

Sprague. Discourse in Aid of the
Albany Apprentices' Library. 1833

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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

ON SABBATH EVENING, MARCH 17, 1833,

IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH,

IN AID OF THE

ALBANY APPRENTICES' LIBRARY,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE TRUSTEES.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY.

ALBANY:

PRINTED BY HOSFORD AND WAIT.

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DISCOURSE.

PROVERBS, XVI, 22.

Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it.

By *understanding* in this passage, the wise man could have meant nothing less than a well cultivated and well directed understanding ; for it could never be said of a mind, either clouded by ignorance, or devoted to evil, that it is a *well-spring of life*, or a permanent source of blessing. Ignorance may indeed consist with that groveling enjoyment which has its seat in the animal nature ; and where it is not found in a companionship with vice, it may sometimes rise to a degree of happiness of a higher kind, and even be instrumental of some good to others ; but in the most favorable circumstances, it can never reach the point either of enjoyment or usefulness, to which every intelligent being ought to aspire. On the other hand, the assertion of the wise man would be equally inapplicable to intellectual energy, either original or acquired, which should be subject to the control of a corrupt inclination ; for experience has long since proved that the brightest intellect will find a source of misery

even in its own reflections, and will diffuse misery wherever it can exert an influence, if it is associated with a heart fully set to do evil. Few men have united genius and depravity in so high a degree as Voltaire; and yet who that reads the record of his life, and especially of his death, can resist the conviction that while he scattered the seeds of wo every where, he carried about in his own bosom the elements of an undying agony?

Not so with him whose understanding is at once properly enlightened and properly directed. He may, indeed, have his full share of the calamities of the world, but he will have inward resources which will render him, in a great degree, independent of the world. In the habit of reflection which he has formed, in the treasures of wisdom which he has laid up, in the approbation of conscience which he has secured, he has the elements of a joy which others know not of. And he is not less useful than happy; for he has at once the ability and the disposition to do good; and while his efforts contribute directly to benefit his fellow men, there is a benign and quickening influence that comes back from them to his own soul. Happy, thrice happy, the man, who has within him this "well-spring of life!"

I have chosen this passage, my friends, illustrative of the great importance of a union of knowledge and virtue, as introductory to the object which I have been requested to present before you. You are aware that there is in the midst of us a large class who are learning some or other of the various mechanical trades; and by the liberality of our citizens in preceding years, a library, which contains now upwards of two thousand volumes, has been established, with a view to their intellectual and moral improvement. I shall ask you, by and by, to contribute something for the enlargement of this library; but before doing so, I hope to make it appear that the class referred to have some peculiar claims on your benevolent regard;

and that these claims are, to some extent at least, happily met by the institution which I am to commend to your favor.

I. I am first to show that *the class contemplated by this occasion have some special claims on your benevolent regard.*

And in doing this let me remark,

1. That it is a class *composed of youth; especially young men.**

There is something in human nature, which leads us to regard with peculiar interest whatever has within itself the principle of developement or expansion. We look, for instance, with higher interest upon the seed that has just germinated in the earth, than we do upon the pebble of the brook, or the clods we tread upon; because, in the latter case, we know that there is no susceptibility of progress or improvement; but, in the former, we are assured there is that which will gradually rise into a majestic tree, or expand into a beautiful flower. And if, in the object we are contemplating, we know there is a principle of life whether vegetable or animal, and yet are uncertain as to the character which that living object may assume;—if we are in doubt whether there will come forth from the egg a harmless and beautiful bird, or a venomous and frightful serpent;—whether the plant which is rising out of the earth will have in it the power of life, or of death;—this very uncertainty must, in one sense, heighten, rather than diminish the interest with which we regard it. The mind is thereby kept in a more wakeful state respecting it; and the principle of curiosity especially, is quickened to more vigorous exercise, than if we could foresee with absolute certainty in what the incipient process of mutation would result.

* Since the delivery of the discourse, the author has learned that the benefits of the library are extended to female apprentices; and that they, in common with the other sex, extensively avail themselves of it.

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Now who does not perceive that this same principle may legitimately come into operation, and in a much higher degree, in our estimate of those who are in the morning of life? In the cases already referred to, there is no improvement beyond a certain limit: on the contrary, there is the retrograde process of decay and death. But in the case of every youth, there is a germ of existence — of intellectual and moral existence, which is destined to immortality; nay, to an immortal expansion. Not a child do you meet, however obscure or degraded, but has an actual importance which throws into the shade the whole material system: for this globe which we inhabit shall be burnt up; the bright lights which shine forth on the face of heaven shall be extinguished; and the whole fabric of nature shall be crushed by the hand of omnipotence into a mighty ruin. But that boy whom you pass unheeded in the street, has in his bosom a principle that will live unhurt amidst this universal wreck: he will be an eye witness of the falling of the rocks and the mountains at the last day: he will mingle in the scenes of the judgment: he will pass off to the right hand with the glorified, or to the left hand with the reprobate: through everlasting ages he will be burning with the ecstasy of a seraph, or suffering the agony of a fiend. And what he is to be through life, and through his whole existence, is probably to be determined by the influence which is exerted upon him in the period through which he is now passing. So much you *know* concerning him; but as to the question whether he is to live or die with the character of a sinner or a saint; whether his future career is to be one of knowledge, and virtue, and glory, or of debasement, and wo, and ruin, you can do nothing more than conjecture. Look at any child or youth you meet, with these thoughts in your mind, and say whether he does not rise in your estimation, into a being of mighty importance. If his destiny for life and for eternity is yet

to be decided, and if it is given to you to do something to decide it favorably, is there not a demand on you, not only for feeling but action?

If the considerations which have been mentioned invest with deep interest, the character and condition of youth in general, there is one additional consideration to the same point that deserves to be noticed in respect to young *men*: I refer to the fact that they are probably destined not only to mingle much with the world, but to bear a part in the more active scenes of life. And here will be a field on which their influence will of course be extensively felt either for good or evil. The circumstances of every day will bring them much in contact with other minds; and the influence which they hereby gain, may be expected to accumulate with advancing years. And they are to have an agency, in this country at least, in the great affairs of civil government. No matter how obscure may be his station, or how uncultivated his intellect, or how questionable his integrity, every young man among us has, either in possession or in prospect, the right of assisting in the election of our rulers; than which scarcely any thing has a more direct bearing on our country's prosperity. But the class which I bring before you to-night are young men; who already, in the circle of their relations, occupy various posts of influence, and are destined no doubt to occupy others still more important; and who, if they live, must inevitably, at no distant period, have a hand upon the springs of our national weal or wo. In this point of view, are they not entitled to our watchful and benevolent regards?

2. The class which this occasion contemplates, are in some respects *peculiarly exposed to temptation*.*

They are so, inasmuch as they are removed, in most instances, from the immediate sphere of parental influ-

* A few sentences have been introduced under this article, since the discourse was delivered.

ence. Many of them have parents at home, who have felt and still feel for them the most affectionate concern; pious parents, it may be, who have dedicated them to God in faith and prayer; who have faithfully instructed them in the principles of religion, and counselled them to remember their Creator, and admonished them to beware of temptation; and when they were on the eve of leaving the paternal home, not improbably the solicitude of their parents became deeper than ever, and parental benedictions mingled with parental tears; and the scene of parting may have been one never to be forgotten by them for its interest and tenderness. Nevertheless that scene is past; and now only comes occasionally to their remembrance: they have found a new home; and one peculiarity of it is that the voice of parental instruction to which they have been used to listen, and the hand of parental restraint by which they have been accustomed to be controlled is not there; for though the families in which they reside may even be Christian families, and though the individual into whose service they have entered may have the fear of God before his eyes, yet who needs be told that a father or a mother has feelings which a stranger intermeddled not with; and that where parental affection is well directed, scarcely any thing can be an adequate substitute for it? But when it is considered that in a fearful proportion of instances, these young men are introduced into families in which there is no special regard for their intellectual or moral improvement, and the only inquiry that is made concerning them respects their fidelity in the business in which they are engaged; the change which they have experienced in leaving home, especially supposing them to be the children of pious parents, is certainly fitted to commend them to our earnest solicitude. There is danger that the absence of parental restraint will quicken the propensity to evil; and that the thought that they can go out and come in, with-

out being subject to the scrutiny of a parent's eye, or without receiving reproof from a parent's lips, or without giving pain to a parent's heart, will insensibly operate to form them to irregular and even profligate habits. I know of at least one widowed mother, who, if she were here, would respond with pain to this remark, as descriptive of the first stage of a career which has terminated in the ruin of her son, and the blasting of her hopes.

These young men are peculiarly exposed to temptation from another source — they are almost of course associated in considerable numbers; and every one must perceive that the social principle in such circumstances is capable of being perverted to great evil. In every case indeed in which several persons are thrown almost continually together, and observe each others habits, and mingle in unreserved intercourse, it is scarcely possible but that they will be instrumental in a great degree of moulding each others characters: and this may the more confidently be expected, when, as in the present case, the individuals who are thus associated, happen to be of nearly the same age, to be engaged in similar pursuits, and to hold the same rank in society. How much danger is there that young men in these circumstances, will pervert their daily intercourse to mutual injury and ruin! And how much greater the occasion to fear, when it is remembered that there is often among them one or more who acknowledges no religious or even moral principle; who makes no scruple of profaning the name of God, and jeering at the holy truths of the Bible! How almost certain is it that, in this case, *that* one sinner, (admitting that there is *but* one) will be found to have destroyed much good; and if he be witty, and crafty, and ingenious, as well as profane, the amount of mischief which he will accomplish may defy all calculation. And then again, what advantages are furnished by this constant intercourse for devising and maturing plans of wickedness; for con-

ceiving mischievous purposes by day to be put in execution by night; for strengthening the unpractised and faint hearted in the ways of iniquity, and laughing them out of their scruples of conscience, and bringing them to the infidel's creed, or the profligate's standard of honor! What a fearful probability is there that a young man of correct principles exposed to such an influence, will gradually become the sport of temptation, and at no distant period, will be walking in the counsel of the ungodly, and sitting in the seat of the scoffer!

Another source of peculiar danger to these young men is found in the fact, that a city like this supplies numerous facilities for their becoming practised in the arts of wickedness, and for accomplishing their own destruction. I might refer here to those dark retreats in which infidels come together to talk over their impious creed, and to encourage each other in scoffing at the Bible; or to those haunts of midnight revelry in which the profligate and the profane meet for intoxication and riot; or to those scenes of deep pollution at which even decency blushes, and sickens, and weeps; but instead of going into particulars, I will mention a single institution in the midst of us, in which, if I mistake not, are the elements of almost every vice; a public fountain of immorality and crime, which sends out its streams of death in every direction—need I say that I refer to the theatre? Here is all that is brilliant to attract, with all that is malignant to destroy. On the one hand, there is the charm of music; the fascination of beauty; the magic power of eloquence; the glitter of imposing drapery; every thing to give splendor and spirit to the scene: on the other, there is the irreverent use of God's awful name and of his holy word; there are false views of human-life—visions of worldly joy which are fitted only to mislead and betray; there are the most exciting influences brought to bear upon the worst passions of human nature; there is a commingling

of the gay, and the profligate, and the polluted ; and then there is but a single step from the theatre into those scenes in which man turns himself into a brute, and trains himself to become a fiend. Let a young man once contract a strong relish for this amusement, and there is scarcely any barrier which will be sufficient to keep him from it. And not improbably there will soon grow out of this habit a neglect of his daily business ; an intimacy with the profane and abandoned ; the entire corruption of his moral principles ; an utter recklessness of his own character ; and it may be, for it has been in a multitude of instances, a mad and fearful rushing upon his final doom by means of the halter or the pistol. Not a better adapted instrument than this was ever devised by the prince of darkness for the ruin of young men. Tens of thousands have tested it, and proved its malignant efficacy. If I had a voice that could reach every youth in this city, I would say to him — “that house is the way to hell ; it leadeth down to the chambers of death.”

You will by no means understand me as intimating that the evils to which I have adverted under this head, are ordinarily realized by this class of young men ; for if that were the case, what parent but would sooner follow his son to the grave than put him to a trade ? — I only mean that the circumstances in which they are placed, especially in a city, expose them to these temptations ; and there are cases enough to constitute an awful chapter of admonition, in which the tempter triumphs, and ruin ensues for time and eternity. And if it be so, I ask again, whether they have not some peculiar claims on our regard ?

3. Many of them are *highly gifted* young men. There is an impartiality, if I may so speak, in the distribution of intellectual endowments on the part of the Creator, which is exceedingly well fitted to abase the proud spirit of worldly greatness. The children of the obscure and

depressed are as likely to be born with the germ of a mighty intellect, as those of the opulent and noble ; and who needs be told that it has sometimes happened that, while the accomplished teacher has labored hard, and long, and unsuccessfully, in a mansion of splendor, to develop intellect in a child, and in the whole course of his efforts has held a sharp conflict with dulness, bordering well nigh upon idiocy, there has been perhaps in a neighboring hut of poverty, an infant mind bursting forth spontaneously into bright and living action, notwithstanding all the impediments which surrounding influences may have thrown in its way ? And in the class of young men to which I am referring, while they are generally of no inferior intellects, there are to be found those who rise above the common level of mental endowment ; and some who in other circumstances and in maturer years, might guide the destinies of a state by their wisdom, or electrify a nation by their eloquence. I remember, and you all remember, the case of an individual who, when he was a boy, learned to set types in a printer's shop ; but farther onward you hear his voice in the hall of legislation ; you read his name among other great and immortal names on the declaration of his country's independence ; you hear of him abroad, settling great questions of national policy between his own and other countries ; you see him at home in every part of the field of science ; discovering philosophical principles which, for aught that appears, only the Creator knew before him ; and bringing the lightning of heaven out of its secret chambers, and causing it to pass harmless at his feet : and now that his career is closed, who does not know that his discoveries and improvements are regarded as the property of the world ; and that there is scarcely a name which stands out with a brighter prominence than his, in all the annals of philosophical greatness ? When he first put his hand to the humble business of setting types, who would have im-

agined that that same hand would one day have chained the elements, or assisted in laying the corner stone of his country's glory ?

My friends, the world has yet seen but one Franklin ; and he began life a printer's boy. I will not say that in the same ranks in which he originally moved, there are other minds equally gifted with his ; for I well know that one such intellect may give character to an age ; but I cannot doubt that among the apprentices of our day, and even of our city, may be found young men who are capable of bright and bold conceptions, and who would have attained to distinguished eminence, had they been destined to any of the liberal professions. Now I am far from saying that, even in every case of uncommon intellect, it is proper for an individual who is learning a mechanical trade, to abandon it with an ultimate view to professional life : whether or not such a step is justifiable, must be determined in a great measure, by the circumstances of each particular case : but let the pursuit of the individual be what it may, if he have an intellect of a high order, it should not remain uncultivated ; he should have the opportunity at least, of combining mental improvement with manual labor. And let me say that a cultivated intellect may often be employed with great advantage and success in connexion with a mechanical trade ; for though it may require little genius to follow on in a beaten track in any department of mechanics, yet an original mind may go off into the broad field of invention, and may discover new principles, or new combinations of principles, and the result may be, as it has been in the case of our own Fulton and Whitney, of immense practical utility to the world. If God has distinguished any individual by his intellectual powers, no doubt it should be regarded as a signal for special effort in the way of improvement ; and though the acquisitions of that individual should be applied to nothing beyond the hum-

blest trade, still the world may be the better for his having made them. Is there not here then another good reason why the improvement of this class of young men should be regarded a matter of special interest ?

4. They are *destined to exert an important influence in society.*

Be it so that the authority which pertains to the opinions and example of an individual, is generally somewhat in proportion to the dignity of the station which he occupies ; nevertheless, it were an error to suppose that there is not a vast amount of influence exerted by those in the inferior walks of life ; for though it were admitted that an individual from the middling class in society, might be able to find little access to the minds of the higher orders, and though his opinions and his practice might, in some respects, have less weight with the class to which he belongs, than if he were more elevated, yet the very level which he holds is after all, on some accounts, favorable to his influence ; for it secures him direct access to a greater number of minds, (the middling class being always the largest) and in many instances at points which he could never approach, if he were to move in the narrow circle of the great. But to admit that men in the common walks of life exert no important influence upon those above them, were conceding too much ; especially in a country like ours, where, from the very nature of our institutions, there is, to a considerable extent, a commingling of all classes with each other. Indeed there is a mysterious power in example, which will make itself felt not unfrequently, inspite of any artificial barriers that can be erected ; and no doubt the character of many a man has been, insensibly to himself, formed in a great degree by influences which have emanated from below him. I have heard of an instance, in which even a haughty and cruel and infidel master, by observing the habitual meekness, and faithfulness, and docility, of a pious slave, has found

his prejudices against the gospel gradually giving way, and at length has been baptized into the spirit of Christianity, and then into the name of its Author.

You will at once perceive that these general remarks apply in their full force to the case of mechanics ; with this single exception, that there are individuals among them, whose ingenuity, and attainments, and discoveries, actually bring them up into the higher walks of society. But there is one point of view in which the influence of this class deserves especially to be regarded — I refer to the fact that many of them are thrown, in the ordinary course of their business, into your families, and they become for a time familiar with your children ; and in this way they may not improbably leave upon their youthful minds some stain which, for aught you can tell, may be indelible, or some permanent impression favorable to morality and virtue. Let the parent who earnestly desires that no unhallowed influence may ever reach the minds of his children ; let the upright and public spirited citizen who would see all the fountains of public influence pure and healthful ; say whether it is not a dictate of philanthropy, that some special attention should be given to the intellectual and moral improvement of a class, who are to do so much either for the good or evil of the community.

If I have in any degree accomplished my purpose, I have shown you that the young men whom this occasion contemplates, have some special claims on our benevolent regard. Let me now

II. Endeavor to show that *these claims are happily met, to some extent at least, in the institution which this occasion brings before you ; — the Apprentices' Library of our city.*

This will appear if we consider

1. That *it diminishes the temptation to mingle in bad company.*

I point you to a young man, (would that it were a solitary case) who has already run a career that is terminating in ruin. If you look at him, you will see that the lines of premature death are drawn in his countenance. That deep, unnatural flush tells that the destroyer has well nigh done his work. He scarcely feels at home except in the midnight revel. From his conversation you might suppose he had taken lessons in the blasphemy of the pit. He shrinks not from deeds of violence : he would stab his own father in the dark. Now learn the history of this youthful veteran in crime. He was born in a retired village, and passed his first years under the paternal roof, enjoying the benefit of a religious education, and giving promise of a virtuous and useful character. It was determined that he should learn a mechanical trade ; and at the usual age he went to the city for that purpose ; he went, an unsuspecting, well disposed, and promising boy. Unhappily he was associated from the beginning in his daily employment with several young men, who had already had a thorough training in the school of vice. At first he ventured to reprove them for their impiety ; and they in turn ridiculed him as a sanctimonious hypocrite ; and the result was that he accomplished nothing by his reproof, while they accomplished every thing by their ridicule. They attracted him first to the gaming table ; and there they brought him in contact with vice in one of its most fascinating forms ; and while he had yet scarcely suspected a snare, his heart was thrown open to welcome the tempter. He became a gamester as soon as he could learn the art ; and forthwith he struggled through all the obstacles which education, and conscience, and filial affection, had thrown up against his being a blasphemer and a drunkard ; and now he is an out-law, even among the ordinarily vicious.

Pause here for a moment and estimate the fearful amount of good that has been sacrificed, of evil that has

been incurred. On the one hand, if that young man had been saved from this snare, how much good might have been accomplished to himself, in the respectability and usefulness of the present life, and the immortal glory of the next : how much good to his parents, in fulfilling their bright hopes, and gladdening their declining years : how much good to society, in diffusing the influence of a good example, and elevating the standard of morality and virtue ! All this amount of blessing has been deliberately and wantonly sacrificed. And how shall we estimate the evil that has been incurred ? Estimate it by the degradation to which he has voluntarily consigned himself ; by the wild and horrid and blasphemous scenes in which he has become perfectly at home ; by the exhausted faculties and enfeebled frame which he carries with him to the chamber where he seeks repose, but where instead of repose comes remorse and agony ; by the horrors that cluster around the death-bed of the drunkard and profligate ; and by the yet more appalling horrors which must enter into the retributions of the next world. Estimate it by the ruin of parental hopes ; and if you will fully understand what I mean, go to the home of that profligate and wretched youth, and see the tears stream down the furrowed cheeks of his aged parents, while they compare the hopes which they had formed, with the anguish which they have realized, and while they tell you that in the ruin of that son their best earthly joys are extinguished, and that nothing remains but that their gray hairs should come down in sorrow to the grave. And finally, estimate this evil by observing the corrupting process which he is carrying forward upon the characters of others, the debasement and ruin into which they are sinking through his instrumentality ; and the torrent of vice and misery which is pouring in upon society, through the flood gates which he has thrown open. The great day of

revelation only can fully disclose the evil which has resulted from his having fallen into vicious company.

Now far be it from me to say that this institution which I would commend to your regard, furnishes an *adequate* security against the temptation of which I have been speaking: nevertheless, it does furnish *some* security against it, and that by no means unimportant. It offers an agreeable and profitable employment for the evening;—the time when temptation to vice and especially to evil company, is most powerful and most likely to prevail; particularly, as this with apprentices is a season of leisure, and usually the only season of leisure they can command. Only let this portion of their time be devoted to useful reading, and there is a great probability, humanly speaking, that they will be saved from corruption. The opportunity of thus occupying themselves is proffered to them by this institution; and it is not too much to hope in any given case that the happy result of which we have spoken, may be realized. Will any one doubt then whether this institution ought to be sustained? Especially will any parent doubt, who knows by experience the blessing of a correct and virtuous child, or who has already wept over a profligate and miserable son?

2. This institution *is favorable to a habit of industry.*

There is scarcely any thing that enters more deeply into the formation of character, than a habit of diligently improving time on the one hand, or of suffering it to run to waste on the other. It is true, I acknowledge, that many who have been distinguished by their industry, have been scourges to the world; because, while they have tasked their faculties to the utmost, they have used their acquisitions to bring mildew over the best hopes of men. But it is not true, on the other hand, that there have been found among the great benefactors of the world, men who have sunk down under the paralyzing hand of indolence into the sensual enjoyment of themselves.

They who have done most for the culture of their own minds and the benefit of their fellow men, have placed a high estimate on their time, and have not only been actively, but for the most part systematically, employed. And let me say a habit of industry, if it be not formed in the morning of life, is rarely formed at all. In most instances, the period of youth passed in idleness, is the harbinger of an inactive and useless life ; while the same period industriously employed, furnishes some pledge that there will subsequently be a good degree of activity and usefulness.

It will readily occur to you how a collection of useful books will be likely to aid this interesting class of young men to the formation of a habit of diligence. While it furnishes useful employment for their hours of leisure, and keeps their minds busy when their hands are at rest ; it opens a legitimate source of amusement, invigorates their faculties for their daily labor, and thus induces a general habit of economy in regard to their time, which might probably never be formed under a different influence. Show me a youth who has a strong passion for reading useful works, and I will show you one who knows the value not only of hours but of moments. Show me an institution which is designed to encourage the rising generation in this delightful employment, and especially those whose time is from necessity chiefly spent in manual labor, and I will show you one which is adapted to cherish a spirit of universal and systematic industry.

3. This institution is farther adapted *to develop and direct the intellectual energies.*

Here are books on almost every subject in the wide range of science and literature ; or if the collection, as it now exists, is not so extensive, yet it is the design of the friends and patrons of the institution to make it so. Suppose a young man wishes to become familiar with history — no matter whether it be the history of his own or

preceding times ;— or suppose he is inclined to go into the walks of polite literature, and read the productions of the greatest and most accomplished minds ; or suppose he chooses to direct his attention more particularly to some or other of the branches of science appropriately so called ;— in either of these cases, the institution which we are contemplating meets him with the necessary provision. And thus it furnishes him an opportunity of acquiring a stock of useful knowledge which he may turn to great account in his subsequent life. And what is not less, but even more important, it develops and strengthens his intellectual faculties, thus constantly increasing his capacity both for improvement and usefulness. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the minute history of this institution, to enable me to speak of results that may have already been witnessed ; but I should not be surprised to know, nay, if I knew the whole truth I should be surprised *not* to know, that instances have already occurred in which young men among us have acquired a taste for reading, and reflection, and study, who, but for this library, would have come forward into life with a confirmed habit of mental inaction.

But observe that the advantage here contemplated is far from being limited to the season of youth, but looks forward through every subsequent period. He who has acquired a habit of reading and reflection, has gained a habit for life ; and in it he may expect to find a source of rich and growing enjoyment. While his intellectual faculties will be constantly expanding and improving, he will be saved from the tedium of idle and heavy hours ; and even his old age, if he should live to that period, will be relieved in some measure of its heaviness by this delightful employment. Rarely is there an instance in which an individual who contracts a fondness for reading while young, ever loses it in mature life ; and not less rare is the case in which a person, who in youth has neglected

to cultivate this habit, acquires it at any subsequent period. Is it not fair then to measure the importance of this institution by the importance of the diffusion of useful knowledge, at least in a large class of the community?

4. It is the tendency of this institution *to cherish in those who avail themselves of it a habit of self-respect.*

When I speak of self-respect, I do not mean that conceited spirit which thinks more highly of itself than it ought to think; or that arrogant spirit which urges false claims to superiority, and obtrudes itself continually on public observation; and much less that revengeful spirit which takes fire at every word which may have even the semblance of disrespect: but I mean that spirit which leads an individual to make a *right* estimate of himself; to say nothing, do nothing, which shall be inconsistent with true dignity. So important an element is this in a virtuous character, that the entire absence of it is sure to be associated with a habit of utter recklessness, and sooner or later with a state of deep degradation. Let an individual become such that he can no longer respect himself, and it is almost certain that he has reached a point at which no one else will respect him; and what is more, a point at which he will lose all regard for the opinion of the world, and be beyond the influence of any motive to regain a standing either with himself or his fellow men.

Now if this feeling of self-respect is of such great moment to every one, and especially to every young man, it becomes immensely important that every means should be used that is adapted to cherish it; and it is manifest that while this sentiment has a direct tendency to elevate the character, whatever else contributes to elevate the character, is fitted to cherish this. This is true of knowledge, especially when combined with virtue: it confers true dignity upon the mind, and falls in with its lofty aspirations and immortal destiny. He who possesses it has a treasure of unspeakable value; and he cannot but know

it; and as it becomes a part of himself, incorporated as it were into his own intellectual existence, he cannot but respect himself the more on account of it. And out of this feeling there arises a new motive to press onward to higher and still higher attainments. The immediate design of the institution for which I am pleading, is to imbue the minds of a large class of young men with useful knowledge. If then the feeling of self-respect which has so much to do with the formation of the character, which is emphatically the germ of some of its best acquisitions and loftiest purposes, is fostered by intellectual improvement, say whether this institution is not entitled to a liberal patronage?

5. I observe, once more, that this institution is fitted *to subserve the interests of morality and virtue.*

I have already had occasion in the course of these remarks to illustrate more or less directly, the great importance of correct and virtuous habits in this class of young men; and even if I had said nothing on the subject, your own reflections would have readily supplied the deficiency. I do not say that the mere fact of their having a good library within their reach, even if they diligently avail themselves of it, is a pledge that they will be kept from temptation, or that it supersedes the necessity of a more direct moral influence; but I do insist that it is fitted to be a powerful auxiliary not only to their intellectual but moral improvement. For only review the ground which we have come over, and see whether we are not fairly brought to this conclusion. Is it not favorable to the morals of young men that the temptation to mingle in bad company should be diminished; that they should be brought early to form a habit of diligently employing their time; that their intellectual powers should be developed and strengthened, and their minds enriched with useful knowledge; and finally that they should habitually cherish a proper sentiment of respect for themselves?

I know that all this may exist independently of a principle of true piety; but I also know that these are among the leading elements of a useful life; and unless I greatly mistake, there is a general influence hereby exerted upon the character which is favorable to that higher influence that comes from the Spirit of God. Be it so that a youth who diligently employs his leisure hours in useful reading, and thus falls in with the immediate design of this institution, may neglect his immortal interests and perish at last; yet can it admit of question whether, in ordinary cases, such an individual would not be far more accessible by religious influences, and humanly speaking, a much more promising candidate for converting grace, than if he were giving all his leisure to idleness or dissipation?

If I had not already occupied nearly as much time as custom allots to an exercise like this, I should feel myself called upon to apply this subject in a somewhat extended train of remark, to the class of young men whom it particularly contemplates. As it is, I trust I shall be indulged in a few brief hints.

I hardly need say, my young friends, that whether the design of this institution is to be answered or not, depends upon yourselves; for it matters not how large or how valuable may be the collection of books which is placed within your reach, provided you do not avail yourselves of them. But while I would urge to a diligent and proper use of this library, I ought to connect with it a caution that your taste for reading should not lead you to neglect your daily business. It is due to yourselves, inasmuch as you are learning a trade on which you are to depend for your future support; — it is due to those in whose service you are employed, inasmuch as you have stipulated that they shall have the benefit of your labor; — it is due to truth and honesty, to your obligations and prospects, that you should not suffer even the love of mental improvement to

take you off from the appropriate duties of the workshop. Let it be your principal object, so far as respects the disposal of your time, to become thoroughly accomplished in the business to which you are devoted, and to discharge the obligations you owe to your employers in an honest and honorable manner.

You perceive then, that the use you are to make of the library is a secondary matter; it is never to interfere with your main business; but, so far as possible, to be made subservient to it. But as for that portion of your time which fairly belongs to yourself, I would say that a considerable part of it at least, may very properly and profitably be employed in reading. And that your reading may be to good purpose, be careful in respect to your selection of books — that they are such as will contribute at once to enlarge your mind, and increase your stock of useful knowledge. Be careful that you do not read more than you can digest; for the mind can become surfeited with food as well as the body; and in either case there is danger that some temporary derangement of the system will ensue. Accustom yourselves always to join reflection with reading — just so much reflection as is necessary to secure to you the full benefit of your author. Do not read merely for amusement; but endeavor to turn every thing, so far as you can, to some useful account.— Avoid an undue proportion of *light* reading: there is danger that it will inspire levity of mind, and ultimately throw an air of insipidity over your whole character. The amount of what I would say under this head is, that you should choose the best books, and read them with a judicious reference to the improvement of your mind and heart.

Let me counsel you, still farther, to keep constantly in view a high standard of character. Remember that you belong to a class who are destined to exert an important influence in society; and that it is due to others as well as

yourselves, that you aim at respectability and usefulness. If it should ever occur to you that your influence, from the nature of your vocation, cannot be very important, banish it as a suggestion of the tempter; and be assured that society is expecting from you, nay I may add, is actually receiving from some of you, important aid in the work of reform; for who does not know that among our mechanics and apprentices are to be found many zealous and efficient friends of the temperance cause;—many whose example on this subject is a rebuke to a large proportion of those who move in the higher walks of life? Yes, my young friends, every motive that ought to influence a human being, presses upon you to aim at the formation of a dignified and virtuous character: and with a view to this, let me caution you to beware of the path of the destroyer; to beware of the first step towards an evil habit; to beware of evil companions as you would shun the midnight assassin. Obey the honest dictates of an enlightened conscience. Never do an act which, in respect to its moral character, would not bear to be brought out in the light of day. Care nothing for the scorn of fools; and next to the approbation of God and conscience, value that of the wise and good. Let your character be formed under such an influence, and I do not say that you will ever rise to a high station of worldly honor, but I do say that, occupy whatever station you may, you will be respected and useful; and it may be that after you are dead, you will have a monument erected in the hearts of your fellow men, which will last, when many a proud monument of worldly greatness shall have crumbled into dust.

But I must not take leave of you till I have distinctly urged you to a decidedly religious life. This indeed may be considered as included in the remarks which I have already made; but I wish to admonish you in so many words that except you repent of your sins, and believe in

the Lord Jesus Christ, you must perish ; and in that word *perish*, there is a depth of meaning which the infinite mind alone can fathom. Here every thing that is distinctive in your circumstances disappears : you come upon a level on which all the children of men meet. To you therefore in common with every other class, I would address the exhortation, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ;" and as an argument for immediate compliance, I would follow it with the admonition — "Behold now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation !"

I am willing to believe, my friends and brethren, that the object for which I am pleading to-night has already found so much favor in your eyes, and has so commended itself to your judgment, that there is no occasion for any formal appeal to your charity. Nevertheless I cannot but remind you, yet once more, before you cast in your offering, that you are about to contribute to an object in which are bound up in a high degree, the elements of personal, and social, of temporal, and may I not add, immortal happiness. Settle the question then how much you will give, by the regard which you bear to the great and useful ends which this institution contemplates. How much will you give to throw in the way of a great and interesting class of young men, a strong barrier against temptation, and vice, and ruin? How much will you give to elevate the standard of intellectual attainment among them, and prepare them to act a useful part in their various relations? How much will you give to secure their good influence to the general interests of society ; to render their occasional intercourse with your own families a blessing rather than a curse? How much will you give to save the heart of many an aged parent from being oppressed with the burden of blasted hope ; from sighing even for the grave as a refuge from its sorrows? How much will you give for the cause of humanity, of virtue, of religion? Is there an individual before me

whose avarice makes him doubtful of the object, and whose doubts are to be his apology for closing his hand against it? Be it so—with such doubts I cannot consent to reason : to the man who indulges them I would only say, there is an eye from yonder world looking down upon you as a flame of fire ; there is a record kept there of all that you do and all that you leave undone ; and he who keeps the record, and will bring it forth at last, hath said, that the giving even of a little cold water in his name shall not lose its reward.

