EXERCISES

AT THE

SEMI-CENTENNIAL

OF

AMHERST COLLEGE,

JULY 12, 1871.

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ADDRESS BY REV. DR. E. P. HUMPHREY.

Mr. Chairman and Fellow-Students: Your Committee of Arrangements have requested me to respond for the administration of our second President. This duty would have been more gracefully discharged by another alumnus. But I do not feel at liberty to refuse the office, although hedged about with many limitations of delicacy and propriety. These limitations, however, are somewhat reduced by the fact that we may be said to occupy, to-day, towards President Humphrey's term of service the relation of posterity. He was inaugurated in October, 1823—forty-eight years ago; and he retired from office in April, 1845, twenty-six years ago. That is the measure of time. But according to the wider measure of progress in society and of the changes wrought by many and great revolutions, in peace and war, we are removed to a period very remote from that presidency. Longer as well as

"Better fifty years of Europe, than a cycle of Cathay."

In this circumstance, I find an apology, at least, for responding to the call now made upon me.

It requires the effort of a mind that can recall not only, but can recreate the past, to set before us the year 1823. At that time the railroad, the steamship, the magnetic telegraph, and the gold mines of California were among the undiscovered forces of our material civilization. The marvels of machinery, which have imparted a prodigious impulse to the manufacturing

industry of the country, were then unknown. The beginning of Dr. Humphrey's administration carries us back to the latter days of primitive times, when the vigorous old was ready to bring forth the more vigorous new. The old Puritan customs and traditions were still in vogue. The proverbs and maxims of the seventeenth century were current, and were quoted in the old-time accent and pronunciation. The Sabbath day was remembered to keep it holy. Thanksgivings, and fast-days, and town-meetings, and general trainings, and election days, and the shorter catechism, and doctrinal sermons running into the second hour, and the primeval Federal and Democratic parties held their own. We had no city in Massachusetts; it was the town of Boston. The roads leading thither from the west, climbed all the hill-tops from the Taconics to the sea. Highways they were, along which we toiled through the live-long day, leaving Boston a little after midnight, and reaching Northampton or Springfield a little before bed-time. But our journey was marked off and relieved by the dear old meeting-houses, posted on all the dividing ridges, by a sort of unconscious response to the piety of the ancient tribes, who erected altars at the headsprings of their rivers. The College was the product of that period; so, also, was its second President.

But we must take another step. Nothing is better known respecting the hard-working farmers of that day, than their desire to send their sons to College. Mr. Curtis, in his life of Daniel Webster, informs us that Captain Webster mortgaged his farm to educate his son Daniel, and then that he gave all that he had left to educate his son Ezekiel. Mr. Curtis might have added that similar parental sacrifices have been made a thousand times in those regions. A large proportion of the students of this College—I speak now of its first quarter century—were drawn from the farm-houses of these old hill towns,

and were educated here by the toils and sacrifices of the father and the mother—and I might add the sisters and brothers,—working hard and long. When those came to Amherst in their homespun, they found here a President who knew all about the life of a penniless boy. He was himself the son of a small farmer, one of eleven children. This son labored on his father's farm till he was nearly grown. Then for about seven years, he served in summer as "hired man" on the farms of his neighbors, and in the winter he taught their children in the district schools. At the age of twenty-five he entered the Junior class in Yale College, supporting himself while there by waiting in the commons, and by teaching school; graduating honorably with his class, having paid all his College bills from the fruits of his own labor and economy, and leaving New Haven—such is the tradition—with nearly a hundred dollars in his pocket. This was the manner of man to whom our plain farmers and laboring people sent their sons when they sent them here, a man who knew more than they did about early poverty and the way to meet it; a man who had stood on every plank of the steep, arduous stairway that leads to Mr. Webster's upper story.

But we must go deeper than that. We must not lose sight of the fact that the College was established avowedly and undoubtedly for the purpose of educating men for the ministry of the gospel. It opened its doors from the beginning to every youth who sought a classical education, but its first and leading purpose was to raise up a company of men who should go into all the world, preaching the gospel. In 1823 they needed a President who was in the fullest accord with the enterprises in which the people of God, in and out of New England, were then engaging. In Dr. Humphrey, the Church recognized one of the founders of the American Bible Society; a supporter, from

the beginning, of the American Board of Foreign Missions; as far back as 1811, an advocate of total abstinence as the infallible cure of intemperance; and as early as 1818, a friend of colonization, as the best remedy then proposed for African slavery. In him, also, what we call the "revival spirit," was a living power. His experience in several illustrious works of grace in Berkshire—works which changed the face of society there—gave him preparation to labor in the powerful revivals of religion which occurred here during his administration. They were six in number. They were so distributed through his term of service, that every class during its course of study, witnessed at least one of these displays of saving mercy. So genuine and enduring were their results, that a large majority of the students entered on the religious life, and of the seven hundred and ninety-five who were graduated by President Humphrey, four hundred and thirty became ministers of the gospel.

Our second President was in lively sympathy with the progress of society. He was a man of both the old and the new, not clinging to error because it was old, nor afraid of the true because it was new. It ought to be mentioned, that as far back as 1828, an elective course of study was established here, very similar to the scientific department now so common in other Colleges. The course proposed here differed from those now adopted, mainly in the fact that the elective course terminated in the bachelor's degree. It was abandoned here, partly for the want of funds, and partly, perhaps, because the public was not quite ready for it. But it was the beginning of that method of education, and owed its origin to the sagacity and enterprise of our second President and his associates.

For the rest, the College called into its service in him, a man of vigorous physical constitution, matured, not broken, by the

hardships of early years, of a sound common sense, and of a remarkable directness of purpose. With what courage and success he fought out your early battles with penury and discontent, with loud detraction and faint praise, with hot enemies and cold friends, let the old men around me tell you. Through it all he was calm, resolute, hopeful, full of mother wit, not in the habit of being baffled or put down, not easily scared or hurt; and, above all, believing in God. They say he was somewhat stern at times, in his methods of discipline. But so was his master, Timothy Dwight, and so were his contemporaries, Jeremiah Day, Edward Dorr Griffin, John Thornton Kirkland, and Josiah Quincy. Perhaps, also, the boy-nature of that generation was less self-willed and unruly than the boy-nature of this softer and gentler age! But it must be said that he left to the College no injurious custom or precedent or tradition—not one. And further, it is to be said that neither by word or act, not even by a hasty word or an impulsive act, whether in anger or merriment, did this man leave upon any one of his thousand pupils an impression derogatory to the honor or integrity or manners of a Christian gentleman.

It is a well-known tradition that Massachusetts has sought tranquillity under liberty by the sword. But for the perfection and perpetuity of that tranquillity she is indebted to the pious labors of such men as Moore and Humphrey and Hitchcock and Stearns, and their associates here, and their contemporaries in the colleges and churches of Massachusetts. I speak in the presence of the leading citizens of the Commonwealth, her scholars and jurists and clergymen and statesmen,—in the presence of our distinguished Chairman, who has already adorned the Chair of State, and he touches nothing that he does not adorn. In this superb presence I repeat the sentiment uttered by our second President when he retired from office, "My hope for the colleges, for my country and the church, is in God."