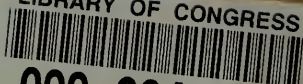


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THE CLAIMS OF HARVARD COLLEGE UPON ITS SONS.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF THAT INSTITUTION,

ON

LORD'S DAY AFTERNOON,

JULY 13, 1834.

BY JOHN G. PALFREY, A. M.,

PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE.

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S E R M O N .

2 KINGS, IV. 13.

SAY NOW UNTO HER ; BEHOLD, THOU HAST BEEN CAREFUL FOR US
WITH ALL THIS CARE ; WHAT IS TO BE DONE FOR THEE ?

W. W. W. 2 Feb. '05.

YOUR thoughts, my friends, anticipate me, in the use which I am about to make of this text. The question proposed, in the application I have in view, while it may be supposed to address itself, at this moment, with a special interest to the minds of those, who are taking part for the last time in our Sabbath solemnities, yet demands, on essentially the same grounds of obligation, to be as seriously weighed by others of my hearers as by them. To some of us, in other times, has been already extended by this college that care, which more recently these, our young friends, have been experiencing ; and some, in one or another stage of the course now completing by their associates, are accumulating the debt to which our present inquiry relates. This college has been careful with great care for many more, now scattered to all the borders of the country, and to all the quarters of the world. What is to be done by all and by each of us, in requital of the benefit so conferred ?

Am I met, however, on the threshold of the inquiry, by the remark, that, when I speak of a college, I am speaking only of an abstraction, am only using a name ; that a college is a thing incapable of an intelligent purpose to do a service, and incapable of being the object of gratitude for a service done ? If it be necessary to advert to such a thought, it cannot be necessary to do more than say, that to speak of an institution of this nature as conferring benefits and entitled to gratitude, is to employ, if a not entirely accurate, a brief and convenient way of expressing a very substantial and unquestionable fact. That a good has been done, when the minds of many, or of few, under suitable discipline, have been endowed with great resources and satisfactions within themselves, and with a great power to serve others, is an argument which I suppose needs not to be labored here. If the good has been done, by what means has it been done ? Of course, by means of the apparatus here provided and maintained ; by the communications of the living teacher, by access to books, and to other like instruments for the acquisition of knowledge, and by the mutually quickening influence of association among those, whom the existence of such advantages here has brought together to enjoy them. How then came these advantages here, for they are not the spontaneous products of the soil ? They have been collected by successive endowments of public and private bounty. The Commonwealth, with a signal munificence, has done

her part, through all the period of her history, giving from a treasury furnished by contributions of all her citizens, the rich and the poor. Private benefactors have with a generous public spirit done theirs, bringing hither, from generation to generation, the tribute of their hard earnings, and the tokens of their liberal and enlightened views; the opulent giving in the measure of their abundance, and they who were rich only in the wealth of a noble spirit, bestowing in the largest proportion of their narrower ability. They make all of us, who have studied here, the objects of their gratuitous bounty, the recipients of their intelligent charity. They suffer no one to defray the charge of the education which he receives within their walls. However affluent, my friends, any of us or of our parents may be, we have none of us been living here at our own or our parents' cost. For a great part of the means of improvement, which here we have been enjoying, we are suffered to render no pecuniary equivalent. What view had they who have so served us, in putting themselves to such an expense? Certainly not a view to the indulgence of any whim or convenience of their own, or of ours; but a view to the promotion of certain great objects, which when we have considered, we shall be guided to repay the debt of gratitude we owe to them, or, in other words, as I first stated it, to the college through which we have received their benefactions. The debt of gratitude, I say; for never was a more incontestable claim of justice. Their college has

found no very apt pupil, as far as logic is concerned, in him who can entertain the idea, that he may honorably go from beneath their roof, to pursue merely his own selfish ends with the help of the learning which they gave him, regardless henceforward of them, and of the purposes for which they bestowed it.

But, if we owe the patrons of our college such a debt, to whom shall we repay it? since from its nature and the circumstances of the case, it is incapable of being discharged directly to themselves, nor was such their own intention.

I. We should testify our gratitude, in the first place, by causing their good offices to be effectual for that elevation of our own characters, which was one of the objects in their contemplation.

Doubtless it was part of their design, to be benefactors, on a large scale, by promoting the individual good of all, who, from age to age, should present themselves to share in the advantages they offered; and, accordingly, by using those advantages to that end, it belongs to us to accomplish their wishes, and render our acknowledgments. They intended to give to every object of their liberality the power of earning, by the honest labor of his mind, a decent maintenance, without being further burdensome to others; and so far they would have a right to complain of whoever should go from beneath their care to live an idle life, even if he should think to dignify his pusillanimous unprofitableness, by calling it by some such name as the enjoyment of learned leisure. They de-

signed to give to their pensioners opportunity to realize the satisfactions, appropriate to the holding of those places in society, which are attended with influence, and regarded with respect ; and it concerns our duty to them, that no negligence of ours should frustrate this their purpose. But they intended, my hearers, to put us in possession of enjoyments, far beyond what any array of prosperous external circumstances is able to afford. The world of intellect and feeling within us, is that where our happiness is most truly held to reside ; and that world it was their purpose to set in order and enrich. The high and unalloyed satisfactions, which God has made to be found in the pursuit and contemplation of the truth ; the pleasures inseparable from the mind's action in a sphere, where there is every thing to excite, and nothing to irritate ; the delights belonging to the developement and harmony of those capacities, which ally the human with superior natures ; the joys that inhabit the empyrean region of sober thought ; to these, and to a strong and permanent relish for these, it was their will to introduce us, and if we do not greatly prize and earnestly seek the boon, we shall have done them, as truly as ourselves, much less than justice. They did not desire to give a knowledge, which should serve the bad purposes of an unholy mind. They did not aim to furnish, in any man's cultivated understanding, an armoury of treason against his higher nature. It was the mandate of a christian charity, which bade these walls arise ; of a charity, which con-

templated the advancement of the interests of the accountable and never-dying soul. Upon their humble front, when first it lifted itself, making the desert rejoice, it wrote their consecration 'to Christ and to the Church.' It did not mean thus to announce alone, that it proposed to rear within them a ministry for Christ's and the Church's service ; though this of course was one prominent way towards the attainment of the more comprehensive object ; but, that it would build up, in every heart it might reach, an invisible temple of the christian faith, that it would send forth in every intellect it should nurture, an efficient friend and advocate of the Redeemer's cause. It meant to make the intellectual element in man capable of ministering effectually to the higher element of goodness ; of doing its bidding, and quickening its growth, and signalizing its dignity. Few, if any, my friends, let us trust, will ever be found those recreant brethren of ours, who will be so lost to reason and to duty alike, as to use the weapons, with which they have furnished themselves from this mental arsenal, in a warfare against all that is most excellent within them. Such 'a foolish son' might well be called 'the heaviness of his mother,' and 'his mother,' as the prophet says, be 'sore confounded by him.' Be it ours, at all events, to render so far the most acceptable honor to the benefactors of our minds, by dedicating all conquests, we may have won in the wide field of intellect, for so many sanctified offerings to the supreme source of all intelligence ;

by making all knowledge and accomplishments, we have been assisted to acquire, lend their aid towards the culture of a manly, pervading, and vigorous piety. The intellectual light is but faint and clouded, unless the spiritual lend its rays, making it pierce and warm, while it shines ; nor alone can it quicken any growth of the soul, to repay much pains in the rearing. But let the acquisitions of the understanding bring the tribute of their energy and richness to the graces of the heart, and we witness a venerable specimen of that nature, which then without incredulity we hear described as ‘a little lower than the angels.’

II. But certainly it was not the ultimate object of those, whose wishes, having been benefited by their bounty, we are bound to consult, to convey even the highest good to such as should be the immediate objects of their care. They entertained the comprehensive wishes of patriots, of philanthropists, of christians. At their own cost, but through our agency, they designed to benefit their race, in our country, in all countries, in all interests, in all times. Intelligent and well-intended human action, they knew was the instrument for doing this ; and for such action they designed to give power and impulse, through their benefactions, to every mind which these should reach.

Accordingly, my friends, I present it as a distinct and unquestionable obligation resting on the sons of this college, to go thence to labor, after the largest measure of their powers, for the pro-

motion of the common good. We withhold the payment of a debt contracted to those, who have here put us in possession of any capacities of effective action we may exert, if we limit ourselves, in the use of these capacities, to the attainment of any personal end. In whatever liberal pursuit we may choose, we cannot consent, until we have become deaf to the plainest dictates of justice, to do merely as much as will give us a living, or wealth, or office, or fame, and there cease our endeavours. Our public spirit, our spirit of christian benevolence, is to be partly manifested in one or another form, according to the peculiar facilities and occasions of that sphere of service to God and our generation, which we may have adopted for our own ; but in no sphere of action can it honorably fail of being manifested. The lawyer is not to argue his causes, and satisfy his clients, and receive his gains, and then suppose that he is acquitted of his duty. No ; he received part of his preparation to do this at the charge of those, who demand from him, in return, that he should make some contribution to those great doctrines of social justice, on which, as on a broad and firm foundation, the fabric of social happiness stands ; or, at least, that, pervaded by the spirit of the noble science he professes, he should always be found standing in his lot, the inflexible friend of public liberty and order, and of private right. The physician has not discharged the obligations, which here in the early stage of his career were laid upon him, when he has pur-

sued his curious researches into all the realms of nature, and into the mysterious dependencies of the fearfully and wonderfully fashioned human frame, nor when he has spread his renown, nor when he has made his fortune. No ; he owes such contributions as he may make to the resources of the excellent art he practices ; and he has an office of benevolence to fulfil, wherever he may bring relief to the infirmities of man's exposed and suffering mortal nature. The statesman, educated here, leaves a large and righteous claim unsatisfied, if he allows himself, I will not say, to consult only his own aggrandisement, but to limit his action to any narrow aims ; and the man of fortune, if he devotes himself to the indulgence of his ease or his tastes. Such service as either has acquired here capacity to render to the general welfare, and to that truth which in all departments is the great element of the general welfare, such service each has come here under an inevitable obligation to present. The teacher, who has been here instructed, is not to teach, the merchant is not to traffic, without higher views than views of private interest mingling among their motives. They stand indebted to those who meant, that whoever should be indebted to them should in his turn bring others under obligation for wise and generous kindnesses. Each is thus held to do the work, by which he supports or advances himself, in a liberal spirit, using under the impulse of a high sense of duty the opportunities, which his peculiar pursuits afford, for communi-

cating knowledge, and diffusing happiness, and recommending good habits and good principles to all with whom those pursuits connect him. And the minister of religion, solemn and clear and conclusive as his other obligations are, is to recognise yet an added motive to abound for others in every good word and work, in the implied condition, under which he received so much of whatever power he has of addressing others' reason and feelings. But very far are the forms of effort, in which the good and wise are to fulfil their appointed office, from being circumscribed within the limits of any professional action. The lawyer, or physician, or teacher, does not sustain that one character alone. He is much more, than what the name of his occupation indicates. He is a man ; having all the sympathies and relations of a man ; having endless ways, in his extra-professional walk, of access to human understandings, and control over human character and welfare. All methods of influence, thus opened to minds, which possess any added power of influence by means of their acquisitions here, are to be sacredly employed for others' highest benefit. We are to be true to our vocation in taking care, that whoever is at the trouble to observe any one of us, shall observe the course of a friend to good order ; a patron, according to his means, of good objects ; an associate and fellow-laborer, a counsellor or disciple of good men ; an inquisitive and honest seeker, a firm and fearless champion, of the truth. If God has given us ability to do any thing to

extend the triumphs of truth, we shall regard this as a privilege deserving all gratitude, and a work demanding all devoted endeavour. And, with humility, no doubt, but still with meek confidence in him, who suffers no well-intended service to remain wholly and for ever unavailing, we shall indulge the hope, that something we may have worthily done, in act or thought, may be beneficially felt, though the doer should be all unknown, even by distant men and by other times.

III. Once more ; if we acknowledge obligations to the worthies on the honored roll of the patrons of this college, the institution through which their bounty has been conveyed to us, the institution which was such a cherished object of their affection and care, should be always an object of affection and care to us.

I am not asserting, my friends, that, should circumstances make such a course possible, we are ever to show our gratitude to our college at the expense of our integrity. I know of no gratitude, which cancels that obligation ; and sure I am, that such a service our college will never ask at our hands, and will never receive from them, till we are most unworthy sons. I am not saying, that the measures of her administration are never to be canvassed by those, who have been objects of her bounty. It may well be more or less their right and duty, according to different relations which they sustain to her, and to different opportunities possessed by them of information and influence, to have, and to urge an opinion, favor-

able or otherwise, upon such measures. But I am affirming, that they are to be canvassed, when they do come under our notice, I was about to say, in the spirit of an affectionate solicitude, that they may be found, on examination, to be worthy of approval ; but I will rather say, in the spirit of an earnest solicitude, that they may either prove to be of that character, or may eventually be made so. But, leaving this, with the repetition of the single remark, that I am speaking of no gratitude, if such there could be, which should involve any violation of integrity or justice, I urge that the sons of this college, wherever they go, and whatever they do, are not to suffer themselves to forget, that here dwells the nursing mother of their minds ; and it is ‘a foolish son,’ says the wise man, who ‘despiseth his mother.’ If she should ever seem to appeal to us, by a claim of filial duty, for any thing adverse to severer obligations, we may be sure that it is not then her voice that speaks, the blended voice of her wise and worthy through seven generations. But, on the other hand, in evil report and good report, our mother’s honor is alike our care ; our mother’s name is not to be lightly taken on injurious lips, while we stand by and hear. Till we are caitiff sons, we shall not imagine that there is no task for us, when justice, as we deem it, is not done her to the full. If we believe any charges which may have been made against her, on the score of religious partisanship, or the like, to be altogether unauthorized by the fact, we can have no dis-

pensation from saying so ; and that, very freely, unambiguously, and emphatically. If we believe, that an education nearly as good as is to be obtained any where else in this country, or quite as good, or a great deal better, is to be here obtained, in expressing our opinion to this effect, according as it may be, we shall but be acquitting ourselves of a manifest obligation of honorable men, sustaining the relation which we bear. But the credit of our college is not all, for which we are to feel concern, nor shall we have accomplished what in this aspect appears to be its due from us, when we have vindicated its good name, and published and urged its merits. All its interests are to be substantially served by the labors of its friends, and among those friends we are to have our actions take care that our names be recorded. If God blesses us with wealth, I know not, among the public distributions which we may have grace to devise, what more grateful object we can propose to ourselves, than to turn back to pour a filial tribute into our mother's lap, to be dispensed to her younger hopes in ampler bounty, than she could command the means to afford to us. And here, I will even ask, in passing, since the subject leads to the inquiry, whether, while separately many of her children have 'done virtuously' in this way, it is not time that some more extended and united action of them together should 'excel them all.' An eminent jurist* of the last century called his liberal

* Chief Justice Dudley.

testamentary endowment, 'a poor thank-offering to God from his unworthy servant for his many and great mercies to him in his education at that college;' and the words, 'once* a pupil, always a patron,' making part of the inscription, in which her gratitude recorded the merits of another distinguished magistrate, on the edifice, by the gift of which he had expressed his filial regard, have a truth and an interest for the many bosoms, in which the same sentiment is doubtless devoutly cherished.† If we have no wealth to offer her, possibly there are those who have, who desire to have their liberal designs enlightened and guided by our, so far, better discretion, and to whom our upright and fitly spoken word may usefully commend her claims. We do something to possess

* The inscription on the front of old Stoughton Hall was as follows;

DEO OPT. MAX. BONISQ. LITERIS S.
GULIELMUS STOUGHTON ARMIGER PROVINCIAE
MASSACHUSET. NOV-ANGLORUM VICE-GUBERNATOR
COLLEGII HARVARDINI OLIM ALUMNUS
SEMPER PATRONUS FECIT
ANNO DOMINI 1699.

Peirce's History, p. 71.

† 'The Court agreed to give 400 £ towards a schoale or Colledge, whearoff 200 £ to bee paid the next yeare, and 200 £ when the worke is finished, and the next Court to appoint wheare and wt building.'

Such is part of the record of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, convened Sept. 25th, (Oct. 6th, N. S.) 1636, and continued thence from day to day by adjournment. In little more than two years, then, the second century from the foundation of the College will be completed.

Is it fit, or not, that her nineteen hundred living sons should be thinking of doing honor to that event by some joint expression of their gratitude?

Their aggregate means are ample. The wants of the college, in two respects, those of accommodation for its invaluable library, and provision for indigent students, are great. To keep the anniversary by a liberal united effort to advance the object, to which it owes its interest, would make a sensible and memorable novelty among forms of commemoration.

her patrons of the reward they coveted, when we increase the number of sharers in the good which they devised; and, understanding their spirit to be that of the sage who said, that, when he did a kind action to one man, he always meant it should be paid to another, for he 'loved to have benefits go round,' we shall, as opportunity favors, enable young persons, who desire, and would do justice to, the advantages here, which we have enjoyed, to obtain them, by pecuniary assistance, if they need, and we can render it, or by information, counsel, facilities in their studies, or other requisite aid. It may be, that the interests of our college may require to be served in the public councils. If we have a place there, it is true that we shall be acting under obligations, higher than can be deduced from any relations our youth has borne, or favors it has experienced. But, in that sphere, we may well rejoice, that we can use the voice she formed to tell with freedom and affection all her desert, and to plead her cause, with a full heart and to good purpose, as often as we see that her interests and the public interests are the same. Like the Psalmist's wishes for the home of his kindred, our friendly wishes will be breathed for her, in entreaties for a blessing to him who alone can bless. We shall pray for her peace; that they may prosper that love her; that peace may be within her walls, prosperity within her palaces. For our brethren and companions' sakes we shall ask, that peace may be within her. Happy they, once more, who, rendering her the

best honor by signal services to the cause of truth, and righteousness, and God, and man, shall authorize her to say, with the proudest exultation of the maternal heart, 'behold my jewels.' Yes, my brethren; and happy every one of us, who, in an humbler sphere, by the consistent tenor of worthy lives, shall do credit to the rearing which she gave us.

If there is any truth in what has been said, I would submit, in a word, that it is not applicable alone to such, as have obtained from this college that general education of the mind, which is to serve for a basis for the further studies of preparation for professional pursuits; but also to those, her children by later adoption, who having chosen their walks in life, have then sought her aid, while they advanced towards them.* They, too, have been domesticated in her family. They have been profited by, and become debtors to, her bounty. Her honor is their honor. Her prosperity must be their care; nor of them is it any more to be supposed, that having received from her what she had to bestow, they should ever go from her door that welcomed them, on their sordid way, and not cast back, while they tread it, a glance of thankfulness and good-will.

For those who are not to meet us again in these Sabbath services, the feeling which arises in the mind cannot fail to be a feeling of affectionate in-

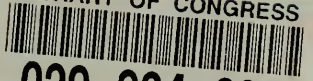
* The number of professional students in the different faculties, in the academical year 1833-4, approached within one fifth to that of undergraduates.

terest. We hope that success and honors await them in the world ; and we hope that the world, into whose mass they are proceeding, is to find them ambitious of that truest honor and success, which are only to be found in usefulness. But we know that honor and success are not all which they are to look for. They are men ; and the common lot of men is to be theirs. We hope that when, hereafter, the bitter experiences of that changing lot shall come to any, they may find the christian spirit ‘ of power and of a sound mind,’ ‘ of wisdom and of the fear of the Lord,’ present to sustain them in their hour of trial; and ‘ the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,’ shining like warm sunlight on their hearts, when the cloud has passed away. May God Almighty, ‘ the God before whom their fathers walked,’ ‘ the God which hath fed them all their lives long unto this day,’ go with them on their untried way, keep, and direct, and bless them, and redeem them from all the evil that is in the world. A guiding pillar of fire to them in the glooms of life, may he be too a shading pillar of a cloud to allay the consuming blaze of their untempered prosperity. May he incline them to trace happiness to its untroubled fountain. May he teach them to sanctify and truly to enjoy his gifts, by devoting them to the one great aim of his glory and his children’s good. May they prove signal blessings to the friends who have so longed, and perhaps so struggled, to see them coming forward to the honorable tasks of life. Young, may they pro-



foundly feel the high responsibilities of educated youth. Aged, may they reap the rich reward of well-spent years in the general esteem, and their own approving consciousness. May they be aided to contribute bright names to the catalogue of their country's worthies. May every name stand in golden characters on the Lamb's book of life. Long, and useful, and prosperous, if so it please God, be their earthly service ; honored, the place of their last rest ; that memory of the just which is blessed, the memory which they leave behind ; and the company of the just made perfect, the society where their ripe spirits shall find at last congenial and satisfying good.

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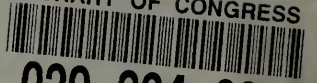


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