elementary principles or objects of thought, is not the business of education. But it is the province of education to collect and arrange the objects of thought which creative wisdom has furnished, and to train the mind to the exercise of an appropriate action on these objects—By this action of the mind, I mean something more than the simple retention of the objects of thought in the memory—This is not to be disregarded. But there is often a great leanness and poverty of thought, connected with a very large accumulation of facts in the memory. In such cases, men may be nominally learned, but they can be deemed nothing better than literary scavengers and

slaves, doomed to retail the opinions of others, without ever having ventured to decide whether they were right or wrong.

In directing the education of young men, then, it will be a leading object of attention to accustom them to think. They must not calculate upon receiving from their instructors every thing matured and digested to their hand. This would be to deprive them of the means of mental culture.—And the teacher who should attempt to make scholars in this way, would act the part of a mechanic who should expect to make a skilful artist of his apprentice by doing all the work himself, while the apprentice looked on as the witness of his skill. A total want of practical, mechanical skill, would not more certainly follow in the one case, than a want of mental elasticity, and a knowledge of the right application of intellectual power in the other. Young men must be taught to think, to discriminate, to analyze, to compare and decide upon conflicting opinions and rival systems. The labour of acquisition belongs to them—The direction of that labour to their instructors. And the youth who shall succeed best, in giving quickness, and energy, and capaciousness to his intellectual powers, will be most likely to obtain the highest honours which are awarded to educated merit—At all events, his title to them will be generally conceded.

II. The just regulation of the moral powers, or the improvement of the heart, is another point to which education must be directed, with a view to the formation of character. This has been too generally overlooked, especially in collegiate training. Our young men have been viewed as mere creatures of intellect, and their education has been too exclusively intellectual. The acquisition of science, with an entire reference to intellectual elevation, has constituted the sum total of the aims and wishes of many teachers, and parents, and pupils, to the neglect of that moral culture so necessary to the formation of a character of the highest excellence and power.

But can any good reason be assigned why moral cultivation should be superseded by that which is intellectual? Why the head should be attended to, at the expense of the heart? Have intellectual acquisitions, apart from moral worth, ever given men very high claims upon the admiration and esteem of their fellow-men? It is believed not. Many men whose learning would have entitled them to rank with the benefactors of the world, have been degraded to the lowest point of infamy by their destitution of moral worth. To give names amongst the living, in illustration of this remark, might be deemed invidious,

and of the dead, we approve and practice upon the maxim "nil nisi bonum." But on the other hand, where the head and the heart have each received their appropriate training, and a favourable impulse has been simultaneously given to the intellectual and moral powers of the soul, a proportionate weight and excellence of character has been the result—And men formed upon this plan, either by their own exertions, or those of others, while they have elicited the admiration of the world, have proved her greatest benefactors, and secured the largest amount of her esteem.—Such men were Plato, and Seneca, and Tully, among the ancients, and Bacon, and Boyle, and Newton, and Locke, among the moderns. And though not equally learned in technical science, I shall be pardoned for adding that prodigy of intellectual wisdom and moral worth, whose achievements form the brightest page in the history of our country, and by the appropriation of whose name, both our town and our college are honored.

It may be thought that the course of science taught in colleges, is inauspicious to moral improvement, and hence, that this species of culture should be reserved for other times and places. But it is certainly the duty of those to whom the control of our colleges is entrusted, to see that nothing of an immoral character be admitted. And with regard to the authorized branches of study, although some of them have a more exclusive tendency to impart vigour and certainty to the operations of the intellect, there are few, if any of them, which may not be made auxiliary, in their application, to the improvement of the heart. The adaptation of the Moral sciences to this end, will readily be admitted, as it is their very design, by making man acquainted with himself and the relations which he sustains to God and to his fellow-men, to influence his heart to a fulfilment of the obligations and duties growing out of these relations. Nor are the Physical sciences less fruitful in facts and discoveries calculated to repress the arrogance of man, to restrain the bold impetuosity of his passions, and to fill him with elevated conceptions of the continued presence and agency of the great Creator, whose right it is to exact the unlimited homage of the heart. Hence, in all his researches into nature, the youthful student should be led up to nature's God, who,

"Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,

Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees"

And even the Exact sciences, in which the moral powers seem to have so little concern, may be so improved as to contribute to the amendment of the heart. For if, in the use of his limited faculties, man can

arrive at such certainty in his demonstrations, with what infinite ease can the omniscient Jehovah comprehend, at one glance, all the varieties and combinations of thought and of action? And if, in the use of his acquired knowledge, man possesses such power over the subordinate parts of creation, what power must belong to the all-wise God for the government of his creatures, and the punishment of those who rise up in rebellion against his authority?

To make every branch of collegiate study thus subservient to the elevation of the moral character, is a constituent part of practical education. While the intellect is trained to vigorous thought, its acquisitions must be made tributary to the heart, and tend to its improvement in all that is good and excellent. At the same time, I wish here to avow it as my deliberate conviction, that true moral excellence of the highest kind, is not attainable by any education which does not embrace in it subjection to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. In improving the intellectual and moral powers with a reference to the formation of character, the acquisition of habits of *order, obedience and progressive industry* on the part of the students, will claim particular attention.

1. With regard to *order*. This, when used in reference to education, consists in the right apportionment of time between study and recreation, and the judicious distribution of the hours of study in relation to the different subjects of literary pursuit. The amount of time to be devoted to study and recreation respectively, by different individuals, must depend in a good degree upon their constitutional habits. But whatever may be the amount of either, attention to order will be found productive of the most beneficial results. It is believed that exercise when taken uniformly at the same hours of the day, and to the same extent, will be found more favourable to the promotion of health and intellectual activity, than when taken irregularly, and without regard either to time or quantity. And as to literary proficiency in the different departments of science, much depends upon "doing one thing at a time;" a principle, by the faithful application of which, some politicians and men of business have excited astonishment at the amount and variety of labour which they have been enabled to despatch in a short period. This habit of order, doing one thing at a time, and every thing at its proper time, is one of the grand secrets of improvement, and the attainment of which must not be overlooked in the business of education.

2. The habit of yielding prompt and respectful obedience to rightful authority, is a further point to which education should be directed. In a government of laws, like that under which it is our privilege to live, this habit is of incalculable importance—It goes far to ensure the permanence of the government, by preserving peace, and preventing riots and insurrections—It supersedes the necessity of a standing military force, for the purpose of constraining submission to the laws, and thus adds to the financial ability of the country to sustain objects of intrinsic and permanent utility. In the domestic circle, its operation in adding to the comfort, respectability and influence of families, is too obvious to require proof—Nor is it of less importance in the constitution of a college. Here paternal authority must be exercised, and filial obedience required. And in proportion as this obedience is habitual, in the same proportion will it contribute to the respectability and permanence of the institution. Indeed no college can long sustain either a good reputation, or a healthful existence, where habits of subordination to the constituted authorities have no place.

It shall be our aim, then, to enforce habitual obedience to the laws of the college. The government shall be reasonable and just, and administered with a due regard to the feelings of the governed. The students shall be treated as *gentlemen*, as long as by their conduct they merit this appellation, and when they cease to sustain that character, the fault will not be ours, if the rigour of the government be adapted to the baseness of the conduct which it is designed to correct. We shall be disappointed, however, in the character of the youth who compose the little band who are entering with us upon the generous enterprise of raising to honourable distinction and literary fame an institution whose very *name* is a guard against meanness and vice, if we shall have occasion often to rebuke disorder or punish disobedience. In the honourable career of literary and moral acquisition, we trust that they will find nobler employment than in breaking through the restraints of authority, and impugning the salutary counsels of those who are labouring for their good. Indeed, we shall be totally mistaken, if in the justness of their moral perceptions, and their devotion to the best interests of the college, we do not find an effectual guaranty against the contemptible tricks of grovelling minds, and that bold resistance which would set at defiance the wholesome restraints of well regulated government.

3. To secure the habit of patient, persevering industry, will also be an object of attention. This has often been urged by writers on the subject of education—But it is deemed too important not to be here presented, though at the hazard of appearing trite in my remarks.—There are few young men who are not occasionally stimulated to laborious application for a season. In reading the productions of genius, in contemplating the high honours which have been awarded to literary achievement, in observing the rapid progress of a competitor, or in listening to the urgent solicitations of an affectionate teacher, the spirit of emulation is roused, and the most laborious efforts for the attainment of scientific superiority succeeds. But the fire of ambition thus kindled, often burns out in a very short season, and the youthful aspirant after literary distinction, becomes the indolent caterer of a few stale opinions which serve him as a substitute for the richer productions of thought, and the more extended acquisitions of profound and persevering research. This is an evil to be deprecated and guarded against. No matter how vigorous and well directed may be the efforts of the mind for the attainment of knowledge, if they are permitted to give place to vacuity and inaction.—The best trained intellect will, if suffered to yield to the stupefying influence of idleness, become enfeebled and incapable of any useful exertion. So true is the observation of a celebrated French philosopher that “he who should live without reflection, for the space of ten years, would never again be capable of it during the residue of his life.”

Hence, the necessity of training the mind to habitual industry, by repeated and progressive demands upon the powers of thought and reflection.—For, this habit of industry, like all others, is formed by a repetition and succession of acts. We shall not, therefore, be considered as acting the part of cruel task-masters, when we demand an amount of productive industry daily, proportioned to the extent of the mental power and acquired skill of those committed to our direction. By thus drawing continuously upon their resources, the mind will be formed to habits of deep reflection, and the proper application of all its powers to the varied objects which may be presented for investigation.

This habit of patient, persevering industry has done more to raise men to intellectual and literary eminence than, perhaps, any thing else. It has often outrun genius itself. In the rapidity and hurry of its movements, genius has often expended itself before it reached

the goal of high literary and intellectual distinction: while on the other hand, patient industry, acquiring strength as it proceeded, has conducted its possessor by slow and sure advances, to an elevated and imperishable fame. It was to his untiring industry that Sir Isaac Newton was chiefly indebted for the profoundness and extent of his philosophical attainments.—His maxim was “*never to hurry.*” And to this habit of deliberate, patient thinking, he himself ascribes all his success, and not to any original superiority of intellect which he possessed.

The habit of study, then, must be acquired by our young men—They must be *students*, in the proper sense of the term. Not loiterers and idlers, suffering their intellectual vigour to run to waste; but by the continued and persevering application of their powers to the various objects of thought and reflection, they must seek to strengthen their mental energies, and to prepare themselves for actively sustaining the great interests of God and man, in the stations where they may be called to act in the world. In this, they will be much aided by cherishing an ardent love for the truth. No sordid, selfish motive should influence them; but they should desire to know the truth, that in its possession they may be able better to fulfil the great ends of their creation, and make their existence a blessing to themselves and to their fellow-men. Humility of mind will also be a useful auxiliary to the attainment of the same end. Men who know most, are generally most sensible of their deficiencies, and of the immense treasures of knowledge which lie beyond the horizon of their intellectual vision. This gives a continued impulse to their inquiries, and urges them forward in adding to their stock on hand. While conceited ignorance, reposing with complacency in the most limited attainments as though the whole field of science had been explored, languishes in idleness, and sinks into disgrace.

Having thus hastily sketched our views of what we conceive to be the leading object of education, and the manner in which it should be conducted, so as to answer its design, I have only to add, that we shall rely with confidence on the united and active co-operation of the Board of Trustees, and of the good citizens of this borough. This will be indispensable to the success of the experiment on which we are entering.—But with such co-operation, you will pardon the enthusiasm which inspires the hope of ultimate and complete success. In the elevated character and prosperous condition of a neighbouring sister institution, we have an example of what industry and devotion

to the interests of literature can accomplish.—Instead of envying her prosperity, we shall rather labour, by an honourable rivalry, to participate with her in the confidence and patronage of an enlightened community.

To our Students also, we shall look to aid us in this work. Upon their accurate attainments in science, their irreproachable morals, their high sense of honour, and their marked abhorrence of every thing that is mean and wicked, much of the reputation of our institution will depend. If we can furnish these testimonials to the public, we shall not long fail of securing a portion of her favour.

After all, gentlemen, we must not forget the remark of one, who was equally distinguished by the sublimity of his genius, and the extent of his science: "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*"—His blessing is as necessary here, as in any of the undertakings or enterprises of life. Let the aspirations of our hearts, then, ascend daily to God on behalf of this seminary of learning, that it may be a nursery from which multitudes of intelligent and well-taught youth may spring up, and go forth to bless their country and the world.

APPENDIX.

The Committee charged by the Board of Trustees with the publication of the preceding Address, beg leave to accompany it with a brief statement of the re-organization and incipient condition of the Institution. — The Faculty, consisting of the Rev. D. ELLIOTT, A. M. Prof. of Mor Phil &c and acting Principal, the Rev. W. M. P. ALRICH, A. M. Prof. of Math. Nat. Phil. & Chemistry, and Mr. W. M. SMITH, Prof. of Languages, were inducted to office, on Tuesday the 2d instant, in the College Chapel, in the presence of the Board of Trustees, the Students, and a large number of their fellow-citizens. The oath of office was administered by the Hon. Judge MERCER, and prayers were offered by the Rev. Mr. WATTERMAN, of the Methodist Ep. Church, and the Rev. Mr. HOGE, of the Presbyterian Church. The deep interest manifested on the occasion by the citizens of the town and vicinity, was highly encouraging, and inspires the hope that nothing will be wanting on their part, to sustain the rising Institution. Repairs on the building are in progress, and the Board contemplate an enlargement of the Central Hall, with such other improvements on the building and campus, as will add greatly to the beauty and convenience of the whole.

Already we number 40 Students, and several others expected daily— This is deemed highly flattering, considering the lateness of the period of our organization. From information received, considerable additions are confidently expected by the commencement of the next session. To the Alumni of the College, we send our congratulations on the occasion of the resuscitation of their Alma Mater, and shall look to them to aid us in raising again this object of their early attachment, and giving her an honourable distinction among the literary institutions of our country.

ALEXANDER REED,
WILLIAM BAIRD,
JOHN K. WILSON,

COMMITTEE.

November 15, 1830.