Speech

of

HON. A. W. VENABLE,

Before the two Societies

at

Wake Forest College.

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Correspondence.

EUXELIAN HALL, June 8th, 1862.

Sir:—The Euxelian Society expresses through the undersigned its sincere thanks for the entertaining and instructive address delivered before the Euxelian and Philomatheian Societies, and respectfully requests a copy for publication.

BENJ. E. MARABLE,
SAMUEL JACOBS,
A. J. EMERSON,

Hon. A. W. VENABLE.

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Wake Forest College, June 9th, 1862.

Gentlemen,—Your note of the 8th was received yesterday. In complying with your request, permit me to express the hope that you are not mistaken in your kind appreciation of the address which you propose to publish. I shall be happy if any of the suggestions which I have made shall induce the educated young gentlemen of North Carolina to feel more deeply their obligations to labor for the advancement of the interests of our State.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. W. VENABLE.

Messrs. B. E. MARABLE,
SAMUEL JACOBS,
A. J. EMERSON,
Committee.
AND PARIAMANDRAN SOUTHERNS.

REEX.
This instinct marks and identifies our race. The most obscure, as well as the most distinguished, shudder at the thought of being forgotten. It is for this reason that names descend through generations as memorials of ancestry. It is for this that men visit scenes rendered dear by associations; the instinct speaks in the heart that others will remember us as we remember those who have gone before us. It is right that the young and the educated, should desire success and distinction; that they should aspire to a commanding position on the heights of honest fame. High aims indicate a noble nature—an elevated mind. He who has no high aspirations confesses to inferiority—nothing can elevate him. He was never made to soar—to crown is his destiny.

But what is meant by success in coming years? What is that distinction amongst your fellow-men that you desire? I assume, that by success you mean that favorable coincidence of circumstances by which individual happiness, and above all, individual usefulness, is attained—the results of continued and systematic effort, legitimately directed to good and valuable ends—and by distinction amongst your fellow-men, the acknowledgment of great attainments and higher usefulness, acquired by virtuous industry, a tribute always paid to superior merit sooner or later by the unerring judgment of mankind. Anything below these is unworthy of the name, and the distinction which follows beneath a fair ambition. There are pursuits in which men eagerly engage, and completely succeed, which confer but little of real good upon those who are their contemporaries, and there is a distinction which never outlives the generation which bestows it, although securing great influence while it lasts. The acquisition of wealth for the pleasure of possession and the power which it gives, affords an illustration: A success measured by one short life, a history to be contained in one short epitaph, and a distinction which is wrapped in the same grave-clothes, and buried with its possessor. I have seen men whose whole long life of accumulation might at its close be fully illustrated by an emblem found in every deserted field; the stone which by long lying still, has become covered with moss. It is not to such success or such distinction that I would seek to guide you.—But noble must be your purposes and high your aims if the glory shall be yours. Numerous are the pursuits in which the prize is to be won. Great the diversity of occupations in which all of your energies may have full employment. You are now to make the selection, and as life's time is short, life's business and duties

such an estimate of the interest which the country possesses in the proper direction of all the talent and energies of her sons, and with a strong conviction, that all of worth to secure prosperity and permanent good, must shortly come into the hands of the generation which you represent, I acceded to your request to address you on this occasion. By consenting to do so, I have been compelled to encroach upon time fully occupied with other engagements; but I could not decline your invitation, being alike conscious of the kindness which suggested the choice, and of the obligation which rests upon those who are growing old in the race upon which you have entered, to give their counsel freely—to furnish the aid of their experience, and stimulate by proper encouragement those hopes, which, whilst they quicken the energies, relieve the labor of pursuit in the enterprises in which you are about to engage.

How shall I secure success in coming years? How shall I attain distinction amongst my fellow-men? These inquiries, young gentlemen, have often affected your hearts. They are common to all whose minds, quickened by the stimulus of knowledge, reach towards the future and seek for something real upon which to rest. They are the restless impulses of intellectual nature, conscious of energies before unknown to itself. The suspension of poverty upon the discovery of hidden wealth. The exaltation of prisoners unexpectedly recovering liberty. Each of you, I doubt not, have revolved these questions in your minds; have adopted conclusions, and determined upon the direction of your efforts to secure these ends. It is natural, it is right, that it should be so. It is not only lawful, but it is noble to desire the admiration and esteem of our fellow-men. It is the instinct of immortality which awakens the desire to live, not only in another state of being, but also in the memory of those who come after us. Immortality draws its bow with an arm armed with the love of well-earned fame, and points its arrow down the course of years—although its goal is eternity—that arrow leaves the traces of its flight on all the field of time. Next to the horror of annihilation, is the dread of being forgotten by our race. Shall I be forgotten? Will none remember me when the grave shall be my resting-place? Oh! how this inquiry intrudes upon the heart! How we recoil from the apprehension that it may be true. The history of the human race, barbarous as well as civilized, is full of the evidences of this dread. Mounds and rude piles, mausoles, statues, temples and pyramids, have been constructed to rescue names from oblivion.
demand it all. The prize for which you contend is rich and valuable. The means of acquisition should be most cautiously considered. Many are the failures, great the disasters, and deep the sorrows which have resulted from errors in the beginning. Errors apparently small, but which give color to all after life, have left the trail of the serpent on the whole of that life's progress and ended in disappointment. Perhaps the most satisfactory answer to the question may be found in the reasons of failure. Among these, none is more prominent than the want of self-denial. I know that I suggest a common theme. I incur the hazard of dealing in commonplace remarks. I feel that I repeat a warning given by all whose duty calls them to advise the young.

But remember, honorable success and high usefulness in life is not its common issue, but the exception. Defects and disappointments are so frequent as almost to seem the general result. The want of self-denial and self-control is the plague-spot that marks the malady which stricken down the numberless victims whose bones whiten the path to fame—fallen and destroyed, because not protected by this shield. I can but just allude to this indispensable element in success and distinction. Its importance cannot fail to strike every mind. There is scarcely a heart in this large assembly that has not been stricken and well-nigh crushed because of blighted hopes and unfulfilled promises. Because those beloved by them had neither learned nor practiced self-denial. The aims of a cultivated mind and generous heart must be high, to be worth attaining. The solicitations of indolence, the demands of appetite must be controlled and subdued, or they can never be reached. Success without such restraints would be defeat, and distinction nothing but notoriety and disgrace.

I have said that the business of life demands all of life's time. Even its recreations and enjoyments are seasons of relaxation—not of idleness—a direction of the current of thought into other channels, not a stagnation of the stream—the pleasure of beholding the beauties upon our pathway, relieving the sameness of the scene without intermission in our progress. Intellectual exercise imparts vigor to the mind by keeping all its powers in action. He who would succeed and be honored by his generation, must practice self-denial. He may acquire self-control by forming the habit of self-denial. How much is meant by that word habit! It is an acknowledgement that our minds and our bodies are influenced and even controlled by the frequent repetition of the same acts, the same thoughts. Something so powerful—an influence so commanding is created, that the strongest minds and most iron nerves succumb. Evil habits are most easily acquired, because of our natural proclivity to evil. Those which are good are the greatest aids to success, and the more valuable because requiring stronger effort in the formation. The first grow, naturally, in a congenial soil; the last the result of artificial culture and unremitting care. It has been well said that good habits, like angel's wings, bear us above; whilst those which are evil, like the grasp of demons, drag us down to ruin. None have ever been eminently great, who have not learned to govern themselves. One who had deeply felt this want, has most beautifully written—

"Reader, attend, whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flight beyond the pole,
Or doubling grubs this earthly hole
In low pursuit,
Know prudent, cautious, self-control
Is wisdom's root."

It was not high crime or degrading vice of which he was the victim—

"But thoughtless follies laid him low
And stained his name."

Great knowledge and high attainments are great achievements. They fall to none by accident, and are not among the gifts of fortune. The enduring monuments which stand on the way-side of this world's progress, successfully resisting the elements of destruction, the works of taste, and the revelations of science, which have sustained themselves upon the wave of time, were the results of patient, untiring toil. The granite and the marble each felt the hammer and the chisel upon all of its surface, and thought after thought, with unwearyed industry, were accumulated by the strongest minds, till the great mass of learning was completed.—He who looks for success and distinction, must be content to acquire it by laborious toil and patient industry, sustained by a determination to succeed. He must understand that distinction is not mere notoriety. He must appreciate the difference between the blaze of the meteor and the steady light of the star. He must lay a sure foundation for the monument he would erect to his fame.

But there are other obstructions to success—other difficulties, which have prevented distinction, where the promise was brightest
and the prospect most fair. By recurring to the records of literary institutions, we are often surprised at the different estimates placed by professors and the world, upon the capacities of those who have passed from their hands into the business of life. Some whose position and distinctions rendered them the admiration, if not the envy, of their associates, have gone forth with their academic honors, fresh and blooming, with high hopes, and higher expectations on the part of friends. But their laurels wilted in the stern sunshine which beats upon the vast area of social organization.—

Retaining all that was amiable, and the victims of no vice, they have either receded into the enjoyment of elegant leisure, or, crippled in the first conflict, retired, disgusted and despairing. Often, when neither of these events has occurred, the world has not realized the expectations founded upon such demonstrations of the power to acquire knowledge. The list of benefactors to the human race—the truly distinguished and valuable men, whose mark is made permanently upon the times in which they live, have not always discovered the capacity for the great works which they performed, in the early stage of their intellectual development.—

The mere faculty of acquiring knowledge, whilst it is the certain road to scholastic distinction, whilst it must form a most important element in the estimates of professors of individual scholarship, yet is not always associated with the power of making the best use of that knowledge when acquired. It is also true, that acquisitions are usually valued in proportion to the labor which was necessary for their attainment. In this way, the consciousness of learning with great ease may cause the student to undervalue what is learned, or create the habit of relying upon books alone, not only for the material out of which thoughts are constructed, but for the thoughts themselves; thus producing a paralysis of genius by never exercising its creative power, and enfeebled the mind as one might enfeebled the body by the non-use of its muscles. Whatever may be the cause, results show that the patient, prudent, laborsious, thinking students, without much reference to academic rank, have usually filled the niches of fame, and now stand forth confessed the lights of the ages in which they lived. I would not be misunderstood. I discourage none from the earliest entrance in this noble competition; "Literary prizes and Academic honors are laudable objects of any young man's ambition. They are proofs of present merit, and pledges of future utility." They are, however, the blossom, and not the fruit. Let them be sought as means, not as ends—the premiums for literary and scientific attainments, cultivated and improved minds, virtuous habits, and decided intellectual development. They will be, then, the avant couriers to the judgment of your fellow-men when the real business of life shall absorb all your thoughts; but avoid the mistake that by this means of success, this allowed distinction, the goal is reached and the object of life accomplished. This would indeed be to magnify a toy into a treasure; a trifle into a gem. It requires not only speed, but endurance, to win the race. The elimination of college life, and the minute preparation it affords upon all the subjects of study, will not find a parallel in the ever-changing scenes and questions which the conflicting interests of men create and propose. But whilst all this is true, it should not be forgotten that the process by which proper scholastic distinction is obtained, is the same which leads to eminence in after life. I have said thus much to account for disappointments which have occurred, and to suggest the causes in order that they may be avoided. Your scholars have failed to fulfill expectations, not on account of their distinction in the commencement of their literary course, but because they have mistaken the means or have neglected to employ them. It is a great error to suppose that any training at a school, any mental discipline at a college, is complete education; it is but the preparation of the soil—the seed-time of life—the time for acquiring a knowledge and the use of the tools—coming duties afford the opportunity for their valuable employment. One thing all experience confirms—that he who concludes that he is fully educated when leaving his instructors, however remarkable his proficiency or acquire his knowledge of the subjects of his study, rarely rises above mediocrity, and usually sinks below. As well might a financier expect wealth from capital either idle or badly secured. It is productiveness and increase which brings prosperity. We cannot but look with pain upon the ordinary results of attempts to educate young gentlemen, by anxious friends, who, regardless of expense or sacrifices, persist in the purpose of cultivating minds who will not receive the impressions so ardentiy desired. Years devoted to classical learning and abstract science, and the cultivation of taste, close with the common ceremonial of a literary degree, and in a short time the translation of a Latin sentence would be a task requiring much labor, whilst the knowledge of the Greek
letters has nearly passed away. Mathematics and Astronomy become mysteries; and a few, and but a few, of the common principles of philosophy linger in their minds. It is for this reason, that ripe scholars are so rare. Books and science, learning and the elegant accomplishments, which so much adorn and beautify, all give place to other pursuits; and newspaper literature and pamphlet romances, satisfy the cravings with which the mind, resenting utter neglect, tortures its possessor. He who looks to the close of his pupilage as a deliverance from thraldom, should seek success and distinction elsewhere than in literary pursuits. Let him remember, however, that the highest mental culture is no obstruction to his progress in whatever honorable and useful pursuits he may engage. Agriculture, mechanics and the arts, all look to science, learning and to taste, for the perfection of their productions. A man may succeed in spite of his want of these qualifications; but his success will neither be as great or his usefulness as extensive.

There is, however, another fruitful source of disappointments in our calculations founded upon the number of educated young gentlemen, who annually make their entrance into society. This is to be found in the multitude, who, disregarding the great law of demand and supply, devote themselves to the two professions of Law and Medicine. It is often remarked that the Legislatures of our country are chiefly composed of lawyers and doctors. This is true; not however because there are the only professions which lead to eminence and distinction, but from the fact that a vast proportion of the educated men of the country have adopted them. Education and intelligence control society, and whether appropriated by one profession or another, the result is the same. For centuries, the priesthood ruled with an iron despotism the affairs of the world. Monarchs consented to bear the degradation of a priest's foot upon their necks, and even in sackcloth for pontifical pardon. The cloister and the religious orders had monopolized the learning of the world. Monks, priests and cardinals became the statesmen, judges and law-givers, and the whole civilized world bowed to the domination of their orders. Under such a system, genius languished and society sunk into the apathy of ignorance, or wasted its resources in ways distorted by sacerdotal ambition. It was only when Luther liberated mind, by preaching the long neglected doctrine of justification by faith—justification independent of priestly absolu-

tion, and rising higher than the caprice of a suripiced hierarchy—a truth which devotes man to communion with his Maker through the revelations of the Bible—it was then that a new impulse was given to intellect, and all classes of men aspired to, and attained that influence, without which social organization becomes a gloomy despotism. The dominion of a clique of scholars—a combination of professional men, all engaged in the same pursuits—was broken and destroyed, and Christendom felt the reviving influence of the change. Religion had become priestcraft, and bigotry and physical sciences a sort of slight-of-hand mummerery, whilst the syllogistic triflings of metaphysicians, confused instead of instructed mankind. Christendom awoke from its lethargic sleep, and Bacon, the great reformer in Philosophy, restored science and logic to its legitimate position.

Although the same deplorable consequences are not now likely to ensue to so great an extent, from the appropriation of so much of the education of the country to a few professions, yet the progress of the age in the right direction is greatly retarded. When the supply of professional men in particular departments greatly exceeds the demand for their services, the consequence is inevitable, that all must suffer from inactivity, or seek other fields of employment. It is perhaps, for this reason, that we are often constrained to regret the loss of so much of the energy and talent of our own State, which has become the wealth and property of other portions of our confederacy. We cannot be unconscious of this draft upon our resources; and it has been said with much point, that North Carolina is a good State to remove from. I have heard this remark made by a distinguished scholar and statesman, now no more; and when I knew that I sat in Congress with twelve North Carolinians, representing in the Senate and House of Representatives, other States, eight of them from my own district, and a North Carolinian the Chief Magistrate of the Republic, and all of these lawyers, I felt that in these cases, at least, it was true. Let any one consider for a moment the number of young lawyers and physicians struggling for a mere support, desponding, and perhaps despairing, and then reflect upon the fact that our instructors of youth are imported from abroad. Scientific men, for developing the geological and mineral resources of our State, Engineers to locate our Rail Roads and construct our canals, all citizens of other
States; but bringing their skill where there is a demand for its employment, and reaping the reward due to their wisdom and forecast in selecting professions which were not overwhelmed by a competition among themselves. I rejoice that such men are to be found. I welcome them to our good old State. Their success and distinction may teach by example, when addresses and lectures may fail to instruct. We have cause of satisfaction in the conviction that knowledge, merit, science and energy belong to no clime or country. The world is their home, and the whole race of mankind the subjects of their benefactions.

Look to the undeveloped resources of our own State, the destructive system of agriculture daily diminishing our real wealth, and ask the reason. You will find the response in the absence of a corps of Engineers, composed of our own educated sons, and the want of agricultural chemists in the persons of our educated farmers, who should long since have awakened the public mind to these obstructions in our march to wealth and power. Our sister States, North and South, furnish the markets for most of our products. They have placed their suckers in our pond, and draw much of their wealth from our fountain. Notwithstanding our great production, in the statistical exhibits of exports North Carolina is one of the smallest of the old thirteen. Her soil and her forests yield their increase, but it finds a market outside of her borders, and goes to other States. Of this alone, we would not complain, if the cause was not so obvious, and the remedy so simple and easy of application. One-tenth part of the enterprise manifested by other States would have drawn much of their wealth to our own deep water, on our seashore, and placed us half a century in advance of our present position.

These are fields for the employment of all the best powers of the generation in which you live. Do you desire success? here it may be secured. Do you aspire to distinction? here it may be obtained. Look upon the vast amount of intellectual power now dormant and undeveloped, and ask yourselves is there a higher or a nobler aim than to arouse and vivify it? Become yourselves, instructors; increase your own attainments by communicating knowledge to others. Take the plough and the spade from the hand of un instructed labor, and teach the tiller of the soil the discoveries of science applicable to his occupation. Demonstrate as you may, that production should not decrease fertility—that the world was not created for one generation, but for the whole race of mankind in all its lengthened course—that true patriotism cannot co-exist with a purpose of disfiguring and destroying all that portion of the country which belongs to us. Look to mechanical professions as the great high road to success and distinction. Bring all the treasures of science to simplify and expedite operations so indispensable to human progress. "It is not the profession which dignifies the man; but the man who gives dignity to the profession. Great minds are not insensible to present fame, but are much more concerned about that which shall follow them. "Charlatans and pretenders are content to receive the execrations of honest men when they are dead, if their vanity can feed upon the flattery of knaves whilst living."—It is better that posterity should inquire why monuments were not raised to men, than why they were.

The inequalities of life are real, but are greatly increased or diminished by circumstances under our own control. More physical inequality loses much of its importance by the force of civilization; but health and talent communicate power wherever society exists. It would be folly not to recognize principles so manifest, and wisdom suggests the inquiry, how can they be rendered available to useful purposes. To eradicate those inequalities would be neither practicable nor desirable. "Ecepist fuerat tenera nascente recurrerit." Society, in its various elements, constitutes an aggregation of all that is necessary for human comfort and human progress; and the office of those who would benefit it, is so to arrange those elements that the most valuable should be most influential—that a controlling power should not be given to any one which is not a necessary consequence of its importance. It is on this account that a morbid and unnatural inequality exists in society, when wealth over-rides and governs talent. The true state of moral feeling is thus easily discovered; where talent is the controlling power, avarice shrinks—"scorched from the glance of its eye." Mind rules matter, and wealth fills its proper, because a secondary, station. These inequalities have unnecessarily marred the face of society amongst us. Talent and learning, confining themselves to so great an extent to particular channels, has left the most important interests of the country in the hands of strangers, or of those who are un instructed. Agriculture, commerce and mechanics,
true sources of all that is valued, have receded in the scale of importance behind those professions which deal only in the crimes and calamities of life. Many an educated young man has longed for some employment, at once lucrative and reputable, to which to devote his life; but looking forward to distinction and success has resolved, against the inclination of his mind and genius to study law or medicine, because the great majority of the statesmen and distinguished men are from the ranks of those professions. He feels that purely scientific men must expect the greatest portion of their rewards from posterity; the present demands his efforts. Commerce, agriculture and mechanics, have from necessity been compelled to sustain themselves almost, unassisted by science.—Although convinced that distinction may be here acquired, yet, the labor is so great, the difficulties so appalling, he yields to circumstances, and pursues the easier, because the beaten course. He finds that he may regulate himself by events, but that it is no easy task to cause events to regulate themselves by him. To rise above such a pressure as this, requires a mind of unusual vigor—a will of uncommon force.

In presenting these views, it must not be understood that the professions alluded to are intended to be underrated or disparaged. Far from it. The friends of human liberty, the dispensers of justice, and those who soothe and relieve calamity and pain, can never lose place in the front rank of the benefactors of our race. Liberty, learning and science owe them too much, to discredit their drafts upon them for gratitude and respect. Our purpose is not to disparage men who now occupy the front, but to urge those improperly in the rear to claim the position which is their due.

A morbid state of public feeling has matured the impression that agricultural, commercial or mechanical pursuits are not the first in dignity, or the most certain in the attainment of distinction. The remark that a man is a mere farmer, mechanic or merchant, is often made in a manner calculated to disparage his occupation, by apologizing in advance for any failure which may ensue. It is true, that if all the higher intellectual culture, the best education of the country, is to be diverted from those professions, the remark may well apply. The farmer will be a mere awkward, land-destroyer; the mechanic, a simple user of tools according to certain rules he has learned; and the merchant, a shop-keeper. But under the same state of things, the lawyer would be a pettifogger, and the physician a quack. In this state of public opinion, many a young man who might have pursued a course of uninterrupted success, has shrunk from the anticipated sneer, the dreaded shaft of ridicule—has permitted his sensibilities to over-rule his judgment, and paid the penalty of neglecting the instincts of his own genius. No man is insensible to ridicule. The hero of more than a hundred great battles, could bear the loss of his imperial crown with less external manifestation of chagrin, than he discovered when reading a placard on the base of the monument raised to his honor. A play upon the words composing the inscription gave the title of charlatan to the figure which occupied the top, and the Napoleon of Austerlitz and Europe lost his dignity in his rage. There is nothing against which you should guard yourselves more carefully than the fear of ridicule. Nothing has been productive of more failure in life. He who would govern you, has only to know this weakness, and you are his slave. It has been well said by a distinguished essayist: “Learn from the earliest days to inure your principles against the perils of ridicule; you can no more exercise your reason if you are in the constant dread of laughter, than you can enjoy your life in the constant terror of death.”” If you think it right to differ from the times, and make a point of morals, do it; however antiquated, however pedantic it may appear, do it; not for insouciance, but seriously and grandly, as a man who wore a soul of his own in his bosom, and did not wait until it was breathed into him by the breath of fashion.” Those amongst you will most certainly succeed in life and acquire distinction in the present and future generations, who, rising above the fear of ridicule, shall be most efficient in devoting by precept and example the cultivated intellect of our State to the occupations of teaching agriculture, mechanical and commercial pursuits—who shall bring science and learning to enlarge the area of their influence—who shall point the young men of the country to the high distinction which will be not only due, but accorded to those who by the best modes of instruction, shall elevate the intellectual standard of our times—who shall not feel disparaged by a profession in which all the great lights of ancient days, and almost all of the renowned of modern times, were employed—who shall urge the improvement of the soil, the consequent increase of production, and the attraction to the homes of our citizens, and illustrate their
science by its personal and practical application to farming—who shall learn practical mechanics only to extend the dominion of the art by the aid of science—to relieve human labor, and add to human comfort and luxury by those combinations of mechanical powers for which our age is so remarkable—and who shall carry into commerce enlightened, expansive liberality, the true source of success; teaching that all mankind are but one community, and that commerce is the process by which the connecting links of the chain which binds them together is brightened and perpetuated. These are works to which you are invited, and the success of which will make our position so desirable that none can be induced to seek remote fields of enterprise, carrying with them the energy and the capacity which belongs to our own good State.

Men will then realize that the builder of the house is entitled to equal rank with him who lives within it; that he who forges from the metal the implements which cause the earth to produce under the tillage of the farmer, as well as the enlightened merchant who provides an outlet for all the surplus of labor and a supply for domestic wants, are truly amongst the first in usefulness, and behind none in claims for a dignified station in society. Statesmen will seek their counsel, and the country look to them for rulers and law-givers.

But in order to success in our undertakings and the attainment of distinction, it is necessary that the indications of the age in which we live should be maturely and narrowly considered. It was in reference to this that I have urged upon you the enlargement of the area of selection in the professions which you may choose, or the employments in which you may engage. Each age has its distinctive mental development—a peculiar direction in which intellectual energies are impelled. Influence and power have followed that current, and those who had made the greatest progress in that direction exerected the most extended control. On the success of the reformation, the influence of the priests was shared by the philosophers, and each successive epoch was marked by the transfer of some portion of power to other classes, who, from the force of circumstances were placed in positions to demand and enjoy it. The influence of Macnas in the Court of the Roman Emperor, and the position of Addison as Secretary in the English Cabinet, indicate the supremacy of elegant literature over the courts augmented by their presence. There are cycles to these influences,
that every useful branch of knowledge is dependent for its continuous progress upon the corresponding advancement of all others—equally important and useful. Great minds see in the distance results which they cannot produce. They indicate them, and centuries roll on before they become facts. The philosophic friar of the twelfth century indicated that steam would become the propelling power of machinery and navigation; but six hundred years passed by before its consummation by Bulton and Watt.

Arthur Young found the electric telegraph in all its important principles in operation in the factory of Mr. Lomond, in France, in 1787. It was considered a mere scientific curiosity, and slept until the genius of Morse, in this our utilitarian age, bound the extremes of the world together by his magic wire. And Ericsson, whose caloric engine promises to be the great fact of the age, has only improved upon the discovery of Sterling, the pastor of a congregation in Scotland. The accumulated discoveries of a whole age exclusively directed to any one, or very few pursuits in literature, science or art, are usually just so many useless acquisitions, until called into use by the advance of some other branches which may employ them with profit. In the pursuits of the mind, as well as of agriculture, there is a weariness of one continual production.

A rotation of crops is indispensable to the permanence of the producing power. In this state of things mediocrity acquires the supremacy. The laws which regulate the action of the human mind readily explain the cause of this state of things. The fossil remains of animals do not more certainly indicate their former existence and their destruction, than the character of the literature of a declining age does the causes of that decline. The reformation of taste and the renewal of intellectual supremacy are equally in accordance with the same moral causes which have so often been illustrated in the history of the world.

It has been already remarked that in one of those intellectual intermissions, when darkness seems to threaten the world, and a dominion like that of the schoolmen who exhausted ages in learned trifling, a bright light starts in the firmament and is soon seconded by others of equal or superior brightness, and suddenly the world rejoices in the illumination. And well it may—it is proper that there should be a jubilee upon a deliverance from the leaden scepter of mediocrity. Science in advance of the useful application of its discoveries, has accumulated treasures which are not available, because unconnected with any of the practical purposes of society. But they were real discoveries—great facts ready for use when occasion demands it. Without such a demand they were mere curiosities. Men of small intellectual powers could easily attain to knowledge which great minds acquired and discovered by long and industrious efforts. A child may crawl up the steps which only the hands of a giant could cut out of the mountain's steep and flinty side, and having attained the highest, may well imagine a greater ascent impossible. It is under such circumstances that mediocrity rules, and cold hearts and narrow minds find a paradise.

If you would succeed in life or attain distinction amongst your fellow-men, always rebel against the rule of such a Tyrant. Cherish and cultivate freedom of thought and enquiry, reverent and respectful to the great source of truth, but as free as it is reverent and as unrestrained as it is respectful.

Of all the calamities which befall an age the reign of mediocrity is the most deplorable. When mere dullness is in the ascendency there is hope of improvement. The dim eye may be reached and excited by the light, and enquiry may be awakened without the disturbing influence of suspicion. Dullness makes but few pretensions, and is satisfied with power. But mediocrity in attainments and intellectual gifts, having acquired power and influence, instinctively, dreads comparison with superiors, takes counsel of jealousy and is insensible to generous emotions. Under such control, orators give place to demagogues and ranters; and statesmen are substituted by crafty intriguers. This is the necessary result of the reign of mediocrity in literature, science, art and statesmanship. Never rising high, of course it fixes its standard low. Conscious of the want of intellectual acumen, it is suspicious of those who are supposed to possess it. Limited in mental resources, is niggardly in the communication of thoughts. Deficient in wisdom, it substitutes in its place the counterfeit currency. Afraid of frank and candid counsel, it seeks for tools instead of advisers. Feeling incapacity to control individual talent and attainments, reliance is placed upon party organization to resist the power of superior genius. Under this gloomy reign mind slumbers, merit pines, and should talent make a successful assault upon the drowsy host, a victory over prejudice or a castigation of folly teaches no permanent lesson.—Small advantages allure, and small points in policy absorb, and rules adopted without comprehending the philosophy which suggested them, are looked to to excise the spirit of disorder.
Boldness of thought and independence of action are prescribed and denounced, and the tyranny of little men sustained for a season. Mediocrity and ignorance having obtained power, a war upon all that is elevated, and liberal is waged to the knife. Nor does science, art, taste or literature fare any better under this authority. Ignorance regards learning as a species of necromancy, or at least an useless accomplishment, and considers the elegance of cultivated taste too expensive a recreation. The wisdom of the past and the experience of the present are regarded only as rubbish, except so far as it subserves the organization of party, or answers the ends of some political pillar. What does mediocrity care for the beauties of style or the sweet harmony of poetry? Of what use is the accumulated wisdom of ages? Fearing nothing so much as superiority, trembling at rivalry, and moved by the instincts of self-preservation, it hastens to inspire dread by smothering and destroying all that indicates the existence of the one or the other. “Necesse est multis timet quem multi timent.” 1 With the instinct of the Tyrant it seeks safety in proscription and security in the destruction of those whom jealousy distrusts or envy hates.

Mediocrity in authority rarely reasons, because incapable of high mental effort; hence, it substitutes sotophems and sayings, for reasons and principles, uses the names of virtues for the reality, and cabalistic terms for the wisdom of staetmanship—perceives greater evil in the disregard of party tactics than in the commission of actual wrong. For this reason it is eminently prescriptive, and unless some strong rebellion exposes its weakness and subverts its authority, the weight of its leaden sceptre would increase until the triumph of stupidity, more fatal than the incursion of barbarians, would overwhelm and overturn all that wisdom had discovered or experience fixed. A dark age would supervene, and the spirits of men depressed by the tyranny of inferior minds, would take refuge under any strong arm which promised deliverance from such ignoble rule.

But another and a more beneficent influence succeeds—a brighter reign where power legitimately belongs, and where success and distinction are secured and bestowed—the reign of genius, which is always generous. Talent develops, and mind expands under its dominion, and the competition which it produces, only illustrates by brilliant achievement the high position which intellect may attain. Like the spring bursting from the mountain-side, it has no distrust of the richness of the source, and leaps in shining cascade, or flows in transparent beauty beside a kindred stream; receives into its bosom the rills which swell its volume, and pursues its course refreshing and enriching with unstained profusion. Genius collects jewels only to refresh the eyes of all by their light—accumulates treasures only to supply the wants of mind—gathers flowers to embellish by their beauty, and delight by their fragrance—smiles on pleasure upon every opening bud, expanding it by culture, and cherishing it by attention. Jealousy expires in salubrious atmospheres which surround it, and envy perishes for want of food. The scarcely fledged wing is sustained by its hand and taught to soar, and the timid, but gifted, stimulated to high adventure. Genius takes no pleasure in grovelling intrigues, has no sympathy with selfish enterprises—is not interested in the conflicts of little men, and has no toleration for the ascendency of trickery over merit. Genius tolerates freedom of enquire, and rejoices in independence of thought—conscious of creative power, it delights in the high creations of others—possessing a common interest in the treasures of knowledge, it glories in every accumulation, without fearing to think who brought it to the common store—regarding the whole world of science, knowledge, eloquence, poetry and art as one great field for kindred minds to enter and possess. It owns no right in any to appropriate, but to enjoy—not to exclude those who would enter, but to invite all to come. As the sparkling gem or the lovely flower can as easily delight a thousand eyes as one by its light or its beauty, so the creations of genius and of taste dispense their refreshing influence to the generations of mankind. The volumes of learning which have been given to the world, the history, poetry, and elegant literature, the temples, statues, and the canvasses glowing with mimic life, are all the trophies of generous, prolific genius, which seeks for fair renown by doing justice to those who have gone before, and begins the pursuit by proclaiming their praises. It catches the dying cadence of the song where it paused, only to recreate and swell its melody, and vary and prolong its notes. With a kind and truthful hand it records the glories of its predecessors, or the marble which covers their dust—it holds communion with the great departed in the works which they have left as a legacy to the world, and brings bright minds of ages past into the family circle. These are the offices, the

1. He must fear many whom so many fear.
powers, the associations, and the triumphs of genius. It is here that you may come to know that you may be wiser, brighter and better. Here anthems of praise can employ every voice, and still retain the harmony. In this concentration of light, the roads to success and distinction are so clearly indicated that none can mistake them.

Here it will be perceived, that manliness in its true meaning is the greatest element of success; purpose, will, and self-reliance. One of the first scholars of the age has well written: "The longer I live the more certain I am, that the great difference between men, the great significant, is energy, invincible determination, an honest purpose once fixed, and then victory. That quality will do anything that can be done in the world, and no talent, no circumstances can make one man a man without it." Rely much upon yourselves, act upon the conclusions of your own minds, after mature deliberation and impartial investigation. Decide under the best lights, and stand by the decision until its falling is so obvious as to demand its abandonment; and never murmur—never croak—complain not of neglect—neither indulge in useless comparisons of your own, with the progress of others. Murmurs are usually the fruit of a want of self-respect, and croakings the offspring of irresolution and jealousy. To complain of neglect, is to admit the superiority of those against whom the complaint is made; for in equals it should be disregarded as unmeaning; in inferiors despised. Besides we are often mistaken in the causes which seem to justify discontent; it should not be forgotten "that men and actions, like objects of sight, have their perspective; some must be seen at a distance."

To succeed eminently, is to learn wisdom from discouragements, and to compel present defeats to minister to future victories. To prefer the approbation of your own conscience to the decrees of public opinion—decrees pronounced and sought to be enforced by those who by the effect of circumstances are placed in the lead—a position not always won by wisdom or awarded to superior attainments. A power so often abused for the persecution of real merit as for the advancement of true principles. To those who do not possess them, good qualities and great abilities are both incomprehensible and inconceivable. Talent is always offensive to tyranny. "In weakness it fears it as a power; in power it hates it as a

* Goethe.

Liberty." Knowing these things seek to subsidise the talent, genius, learning, science, whatever may adorn, instruct or bless the generation in which you live, to the great end of making men wiser, better and happier—seek a knowledge of all that the creative power of God has called into being. Nothing which employed Divinity in its creation can be unworthy of our study. Allow no day to pass without some new acquisition, some aggressive advance upon the hitherto uninvaded field of research. But remember, "one false step, one wrong habit, one corrupt companion, one loose principle, may wreck all your prospects, and all the hopes of those that love you."

It is a great mistake to suppose that a selfish pursuit of your individual distinction is the surest road to success. Selfishness demonstrated in the life, creates enemies at every step, and society instinctively mortifies and rebukes a temper which would rob all other men. He that discovers to the world that he would grasp all of honor or of profit which it has to bestow, whose desire of promotion and distinction are so rabid as to become exclusive, must content himself with a path beset with thorns, and must engage in a contest which necessarily terminates in defeat. The horse leach and the grave are still as uninviting as when the wise man declared that they ceased to cry give, give. Sound policy, as well as elevated principles, dictates a far different course. The world abounds with fields of generous enterprise, and the language of those who have engaged in them is, press on, to those who are in advance, and come on to those behind. It may be a weary path—the goal is in the distance—but the tediousness of the way may be much relieved or greatly aggravated by the temper and dispositions which you cultivate. Be kind; speak kindly to all who seek advice or would cultivate your acquaintance. "Kind words are the brightest flowers of earth's existence; they make a very paradise of the humblest home the world can show. They are jewels beyond price, and more precious to heal the wounded heart and make the weighed down spirit glad than all the blessings the earth can give."

One of the greatest statesmen and jurists of the age often said that, one kind, encouraging expression from a person at that time unknown to him, was the pledge of his future success. Recently admitted to the bar, after a long struggle with embarrassments growing out of restricted means, he appeared in a cause of some importance to the parties, and of much interest amongst the people where it was tried. After due preparation he appeared to argue
the case. Trembling for fear of a failure, but resolved to do his
duty, he proceeded with his argument to the conclusion. As he
reduced his seat, his ear caught a voice behind the bar which said,
"That young man has talents, and will become distinguished."—
The words fell upon his anxious heart like the dew of heaven upon
dravens wilted by the sun. It refreshed his spirit and invigorated
his hopes. He said that in all the despondencies of after life, those
words would come over him and revive and refresh his heart.—
Those kind words by one then unknown, but who was a competent
judge of what he saw, were a light upon the path of that statesman,
who filled so great a space in the admiration of his countrymen
whilst living, and has but recently gone to the grave amidst their
sorrows and their tears. It is not surprising that he loved the
man who first told him of the great future which awaited him, for
"gratitude is the music of the heart, when its chords are touched
by the breeze of kindness."

I trust it will not be considered a digression if I should remark,
that this incident speaks volumes concerning the manner in which
those advanced in life should regulate their intercourse with the
young. "Age is dark and unlovely:"—the verdure which may
adorn it, and the flowers which may relieve its barren aspect must
be borrowed from them. He, who conscious of the advantages of
age and experience, withdraws himself from those to whom he
might be a benefactor, and repels their efforts to conciliate his
regard and acquire his confidence, must expect at last to stand like
some lonely old tree in an extensive field, exposed to every blast,
and with no young forest around to break the force of the storm.
The friendship of the young gives a cheerful expression to features
furrowed over by time, and transposes a vitality which gently breaks
the fall to the grave. None are so well situated for usefulness of this kind as those to whom the direction of education is
entrusted. You, gentlemen of the Faculty, have a golden oppor-
tunity of doing good in this way. It has been well said, "that
education depends upon regulating our conduct with reference to
the promotion of character when matured, rather than by confining
our views to the immediate effects of our labor." By proper dis-
ermination of individual character, a kind and paternal interest,
and the cultivation of affectionate confidence on the part of your
pupils, you will perform much the most important part of the
duties which grow out of your relations to those placed under your
control.

But I must close these remarks. In order to success and the
attainment of distinction amongst your fellow-men, it is important
that you cultivate a hopeful, cheerful temper. Despondency is an
artificial weight upon the natural spring of the intellectual system;
weakening its force and paralysing its powers. Whoever yields
his spirits to the domination of selfishness, or ill temper, has ensured
for himself a life of sadness and disappointment. "Never allow
occasional sorrowful experience to prevent your perception of the
proponderance of good."

Politeness in your intercourse with your fellow-men is an indis-
penible element in success. The amenities of life are so near
akin to its virtues that they are rarely found separated. Matters
apparently small and unimportant create enmities and estrange
friends; for they indicate with unerring certainty the state of the
feelings. One single plague-spot discloses the existence of disease
as surely as if the whole body was covered with its ravages. These
conditions are only different stages of the malady. Thus it often
occurs that these small incidents in a man's personal history reveal
more of his character than all beside; because, spontaneous devel-
opments unrestrained by caution, they unconsciously to himself
betray the state of his heart. Courtesy, generosity, politeness,
create as much happiness in the heart as they communicate to
others. The reflected light of our own kind feelings returns upon
ourselves, and produces an accumulation of brightness to gladden
and cheer the soul. The

"Sweet and merry sunshine of affection's gentle light,
That never wears a sullen cloud, and fades not in night."

Need I allude to the necessity of fairness in all the competitions
in which you engage. Leave unparliamentary demeanor and un-
candid trickery to charlatans and demagogues. Always consider
that which you know to be true, and state with rigid accuracy the
positions of your antagonist. He who is tempted to violate these
rules will ultimately fall by the effect of his own petty expedients.
The smallness of his advantages will afford no compensation for the
meanness of the tricks which he employs, and a loss of his own,
together with the respect of others, must certainly overthrow him.
Let competition be chivalrous and high and generous; then victory
is glory and renown.

We should not look for immediate returns from every effort to
do good to our fellow-men. There is a seed-time and harvest
always in action. Like the illustrious Davy, prefer a firm, religious belief, founded upon the Bible, to every other blessing. Then with minds enlightened and purpose fixed, with hearts filled with kindness, and a burning desire to be useful, you cannot fail of success. Distinction will come to reward you. Stand like watchmen looking for the development of something new, great and useful.—Catch the ideas and cherish the thoughts which spring up in your minds. A single idea has often suggested the great laws of nature and of mind. A single idea recorded—

"One little drop of ink,
Falling like dew upon a thought,
Produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions think."

These have led to all that was brilliant and useful in science and the arts. Heaven sends the idea like some angelic messenger, and finding a congenial mind, an impulse is communicated, and all mankind are made to feel. Who can tell the power of a single idea? One has beautifully said: "It came from Newton, as he lay under the tree and all the stars in heaven and the sun himself yielded obedience. It came from Watt, as he thought of the separate condenser, and an army of cranks and wheels more numerous than the countless host that sung psalms before the holy city, have this day sung his praises. It came from Fulton, as he thought of the paddle wheel, and every river and every sea is now blossoming with the flowers of his genius. It came from Franklin, as he thought of the kite, and the very lightnings came down from their thrones to do him honor. It came from Bacon, as he thought of the inductive system and the whole mental world leaped into new existence.—Philosophy turned from her beaten path and followed him as a dog would follow his master—the physical world awakes. Then came a voice from every drop in the salt ocean, and from every rock on the broad land, from every trembling star above us and from every sleeping fossil beneath; and rock, star and dew-drop, cloud, fish and fossil, all found tongues and voices to proclaim his praise."

* Wm. Starke.
the beginning of the great triumph which awaits the faithful devotion of time, learning, genius and virtue, to the great purpose of elevating improving and blessing mankind. In this progress I urge you to be active. Let instruction, mechanics, agriculture, commerce, practical engineering and geological research engage your minds and employ your energies. Whilst you desire the blessings of heaven upon North Carolina, work diligently that the blessing may come.—

Cesse not to enlist all of talent and of energy which you can influence, until with resources developed, and fields smiling under the direction of the skilful tiller of the soil, together with the supply from our own genius and resources of the wants of our citizens—our State blessed with climate, soil, health and all the bounties of Nature, shall stand forth as she did in the memorable era of her declaration of independence—first amongst the foremost. This glory North Carolina demands at the hands of her sons.

The End.