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Delibered at the

SEMI-CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL,

MAY 2, 1871.

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By R. C. WATERSTON.

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY NATHAN SAWYER & SON,
No. 70 STATE STREET.
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HIGH SCHOOL

SEMI-CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY.

At this interesting Celebration of the English High School, more than twelve hundred graduates were present. They came, in many instances, from distant parts of the country. Classmates met on that day, who had been separated for years. The whole company first assembled at Faneuil Hall, where, after pleasant interchange of friendly salutation and social intercourse, the members of various classes were organized by their appointed marshals, forming into class columns in sections of four, under the guidance of Gen. B. F. Edmands, of the Class of 1821, as Chief Marshal. The whole procession, escorted by the "High School Battalion," commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Dexter, proceeded to the Music Hall, — the City and State authorities uniting with the procession at the City Hall and State House. Every circumstance conspired to render the occasion eminently successful. The floor of the Music Hall was occupied by the past and present pupils of the school; the galleries were filled with ladies, while upon the platform were the officers of the day, and distinguished guests. Mr. John B. Babcock, Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements, after expressions of cordial welcome, called upon Mr. Thomas Gaffield, President of the High School Association, to preside upon the occasion. Prayer was offered by Rev. Samuel B. Babcock, D.D., of the Class of 1821. The President then made an admirable address, during which a beautiful marble bust of Thomas Sherwin, from the chisel of Thomas R. Gould, of the Class of 1831, was unveiled by George B. Emerson, LL.D., and Mr. Charles M. Cumston, the first and the last Head Masters of the School, the whole audience rising. After which the Rev. R. C. Waterston, of the Class of 1828, was introduced as the Poet of the day. The Poem was listened to with marked attention, and was frequently interrupted by cordial and prolonged applause. At the close of the Poem, an Oration was delivered by the Hon. J. Wiley Edmands, of the Class of 1821, giving, in felicitous language, a sketch of the progress of education and the history of the school, combined with much sound wisdom and valuable counsel. The whole occasion was one of deep interest, and, by those who participated in its services, can never be forgotten.



P O E M .

Comrades and friends, mysterious power
Is centred in this sacred hour,
Forming a tie no force can part,
Binding us closely, heart to heart ;
Shoulder to shoulder here we stand,
Thought linked to thought, hand clasped in hand ;
So bring we up with smiles and tears,
The memories of by-gone years,
With smiles, for pleasant jokes and plays,
Which gladdened us in boyhood's days ;
With tears, at thought of some still dear,
The youthful friends no longer here.

Flight of time we'll not deplore,
For we all are " boys " once more !
Oldest or youngest, we'll not say,
No one shall tell tales to-day !
Though your hair were white as snow,
It's only powdered for a show ;
Those aged looks cannot deceive
You playfully, but make believe ;
Though perfectly you play your part,
One sees how young you are — at heart ;
Here have we found, in very truth,
The fountain which renews our youth !

Your Poet, too, may well feel glad
 To know that he is but a lad ;
 Who trusts that riper years may show him
 How he could write a better Poem,
 Which might, perchance, with bloom perennial,
 Be ready for the next Centennial !

Ah, friends, what changes we have known,
 Many and strange, as the years have flown !
 Does it all seem the same, as we pace up and down
 The familiar walks of this dear old town ?

In the good old times every place could be found,
 For all we need do was to go round and round ;
 You could n't go wrong, — when you lost your track,
 If you kept right on, you were sure to come back !
 Now, the crooked — is straightened on every side,
 And that which was narrow — is stately and wide :
 We make no complaint, let them do as they will,
 While the good-natured tax-payers settle the bill !
 As you stand on the Common, look westward, and say,
 Where now will you find the old Back Bay ?
 The quaint gable-roofs, — do you see them still ?
 Where now is the Mall on the old Fort Hill ?
 Rope-walks and wind-mills no more meet the sight,
 While hotels and markets are wheeled left and right.
 As they fill up the hollows, it is not surprising
 That, to those who reside there, real estate should seem rising !

What changes have come ! Ah, those were the days
 Of the old stage-coach, and the one-horse chaise !
 Our fathers had then not yet got the notion
 Of putting a telegraph under the ocean !

Now, men travel the globe as if they could span it,
 And talk in a whisper all round the planet ;

The dullest of mortals, though you would not expect it,
 When he speaks by telegraph, becomes electric !
 If I could but utter this Poem by " wire,"
 Every word would seem written in letters of fire !

I almost wish, —though it might have seemed queer, —
 I had brought a galvanic battery here !

And now let me say to you, Mr. Chairman,
 That, in some respects, you are hardly a fair man,
 For my anxious fears you had hardly a care, man.

You said with elation,
 That you had secured a first-class oration ;
 I do not affirm you did anything slyly,
 Though I think in your thought there was much that was Wiley !
 We shall soon see your wisdom by what we have heard,
 When with every description our souls shall be stirred,
 While our hearts will be thrilled by each eloquent word.

Then, without delay, Sir,
 You went on to say, Sir,
 That as for a Poem there could be no evasion,
 And I *must* be ready to meet the occasion ;
 For my apprehensions you extended no pity,
 I had, nothing to do, but obey the Committee !
 So here, as a school-boy, I take my stand,
 And do what I may to meet the command.

Then O let me see, by the smile on your faces,
 That my lines have fallen — in pleasant places !

Last Summer I left the old Bay State,
 To travel by rail to the Golden Gate.
 In our boyish days, what journey were harder
 Than the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada ?

There was not there then, so much as a mail road,
 Now we dart over snow-covered summits by railroad ;
 Plains, prairies, and deserts we leave far behind us,
 In strange Mormon cities companions might find us !
 Now, we look out over regions of snow,
 Now, wind amid tropical valleys below ;
 What surpassing marvels and wonders one sees
 In Yo-Semite valleys and Mammoth Trees !
 [Fit temple, this, with the Heavens o'er us,
 For Handel's Hallelujah Chorus !]

You may think it is time that our thoughts should be turning
 To the theme now before us, — Institutions of Learning ;
 Well, *there* they are planting the best seeds of knowledge,
 And richly endowing the school and the college ;
 While each thought wanders here, for the impulse it prizes,
 Looking back to the land where the morning sun rises !

I have journeyed far beneath foreign skies,
 No land like our own has yet met my eyes ;
 Here, the widest diffusion of comfort we find,
 Prosperity based upon culture of mind.

Not here the proud palace where royalty waits,
 Not old Fendal castles with princely estates ;
 Not belted knights with their courtly manners,
 In baronial halls, with escutcheons and banners.

Not show and romance with its ancient splendor,
 Where an ignorant peasantry homage render,
 But a People — who crave the right to learn,
 The skill to judge, and the power to discern.

A People — who ask for an honest rule,
 And who prize above all, the Home and the School ;
 Where Heaven's gifts around like the sunbeams pour,
 And the road of knowledge runs right by each door.

Here in New England, the poorest who live,
 May enjoy the best teaching the State can give ;
 This, star-like, flames over life's early morn,
 A priceless boon to each child that is born.

The village school-house, shaded by its trees,
 Seeds forth a murmur, like the hum of bees ;
 There 'neath the blessed light of love and truth,
 Beautiful childhood blossoms into youth.

Turn to the city, with its thousand homes,
 Its stately temples and its spacious domes ;
 Mid boundless wealth, what should be treasured most,
 As her chief glory and her proudest boast ?

Kindling with joy, the patriot spirit burns,
 While to her SCHOOLS in Christian faith she turns ;
 What worthier field demands the statesman's care !
 Ages to come receive their impress there.

Pervert but these, — with bitterest curses dread,
 The stream is poisoned at its fountain-head !
 Pervert but these — like the decree of fate,
 You sap the deep foundations of the State !

In wisdom watch, with struggling hope and fear,
 The seeds of empire which are garnered here ;
 In wisdom watch, — no tongue of man has told
 The vast results which may from thence unfold !

Here is a Loom which weaves with threads of thought ;
 Through warp and woof each deathless hue is wrought ;
 Here Mind is formed ; — and here direction given,
 Which may go onward, even into Heaven !

Who is the Faithful Teacher? He whose heart
 Is ever in his work ; who leaves no part
 Of duty unfulfilled ; who throws his soul
 Into each act, till he inspires the whole !
 Not *quantity* but *quality* he asks ;
 A cheerful offering, and not servile tasks.
 Duty with him is no ignoble strife,
 His joyous spirit overflows with life,
 And the glad sunshine of his nature streams
 Around, till all are kindled by its beams.
 Ideas and principles by him are taught,
 Not isolated facts, but living thought.
 And more, far more, — with him the loftiest plan,
 Is that which forms the noblest type of MAN !
 That which shall stand the test of future hours,
 In balanced will and well-directed powers.

Is such a picture all ideal?
 Or has life made the image real?
 Ah, friends, to us assembled here
 Such thought recalls a memory dear ;
 Bound up within our heart of hearts,
 And cherished still till life departs ;
 And even then, that sacred love
 We'll cling to, in the realms above !

Think of that character, — so just, —
 And gaze on yonder marble bust !
 That placid look, that noble brow,
 Those lips, — Oh could they speak but now !
 That simple majesty of frame ;
 That marble, snow-white, like his fame ;
 Around it gather, Age and Youth,
 To honor him, who honored truth.

The artist's marvellous skill has brought
 His very look, — his hope, — his thought :

Thus may this marble stand,
 A power and influence in the land !
 So may it endless good impart,
 And quicken every generous heart !

It needs no words, this breathing stone,
 It hath a language of its own, —
 That heavenly look, so calm, so clear,
 It sheds a benediction here !

MILES, EMERSON, AND SHERWIN, — honored names,
 Each, ever faithful, worthy tribute claims.
 Two have departed, — one is here this day,
 To take the homage which we gladly pay ;
 One of the noblest teachers of his time,
 Thank God he lives, fresh as in manhood's prime ;
 May Heaven upon him richest favors shower,
 And crown with blessings every passing hour !

This School, it knows no page of mystery,
 Open and clear is all its history ;
 Goodness and honor have marked its way,
 Its annals are bright as the light of day.

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Here thousands have gathered that true education
 Which gladdens the State, and rejoices the Nation.
 Oh long be it thus its good fortune to stand,
 The pride of our city, the joy of the land!

Now, as boys, we see all in their studies engrossed ;
 Soon, as merchants and statesmen, each stands at his post ;
 First comes the effort of duly preparing,
 Then follows the struggle of doing and daring.
 The seed-time demands our most dutiful care,
 The wealth of the harvest is manifest there ;
 The rivers of wisdom commence here their flow,
 The blessings they scatter no mortal may know !

How silent, and softly the years glide away,
 Like the gentle breath of a summer's day !
 Yes, — but have we ne'er watched the appalling form
 Of tempest, and torrent, and rushing storm ?
 The darkening eclipse, the blinding flash
 Of lightning, mid the terrible thunder's crash ?
 Was it not even so,
 When the rebel foe
 Trampled, in hate, on the nation's law,
 And the country was torn by civil war ?
 When a deadly hand
 Was lifted to smite at the life of the land ?
 When honor and justice and freedom were mocked,
 And the deepest foundations of all things rocked ?
 When the sea and the shore,
 Heard the cannon's roar ;
 And insults were heaped upon everything just,
 While the flag of the nation was dragged in the dust.

Youth's sheltered harbor left, without dismay,
 Through dashing surge, you took your fearless way ;
 I hear e'en now, borne by the breeze along,
 Each inch of canvas spread, this rapturous song !
 It tells us how, mid shades of night,
 To guide your way, to cheer your sight,
 There always burned a Beacon Light.

We gaze o'er the wave, with a joyous emotion,
 Beholding the light-house that shines from afar,
 As, o'er the smooth plain of the slumbering ocean,
 It sends forth its beams like a Heaven-lighted star :
 So in moments of bliss and in calm hours of feeling,
 When joy knows no shadow, and passion no strife,
 Heaven shines o'er our path, future pleasures revealing,
 Lighting up with its smile the great ocean of life.

But look ! the dark tempest in fury is lashing,
 O'er bleak rocks and sand-bars, the foam-crested wave,
 Yet there stands the light-house, while wild waves are dashing,
 Its beacon-fires flashing, to warn and to save :
 Even thus does kind Heaven in mercy befriend us,
 Its bright splendors streaming through sorrow's pale night,
 In peace and in peril its succor to lend us,
 Pouring down through the darkness unquenchable light.

One word I would speak to those in life's prime :
 [Perhaps no one here has passed out of that time !]
 Think not that now, we have such tranquil hours,
 That nothing is left to try men's powers.
 There is work for all ! Let each be up and doing !
 Hark to the voice which is each mind pursuing !

Look around thee! Say how long
 Shall the earth be ruled by wrong?
 When shall error flee away?
 And this darkness turn to day?

When will evil from the soul
 Render back its dread control?
 When shall all men duty see?
 And the world be pure and free?

Rouse thee for the mental strife!
 Gird thee for the task of life!
 With the sword and with the shield,
 Forward to the battle-field!

“On!” a thousand voices cry,
 Through the earth and from the sky;
 “Up!” Heaven’s light is on thy brow!
 Let thy work be **HERE** and **NOW**!

To the Undergraduates let me say,
 Make this memorable day
 An era in your career,
 Whose influence shall deepen year by year.

Vow before God that this school shall stand,
 Second to none in all the land;
 Guard it and shield it from every harm,
 Protect and defend it with your right arm;

Should evil and wrong its position assail,
 Stand by it, as clothed in triple mail ;
 But feel, that the best defence in the strife,
 Will be the scholar's unblemished life.
 Do you cherish its name, and honor its rule ?
 Feel that — as are the scholars, even such is the school ;
 Represent in your life — what is truest and best, —
 All friends of good learning will take care of the rest.

Think not each generous deed has yet been done,
 Or truth's diviner summits all been won ;
 Let light and love their splendor shed for you,
 So boundless realms shall open to your view.
 Duty can greatness give, to every time,
 And make TO-DAY both glorious and sublime.

Along the dryest, dustiest walk of earth,
 The noblest powers may struggle into birth ;
 Mid toil and trial, some great work fulfil,
 With lofty purpose and heroic will !
 Pursue the path by truth and virtue trod,
 True to yourselves, your country, and your God !

When Israel's host, in days of old,
 Had reached in joy a place of rest,
 They to their children's children told
 How righteous Heaven their sires had blest ;
 That God had led the appointed way,
 In fire by night, in cloud by day.

Thus even now, O Lord, we stand,
And gladly count thy blessings o'er,
Guarded and guided by Thy hand,
Thy sovereign love we would adore ;
Be with us here, in gracious power,
And crown with joy this festal hour !

Here to this shrine, each heart has brought,
The tribute of its grateful love ;
Guide Thou, the Teachers and the Taught,
The SCHOOL, O bless it from above !
And guard it still, mid hopes and fears,
Even as Thou hast — for Fifty Years !

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