

Baccalaureate address, delivered August 11, 1834, at the third annual commencement of the University of the state of Alabama.

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BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS,

DELIVERED

AUGUST 11, 1834,

AT THE

THIRD ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF ALABAMA.

BY ALVA WOODS, D. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY.



[m.p.]

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE TRUSTEES.

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ADDRESS.

Young Gentlemen of the Graduating Class,

By the kind providence of that Being, who never slumbers, we are brought to the close of another College year:—and I now appear before you to give you the parting hand, and to bid you God speed in the way that lies before you.

It cannot have escaped your observation, that youth especially are prone to indulge in the illusions of hope;—prone to lend a willing ear to every whisper of fancy, and to imagine that the brightest visions of bliss now flitting before them will be speedily followed by the fulness of fruition. With this natural proneness you may sometimes have seen associated a self-confidence, which spurns restraint, which disposes its possessor to think himself too wise to learn, too knowing to take advice, and which is the precursor of an early downfall. You all, no doubt, have learned this lesson, that the counsels of a Mentor are most needed when least desired. Could youth be induced to seek and to heed the counsels of friendship and of maturer years, they might in a measure supply the want of experience, escape many a danger, and avoid many a sad disappointment. Whatever may be the event, it is the duty of every parent and every teacher, to give such counsels, and to

accompany them with the earnest prayer that they may exert a salutary influence on the future destiny of those committed to his charge.

Much of your future comfort and usefulness will depend upon a right choice of the profession or pursuit which is to engage your attention through subsequent life. Should you make a mistake here, the consequences will be disastrous not only to yourselves, but to those with whom you may be associated. But if you wisely select a calling for which you are fitted by your natural talents and temperament, by your habits, by your intellectual attainments, and, above all, by your moral qualities, you may safely promise yourselves an honorable and a successful career. At least, if you fail, the fault will be in yourselves; the fault will be, that you do not put forth those exertions without which a man will not and cannot succeed in any undertaking.

Before you determine, then, on the choice of a pursuit, study well your own character. Consider not only in what you excel, but in what you are deficient; not only what you can do, but what you can endure. Look not only to the strong but to the weak points of your character. Remember that in whatever sphere you may move, your Creator has destined you to undergo a moral discipline; that your integrity is to be tried, and all your moral virtues are to be tested, again and again.

Compare, then, the advantages and the disadvantages of any calling which invites your attention. Consider the labors which you will have to perform, and the temptations you will have to resist. Look not only to the emoluments of the calling, but to the opportunities of usefulness which that calling may afford you. In short, select that vocation for life, in which you will probably be able to combine the greatest amount of personal virtue and of personal enjoyment, with the greatest amount of usefulness to your fellow men.

Do any of you propose to embark in the practice of the Law? Weigh well the responsibilities which you assume. Remember you will be called to defend the personal rights, the property, the reputation, the lives of your fellow citizens. And should

you prove yourselves worthy of the literary advantages which you have here enjoyed, you may be called to the Legislative Hall, to frame laws for the government of your state, perhaps of your country. The dearest interests of your fellow men may turn upon the extent and the accuracy of your legal attainments. Upon your professional eminence, the welfare of your countrymen may greatly depend. You may yet be called to act as the Judges of Constitutional Law; and on your decisions may hang the liberties and the lives of your fellow men. Be not desirous, then, of obtaining speedy admission to the practice of such a profession; but be mainly anxious that, when you are admitted, you shall be fully qualified to meet your high responsibilities; and to take rank with the most eminent men of your profession. This is the profession which may be regarded as the high road to civil office and to civil honors. But, as you value your permanent reputation and usefulness, attempt not to purchase the offices in the gift of a free and enlightened people with any thing but sterling worth of character, a thorough knowledge of your profession, with untiring devotion to its duties, and unbending patriotic virtue. With these qualifications, your success in life may be pronounced morally certain. In fine, let me intreat you, as you value your peace in a future day, never sacrifice the immutable principles of rectitude for the sake of gain. Never strive, like Milton's Belial, to

—————"make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels."

Consecrate your talents solely to the cause of innocence, of truth, of justice, and eternal right. Let your maxim ever be, "*Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.*" In an English work, just issued from the American press, "Dymond's Essays on the Principles of Morality," you will find a chapter on the Morality of Legal Practice, worthy your most attentive perusal.

Do any of you propose to engage in the practice of Medicine? Consider that the care of the health and the life of your fellow men, is a trust of no ordinary magnitude. Beware that

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that health and that life are never sacrificed through your ignorance or your inattention. Qualify yourselves, then, for the high duties of your calling, by private studies, by attendance on public lectures, by a close observation of all the phenomena of disease, and by combining the results of your own observation with the wisdom and experience of the ablest practitioners in the healing art.

Investigate also the causes as well as the phenomena of disease ; that you may be able, not only to cure, but to prevent maladies ; and thus to render yourselves benefactors to your race. Examine well all those physical and moral causes which affect the health of individuals and of whole communities, that you may be able to decide how far those causes are to be removed by individual efforts, by municipal regulations, or by more general legislative enactments. Study well the physical constitution of man ; and make yourselves familiar with all those laws which govern a diseased or a healthy action of the human system. In a word, pursue this profession, not merely as a source of personal emolument, but as a means of usefulness to society. The Medical profession, when founded on an accurate knowledge of the complex nature of man, and pursued on broad and liberal principles, is a rational, noble profession. It contains within itself one of the most important elements of human happiness, that is, a sufficient amount of mental and bodily activity. It also opens a wide field for the exercise of the benevolent affections. The consciousness of laboring, and laboring successfully, to relieve distress and alleviate woe, must impart permanent gratification to the mind, and elevate a man in his own estimation, as well as in the estimation and gratitude of his fellow men.

Should any of you, at any time, propose to enter upon the duties of the Christian Ministry, examine well the motives by which you are actuated to undertake an office of the most awful responsibility. Take heed that no selfish or sinister considerations sway your mind. Look not for those emoluments and those worldly honors, which are to be obtained in the other professions. For the reward of your toils, you must look mainly

to your own breast, and to the retributions of a future world. Consider that the well-being of your fellow men, not only for this life, but for that life which shall never end, is at stake ; that on your fidelity eternal consequences may be suspended.

Spare no pains, then, to prepare yourselves for this high vocation by useful knowledge, by a diligent study of the Book of God, by eminent piety, and, above all, by seeking constantly the guidance and blessing of the great Eternal. Fix on a lofty standard for your attainments and for your efforts. In a profession which involves the destinies of man, not only in this but in another world, all the learning of a Paul, and all the eloquence of an Apollos, you will find not too much ; and you will find it all infinitely too little, without the special benediction of Almighty God resting upon your labors.

Do any of you propose to engage in the profession of Teaching? Imagine not that inferior talents and inferior attainments are sufficient for the duties of this calling. Do we require skill and experience in those who propose to take care of the health of the body, and are less skill and experience necessary in those who undertake to watch over the health and the growth of the mind ? Does an intelligent parent seek to employ in his service mechanics and artisans who understand well the business which they profess, and will he give the formation of the minds of his children into the hands of ignorant, of prejudiced, or of unprincipled men ? There is, indeed, reason to fear that many parents are not sufficiently impressed with the vast importance of this subject ; that they do not see how much their own comfort and happiness, and how much the comfort and happiness and usefulness of their children, depend on the character of those to whom their education is committed. Hence teachers are often employed without sufficient regard to their literary and moral qualifications.

Is there not also reason to fear that the importance of this subject to the welfare of our country is often overlooked ? If it be acknowledged that intelligence and virtue are essential to the permanent prosperity of a republic, what can be more important to the welfare of our beloved country, than the instruc-

tion of the rising generation? This, then, is the profession, which, in these United States, ought to enlist and employ the highest order of intellect, and the highest attainments in literary and moral excellence. If it be better for individuals and for society to prevent crime than to punish it, then is that office of the very first importance, which requires a man, in the discharge of its duties, to enlighten the youthful mind and to inculcate a love of virtue and an abhorrence of vice.

While this office is wholly unknown, or lightly esteemed among the more barbarous nations, it is held in the highest veneration among the enlightened. In the brightest days of the glory of Greece, you find the instructors of her youth ranked among the illustrious, the revered, and the honored men of the country. Go to the most polished nations of Europe at this day, and you find their philosophers and teachers associated with the great and the noble and the virtuous of the land. Indeed, you may judge of the progress which any community has made towards a state of general intelligence and high culture by the respect which they render to men of learning, and by the estimation in which they hold the office of an Instructor of youth.

It is believed, that there is at this time, in our country, a call for an additional number of well qualified teachers; and that the time is at hand when the labors of such teachers will be duly appreciated and liberally remunerated. Should any of you, then, engage in this profession, act in a manner worthy of its dignity and importance. Acquaint yourselves with all the improved methods of teaching. Review carefully and extend your knowledge of Mental Science. This science is the foundation of the Art of Teaching: and a man ignorant of this science, will inevitably fail as a teacher. You know that the phenomena of the mind are regulated by certain fixed laws, as much as are the phenomena of the material universe; and that it is only by understanding these laws, and acting in accordance with them, that the mind can be successfully educated. You know that we cannot arbitrarily introduce ideas into our own minds;—that they are introduced according to those laws of suggestion

which regulate the succession of thought. You know that we cannot force our own opinions or our own belief;—that these must be the result of facts and of evidence presented to the mind. Much less, then, can we extend such arbitrary power over the minds of others. Avail yourselves, also, of the experience of those who have gone before you. And from your own daily experience and observation, add something to the general stock of improvement in the method of teaching. In a word, as your profession is inferior to none in dignity and value to the community, let it be inferior to none in the ability and untiring fidelity with which its duties are discharged.

Do any of you propose to become Civil Engineers? It is an employment of great and growing importance to our wide-spread and prosperous republic; and an employment in which mechanical genius and scientific attainments may secure for their possessor ample rewards. The vast and fertile valley of the Mississippi, from the Lake of the Woods to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Alleghany to the Rocky Mountains, is yet to be intersected with rail-roads and canals, giving facility of transportation to all the varied fruits of our own industry and to the productions of foreign climes. The construction of those works of internal improvement will call for bold enterprise and for mathematical talent. In erecting such works of public and general utility, an able engineer may at the same time build up his own fame and fortune, and identify his name with the prosperity and glory of his country.

Read the story of the eminent English engineer, Brindley, and imitate his untiring perseverance under difficulties. The three thousand miles of British canal navigation, the production of the last seventy years, and all the additional prosperity which that navigation has given to the British nation, may be regarded as the fruits of the unconquerable genius of James Brindley.

But should you not engage in any of the professions already named, imagine not that the education which you have here received will be useless to you. There are many other pursuits in which knowledge, intelligence, and moral worth, are duly appreciated and amply rewarded.

The fair merchant, who by honest gains acquires a livelihood for himself and family, does at the same time render a service to the community.

The industrious farmer, who by the sweat of his brow gets his daily bread, and who produces bread for the consumption of others, is a public benefactor. Of all employments, agriculture is the most indispensable, the most healthful, and the most independent. It is the employment in which the greater portion of the inhabitants of this country will always engage. This pursuit, by giving activity to the powers both of body and mind, by removing individuals from scenes of vice and sources of disease in the crowded city, by securing moderate, not enormous, gains, as the fruits of industry, is highly favorable to moral character and to mental enjoyment. This is the employment which is to furnish materials for the manufacturer, which is to produce articles for commerce, and to which mankind must look principally for the supply of their necessary wants. And there is little danger of its being crowded to excess, as is the case in most countries with what are peculiarly denominated the Professions. The author of a very recent English work, entitled "England and America," asserts that two thirds of the professional men in England live by snatching the bread out of each other's mouths.

Now the more general intelligence a farmer, or mechanic, or merchant, possesses, the better is he qualified to promote his own interests and the interests of that community in which he resides. Should he be called by his fellow citizens to fill some public office, will he not be able to do it with more satisfaction to himself, and with more benefit to the community, from his having enjoyed the advantages of education? With such advantages, he will, even as a private citizen, be a more efficient and useful member of the body politic, in a country like ours, in which every man may participate in the affairs of the government.

In whatever employment, then, young gentlemen, you engage, you may find the education, which you have here received, of essential value. And never think it a degradation to

engage in any employment by which you can be made comfortable and happy, and at the same time useful to society.

“Honor and shame from no condition rise :
Act well your part ; there all the honor lies.”

And here let me exhort you, when you have with due deliberation chosen your profession or pursuit, be steadfast in your purpose. Fickleness is one of the principal causes of failure to young men of talents and education. Thrown upon the ocean of life, instead of pressing “with lusty sinews and with hearts of controversy” for the distant point which they desire to reach, they allow themselves to be drifted about to every point of the compass, just as the wind or the wave may take them. Instead of making circumstances bend to them, they bend to every circumstance. Do they find the pursuit which they have selected a laborious or difficult one—and what pursuit is there which has not its labor or difficulty—they soon abandon it for another which is deemed more pleasant. In this too they find trials, and vexations, and disappointments ; and are soon allured off to some other calling which seems to promise a shorter road or an easier way to wealth, to fortune, or to fame. Thus their life is wasted away, without accomplishing any thing valuable for themselves, for their friends, or for their country. Had it not been for this fickleness of disposition in the poet Burns, which rendered him discontented with the peaceful enjoyment of a country life, he might never have “dwindled,” to use his own language, “into a paltry excise-man, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the lowest of mankind.”

In a person of liberal education, it would be reputable and desirable to possess some general acquaintance with the various professions and pursuits of civilized man : but to attempt more than this would prevent the attainment of success in any one. It is only by giving the principal attention and energies to one pursuit, that a person can rationally hope for eminent success ; and it is in this way too that he can render himself most useful to the community. Whatever knowledge, then, of a general

nature you may possess, remember that your success in life, your respectability, and your usefulness, will depend upon your thorough knowledge of your own profession and your untiring devotion to it. Soar aloft, then, to the heights of professional eminence, "with an eye that never winks, and a wing that never tires." In a word, adopt, as yours, a motto which I once beheld over the gate of the Abbé Rozier, at Lyons in France, "*Laudate magna rura, Colite exiguum.*"

Young gentlemen, before concluding this address, I deem it my duty to make some suggestions of a more strictly moral nature.

I would call your attention, then, to the indissoluble connection which exists between cause and effect in the moral world. My object is not to give you a metaphysical dissertation on the theory of causation ; but to offer a few observations which may be of practical utility in the conduct of life.

In the natural world, we are ready to acknowledge the connection between causes and effects, between means and ends. We do not expect to see in the horizon the beautiful rainbow, unless there be the falling shower and the shining sun. Our planters do not expect their land to produce an abundant cotton crop without cultivation. The mariner would not hope to reach the far distant port, unless he were to spread his sails to the winds of heaven.

But do we not often see persons expecting to be wise without knowledge, learned without application, rich without diligence, healthy without temperance, happy without virtue, and saved without holiness? The gambler, with the fell purpose of enriching himself by the impoverishment of others, the epicure with his luxurious living, the drunkard with his bowls, the debauchee with his guilty pleasures—each promises himself health, and peace, and happiness! See yonder youth entering into a profession, which calls for ceaseless vigilance. He folds his arms in indolence, passes his time with idle loungers, relies upon the patronage of his friends, or trusts to some good luck in his stars, and then wonders at his want of success. He can-

not tell why fortune does not pour into his lap the horn of plenty, or crown his brow with the laurel wreath. He prays, perhaps, for prosperity ; but, to use the language of the fable, he does not put his own shoulder to the wheel. Suppose that, contrary to all reasonable expectation, professional success attends him ; will it not find him unfitted to enjoy it, and destitute of those habits which would enable him to turn it to good account ? Will not his prosperity come upon him like a great prize obtained in a lottery, which generally ruins him who obtains it ?

This inattention to the connection of means with ends is especially observable in moral conduct. How often do you see a young man entering on life, who appears entirely to overlook the fact that every moral action has its effect ; that that effect is good or bad according to the character of the action ; that the effect follows the action as surely as a shadow follows its substance. Because the effect is not always to be seen immediately, he does not trace the effect to the action as its cause. He seems not to perceive that long continued integrity will certainly inspire confidence in his character ; and that dishonesty and falsehood will as certainly secure contempt and indignation ; that vicious practices will always, in one way or another, produce misery ; that if the effect be delayed, if the day of retribution be postponed, it is only that it may come with accumulated vengeance. On the other hand, he seems to forget that the rewards of virtue can be purchased only with virtue herself ; and that these rewards will as certainly accompany virtuous conduct as day accompanies the rising of the sun.

This law, young gentlemen, which binds the effect to its cause, which links together by an indissoluble bond happiness with virtue, and misery with vice, is the great conservative principle of the moral world. It is this which holds together the elements of the moral universe ; this which binds man to duty and to God. Destroy this law, and you uproot the very foundations of all government, and throw into one universal chaos the whole rational creation of the Almighty.

If, then, you wish to avoid evil and obtain good, weigh well the consequences of your actions ; and be governed by a prudent foresight of those consequences. Employ those means whose tendency is to produce the ends which you desire, and to lead you on to peace and prosperity ; and avoid those causes which bring after them disappointment, shame, remorse, and all the ills that follow in the train of imprudence, folly, and vice. Consider, when you are performing an action, you may be laying a train of consequences which will run far into futurity, which may extend through the whole of your earthly life, perhaps through the interminable ages of your existence !

Finally, young gentlemen, let me urge upon your attention the importance of personal religion. Its benefits are not confined to that life which is to come. It has a close connection with that kind of prosperity in this life, which is most desirable. It enhances the pleasure of worldly enjoyments by inducing us to use them with moderation. It preserves its votaries from those wasteful expenditures which dissipate property, and from those habits of vice and immorality which undermine the physical constitution, which destroy peace and tranquillity of mind, and which sap the foundations of character. It is this which gives true dignity and elevation to our nature ; which qualifies us to enjoy prosperity with gratitude, and to bear adversity with fortitude. Let me exhort you, then, in the language of Lord Chatham to his nephew, while at the University of Cambridge, "Hold fast by this sheet-anchor of happiness, religion ; you will often want it in times of most danger, the storms and tempests of life. Cherish true religion as precious as you will fly, with abhorrence and contempt, superstition and enthusiasm. The first is the perfection and glory of human nature ; the two last the depravation and disgrace of it."

And here, in passing, let me intreat you ever to avoid all hypocritical pretences in matters of religion. Let no consideration ever induce you to profess to be what you are not. Remember that our Saviour's heaviest maledictions were pronounced upon hypocrites ; upon those who, with professions of uncommon sanctity, were the secret workers of iniquity.

Again said Lord Chatham to his nephew, "If you are not right towards God, you can never be so towards man." Does any one persuade you that it is the part of weakness or ignorance to be a believer in religion? regard him not. It is probable that he has never examined the evidences of our religion, or made himself acquainted with the claims which it has to the homage of mankind. He cannot have known with what an array of talent and learning Christianity has been vindicated from the attacks of its enemies.

Was the late Baron Cuvier a competent witness as to the credibility of the Scripture account of the creation of the world? Who has equalled him in a knowledge of Geology, Zoology, and of the Organic Remains of a former world? No one, who has visited the Garden of Plants at Paris, will call in question the extent and accuracy of his attainments in Natural Science. But Cuvier maintains that the order which the cosmogony of Moses assigns to the different epochs of creation, is precisely the same as that which has been deduced from geological considerations.

Was Sir Humphrey Davy, a President of the Royal Society and the most eminent chemist of the present century—was he weak and ignorant when he affirmed, "I should prefer a firm religious belief to every other blessing?"

Will you go to Sir Isaac Newton, whose powers of reasoning have never been surpassed, whose sublime discoveries have never been equalled by the most towering genius, and who directed his powerful intellect to the investigation of moral as well as of physical science? You find him an humble believer in the Christian faith; and the Bible a constant companion of his ripest years.

Will you go to our beloved Washington, who was first in the council, first in the field, and first in the hearts of his countrymen? Was he a man of wisdom, of sound mind, and of discriminating judgment! Follow him to his most secret retirements, and you find him kneeling at the altar of Christianity, and bowing his soul in humble adoration to the Father of his spirit.



But why do I appeal to human authority, when we have a Teacher who is greater than Solomon, and wiser than the wisest of our race? The day is coming, in which the opinion of your fellow men, in every thing pertaining to duty and salvation, will weigh in your estimation lighter than the dust of the balance. Be not, then, deluded out of your religion by the raillery of the skeptical or by the scoffs of the impious. As you value rational happiness in this life, and eternal felicity hereafter, place yourselves under the guidance of the great Christian Teacher and Lawgiver; and receive from Him, with all docility, the lessons of heavenly wisdom. Make His morality the standard of your actions, and rely on that propitiation which He has made for sin for your hopes of eternal salvation; and you will enjoy in this life that degree of success and prosperity which is best for you, and in the future world a glorious immortality will be your portion.

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