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## DILIGENCE AND PERSEVERANCE:

### SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL OF DAVIDSON COLLEGE,  
OCT. 26TH, 1845.

BY J. A. WALLACE.

Youth is the most interesting and momentous period of human life. The fortunes of later years, and the destinies of the soul in eternity, depend in a great measure, on early training. The mind of man commences its existence destitute of a single idea, an intellectual blank. All its faculties exist only in embryo, and require age to expand and develop them. But from the time that the eye is first opened on the light of this world, until the dissolution of the soul and the body in death, the mind continues to receive impressions from the objects around it. Ideas are poured in upon it, from without, and the whole system of mental machinery is active within, combining, planning, and executing. And that knowledge which is imparted to the mind, in the first years of its existence, will generally stamp its character, for time and for eternity. Early impressions take precedence of all others. And whatever may be the course of after life, the vicissitudes, the attachments, and the pursuits, the impressions of youth are never wholly obliterated. Amid all the emblazonry of fashion and honor, and all the pomp and circumstance of military glory, the associations of early life rise up, and flash upon the soul, like the occasional burst of the vivid lightning on the bosom of the dark summer cloud.

The mind of the aged man wanders back, over a long life of toils, and fluctuations and disappointments, to the scenes of youthful enjoyment. The pleasures and amusements of childhood come up to him like the voice of the dead of other days. And all these scenes, though in some measure obliterated from the mind by the crowded events of years of business, will have their bearing, in a greater or less degree, on after life. A life of prosperity and virtuous action, will be reviewed with a high degree of pleasure. But the recollection of hopes crushed, fears realized, and plans frustrated will produce sensations, to fill the soul with gloom and melancholy.

Life is a stream that heads in infancy; and the waters that rise in the fountain will mingle with and influence all the tributaries that afterwards flow into it. If the waters of that fountain be bitter, like the waters of Marah, they will diffuse their bitterness through the whole length and breadth of the stream. Or life may be compared to the little wave, set in motion by the gentle breeze, which rolls onward and onward, increasing in size and strength, until it becomes the mountain billow, and bears the man of war upon its bosom. Then how interesting and important a period is youth, since it is the beginning of that which shall never end, the cause which produces consequences, that must endure, through life and to all eternity!

But it is of the young of the sterner sex, that I will presume now particularly to speak. I venture to address those who shall ere long be engaged in the active scenes of busy life. And though woman from the sphere in which she moves and the silent influence which she wields, may with propriety be termed "a power behind the throne," yet man is the throne itself. It is his to plunge immediately into the vortex of a troublous life, and engage in the ever varying scenes of a vexatious world. It is his province to till the soil, and bear its products to distant climes; to raise up and put down rulers; to sit on thrones of power; to sway "listening Senates" by his eloquence; and to stand up as the Minister of reconciliation to a fallen world. It is a life of energy, activity and enterprise. The stormy agitations of life are the Elysium of his delights. His throne is tempest, and his state convulsion. He rules nations by a word, shakes kingdoms by his influence, overturns governments at his will, and destroys his fellow-man in the mere wantonness of power." On the shoulders of those young men now just entering upon the threshold of busy life will soon fall the mantles of their fathers. By them the ship of State must be steered, the Church upheld, and all the institutions of our country, Religious, Literary and Political, controlled. All the wealth, the power, and the learning of the world, will soon be in the hands of the present rising generation.

And how important that these mighty resources, which may be turned for the weal or the woe of mankind, should be applied to useful purposes! How important, that the future guardians of our country's welfare, should be prepared for the onerous and responsible duties that must soon devolve upon them! The young men of our land! There is something soul-stirring and charming in the term. There is something both noble and interesting in the mind of youth just developing its latent powers, like the bud of opening flower, blowing out into the corolla of an hundred leaves. And there is something interesting in that mind bursting down in the shackles of youth, leaving its idle sports, settling down in the sedateness of manhood, and preparing for the infirmities of old age.—Nor is this an idle speculation, or empty theme for the orator's declamation; nor is the view that we have taken, a novel or hasty one. The portrait is as antiquated as the pages of Holy Writ, and drawn by the wisest of even inspired men. The Preacher was wise, and set in order many proverbs, and the burden of these are applicable to the young. How graphically is his picture of the temptations to which the young man is exposed! How does his heart yearn over those whom he knew to be within the reach of these seductive influences! He had run the round of youthful folly; he had proved himself with mirth; he had enjoyed all the dazzling splendors of honor and wealth, and the pleasures of sense; and now when he had arrived at mature old age, we find him describing all as "vanity of vanities." And casting his eye back on the scenes through which he had passed, and beholding others about to grapple with temptations which had proved too strong for his moral fortitude, he seems to agonize in spirit, to throw his experience before them as a beacon light to their feet. The young man is ever first in his mind. "My son," how endearing the term! "My son, if sinners entice thee consent thou not." "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding." "My son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

And looking backward from old age, to the days of his youth, and remembering how swiftly the years had passed away, and how much of duty was to be done in so short a period, and seeing that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, he addresses us in the words of the text: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And the reason assigned for this promptness and diligence in action, is the shortness of the time in which the work may be done. "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

These words were penned by the wisest of men. And they were written in old age, and are the result of a long and full experience. Since man must soon go to his long home, it behooves him to be diligent, that he may perform with faithfulness, the part assigned to him by his Creator. The words

are especially applicable to those whom we now particularly address. If there is a class upon earth whom it behoves to be diligent and persevering, that class are young men.—The world is before them, with its vicissitudes, its conflicts, and its rewards. Every man is to a great extent *faber fortunæ*, the builder of his own fortune. And although the dispensations of an overruling providence often seem adverse, and overthrow the wisest schemes of men, the saying may nevertheless be esteemed as true. Though one effort may prove abortive another may be attended with success.—Though the dark cloud of misfortune may lower for a while, it will eventually break away, and the sunshine of prosperity will appear. And if we examine into the history of those who have been denominated unfortunate, we shall find their want of success to have been the result of unskillfulness, indolence, or a want of perseverance to overcome the obstacles thrown in their way. If constant dropping will wear away the hardest rocks, surely the assiduous persevering efforts of a rational and experienced creature, may overcome the difficulties of an adverse fortune. There is a regular and natural connexion between cause and result. And though there may be many intervening links in the chain that binds them together, the chain is never entirely broken. One man rides into a throne of power in an almost bloodless triumph, while another experiences repeated defeat and disaster, and, is at last, completely overthrown. But were the same means used in the one case as the other? One was a more skilful General, marshalled better troops, and selected his time and laid his plans with more wisdom than the other. And where strength and numbers were wanting, prudence has supplied their place, and enabled one to chase a thousand and two to put ten thousand to flight.

We venture then to lay it down as a truth, that *diligence and perseverance will overcome all difficulties*. This is clearly deducible from the injunction of our text, and well attested by our own experience.

In considering this subject as applicable to young men, we are taught,

1. That they should engage diligently and perseveringly in some useful avocation in life. Sacred Writ tells us elsewhere, that the man that provides not for his own household is worse than the infidel, and has denied the faith. Man was not made to be a mere cipher in society, a blank in the creation of God. Nor is it his appropriate part to while away his precious time in a perpetual whirl of folly and amusement, nor to prostitute his noble powers of soul and body to a life of rebellion against his God. Imbecility and inaction are the very reverse of human nature in its primitive excellence. The first man that was created, by far more noble and highly exalted in privilege, than any of his descendants, was a working man. The lovely Eden was given him, as an earthly inheritance, but he was commanded to dress and to keep it with his own hands. And there is no greater mistake to be made than that which supposes, that if man had retained his innocence he would not have been required to labor, and to labor diligently and perseveringly. And the difference between the performance of his duties in the days of his innocence, and since the fall exists in the change of his disposition and his powers, and the success that attends his efforts. Then every duty was performed with a hallowed delight, and every expectation was fulfilled. No cares then pervaded an anxious breast, and no disappointments vexed a troubled spirit. It was truly and emphatically, his meat and his drink to do the will of his Creator, in both spiritual and temporal duties. But now the whole order of nature is reversed. Labor has become a drudgery and a pain; and the highest and noblest efforts of man are often met with the most signal disappointments. The ground is cursed, that it may not bring forth its fruits in due season. But the divine command still stands in its full force: "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." And why in reason should man form an exception to all the rest of creation animate and inanimate, by proving a useless appendage and a scourge to all others. From the heaviest planet that rolls through the heavens, to the smallest insect that grovels in obscurity, all have their appropriate use in the vast universe of God. No one is lost sight of by the eye of Omnipotence. The same Omnipotent power that brought them into being at first, will not suffer them to fall to the ground without his permission. They are all engaged in performing his will though unknown to us, or despised and trampled underfoot as unworthy of our notice. And shall man with all his noble powers of soul and body,—man who was placed in the scale of creation only a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honor,—man who was made upright in the image of God himself, with capacities susceptible of the highest enjoyments, and a soul that must live and expand forever—man who shall survive this wreck of matter and this crush of worlds—shall he stoop down from his high estate, and sink himself below even the most insignificant of God's creatures, proving himself a vile and useless thing? Man is never so noble, never feels so much complacency and independence, as when engaged in some honorable and useful calling. And although his vocation may be an humble one in the eyes of the world, though it may add no garlands to his brow, it will afford him both the reward of a portion of earthly comforts, and the answer of a good conscience.

The man who devotes himself to the humble duties of training the youthful mind cannot expect to claim the immediate adulations of so large a portion of his race as many others. He cannot, in his vocation, rise like the orator, and sweep away his audience in the whirlwind of his eloquence. But are his labors the less honorable, because they attract the notice, and receive the applause of a smaller portion of his fellow-men? Is there nothing momentous and big with importance, in the still small voice of instruction that shapes the youthful mind, and prepares it for the responsible duties of life, and for the enjoyments of eternity? And is it no gratification to the instructor in literature and science, to have scores and hundreds of the noblest spirits in the land to rise up, and with gratitude hail him as their benefactor? Does it reflect no honor on the memories of Caldwell and Waddell, that many of the Carolinas' most gifted sons rise up and call them blessed? Was it no honor to an Aristotle that he trained an Alexander, though the powers of his mighty mind were perverted to bloodshed and conquest, and his youthful honors were lost in crime, before he reached the meridian of life?

And where shall we place the followers of other useful and indispensable professions? Shall the husbandman, the merchant, and the mechanic, be ranked below other callings, because they may not ride so high as they on the wave of popularity? Are they not all engaged in pursuits sanctioned by God himself; in those arts for which he destined them, and in which they can best promote their own interests and happiness of their fellow-men? All other classes of men are dependent on these, for the ordinary comforts of life. The king himself is obliged to the humblest of his subjects, for all the blessings that crown his board.

The Gospel Minister, though he is in a great measure cut off from the emoluments and the honors of this world, is yet not without his reward. He lives in the affections of his people and in the favor of God so long as he is faithful to his

trust. He bears a commission signed by the King of Heaven, as an ambassador of peace to a lost and rebellious world. And though he may not be allowed to deal in high-sounding words to gain the admiration of men, he can catch inspiration from the sublimity of his theme itself. He deals not with sublimity things. He rises into the glories of the upper sanctuary, and descends into the dark regions of the pit. His subject is eternity, with its glories and its horrors: the soul mounting up from one degree of happiness to another, or sinking down to deeper abodes of misery, throughout the endless ages of eternity. But has not the Minister a just and high claim on the affections of his fellow-men for his services, although none should ever dare seek the sacred office from that motive? What class of men have ever proved more self-denying, and more devoted to the great works of philanthropy, and the alleviation of human woes, than the ministers of Jesus? And who have ever done so much to keep alive the lamp of science, and to uphold the tottering pillars of the State? In the middle of ages, when literature had fled from all other parts of the world, it still retained a lingering hold on the asylums of the monks. And it is a notorious and gratifying truth, that the gospel missionaries have borne the lamp of science, as well as the word of eternal truth, back to the old world. From this recent wilderness, where lately none but savage roamed and wild beasts uttered their fearful cry, the light of learning and religion has gone to illumine the once most favored regions of the East. The heralds of the cross now stand on Mars' Hill, where Paul stood eighteen hundred years ago, and preached the resurrection from the dead and a day of final judgment. They are imparting knowledge, scattering the mists of superstition, and teaching gospel truth; and doing more for the honor of their country, than any other class of men that have ever visited those regions of darkness. Can any then deny the usefulness of the Minister of the Cross, even when his labors are confined within the limits of earthly things. Much too might be said of the other learned professions, but we deem it unnecessary. Their excellencies and their advantages are obvious to all.

And may we not, from a consideration of these truths assign to each and all of these classes of men, a high and honorable station among mankind? Can we not with propriety, place together in the highest niche in the temple of fame, a Newton and a Bacon, an Arkwright and Fulton, a West and Stuart, a Mansfield and a Hale, an Abercrombia and a Rush, a Whitfield and a Brainerd, a Howard and a Washington? These all lived not for themselves only, not for the simple gratification of their pleasure and ambition, but for the happiness of their fellow-men, the welfare of their country and the glory of their God.

And can any young man now be at a loss in casting about him, to find some honorable and useful calling adapted to his taste and his talents? Does the wide field of which we have explored only a little part, present no spot on which the eye may rest with pleasure? In the whole range, of husbandry, the mechanic arts, and the learned professions, is there no occupation to which each one may apply the powers which God has given him for usefulness and pleasure? Or has human nature so sadly degenerated as to furnish a class of beings who may with propriety, be termed *good for nothing*? Are the powers of the soul on which the image of the Almighty was once stamped, so deteriorated as to be no longer capable of high and noble achievements? We deny the allegation. Human nature is the same now that it ever was. But it is sadly perverted in our day, by imperfect and improper modes of early training. It is a lamentable truth, that God's most perfect workmanship has been rudely marred. There are multitudes of young men, highly endowed by nature, and who might share largely in their country's honors, with proper training, and by a diligent application to some useful calling; but whose education has been wrong or neglected, and who are sleeping away a life of inactivity and usefulness; or what is worse, indulging in the commission of crime.

And what is the cause of so much suffering? and why are there so many disappointments? and why do so many young men fall in the earlier part of their earthly career? Says a late writer: "One half sink into an early grave, while the tears of disappointed affection, the deep sighs of blasted love, are the memorials of their fearful end. Crowds of our young men fall suicidal to the grave: while others mere dying wrecks remain, with pallid brows and wasted powers: the cold marble, on which, in characters of shame and blood their epitaph is written. Passing from this waste of life and blasted character, we search for the result of others: we look for their success in life; and a melancholy picture meets us here. The country and the age present us with an almost unbroken history of failures, severely trying to moral principle, and fearfully disclosing moral delinquency." For years past few of our young men have succeeded even in the laudable pursuits of life: while the failure is wholly unnecessary. We take up the College Catalogue only a few years after the classes have passed from the cloisters of their Alma Mater, and with throbbing hearts we follow them out into the world. Some are in the enjoyment of comparative peace and happiness, and a few are wending their arduous way to the heights of honor; but the greater portion have sunk into obscurity, or have become the inmates of the asylum and the tomb.

The source of the evil is obvious. Youthful training is not now as it was fifty years ago. Young men and young maidens are not now as were those who landed more than two centuries ago amid the snows of the rock of Plymouth; nor as they were in the days of our revolutionary struggle. Thousands of both sexes are now reared expressly for want, misery, crime, and an early and inglorious grave. Every one grows up with the impression, that there is a Utopian period, when the restraints of youth will be cast off, if any indeed they ever endured, when labors and cares will be wholly dispensed with, and life will be one halcyon holiday of uninterrupted delight. They expect, in some unknown and mysterious way, to achieve a fortune, or secure an honor, without the slow dull routine of virtuous action that is deserving of such a reward. To live without labor, to enjoy without care is the motto of thousands. But O how mistaken the idea. That individual who does not perform his part in the great drama of human life, who fails to add his portion to the general stock of wealth, by his own individual exertion, is, on the clearest principles of political economy, a swindler of his race. If he lives not by his own industry, he must and will live on the savings of others.

And what the result will be, we cannot divine. When a great moral revolution will take place, when the sons and the daughters of our land will leave their idle habits, give up their imaginary pleasures, and return to the sober pursuits of industry, for which our fathers and our mothers were famed we cannot foresee. It is said that revolutions never go backwards. When the habits of a people begin to deteriorate, they grow from worse to worse, until the government is overthrown. If this be true, what is to be our fate, the fate of our beloved America before another half century rolls round? Idleness begets poverty, poverty begets crime, and crime is Apollyon of all law and social order. And if we progress downward for a few years longer as we have done in years

that are past, we may, like ancient Rome with her luxurious and licentious habits, fall to pieces from the burthen of our own weakness. May the God of heaven, the God of our country, the God of our fathers avert such a calamity.

II. Young men should be diligent and persevering in the pursuit of knowledge.

It has been said with some degree of truth, that in America the practical and the profitable swallow up every other thought. It has been said that here is the land "where genius sickens and where fancy dies," and where there is an utter destitution of taste. As a nation, we have been charged with an exclusive devotion to the accumulation of wealth, and the acquisition of those petty honors which any shrewd aspiring demagogue may obtain. And although these things have been exaggerated, and uttered in any but a liberal spirit, yet there is unfortunately, too much ground for the charge. As a people, we live in the hurry and bustle of life. Engaged generally in the more active and exciting pursuits, we overlook, or are entirely ignorant of those rich intellectual pleasures which literary men enjoy. In this land of activity and enterprise the temptations to these evils are very great. The demands upon talent for active service are greater than the calls for that knowledge which books impart. We are more an active and enterprising, than a literary people. And for this there are many causes. As a nation, we are yet in the infancy of our existence. Vast regions of our extensive domain are yet unsettled, and large portions are only just brought under the control of civilization. And in felling forest trees and rearing humble cottages there is but little disposition or opportunity for attention to reading books. And in the counting room of the merchant, and the workshop of the mechanic, and even in the office of the professional man, the business of each one's immediate calling is too pressing to give room for the pursuits of literature. The political journal takes the place of the Literary Review and the cumbersome volume. And party slang inflames the baser passions of the mind which might be sweetened and enriched with the intellectual treasures of the mightiest spirits of the age. The noble powers of the intellect are paralyzed through inaction, or perverted and inflamed by unwholesome aliment. But there are thousands whose taste for reading if cultivated, would afford much substantial and ennobling pleasure, but who have suffered all within to run to waste and are wholly absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, or are wasting their lives in idleness and folly. In the language of a distinguished statesman and scholar of our own age and country. "The mighty ladder of thought and reason, reaching from the visible to the invisible—from the crude knowledge gained through the senses to the sublimest inferences of the pure reason—from the earth to the very footstool of God's throne, is before them and invites their ascent. But they bend their eyes obstinately downwards upon the glittering ores at their feet, until they lose the wish or the hope, for any thing better."

It is true that we have in our country no class of men devoted exclusively to literary pursuits. We have here no richly endowed fellowships, where men of talents and taste may devote themselves to scientific and literary research, without the interruption of external cares. We have not, as in Europe, a pampered Literary Aristocracy. Here the man who scans the wide field of literature must mingle these labors with his professional duties. The Lawyer, the Physician and the Minister, can devote to science and literature, only the time which they take from their hours of repose and recreation. But does this fact furnish a sufficient excuse for the utter neglect of reading and cultivating the mind? In our free country no one, as in despotic Europe, is confined by law exclusively to any one single vocation. A man may engage at the same time in as many different pursuits, as may be agreeable to his taste, and advance his interests. And while even the man engaged in active life, is supervising the affairs of his farm, his store, or his study, he may find many remnant hours, in which he may retire from the bustling scenes of the world, and hold communion with the mighty intellects of different countries and other ages. When did Franklin make his most astonishing and useful discoveries in science, but while engaged in the drudgery of a printing office, and pressed with a multitude of other cares. When did Edwards complete those "far drawn speculations in Metaphysics, which astounded the most profound of European scholars, but while performing the pressing and responsible duties of a Gospel Minister? A distinguished Physician of the State of South Carolina, while engaged in the labors of an extensive practice, imposed on himself the duty of writing one Literary Essay every week. A pious Minister of the Gospel in Philadelphia, has given to the world, in the last ten years, a greater amount of Biblical Exposition than any Theological Professor in the land. That distinguished Scotch Lawyer Archibald Alison, amid the duties of a laborious profession, has written the best history of Europe, during the time embraced, that the world has ever seen. And what shall we say of a Macaulay, the researches of whose mind seem to expand at one and the same time to the four winds of heaven and through every age of the world? And what of a Brougham, whose giant intellect grasps at once the mighty truths law, politics, literature, and revelation present? And what of our own learned mechanics, one of them a son of Ethiopia, whose literary attainments would put many of the privileged sons of freedom to the blush? It is true that some of these brilliant examples which we have cited are from among the great men of the old world. But they serve as well as others, to illustrate the same principle as the learned and enterprising of our own land. They labor under the same disadvantages, have the same multiplicity of professional duties to perform with those in our own country, who make these excuses for their criminal neglect of literary pursuits.

Nor is application to literature uncongenial to the spirit of our free institutions. It is a slander on the genius of republicanism, to say that here men may not attain to a standard of literature of a high order. And why may we not? There is no want of native talent of as high a grade as nature ever produced. Our history furnishes themes as rich, as romantic, and as interesting as ever poet, novelist or historian discoursed upon. Our country abounds in beautiful landscape scenes, in sublime mountain scenery, in mighty cataracts and majestic rivers, outwielding those of the old world. The allegations of Buffon and De Pauw, that in this country both men and animals deteriorate are just as false, as the reason assigned for the phenomenon is absurd, that this continent was submerged by a deluge long subsequent to that of Noah; and as the theory, that this globe originated in the impact of a comet against the surface of the sun, which struck a huge mass of melted glass and sent it whizzing on its aerial journey. There is nothing, so far as the history of our country can show, either in climate, or soil, or in our free institutions, to prove the deterioration of the American mind, or its unfitness for high literary and scientific attainments. There is nothing in republicanism itself, even in the party changes that continually occur adverse to it. The very reverse is true. Freedom of spirit gives range to the flight of thoughts, and kindles the latent fires of eloquence: and the changes, and

\* Mr. Verplanck.