

Importance of Education,

ILLUSTRATED

IN AN

O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

TRUSTEES, PRECEPTORS & STUDENTS

OF

Leicester Academy,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1806;

At opening of a New BUILDING for the use of that SEMINARY.

BY REV. AARON BANCROFT.

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JULY—1806.

REV. MR. SUMNER'S ADDRESS.

ON the morning of the 4th July, 1806, the Corporation of LEICESTER ACADEMY met to open a New Building for the use of that Institution. The TRUSTEES, PRECEPTORS and STUDENTS formed in procession, and proceeded to take possession of the Edifice, upon which the Rev. Mr. SUMNER, President of the Academy, delivered the following ADDRESS to the Students and Spectators.

ON the 23d. of March 1784 Leicester Academy was established by the Government of this Commonwealth for the purpose of diffusing useful knowledge, and the promotion of virtue and true piety. Soon after the Charter was granted, the seminary was opened and was in a flourishing condition until the want of energy in the confederation of the U. States, and the tumults that existed in this State, so far destroyed public credit, as to render the resources of this Institution unproductive, and for a time it was shut up; and so it must have remained had



it not for the exertions of individuals, and particularly of the Inhabitants of Leicester. By means of which it was kept alive, until the Federal Constitution was framed, and the Federal Government established, which restored public credit, and of course revived this institution; since which time it has prospered, and many have here been trained up to take active, and useful parts upon the stage of life; many have been furnished to become instructors of private Schools, others have been prepared to enter upon professional studies, and not a few have been fitted to become members of Colleges and Universities. When a new building was found necessary for the accommodation of the Preceptors and Students, and the funds were judged competent to the expense, it was undertaken. On the 14th of May 1805, the Corner Stone of this Edifice was laid, since which time, this superstructure has been erected thereon—convenient and sufficiently elegant; of which we this day take possession for the use of this Academy, agreeably to the charter. We add our ardent wishes, that it may long stand, and be an extensive blessing for ages yet to come—a pure fountain, from which may issue such streams as may gladden the hearts of the pious and good—that the most useful knowledge may here be faithfully communicated, according to the age and capacity of the students, and by them as carefully

pursued—that the purest principles of virtue, piety and true religion, may be here inculcated, and conscientiously practised—that the proficiency of the present members, and others who may succeed them, may be proportionate to their advantages and according to the just expectations of Parents and Friends—that these walls may never be abused, by unnecessary defacements; especially that they never be made a covert to vice, and wickedness—but that the knowledge and fear of the true God, be here promoted and maintained, to the latest period of time.

Let us now go into the house of the LORD and there offer our praise and thanksgiving for the smiles of Heaven upon this institution, and the success that has attended the erecting of this building; at the same time by prayer and supplication commend this seminary to the divine benediction, and attend to the importance of Education.

REV. MR. BANCROFT'S ORATION.

IN the pleasing exercises of this morning the oration was originally assigned to the principal instructor of the Academy. He declined the service, and it has unhappily devolved on me.— While I regret that the ultimate appointment of the Corporation had not been directed in a different manner, it becomes my indispensable duty to address this respected audience on the subject of education.

The importance of education will appear from every view, in which it can be contemplated. The difference between men resulting from education is much greater than that which arises from endowments of nature. What disproportion between the intellectual capacity of the man, who has extensively cultivated the field of science, and that of the mere child of the earth, who is ignorant of every thing but the purposes of animal life! Culture unfolds the powers of the human mind and displays the faculties of him, who by the inspiration of the Almighty possesses understanding. To the man of an improved

mind nature unfolds her secret operations, and presents her richest treasures ; he possesses unfailing sources of pleasing reflection and moves in an extended sphere of benevolent action. From earth he rises to heaven, attains to worthy apprehensions of the character and government of God, understands his moral relations, and rightly conceives of his immortal destination.

The effects of education are still more important upon the moral, than the intellectual nature of man. This disciplines his passions, purifies his temper, and refines his manners. It gives useful direction to the sensibilities of the human heart, and forms the soul to an habit of virtue. By it, are we fitted to sustain the offices, and to participate in the endearments of domestic and social life. On its influence must we depend to form the kind neighbor, the good citizen and the pious and charitable christian. By wise methods of moral education, may we expect to be fitted for a life of continued improvement in knowledge and of attainments in virtue, when the distinctions of this world shall be lost, and all the monuments of human ingenuity be obliterated.

Under the impressions, which our subject is calculated to make, do we not dwell with veneration and gratitude upon the memories of our first New-England Ancestors ? The European settlers of our country, under all the dangers and embarrassments

with which they were encompassed, felt a rational solicitude for their posterity. Being separated from the improvements of the old world, and having direct intercourse only with the savage of the wilderness, they perceived the danger, to which their descendants were exposed, of falling into a state of ignorance and barbarism, and they exerted strenuous efforts to preserve them from the fatal evil, and to render them the worthy repositories of the invaluable inheritance, which they hoped to transmit. To their piety and patriotism are we indebted for the early foundation of a College, for our liberal and judicious plan of schools in incorporated towns, and for the general system of our literary and religious institutions. Time, which tests all things, has proved the wisdom and efficacy of the measures of their adoption.

Look down, ye revered spirits, from the abodes of the blessed, and behold the fruits of your toils and hazards. Your Newtown school has grown into Harvard University, which embraces the whole circle of science. Your Western border is illuminated by a Literary seminary of encreasing splendor and usefulness. On the shores of Maine, under favorable auspices, arises a College, which promises to disseminate knowledge and virtue through a populous district, which will soon claim the honor of an independent state. Various Humane societies



are formed in different parts of your country, and by their benevolent agency remove or alleviate the calamities incident to the life of man. Throughout the extent of your patent, where stood the altar, on which the deluded Indian offered his unmeaning sacrifice to an unknown Deity, are temples opened for the spiritual and ennobling worship of the God of heaven and earth; where the savage youth were taught the stratagems of insidious war, and instructed in the refinements of torture upon a vanquished enemy, are seminaries erected to teach your descendents the arts of peace, and to initiate them in the business of civilized society. To the awful gloom and silence of extended forests, to the hideous yell of the infuriated warrior, to the uncertain supplies of the chase, succeed the variegated prospects of populous towns, and cultivated fields, the hum of busy life and the abundance of agriculture and commerce.

In the United States, necessary devotion to professional business leaves to few the exclusive pursuits of science; among those therefore, who rank with scholars, we have not the proportion of men of profound erudition, which is found in old countries whose Universities have attained to a high degree of perfection, and among whom there are great numbers, who, born to affluent fortunes, spend their lives in Academic walks. The expectation of this would be unreasonable, the claim is vanity.

But, the age of our nation considered, have we reason to be ashamed of the state of American literature? In the higher branches of science, and in the most useful arts we have had individuals preeminently distinguished; and some who have led the way to the first philosophers of Europe. In the fine arts we are making essays:—In practical arts that broaden the basis of society, and ameliorate the condition of man, we hold an honorary grade. In the elementary plan of education, which is extended to the rich and the poor, which embraces the whole mass of our citizens, we will yield precedence to no nation on earth. The value of these improvements cannot be calculated. Compare our country with one, whose inhabitants are destitute of advantages of this nature, and where general ignorance and barbarism prevail. How many channels of useful business, how many sources of enjoyment and happiness are open to us, which are closed to them! Of how much higher value is property, is domestic relation, is life itself! Among the richest benefits of that degree of learning, which is within the attainment of all classes of people, we may reckon the ability acquired to understand our religion, in its evidence, its spirit and design; by which men are guarded against the useless services of superstition, secured from the delusions of enthusiasm, and are enabled to direct their religious observances to real attainments in moral life.

As the intermediate, grade, between our Colleges and Town schools, Academies are incorporated. In these youth may obtain an education, that will fit them for the active business of society, and qualify them to become instructors in subordinate schools; but it is not expected that the profound scholar should here be formed. To these the female part of our youth are admitted, that they also may acquire a grammatical knowledge of their language, and possess a confidence in the correctness of their own compositions; that their minds may be raised to a perception of the beauties of polite literature, formed to relish the charms of elegant composition, and to feel the worth of chaste, moral sentiment; and that sources of mental enjoyment may be opened to them, to sooth the sorrows, and to lighten the burdens to which in future life they are inevitably destined.

We confide in the wisdom of the Legislature not to multiply institutions of this nature to break in upon our excellent establishment of schools in towns. A more serious evil than this could scarcely befall families in the humble grades of society; it would take from the poor the opportunity to give their children the lowest instruction of the school. We confide in the discretion of those, who have wealth, not to bound at the Academy the literary

course of those sons, to whom they wish to give a thorough education.

The Academy is an elevation which extends the literary horizon, and brings into distant view the region of science ; but the path to the heights of this region lies through the University. Here it is the twilight of the morning, there the splendor of meridian day ; here a few faint blossoms may be collected, there the flowers expand, ripen and yield their fruit.

Youth, who mean to become scholars, will consider the education of the Academy only as a preparation for a seat in a higher literary establishment. With high satisfaction we remark that Harvard University is rising in her requirements from candidates for admission ; we trust that an example so friendly to the interests of literature will be followed by other Colleges, and that in our system of public education, we shall soon rival the most literary country of the old world.

Leicester Academy may be reckoned among those that are the most useful in the Commonwealth. Its local situation, near the centre of a populous county, is favorable to the important purposes of its institution. With grateful recollection, we recognize a CRAFT and a DAVIS as its founders. Their liberality, aided by the donations of the town of Leicester, and of a number of private gentlemen of

this vicinity, enabled those who were originally incorporated as trustees, early to begin the business of instruction. But you well recollect, gentlemen, your embarrassments from the loss of public credit. Your small capital had little more than a nominal value, and you even doubted whether the pious and benevolent intentions of the founders of the Academy were practicable ; but when our country, under the auspices of the WASHINGTON administration, arose to credit, honor and prosperity, your prospects brightened. When the genius of HAMILTON explored the resources of united America, infused life into her funds, and communicated the vital principle through all their ramifications, you felt the salutary effect. Your capital rose to its nominal value ; and this, increased by the sale of a township of land, the gift of the government of the Commonwealth, has enabled you successfully to prosecute the original plan, and I congratulate you gentlemen, and all the friends of the seminary, that on this day we take possession of a spacious and convenient edifice, erected for the accommodation of the Academy.— The expense of its erection has, indeed, greatly encroached upon our funds and I solicit the charitable attentions of the patrons of science to this rising seminary, that we may extend the branches of useful instruction, and ever command qualified instructors,

by giving them a compensation adequate to their services.

The gentlemen who compose the corporation, will permit me respectfully to observe, that the public utility of the Academy depends on the manner in which they shall execute their trust. They are ultimately responsible to the community for its interior regulation, for the competency of its instruction, and for the whole system of its administration. May the success of their past exertions animate them to future vigilance and assiduity. An habitual impression, that we are all accountable to God for the execution of the commissions of life, may animate them to fidelity in this trust ; and the day of retribution will be brought into near prospect by the consideration, that one half of those who originally composed their body, are now numbered with the dead.

The gentlemen who are immediately concerned in the instruction of the students will feel the weight of their charge. Few offices in society are more highly important than that which you sustain. To your management we commit these youth and children, the hope of our country. To your culture we entrust the minds of those in whose welfare we feel the dearest interest ; on whose wise and virtuous behavior we depend for the greatest joys

of life, and for the best solace of age ; and to whom we look to honor our memories when we shall sleep in the dust. Removed from the guardianship and the endearments of their paternal domes, to you we transfer the authority and the affection, the solicitude and the tenderness of the parent. By the discreet exercise of power ensure submission, and by engaging the ingenuous feelings of the innocent heart, obtain a more effectual control ; draw these youth into the paths of knowledge and virtue by the cords of love. Fan the fire of genius ; enkindle the spirit of emulation ; encourage the youthful mind to exert its own powers, and strengthen its faculties by exercises adapted to their period of life. Acquainted as you are with the progress of the human mind, you are convinced that the superstructure of a thorough education can be erected only on a solid foundation laid in early life.

While thus solicitous to conduct your pupils in the paths of useful literature, you will bear in mind, that an essential and primary end of this Academy is the promotion of piety and christian virtue. At no period was attention to moral education more necessary than at the present. The fountains of infidelity and vice are all uncovered, and their poisonous streams are continually poured into the minds of youth ; and on you we depend to

apply the antidote. Vain are the richest gifts of genius, vain the acquisitions of natural science, and worse than vanity the insinuating charms of polished manners, unless these are directed by moral principle. Guard then the minds of our rising offspring from the contagion of irreligion, and lead them to feel the force of moral obligation ; teach them the reverence of God ; make them to understand the system of christianity ; and habituate them to act from a regard to the issue of the day of judgment ; and then, amidst the prevalence of the impious maxims of the sceptic, and the vain dogmas of the sophist ; amidst the corrupting agitations of political parties and the seductions of vice, they will have within themselves a standard of truth and rectitude, and will be influenced to right conduct by motives, which cannot be counteracted by the allurements of dissipation, nor by the attractions of ambition.

With warmth of affection, with ardent desires for your improvement, we address you, my young friends, who are pupils in the Academy. The expensive care of your parents, and the unwearied diligence of your preceptors will not avail, unless you maintain a teachable disposition, and second their endeavors by your own application. View not those who are entrusted with your instruction

as inquisitors, who take pleasure in prying out your errors, and find delight in making you suffer.— your deficiencies and faults will occasion them the keenest sorrow, and the task of punishment they will feel as the heaviest burden of their office.— Consider them as your best friends, and render their government and instruction light and pleasant by your submissive and respectful behavior, and by a diligent use of your time. Let their maturer experience induce you cheerfully to adopt their advice even in instances where you do not perceive its propriety.

You, of both sexes, possess advantages, which were unknown to those who preceded you in the path of life ; be ambitious to derive from them their full benefit ; labor is the price set upon the valuable objects of the world. Learning is not the gift of chance ; the seeds of science are not of that easy and careless growth, as not to require the fostering hand of culture. Conquer then the indolence too common to the human mind. Guard against the dissipation to which your passions always prompt. Look into the world, and notice the men who are the most eminent, in the professions of society, and the most worthy in the walks of life. Are they not men who rose by their own exertions ? Emulate their laudable industry ; like them improve your

advantages, and like them you may rise to eminence and worth.

Let not the learning you acquire inflate you with vanity and pride. Consider not learning as the end of education, but as the means to render you the more useful. Knowledge is valuable only as it increases your capacity to do good ; as it fits you the more honorably to fill the offices of society. Knowledge is valuable as it brings you acquainted with the works and ways of God, assists your apprehensions of moral truth and moral duty, and aids your progress towards the goal of human perfection. Open then your hearts to the seeds of truth, of useful knowledge, and of christian virtue ; cherish their growth, that nourished by the dew of heaven, in you they may yield their richest harvest.

By a regard to the peace and happiness of your parents ; by the love of reputation ; by the desire of eminence ; by the worth of immortal life, be persuaded to improve the price put into your hands to gain wisdom.

To thy benediction, Parent of wisdom, we commend this seminary. Inspire the wealthy, the stewards of thy bounty, with the spirit of charity to become its benefactors. Through every period of time, may it prove the nursery of piety, virtue and useful literature. Assist thy servants of the corporation

to the faithful and judicious execution of their trust. May our preceptors adopt a wise plan of government, pursue an effectual method of instruction, and in their own example persuasively illustrate the moral lessons they teach. May these our sons grow up strong and healthy; and these our daughters beautiful and amiable. May they be endowed with useful knowledge, and formed to moral worth. May they become estimable through all the connexions of society and all the relations of life; finally, may they be admitted to the mansions of the blessed.

