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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

**THE SOCIETY OF THE
ALUMNI OF WILLIAMS COLLEGE,**

ON THE DAY OF THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

SEPTEMBER 3, 1823.

—●●●—
BY JOHN WOODBRIDGE,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN HADLEY, MASS.

HARTFORD :

PRINTED BY GEORGE GOODWIN.

.....
1823.

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FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
1918**

At a meeting of "the Society of the ALUMNI of WILLIAMS COLLEGE," on the third of September 1823:

VOTED, that the President and Secretary of the Society, be requested to present to the Rev. JOHN WOODBRIDGE, the thanks of the Society for his Address this day delivered, and request a copy of the same for the press.

Attest,

C. A. DEWEY, Secretary.

AN ADDRESS.

TO us, who boast of our relation to Williams College, as the parent of our earliest literary hopes, and the generous rewarder of our toils, this day brings with it a thousand fondly cherished recollections. With the festivities of the occasion, we associate the period, when first our eyes greeted these academic walls; the rooms where we studied; the morning and the evening prayer; the recitation bell; the anxious preparations, and the bustling ambition of the examination day; the endeared companions; the social walk; the loved amusement; the anticipated vacation; the glad return; the competitions of scientific diligence, of eloquence, and even of muscular activity; our fears, disappointments, and triumphs in the race of honorable fame; and, to crown all, the mingled emotions of sorrow and of joy, with which we received the last benediction of our Alma Mater, and, with the parchment earned by four year's service in our hand, bidding adieu to the friends of our pupillage, and going forth, weak and solitary, to seek occupation and a home in this wide world. We participate anew in all that gladdened our bosoms, and seem to gather around us, in one interesting group, the well known faces, the

incidents and the scenery, where the elements of our character were formed, and whence that thread of destiny commenced, which, amidst all its diversities of light and of shade, has pervaded, connected, and assimilated the whole tissue of our history. Addressing such an audience, and on such an occasion, I entertain no doubt of their candor and their kindness; and I have only to regret my inability to do justice to that respectful attention, with which, I am sure, they will honor me.

The principles that have ever been inculcated in this seminary, the habits it has fostered, and those visitations of heavenly grace it has peculiarly enjoyed, conspire with my own feelings, to urge the propriety of employing the moments allotted to the present service, on some subject, connected with our interests and our duty, as christians, and as heirs of immortality. Aware that any apology for such a choice would betray my own weakness, and an unworthy distrust of your dispositions and sentiments, I confidently solicit your indulgence to a few remarks *on the obligations of literary men, to embrace with ardor, and to maintain with constancy, the divine religion of the gospel.* To the considerations, which wrest from the most ignorant every plea for hostility, or indifference to the subject, scholars have the superadded inducements of an increased responsibility, proportionate to their facilities of knowledge and of usefulness.

By their intellectual habits and acquisitions, they are eminently prepared for those investigations, which result in the discovery of divine truth, and open to the light of day, the massy and eternal pillars that contri-

bute to its support. It is the very object of science, to train the mind to that power of discrimination, and closeness of thought, which can separate truth from its most essential appendages ; follow it, with undivided attention, through the most intricate mazes of error, even to its source ; and rest there, in all the satisfaction of assurance. Mathematics, philosophy, metaphysics, the subtilties of philology, professional pursuit, and, whatever may, with propriety, be denominated study, aid in that maturity of judgment, and that strength of reason, which, next to integrity of motive, are the first prerequisites to a successful examination of the evidences of Christianity, and the proofs of its particular doctrines. He surely must be unpardonable, who, with these advantages, does not faithfully apply his powers to the subject most worthy of their exercise ; who, patient of research, and cautious in his conclusions, when the time of an eclipse, or the origin of a worthless legend is to be ascertained, yields to discouragement and despair, on the first difficulty that presents itself in his religious inquiries, or rashly gives to prejudice and passion, instead of argument, the high distinction of creating, controlling, and regulating his most solemn opinions, and his most sacred hopes.

To the acuteness and energy, acquired by scientific pursuits, the literary man adds that expansion of intellect, which embraces the field of general knowledge, and reveals the most important sources of proof in support of the claims of Christianity. The gospel, like every thing else of superlative excellency, is seen to the best advantage, in contrast with its rivals ; its majesty and purity are the more conspicuous, when set

in opposition to the littleness and licentiousness of heathenism ; and its salutary influence is the more admirable, when it is compared with the impotency of the mightiest earthly efforts, to cure the wayward passions, subdue the ferocities, and elevate the virtues of the human character. This argument, from comparison, receives perpetual confirmation, and is copiously illustrated, in all the walks of classical literature ; and perverse, indeed, must be the preferences of that man, who, after wandering through the portico, the lyceum, the groves of Academus, or the temples of idolatry, encircled in the magic dance of the muses, or entranced on the height of Olympus *ad coenas Deorum*, does not return, to listen and to worship, with deeper reverence, at the feet of the immaculate Redeemer. There is much, I acknowledge, to admire in pagan genius ; it has founded states and governments, to be celebrated for their wisdom to the end of time ; in its enterprises of aggrandizement, in the compass of its aims, and in the energy of its actions, it has shewn itself above all praise ; it has enriched and adorned all the arts of life ; it has taught us to war, to build, and to enjoy, with classic taste, the blessings of competency and of peace ; it has impressed immortality on the canvass and the marble ; it has given durability to the evanescent images of fancy ; it has embalmed, in matchless eloquence, and undying song, its opinions, its passions, its history, and its fame. Yet, with all its achievements, it has been too feeble to emancipate itself from the chains of superstition and sensuality ; and every experiment has but served to evince the utter incompetency of human effort, to dispel the mists of moral

ignorance, and shed a certain light on the path to heaven. Who can be familiar with its records of talent, debasement, and crime, without a more intense conviction of the necessity and value of a revelation from God, to guide the erring steps of his creatures? From the contemplation of deities, "whose attributes were rage, revenge, and lust;" polluting all the springs of government; all the sources and streams of learning; all the customs, laws, and feelings of social intercourse;—who does not turn, with new emotions of admiring awe, to the venerable exhibition of the divine nature, in the writings of the prophets and apostles? From the mythological heaven, shaken by the laughter, or the broils of a deified rabble, how wide the excursion to that pure region, where sits Jehovah, enthroned in light and in majesty. Had the monstrous fictions of the poets shocked vulgar belief, the works that contained them would have been exploded as impious; but they were received with unmixed applause; and Homer was the theologian, as well as the bard of his country. His machinery, with all its horrid and disgusting features, was sanctified by popular opinion, and all the pomp of worship; and to expose its deformity, was deemed scarcely less criminal, than avowed atheism itself. With facts like these, the scholar, from the very nature of his pursuits, is conversant; he knows how little unassisted reason can accomplish, in the moral improvement of his species; and he must be peculiarly inexcusable, if, with all his knowledge of the consecrated corruptions of paganism, he can withhold the homage of his faith, and the devotedness of his heart, from a religion, as holy in its design, as it is

certain in its proofs. Descending to the minuteness of individual comparison, he feels, at every step, an increasing admiration of the surpassing glory of the religion of Christ. Awful is the thunderer of Olympus; but it is the awfulness of resistless power, bent on purposes of profligate indulgence, low ambition, and revenge. Divested of the passions, with which poetry had arrayed him, the supreme Divinity was exhibited in the schools, as abstract mightiness and knowledge, a mere physical greatness, the object, neither of dread, nor of love to mankind. On the first appearance of the Sun of Righteousness, all these fallacies depart; and a God, worthy of all the glories that surround him, is seen presiding over the destinies of the universe.

The characters approved by Christianity, are as opposite, as they are superior, to all the models of excellence, proposed by other religions. No contrast can be stronger, than that which exists, between the great men and the heroes, nurtured by a fabulous theology, and the noble company of the apostles, confessors, and martyrs of the cross: it is pride against humility—stubbornness against patience—contempt, or implacable wrath, against love to enemies—and patriotism, pursuing its country's glory, at the expense of the rights, the peace, and the existence of all other nations, against that universal benevolence, which recognizes in every man a brother, weeps with all that suffer, and pours out its prayers, and toils, and denies itself, to bless and to save the world. It would be superfluous to remark, that heathen genius has never conceived of such purity and loveliness, as unite their attractions in the majestic Redeemer; his char-

acter is all original ; it is a beam in a starless hemisphere, a single radiating point on the night of human destiny. It is easy, therefore, to account for the wide difference, which has often been observed, between the spirit and sentiments of christian writers, in every department of learning, and of those, who draw all their materials of thought and of ornament, from pagan sources. Not to say, that antiquity furnishes no example of a philosopher, who could think like Newton, or of a moralist, who could elucidate human obligation like Edwards, or Johnson ; we find a proof of the superiority of christian principles, even in those works of imagination, which are deemed scarcely susceptible of influence from religion. The common romance and the novel, with all their fooleries and ravings, would be more contemptible than they are, did they not sometimes, undesignedly, catch a conception, or adorn a character, from the rich treasury of revelation ; and the more splendid fictions of the poet, derive their highest charm, from the evangelical philanthropy, tenderness, and sublimity that invest them. But for the gospel, Homer and Milton might have stood upon the same shelf, equals in morality, as they are competitors for renown ; Young, had been ranked with Juvenal ; and Cowper, perhaps, the enchanting Cowper, had united with Horace and with Ovid, to swell the tide of voluptuousness. I revolt from the thought. Who would reduce to one mass of sensuality, inflammable passion, pride, superstition, and impiety, all that delights us in the aspirings of fancy, and the magic of invention ?

The advantages enjoyed by the literary man, for the cultivation of his taste, are, in various respects,

favorable to the finer and more elevated sentiments of christian piety. With a soul attuned to all the melodies of nature and of art ; seeing what none but himself can see ; hearing what others cannot hear ; living among the elements of the beautiful and the grand, till he feels them blending with all the principles of his intellectual being ; must he not, while disgusted even to loathing by the grossness of an absurd mythology, be melted and transported by the more than earthly loveliness and sublimity, which kindle on the page of inspiration ? To the shame of elegant letters, we are obliged to admit, that their admirers have too often felt with vulgar libertines and sceptics, on the holy subject of religion ; and have even employed that power of exquisite discernment, which should have found its richest enjoyment in the discoveries of the bible, in tracing ideal graces, on the visage of vice and profaneness. These, however, are to be regarded, only, as examples of depraved passion, overpowering the barriers raised to confine and subdue it : it is not always thus ; and many a scholar has found, with Martyn, that the pleasures of taste and of piety, like Thalia and her sisters, are ever hand in hand, reciprocal in the support they afford, and in all the acts of endearment.

“ Learning has borne such fruit in other days,
 “ On all her branches ; piety has found
 “ Friends in the friends of science ; and true prayer
 “ Has flowed from lips, wet with Castalian dews.”

The benefits which Christianity has conferred on science and literature, are not to be forgotten by him, from whom the labors of his predecessors have removed the impediments to knowledge, and who feasts, in

undisturbed seclusion, on "the collected sweets" of centuries. The gospel has given to the human mind, its mightiest impulse ; and the revival of its pure doctrines, was the era of improvement, in all that refines and dignifies the social state of man. By the grandeur and unutterable interest of its subjects, it raised "the soul to heavenly musing," and gave it wing for the highest flights of science ; and, leading to an investigation of the languages, arts, and history of antiquity, for the illustration of its records, it unlocked to its students, the intellectual wealth that ages had accumulated. It was thus that Wickliffe, and Huss, and Jerome commenced that stupendous revolution, which has elevated benighted nations to the dawning glories of a moral day, destined still to advance in brightness, till not a cloud or a shadow shall remain, to deform the face of this beautiful world. Had not the gospel been given to Europe, it would, we have every reason to believe, have continued to this hour, in all its original ignorance and barbarism ; and the energy of a Voltaire, a Hume, and a Gibbon, instead of employing itself against the designs of enthusiasts and bigots, had been expended in the depredations of savage warfare ; in studying the mysteries of Druidism ; or, in celebrating, with all the warmth of devotion, the deeds of the terrible Woden. Such are the obligations of learning, to Christianity ; and it must be no ordinary ingratitude in the scholar, to overlook the claims of a religion, which is the source of his purest pleasures, and prostitute all its gifts to serve other interests, hostile to its spirit and its aims.

Every endowment is from God. The understanding which can receive, the opportunity to pursue, the success to acquire, and the ability to communicate knowledge, as well as all the talents of fortune and of character, are from the Father of our spirits. How can we better evince our gratitude to him, than by consecrating all our acquisitions and influence, to the service of a religion, which he has established, maintained, and declared to be the only refuge and hope to miserable man? Of all, who withhold from Christianity, their warmest affections, and their unremitted efforts, I know of none, who deserve a severer doom, than the unsanctified possessors of learning. Scholars may do much for the gospel; and surely, their labors and their zeal, should bear some proportion to their means of efficient action, and the magnitude of their responsibility. To them it belongs, to bear the decided testimony of their example, eloquence, and wealth, to the benignity and importance of christian institutions, and the objects of christian philanthropy. In a country where learning is respected, their voice will be heard; and the cause must be a bad one, which their patronage cannot raise to popular estimation. Of the agencies employed by Providence, for carrying into successful operation the designs of societies, aiming at the conversion of the world, none have been more influential, than genius and erudition, dedicated to the glory of God, and employing all their energies, to quicken the dormant sensibility of Christendom, to the extent of its obligations, and the intensity of the woes, claiming its commiseration. Need I refer you to examples? I might speak of a MELVILLE HORNE, whose "Letters

on Missions," seemed like the mysterious power of electricity, dissolving, as by a touch, the icy selfishness that had incrust and bound a thousand hearts, where dwelt the hope of heaven ;—of a BUCHANAN, who opened to the world, the horrid deeps of pagan abomination and wretchedness ;—of a WILBERFORCE, whose expansive soul embraces all his kind ; his country's boast ; the benefactor of nations ; whom Africa, bursting her manacles, and lifting her sable hands on high, hails as her deliverer ;—of a BOUDINOT, that venerable patriarch, whose praise—though his silver locks lie low in the dust—will still be heard, from the cottage, where the poor widow weeps over her bible, to the wigwam of the forest, where the bloody Indian lays aside his tomahawk, and learns, at the foot of the cross, to forgive and to bless his enemies ;—of HUNDREDS MORE, whose names, the records of millennial glory will emblazon, when the deeds of earthly greatness shall have been forgotten, or remembered, only, as the exploits of the giants before the flood. Scholars ! the field of christian enterprise is before you ; it is white to the harvest ; enter, and in the foremost rank of the laborers, toil with unfainting diligence, till, dismissed by a summons from heaven, you depart to your rest and your high reward.

Let it not be imagined, that on the sacred profession alone, devolves the duty of defending, by argument and eloquence, the gospel and its doctrines ; it is binding on all, and, peculiarly, on men, accustomed, by all the modes of education and discipline, to the labor of thought and of research. Their simple testimony to the truth, will not be without its effect, on

that numerous class, who want the patience to investigate subjects for themselves, and who are naturally biased in favor of any opinions, which have the support of names they revere. A single individual of reputed wisdom, may often give currency to the most extravagant dogmas, by no other artifice than avowing them; since it is assumed, that his conclusions must have resulted from a full view, and cautious examination, of the whole ground of evidence. Such a reliance on human authority, is certainly a weakness; as the opposite disposition to hold in contempt, all that others have believed, is childish perversity;—yet, it may be the occasion of securing the mind against the first impressions of error, where all the surrounding influence of talents and worth, is pure and salutary. On this principle, is founded the expediency of moral instruction in childhood, before the understanding has attained sufficient vigor to follow the intricacies of discussion, or even to comprehend the more obvious proofs of any abstract proposition.

The adroitness and diligence of the promoters of error, should stimulate all the friends of the gospel, to unwearied labors for its defence. It is well known, that the riches of ancient and of modern science, have been ransacked, all the recesses of literature explored, and all the arts of imposition laboriously studied, to furnish the adversaries of the Saviour to the worse than vandal war, which they have proclaimed. On every side, and in every form, the assault is made. Poison lurks in the amusing pamphlet, and the philosophical essay; it is diffused through the volume of sermons, the religious tract, and the heavy commen-

tary on the scriptures ; it mingles with politics ; and it rolls, deep and unsuspected, with the current of song. The insidious foe bursts upon us in flashes of wit, or melts us by his tenderness, or awes us by his majesty, or stalks before us in the solemn gravity of wisdom. And to whom, but scholars, does it belong, to detect, expose, and restrain him ? For what, have they been furnished with knowledge, and taught to reason, if not to instruct mankind, and vindicate the truth against all its assailants ? Nor can they doubt, whether, in such a cause, their ultimate triumph will be complete ;—sophistry must fall before argument ; misrepresentation must yield to facts ; Omnipotence has promised them the victory.

In the performance of his professional duties, the literary man may find frequent occasions, which he cannot, without peculiar guilt, neglect, of doing honor to the sentiments of the gospel. I refer not here to him, the whole of whose official life is avowedly devoted to the single object of defending the truths, and extending the blessings of Christianity. He must be a wretch indeed, if, with the authority of a messenger of God to men, he overlooks the design of his embassy ; substitutes the dreams of speculation for the religion of the cross ; or, suffers the allurements of this passing world, to divert him from the durable realities of the life to come. It is not the clergyman, only, with whom the principles of religion should be associated and blended with all his pursuits. Happy is that advocate at the bar, with whom the emoluments of his situation are of little worth, compared with the interests of justice and humanity ; who reproves vice

by his example, as well as by his tongue ; who dissuades from contention, and pleads the cause of oppressed innocence and poverty ; who is not ashamed to be singular in goodness, and to prove, by his words and by his life, his sincere attachment to the doctrines, and his humble dependance on the promises of Jesus. The widow and the fatherless shall call him blessed ; and, dying, their tears shall bedew his grave. Precious tribute to virtue ! Lawyers ! may such be the tribute, offered to your hallowed memory. Happy is that Judge on the bench, who, like Hale, remembers the omniscient eye, and dwells on the day, when all his decisions, and the motives which prompted them, will be reviewed by the God of righteousness ; who bows to the authority of revelation as supreme ; and who recommends to the trembling criminal, that blood of atonement, whither himself has fled for protection and peace. Happy is that Physician, who, with the illustrious Boerhaave, carries his devotions into all the experiments and studies of science ; who unites to his prescriptions, the ardent prayer of faith ; who brings to the chambers of the sick, and the hovels of the poor, more than earthly consolations ; and who, in reply to the anxious demand,—

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ;
 “Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
 “Rase out the written troubles of the brain,
 “And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
 “Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff,
 “Which weighs upon the heart ?”—

points the dying sinner to the Lamb of God, bearing the griefs, and taking away the sins of the world. Such a man, seems an angel of mercy ; the fairest

image on earth, of our blessed Redeemer. Happy country ! where such men are the ornaments of learning, in all its professions ; and are loved and honored as they deserve. Happy must thou be in thy institutions and laws ; in their wise administration ; in thy prospects for the future ; and in the glories of the church within thee. Wretched country ! where men of a different character, occupy the seats of influence ; corrupting and corrupt ; weakening thy dearest hopes ; draining thee of thy morals ; and exhausting thy interest in heaven.

ALUMNI OF WILLIAMS ! you will remember, that the seminary, where your opening minds received the first nutriment of science, has ever been pre-eminent for its parental regard to the religious principles, and the piety of its children. You were never left to wander here, without example or counsel, to invite you back to the paths of holiness ; and it has always been understood, that mental culture failed of its purpose, if it did not terminate in the active services of the christian life. Let the lessons you here imbibed, never pass away from your memory ; carry them with you to all the duties of your employments and stations in the world ; press them to your hearts in death ; and to this favored spot, you may turn a grateful eye, after all that is now called magnificent in talents and in fame, shall be found like the pageant of an hour, splendid vanity and nothingness. Let it be thus, my respected friends, that you recommend the sentiments, and the wisdom of your Alma Mater. We gather around her with affectionate gratitude, and invoke the richest blessings on her head. Long may she live and

flourish ; and when we shall be no more, may other generations behold her, venerable in all the lustre of learning and of sanctity ; and happy in the virtues, the honors, and the respectful kindness of her sons. May the union of science and religion here ever remain inviolable ; may the muses invited to these retreats, be those that dwelt with the sage of Horeb ; and the inspiration of genius, be enkindled by the breath of HIM,

“ Who touch’d Isaiah’s hallowed lips with fire.”

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