

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN HADLEY, ON TUESDAY, DEC. 9, 1817.

AT THE OPENING OF

Hopkins Academy,

IN THAT TOWN.

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BY JOHN WOODBRIDGE,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN HADLEY.

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SERMON.



DEUTERONOMY vi. 7.

AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY UNTO THY CHILDREN.

IN none of the appointments of the legal dispensation was the wisdom of God manifested more clearly, than in the provision for the instruction of all classes, by which the tribes of Israel were distinguished from the surrounding nations. In the neighboring countries, the education of the common people, except in its relation to their particular professions, was accounted an object of little importance, and, in many instances, was purposely neglected, from motives of policy. The learning of Egypt was chiefly confined to the priests ; while the lower orders, doomed to hereditary ignorance, were never animated by the prospect of happier days, for themselves, or their children ; and seemed contented to procure a miserable subsistence by the toils of hopeless servitude.

The Israelites, on the contrary, whatever might be their rank in society, were taught to regard one another as brethren ; and each family was to be a seminary of knowledge, in which lessons of wisdom should be enforced, by the powerful auxiliaries of parental tenderness and authority. Under the tuition of the father, children were to learn the history of their country, and those divinely enacted laws, which served as the basis of their civil government, as well as the guide of their steps in the path to immortality. To furnish the nation with wise men and teachers, the schools of the prophets were established at an early period, and were continued to the Babylonish captivity. These were succeeded by synagogues, which, as they were multiplied to a great extent, furnished all

classes with the means of gaining an enlarged acquaintance with the precepts, ordinances and doctrines of religion. For many years, important benefits, in the dissemination of intelligence, and the principles of piety, resulted to the nation, from the regular services of the synagogue ; and not, until the whole system of theology had been corrupted by vain tradition, did they cease to exert a salutary influence on the minds and morals of the Jewish populace.

The example of the ancient Jews should not be lost on us ; and, since we, like them, are favoured with the word of God, we should imitate their endeavours to promote knowledge and piety. Many means are in our power for advancing these objects ; and it is our duty to employ them to the best advantage. I shall, however, confine myself at this time, to that view of the subject, which is suggested by the occasion.

LITERARY INSTITUTIONS, established on just principles, are among the most potent engines for spreading intelligence in any country ;—and to illustrate their importance to the United States, and the peculiar advantages we enjoy to encourage and promote them, is my design in the present discourse.

Had we no higher aim than national glory, wisdom would dictate the expediency of fostering, to the extent of our ability, the cause of science and learning. Reason distinguishes man from the inferior animals ; and mental improvement raises him above the savage. Unlearned nations may be skilful in war, and astonish the world by their deeds of valor ; but they can hardly be remembered with respect, by succeeding ages, and their subversion is regarded with pleasure, by all the friends of the human race, as the downfall of injustice, violence and barbarity. If literary pursuits be undervalued, though the arts of business may be cultivated to a high degree, a nation can never attain to the summit of fame. In exemplification of this remark, let me refer you to ancient Carthage. Her seamen visited every port, and returned, laden with the wealth of distant countries ; her citizens were the

merchants of the world ; and her armies were long able to withstand the power of Rome itself. Yet little is known of her greatness, save what is derived from prejudiced historians, who had been taught, from their infancy, to execrate Punick faithlessness. Had she been illustrious in letters as she was in arms, her own writers would have perpetuated her glory to the most remote generations ; her true character would have appeared in imperishable records ; and, with her name, would have been associated, in the mind of every scholar, all the sacredness of classical antiquity.

With no poet and historian to commemorate his exploits, the proudest warrior is fated to the same obscurity in his end, with the simple shepherd, whose only employment, from childhood to the grave, is to nourish and protect the flock, that feed and gambol around him.

Had Greece never emerged from the barbarism of her early days, the stories of Hercules and Theseus would be no more interesting to us, than the wild fables of the Sandwich islands ; and her military prowess had long ere this been forgotten. It is in the pages of Herodotus and Xenophon, that we learn to admire her courage and magnanimity ; it is in the epic and the lyric song, that we feel the power of her genius ; it is listening to the thunder of her eloquence, that we attribute, to the ardor of her enterprize, all that is possible to humanity. Her sages have done more, than her generals and her princes, to elevate her character above all contemporaries, and give her a reputation lasting as time.

Rome herself, had she not at last been humanized by letters, would have shone in the annals of nations with scarcely greater lustre, than the barbarians, by whom she was subdued ; and her Romulus and Brutus had slept with the unknown heroes before the flood. The pen of Cæsar was a more potent weapon than his sword ; and to the age of Augustus, Rome is indebted for the splendor, which invests the records of her earlier achievements. While Livy told her

story in honest prose, and Maro spread around it the enchantments of an elegant fancy, her patriots and her soldiers seemed to live again, and to stand on an eminence, covered with everlasting honors.

“ Proud of her sons, she lifts her head on high,
 “ Proud as the mighty mother of the sky,
 “ When, through the Phrygian towns, sublime in air,
 “ She rides triumphant in her golden car,
 “ Crown’d with a nodding diadem of towers,
 “ And counts her offspring, the celestial powers,
 “ A shining train, who fill the blest abode,
 “ A hundred sons, and ev’ry son a god.”

Great Britain owes more to her scholars, than to her kings and commanders, for the reputation she has long maintained among the empires of the world ; it is, most of all, as the friend of virtue, and the patron of science, that the venerated Alfred claims the homage of posterity ; and the island, which gave birth to a Newton, and fostered his growing genius, is named with sincerer respect, than the country of a Marlborough, or a Nelson.

I am far from thinking, that the greatness of a nation depends on the celebrity and influence of a few literary men. If ignorance, with its delusions and prejudices, prevail among a people, their degradation is certainly not the less apparent, because individuals among them arise, to assert, by an industrious application of their talents to the noblest objects of pursuit, the dignity of the human mind. The Athenians were, as a body, ingenious and inquisitive ; and the orations of Demosthenes afford no stronger proof of his own powers, than of the enlightened sagacity of the audience, who could understand and admire these extraordinary specimens of composition. The intelligence of the Swiss peasantry is proverbial ; this, together with their virtue, was, for many years, their security against the inroads of oppression ; and when Switzerland fell, Europe was astonished, and in tears. Scotland is more indebted to her schools, than to any thing else, save her religion, for the enterprize, dili-

gence and manly independence of her citizens ; and if the time shall ever come, when Ireland may claim an equality with her, she will gain the distinction by similar means.

The connection between useful knowledge and morality, is a common, though very important topick. It must be owned, that mental attainments are not necessarily attended with purity of manners ; too often, men are to be found, who employ genius and erudition to recommend vice ; and sometimes, a corrupt literature is one of the most successful instruments in preparing a guilty nation for its doom. Sufficient proof has been given, of the fatal influence of a spurious philosophy, in the contamination of principles, and desperate madness of innovation, which introduced the horrors of the French revolution. Better had it been for the country of Voltaire to have slumbered in the ignorance of the dark ages, than be awakened by the voice of that apostle of sedition and infidelity. Learning is not however responsible for the abuses, to which it is liable ; and we can only say, that the best advantages may be perverted, and become the occasion of extensive mischief.

It should be remembered, that ignorance is not the mother of devotion, or of virtue ; indolence, superstition and cruelty are its legitimate offspring. A well directed education, on the contrary, is favorable to the growth of the best affections of the heart, and the formation of such habits, as exalt human nature. The labour necessary to the acquisition of knowledge, subdues the youthful mind to patience and self-denial ; and the expanded views of the man of letters can hardly fail to oppose some restraint to the indulgence of his propensity to vice. He cannot become completely abandoned, without a violent conflict with his taste, as well as his principles ; and it must be no ordinary effort, which can conceal the deformity of meanness, vulgarity and lewdness, by the graces of sentiment. Yet this must be accomplished, before his feelings can be reconciled to a course of profligacy and

profaneness. These conclusions are justified by experience. Men of the greatest learning, amidst all their foibles, have commonly maintained sobriety of manners ; the triflers in literature, to whom amusement was the great end of reading, and whose revelry of mind, among the pollutions of books, they dignified by the name of study, have most frequently been sceptical in their opinions, and loose in their morals.

It will be found, in general, that nations, in which the means of information are most abundant, and accessible to all classes, have the highest standard of virtue ; their laws are wise, and executed with impartiality ; the habits of their people are social, friendly and respectable. In what parts of our own country, do we find most of civility and order, most of private worth, and of public spirit ? I fear not the charge of local prejudice, when I answer,—in those states, where well regulated schools are most frequent, and learning has made the greatest advances. He is to be pitied for his ignorance, or detested for the depravity of his moral judgment, who can hesitate in deciding between the habits of New England, with all its faults, and those which prevail in the southern section of the Union. Our more enlightened brethren at the south have lately begun to feel this subject ; and, made wise by experience, they have, in many instances, been engaged in devising plans for extending the benefits of education to all the conditions of society.

The utility of learning to the interests of true religion, is a circumstance, which, above all, should recommend it to our patronage. Science is naturally the friend of christianity ; and, whenever it appears in the garb of an enemy, the absurd metamorphosis is to be imputed to the influence of that pride, which no outward means can effectually subdue, and which perverts every advantage to subserve its own designs. Learning invigorates those powers, which are to be employed in the discovery of truth ; and, by multiplying the resources of argumentation, furnishes means for the establishment of the mind in the belief of the

Gospel. To this, we owe our acquaintance with the external proofs of the divinity of the scriptures, which, in opposition to the deepest prejudices of the heart, have often forced the assent of the understanding ; and a knowledge of which, next to the spiritual discernment, peculiar to good men, of the beauty of the word of God, is the best antidote to that licentious sophistry, whereby the principles of the unwary become debased, to the ruin of their character, and immortal interests. To this, must be ascribed much of the comprehension and acuteness of the mental faculties, which are of immense value to the candid enquirer, anxious to separate the doctrines of the Bible from the heterogeneous mass of human opinions, with which they are too often confounded.

The necessity of literary attainments to the Christian ministry, is generally allowed ; and he, who should assume the office of a religious teacher, without some degree of preparatory study, might surely reckon on the contempt, or pity of all his judicious hearers. But it ought to be considered, if learning in a preacher is indispensable to his usefulness, that his audience should have, at least, sufficient information, to feel an interest in the momentous truths he discusses. Extreme ignorance confines the mind to objects of sense ; and it must be by a miracle indeed, that he, who has never been taught to *think as a rational being*, is induced to attend to the sublime subjects of the christian revelation. The most common instances of true piety are among such, as were well educated in their youth ; and, in those parts of America, where intelligence is most generally disseminated, the Gospel has had the greatest success.

The subject before us has special claims to our consideration, from the peculiar form of the government, under which we live. No hope can be more chimerical, than that the liberties of a people may be preserved, without attention to the means of education ; and experience has verified the observation, that, though an illiterate mob may be terrible for a season, and suc-

cessful in tearing a tyrant from his throne, yet, since they are incapable of governing themselves, they must, and *will* have a master. By those, whose judgment is formed by partial representations, and whose passions are their guide, it is impossible that any regular and efficacious system should be adopted, to promote the good of a nation ; and every government, in which such men have an influential share, will be sure to perish by rough handling.

The frequency of our elections, and the numerous departments of office to be filled, render it peculiarly necessary, that there should be among us many individuals of cultivated minds, and enlarged views. A man, without talents, and without information, elevated to authority, though he be upright as Aristides, will be certain to disgrace himself, and dishonor his country, by the weakness and inconsistency of his public conduct. Nor is it of small importance, that those, who have the immunities of electors, should be men of sound and enlightened understanding ; for otherwise, they can never be secure from imposition, and will be in danger, while they intend no evil, of contributing, by their suffrages, to the ruin of their country. The ignorant are ever the dupes of the crafty ; and are more ready to believe the honied tales of sycophants than the sober language of truth.

The extent of our territory, and the rapid increase of our population evince the necessity of that generous intelligence, which, overlooking petty and local interests, can embrace the good of the whole, and comprehend designs, worthy of a great empire. To the want of this, must be principally attributed those mean jealousies, and childish partialities, from which most of our troubles have originated, and which have endangered our national existence. Unless knowledge among us shall keep pace with our physical strength, the time cannot be far distant, when the multitude of jarring opinions, carrying their influence into our public measures, will put us in still greater jeopardy ; and it will not be wonderful, if we follow

the fate of the ancient republics. This event has been predicted by many sagacious statesmen ; and to avert such a doom, no true American can account any means, compatible with honour, too expensive.

Nothing can be better calculated to promote intelligence in the United States, than the establishment of schools, supplied with qualified instructors, and open to all classes. All seminaries of learning, when just moral sentiments, as well as correct principles of reasoning, are consistently inculcated, must be regarded with a favorable eye, by every true friend of liberty ; for there, the men are formed, whose example is to excite a spirit of enquiry in every rank, and who are to guide in the grand concerns of the common welfare. Our colleges are already important instruments in the diffusion of knowledge ; and, were they uniformly regulated and endowed, as they ought to be, their usefulness would be augmented, in a degree exceeding calculation.

Academies have their peculiar advantages. They furnish those with an opportunity of becoming respectable by their attainments, whose pecuniary circumstances, or intended pursuits in life, would not justify the attempt to gain a finished classical education ; and who, were it not for these institutions, would be content with the narrow privileges of the common school. Such seminaries ought to be multiplied, in some proportion to the number of youth to be taught ; and he, who judges of our present necessities, from what would have been sufficient twenty years ago, will, without doubt, adopt a conclusion, widely distant from the truth.

Institutions of this kind, serve, in an eminent degree, to awaken a thirst for knowledge in the rising generation. Many a youth, who, with the benefits of good society, and free access to useful books, would, at home, have been a mere idler, is roused, by the competitions of rivalry, and the judicious praises bestowed on merit, in the school room, to vigorous exertions of intellect, and acquires habits, never to be lost.

of the utmost consequence to his reputation and influence. It will be found true, in most instances, that the information, diffused among a people, is in proportion to the number and character of their schools ; and we rarely meet with a person of decent acquirements, who did not begin to learn, early in life, under the advantages of regular and systematic instruction.

No doubt then can remain, in reference to the expediency of giving encouragement to literary institutions in this country ; and far more than has ever yet been done, ought to be attempted.

It has been said, that, as we are yet in our infancy, little, at present, can be expected from us ; but that, at some future period, we shall probably have the disposition, with the ability, to rival the greatest nations in the world, by our patronage of learning. It is fervently wished, that this prediction may be verified ; and various circumstances have of late occurred, to strengthen our hope of its fulfilment. Yet it ought not to be forgotten, that our necessities are great, and increasing ; that, in a multitude of instances, literary seminaries have become almost useless, from the want of funds ; that, in many places, children are suffered to roam, whither they will, instead of being subjected to the wholesome discipline of the school ; and that large sections of our country, with a growing population, approximate to a state of barbarism. The consequences of neglecting the application of a remedy to these evils, may be more serious than we apprehend ; and no patriot, no good man, can think of them without terror.

Let us not, however, suffer ourselves to sink under discouragement. The situation of our country is not hopeless, if she have the wisdom to perceive, and the magnanimity to pursue her true interests. She has many *advantages* to make herself truly great among the nations, by her liberal patronage of all that is useful and ornamental in society.

She has the benefit of the experience of former generations ; the results of practical wisdom are be-

fore her ; and she may trace to its source, the failure of those projects, which were admired in their day, but have long since sunk into merited contempt.

We have sprung from a nation, whose scholars have not been inferior to any, that ever adorned the theatre of literary glory. We find the best illustrations of the ancient classicks ; the purest examples of modern writing ; and the justest guides, in taste, reasoning and philosophy, in the works of that language, with which we have been familiar from our childhood. This is certainly no trifling advantage : infant nations are generally obliged, in their struggles for improvement, to contend with the rigidity of a barbarous tongue ; and their learned men are principally indebted to people of another speech, and other modes of thinking, than themselves. In such a situation, the progress in knowledge must be extremely slow, even with professed scholars ; and many years, perhaps ages must elapse, before the vulgar language can be so modified and enriched, as to reduce the discoveries of science to the comprehension of the unlearned.

Our enlarged commercial relations, the state of the arts among us, the degree of intelligence which already exists, and the disposition manifested by many to extend favor to literary institutions, are indications, to encourage our efforts in the cause of useful learning.

At a distance from the old world, which has almost perpetually been the seat of war, and possessing sufficient resources within ourselves, we can have little reasonable inducement to engage in those contentions, which may hereafter arise in Europe ; and it will be long, before we can be in any danger from neighboring nations. Here then, in a secure retreat, our academies and our universities may flourish, unmolested by the sound of battle ; and poets, historians, philosophers and divines, instead of victorious armies, may become the glory of our country.

Nor let it be imagined, that we have not the wealth requisite to carry into effect, the designs of benevo-

lence and patriotism ; for if we are without an overgrown nobility, who can find no other employment for their property, than rewarding genius, and endowing colleges by immense benefactions, we have many men of great affluence, and more, whose abundance raises them to independence. I need not here remark on the numberless facilities, we enjoy, for the acquisition of riches ; nor tell you, that we, as a people, have more comfort, and less poverty, than any other nation on the globe. These subjects, you are aware, are too copious to admit of suitable illustration in this place.

Let us rejoice, Americans, in every attempt to advance the interests of literature and piety. When schools and academies arise, on the right hand, and on the left, where our children are to be favored with the means of instruction, by which, many of them will, we hope, be prepared to fulfil, with credit to themselves, and usefulness to their country, the duties of their future stations in the world ; let us give thanks to the God of Heaven, whose mercy endureth forever.

Let us bless Him, my hearers, for the occasion, on which we have this day assembled. By the favor of his Providence, yonder edifice, dedicated to literature, virtue and religion, is happily completed ; and, on the morrow, its doors will be opened to our children and youth, who would resort thither, for instruction and wisdom.

Were the venerable man, whose munificence laid the foundation of this institution, now present, how would his heart swell with gratitude, to the author of every good and perfect gift. But, though he has long since ceased to be an inhabitant of this world, he enjoys, we trust, the rewards of his liberality in brighter regions. To us, it belongs to cherish his memory while we live ; and, after we shall have left these mortal shores, his name will be honored by our posterity. Let it be our main concern, to imitate that piety and benevolence, which adorned his character, that we may at last unite with him in the employments of that everlasting life, which God has promised to his friends.

The prayers of that holy man, will, I hope, be answered, in the important benefits, which shall accrue to this people, and to the church of Jesus Christ in our land, from the establishment of this seminary of learning. Here, may multitudes of our youth acquire those principles, which will prepare them to act a virtuous and honorable part on the stage of life ; and here, may many, while engaged in the pursuit of human science, receive an unction from the holy One, and learn, with all the saints, the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of the love of God, which passeth knowledge. We thank the blessed Spirit, that he has visited in mercy, many of the seats of literature in our favored country ;—may HE condescend to notice this also, and shed his choicest influences, in the hearts of the teachers, and of their pupils. May the HOPKINS ACADEMY flourish in well earned fame, and dispense its blessings on every side, after our voices shall be silent in the grave. May it be a witness of the glory, and participate in the joys, of the millennium.

Ye friends of science, this institution needs encouragement. Though now feeble, it may one day be strong ; and you cannot but wish it prosperity.

Ye friends of Jesus, it claims your prayers. God alone can give success to human enterprizes ; and his frown can disappoint the proudest hopes. Go to your heavenly Father, and fervently entreat him, in behalf of this seminary, that it may be ever favored with his protection and blessing ; that it may become, equally, the nursery of religion, and of learning ; and that, under its auspices, our children, and our children's children may be trained up to glory, honor and immortality. Do this, and you shall not lose your reward ; do this, and, in answer to your supplications, people yet unborn, may be saved from the dominion of sin, and become your crown of rejoicing forever.

Ye who are in the morning of life ; we rejoice with you, that much has been done for your good, by God and man ; and happy should we be, to observe in you

the disposition to use wisely your numerous privileges. Disappoint not, we beseech you, the reasonable expectations of your friends, and your country ; but let your proficiency, in every laudable pursuit, be equal to your advantages, and the lively concern, which others have manifested, in your welfare.

While you have an opportunity, attend, with diligence, to the improvement of your minds, and labour to gain those intellectual stores, a right use of which will make you respectable, through the whole of your future years. The period of youth will soon be past: and, if you shall enter on the scenes of active life, destitute of useful knowledge, you will probably remain in ignorance, exposed to all the reproach and wretchedness which it involves, to the close of your days.

Above all, remember, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ; that, without it, you have little to hope for, here ; and, beyond the grave, NOTHING.

May we all be *wise* for time, and for eternity.

AMEN.