

RALEIGH REGISTER, AND NORTH-CAROLINA GAZETTE.

"OURS ARE THE PLANS OF FAIR DELIGHTFUL PEACE, UNWARD' BY PARTY RAGE, TO LIVE LIKE BROTHERS."

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 1833.

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THE REGISTER

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A LECTURE

ON THE IMPERFECTIONS OF OUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

And the best method of correcting them; delivered before the North-Carolina Institute of Education at Chapel-Hill, June 20, 1833.

BY WILLIAM HOOPER,
Professor of Ancient Languages in the University.

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Institute:

We, upon whom you have devolved the task of addressing an audience which has been feasted by the intellectual entertainment of this morning, have, we can assure you, partaken largely of the general festivity, and can exchange hearty congratulations with a delighted public. Yet we cannot but be sensible of the disadvantage under which we labor of succeeding such a speaker, and of providing entertainment for eyes yet resting with such music. What we must lose, however, in the favorable hearing of our humble essays, we shall have amply made up to us in the countenance and sanction given to the labors of our lives by the sentiments uttered to-day; and we, whose office it is daily to instruct the youth who hang upon the lips of the orator of the day, cannot but rejoice to have our opinions ratified, and our authority seconded by remarks issued from so high a source.

We feel much indebted to one who has added the force of his sagacity to the utility of that system of classical, mathematical and philosophical study by which it is the business of our lives to train up the youth of our country for the future demands of that country. We feel that our hands are strengthened by such an ally; we rejoice in the arrival of such an auxiliary to fight the great battle of truth and freedom, and provided the blessed victory is won, we care not much whose brow shall wear the laurels. We can very contentedly follow on, unnoticed, in the triumph procession, and envy not the hero who sits in the chariot before us; but feel happy to have a contest so dear to us maintained by stronger arms than ours, and proud to have one of North-Carolina's first and favorite names proclaimed, in the exercises of this day, on the side of sound learning and immortal patriotism.

The subject which was assigned me for a lecture before the Institute at this time is, "The imperfections of our Primary Schools; and the best method of correcting them." The proposal and adoption of this, as a subject of discussion, implies a conviction in the minds of the public, that evils do exist in the system of our Primary Schools; that those evils are felt and deplored, and that a remedy is anxiously desired. Indeed it can escape the observation of no one, that in the present state of things there is much waste of time and expense, that a large number of our youth make no improvement, and that the attainments of all come far short of what is practicable. To borrow a comparison from another art, we may say, there is a prodigal waste of the raw materials for education, by want of skill in the manufacture.

(The evil which we deprecate, and whose causes we propose to explore, results almost necessarily from the present circumstances of our country. Our country is comparatively young. We are a nation of scattered agriculturalists, embosomed and hidden in the midst of a boundless forest, upon whose breast all our labors hitherto, have only here and there, made little spots of culture, bearing scarcely any proportion to the vast sylvan expanse which surrounds and overhangs them, and insulates each family from its neighbors. Let any person ascend one of our mountains, or even one of our loftiest spires or cupolas, and look down upon the prospect beneath him. He will be surprised to see how little territory we have yet reclaimed from the wilderness—how diminutive appear the impressions which human hands have made, in so many years, upon the wide face of nature. He will see that we observe yet to be denominated, in a great measure, a people of the woods. In such a state of society there will be a great waste of raw materials of every description, of mind, no less than of wood, land

and water. The rich resources of such a country exceed the wants of its thin population, and therefore lie hidden from their view, or are neglected under their feet. Their innumerable trees of stately timber, which, in a more advanced state of society would all be in demand, and all be fashioned into a thousand articles for domestic convenience and embellishment, are now hewn down with unsparring hand, as an incumbrance, thrown into piles and burned. Its streams, which amid a dense population would be alive with watermen and those loaded batteaux, or resounding with the rumbling of machinery, now wind their course through the thickets unexplored by the curiosity, and unweaved by the cupidty of man. Is it wonderful that in such an early, incipient state of society, mind should be wasted or unemployed as well as matter? In these circumstances, those qualities of body and mind only will be valued and cultivated which are immediately applicable to the wants of life. Such people, either themselves emigrants from a more improved country, or the children of such emigrants, will carry in their minds the idea and model of improvements belonging to that older country. They will be impatient to bring their own rude land to an equality with such a model, and will go on emulating, and gradually approximating to an admired standard. This approximation may be made more rapidly in agriculture and the arts than in education. A man may, by the application of industry and taste, clear out a spot in the desert, and embellish it at once with a fine house and garden and fields, in imitation of those he has seen in a more cultivated region. But it is not so easy to transport to that forest, the intellectual society of the mother land, and to rear up there a school or college in all the perfection of older institutions of the same kind. The majority of people in such early settlements will always be rather of the poorer and more ignorant class of the community. Their ideas of education will, of course, be limited. The bulk of youth growing up in such circumstances, will be satisfied with very little mental improvement—will pass a great part of their life in the hunter and fisher states; their chief companions will be their dogs and their horses, and the merits of these favorites the common topic of their social hours. If a few families of superior cultivation are dispersed amidst this mass, they cannot raise it to their standard, but must be drawn down by superior numbers to a lower standard. And thus it will often happen that, in a family where the beauties of Shakespeare, Milton and Addison, or the philosophy of Locke and Dugald Stewart formed the subject of treatable discussion, will be heard from the lips of the next generation only the price of cotton and of negroes; and a group of young gentlemen, instead of discussing the point, whether Sir Walter Scott or Washington Irving be the more elegant writer, or investigating the meaning of a passage in Cicero and Virgil, will be heard disputing with clamorous eloquence, whether Dr. Jones's colt or Capt. Eagle's filly be the best heels, and whether Jowler or Musick first roused Reynolds from his morning slumbers.

Until society has been pushed far beyond this condition, you cannot expect good schools or cultivated men. Everything like polite learning will be despised and ignorance will be respectable because it will be fashionable. It would be useless in such a community to have a good school. The youth will not take an education if you throw it in their way. Now, although the tenor of these remarks is more applicable to some newer settlements in the West than to the State of North-Carolina, yet we feel considerably the disadvantages of this incipient period of national existence.

I. The first cause, therefore, on which I shall touch, of the imperfections in our primary schools is, the circumstances of our youth. There is not a sufficient stimulus upon the youth of our State to cultivate the powers of their minds. Most of those sent to school are the children of men of considerable property. These young persons have never felt the pressure of want and the necessity of exertion. While at home, they have been accustomed to pass their time in ease and amusement, and when they leave that home for school or college, the change must be rksome. The confinement of a schoolroom, the demand of close application to uninteresting studies, the stern obligation of performing a regular daily task, and the privations of a boarding house, must go hard with a boy after being accustomed to ramble about his father's plantation, with dogs at his heels and a gun or fishing rod on his shoulder, until he is tired, and then to return to his house, open his mother's pantry, and there fish with more success among jars of sweetmeats and jellies. Will it be wonderful if a youth sent from these domestic indulgences, should find school ungrateful, or, to use a favorite school-boy phrase, "of showing partiality?" that he should recite with mournful recollections, and still sadder forebodings, that awful Greek verb *επιπλανάω*, "to bewilder, to beat about;" *επιπλανάω, I was under beat-*

ing a little while ago; and then to discern a future, *επιπλανάω, I shall be beaten*—but above all that most faithful of all the tenses, the pain-past-future, (depreciating the prominence of his danger) *επιπλανάω, I shall very soon be beaten again.* A-k such a boy the usual grammatical question, "what is a verb?" and it will be no wonder if he forget the foregoing part of the definition, "to be and to do," and answer, "that a verb is a word which signifies to suffer." Will it be wonderful that such a boy should sigh for the boys of home, and while his task calls him to accompany Zenas in his wanderings, his mind should be off, recollecting his own pleasanter wanderings on the banks of the Cape Fear, the Yadkin or the Roanoke? (Would he consider it a very serious misfortune, if for inattention to his books, or some youthful prank, he should be sent home to the scene of his former amusements? Will he be very loath to incur such a misfortune? For what does he expect when he arrives at his father's house? He may a little dread the first interview; but he knows that after a good scolding his time will pass as pleasantly as before. His indulgent parent allows him to cheer the days of his rustication with his fowling piece, thus contriving at home what could not be effected at school, a way "to teach the young idea how to shoot." Hunting, fishing and neighborhood visits, will constitute the tenor of his life. These are the circumstances in which our youth are placed, and this constitutes one grand obstacle to their improvement at school and at college; for these remarks apply with as much force to the collegians as to the school-boy. There is too strong a contrast between a youth's situation at home and a school, and that contrast all in favor of home. Now this being the case, parents have the remedy in their own hands.—This inequality must be altered. The student who goes home in disgrace, must be no gainer by the exchange. Let the sending of him home, be like sending him to the penitentiary. Let him be loath to put off his broad-cloth coat, in which he would be glad to go and see the young ladies, and let him array himself in a plantation suit from his mother's own loom, and let him tend his father's crop and earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. A discipline of this kind would soon make school lose its charms, and perhaps a few months' labour at the plough or the hoe would bring about an earnest petition to be permitted to return to school, with the promise of diligence and good behaviour. I fear there is little prospect of persuading parents to adopt measures of this kind. They are generally so injudiciously indulgent, that their children are not afraid to offend them. And this is the reason why so few who set out to get an education, persevere till they arrive at the goal.—Whereas in the Northern States, few, comparatively, break off after once beginning. The reason of this is the certainty of meeting from their parents the treatment I have been recommending, if they refuse to improve at school.) One remarkable instance may be mentioned. It is told of the first President Adams, that when he was first sent to school he would not learn his Latin Grammar. His father, who seems to have been one of those plain sensible men that go by the old proverb, "a bird that can sing and won't sing," &c. took him home, and set him to dictating, an operation so little to the taste of the future Chief Magistrate, that it made all the combined errors of the eight parts of speech appear as nothing in comparison—and such sounds as *quicquid, quicquid, quicquid*, &c. would break his jaws in the very utterance of them, he could pro-

ceed no farther. Parents are little aware how necessary it is that they should lay the ground work of their children's subordination within the domestic walls. They must prepare them by previous training for an orderly subjection to the rules and requisits of scholastic life. If they do not, they are laying up future trouble for their children, and preparing them to resist against the most necessary restraints. How can we expect that a boy, indulged at home in every wish, and accustomed, by obstinate adherence to his purpose, to get the better of his father and mother, will, when he goes to school, stand to the authority of his preceptor? If the history of many men who disturb the world by their restless and turbulent dispositions were traced back to the habits of infancy, it would probably be seen that the foundation of their characters was laid in early mismanagement: they were allowed to indulge a violent temper without punishment, to domineer over slaves, to struggle with, and even neglect their mothers, when they attempted to control them, and been only laughed at for these paroxysms of impetuous rage. (These young clouds no doubt gave, even in the nursery, plain presages of their future of rejection, and their constitutional scuples to all generous expectations. One might have seen the embryo of the future patriot, resisting all invasion of his rights. He gave happy augurs if his loud screams whenever the bread and butter were locked up; and that he would no day be a deadly foe to tariffs, he gave striking presages whenever he was promised a lump of sugar upon the payment of certain navy duty, such as keeping quiet, or getting his lesson; for he always would have the sugar free of duty. It was Voltaire, I believe who said that the fate of nations sometimes depended upon the good or bad digestion of the prime minister;—and perhaps the repose of a republic may depend upon the indigestion of a few wholesome stripes upon a forward child.)

Exercise. I hope, nothing here said can be so misunderstood as to be construed into disrespect for the medical profession. No one cherishes higher respect or a more affectionate regard than I do for the gentle art of physic—those southern or human words, those friends on whom we repose our throbbing bosoms in the most agonizing hours of life. Far from concurring in the above ignorant and shallow notions of the intellect and cultivation requisite to the profession, I believe there is no profession which requires more acute sensibility, more profound philosophical views, and more liberal information. So much does it depend on business depend on my-sensations, that if any man whatever, ought to bring to his aid, all the light and all the strength which the best opportunities and the most perfect cultivation of the mental powers can bestow, it is because I entertain such opinions of the proper qualifications for a valuable physician, that it seemed to me not amiss to expose to just censure the narrow conceptions of some who devote themselves for that most responsible vocation. Nor can it offend any of our elderly physicians of eminence, whose early opportunities were limited, to insist on the necessity of a liberal education to success and distinction in the profession. They may, by the best use of their own education, and by the aid of a few of our unpretending, have arisen to merited celebrity; but they will not deny, that, with a better education, they themselves would have reached a higher eminence with perhaps far greater ease.

no one, as plibly as his a. b. c. This, then, be it remembered, says John Adams, President of the United States—the alternative *Latin or the ditch*. We must make scholars by the same art that the Romans made soldiers. Their very name for *army* is taken from the exercises daily required of the soldiers, which exercises were more severe and oppressive in time of peace than in time of war. This made the Roman soldier sigh for a campaign, as procuring him a holiday from the tedium of drilling.

But it is not merely the love of home indulgence and home amusements which damps the ardor and relaxes the exertion of the youth in school. There is a thought which often crosses his mind, while toiling at his daily college lessons, "Of what use is all this going to be to me? I am to be a farmer, or a merchant, or at most a doctor, and everyone knows it takes very little education to make a physician. Look at Dr. X. Y. Z. unknown quantities, to be sure, (as the Algebrasts say), but still in good practice—and although they thin the population a little, yet are certainly less destructive to the human species than either intemperance or the Chelera. If they get along with but a smattering of Latin, and no Greek or Mathematics, so can I." This sentiment is apt to occur with a student somewhere in the course of his Sophomore or Junior year when after moving on frigidly through half his term, the growing labours of the way begin to tickle his heart, and the feeling of incipient manhood to inspire the hope that he may be allowed to have the disposal of himself. Then farewell to further improvement! And next comes a letter from his father, authorizing his son to select his own studies. "Ah, glorious times now! I shall have to recite only two or three times a week, and the rest of the time I can do with as I please—range through the libraries, read novels and newspapers, and have plenty of time to be on the bed and take naps, while the regulars, poor dogs, are digging after Greek roots, or writhing on angles as heart-piercing as a bayonet's point. But may be, I may conclude when I get home, to be a doctor; so a little touch of chemistry before I leave College." And thus is a raw, undisciplined mind suddenly transferred from a lower class up to a course of scientific study for which it is not prepared, and where it does little more than expose its incompetency, and furnish another illustration of the maxim, that there is no royal road to learning. It may be thought that these annual adventures on a partial and mutilated course of study at College, are in fact to my appointed subject as they relate to the subsequent and later part of education rather than to the elementary one. But it is to be feared that the frequent examples of such interruptions to a liberal education, have a malignant influence even on the earlier years of academic life, and encourage and increase the school-boy's distaste for his present studies which he anticipates will be dropped in a few years, and therefore need not be pursued now with much diligence. The remedy for this evil appears to be, that a youth should be given to understand, when he is sent to school that he is to take a thorough course; that the pleasure and profit and credit of the latter part of his course will depend essentially upon his improvement in the first part, and that his education is to be his livelihood. And if, instead of cutting short their sons' collegiate career, out of economy, parents would more frequently give them their patrimony in an education, it might have a most salutary effect on their scholarship and their morals.

2. A second cause injurious to solid improvement, which frustrates the fairest plans of the enlightened and faithful preceptor, and which is chargeable upon the parents, is the consulting of cheapness and cheapness of its terms, and the rapidity with which he can push boys forward for entrance into college. Haste is every thing. Whoever can get a boy through the greatest number of books, in a given

Exercise. I hope, nothing here said can be so misunderstood as to be construed into disrespect for the medical profession. No one cherishes higher respect or a more affectionate regard than I do for the gentle art of physic—those southern or human words, those friends on whom we repose our throbbing bosoms in the most agonizing hours of life. Far from concurring in the above ignorant and shallow notions of the intellect and cultivation requisite to the profession, I believe there is no profession which requires more acute sensibility, more profound philosophical views, and more liberal information. So much does it depend on business depend on my-sensations, that if any man whatever, ought to bring to his aid, all the light and all the strength which the best opportunities and the most perfect cultivation of the mental powers can bestow, it is because I entertain such opinions of the proper qualifications for a valuable physician, that it seemed to me not amiss to expose to just censure the narrow conceptions of some who devote themselves for that most responsible vocation. Nor can it offend any of our elderly physicians of eminence, whose early opportunities were limited, to insist on the necessity of a liberal education to success and distinction in the profession. They may, by the best use of their own education, and by the aid of a few of our unpretending, have arisen to merited celebrity; but they will not deny, that, with a better education, they themselves would have reached a higher eminence with perhaps far greater ease.

time, is the best teacher. I am fortunate in being able to confirm my own observations on this subject, by the testimony of so thorough a scholar and so distinguished a man as Professor Smart of Andover. "Our primary schools," says he, in a late essay, "are, in a multitude of cases, very imperfectly regulated. Students are hurried through every thing. Shortness of time and smallness of expenses are, at present, generally made essential ingredients in the plan of preparatory education. Young men are urged on over a large field with rapid steps—the grand desideratum being to pass over the utmost possible ground in the least possible time. In what way one travels, it matters little or nothing. Be it in a close carriage with a bandage over his eyes, it is all well; he has only travelled." Thus he is pushed through the academy, and pushed into college, when in fact he might be taken up upon his elementary books, and found to be hitting at nearly every step. But this must be overlooked—he has made rapid advances in a small time—he bids fair to command the scheme of economy in time and money, and at any rate he will add to the general sum of knowledge on the catalogue of college members, and help to support the expenses of the institution." Such are the remarks of a man whose station as a Theological Professor in one of our most eminent institutions, has given him large opportunities of judging of the mode of elementary instruction in this country; and they serve to show us how extensively the evil obtains in the United States—that it is not an evil which the South has peculiar reason to complain, but exists in a degree which we should have hardly suspected, in the oldest and most improved section of the republic. And what is the result? Why he assures us, that in a class of from 100 to 150, who come annually into his hands, by far the larger portion cannot decline their Greek nouns and verbs with any tolerable accuracy, and that he is obliged to set them to the study of their Greek grammars as a necessary prerequisite to the study of the Greek testament.

Now in the maintenance of this literary quackery, as it may with propriety be termed, parents and teachers have a reciprocal action upon each other. The parent calls for cheapness and rapidity.—The public calls for cheapness and rapidity.—Crowd as much as possible into a small compass, is the universal demand and the universal cry of this economical, labor-saving age, from the parent who has a son's or a daughter's head to be filled with knowledge, to the bookseller who offers you Gibbon's twelve volumes of the Roman Empire crammed into one groaning octavo. When there is a loud demand for anything, however difficult or impracticable its attainment, there will always be persons who will profess to furnish the desiderated article, whether it be to provide a diamond-crumbling bird-&peacock's tongue for a Chinese mandarin, or to put eight ounces of brains in a skull where nature has left only cavity enough for one. Hence if you make proclamation for a teacher who can put into his boys as much learning in two years, as others can do in four, you will be sure to have your offer accepted. If the object is merely that a boy should gallop through a certain number of books, why the thing may be done, by the usual process by which galloping animals are accelerated—namely, the whip and the spur, and the carrying of little weight. And if reaching the goal first be that which is required to win the stake, the rider, instead of keeping the prescribed track for legitimate racing, may narrow his circuit, or dash, by a short cut, to the termination of the course. These teachers who profess to do so much in so little time, seriously injure the cause of solid learning, by bringing into disrepute those schools which demand more time and more thorough scholarship.—A teacher who is a man of sense and conscience, who knows that four years at least are requisite for taking a boy through the classical course preparatory to entering our common colleges, and who wants to do justice to his employers, is mortified, perhaps, to find that his pupils are taken away, under the complaint that he carries them on too slowly, and perhaps he is taxed with the selfish motive of retarding their progress on purpose to swell his numbers and his emoluments. This is the reward he gets for being faithful and conscientious, and for his many and enlightened views of what constitutes good scholarship. He may have entered upon his professional career with that ardor and enthusiasm which are so conducive to success, and he may have determined to merit the reputation of forming real scholars. But he presently finds that he cannot carry his plans into execution—pupils get discouraged by the length of time he requires; parents, too, revolt against the delay and the expense, and he is obliged, in self-defence, to enter the lists of candid race running, and to cry out with his competitors for public favor.

Occupy extremum scabris; nihil turpe re-plinam E. glish, "the deuce take the hindmost?"

Want, then, of a due valuation and patronage of superior teachers, is one main cause of the low state of our primary schools. Our population so thin, our towns so small, that there is not patronage enough to manure schools in the same place. To warrant, then, the provisions of common-school buildings, and the employment of a well qualified teacher, the patronage must be united and concentrated. But instead of that, what is the state of things in our towns and villages? Instead of a public union in maintaining a reputable academy, you see a number of little petty schools, kept up in various parts of the town—and the town academy, if there be one, is drained of its resources. A few public spirited individuals struggle for some years to maintain a good teacher, at a heavy expense, but are at length discouraged by the apathy of the public, drop the school, and send their sons to a distance. Now it should be deemed the duty of every good citizen to maintain a good school in the place where he resides, whether he is to receive an immediate personal benefit from it or not. He may have no children, or none large enough at present to profit by the school, but still he must have an indirect, an ultimate interest in the good education of the community among whom he and his family are to dwell. Every man, therefore, ought to pay cheerfully, and as liberally as possible for the support of one good school in the place where he lives. Even old bachelors, who often constitute a numerous and respectable class in our towns, ought to indemnify the public for their selfish and indolent celibacy by contributing for the benefit of the children of others, as much as they would have had to expend on a family of their own; and thus they may serve society, by acting the part of stakes, which, though dry and fruitless themselves, answer admirably well as supports, on which the genial vine may lean and hang her clusters to the sun.

While on the subject of patronage, it may not be amiss to mention one species of patronage which would materially benefit all our schools, from the lowest to the highest. It is the patronage of notice.—It is the flattering attention of the public eye. Much depends on this—more than is generally thought of. Whatever attracts public attention, and is the subject of popular conversation, will be estimated by the young as an important matter.—How, then, can the young think their progress in school a matter of importance, when the public, and even parents themselves, will not attend the semi-annual examinations for a few hours a day, every half year? The teachers know what a stimulus it is to their pupils to expect this periodical inspection—they make proclamation, they invite, they beg parents, relations, professional gentlemen to attend, but with scarcely any success. Now and then a transient stranger comes in, but soon gets tired and withdraws, or, if he possesses a more than common share of zeal and patience, finds a happy refuge from the severity of his penance by a nap upon his elbow. Unhappy pupils, and still more unhappy teachers, doomed to all the mortification and discouragement of public neglect! It is said in apology for this neglect, "we are too busy," or "we understand nothing of the subjects of examination, and therefore can do no good by our attendance"—or "it is too dull and wearisome to endure." In reply to these excuses it may be said, is the business you plead of greater importance than the improvement of your child? Or if you have no child at the school, is the prosperity of the school in your town a matter not worth the giving of your attendance for a few hours twice a year? Admitting such attendance to be unpleasant and tedious, yet can you bear no self-denial for the sake of attaining a great public good? Will you sacrifice nothing to stimulate industry and virtuous habits the dear youth of our country, who are the happiness of our parents, and the future rulers of the empire? Parents and other citizens are not aware what a valuable office their very presence may perform upon the minds of both teacher and pupil, or sure they would sacrifice a little time from more agreeable or more lucrative employments, to stimulate the good scholar by their smiles of approbation, and to shame the sluggard and the inert by the stigma of their notice. Surely the faithful and laborious instructor, who is waiting on life in the cause of their children, might expect of the inhabitants of our towns, this little tribute to lighten his burdens and cheer the tedium of his day. He would repay it in increased endeavor to deserve their confidence, and his pupils would repay it to the public by superior attainments in scholarship, and by doing less mischief to their pigs and poultry. In every village where there is an academy, this attendance on the public examinations might be taken by rotation so as to fall lightly upon each; and the ladies, who are fond of encouraging every thing good, and who are apt to take a livelier interest in the young than men do, could not do more good, in all their round of morning calls, than by a morning call at the academy.

(To be concluded in our next.)

Talking a Newspaper? Do you take a newspaper neighbor? • • • Yes. • • • Which one? • • • Egad! I take all I can lay my hands on.

This essay was read on the afternoon of the 20th of June, 1833, at the delivery of his Oration before the two Literary Societies.