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Lessons Derived From
The Plant
By
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LESSONS DERIVED FROM

THE PLANT.

The Baccalaureate Sermon,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

JUNE 26, 1870,

By JAMES McCOSH, D.D., LL.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

PRINCETON, N. J.

STELLE & SMITH, PUBLISHERS AND BOOKSELLERS.

1870.

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PRINCETON, JUNE 27, 1870.

REV. DR. McCOSH,
DEAR SIR :—

The undersigned, in behalf of the Senior Class, respectfully request for publication a copy of your Baccalaureate Sermon delivered June 26, 1870.

Very Respectfully,

JOS. C. GUERNSEY.
JOHN T. SHELBY.
ROBT. M. AGNEW.

PRINCETON, JULY 16, 1870.

GENTLEMEN :—

I consent to the proposal, which your kindness has led you to make, solely in the hope that the Discourse, not from any merit in it, but from the circumstances in which it was delivered, may raise pleasant recollections and profitable thoughts in the minds of the members of the class, as they read it now or at any future time.

Yours Ever,

JAMES McCOSH.

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SERMON.

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” MATT. VI., 30.

The inspired writers are in the way of employing all the objects in nature with which we are familiar, in order to illustrate spiritual truths. Solomon sends the slothful man to the ant, “Go to the ant thou sluggard.” Isaiah makes the ox and ass rebuke the ingratitude of the professing people of God, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” A greater than Solomon and all the prophets, sends those who distrust God’s providence to the lilies of the field, and the fowls of heaven. “Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not equal to one of these.”

All this exercised a most beneficent influence on pious men in ancient Israel. Living as they did much in the open air, and in perpetual view of the wondrous works of God in earth and sky, nature was seen by them to be full of God; the grass sprang, the flowers bloomed,

the wheat and barley yielded their increase, and the vine, the fig and the olive their rich fruit, all in obedience to God's command, and as they did so they shewed forth the glory of God, as well as furnished nourishment to his creatures. Would that the example set by Hebrew shepherds and husbandmen as they tended their flocks, or pruned their vineyards, would induce those who live much among the works of nature to take like elevated views. The works of nature would afford a higher and nobler pleasure when thus connected with God and Divine things, than when associated merely with professional work, and sordid earthly solicitudes. Would that it would lead those who delight to study the operations of nature, or who go forth from our towns at such season of the year as this to walk among the scenes of the country, to take a higher view than they do who look to mere mechanical laws, and make them regard all natural objects as truly works of God, and capable of imparting spiritual instruction.— There is not an object in the mineral, the vegetable, or animal kingdoms, which is not capable of being thus enlisted into the service of Christ.

The plant, in particular, has been much employed by the inspired writers to convey spiritual lessons. The life of the plant seemed to them like the spiritual life in the soul; the rain and dew that nourished it, reminded them of the grace which comes down from heaven; the flowers which adorned it taught them that the soul should be adorned with heavenly graces; and the fruit which it yielded admonished them that they too must bring forth fruit unto God. The lesson of this day is drawn from the plants; Christ himself is the teacher, and the

grass and lilies are the lesson-book. The greatest of all teachers is employing his works as symbols, figures, or models to instruct us in heavenly truth. Let us attend while He speaks. Four topics will open to us as we advance.

FIRST, WE ARE CALLED TO CONSIDER THE WORKS OF GOD, AND IN PARTICULAR THE PLANTS, THE LILIES AND THE GRASS OF THE FIELD.—“Consider,” says he, “the lilies of the field.” There are many who do not consider them. Some of these persons are fond of seeing or possessing fine specimens of human workmanship in dress, in furniture, or houses, or paintings, but they “regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands.” “And yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” We are to mark them, we are to mark how they grow. All persons who have eyes to see may see it, with or without book learning, whether they have or have not been at schools or colleges.

They may in particular observe two things, First, every part of the plant is made to serve an end. “They toil not, neither do they spin,” yet every organ of the plant has its use. Look at that swelling tree that overshadows us, or at this graceful lily at our feet. It has roots which serve a purpose. These roots penetrate into the soil and draw nourishment from it. They spread out downwards as the trunk and branches mount upward, and enable the tree, the oak for example, to stand the storms of a hundred winters. The form of the bole of a tree and the manner in which it fixes itself in the ground, is said to have yielded some suggestions to a celebrated engineer in

the construction of a famous lighthouse. You may remark how the tree springs up from the ground as a stem or trunk; on which hang all the branches and flowers and seed and fruit. This trunk as it mounts upwards spreads out all around into the air as branches and branchlets. These are covered with leaves, rejoicing in the sunshine and the moisture of dew and rain, and drawing in nourishment from the atmosphere. Upon these at the proper season you may look for and find flowers to delight the eye, and seed wherewith to propagate other plants after their kind, and fruit for the sustenance of God's creatures. It is obvious to every reflecting mind that in this Divine workmanship, every part has its use and its end. The architect of a famous palace confesses that he derived some of the ideas embodied in that structure, from observing the wonderful provision made for bearing up the very broad leaf of one of the most beautiful of our lilies. But there is another principle to be observed in the plant.

Secondly. There is visible in the plant, an order, an ornament. Special reference is made to this by Him who made them ("by whom also he made the world,") and who now uses them to teach us lessons. God is said not only to have made, but to have *clothed* the grass of the field. While every part of the plant has its use, it has also a clothing, it is clothed with beauty to minister to our delight, and manifest the divine glory. So far as we know, the plant could have fulfilled all its other and ordinary functions, without its having such an elegance of form, or garniture of colouring. "I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these." It can be shown

that every plant, and every organ of the plant is, as it were, constructed upon a model or pattern in the Divine mind. Look at the full formed tree, growing apart from all other trees, and you see at once that it is made to grow up into a particular form, and this form is beautiful to look upon. It can be shown that every tree takes its own peculiar form—a form after its kind, and if not interfered with that form is lovely. Look at the flower of the lily or any other plant, and in every part of it, its stalk, its petals and inner organs, in their forms, and in the way in which they are placed, there are obvious order and ornament to call forth our admiration and our praise. Then what richness of colouring in the flower. First of all every colour is beautiful in itself, and those colours which are accordant are placed alongside of each other in pleasing melody or exciting harmony. It needs science to explain all this, to shew how it arises, and point out the causes of it, but it needs no science to enable us to observe it or enjoy it; the eye perceives it spontaneously and drinks in the beauty; and it needs only piety to enable us to turn all this into an anthem of praise. This *clothing* of the plant meets us everywhere. Take the commonest plant, the weed that grows on the common, the seaweed that cleaves to the rocks washed by the ocean, or the fern that springs up in the mountain glen, and you may observe in its structure, its leaves and all its pendicles a wonderful correspondence of side to side, and a counterbalancing of one part by another. Let the eye travel over nature as we walk among the cultivated fields, or on the grassy slopes and valleys of our upland districts; or among the thick

woods where the winds have sown the seeds, and bush and tree of every kind spring up, each eager to maintain its place and shew its separate form and beauty, and we discover an order and a loveliness in every branch and blade and leaf and colour. Pluck the leaf and flower and consider it; and observe how one edge has the same number of notches in it as the other edge; and what nice balancings and counterpoises there are; and how nicely the lines and dots and shadings meet each other and recur each at its proper place; as if all had been done by the most exact measurement and under the most skilful and tasteful eye. Enter the rich arbour or the cultivated garden, and observe how the flowers have been enlarged or improved by the care which has been taken of them, and in this gayer colour, and in that fuller expanse, and more flowing drapery and richer fragrance, mark how God, who rewards us for opening our eyes and looking abroad upon his works holds out a still greater reward to those, who in love to Him or in love to them take pains with them and bestow labour upon them.

Now all this fitness, and all this order and beauty testify of the wisdom and goodness of God. All these objects point upward to their God and to our God. Every flower that expands itself to the sun, every branch, every blade of grass and every leaf that throws out its points to the air and sky, should raise these earthward looks of ours, and carry up our thoughts to the place where God dwelleth, and where we hope to dwell forever. As our eyes were given us to behold these beauties so our hearts were given us to cherish admiration, adoration and gratitude, and our voices to praise Him who made them all.

These works of God can also serve other religious ends. They may be used as lesson books, they are thus used by Christ to instruct us in great spiritual truths. Nature may thus be sanctified, and be made to teach the very same lessons as the inspired word. Meanwhile I observe that the lessons thus inculcated by our Saviour seem to justify us in setting before us a high aim in our upper educational institutions. Our object should be not the mere utilitarian one of preparing young men to obtain as much as possible of the money and of the comforts of this present world, but it ought to be to impart a knowledge of the works of God in nature, "which are to be sought out of all them that have pleasure therein," and to cultivate and refine the mind by the higher forms of literature and of art. I too am a utilitarian in a sense; but the good I seek to accomplish is nothing less than training and elevating the powers with which God has endowed us. I will return to this subject.

SECONDLY, WE ARE CALLED TO CONSIDER THE GROUNDS WHICH WE HAVE FOR TRUSTING IN GOD THAT HE WILL PROVIDE FOR OUR TEMPORAL WANTS.—"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, much more shall he clothe you."

This is a specimen of Bible reasoning. The Bible speaks as "unto wise men," and calls on us to "judge what it says." But its reasonings are all brief, all very conclusive, but at the same time easily followed. Here in this Word there are no long and circuitous trains of discussion, difficult to pursue and in which sophistry may lurk. All here is simple and transpa-

rent. A child may understand it, a savage may grasp it. It sets forth a simple truth and then draws immediately the proper conclusion. Take as an example, "If God spared not his own Son but gave him freely to the death for us"—here is the premise and the inference follows, "how will he not with him also freely give us all things." Of the same character is the argument in the text. Preaching as he was on the mountain, he points to the fowls of the air which may at the time have been fluttering around him, and to the lilies which may have been growing at his feet, and if, he says, God so cares for the fowls will he not provide food and sustenance for the children of men; if he so clothe the grass of the fields will he not much more provide clothing for those who have immortal souls made at first in his own image. If God, he says, "so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven." There is an allusion here to the manner in which the Jews heated their ovens. These ovens were made by excavating a hole in the earth and paving the bottom with stones; they were as a traveller tells us, "heated by putting wood or dry grass into the oven, and when heated the ashes were removed, and the bread was placed on the heated stones." Such was the use to which the grass was often and legitimately enough put. The grass is seen growing to-day clothed in beauty and to-morrow it is burning in the oven; yet God knowing all the while the use to which the plant might be turned, did thus beautify and adorn it. It is a proof and illustration of the watchful care which God takes of all his works. The works which are the most perishing, those which we might regard as the meanest

and most insignificant, those which we trample under our feet and destroy, even these have had infinite pains bestowed on them. God does nothing in a careless or negligent manner, everything which comes from God is worthy of him, we see that it is God's workmanship. The argument is irresistible, the lesson comes home at once to us. Every bird we hear carolling its song for the very pleasure of it on the tree or in the air, every flower that we see expanding its petals in the fields or garden, is rebuking our want of faith and confidence in God, and as it were saying "If God take such care of me, will He not much more take care of you." Ye are of more value than many sparrows, of more value than all the grass of the field. Ye have a body that is fearfully and wonderfully made, made even with a more amazing skill than the lilies of the field. The lilies of the field are arrayed in greater splendor than Solomon ever was, and Solomon's body and every man's frame is more wonderfully made than the loveliest plant that ever adorned meadow or mountain. Surely the God who made that goodly frame will also feed and clothe it. Then that body is but a casket formed to contain an infinitely more precious jewel. That body is the tenement within which an immortal tenant dwells; and God will preserve that tabernacle, if for no other reason yet for this, that within it the soul dwells. Then that soul was formed at first in the image of God in order to accomplish a high destiny, and when renewed by the Spirit of God it will yet fulfil that end. And ye, the disciples of Christ, ye have been redeemed at a great price, not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. There

is a sense in which man cannot think too lowly of himself, there is a sense in which he is lower than the sparrow, lower than the grass cast into the oven. That sparrow has not sinned against its maker, that grass has not fallen short of the glory of God, both have fulfilled the end of their existence. But it cannot be so said of you or of me. In this sense man cannot think too lowly of himself, or be too much impressed with his sinfulness or vileness. But in another sense, he cannot think too highly of himself—ye are of more value than many sparrows, and you cannot think too highly of the worth of that soul which was formed at first in the likeness of God, of that soul for which Christ died. In this sense man is not at liberty to think meanly of himself as if he were no better than a plant or a beast. He is of more value than all the beasts or plants of the earth, of more value than the sun and moon and all the stars of heaven; for when all living beings have died and the heavenly bodies have been changed as a garment thrown aside when it has fulfilled its purpose, this soul shall be in its youth, its infancy, still with an eternity before it. This soul is reckoned of such value by the Son of God, that rather than it should perish he left the bosom and the glory of the Father in heaven, and came to this earth to suffer ignominy, sorrow and death. Rest assured, oh ye of little faith, that if God so clothe the grass of the field, whose beauties last but for a day, much more will he make provision for you and your wants.

Not my friends that ye are on this account to give up all work and exertion in the thought that God will provide for you. This would be to pervert and abuse

the text. True the fowls of the air sow not, neither do they reap or gather into barns, still even they, according as God hath taught them by the instincts which he hath planted within them, are at pains to secure their food, "That which thou givest them they gather." True, the lilies of the field toil not, neither do they spin, and yet they draw nourishment from the air and from the earth. And just as the fowls of the air are up in the morning and are active, just as the plants of the ground are busy all the sunshine day, drawing in sustenance, so ye too, of more value than these, are to be active in the exercise of the faculties which God has given you and diligent in your callings. The Apostle is at great pains to shew that Christians, because they are Christians, are not at liberty to neglect industry, or to suppose that God will feed them without the use of means: 1 THESS. IV. 11, and that "ye study to be quiet and to do your own business, and to work with your hands as we commanded you." And again, 2 THESS. III. 10, "For even when we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness, they work and eat their own bread." And what then it may be asked, are we warned against by our Lord in this passage?

We are my friends, warned against a spirit of unbelief, we are exhorted to cherish a spirit of confidence. Christ would deliver us from a spirit of anxiety. The fowls of the air gather their food, but they have no

feeling of anxiety while they do so. The lilies of the field draw nourishment from the field and the air, but meanwhile they are not oppressed with fears as to the future. Much more should ye, were it not that your faith is so little, put confidence in God.

But oh, how many are there who are bowed down all the day, because of a burden of care lying on them. What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewith shall I be clothed? These are the anxious questions that are ever pressing themselves on them, and craving for an answer. And because of them, there are many who cannot enjoy the bounties which God has bestowed, for they are always afraid that they may be taken from them. It is sunshine at present; but may not the clouds return after the rain and descend in storm and tempest? And what is to be the issue of all this? Am I to have health or distress, prosperity or adversity, a lengthened life or a speedy death. Now, a believer in Christ has a means of allaying all these apprehensions. He can say, I leave all these things with my God. My concern is this, in whatever state I am therewith to be content; but what my state may be or should be, that is not my concern, but God's. My anxiety should be simply to be in the path of duty, but as to what should befall me in that path, I leave with Him who cares for us. It is thus that the believer lays his burden on Him who is able to bear it, and finds how comfortable it is to obey the Lord's command, "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make known your requests unto God."

There may be some before me who, as knowing that the days of their education are now over, and that they must choose a profession and act for themselves, may be feeling anxious about themselves and the future—I would address myself to them ere I close.

THIRDLY, WE ARE CALLED TO CONSIDER THAT IF GOD SO CLOTHE THE BODIES OF HIS PEOPLE, MUCH MORE WILL HE CLOTHE THEIR SOULS.—This is not the direct lesson taught in the text, but it arises directly out of it. The argument is, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which is of comparatively little value, much more will he provide clothing for his people, who are of more value. But the argument needs only to be carried out a step farther to take this form: if God thus clothe the bodies of his people, much more will he clothe their souls with heavenly graces.

And these souls of ours need to be clothed. The plant once of a graceful form, and clothed with the richest hues, but now bent, broken by the wind, bemired in the dust, all this is the emblem of the soul formed in the very image of God, and arrayed with a brighter glory than the lily, but now fallen from its first estate, broken, and torn, and polluted by sin. The body lately in the vigor and bloom of health, but now maimed, diseased, this is the emblem of the soul once holy and righteous, but now lying under the judgments of heaven and blotted with foul lusts. Ah, how like is that soul to the grass which has been cut down, and which is about to be cast into the oven—that soul has been cut off from its God, the source of all spiritual life; already has the life ceased to circulate in it, and it is ready to be cast into the fire that is not quenched. Can it in-

deed be that this soul is to grow and to flourish once more upon its stalk? Can it be that this soul already in the grasp of death, is to walk forth in newness of life. "Son of man, can these bones live?" "Oh Lord, thou knowest." Oh yes, God knew it from the beginning, and blessed be God he has revealed it to us. "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in God is thy help found." So great value did he set on these souls that he sent his Son from heaven to save them from everlasting death.

Christ's work when on earth was a work of salvation. They brought to him the sick, the maimed, and the blind, and he healed them all. If you had accompanied Christ on some of his pilgrimages when on earth, what a glorious sight would you have seen: not indeed such a sight as this world admires, when it applauds the warrior, with strong and healthy men before him, and whom it is his pride and glory to cut down and destroy; you would, if you had followed Christ, have seen a far different, but a far more glorious sight. You would have seen before him, on the way by which he was to pass, the road covered with couches with the sick laid out upon them, and you would have seen the dumb, when they could not speak, striving to give expression to their woes by their earnest struggles, and you would have heard the blind, when they could not see him, crying to be taken to him. This was the scene before him; and behind him after he had passed, were the sick bearing their couches, and the lame leaping like the harts, and the dumb singing his praises, and the blind looking after him with joyful eyes, and the lunatics in their right mind, and those lately dead

in the embraces of their friends. Yes, these were the fruits that followed Christ's visits wherever he went. And he is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and forever. His office, his prerogative, is still to seek and to save that which is lost. He is in this world now by his Spirit as he once was in his bodily presence. He is not to be discerned by any external splendour, "the kingdom of God cometh not by observation." But still ye may discern him by the eye of faith. Before him are persons afflicted with all manner of soul maladies: some under the power of wild passions, by which they are led captive at pleasure, some covered all over with the leprosy of vice; all of them blind to the perception of spiritual beauty, and deaf to the voice of God addressed to them. Wherever Christ goes the way is strewn with such. And wherever he goes he leaves behind him traces of his presence. Before him as he marches through our world are the blind, the deaf, the dying and the dead; and behind him are the seeing, the hearing, the living, the lively and the loving. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Not only is the soul once dead made alive in this work, it is beautified and adorned. "I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon, his branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall re-

turn, they shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine, the scent thereof shall be as the vine of Lebanon." "Shall not he who so clothes the grass of the field, also clothe you, oh ye of little faith." And the garment with which the Father clothes his beloved child, to the envy and spite of his beloved brethren, is a party colored one. Yes, if ye have faith but as a grain of mustard seed, you will, by the vital power which is imparted, be clothed with graces of many a hue, each lovely in itself, and lovely in the place it has to occupy; there will be the brighter colours, the blue, the pink, and the orange of faith and confidence and hope, mingling with the darker, but not less lovely colours, with the red, the purple, and the olive of penitence, humility and patience, and the whole lightened and brightened, by what is after all the pure beam of heaven, by the pure white light of love, coming direct and unbroken from Him who is Light and Love.

Yes, brethren, our souls need to be beautified. They need not only to be renewed, they need to be adorned. There are some Christian men and women who are under the influence of true faith and steady principle, but they are not amiable. They are cross, or peevish, or violent, or stubborn. Such persons need to be clothed, that they may become not only good, but lovely,—as the lily is lovely. Brethren, watch and pray, live and labor, that ye may be thus lovely. "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek

and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

My friends, this world of ours is but a nursery—a place of nurture, where we are to be nurtured and then transplanted into the paradise above. These flowers around us have their beauty but for a day ; but it is different with the souls which are being adorned by the spirit of God ; they are to bloom forever in a better land, where are no winds to blight, no storms to destroy. We have seen that all plants of the earth are formed after a model. It is the same with the spiritual plants of our heavenly Father's planting. They are all formed after the model of Him who is expressively called the Plant of Renown. Each branch, each leaf, of this Tree of Life is an image of the entire tree. It is thus that we are to grow in likeness to Him, till we can say and sing, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSION IS DRAWN IN THE TEXT. LET US BRIEFLY NOTICE IT—FOURTHLY, LET US REBUKE OUR UNBELIEF, "OH YE OF LITTLE FAITH."—It is a want of faith, or at least a weakness of faith, which leads us to be overwhelmed with worldly anxieties. If God were to come to a wise man and say "I will allow you to

regulate your lot as you please, have health as long as you wish to have it, and wealth as much as you choose to set your heart upon;" if God were to come to a wise man and make this offer, the wise man would certainly decline it; and the wiser the man, he would be the more resolute in refusing it; for if he knows himself—in any measure as he ought—he must be aware that in choosing earthly blessings he might lose heavenly blessings, that in attending to the comfort of the body, he might make shipwreck of his immortal soul. But God does not place such an offer within our power. Thanks be to his wisdom and love, he keeps this power in his own hands. And where else could we leave it so safely, so comfortably, as in the hands of him who sees the end from the beginning, and who loves us with an everlasting love? And surely if we have been able to commit to him our souls and our eternal welfare, we may commit to him our bodies and our temporal well being the few years we are on the earth. And we may rest assured that if God has given us the greater gift, the greatest which he could give to man, the gift of his Son, he will with him also freely give us all things. It is thus the Apostle reasons: "If God spared not his own Son, but gave him freely to the Death for us, will he not with him also freely give us all things."

And then as to spiritual gifts we need to rebuke our evil heart of unbelief. We live not only beneath our bounden duties, we live beneath our promised privileges. We are satisfied with lesser, when we might have larger measures of grace. God does not say anywhere in his Word that we might have the lower, and not the

higher attainments. If our desires and expectations were larger, our supplies would be more abundant. "Ye have not because ye ask not." "Be it according to your faith," is the promise, and we have so little because we have so little faith. "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times," said the prophet Elisha to Joash, king of Israel, when he put the arrow of the Lord's deliverance into his hand and bade him shoot, and he smote only thrice and stayed. "You should have shot five or six times," said the prophet. And so I say to you, you should have asked more than you have done, and more would have been given you. Oh that we, the beggars and suppliants, had but a very little of that earnestness which Christ, the Benefactor, has in pressing the gift upon us. Your supply from that flowing fountain will be in proportion to the size of the vessel you take with you; your portion at this spiritual feast will be as you open your mouth to receive it. "Come now and prove me, saith the Lord, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessing, so that there will not be room to receive it."

(I.) GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS—You have for the last few years been studying at a college which aims at nothing less than cultivating and enlarging the minds of the youth committed to its care. God has so constituted his creatures, animate and inanimate, that they can be improved and are expected to be improved by human agency—which cannot be more nobly employed than in studying and adorning the

Divine workmanship. The gardener seizes that lily, beautiful even in the marsh, and he transplants it into his garden, and it grows with more luxuriance and sends forth a richer fragrance. So we would in a college like this lay hold of the more gifted minds of the country, and raise them to as high a state of refinement as possible, by means of the highest literature of the ancient and modern worlds, and the highest science of modern times. We do not pretend here to make you merchants, or lawyers, or farmers, or theologians, or physicians, but we give such a training that, whatever be the profession to which you turn, you will find yourselves with formed and confirmed powers of application which will continue with you through life, and in possession of varied knowledge which may aid you in your pursuits, and furnish enjoyments of a high kind in the midst of your professional solitudes. That has been the aim of all the discipline here, of the old studies which have stood the test of time, and of the new studies which have given proof that they are worthy of being placed along side of them. And I may take the opportunity of saying, that we have no intention whatever in this college of discarding the old branches, which braced the minds of our forefathers and made them men of courage and power. We have no idea of giving the *imprimatur* of our Degree to persons, as supposed to be educated gentlemen, who, as not being able to translate an ordinary Latin or Greek author, are cut off from the literature and the very history of the past. We mean too, that the minds of our young men should be strengthened by the study of a competent amount of mathematics, which, besides

being the grand instrument of investigation in certain of the physical sciences, is more fitted than any other study to cure that wandering and dissipation which is the ruin intellectually of so many bright youths. Philosophy too, especially the philosophy of the mind of man, has ever had a high place and will continue to have a high place in this institution, were it only to counteract the materialistic spirit of the times, and because it opens to us a far nobler part of God's workmanship than the lilies of the field or the stars of heaven. But in this college we are open to receive light from every quarter, and are prepared to admit history, and modern literature, and every branch of true science. We wish it to be understood that we mean every graduate of ours to be an educated gentleman, who has been trained in language and literature, in science and philosophy, and who has some acquaintance with the past and present. We have a hope too that by means of these Fellowships we shall raise a select body of scholars, who will set forth on independent and original research, and dive down into the depths of this subject and that subject, thence to draw exhaustless treasures for the enriching of the world, and to reflect credit on the college which trained them.

We trust as to all of you that you have received benefits, in the form of knowledge and habits of application, to go with you wherever you go, and continue with you through life. This will hold good, I trust, even of branches to the study of which you may not choose to return in your future lives—the means may disappear because the end has been secured—the scaffolding

may be taken down but the building remains—the stalks may be neglected for the grain has been garnered in your minds. But while I say so, I feel myself required to add, that in order to retain the full good, you must continue to prosecute some of these studies, and this according to some system arranged, each one for himself and to suit his position and his pursuits. And if you are to do so, you are not to abandon them now in the hope of resuming them at any time. If you yield to this temptation you will be astonished to find how soon you have forgotten what you learned; and the irksomeness of re-learning will be a formidable barrier in the way of resuming the study; and much of what you have gained with such labor will be lost forever.

The class now before me is the largest that ever graduated in this college. It contains as many bright and promising youths as any class which old Nassau has sent forth from her walls. Your Alma Mater will watch over your future career with intense interest—with hope not unmingled with anxiety; will rejoice to hear of you prospering in this world, healthy, happy; but will rejoice ten thousand times more when she hears of you, whether in prosperity or adversity, being good and doing good; and she will shed a silent but sad and bitter tear should she hear of any of you declining from the paths of rectitude and purity. But let me tell you that this mother's love is somewhat of a jealous love. She will be disappointed if you forget her; if you do not come up from time to time to visit her on this pleasant height on which she dwells, to revive old recollections in your bosoms, and make her

feel as if she were yet young, when she sees her boys gathering around her, and listens to them as they tell with their own lips what they are doing, and what God is doing for them and by them. In short, as she loves you with a mother's affection, she expects you to love her in return with a filial regard.

(2.) But some may be saying to me, as it were: We have to look to other things as well as mental improvement and æsthetic cultivation. We have now to choose a profession in life, or we have now to enter upon the hard duties of a profession. And at such a season ye should be asking counsel of God, that ye may be kept from the path which leads downwards to sin, to ruin or hell, and that ye may be guided into the path of honor, of integrity, of faith, of holiness—towards God and heaven and glory. What far reaching evils may follow if we neglect to ask direction from God at such a crisis! There is a record left us of the error which the children of Israel committed on their entering the land of Canaan. The Gideonites came to them declaring that they were from a far country, whereas they dwelt near at hand; and the men were persuaded "to take of their victuals, and asked not counsel of the Lord, and Joshua made peace with them," which was the source of calamities to God's people for ages. We may commit an equally fatal blunder, and be readily tempted to an unholy compromise with evil, if, at the critical periods of our history, we neglect to ask wisdom from God. In the ancient church there was a mercy seat provided, and it was one of the privileges of the people that their high priest, wearing the breastplate on which was written the name of the

twelve tribes, could, on great national emergencies, enter into the holiest of all, and ask counsel of God. Blessed be the grace of God, since the veil of the temple which hid the mercy seat has been rent in twain from top to bottom, there is freedom of access to every true believer to a place where he may commune with God and ask advice from him. They who thus ask counsel of God will find that in some way or other guidance is afforded, and that a good man's steps are ordered of the Lord. And having thus sought guidance you may then go on leaving all anxiety behind, leaving the issue with him to whom the issues belong.

(3.) In religious instruction, I have gone over with you the year before last, the Life of our Lord in the Four Gospels, and this last year, the Planting of the Church, from the resurrection of Christ down to the close of the first century, as related in the Book of Acts, and in certain portions of the Epistles. In these courses I have not striven to make you theologians, but have aimed simply at imparting such knowledge as would enable you at any time, week day or Sabbath day, to read the New Testament with greater profit. I hope to carry those who remain with us other two years over the Old Testament, and into the simple exposition of Christian Doctrine.

In this last year's course of lectures we have had our attention drawn among other things—such as the Evidences of Religion—to the conversions detailed in the New Testament, as to those of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, of the Ethiopian eunuch, of Saul, of Cornelius, Lydia and the Philippian jailer. The students had thus their attention drawn, from Sabbath

to Sabbath, and in preparing for the recitation during the week, to the nature and necessity of regeneration. From the very beginning of the year a number of students, old and new, were supplicating in their then rather thinly attended prayer meetings for an outpouring of the Spirit. There was an idea abroad that for ages past no class had passed through Princeton College without being in the midst of a revival, that no student had ever pursued a four years course in our College, without finding himself in the heart of a scene in which friends were confessing sins and professing Christ. So these students prayed on in the midst of discouragements—as if they would take no refusal, and hoped against hope. The Day of Prayer for Colleges came and passed away, and the heaven was over our head as brass, and the earth under us as iron. Meanwhile a noble and generous resolution of one of the Classes, that they would abstain from a practice which would bring themselves and companions into temptation, was registered in the annals of the College—I believe also in the records of heaven. A blessing came not long after on the College, and descended specially on that Class. It visited first those who had been professing followers of Christ, but who were not living worthy of their profession. Then it spread to others, who had previously manifested no interest in religion. It appeared at a time when the students were busily preparing for a sessional examination, and yet the examination did not hinder the work of God, nor did the work of God hinder the preparation for the examination. It outlived the vacation that succeeded, and has continued through the term now closed. It has been accompanied with no

worldly demonstrations, with no carnal excitement of any kind. It has been produced simply by the Word read, or uttered by the lips of those who felt its power. For the last three months meetings for prayer have been held every night among the students, and no ordinary College room could hold those who attended, and we had to throw open the College Chapel; and there have been other meetings held every evening in the rooms of the students. Our strongest young men have been bowed down under a mastering power which they felt it in vain to resist. Some of our youths of brightest promise, who took the honors in their classes, have publicly professed themselves followers of the crucified one, and declared "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." There cannot have been fewer than one hundred who have avowed that they received a quickening or converting power; and I believe there have been more. Not a few of those originally intended for other professions, have devoted themselves to the service of God in the work of the minister or missionary, while a number have resolved to lead a consistent Christian life, and promote religion in other professions and walks of life. I do not deem it for edification in this public place to enter into farther details and calculations; all who have been engaged in the work will acknowledge that I am understating the facts rather than exaggerating. There will doubtless come trials and temptations, to show how much is genuine, and how much is fictitious in this work.

But this I must say, before I part with you, that I fear there are some here, some in the class now specially

before me, who have passed through these scenes without being benefitted by them. The hearts of others have been melted, but your heart has continued hardened as the rock you have seen remaining in the midst of the cultivated field, hard and barren while all around is fruitful. May not this last appeal reach some so situated and melt them down, as others have been melted, under the power of God's Word and Spirit.

And as to those who think they have received good, let them give the glory to God, and not take it to themselves. Let them keep humble, lest the great adversary tempt them through cherished pride to lose what they have gained. Let them daily feed upon the Word, as the proper nutriment provided for a living soul. Let them be instant in prayer, and thus be continually drawing down blessings to supply their continual wants.

In following out the lesson of the text let me remind you finally that grace grows. If you have no desire to make progress, you may have reason to doubt whether you have begun the journey. You conclude that the tree is dead when it is shooting out nothing new, no leaves, no new branches, no fruit. In like manner the professor of religion may begin to fear when nothing of life or vigor appears. But let me not be misunderstood, or understood as if I asserted that the believer is making progress every instant, or always making progress. No, there are times in his history when he may feel as if all spiritual life were gone, and as if every thing were left withered and dead. But even then he is like the tree in winter, with some life and substance, ready for the first approach of Spring,

“as a teil tree and as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves, so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof;” and the believer on the whole is making progress—just as the healthy and vigorous tree does from year to year. The Christian is like a traveler ascending a high mountain. On his way to the summit he may meet with deep valleys, down which he has to descend; but still upon the whole he is mounting upwards: so it is with the pilgrim heavenward; he may meet on his journey with valleys deep and dark as those of Baca; but he is rising nearer and nearer to perfection, and as he mounts he breathes a purer and more ethereal atmosphere, and gains a wider and nobler prospect. His course is like that of the stream rising in some fountain among the hills, and finding its way after receiving many accessions to the ocean: so it is with the believer; his course may often seem a perplexed or a crooked one, sometimes a backward one, but gathering experience as it moves on, widening and deepening, till at last it loses itself in the fulness of heavenly perfection. The believer may not yet be perfect, but he is going on towards perfection; and he dies at last like Samson, amid the glories of his strength, slaying in his death the last of his spiritual enemies.