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AN

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE TRUSTEES OF

DICKINSON COLLEGE,

AT CARLISLE, PA.

NOVEMBER 9, 1824,

26.6

BY

WILLIAM NEILL, D. D.

PRINCIPAL.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE TRUSTEES,

Doctrina sed vim promovet insitam.

HORACE.

CARLISLE: *Pe*

PRINTED AT THE HERALD OFFICE.

1824.

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CARLISLE, Nov. 10, 1824.

DR. WM. NEILL,

Rev. and Dear Sir,

THE Board of Trustees of Dickinson College have directed us to solicit from you a copy of your Inaugural Address delivered yesterday, and with your permission to have it printed for their use. We hope that you will accede to their wishes and confer a lasting obligation on, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Yours with great respect,

GEORGE DUFFIELD, JR.
JOHN S. EBAUGH,
JOSEPH KNOX.

Nov. 12, 1824.

GENTLEMEN,

THE Address, of which your Board request a copy for publication, was prepared amidst pressing cares, and is, of course, far from being profound; but if the Trustees judge it worthy of being printed, it is at their service.

Very respectfully, yours, &c.

W. NEILL.

Messrs. Duffield, Ebaugh & Knox.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

*Gentlemen of the Board of Trustees,
and Fellow-Citizens,*

THERE is a great deal of truth in the common adage, that man is formed, very much, by the circumstances in which he is placed, and the habits in which he is trained. To these factitious causes, rather than any original difference of constitution, is to be ascribed the diversity, observable among the individuals of our race, in their intellectual and moral qualities. He who has the misfortune to be born and reared a savage, will delight in the chase and the war dance; and these and like objects will bound his views of happiness; while the more fortunate child of civilization and refinement, will, very soon, under parental guidance, discover a taste for books, and the charities of social life.

I do not say, nor mean to insinuate, that all human beings are endowed with equal capabilities for intellectual improvement. Some, even in early childhood, discover a sensitiveness,—an aptitude of the external organs to receive impressions from outward objects, which distinguishes them from others, of a more sluggish disposition, and whose powers of perception are less keen and discriminating. The faculties and susceptibilities of the mind may differ, in some measure, as do the features of the countenance; but the difference is, in my apprehension, not so great in the former case as in the latter ; at least, it is not so permanent and unalterable. In a *moral* point of view, if the law of God be the standard of morality, (and I know of no other that deserves the name) we are all, naturally, pretty much on a level ; except that in some instances, the peculiar forms of sin, seem to be transmitted from parent to child : These instances, however, are not so clear, so easily discernible, or of so unequivocal a character as to warrant the opinion that one human being is, *originally*, more depraved than another. We receive it as a mournful truth, fully disclosed in the sacred scriptures, and confirmed by ob-

servation and experience, that our common apostasy from God has impaired our intellectual powers, darkened our minds, perverted our wills, and blunted our moral sensibilities; so that, *now*, mental effort, under the hand of culture, makes the *man of science*, and free grace, operating by means of *truth divine*, makes the *man of God*.

If these observations be just, then, the proper design of education is, to operate on the capacity of man's nature, considered as a rational and accountable being. We have few, if any, inborn ideas; but we are capable of receiving information from surrounding objects, and soon become capable of improving acquired knowledge by reflection. Of moral rectitude, or a conformity of heart to the law of duty, we have nothing to boast; but we have a susceptibility of religious truths, emotions, and enjoyments. The cultivation of the mind, like that of the field, supposes a soil, on which to operate. It creates no faculties; but it resuscitates and calls into action, those that, without its aid, would remain dormant and, comparatively, useless. It does not inspire a new system of affections; but it does propose to regu-

late such as already exist, by presenting worthy objects, in connexion with their claims to our esteem. It cannot impart holy aspirations; but it can exhibit the truth, and inculcate a compliance with its dictates;—it can discipline the mind to habits of attention and accurate investigation, thus, preparing it to feel the force of evidence, and ascertain important points of duty. Thus, too, it gives energy to conscience, by enlightening the judgment, and by asserting its high prerogatives in the moral system.

The occasion, on which we are assembled, seems to demand that something should be said, *on the importance of a good education*: and this will be my apology for adventuring upon so large a subject, in an address so limited, as the present must necessarily be. The business of education has high and commanding claims to the attention, as well of the christian, as of the statesman and the philanthropist. Under all forms of civil society, a well-instructed people have the fairest prospect of happiness and respectability. Gross ignorance, in the great body of a nation, will soon be followed, either by despotism or anarchy. In a government like ours, where the people are

the fountain of power,—where every industrious and orderly citizen is held in estimation, and exercises the right of suffrage which tells, in the cabinet, and in the halls of legislation,—where all our institutions, both civil and religious, owe their origin and support to public opinion, the dissemination of knowledge is, to our healthful national existence, what the circulation of the blood is to the animal economy,—essential to all the functions of vitality and enjoyment : Indeed, any government which takes no pains for the instruction of youth,—which affords no patronage,—extends no fostering hand to institutions of learning, may be pronounced wanting in a just regard, not only to the people's dearest rights and best interests, but to the only effectual means of its own preservation.

Happily for us, fellow-citizens, this matter has not been altogether neglected in our favoured country. Something had been done, while we were yet subject to a foreign power; but ever since we assumed a place among independent nations, a decent, common education has been deemed an object of vast importance; so that we

may safely affirm that, taking the entire mass of the population together, no nation is better informed than the people of these United States. It is true, we have not a great many very learned men;—our writers, however, are as numerous, and the subjects handled by them, are as various, and as ably treated, as could reasonably be expected, at the present early period of our national career. Seminaries of learning, of different grades have arisen and are still springing up, under the genial influence of individual munificence, and public favour, which promise much for the interests of science and the useful arts, in our happy and growing republic: and most of the men who fill the learned professions, and occupy the stations of honour and trust among us, have been educated in our own schools and colleges. This is a hopeful beginning. But we are not to rest satisfied with what has been done. There remains yet an immense deal to be accomplished; our institutions are all in their infancy, and our population is increasing faster than that of any nation on the globe. Nor is it to be concealed that, while public sentiment is, upon the whole, favourable to literature and literary pur-

suits, many persons, and some of them men of wealth and influence, manifest, if not open hostility, surprizing lukewarmness towards the cause of education, particularly, in its higher and more expensive efforts. Now, we bring no railing accusation against men of this cast, not doubting the purity of their motives; yet we should like to reason the matter with them, in a plain and friendly way: Indeed, it seems to be the duty of those to whom the business of education is mainly entrusted, to hear dispassionately the scruples and objections of gain-sayers, and, if possible, to remove them. If the professed friends of learning do not look after its interests, and vindicate its claims to public attention, who will? Science is not a plant of spontaneous growth. Its fragrance and its fruits are yielded to those, and to those only who cherish and cultivate it. Public favour constitutes the only atmosphere in which it can thrive permanently, and to any considerable extent.

Education, in its most extended import, begins in the nursery, and is conducted, most successfully by maternal tenderness and assiduity. Most devoutly is it to be wished, therefore, that, all

mothers would reflect, that every new-born child is an heir of immortality ; and that Providence ordinarily assigns to her who bore it, the pleasing and the honourable task of conducting it through the first seven years, at least, of its training for eternity. During this period of education, the grand point is, to watch the developement of mind, and, under a salutary and well-measured discipline, to furnish the intellect with suitable materials to work upon, and the affections with worthy objects, and let both have free scope, with no more coercion or restraint than sound morality and pure religion demand. A mother may not conclude that she has fully performed her duty to her child, when she has seen it well fed and clothed. The child *is*, or *is to be* a rational creature ; and, therefore, needs mental provision, and moral culture : and, I shall perhaps be allowed to remark, in this place, that if due attention were paid to *female education* among us, our infant statesmen, orators, poets and divines, would receive some of their very best lessons from maternal lips, deepened and sealed by a mother's prayers. But, as the custom has been too long, and too generally, in this country, many, other-

wise, amiable and excellent mothers are wholly unqualified “to teach the young ideas how to shoot,” and have no adequate conception of how much useful instruction may be given to a child, within the first few years of its life. We hail with joy and gladness, however, the dawn of a reformation in this important concern. Many excellent schools for females have been opened of late years; and we could name several ladies of the United States, who have given full proof of their ability to furnish useful entertainment, and render very acceptable service to the cause of truth and piety, by their writings. Among these productions I cannot forego the gratification of mentioning, “Conversations on the Bible” by a venerable matron of Philadelphia, still living,—and a beautiful little poem, entitled “The Pleasures of Religion,” with several fugitive pieces, by the late Mrs. Susan De Witt, of Albany, in the state of New York. Let our schools for the instruction of our daughters be cherished, and let the *substantial* branches of education be appreciated and preferred to those that are merely showy and ephemeral, and why may we not hope to rear American female Moores, and Hamiltons

and Edgeworths ? But my zeal on this subject has led me into a digression from my proper topic.

The question, relating to the comparative advantages of a *domestic* and a *public* education, is often an embarrassing one to parents. We have not time to bestow on this question any thing more than a very short notice. There are, undoubtedly, advantages and disadvantages peculiar to each ; but, I am fully persuaded that the preponderance is decisively in favour of the latter. Suppose a public institution to be well organized, —well supplied with able and faithful teachers, who maintain a parental, wise, and uniform system of discipline,—suppose the course of study to be judicious and comprehensive,—and that, proper attention is paid to the manners, the religious instruction, the expenditures, the diet, and the recreative exercises of the youth, and then institute a comparison between the two modes of education, in question. At home the boy is very liable to be injured by excessive indulgence,—he studies alone, with little or nothing to stimulate his exertions, no competitors or associates with whom to compare ideas, and measure attainments. The rewards proposed to him are

far-distant, and, therefore, feeble in their influence. He is confined, generally, to one teacher, who from the want of the proper stimulants, is also very likely to fall into a dull and monotonous way of communicating instruction ; and who may be negligent or tyrannical, in the absence of associates, or competent judges of the manner in which he performs his duties. On the other hand place a lad of a good mind, and ingenuous disposition in college, and you bring him immediately in contact with almost every thing that is calculated to rouse his powers, and call forth his best exertions. He finds himself subject to a government devised with care, and exercised without partiality. He rises, studies, recites, takes rest, and food, and recreation systematically, and with his mates. He has the opportunity of comparing his strength and proficiency with those of his companions ; some he sees before him, some about equal, and others following after : and, thus, he is guarded, on the one hand, from self-confidence, and, on the other, from inglorious and desponding indolence. He has the advantage, moreover, of attending on the instructions of several teachers, whose various manner,

if nothing else, will keep up his attention, and whose sense of obligation, and responsibility, and self-respect conspire to guarantee to him every assistance and encouragement that can reasonably be desired. His hopes, and fears,—his ambition,—his sense of honour, and regard for the wishes and expectations of parents and other esteemed friends, are kept in constant play, by a system of honourable distinctions and moral correctives: and, lastly, though not the least important, he dwells in a little community, where he may learn much of human nature, habituate himself to a right distribution of his time, and form acquaintances and friendships of the most endearing character, and which may be eminently beneficial to him in after-life.

It is often objected to a College education, that too much time and attention are expended on subjects which seem to be of but little practical use. Of what real advantage, it is asked, can a knowledge of dead languages, of Natural Philosophy, Mathematics, Chemistry, Mental Philosophy, Logic, &c. be, to a man in procuring an honest livelihood, or in fulfilling the duties of a good citizen? Before I attempt a short answer

to this question, let it be observed, that, we do not think it desirable, if it were practicable, that all young men should receive, what is commonly called, a liberal education, but only a reasonable proportion of them; so that literature, science, and the arts, useful and ornamental, may never want a sufficient number of those who understand their principles, and can show how these principles are to be applied with most effect, i. e. that practice may receive all the facilities and efficiency that theory can give it. In the arts, as well as in morals, all rational practice is founded on principle, whether the man recognize the fact or not; and where principles are wholly disregarded, practice becomes a thing of random,—a lottery,—a matter of hazardous,—often of perilous experiment. A thousand hands, in as many years, could not complete a palace, without the aid of, at least, one man who has studied the theory of architecture.

Now, for the objection just stated; and, first, as it relates to the dead languages. Much time and pains are bestowed on these in College. Is this wise and useful? In reply, it may be re-

marked, that, Language, as it is the common medium through which man holds intercourse with his fellow-man, deserves to be well understood. Originally, we suppose, it was one and the same ; but in process of time, there have grown out of the primitive stock, many branches, all, however, related, and analagous, more or less : whence it seems evident, that, the more attention we pay to language in general, the better we shall comprehend the meaning and right use of our mother tongue. From the Latin and Greek languages, much of our own is derived, and, therefore, to these it is deemed proper to pay special attention. From these languages are taken most of the technical terms used in the arts and sciences ; so that the druggist, the physician, the surgeon, the lawyer, and even the gardener would find himself but poorly qualified for his profession without some acquaintance with them. This may be complained of, as an obstacle in the way of the English scholar ; but, so long as it remains, let us not neglect the only effectual means of surmounting it. When the whole dress, and ordinary channels of useful knowledge are changed, we will think about accommodating ourselves

to the change. But, really, the popular scheme of epitomizing, and simplifying every thing that is to be learned,—of encouraging young men to hope for liberal attainments, in a short time, and with light study, promises no great advantage to the cause of solid learning. There are immense stores of literature, and useful knowledge locked up in the learned languages ; and shall we permit these rich treasures to remain unexplored and unoccupied, through fear of a little trouble in learning the use of the key ? Would you deprive the lovers of History, Poetry, Philosophy and Husbandry of the profit and the luxury of reading Herodotus, Livy, Thucydides,—Homer, Horace and Virgil,—Cicero, Seneca, and other eminent writers of ancient Greece and Rome, on almost all subjects ? Would you consign to perpetual oblivion, the works of those great men of Britain, France, Germany, and Holland who, in *modern* times, have chosen to communicate to posterity the result of their prodigious researches through the medium of the Latin tongue ? Would you have your preachers undertake to expound the doctrines and duties of Christianity, ignorant of the language in which the sacred

Scriptures were given by inspiration of God ? You will say, perhaps, we have translations ; ah, but who made these translations ; and are they true to their originals : and when these wear out, who will furnish you with others ? The languages in question, then ought to be studied.

As to Natural Philosophy, it proposes to investigate the powers of nature, to explain the properties of natural bodies, their action upon one another, and to show how this action may be applied, so as to subserve the comfort and convenience of mankind. Now as we are continually conversant with material objects, and obliged to use them in providing for our sustenance and preservation, it seems desirable that, we should know how to use them with the best effect. This is the professed aim of this branch of physical science ; and this it does, to an extent, little considered, and, therefore, little known or acknowledged by most men. It is, indeed, scarcely possible to estimate the benefits which accrue to society from the knowledge and application of the mechanical powers alone. How amazingly is the muscular strength of an individual aided by the inclined plane, the wedge, the screw, the

axle and the wheel, the pulley and the lever ! To what a variety of useful purposes are atmospheric air, water and steam applied, by a right understanding of the properties and powers of these substances ! It is by the principles of philosophy, and the proper use of the implements and engines founded thereon, that, from raw and rude materials, your dwellings, your mills, and factories, your ships, fortifications and canals are constructed ; and a thousand other machines and contrivances put in motion, all contributing to augment the power, and promote the comfort of civilized man.

The Science of Mathematics, nearly related to or rather embracing that of which we have just been speaking, is comprehensive in its range, and eminently practical. It treats of the ratio and comparison of quantities. It is a methodical concatenation of principles, reasonings and conclusions, conducting us to absolute and indubitable certainty. It teaches us how to measure time, space, and distance,—to apportion out the land to its inhabitants,—to navigate the seas, and travel among the stars. But the time would fail us to speak of the almost endless uses and valuable

purposes to which this masculine and noble department of human science is applicable. Mathematical studies not only conduce largely to the comfort and convenience of society, but exert a most benign influence on the mind of the student himself. "The Mathematics," says the great and excellent Dr. Borrow, "effectually exercise, not vainly delude, nor vexatiously torment studious minds, with obscure subtilties, but plainly demonstrate every thing within their reach, draw certain conclusions, instruct by profitable rules, and unfold pleasant questions. These disciplines also inure and corroborate the mind to a constant diligence in study ; they wholly deliver us from a credulous simplicity, and most strongly fortify us against the vanity of scepticism ; they effectually restrain us from a rash presumption, most easily incline us to a due assent, and perfectly subject us to the government of right reason. While the mind is abstracted and elevated from sensible matter, it distinctly views pure forms, conceives the beauty of ideas, and investigates the harmony of proportions : the manners, also, are sensibly corrected and improved, the affections composed and rectified, the fancy

calmed and settled, and the understanding raised and excited to more divine contemplations.”

Against Chemistry, the prejudice is peculiarly clamorous and inveterate; and the reason is;—its nature and objects are not known to multitudes, who are continually feeding on its pleasant fruits. Its professed design is to analyze, and explain the qualities of all those material substances, which the Creator has intended for the use and happiness of man. Its subjects are so numerous, that, a bare classification of them, would occupy more time than can be spared, for the purpose, on the present occasion. Suffice it to say, that, it teaches us how to cultivate the field and the garden, so as to secure the utmost, in quantity, and the best, in quality, of their inestimable productions;—that, it instructs us in the most eligible methods of preparing food, and all the varieties of vinous, spirituous, and fermented liquors,—and in the important arts of bleaching, tanning, and colouring the fabrics of which our wearing apparel is made. And are not these practical and useful matters? Do they not merit some share of regard, in a course of liberal education?

The Philosophy of the human mind, together with morals, and Logic, and all that extensive range of topics designated Belles Lettres, open before us a wide field, and rich as the gold of Ophir, fragrant as the rose, and beautiful as the rainbow. The prominent objects of these kindred sciences are;—to investigate the faculties and properties of the mind, and exhibit the best methods of acquiring, retaining, arranging, and communicating knowledge; to expound the law of duty, and demonstrate *how we may*, and *why we should* conform to its dictates; or, in other words, to introduce us to an acquaintance with ourselves, considered as intelligent and moral agents, and to put us in the way of doing our duty in all the relations of social life. It is not easy to conceive of objects more worthy of attention, or more important in their bearing on individual happiness, and social order, than are these: and the literary institution which sends forth, annually, a corps of youth, well indoctrinated in the science of duty, inured to diligence, subordination, and sobriety of manners, renders to community ample remuneration for any patronage that may have been bestowed upon it. A dis-

tinguished writer, on the philosophy of the mind, reckons it among those preparatory disciplines, which Bishop Berkley has happily compared to “the crops which are raised, not for the sake of the harvest, but to be ploughed in, as a dressing to the land.”

One thing more, and your patience shall be speedily relieved ;—I mean the *religious* instruction which should enter into a course of liberal education. That some attention is due to this subject, will, probably be conceded by all sober, christian people. Yet it is a matter about which we often hear complaints ; and, indeed, to avoid giving ground of complaint, it requires to be managed with great care. It so happens, and, from the nature of the case, it is likely so to happen, that in every institution of learning, some particular denomination of christians has the predominant influence ; and, as a consequence, it is supposed that the religious instruction given, will be of a sectarian tincture. This is regarded, as a grievance, alike by the bigoted, and by those who profess to be extremely catholic, and by such, for such there are, as feel and avow a re-

pugnance to religion, in all its *christian* forms. Now, if there be ~~such~~ a thing as ~~true~~ religion, and if, as we read in the Bible, “it be profitable *unto all things*, having a promise concerning both the present and the future life,” would it be wise, —would it be reasonable,—would it be consistent with approved practice in other matters, to neglect it altogether, in the training of our youth? As to the *manner* and *measure* in which it is to be attended to, sound discretion and good sense must determine. That no creed, embracing the peculiar tenets of any one sect, should be imposed ;—and, that, the instructions, on this subject, should be liberal, and free from sectarian cant, is indisputable. This, is, demanded by the rights of conscience, and it is well guaranteed, by the free institutions, and tolerant sentiments and habits of the people of this country. And that these views are entertained and practised upon, in most of the public seminaries in the United States, may be easily ascertained, by any one, who will take the trouble to make the inquiry. I spent five of the happiest years of my life, in the “College of New-Jersey,” at Princeton, and, to use the words of the Rev. Dr. Green,

late President of that institution, "I can most unreservedly declare that I never heard a discourse" delivered to the students, "that could, with any show of justice, be denominated sectarian.* As to the *measure* or *amount* of religious instruction, proper to be given in a collegiate course, it ought, in my opinion, to be considerable, and to be regular, and systematic;—something more than occasional advice about moral conduct, or laboured lectures on the attractions of virtue. It ought to be BIBLICAL, strictly, and in the BIBLE MODE, "Line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept," enforced by all the "*suaviter in modo et fortiter in re*" that parental kindness, and christian faith, and the love of souls can inspire. Young men, as well for their own sake, as on account of the influence which they may be expected to exert on the general tone of public sentiment and manners, should not be permitted to pass from the consecrated walls of their Alma Mater, without some acquaintance with the sacred scriptures, or without having been conducted

* See a volume of excellent Discourses, &c. including a Historical Sketch of the College, recently published, by Ashbel Green, D. D. L. L. D.

through a careful examination of the grounds upon which the Christian Religion claims their faith. And I am happy to find that the promotion of religion was a primary object with the worthy founders of this college. In an address of the venerable John Dickinson, Esq. then president of the Board of Trustees, delivered in April, 1784, he says “that they,” i. e. the first friends and founders of the College, “thought that they could not better employ the beginning of the peace, so graciously bestowed, than by forming an establishment for advancing the interests of RELIGION, VIRTUE, FREEDOM and LITERATURE. Let the friends of Dickinson College, and of our beloved country, *ever* and *assiduously* cherish these things *in union*. They form a four-fold cord,—the only cord, of sufficient strength to bind human society together, for any length of time, and with any tolerable degree of comfort.

It cannot be, that an institution, which aims to promote such important objects as these, will be left to languish, for want of patronage, in the heart of a great nation; in the very centre of the wealthy, the populous and happy Commonwealth

of Pennsylvania. No; it cannot be;—we will not indulge the mortifying apprehension, that, we shall be cramped and trammelled, in our endeavours to do justice to the youth committed to our care and instruction, through the want of a Library and Philosophical Apparatus, suited to the age in which we live, and to the present improved state of literature, science and the arts. We do respectfully solicit a share of public favour, and an interest in the prayers of the pious: but we confide mainly in the smiles of **DIVINE PROVIDENCE**, without which, no enterprize *can*, or *should* prosper.

FINIS.

Hendee Webster

AN

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WILLIAM NEILL, D. D.

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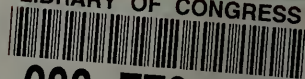
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