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1831

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ADDRESS,

DELIVERED TO THE

GRADUATES OF RUTGERS COLLEGE,

AT COMMENCEMENT

HELD IN THE

REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH,

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

JULY 20, 1831,

BY PHILIP MILLEDOLER,

PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

Rutgers Press—New York:

WILLIAM A. MERCEIN, PRINTER, 240 PEARL STREET.

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July 20th, 1831, New Brunswick.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Many of the Trustees of Rutgers College, having expressed their high approbation of the address delivered by you this day, to the graduates, and wishing to see it in print ; have appointed the undersigned a Committee to make a respectful application for a copy of the address for publication. Had not the Board adjourned, the application would probably have been made in a more formal manner.

JACOB R. HARDENBERGH,
JACOB BRODHEAD.

GENTLEMEN,

I have received your polite application for a copy of the address delivered yesterday to the Graduates of our College. If you think its publication will be useful, the manuscript is at your service.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

PHILIP MILLEDOLER.

*Rutgers College, New Brunswick, }
July 20th, 1831.*

JACOB R. HARDENBERGH, ESQ.,

REV. DR. BRODHEAD.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN GRADUATES :

THE period has arrived at which you pass from our halls, to enter upon a new course of action. You will soon be engaged in various pursuits, and in more immediate preparation to act your parts in the great drama of life.

There has never been an era, perhaps, in the history of the world, more deeply interesting than the present, or more pregnant with extraordinary events.

The day in which we live, is indeed in science, in politics, and in religion, most eventful. The whole world appears to be more or less agitated. The population of Europe is heaving like the waves of the ocean in a storm.—The call for

reform, in many of its ancient governments is loud, extended, and extending. In others the elements of change are secretly, but powerfully operating. A crisis in the existing governments of the old world, appears to be approaching, which may shake thrones, and constitutions, and religious establishments to their base. To this state of things, our country has perhaps largely contributed. The experiment is now being made in these United States—whether a great nation—covering a vast extent of territory—with, in some instances, conflicting interests, has wisdom enough, and virtue enough, to maintain its republican institutions,—and whether the religion of the Bible, supported by its own intrinsic excellency, and the providence of God, can exist without legal establishment.

As Americans, we firmly believe in the affirmative of these questions. The experience of the country, since the Declaration of its Independence, and especially since the adoption of the federal constitution, is altogether favorable to this view.

Parties have existed, and will always exist in free states, but the agitation they produce, if not too violent, purifies the political atmosphere and contributes to the general health.

Local, and general interests sometimes interfere with each other, but such collisions exist under every form of government, and the calm reflection of a reading and intelligent people, will soon convince them that the advantages of the republican and federative systems, immensely outweigh their partial inconveniences.

The freedom of the press, as established by law, though sometimes abused to licentiousness, is nevertheless the *great palladium* of our liberties. The moral and religious information diffused by this, and similar means, through so many channels, in every part of our territory, bids fair, by forming an intelligent and virtuous community, to extend and to perpetuate our national greatness. The progress of science and the arts, and especially of the fine arts amongst us, is almost with-

out a parallel. In architecture, in ship building, in manufactures of every description—in painting, printing, engraving, how rapid has been our improvement for the last twenty years. The facilities which have sprung up to lessen time and distance, and consequently to promote intercourse between distant parts of our country, and to give a cheap and easy outlet to market for the surplus of our agricultural and mechanical productions, must strike the most inattentive observer.

The legislatures of many states of this confederacy, have done themselves immortal honor, by patronizing public schools, and encouraging the general interests of literature.

Conscious of the close connexion of science and liberty on the one hand, and of ignorance and slavery on the other—they have adopted the enlightened aphorisms—that no nation can long be free, that has ceased to be virtuous—and that to be virtuous, it must necessarily be intelligent. To perpetuate the liberties of their country, these

patriots have discovered no surer or shorter way, than that of extending useful information, and of leavening with it the whole mass of our population.

The aristocracy of blood and wealth, is fast passing away, and we are persuaded that no other will be tolerated amongst us, but that of talent and of virtue. This is the aristocracy, if so it may be called, which God and enlightened men delight to honor, and the only one that will take root in the United States of America.

These are the only stars of nobility, that can either now or hereafter adorn our statesmen, our civilians—our commanders by sea and land—our physicians, and divines—and graduated by these, they will either stand high or low on the roll of our national glory.

If we are true to ourselves and to our own principles, it cannot be otherwise—for freemen must act upon the rules, that greatness shall be

tested by usefulness, and that honor shall be measured by virtue. A state of slavery, indeed, is unnatural to man. He was created free, dependent only on that sovereign God, in whom all his happiness is centred. Despotism and slavery are the legitimate offspring of sin, and the mind can no more become reconciled to them, than the body can be inured to the action upon it of a consuming fire.

The experience too of ages has shewn, that in matters of religion, the soul cannot be fettered.

As human laws cannot mould the understandings of men, it is impossible that they should coerce the conscience. The Jesuits attempted it and failed. The Inquisition in Spain was the hope of a tottering church, but instead of retarding, it rather accelerated its fall.

What power or craft can resist the force of public opinion? When roused into action by oppression, enlightened by experience, guided by

wisdom, and conducted by valor; it can be arrested by no arm but that of Omnipotence; it can be controlled by no voice but the voice of God.

In civil concerns our nation is free. In religious concerns it is also free. And what thus far has been the result of experience? Has not God in our land, fulfilled his own promise, and supported his own cause? Has religion, unproped by tyrannic influence, expired? Far from it. In no country upon earth is its attitude more *commanding*. It stands in its own lovely, unrivalled, and untrammelled majesty. It is supported by the mighty and spontaneous action of a free people—and this tree of life, transplanted by our pilgrim fathers in a genial soil, has not only lived, but its branches have spread wide, and its roots have stricken deep, and it has constantly yielded its perennial blessings, and its leaves and its fruit are for the healing of the nations.

If we examine the map of our country, we shall perceive an immeasurable field opening to the

future labors of the patriot and philanthropist :— and if we look at our benevolent institutions, we shall see the incipient means at least of entering upon these labors with success.

If it had been asserted a few years ago, that our American population would soon be obtruded to the shores of the Pacific, it would have been considered as an idle tale. But the supposed chimera begins to fall not only within the circle of probability, but of absolute reality. Bordering on the Asiatic continent, who can describe the effects of such a population upon that continent. What openings for future enterprize, what noble efforts, what happy changes in morals, in religion, in science, and in government, are suggested by the wide—the magnificent—and almost boundless prospect that here rises to our view.

With Africa we are already connected. By one of those grand and wonderful movements of the providence of God, by which he brings the

greatest good out of the greatest evils,—Africa may soon be regenerated by her own sons, in the widest, highest, noblest acceptation of the term. The genius of African emancipation, appeared amongst us many years ago, in the monitory pleadings of an amiable and retiring class of our fellow citizens; *now* it appears embodied, in a more imposing form, in the existence and labors of the American Colonization Society. Second to none in the grandeur of its objects, and combining as it has always done, talent, patience, and perseverance, it merits, and will eventually receive, the liberal support of all good men. This Association unrolls the Declaration of American Independence. It holds up to view the great principles for which our revolutionary worthies fought, and bled, and died. Principles so incorporated in the constitution of these United States, as to stand out in bold relief—so presented as to be conspicuous to every eye. No wild or overbearing spirit is exhibited in their appeal to their country—no array of the North against the South—no proud

pretensions to superior virtue—no bitter revilings: The cause, in their view, is too great and too holy to admit of such degradation. Their appeal is strictly Christian and American. It is addressed to our judgment—to acknowledged principles—to humanity—to religion. There is no concealment of its objects—it is African emancipation of the body and of the mind that is contemplated.—It seeks to erase a deep stain from the American character—to dissipate a cloud hanging over us, which cannot be viewed without shuddering—and to accomplish that for which the Omnipotent Saviour of the world offered up his life on the ever memorable day of Expiation. It may be a species of enthusiasm in the speaker, but I think I see the Sun of Righteousness rising upon Africa, and pouring its cheering rays upon the hamlets of myriads of happy beings. I think I hear the voice of millions calling to their fellows and saying—“arise and shine, for your Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is arisen upon you.” Can I be mistaken? Emboldened by prophecy I repeat it—Africa will be regenerated.

To the projectors and patrons of this noble work, she will rear her future monumental pillars : but their most glorious monument will be the happiness, here, and hereafter, brought by their means to the minds and hearts of countless myriads of her now hapless population.

In adverting to the future prospects of our country, shall I point to its free schools ; its stationary Sabbath schools, and those moving to the west ; its temperate societies ; its associations for extending the gospel ; its churches every where rearing their spires ; diffusing their light ; and pouring their moral health into the fountains of society ! How blessed—how venerable—how animating is the scene ?

It is at this time, and under these circumstances of your country, of the church, and of the world, that you, beloved youth, are about to enter on the field of action. Previous to our parting on this occasion perhaps to see each other's face no more, permit me to present you with a brief

outline of the course you should pursue, and to offer some reasons why you should pursue it.

And first of all, as first in importance, see to it, that you are reconciled to God; put yourselves one and all, under the protection of that Arm which defends with resistless power, and sustains with untiring care. Be assured that for the want of piety, no talents, however brilliant, can compensate,—no achievements, however splendid, can atone. To be called good, and great, and honorable, without it, is bitter satire—senseless, horrible mockery.

If the whole vail could be rent, that conceals the retired acts of him, who was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his country,” it would be found, that the great principle which blessed his public efforts, and crowned his private character, was, the fear of God. You will easily perceive the broad line that divides fame like his from that of a Sylla or a Cæsar. His course was not merely that which commands

admiration, but which fixes and rivets the noblest affections of the soul. This is undying fame.

Next to the fear of God, let me charge you, my young friends, to guard your moral character. Though reputation is not to be your idol, it nevertheless claims your solicitude. Popular favor indeed is in some instances like the flux and reflux of a wave, and the sternest integrity may not always shield you from the envenomed tongue of the base calumniator; the “*Mens Conscia recti*” however can bear it, and will eventually triumph over it. But to be shunned by the virtuous part of the community, and to meet the slow finger of scorn, when we are conscious of having merited it, is a very serious calamity. Remember also, that a spotless vesture may easily be tarnished, and that the stain of moral character is indelible. Consider your character, then, not as estimated by fools, but as judged of by wise and good men, as a sacred trust committed to your vigilance, and as a precious legacy to be handed down to your posterity.

As closely connected with the care of reputation, be diligent in business.

That in so many occupations of life, so few become singularly eminent, is owing not so much to the want of talent—or, to unforeseen and inevitable hindrances,—as to the want of application of those talents, arising from indolence, from the love of pleasure, and from the refusal to economize time, and apply to the severer duties of our calling.

Genius and talent lay the foundation of eminence, but industry alone can successfully carry up the superstructure.—This is true in arts, in arms, in science, and even in the holy interests of religion.

The heathen placed the temple of their honor upon a lofty eminence. The road to it they described as steep, and rugged, and the temple itself as extremely difficult of access; but this, said they, renders the achievement more illustrious, and the triumph more complete; none might hope to attain to that summit without great decision of character, manifested in self-denial, in fortitude, and in laborious perseverance. But turning from fables and allegories, we are warranted in asserting, that to attain to that honor that cometh from God, these qualifications are absolutely indispensable. “He that overcometh shall inherit all

things," is inscribed upon all the banners of Him who hath a name written upon his vesture, and upon his thigh, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Let me intreat you also, and especially such of you as shall turn your attention to scientific pursuits, to labor for the advancement of sound literature in our land. You know its worth; as an act of gratitude then for what you have received, promote its interests. The ungenerous, and envious, have attempted on this point to shade the American character—be it your care to redeem it from unmerited obloquy.

As citizens of a free state, remember that you have rights most sacred, to cherish and defend. Let your political creed be modelled after the constitution of your country. With a holy care, guard, and perpetuate its union. Let your attachments be rather to principles than to men. Support with firmness such men, as by the fear of God, by their public services, and inviolable attachment to their country, merit its esteem. The observance of these rules will preserve you from that disgraceful vacillation in public concerns,

which is produced by weakness or selfishness, and which every man of good sense, and sound principle, will never cease to deplore.

Finally, to such institutions of the day, as shall serve to promote true learning, and wholesome action in church and state, give not only your undivided assent, but also a portion of your time, of your influence, and of your pecuniary means, and especially to such as diffuse abroad, and perpetuate the truth as it is in Jesus. *That shunning* the haunts of vice, and the allurements of sinful pleasure, you may always be found associated with good men, in all good and noble deeds, reflecting honor upon the guides of your youth, your connexions, and your country, is our fervent prayer.

Our eyes and our best wishes, will follow you in future, as in time past, with deep solicitude.— And now, commending all, and every one of you, to God, and to his grace—in the name of my associates, and in my own, I bid you farewell.

New Brunswick, July 20th, 1831.