

1802

THE
Inaugural Address,

DELIVERED IN BRUNSWICK,

SEPTEMBER ^{2^d} 1802,

BY THE REV. JOSEPH M'KEEN, A.M. & A.A.S.

AT HIS ENTRANCE ON

THE DUTIES OF PRESIDENT OF BOWDOIN COLLEGE:

WITH

AN EULOGY,

PRONOUNCED AT HIS FUNERAL,

BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM JENKS.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

THE candor I have experienced from the reverend and honorable gentlemen who compose the boards of trustees and overseers of Bowdoin College, will not, I trust, be withholden on this occasion. It is this confidence alone, which enables me to rise and address you, at a moment when the weight of the charge I have consented to undertake, bears with peculiar force upon my mind.

The organization of a literary institution in the district of Maine, which is rapidly increasing in population, is an interesting event, and will form an important epoch in its history. The disadvantages with which the district has contended from the days of its early settlement, have been numerous and discouraging. The scattered inhabitants were long in a weak and defenceless state: for more than a century the

sword of the wilderness was a terror to them; and they were frequently constrained to lay aside the peaceful instruments of the husbandman, and to seize the weapons of defence. Planted in detached settlements along an extensive coast, and depending on precarious supplies of subsistence from abroad, it was long before they could enjoy the means of education with which some other parts of New England were early favored. Add to this, that deep and strong prejudices prevailed against the soil and climate, by which immigrations were discouraged, and the population of the district long retarded. These mistakes have yielded to the correcting hand of time; and Maine is rapidly advancing to that state of maturity, in which, without being forcibly plucked, she will drop from her parent stock.

While the wilderness is literally blossoming like the rose, and the late howling desert by the patient hand of industry is becoming a fruitful field, it is pleasing to the friends of science, religion, and good order, to observe a growing disposition in the inhabitants to promote education; without which, the prospect of the future state of society must be painful to the reflecting and feeling mind.

In this assembly it cannot be necessary to expatiate on its importance to mankind; whether we consider them as inhabitants of this world, or as destined for an immortal existence in a state of retribution beyond the grave. The page of inspiration teaches, that for the soul to be without knowledge, it is not good; without the knowledge of the duties of his station in life, no man can act his part with honor to himself, or advantage to the community. Without knowledge, a man must be a stranger to rational enjoyment; time will often be a heavy burden to him; and to rid himself of such an incumbrance, he will be strongly tempted to abandon himself to sensual gratifications, which will incapacitate him for manly and worthy pursuits, and render him an object of pity to some, and of contempt to others.

A man, who intends to practise any mechanic art, must make himself acquainted with it, or he cannot expect to succeed. Instruction is surely not less necessary to one who contemplates the profession of law, physic, or divinity; without it, he can have the confidence of none but the ignorant, and he cannot depend even on that. As they have no fixed principles, by which to form their judgment,

they easily fall a prey to the delusive arts of any new pretender to superior knowledge, especially in medicine and theology. When the title to a man's estate is disputed, he generally endeavours to employ an able advocate; when the health of his body only is concerned, he can trust the prescriptions of an empiric: but, if undisturbed in the possession of his estate, and enjoying sound health, he is too often contented with such instructions on the subject of his eternal interests as he can obtain from the most illiterate vagrants, who understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

I would not be understood to assert, nor even intimate, that human learning is alone sufficient to make a man a good teacher of religion. I believe that he must have so felt the power of divine truth upon his heart, as to be brought under its governing influence. But since the days of inspiration were over, an acquaintance with the force of language, with the rules of legitimate reasoning, and especially with the sacred scriptures, which can be acquired only by reading, study, and meditation, is necessary to qualify one for the office of a teacher in the church.

That the inhabitants of this district may have of their own sons to fill the liberal professions among them, and particularly to instruct them in the principles and practice of our holy religion, is doubtless the object of this institution; and an object it is, worthy the liberal patronage of the enlightened and patriotic legislature, which laid its foundation, and of the aid its funds have received from several gentlemen, especially that friend of science whose name it bears. That their generous intentions may not be frustrated, it becomes all to take heed, who are, or may be, concerned in its government or instruction.

It ought always to be remembered, that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be enabled to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true, that no man should live to himself, we may safely assert, that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education, and to qualify

himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good.

The governors and instructors of a literary institution owe to God and society the sacred duty of guarding the morals of the youth committed to their care. A young man of talents, who gains an acquaintance with literature and science, but at the same time imbibes irreligious and immoral principles, and contracts vicious habits at college, is likely to become a dangerous member of society. It had been better for him, and for the community, that he had lived in ignorance; in which case, he would have had less guilt, and possessed fewer mischievous accomplishments. He is more dangerous than a madman, armed with instruments of death, and let loose among the defenceless inhabitants of a village. In one case the danger is seen, and an alarm is instantly given to all to be on their guard; in the other it is concealed, and the destroyer is embraced and cherished by those who are soon to be his victims.

Let it never be imagined then, that the sole object of education is to make youth acquainted with languages, sciences, and arts. It is of

incalculable importance, that, as education increases their mental energies, these energies should be rightly directed. It is confessed, that to give them this direction exceeds the greatest human skill. A Paul might plant, and an Apollos water; to command increase is the prerogative of Deity. But as the husbandman is not discouraged from cultivating and sowing his land, by the consideration, that without the genial warmth of the sun and the rain of heaven, his labor will be all in vain, neither should we despair of success in forming the minds of youth to virtue and usefulness in life, because we cannot command it.

Though the principal labor and responsibility will fall to the share of the immediate instructors, these honorable boards will give me leave to remind them, that, without their prompt and steady support, the instructors will be able to accomplish much less than is probably expected of them.

The volatility of a youthful mind frequently gives rise to eccentricities, and an impatience of the most wholesome restraint; the mildest government is thought oppressive, and the indulgent parent's ear is easily opened to the

voice of complaint; imaginary fears are excited, that the genius of a darling son will be cramped, his spirits broken, the fire of his ambition quenched, and that he will be doomed to drudge through life in a sphere far below that for which nature had destined him. His youthful genius must be permitted to expand by its native and uncontrolled energies; and no doubt is entertained, that, in manhood, his virtues will hang in clusters upon him. I confess, that I am not so much of a modern philosopher, as to subscribe implicitly to this doctrine. In the natural world we find, that without culture, weeds outgrow more useful plants, and choke them; and reasoning from analogy will lead us to suppose, that without restraint or discipline, the mind of a youth will resemble the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding.

It is admitted, that, as excessive pruning may injure a tree, so may discipline, too severe, an ingenuous youth. It is proper to consult his genius, and assist its expansion, rather than to force it into an unnatural direction. But an attention to order, and the early formation of habits of industry and investigation, are conceived to be objects of vast importance in the

education of youth. I may venture to assert, that such habits are of more importance than mere knowledge. It is doubtless a desirable thing to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge; but, in aiming at this, there is a serious danger to be avoided, that of inducing an impatience of application, and an aversion to every thing that requires labor. Could we fill the mind of a youth with science by as easy a process as a modern chymist fills a vial with factitious air, it may be doubted whether his education would be of much use to him. In this connexion, it may not be improper to suggest an advantage arising from the study of what are called the learned languages; it inures a youthful mind to application, and is, in this respect, useful; even if no advantage arose from the knowledge of them. The mind acquires strength and vigor from exercise, as well as the body. We should think a parent guilty of a gross error in the education of his son, if he never allowed him to use his limbs, and appointed a servant to carry him in his arms, or convey him in a carriage. We should be guilty of a similar error in education, if we aimed at making a youth learned without study. It is important, that he should have full employment for the

exercise of his mental powers, rather than be carried in the arms of his tutor to the temple of science. Perhaps I have said more than was necessary, on the utility of acquiring habits of industry and application, while youth are in the course of their education. If the importance of the subject will not justify me, I have no apology to offer; and must transgress a little longer upon your patience, while I declare, that, in my opinion, a youth had better be four years employed "*nihil operose agendo*," in diligently doing what would be utterly useless to him in life, than in light reading, which requires no thinking.

If habits of application be of so much importance, it is desirable, that all concerned in the government and instruction of the college should concur in enforcing subordination, regular conduct, and a diligent improvement of time.

Give me leave then, gentlemen, to invite your zealous co-operation with the immediate instructors in ordaining, and executing, such laws and regulations as will be likely to keep our students, during their residence in college, as fully employed as will be consistent with their health. Employment will contribute not

a little to the preservation of their morals, the prevention of unnecessary expense, and the preclusion of pernicious customs, which, once introduced, cannot be easily abolished. The importance of uniting our efforts to effect these salutary purposes cannot escape the notice of a reflecting mind. Should we be so happy as to succeed in forming a number for usefulness in church and state, we may expect our numbers to increase, when more ample accommodations and means of instruction will be necessary.

And now let me entreat all good men here present, who wish to see their fellow citizens enlightened, virtuous, free, and happy, to exert the portion of influence which they possess, in favor of this infant institution; and to unite in fervent supplications to the great Father of light, knowledge, and all good, that his blessing may descend upon this seminary; that it may eminently contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge, the religion of Jesus Christ, the best interests of man, and the glory of God.