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AN
ADDRESS,
TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society,
AT THEIR
ANNUAL MEETING,
MAY 28, 1802.

BY John Quincy Adams.

Methinks already from this chemic flame,
I see a city of more precious mold;
Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,
With silver pav'd, and all divine with gold.
DRYDEN'S *Annus Mirabilis*.

His life was gentle; and the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, THIS WAS A MAN!
SHAKESPEARE.

Second Edition.



BOSTON,
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1802.

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1881

1881



Vote of Thanks.

AT a meeting of the Government of the *Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society*, on Friday, May 28th, 1802—*Voted*, That the VICE PRESIDENT, JOSIAH QUINCY, Esq. and Mr. JAMES WHITE, be a Committee to wait on the Honorable JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, Esq. to return him the thanks of the Government for his Address, delivered before the Society this day, and request of him a Copy for the press. *A true copy from the Records,*

WILLIAM ALLINE, *Rec'g Sec'y.*

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An Address, &c.

THE general advantages arising from social institutions for charitable purposes; the peculiar utility of that, whose annual meeting for discoursing on these topics, and for recommending them by the more powerful eloquence of example this day returns; the dangers, to which all populous cities are liable by the calamities of fire; the aggravations of these dangers, to which we, my fellow-citizens, are exposed, from the perishable materials of which too great a proportion of our habitations is constructed; the intrinsic excellence of that eminently christian virtue, Charity; and the important benefits of its exertions in those cases of distress for the relief of which, your society, gentlemen, was formed: These are the themes to which your attention is naturally, and usually called, on occasions similar to the present. They have been treated with such various ingenuity by those members of the society, who have heretofore addressed you upon these anniversaries, that without a departure from the subjects themselves,

it would be difficult to avoid the repetition of many arguments, and the recurrence to many facts, already urged upon your notice, in preceding years. Such repetition, however, I trust will neither surprize, nor displease you: For if originality of thought might leave on your minds impressions more immediately pleasing, the valuable objects of your institution will more probably be advanced by saying over again with the sanction of your authority, what has already more than once been said in the same manner.

ONE of your great and laudable purposes is that of stimulating genius, to useful discoveries tending to secure the lives and property of our fellow men from destruction by fire. But the discoveries of genius are seldom the result of external stimulus: genius is of an eccentric character; of a restive temper; disdainful of guidance or controul, he resists all influence from without; he deserts every path not traced by himself. Nor is it your design to ask of genius, assistance, which even he is incompetent to afford. In vain would genius stand upon the beach and forbid the waves of ocean to approach his feet: In vain would he bid the flowers of spring to bloom on Zembla's eternal snows: In vain would he command golden harvests to smile on Zara's scorching sands: In vain would he resist or evade the laws of nature, and of nature's God—All his at-

tempts to render permanent what they have proclaimed perishable are but the memorials of his impotence. Let us then not be sanguine to indulge hopes of obtaining much relief from the discoveries of genius. It is by reiterating with unwearied hand, the exhibition of truths long known but not sufficiently felt, by redoubling line upon line, by crowding precept upon precept, by wearing down the garb of persuasion to the very tatters of importunity, that your association will most effectually contribute to arrest the progress of desolation, and disarm the fury of the element. If we spurn the long tried, faithful shield of prudence, with what authority can we call upon genius for new devices to supply its place? Is it not like the Countryman in the Fable, who appeals for aid to Hercules, when he should apply his own shoulder to the wheel? Alas! my friends, we have here less occasion for the inventive faculties of genius, than for the warning voice of experience. We want firmness rather than fancy, discretion rather than discovery, stubborn perseverance in demonstrated right, rather than eager search of ingenious novelty.

IT was the highest boast of Augustus Cæsar, in his old age, that he had found the Roman metropolis of brick, and should leave it of marble. Fellow-townsmen! We should blush to confess that our ambition extends not even to leave our

capital where Augustus began with his. He gloried in the progress of improvements, from safety to ornament; and can you hesitate to persist in advancing from danger to safety? The motives which impelled him to superadd the polish of magnificence to the comfortable dwellings of his people, were contracted and selfish, in comparison with those which ought to stimulate you. He gave splendor to the city for the sake of its reflected lustre upon his own fame. Your personal inducements are of keener edge than his. It is for safety, not for glory, for life itself, or at least its most essential comforts, and not for the bubble reputation that you are contending. But you have the further incentive of the most generous social passions. In securing yourselves, you secure your fellow-citizens, your neighbours, your friends: You have the double enjoyment of partaking the benefit, and seeing it shared by others. You are aiming not only to enlarge the sphere of your own gratifications, but to add high value to the inheritance of posterity. This spur will be peculiarly pointed and forcible to your minds, when you consider that it is not mere property, but the inestimable blessing of security; not merely more durable tenements, but more rational peace of mind; not merely riches of state and brick, which like other riches may take to themselves wings and fly away, but the riches of

quiet and contentment; the infallible increase of positive happiness, by the removal of constant danger, and continual anxiety; the “sober certainty of waking bliss,” that you are adding to the birth-right of your children. It is this, gentlemen, in which consists the most important excellence of your institution. Your immediate charities, as they tend to the relief of existing misery, are amiable and respectable; but the effects of your influence to secure the efficacy of those salutary laws which are to remove the principal cause of our danger, will make you the benefactors of posterity, and entitle you to the gratitude of all future ages. Fellow-citizens! You who are present here merely as spectators, and are not members of the association, is this exaggerated praise? Bring the question home to your own hearts, and the society may confidently await your decision. Open your Province-Law book, and the very first Statute you will find under the Charter of William and Mary, is an act to forbid the erection of wooden buildings in this town, upon the penalty of having them demolished as common nuisances. This law, passed in the year 1692, one hundred and ten years ago, refers to the existence, and the violation of a still more ancient Statute to the same effect, enacted under the former Charter. The preamble, in the energetic, though somewhat antiquated language of

that day, affigns the many *great desolations and ruins* by fires, which wooden buildings had occasioned, as the reason of its injunctions. The town had then existed about sixty years. Necessity and not choice had used at first such materials as it could find. The want of present shelter had been more urgent than that of a safe and permanent habitation; and who, after considering the situation of our venerable forefathers at the first settlement of the country, shall dare to arraign them because they provided first for the most immediate pressure, and left the rest to times of greater ease and convenience, or to the less burthened industry and wisdom of their descendents? In the course of sixty years, however, experience had proved that a wooden city is a vast tinder-box, kindling at every transient spark; an immense mass of phial'd phosphorus, blazing out by mere communication with the air. It had been the source of so many great desolations and ruins, that the Legislature once and again endeavoured to correct the mischief by these sharp and biting Statutes.— Now, suppose, fellow-citizens, that instead of that pusillanimous indulgence, which suffers bad habits to prevail over good laws, the Legislature had uniformly and strenuously maintained that resolution and perseverance, which eventually secure the triumph of good laws over bad habits: Suppose such a society as that in whose name I now

enjoy the privilege of addressing you, had then existed, to promote by united deeds and counsels, by public annual admonition, by the weight of personal influence, and by the impulse of personal example, the full accomplishment of these wise regulations; what would have been the consequences to you? That you, and your fathers, would long since have possessed habitations of durable and incombustible materials: That, of sixteen fires, * “pre-eminent on the black register of destruction,” which glare horrible upon your annals since the date of the law, and innumerable others, deeply calamitous, though flashing less conspicuous from the dismal gloom, probably not one would have happened: That at this time, you might all, with secure and easy minds, nightly commit yourselves, your property, the children of your love, the wives of your bosoms, to the protection of Providence, without carrying into the arms of slumber, the anxious and too well grounded fear, that before your eyes shall open to the succeeding dawn, all, all may be swept away by the relentless fury of the flames. But no such society was extant: The sword of the law, for want of a hand to wield it, idly rusted in its scabbard; and seven years afterwards we find the Legislature, still bearing testimony, against the pernicious practice of building in wood, but

* V. Mr. WELLES'S Address to the Society.

mitigating the penalty as too severe, because it had been so generally set at defiance.

to prescribe a slight punishment where an heavy one has proved ineffectual, is not in this world the best expedient to ensure submission ; and the fifty pounds fine, substituted instead of the demolition of the building, was made the mere foot-ball of public scorn, until it sank into perfect oblivion.

AN ingenious traveller who has given an account of Mount *Ætna*, remarks that although the city at the foot of the mountain had twice been destroyed by eruptions of the volcano, yet the inhabitants, *by some strange infatuation*, could not be prevailed upon to change their situation, but rebuilt their city upon the same spot.—If this conduct of the Catanians appeared the height of absurdity to Brydone, what would he have said of a people who should persist in retaining and furnishing fuel for an *Ætna* within their walls ; for an *Ætna*, the work of their own hands ; who after suffering more from fires, than the neighbourhood of a burning mountain ever inflicted, should cling to their stubble and straw, as if reluctant at the thoughts of parting from the frequent sight of hideous ruin and combustion.—At least the Catanians might plead in their justification that attachment tender and sublime, that love stronger than death, to the place of their

nativity, which vibrates in every fibre of a feeling heart, which is intermingled in every affection of a virtuous mind.—But clapboards and shingles ! What mysterious fascinations can they possess ? What sympathetic sensibilities can they inspire ? Why truly, they are at first cost the cheapest materials—as if the loss of millions in future danger were no counterbalance to the saving of hundreds in present expence ! This computation my friends, ought never to have been posted from the waste-book of folly.—This logic ought forever to moulder on the shelves of exploded madnes. For more than a century and an half no individual in this town, has been compelled to build for want of an immediate shelter over his head, and nothing less can excuse making parsimony your architect, and devastation your inheritance.

GENTLEMEN, I have dwelt too long upon this topic—The sense of the legislature, and of the town have again recently been expressed upon the subject—wholesome laws have again been enacted to relieve us gradually from our greatest dangers of fire, and I trust the spirit of the town and the firmness and vigilance of its officers will carry them into complete execution. Years ; probably many years must elapse before we can hope to obtain the practicable portion of security—Our tenements, such as they are, must

stand, until gradual decay, individual consent, or the cruel hand of calamity shall remove them— It is a consolation however that you are advancing in improvement, and you have the flattering prospect that your children will be less exposed to these perils than yourselves. What these perils are, the experience of the last winter has depicted in colours which the pencil of description could only dilute and weaken. The treasures of commercial opulence, the shelter of honest industry, the solemn temple of Almighty God, have alternately fallen within the ruffian grasp of insatiate ruin. Would to heaven this were the worst!— Daughters of the land! If virtuous sensibility could assume a form and appear in person here, she would only be the loveliest of women: If tenderness has a throne of glory upon earth, it is in the heart of a mother—Lovely women! tender mothers! will you forgive me, for renewing the pang which thrill'd in your bosoms, when the destroying angel laid his hand upon the helpless innocence of infancy?—Yes! the tear that steals from your eyes is a tear of compassion and not of bitterness; it is the pledge that henceforth your irresistible influence will unite with that of all our public-spirited citizens, to redeem the future generations from this impending sword of destruction.

AMERICANS ! to insist long upon an appeal to your liberality, would betray an unworthy and unmerited distrust of your characters as christians: you know that alms to suffering indigence constitute one of the most essential attributes of that universal charity, to inculcate which the Saviour of mankind appeared upon earth: Immortal life to all, was his doctrine: Brotherly love to all, was his precept. These he preach'd in word; these he sanction'd by miracles; for these he died upon the cross. Well might these at his birth, be announced to the world, as glad tidings of great joy, by the voice of an angel! Well might a multitude of the heavenly host then proclaim glory to God in the highest, for this promise of immortality—Peace on earth, good will towards men, by this new bond of fraternal affection! Search all the stores of antient wisdom; ransack all the chambers of modern philosophy; and where can be found two united discoveries, tending to promote the great end and aim of human desires, human happiness, like this combination of universal harmony here below, with eternal and boundless felicity hereafter?

It has been urged by some of the adversaries of christianity, that its tenets are too refined and exalted for the imperfection of human nature: That its sublimest lessons “play round the head but come not to the heart” of its votaries: That

its principles have not been proved by the practice of its adherents, and that from the natural perverseness of mankind, its divine benevolence has been the source of the most atrocious cruelties, its perfect purity, the fountain of the foulest pollutions. To this objection, the general answer is not difficult, but its developement belongs to other times and other hands. The influence of christianity has been counteracted but never suppressed by the depravity of man. Its benign operation though incomplete has been signal, upon whole ages, nations, and generations—Still more instrumental has it been at all times in softening and improving the hearts of individuals. Even in these days of scepticism and infidelity there is not one of us, my friends, but could designate by name, men, whose virtues are purified and whose general practice is guided by the genuine principles of christianity.—Of such a man, your society, gentlemen, in common with the multitude of your fellow citizens, deeply deplore the recent loss.—An account of the life and character of that excellent person has already been delivered in public from this place, by the playmate of his childhood, the companion of his youth, the intimate friend of his riper years; and after that tribute of affection and respect, no additional information will be expected from one, who, though sufficiently favoured with his ac-

quaintance and friendship to have been impress'd profoundly with admiration of his virtues and talents, in a comparative view can only speak of him with the voice of a stranger: Yet it would be inexcusable on this occasion to leave unnoticed the merits of him, who was one of the first founders of your institution; by whose death you were bereft of your President, and who as a man, as a citizen, as a magistrate, as a name of high literary eminence, was an ornament to the country which gave him birth. Of his domestic virtues, of his personal and social accomplishments, I can say, but what is known to many of you, Gentlemen, better than to myself. Are you an observer of men, and has it been your fortune only once in your life to behold GEORGE RICHARDS MINOT? You have remarked the elegance of his person and the peculiar charm of expression in his countenance—Have you witnessed his deportment? It bore the marks of graceful simplicity, of dignified modesty, of unassuming urbanity—Have you listened to his conversation? It was the voice of harmony; it was the index to a penetrating and accurate mind; it was the echo to a warm and generous heart. Such appeared Mr. MINOT, on a first and transient acquaintance; from which period, to that of the most confidential intimacy, our own knowledge, and the unvaried testimony of indisputable authority

concur in affirming that every trace of pleasing first impression was proportionally deepened; every anticipation of sterling worth abundantly fulfill'd. His character, as the citizen of a free country, was not less exemplary. The profoundest historian of antiquity has adduced the life of AGRICOLA, as an extraordinary proof that it is possible to be a great and good man, even under the despotism of the worst of Princes. Mr. MINOR's example may be alledged as a demonstration equally rare under a free republic, that in times of the greatest dissension, and amidst the most virulent rancour of factions, a man may be great and good, and yet acquire and preserve the esteem and veneration of all. In the bitterness of civil contention, he enjoyed the joint applause of minds the most irreconcilable to each other. Before the music of his character the very scorpions drop'd from the lash of discord; the very snakes of faction listened and sunk asleep! Yet did he not purchase this unanimous approbation by the sacrifice of any principle at the shrine of popularity. From that double tongued candour which fashions its doctrines to its company; from that cowardice in the garb of good nature, which assents to all opinions because it dares support none; from that obsequious egotism, ever ready to bow before the idol of the day, to make man its God, and hold the voice of mortality for the voice of heaven, he was pure as the crystal

streams. Personal invectives and odious imputations against political adversaries he knew to be seldom necessary; he knew that when unnecessary, whether exhibited in the disgusting deformity of their nakedness, or tricked out in the gorgeous decorations of philosophy, whether livid with the cadaverous colours of their natural complexion or flaring with the cosmetic washes of pretended patriotism, they are ever found among the profligate prostitutes of party, and not among the vestal virgins of truth. He disdained to use them: but as to all the great questions upon principle which are at the bottom of our divisions, there was no more concealment or disguise in his lips, than hesitation or wavering in his mind. So far was he from courting the prejudices or compromising with the claims of faction, that he published the history of the insurrections in this commonwealth, at a time when the passions which had produced them, were still vigorous and flourishing: and although nothing contributed more than that work to consign the rebellion it recorded, to infamy, none of its numerous abettors ever raised a reclamation against the veracity of the history, or the worth of the historian.

THE community to which such a man as this belongs, confer honor upon themselves by every token of distinction they bestow upon him. Mr.

MINOT was successively employed in various offices of trust and of honor. To vice a merciful but inflexible judge; to misfortune a compassionate friend; to the widow, a protector of her rights; to the orphan, one in place of a father: in every station which the voice of his country called him alternately to fill, he displayed that individual endowment of the mind and that peculiar virtue of the heart, which was most essential to the useful exercise of its functions. During the latter period of his life, his occupations were multiplied beyond the performance of an ordinary man. He not only accomplished them all with facility, but found hours of leisure for his favourite studious pursuits, and hours of relaxation for the enjoyments of social intercourse and convivial festivity.

His attainments in literature outstripp'd the slow advance of years; in the bloom of youth he was associated to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Historical Society recognize in him one of their founders. Of his occasional performances, it may be said without disparagement to others, that there is little difficulty in distinguishing their characteristic excellence. His Oration on the 5th of March; his Eulogy on the first of American patriots and heroes, and his address to your society, from the spot whence this feeble tribute to his memory is now offered, deserve a particular enumeration among the pro-

ductions of his mind. He had an ardent and inextinguishable thirst of general knowledge; but the department of history was that towards which some casual incident, of those which are wont to point the magnet of genius to its polar star, had originally turned the bias of his preference. The result of his labours in this field, is chiefly before the public, and is duly appreciated by all who deem any such labours objects of regard. As an historian, authenticity, impartiality, penetration and sagacity, are obvious characters of his writings. His narrative is perspicuous; his arrangement well delineated: he traces events to their causes, with discriminating eye, and though sparing of his own reflections upon their issue, he skilfully collects and concentrates their rays upon the mind of his reader. He makes no ostentatious display of his moral and intellectual wealth, but gives you the key to the chambers containing them: It is but opening the door, and treasures in profusion are before you. His selection of subjects was dictated by a vigorous judgment, and a well meditated sense of utility. The insurrections of the year 1786, form one of the most instructive periods in the history of our country. Occasions like that, elicit and display many of the virtues and vices, accomplishments and defects of public bodies and private individuals, of constitutions and constituted authorities, which remain latent in times of cooler composure. The younger part

of our fellow-citizens especially, will find themselves amply rewarded for any time and meditation bestowed upon that work. It will give them a deeper insight into the character of this people, a more extensive view of our social organization, and its internal operations at critical times, than they could obtain by years of personal observation. The progress of collisions in public sentiment, until they kindle into civil war, in a country where public sentiment is the final earthly arbiter of all public measures, and where the efficacy of obedience is in ordinary times secured by the mildness of authority, there reveals a precious mine to the search of contemplation. There a citizen of Massachusetts may learn not to despair of public virtue, even when apparently extinguished by the violence of party, and the pressure of distress. There an American may be informed that our Constitutions have within them a principle of self-preservation, beyond the letter of the law, which can redeem them from dissolution even when apparently suffocated by the overwhelming torrents of faction.

THE revolution which separated these States from their connection as Colonies with Great Britain, and their subsequent confederation, have taken from our local history some of its magnitude and moment. These events have expanded the circle, and increased the multitude of our ci-

vil relations. In forming the idea of our country, we are no longer bounded by the scanty dimensions of a petty province. The largest portion of this Continent is united under a social compact, which makes its inhabitants equal fellow-citizens of one great and growing empire. To preserve, to strengthen, to perpetuate this union, is the first political duty, as it ought to be the highest glory of every American. Since its establishment our history has become the history of the nation: and had it been consistent with the wise decrees of Providence to prolong the life of Mr. MINOT, we might have hoped that the period which came within the compass of his observation, would have been transmitted to future times, with that simplicity and purity of style and manner, that zeal for the civil and religious liberties of man, that instinctive and reflected love of virtue and abhorrence of vice, which flowed spontaneously from his pen. But before he could commence upon this arduous task, there was a previous chasm in our history to be filled. It was a period of less general interest than those which preceded and followed it; less propitious therefore to the talents and reputation of its historian. But Mr. MINOT's primary consideration was the public utility, and not his own personal fame.— It was a labour inadequate indeed to his powers, but necessary to connect the chain of our annals; and unless undertaken by him, it might have re-

mained unaccomplished. Of this work, one volume is in possession of the public. He was just closing the second, when the pen was wrested from his hand, by that king of terrors, whom the most elevated human capacity and the most perfect human virtues are alike impotent to resist.

MY countrymen ! When memory turns a retrospective eye upon the days that are past, how short is the space, before she meets the venerable forms of a CLARKE, a BELKNAP, and a MINOT ! When she returns and searches with anxious look, once more to find them in the ranks, among the living friends of science, of virtue and of man, she seeks in vain ! They are here no more ! Where can we look for support under such reiterated and heavy blows, but to the pillars of stoic fortitude ? Where can we hope for comfort under such great and multiplied bereavements, but in the arms of christian resignation ? It is not for man to question or scrutinize the dispensations of his Maker. Unavailing lamentation is inconsistent with the dignity of our nature : It is incompatible with the duties of our religion.—Sainted spirits of our absent friends !—If from the abodes of blessedness, the spirits of the just, made perfect, are permitted to look down upon this dreary scene of human life, and to influence the conduct of their former partners of mortality, call us away from the contemplation of our loss, by alluring us to the imitation of your virtues ! As the Grecian

sculptor proposed by the chissel to convert Mount Athos into the statue of a mortal hero, may the holy mountain of our nation and country bear throughout its extent the lineaments of your immortal minds! If we have not yet learnt to preserve the features and honour the memory of departed excellence in monumental marble, may your example by its operation upon the hearts of the rising generation, erect the fabric of your fame on a basis stronger than of earth; on foundations more durable than the everlasting hills! May we learn of you to combine in happy union, sincere devotion with enlightened philosophy; the fervid love of freedom with the chastened discipline of good order; true christian meekness of spirit with intrepid boldness in the cause of truth; mild compassion for the guilty with inflexible opposition to guilt; glowing patriotism with universal philanthropy! So shall some emanations of your exalted characters remain to latest time on earth! So shall the kindly radiance of your memory here, point the way to your cloudless effulgence in the skies!



Government of the Society,
1802.

ARNOLD WELLES, Jun. Esq. *President,*
Hon. WILLIAM TUDOR, Esq. *Vice-President.*
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STATE OF THE FUNDS, MAY 28, 1802, Viz.

281 Shares in the Union Bank, at 8 dollars,	-	-	2248	00
Maffachusetts State Note,	-	-	333	33
Six Per Cent Stock,	-	-	2000	00
Eight Per Cent Stock,	-	-	1000	00
Cash,	-	-	14	43
				Dollars, 5595 76

DONATIONS SINCE THE LAST PUBLICATION.

Thomas Harris,	-	-	-	-	30	<i>Dlls.</i>
Ephraim Hutchinson,	-	-	-	-	20	
Mary Emery,	-	-	-	-	20	
Mary Bethel,	-	-	-	-	10	
Joseph Churchill,	-	-	-	-	50	
Samuel Ash,	-	-	-	-	50	
Michael Lynch,	-	-	-	-	15	

Dollars 195

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