

THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.
A
BACCALAUREATE DISCOURSE:

DELIVERED TO THE
SENIOR CLASS
OF
RUTGERS COLLEGE,

ON THE SABBATH BEFORE COMMENCEMENT, JULY 18, 1811.

BY JOHN PROUDFIT, D. D.
Professor of the Greek and Latin Languages and Literature in Rutgers College.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SENIOR CLASS.

NEW-YORK:
M. W. DODD,
BRICK CHURCH CHAPEL, OPPOSITE THE CITY HALL.
1841.

JOHN F. TROW, PRINTER,
114 Nassau-street, N. Y.

CORRESPONDENCE.

REV. JOHN PROUDFIT, D. D.

SIR—At a meeting of the Senior Class of Rutgers College, held on the 21st inst., it was unanimously

"*Resolved*, That a copy of the able and impressive Baccalaureate, delivered by Professor Proudfit, on the 18th inst., be requested for publication."

The undersigned were appointed a committee to carry out the wishes of the Class. As we believe that the operation and effect of this Discourse, when published, will be beneficial not only to young men but to the community at large, we sincerely indulge the hope that you will be pleased to yield to our request.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

ABM. R. VAN NEST,
WILLIAM THOMPSON, } *Committee.*
PETER D. OAKLEY,

NEW BRUNSWICK, *July 22*, 1841.

GENTLEMEN—I enclose a copy of the Discourse delivered to your Class, in compliance with your request, which I should have done with less delay but for my absence from home for the greater part of the time since the commencement.

Please to accept the assurance of my best wishes for your happiness and that of your associates.

I am, very respectfully,

Your, etc.

J. PROUDFIT.

To

ABM. R. VAN NEST, }
WILLIAM THOMPSON, } *Committee of the Senior Class.*
PETER D. OAKLEY,

NEW BRUNSWICK, *August 16*, 1841.

DISCOURSE.

Acts ix. 6: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

It is scarcely possible to conceive a more important moment in the life of an individual, than when he passes from his state of pupilage and enters upon the world—when he ceases to be "under tutors and governors," and becomes the master of his own pursuits and of his own actions. Such a moment, to a portion of my youthful hearers, has now arrived, and justifies us (as well as the established usage of this institution) in selecting the subject of the morning with reference to them, and addressing to them such friendly counsels as the experience and affection of instructors may dictate, at this critical and eventful period of their lives.

One of the first exercises of that self-control which a youth acquires in leaving college, is the choice of a profession. It is needless to say, that this is one of the most important decisions of human life. Much of its honor and usefulness, and no less of its enjoyment, will depend on the wisdom with which the choice is made.

To this subject, therefore, my remarks this morning shall be directed—in connection with the inspired words which I have just read, and with the speaker and the occasion of which you are all familiar—with his previous and his subsequent life—with the immediate and total change which they marked in his character, and the glorious and almost unrivalled career of usefulness which they introduced,—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

It was in these words that one of the most enlightened and powerful of human minds surrendered itself absolutely to the dictation and disposition of Christ—laid all its talents and acquirements at his feet—abdicated all its former purposes and predilections, and resolved every deliberation and wish as to its future course into a simple INQUIRY INTO THE WILL OF CHRIST.

And most gladly, my young friends, would I persuade you to

commence life with such an expression of profound submission to God, and reverential inquiry into his will. Fain would I throw the whole energy of persuasion and entreaty into this indispensable precept, "Yield yourselves to God"—"Present yourselves to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable!" Hallowed and happy would this hour be, beyond all the other hours of your life, if it formed the date of such an act of self-dedication! The entire gift of a youthful heart to Christ! It is a lovely and noble spectacle. And it is peculiarly so in the case of those, who, like yourselves, enjoy the inestimable advantages of a superior education. Knowledge and disciplined intellect are power—power of the highest kind—most extensive and lasting in the influence they exert. If you consecrate to your Redeemer the patient and devoted labor of a well-educated mind, you present to him a nobler sacrifice than if you should lay at his feet the amplest fortune, or the influence of the most exalted rank or the most distinguished name. This is no exaggeration. Mind is the noblest gift which God bestows on us, and the noblest offering we can make to Him.

And such an act of self-consecration at this critical moment would be the sure presage, not only of a good and useful, but of a happy and a prosperous life. It throws over you the shield of the Divine protection, and kindles up for you the sure and infallible light of Divine guidance. You will make your pilgrimage between the pillar of fire and of cloud, and the presence of God will go with you and give you rest. Under such conduct, you will never descend into the dark and hopeless paths of profligacy; you will never wring a parent's heart with shame and anguish; you will never pollute your companions by your vicious example; you will never be the dupe of the infidel's sophistry, nor fall into the snare of those "who hunt for the precious life;" you will never dissipate your energies in weak and unfruitful purposes, nor waste your life in laborious trifling. Your mind and heart will be unfolded under the happiest of all influences. Right principles and affections towards God and man will shape and determine all your views, plans and labors. Your example will be pure and salutary. You will enjoy the sweet inward satisfactions attendant upon increasing knowledge and ripening goodness; and the hearts of all who are interested in you will be gladdened by the opening promise and substantial

fruit of your career. You will go forward into the scenes of manly life to be a light and a blessing. Whether destined to an humble or exalted sphere, you will fill it with honor and usefulness. Your path through life will be *as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

If I wished to point out to a youth whom I loved the shortest and surest road to honor, to usefulness—to greatness, I would say to him, “Go! take the attitude of Paul at the feet of Christ, and inquire, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*”

But when we have earnestly inquired the will of God, and resigned ourselves simply and absolutely to its disposition, that will is then to be *ascertained*, doubtless, from his word and providence—from reflection and observation, and all the various sources whence truth and wisdom are in all ordinary cases to be elicited. It is so in other questions of duty, and it cannot be otherwise in this nice and difficult question of *choosing a profession*. Even the case of Paul, evidently and splendidly miraculous as it was, affords no exception to this rule. The first answer to his inquiry was, “Go thy way into the city, and there it shall be showed thee what thou oughtest to do.” Light broke upon his path in scattered and successive rays; but it broke rapidly and brightly—for his eye was single, and there were no prejudices to obstruct it, and no selfish purposes to pervert and falsify it, and no weak and timid shrinkings to deter him from promptly following up the heavenly intimations. Clear and distinct are the manifestations of the will of God to those who receive them with such dispositions. “They shall not walk in darkness—they shall have the light of life.”

Four general observations will comprehend the suggestions which I have to offer on this subject,—the first of which belongs more especially to the younger members of the college. The choice of a profession should not be made prematurely: It should be formed with a due consultation of individual capacities and peculiarities: It should be decided under the influence of sober judgment and not of romantic expectations: and above all, It should be determined on elevated principles and enlarged views of *duty*.

I. The choice of a profession should not be made prematurely. For, if this be the case, it must either be determined by some child-

ish impulse or wholly governed by the judgment of others, neither of which should be permitted to decide so momentous a question. In a few instances, it is true, there are very early indications of superior talents for particular pursuits, and of unconquerable propensities towards them, which ought not, and in fact cannot be repressed—which only gather new energy from opposition and discouragement. When Porson, in childhood, covered the walls of his home with Greek and Latin inscriptions in charcoal ; when Rittenhouse forgot his plough to become absorbed in astronomical lines and calculations drawn on the fence of his father's farm ; when Watts deprecated in verse the rod which was laid upon him for making verses, these were plain indications that their future pursuits were fixed by a law of their nature—by the impress of their Creator. But these and the like are rare and great examples, which cannot be included within any general rule, and do not in the least impair its justice and truth. I have no doubt of the *general* truth of the remark, that the determination of a profession in very early life is attended with many and serious disadvantages.* Shall the child be permitted to form the plan of life for the man ? Or shall parents make the decision for him as their own predilections or convenience may dictate, when his peculiar talents are as yet unknown, and when the lapse of a few years may place him in circumstances wholly unforeseen, and widely different from those which determined the original decision ? There is one disadvantage resulting from such a course, which must occur with peculiar force to those who are concerned in the education of youth. The too early choice of a profession tends to contract the circle of reading, reflection and observation, and to give the youth the wrong and pernicious impression that his time would be thrown away upon this or the other branch of study, inasmuch as it has no immediate connection with his intended plan of life. Now, one great object of early and preparatory education is to enlarge and liberalize the mind, and to awaken and stimulate its powers by giving it a general and rapid view of the whole field of human

* Ineunte enim adolescentia, cum est maxima imbecillitas consilii, tum id sibi quisque genus ætatis degendæ constituit, quod maxime adamavit. *Itaque ante implicatur aliquo certo genere cursuque vivendi quam potuit, quod optimum esset, judicare.* CIC.

knowledge ; it is a sort of *survey* of the region, a part of which we are afterwards to *cultivate*. This object, however, will, in a great measure, be frustrated, if the student, having previously made up his mind what shall be his future pursuit, imagines that no other kind of knowledge can be of much importance to him but that which tends directly to prepare him for it. Why not, then, dispense altogether with a general education, and enter, at once, on professional studies ? This whole deliberation, therefore, is, in most cases, much better deferred till after the completion of your College course. Let this portion of your life (it is surely not too much) be given up to the general cultivation of your mind ; to the formation of sound principles and accurate mental habits, and to the acquisition of useful knowledge of all sorts. You will hereafter agree with me, that not one idea or fact, so acquired, will, in the event, prove useless to you. The superiority of the *liberally* over the merely *professionally* educated man is real and great, even in his own profession,—still more decidedly, in the wider sphere he is called upon to fill as a citizen and a member of society. These important advantages by no means result from the mere *peractio status pupillaris*, which is accomplished by matriculating, and, in due time, graduating according to rule and usage. They can only be acquired by doing vigorous and impartial justice to *all* the studies of your College course ; and any such anticipation of your future pursuits as may lead you to undervalue particular branches of your studies cannot but interfere injuriously with that complete mental development and discipline which is the principal object of education. Besides, the very progress of an extensive and thorough education brings with it many trials of your powers and of your particular fitness for particular pursuits, which, at the end of that course (in addition to the greater maturity of judgment you will then have acquired), will render you much better fitted to decide the important question of a profession than you can possibly be at an earlier age.

When conversion takes place in very early life, the happy subject of it, in the fervor of his first love, and under the deep and powerful impressions which usually accompany the mighty change, often feels impelled to devote himself on the spot, to the ministry of the gospel, perhaps, to a missionary life. Now, if this be done

after much prayer and earnest scrutiny into the motives which prompt to the act, and a serious and deliberate weighing of the sacrifices to which it must expose us, I would not feel at liberty to object to it. The youthful heart may be so overpowered and transported by its first discoveries of a Redeemer's love, as to feel that it never can, it never *must* employ its powers in any other way than in proclaiming to the world the grace which has redeemed it. Would to God that this baptism of the Spirit and of fire, this imposition of a sacred *necessity to preach the gospel*, were laid on many of our educated youth! But a resolution which is to bind us for life, especially one of so high and solemn a nature, should only be taken after all the recesses of the heart have been thrown open to the Divine scrutiny and to our own by long reflection and prayer, and the mind has had time to cool, and the purpose is found to stand firm through many an ebb and flow of animal feeling. It would be rash and dangerous in the extreme to assume such an obligation in a moment of excitement—for this will inevitably pass away,—and the depth and strength of the principle beneath may be found deplorably insufficient to sustain the hour of trial. Many an engagement thus hastily assumed, has proved a snare to the conscience and a galling fetter to the will. Our Lord has commanded us to “count the cost,” and has warned us of failure and shame as the consequence of precipitancy even in good resolutions and enterprises.

Better, then, for the young Christian simply to *rise and follow Christ*, leaving Him to allot his field and line of work;—to inquire as Paul did, amidst a light which outshone the sun, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”—and reverently to await the answer from himself, which will not fail to come in due time. If his intentions are the fruit of Christian principle, they will not prove so transient as he apprehends;—they will, on the contrary, gather new strength through years of study and communion with God. If they are not, but grow merely out of momentary impressions and impulses, no resolutions or vows can give them permanency. They must be re-fashioned of firmer material.

Leave, then, the selection of your future pursuits to the period which will naturally call upon you for the decision. Devote yourselves with fidelity and energy to the peculiar duty of your age

and circumstances ;—the labour of strengthening, enriching and accomplishing your minds by the various knowledge and discipline of a classical and scientific course. This labor, performed with singleness of intention and constant supplication for the Divine blessing, is the best *immediate* service you can render to God, and the best *preparation* for more extensive and important services, if He should permit you to survive to manhood. The day which requires you to decide on a profession will bring with it clearer light, maturer judgment and ampler materials, in every respect, for a wise decision.

II. I proceed to my second general remark. The choice of a profession should undoubtedly be influenced by a regard to our own peculiarities, whether mental or physical. Non omnia possumus omnes. Divine Providence has evidently intended a diversity in the pursuits and occupations of men, and has indicated this purpose in the variety of their endowments and inclinations. If we could find the very place in the great and complex harmony of human society best suited to our talents, and drop ourselves down,

“Just in the niche we were designed to fill,”

it were, doubtless, a very desirable and happy thing.* This is, of course, just what we should aim at in the selection of a profession. “The sway of nature is God’s working.”† If we discover in ourselves a peculiar aptitude to any particular pursuit, or a strong and permanent inclination to it, accompanied with a high and exquisite appreciation of its best productions and models and a certain *propensity to busy ourselves in it*,—if that pursuit be moral and useful, it would certainly be unwise to row against the current of nature, when the very force of that current would, if yielded to, assist us so much towards the attainment of excellence. Ad quas res aptissimi erimus in iis potissimum elaborabimus. It is sometimes necessary, too, to take a fair estimate of our strength whether of mind or body, and to inquire, as impartially as we can, whether it is equal

* Admodum tenenda sunt sua cuique, non vitiosa sed tamen propria, quo facilius decorum, illud, quod quærimus, retineatur. . . . Propriam naturam sequamur; ut etiam, si sint alia graviora atque meliora, tamen nos studia, nostræ naturæ regula, metiamur. Neque enim attinet repugnare naturæ, nec quidquam sequi quod assequi non queas.—CIC.

† Milton, Letter on Education, to Master Hartlib.

to the labors and the demands of the calling we contemplate.
—Quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recusent.

There is nothing, however, in which we are more liable to be mistaken, than in the estimate of our own capabilities. No certain judgment can be formed of *what we can do* from mere introspection, or self-examination, nor even from the opinion of the most judicious friends.* *Occasion* often reveals powers of which the possessor himself was quite unconscious, and the manifestation of which astonishes his most intimate friends. We can no more call up and muster the energies of the soul and thus ascertain the extent of our intellectual forces, than we can "call to the lightnings and they will say, here we are." It is only *occasion*, *collision*, the presence of a great object, the energy of a deep and mighty principle, that calls up into light and activity these mysterious powers. Even the degree of our bodily strength and endurance is a point which we cannot determine by such a process. Slender constitutions often possess an elastic and durable property, which enables them to outlabor and outlast those of far greater apparent robustness. There are, doubtless, cases of physical disability which amount to a providential interdict from certain kinds of labor. Still it is true, and a highly interesting truth, that those who have achieved the mightiest labors and attained the highest excellence in all the elevated pursuits of human life—in all those pursuits where the mind takes the lead—have, in many cases, been men of extremely feeble constitution. Cicero was, all his life, an invalid, and was obliged to manage and economize his slender stock of strength by the utmost attention to diet and exercise. Lord Nelson was scarcely admitted to an examination by the commission of the admiralty, to whom he offered himself for the place of a midshipman, in consequence of his weak and puny physical appearance, and was, through life, a sufferer from ill health. Baxter was told by the physicians, at the age of twenty-eight, "that he must expect present death;"—yet he survived the prediction, through incredible labors and hardships, for more than forty years. Wilberforce, at thirty-five, was

* A striking example of this is the fact, that Dr. Edmund Calamy, when consulted by the youthful Doddridge on the subject of preparing for the ministry, (his constitution being weak and his circumstances discouraging,) dissuaded him from the attempt. What a loss would the Christian church have sustained, had he followed the advice of his venerable counsellor!

pronounced, by a council of eminent physicians in London, "not to have stamina enough to last a fortnight;"—yet the writings and vast philanthropic enterprises which have obtained for him so just and glorious an immortality were accomplished after that period, and he enjoyed a cheerful old age to nearly fourscore. These are a few examples of eminent men of widely different pursuits. There is, undoubtedly, a sustaining and invigorating power imparted to the body itself, by the mind which is engaged in the animated pursuit of great and important objects. The physical nature proves itself "a proud ally of the moral one," and refuses to shrink under the toils and excitements imposed on it by its glorious associate. To determine our actual strength, and what kind of pursuit it would justify us in undertaking, is, perhaps, the last and most difficult achievement of self-knowledge. While some sanguine and ambitious natures would be tempted to an over-estimate, others, of an opposite temperament, would be prone to shrink from enterprises which they were well capable of. This deliberation, therefore, though proper and necessary, must be allowed to be somewhat precarious, and the extent to which it influences the decision, will always be very much modified by the character of the individual. Many a generous youth, even if a sure alternative were presented to him, would make the choice of Achilles, and prefer a few years of high achievement and memorable usefulness to a long but inglorious life of health and tranquillity.

III. The choice of a profession should be, as far as possible, the result of a calm and unbiassed exercise of *the judgment*.

There is a certain *romantic* cast which the youthful mind is apt to throw over even the gravest subjects which it contemplates; and the same feeling will, of course, influence, to a greater or less degree, its anticipations of its future professional career. Now, I have no wish to disenchant the future of the bright hues of early hope; these feelings belong to your age; and, like all other graceful and beautiful things, they have their utility too; but this is only the case, when their light and ethereal drapery is thrown over principles and purposes of more substantial texture. If the *future* be wholly made up of *romance*, the *realization* will be wholly made up of *disappointment*; and the latter will follow the former in pretty exact proportions. In the pictures which we all draw of

our future life, the colors of *romance* are the first to fade. But it is consoling to reflect, that there are others which retain their brilliancy to the last—which, in fact, derive an improved *warmth* and *richness* from age and time. These are the hopes which we form of life as a sphere of useful and benevolent labor—when we choose our particular occupation and enter upon it, prepared to fulfil the condition of our being, and earn, not subsistence merely, but the power of doing good, “by the sweat of our brow,”—and ready to pay down, in full tale, that *labor* which is the price of every thing worth possessing or bestowing. The toil of quarrying and excavating is not more dull and uninteresting than the preparatory studies which are necessary to found a substantial superstructure of professional acquirement and reputation. I need not add, that it is not more necessary. This will prove to be equally the case, whatever profession you may choose. To master its dry details and elementary abstractions, and to keep up your patience and hope through the close and persevering application which this will require, you will need the aid of principle and the steadily cheering auspices of sober judgment;—for romance will desert you at the first plunge which you make into the *slough of despond*.—Enjoyment you may, indeed, rationally and surely expect—satisfactions richer and more substantial than you even anticipate. But you must drive the share deep into the soil before the ample harvest will crown your hopes. You must climb the hill before the rich and varied prospect will spread itself out before you.

IV. Finally, the choice of a profession should be made on elevated principles and enlarged views of *duty*.

Let us suppose such a deliberation as the following to pass through the youthful mind, when revolving the question of its future pursuit.

“I have before me a life which is short and frail at best—which cannot at the utmost continue beyond a few years, and which may be cut short at any moment. Yet the manner in which I spend these few years, is to determine the character of my eternal state—and probably that of many others. At least, I am assured that I may so spend these years as to win for myself eternal happiness and honor, and may hope to impart it to many of my fellow-men—I find myself entering life too at a period when the powers and

means of benevolent action are vastly augmented—when by various providential circumstances, mechanical improvements and social changes, the whole human race is thrown into one great family, and may be reached in its most distant extremities, by individual influence. A life of faith, and of active, self-denying benevolence may therefore achieve good to which the imagination can set no limits. One thing is certain, it is the path to ‘glory, honor and immortality.’ This is a certainty, and a sublime and glorious certainty it is! Then there are objects connected with the present world and limited to it which solicit me—Wealth, pleasure, fame.—These I cannot be certain of attaining. Many have sought them with powers and advantages far superior to mine—have staked their all upon the race, yet lost it. Suppose, however, that I am successful beyond my boldest hopes. The wealth can be only mine while I live upon the earth—the pleasure exists only so long as the senses which it gratifies—the fame will be valueless to me when I sink into the unconsciousness of the grave. How, then, shall I spend my life? What shall I pursue? That which, though its complete and sublime realization is distant, is yet certain as the word of Eternal Truth can make it; or that which, dazzling the eyes and inviting the grasp by an apparent nearness, has deceived, disappointed and ruined, by their own confession, thousands of its most earnest and devoted votaries? Shall I form my plan of life with a view to the shortest and meanest portion of my existence, or to that which will be conversant with far more exalted objects, and will never end?”

Such a deliberation will conduct you to a decision which you can never regret. If an early death awaits you, how sweet, how consoling the consciousness that you “have done what you could,”—that you have dedicated your *expectations of life* to the service of your God and Redeemer.—He too will accept and reward the offering who said to his servant of old, “thou hast done well that it was in thine heart!” What the world calls an *untimely death* will only be an earlier translation to the service of God in a wider sphere and more exalted society. If, on the contrary, you are spared to maturity, and permitted to finish the usual course of human life, what a career is before you! How great the objects—how godlike the labors of your life—the diffusion of truth, the re-

lief of suffering, the resistance of wrong and oppression and the promotion of goodness and happiness among your fellow-men ! These labors, performed from Christian motives and with Christian instrumentalities (however humble their sphere), are the highest imitation of God and of his Son of which any created being, however exalted, is capable. Great, indeed, is their present reward, in the admiration and love of mankind, the testimony of an approving conscience, and the gratification of the best affections and sympathies of our nature—and *great will be their reward, far transcending not only all merit, but all conception or hope, at the resurrection of the just !*

The various professions and pursuits of human life, when rightly viewed, are only different modes of attaining the same end—mere subdivisions of the great business of man upon earth—to serve God and to “serve his generation by the will of God.” One is conversant in the exposition of law and right and its application to particular cases, for the protection of innocence, the punishment of crime, and the checking of fraud and aggression ;—another is employed in the study of the human frame, and the search into the infinite variety of means and appliances which nature furnishes for the prolonging human life and the relief of physical suffering ;—another in the science and art of government, the skilful management of the vast and complicated relations of men and nations for the upholding of social order, the preservation of peace, and the promotion of a mutually beneficial intercourse ;—another in the exchange of the commodities of different and remote countries, tending, directly, to promote the convenience and enjoyment of human life, and indirectly to the advancement of arts, knowledge, peace, civilization, and (when rightly directed) of Christianity itself ;—another is occupied in improving, varying and multiplying the bountiful products of the earth ;—another in presiding over the periodical press, and thus catering to the moral and intellectual wants of multitudes beyond computation ;*—another in the forma-

* This may, strictly, be denominated *a new profession*. Unknown to the ancient world—scarcely existing, in fact, a century ago, it has suddenly acquired great prominence and importance in our own times, from the universal habit of reading and the incredible speed and facility of transmission to distant places. As society is now constituted, few men possess a wider and mightier

tion by knowledge and discipline of the youthful mind ;—another still, (and surely an impartial judgment must account it the highest and noblest,) in the study of the revelation of God, both in nature and the inspired Word—in the exposition of its truths, the enforcement of its duties, the excitation of faith, love and reverence towards the Author of our being, and, in a word, in laboring with all the motives and influences which can be brought from the present and the future, from hope and fear, for the reconciliation of fallen man to his God, and, by this means, his restoration to goodness and happiness. It cannot, for a moment, be doubted that this is the highest style of human exertion—that these are the greatest objects to which the powers of man or of any created being can be directed. Other pursuits and professions rise in importance and dignity in proportion as they are made subservient to this end. The *direct* pursuit of it, therefore,—the entire consecra-

power of good or evil, than the writer who sends forth his thoughts on the wings of the daily or weekly sheet, to penetrate, alike the closet of the scholar and the cottage of the laborer,—to be read almost in the same hour, in far distant places, and to find their way into the mind, not when it is harnessed for the work of investigation, but when it is exposed, unguarded, to impressions which are not the less deep and lasting because they are sudden and unobserved. The editor has one advantage over all other writers—an advantage which Voltaire used to consider the grand object of an author's wishes—he is sure of *being read*. The exciting news and agitating topics of the day, which a skillful writer, by his very mode of *stating* them can make the means of deep moral impression, either good or bad, are always materials ready to his hand ; and the very nature of these materials increases his power. What class of men are, at this moment, exerting a more wide-spread and deeply pervading influence in fashioning the opinions and institutions of men and communities, than editors ? It is not without reason, therefore, that some of the most highly endowed and accomplished minds of the age have devoted themselves to this profession, in the belief that no other gave them equal opportunities for an extensive and efficacious diffusion of their opinions. And if the energies of a La Mennais or a Steele had been exerted, from the commanding positions which they occupied, under the direction of the Christian spirit, and for the diffusion of Christian truth and morals, (while such a consecration would not at all have impaired, but on the contrary, greatly augmented the interest and power of their productions,) they might have conferred blessings on mankind which would have entitled them to a high rank among its benefactors. There are, indeed, honorable instances, both in our own country and elsewhere, in which the influence of this profession is devoted to the best and highest interests. But, in general, there is no other in which the dictation of party spirit and the tyranny of public opinion have been so extensively fatal to independence and moral courage.

tion of heart, reason and speech to it, with the highest culture we can give to each and all,—is certainly the wisest use we can make of this frail and transitory life, and of the infant powers of an immortal being. Will it not appear such when we come to stand on the verge of another and an endless life? When all that is earthly and temporal is fading from our view and vanishing from our grasp—when time shrinks into nothing because it comes into contrast with eternity, and this life appears to the departing soul only *an entrance to another*—then, to have amassed a fortune, to have risen to the summit of office, power and honor—to have even produced a work which shall be our monument to all following ages, to have enlarged the boundaries of science, to have discovered a new planet or continent, will appear of little moment to a dying man, because *all these results we must leave behind us*. But to have saved a soul from death, to have spent our breath in proclaiming the grace of God to perishing men and entreating them to lay hold on eternal life—this remembrance *will* cheer and comfort our mortal agony, because *all these “works will follow after us”*—we shall possess them in another life—they will be eternal as ourselves. Happy then the youth whose heart God hath touched—who can turn away without a sigh from all that this world offers of great and splendid to tempt his pursuit, and devote his life to the humble but glorious labor of *winning souls to Christ!*

But while this pursuit holds the unquestionable pre-eminence, all are innocent, all honorable. All have been filled by eminent benefactors of the human race. A life of faith and benevolence is not by any means confined to a single pursuit. Many have trodden the strait and narrow way amidst the throng and bustle of secular pursuits. The main thing is a *principle* of sincere devotedness to God.—This will render even secular pursuits holy and religious. It will hallow your personal and professional influence, and render you in all the relations of life the “salt” and the “light” of the world. Of the many paths through life, therefore, which now open before you, select that in which you conscientiously believe that you can best serve God and do good—and you will have made the wisest choice.

But even a wise choice is not more important than a resolved and inflexible firmness in adhering to it. When you have once

made the decision, let the whole energies of your soul be concentrated on your chosen pursuit. Let no indolent shrinkings, no weak regrets, no doubtful suggestions of others, no unlooked for difficulties be allowed to unsettle your purpose or impair the vigor of your efforts. A change of profession is seldom made,—unless under the stern compulsion of ill health, or some other equally dire necessity,—without drawing after it a failure for life. If you do not succeed in this, it is not likely that you would have succeeded in any other. If you have not vigor and perseverance to grapple and overcome the difficulties of one, you would, as certainly, have given out before those of another. With the exception of those pursuits which demand *genius*—where industry not thus endowed is unavailing and mediocrity intolerable, (and these are so remote from the ordinary range of human pursuits, and the destination of those who are born to excel in them is so strongly marked that they scarcely belong to a discussion of this nature)—the sole and universal condition of success is *perseverance*—while the finest talents, and even the most nicely poised judgment (if such a quality can be conceived to exist in a feeble character) are rendered worthless and useless by *instability*. *Levis ut aqua non excelles*. I once knew a young man who, after long balancing between the different professions—(the too manifest cause of his indecision being a most extravagant estimate of his own talents, as if a mistake in depositing so vast a weight as *himself* might endanger the equilibrium of society)—at length fixed upon the law:—but finding, probably, that powers so active and brilliant as his were thrown away upon the dry details of that laborious study, he soon after turned off to another pursuit—and having passed through all the various phases of an undecided and irresolute mind, he eventually became—nothing. Rely upon it, young gentlemen, the most judicious choice will be of no avail to you without decision and heartiness, or, as Robert Hall finely expresses it, “an ardor bordering on enthusiasm,” in the pursuit of your object—and *with* these, not only the spectres conjured up by indolence, but real obstacles will vanish before you. You will eventually *like* what you *approve*. The mind will wear itself a channel, even through the rocky bed of difficulties and natural repugnances. For all its other powers and habits ultimately follow the decision of the judgment and the

lead of the determined will. *Optimum elige—facile et suave faciet consuetudo.*

Young gentlemen, the world is before you, and the path by which you are to accomplish your pilgrimage through it, and the objects which you will pursue, are left to your own choice. But that choice, like all our other free acts, will draw after it a long chain of important and inevitable consequences, both to yourselves and others; consequences, of which, in their remote and complicated relations, you can now form no conception. Do not take so important a step without (not only mature and calm deliberation on your own part,) but fervent prayer for Divine direction, and a filial confiding of yourselves to the guidance of God. He perfectly knows the talents He has given you,—where lies your strength and where your weakness—in what pursuits you will surely excel and in what you will inevitably fail;—and all the scenes of your future life are present to His eye, even to its closing hour. *In His hand it is to make you great.* The wise decision, the firm and unbending purpose, the heroic perseverance, are all His gifts, and it is His prerogative to dispose of circumstances so as to give facility, success and extensive results to your efforts. All success—all greatness is from God. And it is in the power of each of you to become great—greatly good and greatly useful,—(and there is no other real and enduring greatness,)—if you strenuously exert the talents which God has given you, in the way which he has intended, and which He, by His own high and sovereign methods will certainly reveal to you, if you will seek His guidance. Grave, therefore, upon your memory, the encouraging promises of His own word, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him.” “In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.” “Commit thy works unto the Lord and *thy thoughts shall be established.*” Embrace these promises—cling to them, and they will prove to you the realization of that fabled lamp which always shone in the dark, and always afforded a sure guidance in the moment of perplexity.

Let me recommend you, after the peculiar engagements and excitements which attend the termination of your College course have ceased, and before those of the world have begun, to take a season for retirement, for self-communion, for prayer, for recollection of

the past and grave contemplation of the future. That historian was a profound observer of human nature who attached so much importance to the "transitus rerum."* At these points of transition in our lives, the mind is freer, seems to act with a higher dignity, and from a wider range of observation;—prejudice and habit relax their hold, the most thoughtless for a while are grave, we look upon life from a higher ground, and feel more liberty to plan and resolve what is wise and right. If any of you are painfully conscious that your college years and opportunities have been misimproved, now is the time to repair the criminal and deeply to be lamented neglect. I have met with the following appropriate passage in the Diary of a student of Yale College, who afterwards rose to a considerable reputation: it was written about the time of his leaving college. "I look back," he says, "on my college life and find nothing but to deplore—time wasted, duties neglected and opportunities misimproved.—*I resolve to reclaim what I have lost.*" And, by the grace of God, he did reclaim it—as far as it is possible to reclaim four years of lost time. In the operation of so desirable and auspicious a change, such a season of retirement as I have now mentioned is an efficient and powerful instrument. Withdraw the mind from its accustomed biases and from the influence of those associates who have hitherto tempted it to folly and wrong;—look inward and upward, for it is from God and our own hearts, from prayer and self-communion that we draw the elements of self-emanicipation. Such a season of tranquil and unbiassed reflection may prove to you, my young friends, (for it has proved to others,) the beginning of a new life. Many a course of youthful folly and even vice has found its end in such a scene, and many a high and bright career of usefulness has commenced in it!

Now is the time, my young friends, for high resolves, for vigorous and manly efforts,—for a noble violence in shaking off wrong and degrading habits and associations, and for breaking through to a higher range of thought and action. The occasion aids the change. Resolve, in the strength of God, to be wise and good. Resolve that the world shall feel your presence and bless your memory. Resolve that you will leave something done which all

* Tacitus.

time, and eternity itself, shall not undo. This is the high birth-right of the rational mind, that when it expends its energies on worthy objects, its works are as lasting as itself. Labor not, then, for a glory that will wane, or for a gain that perisheth—but for objects which will outlast time; for a glory which will emerge with a purer lustre from the gloom of the grave, and will shine undimmed when the sun himself shall be *darkened in his going forth*.

On the noble monument which the gratitude of mankind has erected to the memory of Howard, there are these words, “He trod an open but an unfrequented path to immortality.” That path is open to you. Press into it, therefore—engage in its noble competitions—aspire to its glorious prizes. The gospel cherishes these high aims and generous aspirings. How paltry are the objects of a worldly ambition, compared with what it offers you as the reward of a holy and benevolent life in imitation of your Redeemer! “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne. I will give him the morning star. I will give him power over the nations. They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever!”

And now, young gentlemen, as it regards this place and these services, we bid you farewell. We shall follow you with our best wishes and our most fervent prayers. We shall observe, with deep interest, the manner in which you acquit yourselves on the great scene which you are about to enter. Your manhood will not, we trust, disappoint the hopes which your youth has led us to form for you. We hope to see you bear yourselves like men in the *melée* of life—reflecting honor on the institution in which your youth has been nurtured, and doing good service to the noble republic which has given you birth. We hope to see you rise to posts of honor and influence in your country and in the church of God, or (what is a higher distinction still) nobly leading out the van of the church, (as some honored pupils of this institution are now doing,) in foreign missions. Wherever you go, may the blessing of God attend you! May He permit us, if it be His holy will, often to meet and exchange our congratulations on this ground, consecrated by so many interesting recollections! But though every earthly wish be dis-

appointed, may we all, through the widely deviating paths of this world, find a common rest at last in His heavenly kingdom ! With these wishes, we “commend you to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you unspotted before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy !”

GRADUATES OF RUTGERS COLLEGE FOR 1841.

Thomas N. Benedict,	<i>Red Hook, N. Y.</i>
Fred. J. Blackwell,	<i>Millstone, N. J.</i>
William A. Cornell,	<i>La Grange, N. Y.</i>
J. J. Cowenhoven,	<i>New Utrecht, N. Y.</i>
Robert W. Garretson,	<i>New York City.</i>
John D. Hawes,	<i>Hector, N. Y.</i>
Samuel J. Hopper,	<i>Bergen Co. N. J.</i>
David McNeish,	<i>New York City.</i>
Augustus C. Miller,	<i>Tompkinsville, N. Y.</i>
Peter D. Oakey,	<i>New Brunswick, N. J.</i>
Joseph G. Roe,	<i>Rahway, N. J.</i>
Charles R. Van Romondt,	<i>West Indies.</i>
John L. See,	<i>New York City.</i>
N. Everit Smith,	<i>New York City.</i>
Cyril Spalding,	<i>Westerlo, N. Y.</i>
William J. R. Taylor,	<i>Bergen Co. N. J.</i>
William Thompson,	<i>New Brunswick, N. J.</i>
Abraham R. Van Nest,	“ “ “
Edwin Vedder,	<i>Glenville, N. Y.</i>
Robert Voorhees,	<i>Princeton, N. J.</i>