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An Address delivered Aug. 16, 1843, before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa, in Yale College, by William B. Sprague, New Haven, 1843

Sprague (William B. D.D., of Albany). An Address delivered August 16, 1843, before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa in Yale College.

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AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AUGUST 16, 1843,

BEFORE THE

SOCIETY OF PHI BETA KAPPA

IN

YALE COLLEGE.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D.D.,

OF ALBANY.

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ADDRESS.

We have come up this evening, my friends, to this healthful literary eminence, to keep our annual jubilee in honour of the cause of learning; and it is no offence against the sacredness of this temple of worship that we do it here; for what *is* the cause of learning but the cause of truth, the cause of goodness, the cause of Heaven? We have come from various posts in society, and from different fields of responsibility and occupation;—a few of us, perhaps, from scenes of literary ease and retirement, but the greater part from the dust, and heat, and commotion, incident to professional engagements—have come to forget our cares, and refresh our spirits, and pledge ourselves anew to the republic of letters. Let this hour then be sacred to the object for which we are met. If I were a jurist, I should have no right to discourse to you here of the majesty of the law; or if I were a statesman,—to bring hither

questions from the senate-house; or if I were a political economist,—to task you with speculations upon loss and gain. The ground on which we meet is common to us as scholars; and I should violate the acknowledged proprieties of the occasion, if, in the few remarks I am to address to you, I were to be found outside of the gardens of the Academy, or the groves of the Lyceum.

But while the occasion prescribes literature as our theme, we are to bear in mind that it is literature in its high practical bearings;—literature, not as the creature of a dreaming romance, nor the nurse of intellectual selfishness and vanity, but as the handmaid of usefulness and virtue,—the patroness of all that is great and beautiful and sacred within the range of human contemplation. I should not, therefore, have met the claims of the occasion, if I were to exhibit the attractions of learning, or even to quicken you in its pursuit, unless, at the same time, I should leave you with warmer aspirations of patriotism or philanthropy, and deeper impressions of the importance of human life, and the grandeur of human destiny. Allow me then, in the hope of accomplishing this end, to speak to you, during the brief hour allotted to me, of THE RESPONSIBILITIES, THE TEMPTATIONS, AND THE REWARDS, OF MEN OF LETTERS.

Responsibility is written, as with the point of a diamond, on the very elements of our being. To be endowed with the conscious ability of serving God and our generation, is to be under an obligation to render such service; and in proportion as the number of our relations increases, and the field of our influence widens, is the circle of our obligations carried out. Men of cultivated minds, as well from the position which they occupy in society, as from their ability to direct its movements and mould its character, have a mighty responsibility resting upon them. They have facilities for contributing to the weal or the woe of their fellow men, which are peculiar to themselves; and they owe it to their generation, they owe it to posterity, they owe it to God, that their whole influence be given to the cause of truth, virtue and happiness.

It will assist us to form some just idea of the responsibilities of literary men, to glance, for a moment, at the field in which, and the means by which, their influence operates.

I say then, it devolves upon this class to give complexion to the intellectual character of the community in which they live,—of the age to which they belong.

Every enlightened community has within it a few minds distinguished above all the rest, by their depth,

or vigour, or splendour, which, of themselves, constitute the chief elements of its intellectual greatness. Who now knows any thing of the age of Homer, except that it produced the Iliad?—and in that single fact there is glorious history enough to render the age immortal. Greece, at a later and brighter period, had her thousands of geniuses glowing with celestial fire; but if the names of Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides, Thucydides and Xenophon, Demosthenes and Pericles, were to be lost from her history, she would lose, in a great measure, her distinctive character as the wonder of the world. Rome had her Augustan age; and what else was it but the age of Cæsar and Tully, of Virgil and Horace, of Sallust and Livy? On the revival of letters in Europe, Tuscany became renowned as the seat of literary empire; but with all the great men that she could boast, she could ill afford to spare her Dante, or her Petrarch, or her Boccacio. France in the reign of Louis the fourteenth, and England in the reign of Anne, each attained her zenith of intellectual renown; but suppose France had been without her Moliere, and Racine and Corneille, her Fenelon and Bossuet; and suppose England had lacked her Addison and Steele, her Swift and Pope, her Prior and Arbuthnot,—would France and England have shone forth as they now

do in the firmament of letters? The lesser lights in the intellectual sphere, however serene or benign their lustre, will ere long go out; but the greater lights, neither death nor time, neither ages of revolution nor ages of darkness, have the power to extinguish.

But while the men who are eminent in the walks of literature are themselves a *magna pars* of a nation's glory, and while it is for them to build the monuments that will speak to posterity of the character of their age, let it not be forgotten that to them also is intrusted, in a great measure, the intellectual training of their contemporaries. These are the men who are at once the masters and the property of the world. Their mean thoughts as truly as their great thoughts, have a plastic agency in moulding the minds of millions. Their influence is an all-pervading element upon the face of society,—mounting up to every height, descending to every depth, quickening or blasting every where. Show me a man whose history is the history of his age, and I will show you one who has been the living soul of his generation.

But if the intellectual character of a country or an age is moulded by the hand of a few, its *moral* character is not less determined by their influence; for such is the mysterious relation that exists between

the faculties of thought and of feeling in the mind of man, that the same avenue which opens to the one, gives access also to the other. There are indeed subjects that may occupy the mind as matters of reflection or investigation merely, that are not directly of a moral tendency; and yet even these are easily susceptible of being bent to moral purposes. The student of mathematical or intellectual or physical science, may seem to be out of the way of those higher teachings that relate to human duty and destiny,—that are specially designed to form the conscience and the heart: but it is no moral desert through which he is passing after all; for there are beauties crowding upon him in the world of matter and of mind, in the regions of fancy and abstraction, and of actual and palpable existence, which ought to keep him in constant communion with the God of truth. But a large portion of the objects of human thought have their appropriate field of operation in the region of the affections and passions: they act directly upon those high principles of man's nature, which, in their maturity, will mark him as an angel or a fiend. If then the objects of habitual or prevailing thought in a community are determined chiefly by the influence of superior minds, is it not obvious that to such minds belongs the responsibility not only of giv-

ing direction to the publick intellect, but of fixing the standard of the publick morals?

It belongs, moreover, to cultivated men to construct, and put in motion, and direct, the complex machinery of civil society. Who originated these free institutions,—the arteries through which the life-blood of our country's prosperity circulates? Who built and rocked the cradle of American liberty, and guarded the infant angel, until she walked forth in the vigour of a glorious maturity? Whom do we welcome to the helm of state, when the storm of faction beats, or dark clouds hang about the heavens? Who speak trumpet-tongued to a nation's ear, in behalf of a nation's rights? Who hold the scales of equity, measuring out a portion both to the just and the unjust? Are they men who have been nursed in the lap of ignorance, or are they not rather your great and cultivated minds—your Franklins and Madisons, your Adamses and Websters, your Kents and Spencers and Storys? And then again, who framed that social system,—if system it could be called,—which exploded in the horrours of the French revolution; sporting with time-hallowed associations, and unsealing all the fountains of blood? Think you that ignorance was the presiding genius in that war of elements? Oh no; the master-spirits had many of them been known

as standard bearers in the empire of letters: they partook at once of the strength of the angel, and the depravity of the fiend. And as it is in these opposite cases that I have mentioned, so it is always and every where—men of cultivated minds will ultimately have the power—whether they use it in the spirit of a lofty patriotism, or pervert it to do homage to faction, and tear society in pieces.

There is another and less direct influence which educated men exert upon a nation's institutions, in forming and guiding publick opinion. It is not too much to say, especially in respect to a country like ours, that publick opinion supplies the materials from which these institutions are formed; constitutes the atmosphere in which they live; guides their movements and determines their results. It is true indeed that, through the influence of faction, measures may sometimes be temporarily forced in opposition to the judgment of the mass; but it will be only for a season that such measures can prevail: the popular sentiment will be sure ere long to have its own way. We are anticipating a better era for the world—an era of brighter light in regard to social rights and obligations. We expect that the spirit of our own free institutions, under some form or other, will continue to diffuse itself as an element of light and love,

until there shall be a grand jubilee of freedom kept in the heart of the world, to which all the nations shall come up. But these bright visions of the future, depend less upon any great changes that have already occurred in the relations of states and empires, than upon the gradual progress of publick opinion—an agent which seems now to be doing her work in comparative silence, but will ere long show herself strong enough to break in pieces the thrones of tyrants as a potter's vessel. But if publick opinion possesses so much power in moulding a nation's institutions, what say you of the responsibility of those who control it? What say you of those who think and speak and write as the dictators of their age?

I have spoken of the objects in relation to which the influence of cultivated minds is felt—viz. the formation and direction of a nation's intellect, a nation's morals, and a nation's institutions. Let me now point you to some of the channels through which the influence of this class of minds operates.

It operates through their general intercourse with society. Cultivated talent must be subjected to a state of solitary confinement, in order to be rendered powerless; and even then you must take care that it is without the means of recording its own thoughts;—for thoughts may spring up in a dungeon, that would

only have to find vent, to electrify the world. Let a man of improved intellect have but the usual privilege of walking about on God's footstool, and when you are able to stay the sunbeams in their course, you may hope to neutralize his influence. He may be a man of one profession or another, or of no profession at all: he may associate himself with whatever class he will, and become a party to whatever interest he may;—in any circumstances, in all circumstances, his spirit will be gradually impressing itself upon the thoughts, the feelings, the habits, of those around him. He speaks, and forgets his own words; but others treasure them up. His very looks are oracular; and men will learn or think they learn from them, what to believe and how to act. The dews of night may not be more noiseless than his influence; but the orbs of heaven move not more certainly or more constantly than his influence operates.

There is another channel open to the influence of cultivated minds in the liberal professions. These professions are essentially related, each in its own way, to the higher interests of man, both in his individual and social capacity. To the medical man it belongs to administer to the diseased body, and sometimes to the diseased mind;—to restore to the eye its lustre and to the frame its vigour, and to retain among

the living those who seemed hurrying into the grave: to the lawyer,—to lift up a voice in behalf of truth and right;—to cause suffering innocence to hold up her head and wipe away her tears, while iniquity skulks off into merited exile: to the minister of religion,—to deal out the balm which Heaven has furnished for the wounded spirit;—to establish and strengthen noble and purifying principles;—to conduct to that better world where virtue shall receive its complete and eternal reward. But while these several professions, in their legitimate exercise, must accomplish great good, it is no less true that they are capable, by perversion, of becoming instruments of mighty evil. The healing art may be prostituted to a systematic trifling with human life; the sublime science of the law may become the handmaid of injustice and crime; and even the Heaven-constituted embassy of truth and love may lose every thing but its name, in offering upon the altar the strange fire of an unhallowed ambition. But in addition to the direct influence for good or evil which belongs to the professions, they exert an *indirect* influence, by giving increased importance to one's ordinary actions. They attach to themselves, by consent of the world, a degree of weight proportioned to their responsibility; and hence a lawyer's

clients, or a physician's patients, or a minister's immediate hearers, are by no means the only persons to whose benefit or injury his profession is subservient: all who come within the range of his example, and many who do not, will feel more or less the influence which is hereby secured to him. I am aware that the professions are not exclusively in the occupancy of educated men: I know how ignorance and self-conceit sometimes blaze away at the bar; and how gross vulgarity, having girded herself for a conflict with all that is reverent and decent, mounts the pulpit; and how quackery meets us at the corners of the streets, holding out her pill-boxes labelled with immortality. But after all, these constitute the exceptions: the general control of the professions is in the hands of those who have been trained—it may be *self*-trained—to habits of thought and study. And if there were tenfold more dunces than there now are, that would not affect my position that men of intellectual standing find in the professions a most important channel of influence.

And yet another, and the last which the time will allow me to mention, is the press. We have talked of the press until it has become a threadbare topic; and yet, with all our talk, we have really no practical estimate of its importance. Time was when men's

thoughts could be communicated only by being spoken; and some have conjectured that even the works of Homer were originally committed only to the memories of men, and that generations passed away before they were written on any material substance. And when Demosthenes thundered, and Virgil sung, it was for the few, and not for the many; and their lofty productions were indebted even for their limited circulation to the dogged labours of the transcriber. But the art of printing has operated in respect to the ancients like the word which will accomplish the great resurrection—it has brought them up from the grave of ages, and pledged to them an existence every where and through all time. And the same art now advanced to a degree of perfection which casts into the shade the best improvements of the past, is embalming men's thoughts in our day;—aye, and giving them wings by which they fly all over the world. You may sit in your closet now, and without opening your lips, speak to those who dwell nearest the poles. You may multiply yourself, in a single week, into ten thousand agents either for good or evil. You may incorporate your intellectual or moral existence with that of your generation. You may scarcely ever look into the world, and yet even thrones and principalities may feel the influence of your thoughts.

The simplest view of a subject is often the most impressive. Estimate then the power of the press, by the acknowledged influence of any great mind that has spoken through it. Do you see that man, in the eccentricity of his genius, prostrate upon the floor,—labouring to recall one of the noblest efforts in the annals of intellect? It is Robert Hall, busy with his sermon on modern infidelity. His friends have asked him to publish it, and he will not decline; but as yet it has no existence except in his own mind; and though he loathes the labour of writing, he is turning his hand at intervals to the work. Wonder of the age as he was for modesty as well as for genius, he dreamed not of the influence which that sermon was destined to exert; but when it came forth, the whole world recognized it as the masterpiece of a master mind: it put itself into communion with the greatest intellects of the age; it threw around Christianity a new wall of fire; and infidelity, as she bent over its pages, resolved that silence was prudence. Turn now your eye to yonder villa on the shores of the Mediterranean, and see another mighty mind pouring out upon paper its brilliant thoughts, to be given ere long into the printer's hands. It is Byron,—the Heaven-favoured, and yet foul-minded, Byron,—in the act of producing one of his licentious

poems. Peradventure he is dreaming of nothing but his own fame;—but he is really opening a new fountain of death upon the world; he is making provision to perpetuate his existence as the enemy of his race; he is rendering the splendours of his genius subservient to the wild and desperate purposes of his heart. Both Hall and Byron are stars that must always shine; but in the beams of the one there is life—in the beams of the other, death.

I know not whether it is possible to gain a higher idea of the power of the press, and the consequent responsibility of those who wield it, than by looking at the effects which it produces in connection with the political struggles which occasionally occur in our own history. A member of Congress may rise in his place, and speak five minutes by the watch,—and yet he may have said that which in one week shall well nigh convulse the whole nation. A convention may assemble to propose a candidate for the Presidential chair; and scarcely shall the result be announced, before the remotest village in the most distant state shall have responded to it, and millions of hearts shall be beating, and millions of hands busy, for the success or defeat of the nomination. An emergency may occur in the administration of our government that looks portentous of evil; and yet it shall scarcely

have transpired from the councils of the cabinet, before the details of the whole matter have passed under the eye of the nation, and men of every class and every character are speculating in regard to the policy that should be pursued. And *whenever* the waves of publick feeling are wrought up like the ocean in a storm, it will always be found that the press has had a principal agency in producing the commotion.

I cannot leave this branch of my subject without adverting briefly to our periodical literature; though I regret the necessity of dismissing so important and fertile a topic with a passing remark. What was at first a gentle rill that flowed so silently as scarcely to be observed, ere long became a majestic river; and that has been gradually widening until it has lost its distinctive character in a mighty deluge, that flows within no definable limits. If there is a single corner in any of the departments of human speculation or human action, which our periodical press does not cover, *I* know it not. You may be a philosopher or a statesman, a physician or a lawyer or a divine, a farmer or a merchant, an artizan or an artist, a friend of the muses or a friend of the graces,—and you have only to step into one of our periodical depositories to supply yourself with the

latest, if not the brightest, thoughts in the department to which you are devoted. And you are fortunate indeed if there is no attempt made to set aside your moral agency in this matter;—for it has come to pass, in these days, that periodicals come to us unbidden; and what comes at first with the editor's compliments, is followed up, in due time, with the publisher's bill. But without hazarding any speculations upon the trade, I may say with confidence, that the man who conducts a widely extended periodical, presides at one of the chief fountains of publick influence. He keeps himself in constant, though invisible, contact with thousands and thousands of minds. They may take little note of the effect which he produces upon them, and may even silently congratulate themselves that their opinions are their own; and yet he may be holding them spell-bound under his magic influence. While he determines the manner in which no small part of their time shall be spent, he imperceptibly helps to mould their taste, guide their judgment, fix their prejudices, and give complexion to their character. Yonder is the respectable quarterly, devoted to the interests of science or literature, of philosophy or religion. It goes abroad to do a glorious work; and posterity will see that the name of its editor has a place on the list

of the world's benefactors. Yonder is a weekly sheet, designed as the vehicle of slander and falsehood, of pollution and impiety. Its issues are like the opening of a cage of unclean birds. The vulgar herd together at the corners of the streets, to glut themselves over it. Its editor is a scourge to his generation.

Who then can estimate the influence for good or evil of the periodical press? Who can estimate the number of individuals whom it reaches, the amount of time which it engrosses, the expenditure of thought and feeling to which it leads, the decisive bearing which it has upon our individual, social, and national interests? It is not a small matter, my friends, to be the conductor even of a country newspaper; and I would say to every man who aspires even to *that* vocation, "Sit you down first, and count the cost."

In the view which I have taken of the responsibilities of men of letters, I have limited myself chiefly to the influence which they exert upon their own immediate generation; but I hardly need say that if we will form any thing like a *just* estimate of their responsibilities, we must contemplate the future in connection with the present—must look down the vista of coming ages, and see them living in the character of an unborn posterity. It is no dream

that their existence upon earth is perpetual as well as diffusive; and that what they do to harm or bless their own generation, they do equally to harm or bless all the generations that shall succeed them. To a certain extent indeed this remark is applicable to men of even the humblest intellectual attainments;—for no man liveth to himself alone; but it applies with special force to those who constitute the aristocracy in the empire of thought,—who bear sway over the judgments and prejudices of the multitude, and leave the impress of their own mind broad and deep upon the character of their nation or their age. What a lord in the intellectual world was Aristotle,—not only giving direction and impulse to the great minds of his own day, but holding his sceptre through the whole period of the middle ages! And Bacon—how he swept off with his giant hand the cobwebs of sixty generations! The turbid stream of a scholastic and bewildering subtlety he dried away, and opened in the inductive system a fountain, whose waters, clear as chrystal, have ever since been operating for the refreshment and healing of the world. These are emphatically the men whose lives on earth death does not terminate. When they have gone to the repose of their graves, they have only begun to do that which Heaven has decreed

to be done by them, in moulding the character and destiny of their race.

It would be appropriate to the occasion, if the time would permit, here to illustrate the responsibilities of cultivated minds, with more particular reference to our own age and country; and it would be easy to find the elements of a greatly increased responsibility, not only in the general character of the times,—in the progress of the arts and in the growing facilities for intercourse between distant nations, but especially in the distinctive character of our own institutions—in the unrestrained liberty with which every one may speak his own thoughts, and in that constitution of society which puts merit above rank, and allows the humblest citizen to run for the highest prize. But I must leave this ground and hasten to a consideration of the TEMPTATIONS to which this class are peculiarly exposed; for, in proportion to their responsibility, is the importance of their being guarded against whatever might jeopard their character or usefulness. These temptations are so numerous, and so much determined by circumstances, that I can only hint at a few of the most prominent of them. Some more immediately respect the intellect—others the heart; but in general both the intellectual and moral character are liable to sus-

tain injury, though perhaps not in an equal degree, by the same influences.

There is a temptation not indeed peculiar to any state of society, but existing in our own perhaps in greater strength than in any other—to yield up literary projects and aspirations to the more active employments of life. A young man during his collegiate course becomes so enchained to his books,—so enamoured of the society of the great spirits of the past, that he resolves to give himself for life to the pursuits of learning; and the day that crowns him with academic honours, he regards as marking only the starting point of his career to literary eminence. But poverty whispers in his ear that the poor body has its wants, and that the fruits to be gathered on the top of Helicon or Parnassus, however much they may cheer the soul, can do little to sustain its humbler ally. In such reflections as these originates his conviction that he must after all betake himself to some profession; and he chooses the law,—intending, however, that while the law shall yield him his bread, literature shall be his occupation. But in the progress of his professional pursuits, he discovers that there is no great gulf fixed between the departments of law and politics; and while he is yet scarcely aware of it, he is stepping over from

the one into the other. The great political questions of the day gradually come to engross and agitate his mind; and perhaps he becomes the very life and soul of some threatening faction. The dignified quiet of the Lyceum has lost its attractions for him, and the bustle of the forum, not to say the slang of the market place, has become music to his ear. The man is lost to learning, and there is too much reason to fear, lost to virtue and usefulness. There have been some memorable instances, in which genius that delighted in faction, has been pressed by circumstances into the service of the world. It has been said that but for the exile of Dante, occasioned by the defeat of his party in a political struggle, the world would never have had his incomparable poems; and but for that calamity which turned Milton's life into a perpetual night, detaching him from the violent factions to which he had been a party, England might have lacked her noblest work of poetical genius.

And while there are some who originally promise well, whose passion for learning is quenched in the strife of politics and the scramble for power, there are others who make a similar sacrifice to the pursuit of wealth. In this case, genius covers herself with a mineral crust; and who can expect her to shine? She encumbers herself with an insupportable load;

and who can expect her to rise? I have heard of young men who have gone out from this place laden with literary honours, and glowing with literary ambition; and when I have inquired for them afterwards, have heard that they were regular worshippers of Mammon; and in some instances have been pointed to the prairies of Iowa as the theatre of their wild and ruinous speculations. They once thought that they would like a residence in Attica; but it turns out that they like Bœotia better. Even if they actually become rich, they are not the Mæcenases or the Medicis of their age—nay, though learning should be left to beg and starve, they never would stand forth her benefactors.

But if some err on the right hand, others err on the left: if there are those who sacrifice their taste for learning to active pursuits, there are those also who pervert learning to purposes of mere intellectual gratification;—who are not so much literary men as literary hermits;—who never come into the world but from necessity, and for all that they benefit it, might as well never come at all. These men have associates; but they are the men of other ages. They have affections; but they are given to musty tomes—not to vulgar flesh and blood. Their usefulness commences when they die; for they leave

their libraries behind them, when they go to render an account of their selfish and unprofitable devotion to learning.

History furnishes us with some noble examples of the combination of great literary eminence with a life of unceasing publick activity. Cicero rendered such services to the republic, not only in defeating the conspiracy of Catiline, but in a thousand other ways, that he has been called another founder of Rome; and yet who does not know that Cicero was among the brightest literary glories of his age? If you ask who Cæsar was, the answer is that he was military tribune, and quæstor, and ædile, and pontifex maximus, and first consul, and triumvir, and censor, and perpetual dictator, and victor in five hundred battles, and conqueror of a thousand cities; and yet Cæsar redeemed time for literary pursuits, and in his Commentaries that have come down to us, has erected a monument of genius and taste that will last forever. Even the middle ages furnish some examples of this kind. There was Charlemagne, who, while his whole life seemed to be given to war and conquest, showed himself always the active patron of learning; and not only gathered around him all the best scholars of his day, and established various institutions for the promotion of letters, but also himself wrote a

grammar, and several Latin poems which are said to have evinced a highly cultivated genius. Alfred, though engaged in a perpetual conflict with the Danes, and always constrained to the most watchful and vigorous activity, translated the Psalms, the Fables of Æsop, and one or two philosophical works into Anglo-Saxon, and is supposed by many to have founded the University of Oxford. Who but Burke wrote the treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful—that depository of great thoughts in the higher fields of literature; and yet who needs be told that Burke's greatest glory was that of a statesman? And may I not say that even America has produced some great scholars in her great men not professionally devoted to literature? The man who, for the last half century, has been known throughout Europe as the American geographer, was the minister of one of the largest parishes in New England,—besides which, he had a primary agency in originating or sustaining some of our most important institutions. The man whose death, but the other day, vacated one of the highest civil posts in the nation, is said to have been at once one of the most accomplished scholars and able lawyers of his time; and if I felt myself equal to the task, I would pause here and construct a wreath to lay upon his tomb. If I might

pass from the dead to the living, I would speak of a man who sees no elevation in political life that he has not reached, and whose green old age marks him for a yet longer course of publick action,—to whom the Muses still fly as their patron, and whose literary acquisitions bear a glorious comparison with his civil honours. And I could speak of yet another who, having graced several of the highest civil stations at home, is now charged with the interests of his country abroad,—who is alike qualified to represent his nation's politics, and his nation's literature;—whose name suggests all that is persuasive and graceful in oratory, all that is elegant in taste, all that is attractive in the finished scholar. Be it so that our literature is still in its infancy,—yet we have some scholars—and men too who live for the world—whom, if there were to be a world's literary convention to-morrow, we should not be ashamed to have appear in it.

There is a temptation, in many instances, to pursue literature with an intensity that exhausts prematurely the vital energies, and sends genius to an early grave. A youth whose ruling passion is the love of learning, loses sight of every thing else in the desire for literary eminence. He practically forgets that he has a complex nature, and that one part cannot suffer unless

the other parts suffer with it. In his eagerness to meet the claims of the mind, he overlooks those of the body; and instead of reverencing his body as a noble piece of God's workmanship, through which the mind must operate now, and is destined to operate in the vigour of immortality, he treats it as if it were a mere worthless thing—a supernumerary element in the constitution of his being. His day begins with the early dawn, and never closes until he has trimmed the midnight lamp. The muscles of his frame gradually become rigid for want of exercise; and ere long the lustre of his eye begins to abate, and the rose upon his cheek to wither. Every one but himself sees that it is the mind consuming the body; but though warning after warning is rung in his ear, the adder is not more deaf than he. However he may treat God's *moral* laws, against the laws which are inwrought with his own physical nature he is an open and persevering rebel. And ere long the whole penalty for his offending is measured out to him, in hopes disappointed, in purposes unfulfilled, in the going down of his sun before it is yet noon. Friendship embalms his memory, and Learning weeps that a bright star has been lost from this lower firmament of illustrious minds; but perhaps, if stern Truth should write his epitaph, it might be, "Here lies a literary

suicide." It is at once instructive and monitory to contemplate the history of those whose graves have been made *prematurely*, as we are accustomed to say, beside the path of learning. Many of you, I doubt not, will think of Ebenezer Porter Mason; of whom *you* knew much,—for he was in the midst of you,—though *I* knew nothing, until I met the beautiful tribute that his friend and mine has paid to his memory.

There is a temptation, in the acquisition of knowledge, to grasp at too much, and in the attempt to become a universal scholar, actually to become a superficial one. It was not the design of Heaven that every thing within the reach of the human faculties should be known by any human being—the field of knowledge is too wide, and man's life is too short, for that. The votary of learning, in order that he may accomplish most and best, should select some one department, upon which the energies of his mind should be chiefly concentrated; and though he may not actually limit himself to this, but may occasionally go abroad into other fields of thought, and even become a proficient in other branches of knowledge, yet he should see that his acquisitions are all subservient to his main pursuit: especially should he take heed that he does not wander so far or so long from his chosen field, as to forget the way back, and to be-

come a mere vagabond through the whole region of letters. Wherever you find a man who prides himself upon knowing a little of every thing, it will be strange if you have found one who knows any thing well; especially one whose knowledge turns to much practical account;—for knowledge, in order to answer its high ends, must be accurate and particular. More than that—the very process by which one attempts to spread himself over too wide a field,—lighting down here and there indiscriminately in the regions of fancy, or taste, or science, with no particular end in view, has a most unpropitious bearing upon the mind itself: it gives it a sort of restless and rambling character, not to say that it often renders it absolutely sickly and inefficient. Even Leibnitz fell into the errour of attempting to accomplish too much; and while posterity must always admire his genius, they will never cease to lament this attending infirmity.

There is a temptation, in the department of criticism, to caprice, and partiality, and injustice. The critics bear mighty sway in the republic of letters. They are the medical men, or I should rather say—the surgical operators, of literature; and like others of their profession, they administer caustic remedies, and use sharp tools, and cause their patients to writhe and bleed, sometimes for their life, and sometimes for

their death. Their approbation of a work sends a multitude to enquire for it: their condemnation marks it for lumber in the bookstore. A critic may err from ignorance: he may pronounce with oracular assurance upon the substantial merits of a book, when he can speak intelligently only of the title-page and the binding. Or he may err from prejudice: he may recognize in an author a literary rival or a personal enemy, and may hail with delight the opportunity of gratifying private spleen, by assailing the feelings of the man through the character of his book; or else the author may be his patron and friend—and then peradventure he will find the work studded with gems—he will oblige his friend at the expense of endorsing nonsense. Or he may err from selfishness: he may write one thing or another, as seems to him most likely to promote the interests of his party or of his purse. But here is a word of comfort for authors. "The shafts of Apollo, the god of criticism," though they may strike deep and draw blood from the seat of feeling, rarely prove fatal to real merit. Genius may thus be crippled for a while; but if she has suffered unjustly, she will soon recover herself; or if she has only met her deserts, she will be prepared by the discipline, to plume herself for a more vigorous and successful flight. If another Milton were to arise

and produce another Paradise Lost, and the critics, for a time, should make the world look cold upon it, yet some Addison would ere long come forth as the minister of justice, and let the world see that she had been turning her back upon an angel.

I may add—though it is scarcely more than the amplification of a thought already intimated—that there is sometimes a temptation to men of letters to cater to a corrupt taste, and even prove recreant to the interests of truth and virtue. The publick taste is indicated by the tone of the publick reading; and hence, if you will know the prevailing taste of any community, there is no class that can inform you so well as the booksellers. Suppose then an author, on looking around him, finds evidence on every side that there is a demand for frivolous and worthless productions—suppose that not only the bookseller's shelves groan under them, but they are regarded as the appropriate furniture of almost every center table, and that to be ignorant of them is to be little less than an outlaw from the circles of fashion—what influence should such a state of things have in determining the character of his efforts? If he speaks from an enlightened conscience, he will say, "Though my influence have only a feather's weight, it shall be thrown into the scale on the side of virtue. Though

the light and frothy literature of the day has spread like a dead sea around me, I will not despair of doing something to heal the waters. Forbid it that, as a creature of God, as a friend of my country, I should sow seed that shall yield nothing better than the hemlock or the nightshade!" Nevertheless, there is a powerful temptation involved in these circumstances, to minister to a vitiated appetite, instead of endeavouring to correct it. Suppose conscience interpose her objections to such a course—not improbably they are answered by a voice from an empty purse, asking how an author can live but by his earnings; and what is to be earned by making books that never sell; and if any thing can be expected to sell that puts at defiance the popular taste. Or perhaps a miserable expediency, which is but another name for trifling with principle, whispers in his ear that the current is so broad and deep that it *must* move onward, and that it were gross folly in him to set himself like a straw to resist it. Or it may be that he satisfies himself with producing something of less injurious tendency than has been put forth by some of his predecessors or contemporaries; and as he looks at his own work in the lustre of comparison, he sees in it any thing else than the materials for self-condemnation. Blessed is the man whose mental vision is sufficiently clear, and whose virtuous reso-

lution is sufficiently strong, to enable him to encounter this temptation victoriously.

I pass to the only remaining topic upon which I am to speak—viz. the reward to which a well-directed literary ambition may aspire. I say *well-directed*, for I have taken for granted through this whole train of remark, that learning, in order to accomplish its end, or be entitled to a reward, must go hand in hand with virtue.

It will occur to you at once that it is fitting to connect a consideration of the rewards of men of letters, with their responsibilities and temptations; for they who have heavy responsibilities to bear, and strong temptations to overcome, should have a bright recompense in prospect, to quicken their zeal and ensure their fidelity.

The fact in relation to this matter which seems to lie most upon the surface, and in regard to which we are least in danger of being disputed, is that literary men may not look for their reward chiefly in dollars and cents. The history of literature makes this fact so plain, that no one will venture to question it, who has any knowledge of the past. Every body knows that Cervantes wrote his Don Quixote, while he was in jail for debt; and to a scholar who volunteered a prescription for him, a short time previous to his death, congratulating himself at the same time

upon the honour of making his acquaintance, he replied—"My life is drawing to a period; and by the daily journal of my purse, which I find will have finished its course by next Sunday at farthest, I shall also have finished my career; so that you are come in the very nick of time to be acquainted with me." Savage often passed his nights in the fields or in the streets, because he was unable to pay even for an obscure lodging; and he died at last while he was imprisoned for debt, and was buried at the expense of the jailer. Goldsmith travelled on the continent without a change of raiment, and sometimes was indebted to his German flute for a meal or a lodging from the peasants. Johnson, when he was rapidly mounting to the zenith of his fame, was arrested for a debt of five guineas, from which he was relieved by the generosity of his friend Richardson. Chatterton,—that youthful prodigy in the world of letters, died by his own hand to escape the anticipated horrours of starvation. These are indeed strong—if you please, extreme—cases; but we may regard them rather as illustrating the general rule, than as exceptions to it. You may make out the *reasons* for this feature in the history of literary men for yourselves—you may ascribe it to a want of thoughtfulness and economy growing out of a ruling passion for mere intellectual pursuits; or to the uncertain and fluctu-

ating character of the literary market; or to their own efforts at mutual crimination and detraction; or to the disposition of publishers, in common with the rest of the world, to look out for themselves—but in whatever way you account for it, the fact is unquestionable. In this country we have scarcely any men who make literature a profession; and most of those who come nearest to it, I may say, without the fear of contradiction, have hard work to earn their bread. I remember once, even in England, to have gone in search of one of her brightest stars, and to have found him in an humble apartment in the fifth or sixth story; with his books around him indeed, but with every thing else to indicate that literature with him was the twin sister of poverty. I maintain that learning may look for a noble reward; and I am about to show you in what it consists: but if I knew any one who was entering the path of literature for the sake of the silver or gold he might find in it, I would, in mercy to his hopes, point him to the farm or the workshop—I would bid him become a hewer of wood or a drawer of water.

Let me say then that the reward of men of letters begins in the calm and exalted satisfaction incident to intellectual pursuits. He who has given to the mind the power of being active, has ordained that its activity, when rightly directed, should be a source of

enjoyment, and *that* irrespectively of the results to which it may lead. Yes, there is pleasure in keeping this Heaven-constructed machinery in motion; and hence the cultivated mind has within itself a perennial fountain of pleasure, in its materials of thought, and its ability to use them to advantage. And connected with the satisfaction that belongs essentially to the legitimate exercise of the faculties, is that which results from the success with which such exercise is crowned;—from the surmounting of obstacles, and the clearing away of difficulties, and the final attainment of that to which the energies of the mind have been directed. You all remember the story of the Grecian philosopher who, unfortunately for his decency, happened to hit upon the solution of a difficult problem while he was in a bath; and forthwith, well nigh delirious with exultation, leaped forth and ran into the streets proclaiming it. But a yet nobler satisfaction results from the invigorating and elevating process that passes upon the faculties;—from the mind learning to fathom its own depths, and journey forth into the remoter regions of thought. It is the glory of the mind that it expands to the light of learning, as the rose-bud opens to the sun; that each successive effort that it puts forth is the appropriate preparation for yet higher efforts; and that the highest degree of culture which it ever attains on earth,

is only preliminary to the improvements of immortality.

Did I speak discouragingly when I said that learning could not look for its reward in wealth? But what is wealth to the riches of the mind? Wealth is at best a mere glittering appendage of the man; and he who gains it, gains nothing that is not as empty as the bubble, and *may* not be as transient as the meteor. You may construct iron-bound coffers, and yet riches will work their way out of them, and fly off upon the winds; while he who once possessed them, but possesses them no longer, may sit down in his extremity and weep that he has nothing more to lose. But the mind trained to vigorous exercise, enriched with noble acquisitions, and pressing forward in an ever brightening career, may bid defiance to the accidents of time, and even in the deepest poverty, triumph in conscious independence. I can imagine that an intellectual man may be doing his daily task at the bidding of some tyrant; or may be the tenant of a dungeon for life, where no other footsteps than those of the keeper are ever heard;—but, in the one case, he is doing other and more glorious work than that upon which his hands are employed,—for his mind, superior to all external force, still operates with undiminished energy: in the other, he seems indeed to be sitting in solitude,—and yet he is not alone,—

for his memory is a treasury of the great thoughts of illustrious minds; and hereby he is enabled to gather around him, even in his dungeon, a noble company. Not that which the fire can consume, or the wind scatter, is true riches; but that which inheres in the mind, and, like the mind itself, is imperishable. You remember the well known eloquent tribute that Cicero pays to learning in his oration for Archias the poet. "Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur."

But the intellectual wealth and elevation that learning confers upon its possessor is only the beginning of his reward—another part of it is found in the grateful reflection that his life is given to the service of his fellow men—not only of his own generation but of posterity. Suppose he has constructed some memorial of his genius and wisdom, which, while it will bear witness for *him*, will shed light upon the world after he has left it, and will even grow brighter with the lapse of ages—how grateful must it be to him to reflect that he lives in climes he has never visited; that he enlightens and blesses minds with which he has never been brought in immediate contact; and more than all, that his influence will flow down, as a living and ever widening stream, upon all

the generations that shall succeed him. Or suppose he has occupied a less important place in the world of cultivated minds—suppose that, instead of doing his work through the press, he does it chiefly through his general intercourse with society, bringing to his aid perhaps some one of the liberal professions—still he has the satisfaction of reflecting that he has been a labourer in the great cause of intellectual improvement, and that, though his generation should not record his name, it bears the enduring impress of his character. And are these reflections, my friends, worth nothing? Are they worth nothing to neutralize the influence of worldly disappointments,—to calm the spirit amidst life's agitating scenes,—to scatter the mists that gather around the path of old age? What say you then of the consolations of ignorance—especially of ignorance when found with its natural allies—selfishness and depravity? What say you of the consolations of learning, when divorced from virtue, and wedded to evil, and wielding mighty influences only to curse the world?

Men of letters have yet another source of blessing open to them, in the reflex influence of their country improved and elevated through their instrumentality. You labour for your country by enlightening and guiding her publick sentiment,—by purifying her intellectual and moral atmosphere;—thus giving stability

and elevation to her character, and exalting her in the estimation of other nations. And though you receive your recompense for this partly in the consciousness of having done it, yet you are also privileged to enjoy directly the benefit of your own labours. The tree which you have planted refreshes you with its shade, and cheers you with its fruit. The institutions which you have helped to establish or improve, furnish you with increasing facilities for your own improvement. The fine intellects which you have contributed to develope, shed back their quickening influence upon your own. Society around you, elevated by your wisdom, has some wisdom to impart; and she unconsciously pays her debt, if not by rendering you more wise, yet by rendering you more happy in witnessing her improvement. Learning and patriotism shine in each other's light, and live in each other's life.

And I may not here omit to say that patriotism is not slow to recognize her obligations to learning—to embalm the memories of those who have stood forth the intellectual benefactors of their country. Greece and Rome, glorious for their learning, have long since gone to the cemetery of nations; but wherever you meet an enlightened native of either of those countries now, you will find that he is awake to his relations to the mighty past, as if the fame of Demosthenes or Tully had been left in his keeping.

England and France guard the graves of their illustrious scholars with most vigilant and reverential care. Even America, though yet in the freshness of her youth, has some household words in the names of her departed sons devoted to learning; and she never fails to pronounce them with affection and gratitude. I do not say that this is the highest reward to which a noble mind can aspire; but I do say that there is a principle in man's nature, that forbids his being indifferent to the favour of the good, and that renders grateful the prospect of being embalmed in their affectionate remembrance: I do say that it is worthy of ingenuous minds to desire—I will not call it posthumous fame, for that might seem to imply the workings of an unhallowed ambition—but posthumous veneration and gratitude; especially when there is connected with it the consciousness that it is only a just tribute to their character—a reasonable acknowledgment for their services.

But I should have utterly failed to do justice to this topic, if I were not to say, as the crowning consideration of all, that learning has its highest reward in the approbation of God;—though I must not say this without repeating the qualifying remark, that I mean learning, guided by the right spirit, and consecrated to the right end. God gave these noble faculties not to remain stationary at a low point, or at any point,

but to expand forever;—and will He not smile upon the accomplishment of his own benevolent purposes? He gave them as a mirror to reflect his own glory;—and will he not approve, when, by their fullest development and most active exercise, his glory shines the brightest? And how will he convey to the mind the testimony of his approbation? In the consciousness that it feels of its own lofty and virtuous aims; in the silent blessing from society that falls continually upon its path; and in the anticipation of a world, where it shall have for its theatre boundless regions of light and glory. Here, Scholars, is the consummation of your reward; and all that you may receive on earth ultimately becomes valueless, unless it proves the beginning of that which is to be perfected in Heaven.

I am glad that I can refer you to some illustrious examples of what learning does for its votaries, here in the very city in which we are assembled; that I can point you to graves in yonder beautiful cemetery, toward which the whole community of cultivated minds turn a moistened and grateful eye. There lies your WEBSTER; and the fresh earth upon the spot shows that it was but the other day he was laid there. He gave his life, and a long life too, to the cause of letters; but instead of being exclusively the man of the study, he was awake to all the great interests of society, and had not a little to do in directing some

of its more important movements. But the primary attraction of his character was the union of the scholar with the Christian—of the ornament of a highly cultivated intellect with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. He moved about among you, a patriarch in the walks of literature, of benevolence, of piety; and his influence blessed all who came within its reach. And you surely can be at no loss in respect to what constituted, still constitutes, his reward. He had it in the happiness and usefulness attendant on his intellectual and moral elevation; in the grateful homage of his country and the world; in the approbation of Him whose favour is life. And now that the grave has closed upon him, and he is receiving, we doubt not, his reward in Heaven, the memorials which he has left upon earth are a pledge that he shall never be forgotten; for they are incorporated not only with the literature of his country, but with the language of the best portion of the world. I met him for the last time a year or two since, when he was on a journey; and though he was well nigh exhausted with fatigue, he seemed quickly to recover himself in the pleasure of literary discourse; and as I saw him bearing his honours with so much dignity and meekness, and observed the lighting up of the inward fire as he dwelt upon his favourite topic, I could not but exclaim, *Fortunate Senex—Fortunate Senex!*

Hillhouse, too—has passed beyond the reach of human praise, alas! too early for his country and for the world, but not until he had lived long enough to provide for the immortality of his own name. I have heard much of his private virtues—of the urbanity of his manners and the generosity of his spirit; of his delicate perception of the right and the honourable, as well as the beautiful; of the admirable grace with which he met the various claims of society upon his time, his fortune, and his genius; but it would ill become *me* who am not sure that I ever saw him, to speak of these things to *you*, with whom they are matter of personal recollection. But I *may* speak to you of what he was in the great world of letters; for there we all felt that he was our acquaintance. I *may* speak of the beautiful and boundless creations of his genius; of his imagination, here bursting forth with an almost overpowering radiance, and there moving sweetly and silently, as upon an angel's wing; of his exquisite taste, presiding, with rigid exactness, over his most excursive and brilliant efforts; of the facility with which he could take up and absorb in his own glowing thoughts, whatever is graceful in nature, whatever is instructive in history, whatever is august in the revelations of God. In one respect he stood almost alone on the catalogue of American scholars: while his ample fortune placed him above the neces-

sity of turning his literary labours to pecuniary profit, his noble spirit could find motives enough for exertion in his devotion to the interests of his friends, of his country, and of his race. It is not for me to say precisely where in the first rank of accomplished minds posterity will assign him his place; but sure I am, that so long as a single copy of his works remains to bear witness for him, no man will dare question that he was one of the luminaries of his age.

And there is yet another name which I may not omit to mention,—for it seems to me like the genius of the place;—a name around which sepulchral images gather, but which the sepulchre can never cast into the shade. You know that I can refer only to the illustrious DWIGHT. There are many of us who can never come back to this spot, but that our minds fill with glorious recollections of that venerated man. We seem to realize again his awe-inspiring presence,—to listen again to the eloquence that once charmed us, and to put ourselves, as in other days, in docile subjection to his mighty mind. We venerate yonder halls of learning the more, because there we admired the splendours of his intellect, and felt the heavenly influence of his devotion. Genius, literature, and piety, have long since woven for him an amaranthine chaplet. The world is at once the depository of his writings, and the field of his fame. Many of you

who hear me will, I doubt not, be ready to say of him, in the language of Horace—

> "Multis ille bonis flebilis occidit
> Nulli flebilior quam mihi."

But I must not close this address without reminding you of the obligations which we owe to the institution at which we have been trained; to the Alma Mater that has awakened our early aspirations, and guided our early efforts, in the cause of learning. We have watched her growing usefulness as years have passed over her; and if any cloud has temporarily darkened her horizon, we have anxiously kept our eye upon it until it has disappeared. And so we will continue to do. If she is in prosperity, we will thank God and rejoice. If in adversity, we will hasten with filial affection to her aid; and if we cannot replenish her treasury with our bounty, we will at least plead her cause before the rich. Let her stand, as she *has* done, the bulwark of learning and religion; let her grow fresh as she grows old; let future and better generations lay their willing offerings at her feet; and let her history reach down through all time, and constitute a brilliant chapter in the history of the world.