TRINITY COLLEGE

COMMEMORATION SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE COLLEGE CHAPEL,

DECEMBER 15, 1838,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM WHEWELL, B.D.

FELLOW AND TUTOR.

DEDICATED

TO

THE MASTER,

FELLOWS, AND SCHOLARS

OF

TRINITY COLLEGE,

BY THEIR DEVOTED AND AFFECTIONATE SERVANT

THE PREACHER.

SERMON,

&c.

HEBREWS III. 13.

Exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day.

In this as in other respects, the precepts of our Divine Master and his inspired followers are most wise and kind;—that they do not command us each to sustain his better feelings and hopes by the solitary strength of his own soul alone; but they direct us to assist each other in this task by mutual converse and exhortation. If we were left each to himself;—if we stood apart from each other, with no recognition of a common interest and common sympathy in the great ends of our being; it might well be that all of us, in some dark or some thoughtless moment, might find our convictions waver, our strong resolves bend, our bright hopes grow dim, our patience fail, our love wax cold. But instead of this, we are bidden to exhort one another: and the cheering and warning voice of a brother, thus heard in exhortation, may dissipate the brooding shadows, and restore us to our better selves. But still more;—even when we feel no such trouble of the spirit and sinking of the heart; when all participate in the same feelings and affections; when like thoughts are passing through the minds of a whole society, and

need but to be expressed, to be cordially assented to by all;—still more, under such circumstances, is it a gracious and gladdening command that we should exhort one another; that some one should be appointed, by some convenient rule, who may give a voice to the common sentiment; may utter reflections such as all may acknowledge for their own, or at least may admit as reasonable and fitting; that some one, impelled and sustained by the responsibility of such an office, should endeavour to say, in however inadequate a manner, a word in season.

And as the general commands of the first teachers of our faith direct us to such a course, the special arrangements of the institution to which we belong, urge it upon us in a more peculiar manner. For we, who continue, in our maturer years, to belong to and abide in this christian community, are called upon by its ordinances, on this and on other occasions, to offer, in this sacred place, a word of exhortation, each in his turn to the others. The various solemnities of the christian year, and the sure and constant progress by which one year follows another, bring to us in succession such tasks as I have now to execute; invest us for a time with the office of monitor; make it our place to endeavour "to provoke you to love and good works." Above all, on this day it is our business to invite you to the love and the good works, which have for their object this community in which we live, this institution of which the interests are committed to our hands, this family of which we are members. We stand here, as many have for centuries before us stood, as many others, we trust, of generations yet unborn, shall hereafter stand, to remind you of the blessings

bestowed on and through this College; perhaps to point out grounds why we may admire and rejoice in its fortunes; but also to speak of reasons why we should be earnest in performing the duties which our relation to the society imposes upon us. He who thus for a passing anniversary has to preach the claims of this College, may well feel that there is something solemn in such an office, by which he is called upon to take his place, for a brief and transitory moment, in a succession extending through ages, and dealing with the interests and character of a body which survives so many generations of those who are the organs of its utterance. The house to which we belong stands stedfast from century to century; but we who are for the time its ministers and representatives pass rapidly away, like the leaves of the forest. One race succeeds another, as youth rises to manhood, and manhood declines into age: and every return of this occasion reminds us how little share we have personally in the permanence of which we love to boast as a body. Those whom we have been accustomed to look upon with regard, and listen to with delight, are smitten down upon the bed of sickness; and one by one, sooner or later, melt away from among us. The voice that is now lifted up in your service will, in a few years at the most, be heard no more in these walls; and other tongues than ours shall discourse, and other hands shall labour, and other heads shall busy themselves, on behalf of that body which we now so fondly identify with ourselves. But which of us gathers from such reflections any other lesson than this;—that while we are yet here, while time and power, while thought and voice are granted us, we should use the

gifts to the honour and service of the gracious Giver; and, as one main part of such a lesson, that we should employ those faculties in animating each other to such labours, and such a frame of mind, as best may further the purposes of this society, by which we are connected with each other, with the past and with the future. If our time here be short, the greater is the reason why we should use it well. If no revolutions of years perhaps may again bring back this office to us, it well becomes us to discharge it with a serious faithfulness. To us the injunction of the Apostle in the text comes charged with a peculiar significance: "Exhort one another, while it is called To-day."

The occasion which now assembles us, the commemoration of those who have benefitted and those who have graced this College, might perhaps to some persons appear to furnish occasion of pride. For assuredly it is no poor or ignoble company with which we are thus led to associate ourselves;—no pale or scanty rays of glory are they, according to the estimate of human vision, which beam from the laurelled brows of our predecessors. Of great men who have been sent upon earth, the foremost for acute and penetrating intellect, for deep and comprehensive thought, have moved familiarly through our courts, and worshipped habitually within these walls. And with these, no small company of those who, engaged in active life, have swayed the minds of others; and a sacred band of those who have discharged a far more precious service, studying the commands of God, and making them better known to men. And if the powers and gifts of these our ancestors descended to us by inheritance, and became a part of our own means and

ability, we might well rejoice; and might be—not indeed proud, for pride is not the passion which such endowments inspire,—but glad, that such noble talents were committed to our trust. But when we look back upon the former times and former tenants of this College, may we not rather feel, how vast the disparity is which separates us from them; how little fit we are to stand in their place; how unworthy to support the name which they have borne!

Who among us is so extravagant as to imagine that men in future times shall speak of us as we now speak of them? A few years ago it chanced that journeying in a remote part of this land, I found the tomb of one who had been in former days a member of this our household, and a dweller within its walls. And on the funeral stone it was inscribed that the time of his abode here was that of Barrow and of Newton. Those names were, even in their own day, taken as the marks of a great epoch; while we must reckon *our* years, not by annals in which other names are placed as the successors of theirs, but by measuring our distance from them. And if we have ceased, not only to resemble such men in our powers, but to share in the spirit with which they pursued their course;—if we can scarcely comprehend the writings on which their fame rests;—if we think it much to pursue feebly, scantily, and for worldly purposes, some one branch of those studies which they, with unquenchable energy and generous prodigality of labour, followed over the whole field of literature and science;—if we are impatient of intellectual exertion and constraint, and rebellious against that training of the intellect by which we become capable of understanding, at least,

the labours of their minds;—if any part of this be so, we may well acknowledge, that we have, in the recollection of such names as have been mentioned, small cause for exultation and pride.

In truth, we then only draw, from these and the like recollections, the proper lesson, when we allow them to teach us, not pride, but humility. That lesson lies at the threshold of all genuine excellence. Without that temper, our weaknesses and defects are not only manifest, but ridiculous. And so, without doubt, those persons have constantly felt, who have been best able to comprehend the real merits and achievements of the most gifted of the men whose names stand on our records. Those who have most fully meditated on the profound reason, the wide research, the sure sagacity, the pure aims and steady purposes of the great men of the past, have risen from the contemplation with reverent, not with exulting minds. They have felt awed, as brought into the presence of superiors; not elate, like some weak man unworthily admitted into an illustrious company. Far from us be it, to allow any thought of pride or self-complacency to arise in our minds on account of any former merits or excellencies of the society to which we belong. We can only feel that such things increase the weight of responsibility which rests upon us, not our ability to bear it. They elevate the standard with which we ought to compare ourselves, but they make us conscious how far we fall below its full measure.

To all men of clear and sober minds, any lustre which may have adorned this College, any reputation which it may have enjoyed, is a matter of grave reflection indeed;—a thought to animate and point

their exertions, to dispel all levity and indolence; but assuredly not to inspire any overweening self-opinion, or insolence of spirit. If such dispositions arise in any breasts, it must be in those of the most thoughtless and ignorant only:—of those who, full perhaps of the new pleasure of the admiration of intellectual greatness, are yet so unaware of its real nature, that they deem they may at once, without merit or labour of their own, expect to share in the superiority which it bestows;—who imagine that the deference which men willingly pay to excellence, when it appears with its genuine attributes, may be claimed by all who stand within the circle in which it has dwelt. There is a satisfaction, it seems, for light and vulgar minds, in the persuasion that they possess some title in virtue of which they may look down on those around them;—may assume that, although untried themselves and unapproved, they have acquired a latent power of judging of what is good and bad;—may deem that a few depreciating words from their lips, destroy at once the merit of the patient labours and disciplined exertions of all who belong not to themselves. But we need not stop to point out how idle and shallow, how inexperienced and foolish, this temper is;—how far different is the tone of thought of those who have really engaged in the successful exertions of the mind or the grave researches of solid learning. To the genuine student, of whatever kind of knowledge, every one who has given his strength to similar pursuits is a friend and a brother. And narrow indeed must his views be, and scanty his progress, who has not yet advanced so far as to discover, that in every quarter where there are earnest students and lovers of excel-

lence, there are persons to whom he must look with deference and respect;—acknowledging his own inferiority, and perceiving, with humiliating clearness, that a long series of strenuous efforts and laborious vigils, not the contagion of the excellencies of wiser and more accomplished persons among whom his lot may be cast, is requisite to make him feel himself,—not the superior,—but the equal of those whom the conditions of a liberal education place about him as his rivals and fellow students.

But passing over these possible follies of youth, which, if ever they occur, the sobering influences of age and of action must soon expel, let us look at our own position and duties;—at the claims of this our fostering mother, beneath whose sheltering wing we live. For assuredly she has claims and we have duties. We are not here that we may live for ourselves alone. We may not persuade ourselves that we have nought to do but to repose and to enjoy;—that our sole business with the concerns of this our abode is to cull from them what may best minister to our comfort and caprice. And we, especially, who are not, like the rest, transient sojourners here, but are connected with this our home by closer and more lasting ties, and have made it our fixed habitation; we may not forget that this body looks, and has a right to look, for such labours, such a spirit, such a regulation of our conduct, as may enable it to answer the ends of its institution, not for our time only, but from age to age. We are not permitted to consider ourselves as those whose task is finished; whose labours are over; who, in their season, with strong arm and sharp sickle, have reaped the harvest, and may now sleep upon the sheaves. To

none among men is such a lot assigned, and least of all to us. All have an allotted sphere of duty, which includes the regulation of their internal affections, as well as of their outward deeds. This our family claims from us our service, not in formal acts only, but a ready and habitual devotion of our thoughts to its interests;—a willing regard, ever watchful to discover how its aims may be furthered, its spirit sustained, its perils averted. It is our business to exclude and repress, as far as may be, even all semblance of evil;—all wickedness and temptation, waste and excess, recklessness and riot. It belongs to us, to all of us, to exercise a mild but unrelaxing superintendance, which may sober and restrain the levity of the thoughtless. If we refuse to do this, if we indolently or weakly neglect the functions which our position assigns to us, we unavoidably erect the caprice and self-will of others into masters over us; and, abdicating an authority, willingly acknowledged because obviously just and salutary, we encourage assumptions the most wanton and foolish, the most inconsistent with the constitution of a place of instruction and discipline. For such objects it becomes us to be ready with our exertions, and, if need be, with our sacrifices. Above all it is fit for us to be ready with our *small* sacrifices; for, these duly paid, the larger will seldom be needful. It is for us, by mutual kindness and forbearance, by such habits of intercourse as become members of the same family, by bearing each other's burthens, by sympathising with each other's joys and sorrows, to inspire a mutual confidence with regard to small matters as well as great, and thus to diffuse a social sunshine through the atmosphere of our courts and halls.

While I say these things, I know that I only express the habitual conviction of those who hear me; and that the only fear is, lest I should seem to be asserting that which no one doubts, and urging that which is already present to all your minds. But with the feelings which here prevail among us, how can he whose task it is, on such a day as this, to exhort you, hope to find any train of thought which shall possess the grace of novelty. When we, on such an occasion, speak of the glories of this our home, we suppose not, in so doing, that any of its children have forgotten its splendours: and when on the like occasion we dwell upon our duties, just as little do we admit the thought that any are unmindful of those, or careless in their fulfilment. But how can we more profitably employ the opportunity thus put in our hands, than by impressing upon our own mind and upon yours those great maxims of our conduct with regard to our society, upon which its welfare and credit essentially depend, and which can never be too deeply engraven in our breasts or too constantly present to our thoughts.

But while we thus make this day the occasion of calling to mind the principles by which we may best guide our conduct in smaller matters, let us not neglect to turn our attention to a wider field;—to considerations which do not affect merely the details and the temper of our intercourse with each other, but the great purposes of our institution, and the offices which we have to discharge in the social system of our country. What are those purposes? In one word, our office is Education: but to distinguish that form of instruction which is our peculiar concern, from the various other modes in which, in various conditions

and circumstances, the youth of this country are trained, we term ours peculiarly and emphatically a *Liberal Education.* And what is the leading character of the idea which we thus endeavour to convey? Various, perhaps, in various minds, and vague, it may be, at best, still this, I think, all will feel to be implied in the phrase;—that those who are partakers of such an education are to be made to participate in the influence of all the development and progress, the refinement and enlargement, to which the human mind, in its happiest and most favoured seasons, has attained. It is not because any one is profoundly versed in the records of ancient learning, or because he is familiar with the discoveries of modern art or science, that we deem him liberally educated. It is because he knows, of ancient literature, that which enables him to understand and to sympathise with those noble efforts of thought and imagination, by which Greece and Rome became, and have continued up to the present day, the mistresses and models of the civilized world: and again, because he has accompanied the course of those more recent triumphs of a severer intellectual power, in virtue of which the last two centuries must for all future ages continue to be the leaders and teachers of all nations in the knowledge of material nature. A liberal education is that which, so far as the progress of taste and thought and real knowledge are concerned, connects the past with the present and the future. And those who enjoy the inestimable advantages of such an education are the instruments, graced and honoured by their office, as well as by their possessions, of diffusing through the present race of men, and transmitting to the next

generation, all the best consequences of the intellectual exertions of man, from the first dawn of letters up to the present time. Happy and privileged beings! For them the historian reflected and laboured that he might deliver to posterity an imperishable treasure. For them the poet breathed sweet strains and lofty thoughts into his undying verse. For them the mathematician bent over his diagram while the storm of war thundered unheeded at his door. For them the astronomer has outwatcht the Bear, on the plains of Chaldea, or in the palaces of Europe. All this has been done, that they may learn,—not without labour and exertion indeed, but with a labour and exertion, how small compared with the value of its results!—that they may learn, what noble faculties man possesses, of what exaltation his thought is capable, what pleasures of the mind his bountiful Creator has provided for him, what boundless prospects he has thrown open to his gaze. This he learns: and having learnt this, he cannot but feel that it is his business to take care that this precious inheritance be not, by his fault, lost or damaged. The past is our benefactor, to which we can render no return: but how can we help wishing to repay to the future the vast debt we have incurred? How can we avoid attempting to extend blessings which we so highly value? The torch which was lighted in early Greece, has been passed from hand to hand till it is placed in our grasp: shall we arrest its progress, or hide it in the shade; and not rather trim its flame, and hand it on rejoicing to those who come after us?

The *whole* of the past is our teacher; and it is our proper business to transmit its lore to the future,

augmented by the best lessons which the present can add. The literature of the ancient world has been the means of enlarging and refining men's minds up to the modern times. The science of the modern world will be one of the great means of still further expanding men's thoughts and unfolding their intellects. As surely as we owe our mental cultivation to Homer and Sophocles, Plato and Cicero, so surely will future ages have their minds directed and animated by those vast and penetrating views of nature which have been opened to them by those whose images now stand near us, and whose names are inscribed on our walls. As surely as our reason is still sharpened and methodized by the influence of Socrates and Aristotle, so surely must men now seek the highest discipline of the reason through an acquaintance with the powerful intellectual instruments by which the more recent advance of truth has been effected.

To neglect to make these subjects part of our liberal education,—to confine ourselves to the labours of the ancient world,—would be to mistake, almost to betray, our office. If the education which we here encourage be such as to employ the student among the literature of the past only, and to leave his mind uninformed with those processes of rigorous reasoning, those vast yet solid generalisations of natural laws, which form the peculiar acquirements of modern times; we shall deserve the reproach which is sometimes cast upon us, of employing men's minds upon verbal trifling and obsolete speculations;—we shall be chargeable with stopping, so far as we are concerned, the progress of the human mind. Our education will not only be grievously defective in

what it does not give; but that which it gives will be deprived of its main value;—will lose its proper place and signification, as one of the elements of the civilization and intellectual advancement of the human family.

But there is another observation which I must make before I conclude. Our education, as we have said, ought to be such as shall connect the past and the present with the future;—as shall be fitted for its office in the progressive course to which man is by his Maker destined. And there is still one view in which this connection may be considered, far more important, and more deeply interesting to us than any other. It is this: Our education ought to be such, as shall connect each man's Present with his *eternal* Future;—as shall prepare him for that elevation of his nature to which he is, here and hereafter, called. The same Divine Ruler of man, who directs the career of successive generations on earth in the pursuit and attainment of beauty and truth, invites us also to aim at a more glorious beauty, a holier truth. He places before us, as our highest object, that we should seek to draw near to Him, and rise towards Him in this life; in order that in a future and higher state of being, we may see Him as He is, and may find eternal life and joy in His presence. This is a progressive aspect of our nature which it would be indeed strange if we should forget, when we are considering what the training of man ought to be. Our education would be most incomplete, would be far other than truly liberal, if, while shaping itself by man's intellectual progress, it should forget his spiritual growth:—if, knowing him

to be destined to another stage of being, it should treat him as if he were confined to this:—if, preparing his mind to respond to the loftiest strains of poetry and the sublimest views of science, it should never look forwards to the time when he is to learn the songs of angels, and to know even as he is known.

No education can be liberal which is not also religious. It may not be necessary that doctrine or interpretation in a systematic shape should form a part of its scheme; but the religious nature of man must be recognised; his spiritual hopes and privileges, his dangers and his refuge, must not be kept out of sight. If these did not exist, how mean and narrow, how dark and wretched, would be the human destiny, in spite of the progress of art and knowledge and thought from age to age! If these do exist, and yet are never spoken of among us;—if we never look to each other for sympathy in the midst of these glorious prospects, these awful perils, these gracious promises;—how cold and dull must our hearts be; or else how lamentably must we be bound and chained, checked and silenced, by the fetters which we have made for ourselves! If we willingly meet together, and discourse, and teach, on matters of human learning and knowledge, but hear and utter no expression of our religious hopes and feelings, no word of exhortation or sympathy with regard to our eternal concerns; how shall we, old or young, retain those subjects in our thoughts, with their due force and influence?

To this it may be replied, that our daily worship does afford the means of our uniting in the common expression of the feelings which belong to our religious

condition. And far be it from us to depreciate the value and advantages of that excellent institution of daily prayer, by which the members of a Christian family like this, acknowledge their dependence upon and trust in their Divine Master. Yet, even possessing this, many may feel that something still is wanting;—that to be led by stated ordinances to express to each other, and to these our younger brethren who surround us, the thoughts of Christian hope and fear, which, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, may arise in our hearts, and which assume a clearer shape when we consider ourselves as called upon to address others,—might be salutary to all. So long as this is not done, it may easily be that many of those who sojourn for a time among us, rarely or never hear the word of Christian admonition, which, to most minds, gives a greater reality and impressiveness to all Christian ordinances. And thus it may come to pass, that the heart, though not at first alienated from religious thoughts, may become careless and callous, stony and dead, to all spiritual concerns. If from time to time the voice of the preacher of practical piety were heard within these walls on our Sabbaths, might not many a bosom swell with religious emotions, which are now locked up in the breast by the surrounding chill and silence? Might not many a warning be uttered and take effect, many a virtuous resolution be formed and fulfilled, many a soul be turned to the way of salvation? May we not apply here the remainder of the passage which forms our text:—"Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"? In short, forming, as we do,

a Christian community, united by social worship, might not the other ordinances of Christian societies be here attended with the same blessings which are elsewhere, by means of them, sought?

I have uttered this inquiry with no fear that I shall therefore be deemed presumptuous by any; well knowing that all of us, those who may approve and those who may disapprove of such a suggestion, have still deeply at heart the good of this our Sion: and that none will doubt that whatever counsel is now offered, is given in the spirit of love. We need no assurances from each other that this our home is regarded by us with a strong and steady affection. Endeared to all of us as the place where some of our most precious mental treasures have been acquired, some of our dearest friendships formed; fragrant with the recollections of pleasant, and, we trust, of instructive hours; how can we do other than look upon it with pleasure and regard? We think with joy and gratitude upon this scene, where our imagination was disciplined, our love of excellence fixed, our views of literature and knowledge expanded. But this place may have, and we trust to many of us has, a still higher claim upon our gratitude and love. It may be the place where not only the intellectual but the spiritual man has been built up. It may be the spot where the thought of our eternal destination was awakened in us, or established, or carried into practical effect. It may be the place where we have not only preferred the exertions and enjoyments of the mind to the gratifications of sense and vanity, but have lived among heavenly as well as earthly thoughts;—where we have secured, not only dear

and valued friends below, but a most kind and gracious friend in heaven;—where we have not only learnt to find, in literary tastes, a refuge from the turmoil and care of the world, but have sought also a surer refuge from the sin and death which surround us, in the satisfaction of Jesus Christ and the promise of his Holy Spirit.

If *this* be our case, we have indeed double and sevenfold reason to join, with earnestness and gratitude, in the prayers and wishes which all are ready to give to the welfare of this our beloved College. "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and plenteousness within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I have wished thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good*."

* Ps. cxxii. 6—9.

NOTE.—I find that my memory had in some degree misrepresented the inscription referred to in page 9. It exists at Felton in Northumberland, over the entrance of the Vicarage house; and is as follows:

A. 1683 has ædes posuit ROBERTUS HENDERSON, Trinitatis Coll. Cantab. tempore Barrowii, tempore Newtoni socius; hujus et ecclesiæ non indignus vicarius. Pietatis ergo posuit hoc patri filius testimonium. 1758.