

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Maine History Documents

Special Collections

1806

An Address Delivered at Gorham, on Opening the Academy in that Place

Reuben Nason

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

This Monograph is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History Documents by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Satin

57189

William

6711

AS

40- Noyes 335

located 32

Harvard

the Hunt Soc

PAMP 1286

Vickery

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

GORHAM,

ON OPENING THE ACADEMY IN THAT PLACE,

SEPTEMBER 8, 1806.

BY REUBEN NASON, A. M.

"'Tis education forms the common mind."

PORTLAND :

PRINTED AT THE NEW PRINTING OFFICE,

By J. M'Kown.

1806.

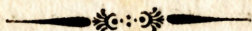
GORHAM, September 8, 1806.

SIR,

The subscribers being appointed a committee to wait on you, hereby tender you the thanks of the Trustees of Gorham Academy for your inaugural address delivered this day; and request a copy of the same for the press.

CALEB BRADLEY,
STEPHEN LONGFELLOW,
LOTHROP LEWIS.

Mr. Reuben Nason.



GORHAM, September 8, 1806.

GENTLEMEN,

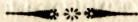
The testimonial of approbation, which you have presented me in the name of the Trustees of Gorham Academy, is peculiarly gratifying. In compliance with your request I submit a copy of the address to the disposal of those, who were pleased to hear it with indulgence, trusting that they will exercise the same candor, they have already shown, and pardon the faults of a hasty performance.

R. NASON.

*Rev. Caleb Bradley,
Hon. Stephen Longfellow,
Lothrop Lewis, Esq.*

AN

ADDRESS, &c.



THE occasion, on which we are convened, so naturally suggests education, as the proper theme for him, who now rises to address you, that he conceives no apology necessary for having chosen it. But he earnestly requests you, polite and learned auditors, to pardon imperfections in his performance, while he attempts to treat of a subject, on which volumes might be written without exhausting it; and to do justice to which would require far more erudition and experience, than he possesses, and powers of eloquence, to which he has no pretensions.

No more will be attempted at present, than briefly to speak of the importance of early instruction, and of the methods, by which, it is thought, it may be most successfully inculcated; to point out some of the advantages, which attend institutions like the one, we this day usher into public view; and to offer those congratulatory addresses, which the occasion seems to demand.

The education of youth has by the wisest and greatest of men been considered unspeakably important. To this the pious have directed their attention, and devoted their labors and wealth, as the surest mean of glorifying God; the patriotic and benevolent by promoting this have conferred the most signal and lasting benefits upon mankind.

Justly has the season of youth been compared with the natural spring. As the fruits of the year depend upon the improvement of the latter, so does the usefulness of life upon that of the former. The human mind is a soil naturally fruitful. But to yield valuable productions, it must be cultivated. Its stubbornness must be softened. The seeds of virtue and knowledge must be sown with care. The weeds and brambles, which spring up, must be eradicated with a gentle and a skilful hand; and the rising growth of every hopeful plant fondly cherished.

Though we do not subscribe in the fullest extent to the opinion of those, who contend, that mental endowments are distributed equally by nature to all men; yet we think ourselves warranted to say, that the difference of character among men is chiefly owing to their education. This is true with respect to their virtues and vices, their social qualities, and literary acquirements.

We readily grant, that man inherits a nature exceedingly prone to evil. But God has not left him without means to meliorate it. The great misfortune is, that for want of a seasonable or skilful application of these the force of bad habits unites to that of natural depravity, and the evil becomes in a manner incurable.

If we examine with strict scrutiny, how often can we trace the most incorrigible propensities to vice to wrong education. Some from their cradles are accustomed daily to behold the worst examples in those, to whom they naturally look for direction, and whom they are most prone to imitate. Some are early suffered to range at pleasure among the profane, the profligate, and abandoned, without parental or friendly counsel to guard them against contamination; and after

wards are left to practice without restraint the lessons, they thus learn. Some are accustomed to hear virtue inculcated with an aspect so stern and forbidding, that it seems an unlovely thing ; or their vices are corrected with such rigor, as serves rather to harden, than melt their hearts. How natural is it for tender minds in such circumstances to acquire a perverse bias.

But on the contrary general experience and observation evince the correctness of Solomon's maxim : " Train up a child in the way, he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Let him be taught not by dull and formal lectures on morality only, but by the lively examples of those, who have the forming of his tender mind, and whom he is most prone to reverence ; that they consider virtue the only sure foundation of honor and happiness, and seldom would he fail to love and pursue it. While daily taught, that vice of every species is hateful, disgraceful, and ruinous, let those, who declare this, evince by their own works, that they believe it so, and seldom would he fail to detest vice and avoid it. Let punishment, if ever it be inflicted, arise as much as possible out of the very nature of his offences, and it would tend to beget the same dread of them, as of itself.

To early habits, and injudicious methods of early instruction, is to be attributed, we conceive, in no small degree the prevailing scarcity of useful and ornamental literature. It is not just to plead in excuse for this, that nature has been niggardly in bestowing talents, except upon a chosen few ; nor can a large proportion of the citizens of this favored country plead with more justice want of leisure and means for improving their minds. Many must indeed labor for subsistence.

But many others are not compelled constantly to do this. Yet of these too frequently do we have to lament, that minds, fitted by nature for the noblest acquirements, are spoiled by early habits of indolence and dissipation. The consequences are, that in subsequent life they become slaves to sordid pursuits or sensual gratifications; being children in understanding, when men in years, they are the easy dupes of the artful and unprincipled; and possessing that influence, which birth or fortune gives, they are the most pestilent members of society. Aided by such men, and often too more through ignorance than real wickedness, fanaticism and hypocrisy have triumphed over rational piety, and anarchy over good order, or what is no less deplorable, unprincipled ambition over civil liberty; the ignorant and the villainous have been exalted in church and state, while men of talents and virtue have in both been neglected, discarded, or persecuted.

Would you possess security against these deplorable evils, the foundation must be laid in the education of the young. The first grand object is, that with the earliest dawns of reason they be taught to trace the immutable boundaries of right and wrong in human actions; and to feel a sense of religious obligation and future accountability. Another scarcely less important object is, that as their minds expand they be imbued with liberal knowledge. This gives to the human mind dignity, stability, and independence. Combined with religious principle it forms the character, on which the highest commendation was bestowed by the Son of God; the character, which unites the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.

7

The way to inculcate moral instruction with effect we have already noticed. Literary instruction, we conceive, would seldom be ineffectual, were it from the beginning skilfully conducted. Were the infant pupil stimulated to exertion by having the beauties of science gradually unfolded to his view, and its various uses explained, study instead of seeming a servile task would be thought a pursuit pleasing in itself, and in its consequences worthy of generous ambition. He was not an inexperienced nor unsuccessful instructor, who declared the right path of education to be "laborious indeed at the first ascent, but "else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sound on every side, that "the harp of Orpheus was not more charming." By cherishing a spirit of emulation among youth, by exciting a love of praise and dread of disgrace in their susceptible minds, they might be animated to surmount the first difficulties, which oppose their pursuit of learning; and the subsequent labor would continually afford increasing pleasure.

Considering the infant state of our country, perhaps it would be unjust to complain, that more liberal provision is not made for education. Schools, it is evident, are already numerous. But if we hence conclude, that learning flourishes in due proportion, we shall widely err. It is far otherwise.

This misfortune is perhaps owing to a great variety of causes. Several of these are obvious. Our common schools with respect to numbers are for the most part greatly overstocked. They consist of too great a variety, as to age and improvement. Parents too often dictate with respect to the modes of government and instruction; or suf-

fer their children to dictate to the instructor. Hence for a man of real abilities to pursue with success a regular system of instruction would in such circumstances be a Herculean task.

But a greater evil is, that many think themselves qualified for teachers, and are employed as such, who need to be taught the first rudiments of learning. In the mischiefs, produced by such in society, is lamentably verified the poet's observation ;

“ A little learning is a dang'rous thing.”

Besides all this, to such as have been suitably educated adequate encouragement is seldom offered, to induce them to make the instruction of common schools their permanent business. While engaged in it, they are anxiously looking forward to some more pleasant establishment. They too often undertake it for a temporary subsistence, while they are qualifying themselves for some other station. Even if they are faithful to their trust, they resign it by the time they have acquired that experience, which is necessary to render them highly useful.

These evils in common schools might doubtless in some measure be remedied ; but it is feared, they will hardly admit an entire cure. Schools upon a different establishment are therefore necessary, to which those may resort, who would pursue the higher branches of a good English education ; and especially those, who would become proficient in classical literature.

For this reason we ought to consider the establishment of academies with liberal endowments, and under proper regulations, as very auspicious to the interests of our rising country. Bad habits, it is true, may have been formed by many pre-

viously to entering these, to eradicate which may baffle every effort of the most skilful instructor. But separately from this consideration, we conceive, that most of the faults incident to common schools may be shunned. System may be observed in the various departments of instruction. Means of provoking emulation will never be wanting. Most of the pupils, being removed from the immediate inspection of their parents, will feel a greater degree of responsibility, and make greater exertions, than they would at home. The instructor too, being liberally compensated for his labors, will feel an interest in the prosperity of the seminary under his care, and in the improvement of his pupils, which from the hireling of a few weeks or months is not to be expected.

Time will allow us only briefly to speak of the principal branches of education, designed to employ those, who may resort to the academy in this place. To detain my auditors long upon these would be superfluous.

Among the studies pursued here, that of our own language will hold a distinguished rank. Of literary acquirements all should consider this the basis. Without it much useful knowledge can neither be acquired nor communicated. In this favored country, where no constitutional impediment hinders the humblest from rising to eminent distinction, every citizen ought to be ambitious to read, to write, and to speak, his native language, with correctness, purity, and elegance. For those, who are destitute of this accomplishment, to be promoted is but to render themselves conspicuous objects of contempt and ridicule. Permit me to add that this is an accomplishment, which the fair sex should hold in no mean estimation.

In view of the wise and discerning it gives brilliancy to all their other charms.

Mathematical learning constitutes another important branch of academical education. Acquaintance with the leading principles of this at least is indispensable to the correct performance of every kind of business. To the farmer, the mechanic, the merchant, and the gentleman, it is equally necessary. Those, who can pursue mathematical studies more extensively, will never have occasion to regret their labor, as lost. In them they will find a source of rational amusement. Separately from the consideration of their utility in various departments of life, by pursuing these the reasoning powers will be strengthened and the mind expanded.

Geography is at once a very pleasing and useful study. It supplies without labor, expense or hazard, the advantages of travelling abroad, which but few possess. While secure at home with our friends and social enjoyments, it brings us acquainted with the relative situations of other countries, their natural and artificial productions, and the characters of their inhabitants. To understand history, travels, or even the common news of the day, acquaintance with this is absolutely necessary. Connected with this is astronomy, of which by the help of a proper apparatus so much knowledge may be acquired even by young pupils, as to give them a general idea of the system of worlds, with which our own is connected ; to correct the vulgar errors, into which they may have fallen, respecting the phenomena of nature ; and lead them to admiring views of the Creator of the universe.

Another department of instruction, for which we hope this seminary will not be undis-

tinguished among its sisters, is that of the learned languages. This is a branch of education, which we are accustomed to hear derided. Classical studies are represented as dry and tedious, and classical knowledge is declared to be useless. Before we join in this clamor, it will be well for us to inquire who they are, that raise it. Are they those, who have industriously spent many a tedious year poring over the volumes of Greece and Rome, that declare these studies insipid? No; from such we ever hear them applauded. Are they those, whose minds are richly stored with the treasures of antient literature, who declare it to be all worthless lumber? So far from it, they are such as scarcely know the rules of a Greek or Latin grammar. Let us allow their judgment all the weight, to which it is entitled. But let us not forget, that those moderns, who have adorned the republic of letters; whose works are held as standards of good taste, correct reasoning, and rich sentiment, were deeply versed in antient lore, and formed after antient models.

We have the authority of the greatest names, and the experience of the most enlightened ages, to sanction our assertion, when we say, whoever would lay a sure foundation for eminence in any learned profession should consider an extensive acquaintance with classical literature an indispensable requisite.

For the divine to be destitute of this is to be dependent upon man for the sense of the sacred oracles; and to be liable to deliver for doctrines of God the inventions of men, if he attempt critically to explain the scriptures. Unfortunately we often find men in the character of religious teachers dogmatically declaring the sense of the obscurest passages of the Bible, who know not even the

alphabet of the languages, in which it was delivered to mankind. Their ignorance and vanity might provoke our smiles, but that to a serious mind it is matter of sorrow, that a sacred cause should suffer reproach, and men's souls be endangered, by such blind guides.

For the physician to be ignorant of the learned languages is to be ignorant of the language of his profession. Without classical knowledge he cannot understand the terms of his art. The lawyer, who is destitute of this, can never in the walks of his profession pass the threshold of the temple of fame.

The gentleman of fortune and leisure, who has a taste sufficiently improved to relish the real beauties of literature, will find in perusing the authors of antiquity a rational and noble amusement. The statesman and the philanthropist will find in them treasures of wisdom. Conversing with the good and wise in their own language, they will naturally catch the flame of patriotism and benevolence, that glowed in their breasts ; and transfer to themselves the noble traits of character, with which they were adorned.

To have said so much may suffice respecting the literary pursuits, to which this seminary invites. May I be permitted to notice one thing more, which it is to be feared is in our schools too much neglected ; that is moral and religious instruction. At the season of life, when youths are sent to schools of this sort, the leading principles of morality might be inculcated with much effect. Some short system upon the subject studied by them, and treasured up in their memories, might be productive of lasting benefits. Here too it might lead to the happiest consequences daily to read a book, by too many considered obsolete and

neglected ; I mean the Bible. By accustoming them to do this, and daily to worship with reverence and solemnity the God of heaven, we might hope to see those christian virtues take root and flourish, whose fruit is peace on earth, and immortal felicity in heaven.

I fear, generous auditors, that I have too long trespassed upon your patience, and have ill requited your goodness. I will close after a few brief remarks.

INHABITANTS OF THIS TOWN AND VICINITY,

To behold commodious and elegant mansions rising, where lately was a dreary wilderness ; to behold the securities, the comforts, and delights, of civilized life enjoyed, where beasts of the forest, and men no less fierce than they, formerly roamed ; to behold the refined and liberal arts supplanting the barbarity and ignorance of savage life ; and the divine religion of the Prince of Peace taking the place of horrid superstition ; must afford exalted pleasure to every good and generous mind. Permit the speaker to congratulate you upon the flourishing state of things among and around you ; and especially to offer you his warm congratulation upon your possession of means to train your rising hopes to virtue and usefulness.

The relation, which he sustains to the literary institution here established, causes him to feel peculiarly solicitous for its welfare. He would beg leave to remind you, who may entrust pupils to his care, that much of his success will depend upon impressions made, and habits formed, at home. The aid of those of you, among whom his pupils are to reside, will be necessary to carry the laudable design of the institution into effect.

Much good or much harm may be done by your influence and example. He would however express his confidence that this caution is needless ; that you are tenderly alive to your own best interest, which is inseparably connected with that of the institution ; that you are no less solicitous, that virtue, sobriety, and good order should be prominent traits in the character of your town, than he is, that they should mark that of the seminary under his care.

GENEROUS PATRONS OF THE ACADEMY,

Much praise is due to our civil fathers for their readiness to incorporate and endow this nursery of learning. But to your liberal and spirited exertions are we indebted for its present respectable appearance. Without your fostering care it must have languished, and many years have elapsed, before it could possess its present vigor and stability. May you be rewarded by the gratitude, the improvement, and usefulness of its children. A richer reward generous minds will not require. Encouraged by your example may new benefactors arise, who shall supply by their liberality what is yet wanting.

RESPECTED BOARD OF TRUSTEES,

I would tender to you my thanks for the honor you have done me by confiding this infant seminary of learning to my care. Destitute of long experience in the business, which devolves upon me by virtue of your choice, I might have shrunk from the task, but for reliance upon your wisdom to direct me, your promptness to aid my exertions, and your candor to pardon faults, which though

not intentional may sometimes be unavoidable. Trusting that this reliance will not be vain, I accept your appointment, not without diffidence of my own talents, and deep sense of my responsibility.

Finally may the Author of every good gift, and Governor of the world, take the institution under his holy protection. May he preside over it and bless it. May he furnish its instructors and overseers with wisdom and discretion, and feed its pupils with knowledge and understanding. May infidelity and impiety, vice and ignorance, with all their baleful train be banished far from its walls. May it foster none, who reverence and love not the God of their fathers and the Redeemer of men. May the plants nurtured here bring forth those fruits, which shall make glad the cities of our God. May GORHAM ACADEMY be distinguished for learning, virtue, and good order, till time shall be no longer.

FINIS.