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"CHARACTER IS AS IMPORTANT TO STATES AS IT IS TO INDIVIDUALS; AND THE GLORY OF THE STATE IS THE COMMON PROPERTY OF ITS CITIZENS."

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ADDRESS

OF THE HON. JOHN Y. MASON,

Before the Alumni Association of the University of North Carolina, June 2, 1847.

In appearing before you to-day, while I regret that your invitation had not found one possessed of more leisure than I have had in which to meet its requirements, I am glad of the opportunity which has thus been afforded me, to testify my continued interest in my Alma Mater, and my sincere regard for those great purposes of science and of virtue which it is the fortunate office of an American University to promote.

After intervals of absence—some of them embracing more than a quarter of a century—we visit again, mindful yet of our literary brotherhood, the cherished scenes of our youthful studies, and renew for a few brief hours, amid the fragrant memorials of Chapel Hill, our ancient companionship of letters, and our old associations of classic life. Turning aside from our accustomed pursuits, we enchange the greetings of friendship in halls long sacred to religion and to truth; and before the altars of our early worship, we gather fresh motives of gratitude to the venerable institution whose virtues they commemorate. We surrender ourselves to the mild influences of the day and the occasion. We forget the discords of professional strife? the hard competitions of business; the feverish thirst for fame; and hushing all the thousand voices of party zeal, we bow ourselves in unresisting submission to the divinity of the place.

In such influences we find our best preparation for the anniversary which we celebrate. It is a festival less of the head than of the heart It has more concern with generous impulses and warm affections, than with the cold deductions of reason, or the dry speculations of metaphysics. It is wisely intended, not so much for the exhibition of hoarded knowledge and the discussions of abstruse thought, as for the promotion of kind feeling, the strengthening of good resolves, the awakening and quickening of a spirit of improvement in ourselves and in others. It brings together, from remote places and various paths, those whose only memories in common cluster around this seat of learning; and it thus perpetuates attachments which might otherwise lie buried forever in the dust of years. In this view of its character, it claims rewards of patriotism, no less than the regards of friendship; and strengthens our union as citizens, by reviving our connexion as students. The bonds which hold together our extended confederacy of States, are not those alone which are to be read in written constitutions and gathered from the enactments of legal codes: but those, rather, which are found in the interchange of social kindness: in the attractions of literary intercourse; and in the manifold associations which spring from the communions of religion and the pursuits of business. Every institution, therefore; which, like our own society, gathers its members at frequent periods from distant sections and different States, forms a new link in that most important chain of causes, upon which we must chiefly rely, under Providence, for the support and perpetuity of our republican system.

In behalf of that system, how numerous and powerful are the motives which appeal to us on an anniversary like this. The tranquillity of these academic walks—the circumstances under which we assemble, speak to us of a beneficent government and a prospered country. The experience, too, of every one of us enforces the same lesson with the strength and vividness of a personal conviction.

In what other nation has honest ambition so wide a range, and merit so certain and so brilliant a reward? Where else, in the civilized world, can a virtuous education be so surely obtained, and lead to results of such transcendant worth?

A distinguished illustration of this truth we have present in our own companionship to-day. The youth, whom some of us remember as a student of Chapel Hill in the class of 1818, whose feeble health had threatened to quench his ardent thirst of knowledge, returns to us now, the occupant of the highest political station which is known on earth. We recognise here no distinction of artificial rank; no claims of lineage; no assumption of wealth, but we acknowledge that the honors conferred upon our brother-in-letters are reflected back upon our University and ourselves, and we recognise them as the fruit of wise instruction, and as incentives to efforts in others, to whom opportunities are offered, more favorable even, than were his. We greet him on this auspicious occasion, not alone as the Chief Magistrate of the republic, but in a more near and friendly relation, as our ancient associate in study, and a graduate, with us, of the same honored institution. Here, where in the bright morning of life he laid, in virtue, in industry, and in science, the deep foundations of his subsequent success, he comes back with us, to pay the sincere homage of gratitude for those early privileges to which he owes so much, and which he can now, more than ever, value as they deserve. In his recollection, as in the memory of us all, this ancient place yet glows with its old attractions, and our affections fondly turn to it, amid the wanderings of earth, with something of youthful ardor, as well as of filial respect. However, in other scenes and less tranquil pursuits,

"———the ear is all unstrung,
"Still, it loves the lowland tongue."

But time, which matures and ripens, also destroys; and as our eyes wander over this assembly, we mourn the absence of many a familiar countenance and many a beloved form. While we acknowledge new welcome accessions to our number from the youthful graduates of the year, we are compelled to remember that they occupy the seats of ealier companions, who have been swept away in the lapse of years and who repose now in the silent shadows of the grave. To those of us who were together here thirty years ago, "*rarinantes in gurgite vasto*," these mournful recollections come with peculiar power. Like dim voices of the dead, they speak to us from the chair of the instructor as well as from the bench of the pupil.

"Now kindred merit fills the sable bier;
Now lacerated friendship claims a tear;
Year chases year; decay pursues decay;
Still drops some joy from withering life away,"

And here I should do injustic to the occasion and to my own feelings, if I did not pursue this painful theme for a moment, to pay the tribute of my affectionate regard to the memory of him who for so many years, often under most adverse circumstances, but still with signal success, administered the affairs of the University as its presiding officer. No one, I am sure, who has ever shared his counsels or profited by his mild reproofs, can easily forget the wisdom and the virtues of President Caldwell. Uniting extended learning with sound judgment, he possessed the rare and difficult art to temper admonition with kindness, and to render discipline more effectual by making it less repulsive.

"His life was gentle; and the elements,
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world, 'that was a man.'"

His character and his usefulness—what he was, and what he was enabled to do—suggest a theme, which in this theatre of his labors, and among these witnesses of his fame, it would be a grateful task under other circumstances to pursue. But his own example would rebuke us, if we should allow even his merits to turn us aside from contemplating the great objects on his toil. Let us seek rather to understand and to do homage to those vast interests of *enlightened culture* if our own country, which he lived, and, I had almost said, he died to promote.

To this general subject we are invited, not only by the proprieties of the occasion, but by its own intrinsic dignity and worth. In its broad and comprehensive sense, the work of education is the grand business of human life; and in these United States. I need hardly say, it can never be neglected, but at the hazard of consequences which no patriot can contemplate without alarm.

This belief was present with America at its very birth and stamped upon its rising institutions the great impress of freedom and perpetuity. In the history of other nations, learning has been the slow growth of society already formed, and has existed, at last, only as the ornament of wealth or the champion of power. But with the Fathers of our Republic, next to religion, it was the first thing thought of; not as a luxury, but as a necessity; not as the handmaid of privilege, but as the nurse of equality; not as the child of endowment or the accident of place, but as the surest basis of public prosperity and of private happiness. They planted knowledge, therefore, in the wilderness; established schools as soon as they builded habitations; and laid the foundations of a University, while yet they were struggling with the ravages of disease and the apprehension of want. More than a century ago the charter governments were celebrated for "promoting letters by free schools and colleges"—and to this feature of their character has been traced the seret of their great success. "Every child born into the world was lifted from the earth by the genius of its country, and in the statutes of the land received, as its political birthright, a pledge of the public care for its morals and its mind."

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In the republics of antiquity, religion was only a part of their political system, and the head of the State was also the father of the church. This unnatural connexion, fatal alike to Christianity and to liberty, which even yet lingers in the Old World, has been wholly repudiated in the *new*; and the land of Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson proclaims liberty of conscience from sixty thousand churches, and inculcates virtue and toleration in as many Sabbath schools. Free government is valuable, after all, not so much for any direct exertion of its own, as for what it permits the people to work our for themselves.

The press began its work in 1639: a century afterwards it had earned the prohibition of England, and was strong enough to defy it; and, at this day, it asserts its freedom by an influence which is only not despotic because it is not harmonious. Far outstripping by its enterprise the fertility of our own writers, the American press appropriates unshrinkingly the literary treasures of the whole earth; while it almost forbids importation of books by the cheapness with which it reprints them, and facility with which it scatters them among all classes of the reading community. But the most striking displays of its activity and power are only to be witnessed in the field of *journalism*, where it more than equals France in energy, and knows no other rival throughout the world It printed the first newspaper in America in the year 1784; in 1828 it had joined an additional number of eight hundred and fifty; and, at this day, it acts upon the popular mind through the teeming columns of more than two thousand journals. Sharing, as well as stimulating, the progressive spirit of the age, it advances into the wilderness with our hardy pioneers; keeps company with our commerce among the islands of the sea; and contends for supremacy with the sword upon every battle-field which is won by our victorious arms. Already it sends us shipping lists from the Sandwich islands, chronicles the news of the day in La Vera Cruz, and echoes back the thunder of our cannon from the shores of the far Pacific. Becoming thus the missionary as well as the schoolmaster of republicanism, it plants among other nations the seeds of freedom, which it has itself ripened upon our soil; and having first contributed to the glory of America at home, it crowns its labor of patriotism, by making it better known, and therefore more honored, abroad.

With influences such as these, it more than pays back to our country whatever of nurture it has received from it, and richly atones for all the imperfections or abuses by which it so often deserves the reproaches of society, and sometimes seems almost to require the censorship of law. The force of enlightened public opinion constitutes, after all, its best restraint, and the only one which would leave to it all its value. Under this guidance, if its teachings are not always pure, they are seldom dangerous; for its errors are met by truth as soon as they appear; and, like the lance of Achilles, it has the virtue to heal the wounds which it has itself inflicted. In the ligher branches of literature, the good which it confers is never doubted; and if it is less free from censure in its higher publications, yet its agency even there is on the side of virtue and in favor of liberty. "Were it left to me to decide," writes Mr Jefferson, "whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I would not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Paradoxical as this may seem, it cannot be doubted that no government can be maintained in the spirit of liberty and purity, without the chastening influences of the newspaper press.

It is sometimes said that a rich source of instruction is closed to us, because America has no monuments; and if by this it is meant that she is not yet marked with the decay of age and the ravages of time, the assertion is strictly true. But unless ruin more desirable than greatness, and the dim figures of antiquity more precious than the fresh and glowing forms of youth, this feature of her character is rather her glory than her reproach. The monuments of America are not found in the scattered fragments of the dusty past, but point all of them to the rising grandeurs of the far-off future; and while older nations "look back through the twilight of ages that lose themselves in night," the genius of our republic goes forth in the dawn of morning, to meet and welcome the approach of day. No feudal castles, crumbling upon our hills, attest the ancient violence of robber-lords; and not for us do the glorious relics of a noble ancestry bear witness, in buried columns and broken arches, to the degenerate spirits of their unworthy sons; but in place of these, and far better than these, *we* crown our landscapes with contented homes, we build altars to science by the hearthstone of every citizen, and with the spires of thousands of churches we point our children the path to Heaven. While we can preserve, unimpaired to our country, *free instruction, free religion*, and *a free press*, we need ask no other support for our institutions, and no other witnesses to our fame

To the means of instruction which have been already mentioned, I should do wrong not to add that other and peculiar education which springs from the very working of our republican system, and from which no member of the community can well escape, even if he would. Under our policy, every citizen is a part of the government, and some of its most important duties are periodically devolved upon him, both by law and by necessity. He wields the power of elective franchise, and determines by his vote the choice alike of measures and of men—not only *who* shall rule him, but *what* shall rule him; he sits in the jury-box, and the fortune, the fame, nay, the very life of his neighbor, rest upon his decision; he is called as a witness, and is sworn to give true testimony on questions involving the deepest interests and the most important results; or, by the suffrages of his fellow citizens, he is clothed with still greater trusts, and assumes responsibilities which belong only to the highest stations in the gift of the people. A sovereign in his own right, the symbols of his authority are thus constantly before his eyes; and from every new exercise of his power, the American citizen derives fresh excitement to his intellect, and increased dignity to his character. In all his public acts, the double motive presses upon him to ensure a reward and to avoid disgrace. Under a free government, he knows full well that, with intelligence and fidelity, there are no plaudits which he may not win, and no prizes of ambition which are above his reach; while, on the other hand, nowhere else is corruption so inexcusable, and ignorance so wholly out of place. In other countries, where passive obedience is the fruit of despotism, a stolid people is the natural accompaniment of an educated prince; but the genius of our institutions contemplates no such thing as an ignorant man, and deems itself defrauded of its just claims when it finds a citizen faithless to his duty. The large requirements, therefore, of American politics, which are with superficial observers the subject of hasty regret, constitute in reality one of the most valuable features of our republican system, a most affluent source of ennobling instruction, and tend, with inevitable certainty, not only to increase the popular intelligence, but to give energy, expansion, and elevation to the popular mind. Tranquility and the repose of exclusive devotion to personal pursuits are not the most favorable elements either for great conceptions or distinguished action. The highest heroism, on the contrary, springs from the strongest excitements; and the period of revolution is also the period of awakened genius. The same causes which break up ancient abuses in society, break up, with equal efficacy, old absurdities in science and in art; and from the still-heaving waves of tumult and reform, emerge side by side the warrior, the statesman, the orator, and the poet. The sublime productions of Milton had their birth in the same times which produced Oliver Cromwell; and the harsh, passionate voice of the one comes softened to our ears by the lofty melody of the other. Amid the fierce passions and new-found energies of revolutionary France, Mirabeau and Robespierre announced together the rising fortunes of the "man of destiny." And after convulsions, such as the earth has rarely seen, Napoleon comes upon the stage prepared for him, and writes his name in iron characters, not only upon the history of Europe, but upon the very forehead of the world. The experience of modern times is confirmed upon this subject by all the lessons of antiquity. The home of freedom was every where the dwelling-place of letters; and we read the examples of successful genius, not amoug the subjects of despotic Babylon, but among the democracy of Athens. There was no literary fame, even in Greece, until the era opened of her republican principles; but then she became the matchless land of civilization and refinement.

"Where science struck the thrones of earth and heaven,
Which shook but fell not; and the harmonious mind
Poured itself forth in all prophetic song,
And music lifted up the listening spirit,
Until it walked exempt from mortal care,
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound,
And human hands first mimicked, and then mocked
With moulded limbs, more lovely than its own,
The human form, till marble grew divine."

And the literature of Greece must prove forever the kindling influences of Grecian liberty.

But as no people can continue indefinitely in a state of revolution, these excitations of the popular mind in other ages and other countries, always producing the same noble fruits, have, after a brief and brilliant reign been as invariably followed by the paralyzing torpor of despotism. It was reserved for our country to devise a system—our own incomparable federative system—which, with the liberalizing influences of the Christian religion in freedom and in purity, is constantly instructing and stimulating the popular mind, and thereby developing all the energies of our nature. It is a problem successfully worked out, which justly commands the admiration of the world, equally auspicious to liberty and to literature, and promises blessings to mankind which the human imagination can hardly conceive. At this moment the disastrous and ominous condition of Europe, which men of philosophical inquiry and reflection, begin to ascribe to inveterate, radical, and permanent evils of political and social systems, but renders more vivid and dazzling the bright aspects of our manifold prosperity." But this is not the occasion to pursue this train of thought.

Devoted in patriotism, and ever ready to act on the noble principle—*salus reipublicæ suprema lex*—our countrymen have yet neglected nothing which was calculated to adorn domestic life and promote individual happiness. Female education has, therefore, always been a subject of primary attention.

Elevated to her appropriate position in society; adorned, refined, and accomplished by careful instruction, the American woman is the happy companion of the American freeman—gladdening his heart by her smile of confidence and love, and cheering him in his great career of public duty by her voice of counsel and approbation.

Glorious as our institutions are, their fruit would have turned to ashes, without the lovely association of the softer sex, fitted by education to be the friend, the joy, the pride of American patriots.

If our country, from the very nature of its government, demands much of its citizens, let us remember that it makes them capable of doing much; and that, by giving to them the stimulus and nature of free institutions, it places within the reach, even of the most humble, the highest attainments of learning and the noblest achievements of mind.

The value of this nurture and of this stimulus is but attested by the great results which they have already accomplished; and thus measured by the standard of results, our whole republic is but a monument to their praise. Under their influence, constantly cherished and constantly in turn exerted, it has not only maintained successfully its freedom and its power, but it has pursued a career of progress and improvement which is without a parallel in the history of the world. Fifty-eight years ago it elected its first President. It then embraced a population of little more than three millions, occupying thirteen States, on the Atlantic coast, and covering an area of less than five hundred thousand square miles. Its population has now swelled to more than twenty millions, and it has added nearly a million of square miles to its represented territory. It has more than doubled the number of States, and new sovereignties still form themselves in the wilderness to claim its confederate honors. With this astonishing increase of its numbers and of its peopled and cultivated territory, has grown up, also in a ratio equally rapid, every important interest which can possibly add either to national wealth or national glory. In agriculture, it has invented new implements of industry, and applied them to fresh fields of toil; and from the rich abundance of its gathered harvests, it not only fills each avenue of want at home, but freights its storeships with a people's tribute to the famine-stricken children of kingdoms abroad. Its commerce whitens the very ocean with its enterprise, and exchanges products with every climate under the sun; while in the rapid advancement of its manufactures, it bids fair, at no distant day, to rival even the skill of English industry, and to transfer to this side of the Atlantic the "workshop of the world."

Pursuing with boundless, because unfettered zeal, each opening of foreign traffic, it at the same time unites its own territory by constantly extending and improving its means of internal intercourse and trade. The remotest inhabitant of the confederacy is not beyond the reach of its post office, and its civilization travels not only with the marvellous power of wind and steam, but with the speed of electricity, subdued by the art of man, along the lines of its magnetic telegraph.

Scarcely more than twenty years ago, it was without a single mile of railroad; in 1836, its iron engines traversed a completed track of 1600 miles, and it has now more miles of railroad than, in the time of Washington, it had of post routes. In proportion to its population, it has more than three times as many canals as England, and more than four times as many as France; and the canal connecting the Hudson with the lakes, is the longest of these artificial rivers which has been constructed in the world.

In the year 1807, Robert Fulton attracted ridicule by building its first steamboat; and ten years after, it had no regular line of steamboats in all its western waters. They now crowd in hundreds upon its ocean rivers and its inland seas, gathering the rich products of the most remote and land-locked regions of our country, and pouring them into the lap of commerce; they defy every form of danger upon its Atlantic coast; they keep company with its navy against the northers of the Gulf of Mexico; and, under the fostering care of Congress, they will soon cross the ocean with its mails, and minister to the wants of our ships of war, and protect our merchant marine in every quarter of the globe. A single one of its western States possesses more steamboats than the whole kingdom of France, and there are said to be as many steamers on Lake Erie as in the Mediterranean sea.

Its increasing means of communication thus keep pace with its extending settlements, and its whole Union is bound together in the strong embraces of mutual intercourse, mutual knowledge, and mutual interest. In this way it administers with facility one government for twenty-eight sovereignties, and from a single central heart diffuses the healthy life-blood of law and justice through all portions of the body politic. Yet, with us, Paris is not France; and that heart would soon become corrupt, and the stream of sanitary circulation torpid, but for the purifying application of the federative principle, and the chastening and correcting influences of the subdivisions of power amongst the States and the people, to whom so large a share in the duty of self-government is wisely confided.

The same influences, too, which have thus developed, with almost startling rapidity, the various sources of its physical power, have adorned it at the same time with cheering monuments of its active benevolence, its scientific ingenuity, and its improving taste. Its charities partake, at once, of the vigor of its enterprise and the abundance of its means, and no worthy object ever yet appealed to it in vain. Shrewd and unyielding as it doubtless is in the concerns of trade, it is characterized by the warmest sympathy for human suffering, and the most generous disposition to give it adequate relief. * * * *

If America has not yet equalled older nations by her advances in literature and art, she has at least laid a firm foundation for them; and bright examples of generous attainment and lofty intellect are not even now wanting among her cultivated citizens. Her statesmanship has been proved in the strictest school of diplomacy; and her public speaking, in the true eloquence,