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Temperance

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TEMPERANCE.

An Address read before the Temperance Society of William & Mary College by Beverley Tucker, Professor of Law. Published at the request of the Society.*

I regret, gentlemen, that my engagements have so long delayed the fulfilment of the duty to which you have been pleased to appoint me. My regret is proportioned to the interest I take in your association, and my desire to show myself not unworthy of the favorable opinion manifested in your selection of myself for that duty. But even now, I beg you to accept my congratulations on what you have done, and my thanks, on behalf of our venerable *alma mater*, for the service you have rendered to her.

It is not my purpose to expatiate on the evils of intemperance, or the general advantages of temperance societies. Were I so inclined, I should find myself forestalled by innumerable publications, in which every argument has been exhausted, every exhortation urged, every anecdote collected. I

* We have departed from our rule in giving a place to the above *Address*; but as the duties of the learned author have, of late years, rendered his contributions like "angels' visits," we would fain woo him again into our columns.—[*Ed. Mess.*]

have no mind to steal the thoughts, or to repeat the words of other men, or to state facts, however striking, on doubtful evidence. It is in bad taste to put forth statements which stagger the faith of the hearer; and exhortations which urge too strongly the sluggish zeal, are apt to "return void" to him that utters them. The credulous simplicity that so often characterizes the best men, sometimes betrays them into indiscretions which injure the cause they advocate. Guileless themselves, they apprehend no guile in others; and, in perfect sincerity of heart, relate, as unquestionable, every anecdote they find in circulation. So too the *intemperate* zeal, with which some men advocate the cause of temperance, and urge on others the example of their own tastes and habits, sometimes provokes reaction. Men are reminded of the exhortation of the Apostle, "to be temperate in all things;" and they feel, that, in the example of those who are so, there is a beauty that needs no eloquence to recommend it.

Let me not be suspected of undervaluing temperance societies, or their labors in the cause of human happiness and virtue. Few men perhaps estimate them more highly: none prize them more. As a matter of *taste*, intemperance is not more disgusting to any man on earth, than myself. As a *moral evil*, no man looks upon it with more abhorrence. As an *enemy to peace, order, intelligence, industry*, and all the *elements of prosperity*, no man deems it more deserving of restraint and censure. But it is superfluous to dwell on truths denied by none who are not deaf to the teachings of reason and experience.

Of the general evils of intemperance therefore, I do not propose to speak, nor shall I offer more than a passing remark on that worst form which the deadly mischief ever can assume; when, like the canker-worm, it insinuates itself into the bud of the youthful mind, and eats the core, and forever arrests its farther development. I should be uncandid, gentlemen, did I pretend to think that many of you had been in actual danger, of this awful destiny. The dissipations of a college-life, are rarely attended with such a result. The very associations that tempt collegians to irregularity, are restraints on any disposition to habitual intemperance. Instances of young men who contract, at college, that degrading habit, which sinks man to the level of the brute, are quite rare. It is too revolting to the self-respect and pride of character, always so conspicuous among young gentlemen assembled together at such a place. This and other powerful influences, are always in action to restrain such as may be predisposed to intemperance. The unfortunate youth, sees that he is forfeiting all claim to academic honors: he finds himself cast out of refined society; and perceives that he is sinking into contempt, even with those who sometimes participate in his excesses. He

has every inducement to resist temptation, and struggle to reclaim himself; and, if he basely shrinks from the effort, he betakes himself to secret drinking, and endeavors to hide his shame from his companions.

I am far, gentlemen, very far from considering an academic life as one of extraordinary danger to the habits and morals of youth. It has its trials indeed, but they are trials to which all men are to be sooner or later exposed, and which most men encounter under circumstances far more disadvantageous. The man whose first acquaintance with the exhilarating glass is made, when it offers itself as an antidote to the corroding cares of his more advanced life, is sorely tried. It comes to soothe the anguish of a bruised spirit, and he receives it as a friend. It stretches forth a hand to lift him from the abyss of despair, and he clutches it with the eagerness of a drowning man. It comes to deaden the sense of present suffering, to blot out from his mind the memory of the irreparable past, and to blind him to the fearful approach of the inevitable future. He has indeed *been told* that death is in the cup, and that in the end it will surely aggravate the ills it proposes to alleviate. But he does not *know* this, and having nothing else to hope for, he hopes this may not be true. Buried in solitude; hiding his afflictions from the common eye; why should he suffer, when the Comforter is at hand, whose cheering influence may lighten his afflictions? In the night he tosses on his bed; his pillow is wet with tears; and sleep—

"Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care;
Balm of hurt minds," denies her balm to him.

When there is none to pity, none to soothe, and none to censure, shall he forbear to steep his senses in forgetfulness with the oblivious draught that courts his lip? Happy! happy he, whose first struggle with this temptation is not postponed till the authority of parents and tutors and the influence of generous emulation are no more, and till the petty troubles that do but dim the sunshine of youth, are exchanged for that deep midnight of the mind, which no ray of hope can penetrate, and which despair peoples with the fiends, and lights up with the fires of hell.

Gentlemen; if I were called on to say wherein consists the chief advantage of an academic education, I should place it precisely here. Speaking from the experience of a life, of which nearly half has been spent in connexion with this institution, I am satisfied that it teaches nothing so valuable as self-knowledge, and the habits of self-command, self-respect, and self-confidence, which it is our study to establish in the mind of the student. I think I may speak as well for my brother-professors as for myself, when I say, that never do we feel so sure that our labors will not be in vain, as when we see that the minds of our young friends are awakened to a sense of the value of these things.

Little does he know of life, who is not aware that its sorest trials, its most formidable dangers, are to be encountered in the struggle with our own passions. These are the fiery steeds that drag the chariot which youth is so eager to mount, and which is to bear us all, whether we will or no, through all the burning signs of the zodiac of life's eventful day. Like the son of Clymene, all of us have to pass between the threatening horns of the bull, and the bloody jaws of the lion, and the long ensnaring arms of the poisonous scorpion. Each of us must contend, as best he may, with the eager spirit of the winged steeds that stand impatiently pawing at the barrier, and filling the air with the fiery breath of their neighings. Alas! how many are there, whose eagerness to enter on this perilous career, is, like that of Phæton, exactly proportioned to their incompetency to its tasks and dangers! To what destiny it shall lead, depends on the firmness and skill of the hand that holds the reins. Whether we shall plod heavily along, unnoticed to the goal; whether we shall set fire to the earth, leaving a track of seared desolation to perpetuate a curse on our memory; whether we shall impiously war against heaven, and provoke God's thunders to strike us down in mid career; or, mounting up on the wings of the morning, shall run our bright course along the appointed path of usefulness and duty, blest of God, and a blessing to the world, depends on ourselves.

At what hazard does he enter on this dangerous journey of life, who, kept in strict irresponsible pupilage, to the very hour that suddenly establishes him in all the prerogatives of manhood, has the reins of self-government for the first time committed to his unpractised hand. What father does not tremble, as he utters the last admonitions which are to prepare his son for the dangers he is about to encounter? What father does not wish that the days of pupilage could be yet a little while prolonged? What father's heart does not echo the tender expostulations, the touching appeals of Apollo to his impatient and ambitious son? How earnestly does he wish that a small portion of parental authority might still be allowed him; an authority to advise, if not to command—to censure, if not to condemn—to restrain, if not to control—to rebuke, if not to punish. But no. The fatal hour has come; the wand of authority is broken; the word of power is hushed; and the impatient youth, impatient by reason of his prolonged pupilage, rushes unprepared to the exercise of all the rights, and the enjoyment of all the privileges, and (as he fondly imagines) the pleasures of manhood, and absolute freedom.

Gentlemen; that season of preparation which the anxious father wishes thus to employ—that mitigated authority which would exercise the unpractised youth in his first essays at the duties of manhood, without exposing him to the irreparable

evils that await its errors, it is the office of academic discipline to supply. Experience is the only school of practical wisdom, and it is proverbially a dear school. To him who takes his first lessons after he has arrived at that time of life, when mistakes are visited with loss of character and loss of fortune, it is dear indeed. Then the protecting disabilities of the law are removed: then the responsibility of the father is withdrawn; then the sympathy with which men look on the errors of youth, no longer pleads for him; then the paternal roof no longer affords shelter to the erring prodigal; and the respectability of a father's name is no longer a screen, behind which the disgrace of the son can lie hid, until it is forgotten.

“In naked helplessness, and aching pride,
He bears the un pitying blast on every side;”

and when he would retrieve his error, there is none to guide his footsteps through the labyrinth in which he is involved. Where shall he find the unquestionable sincerity of a father's advice? where the stern fidelity of a tutor's admonitions? Who now will take the trouble to understand his affairs; to think for him; to watch over him; to supply the defects of his knowledge; to counsel his inexperience; to rebuke his follies; to restrain his waywardness; to soothe, and cheer, and reanimate his wounded spirit?

These considerations have long since led me to the conviction, that there is decided benefit to the student in a system of discipline, that leaves him, for the most part, the regulator of the *details* of his college life. The responsibilities under which he assumes, to a certain extent, the guardianship of his own morals, and the formation of his own habits, afford a reasonable security, that he will be faithful to himself in the discharge of this important task. Entrusted with a considerable portion of personal independence, before he has learned to be impatient of restraint, and restive under authority, a slight admonition, a hint at reproof, are often enough to keep him in the path of duty, while, at the same time, he is left to feel himself free, and to enjoy the success of his struggle against temptation, as a triumph achieved by himself.

In these struggles, and in these triumphs, is one of the most important parts of education. They teach self-command: they inspire self-confidence, and self-respect, and these make the Man. Idleness and dissipation are the serpents that steal into the cradle of infant genius; and, in his strife with these, is the first trial—the first exercise of his fortitude and prowess. He strangles the enemies that seek to destroy him there, and thenceforward he treads upon the adder and the asp unharmed.

In your association, gentlemen, I see an instance of this: hateful and destructive as intemperance is, the security that you have provided for yourselves against that disgusting vice, owes its chief value to the fact, that it is devised, established, and

consecrated by yourselves. The prudence that detected your danger—the practical wisdom that adopted the remedy, are both deserving praise; but what are these in comparison with the *resolution* that adopted, and the *fortitude* and *manliness* that sustain you in it?

I am aware that some, not remarkable for profundity of thought, are pleased to deride the idea of the good that comes by the experience of evil. To such the wisdom of the Creator, in preparing man for the holiness and happiness of heaven, by his sojourn in this vale of sin and sorrow, may look like absurdity. To me it seems to present an instructive example, of which they, who are called to aid him in his great work of preparing the hearts and minds of his creatures for his service, would do well to avail themselves.

“Satan desires to have us all, that he may sift us as wheat;” and it is in that sore trial that the character acquires the strength and consistency which the Saviour sought to establish in the chosen disciple whom he had just before selected and planted as the corner-stone of his church on earth.

The beginning of wisdom is self-knowledge. It awakens to repentance. It is the guide to reformation. Perceiving our errors “we are cleansed from secret faults,” to which self-love might have blinded us to the end. The lessons taught in this severe school, are infinitely various, and suited to all the infinite variety of human character. To each man they teach that which it is most important that he should know. To humble, unpretending merit, they impart self-respect, encouraging it to emerge from obscurity, and signalize itself in the tasks of virtue and usefulness. To rash presumption, they administer rebukes that admonish it to hide its insufficiency behind the semblance of modesty. They teach confidence to the strong, and prudence to the weak; and, at the same time, they apply to both the salutary discipline of opinion, which prescribes forbearance to the one, and inspires the other with a sense of security.

Gentlemen; it is common to speak of youth as the season when the passions are most intense. I neither affirm nor deny this. It may or may not be so. That their ebullitions are then most frequent and conspicuous, I doubt not. Not regulated by experience, not restrained by reason, youth, given up to absolute independence and self-command, rarely exhibits any thing but instances of degrading and mischievous self-indulgence. But, even in such cases, we seldom find that any one passion takes the entire mastery of the whole man. Ambition fights against debauchery: the love of pleasure against the love of money. Vanity struggles with sloth; and Love, the most active and seducing of the whole, rebukes every thing that is degrading, and stimulates to all that is graceful and honorable. And Love itself! what is it in the young heart just awakened to its influence?

A fire that warms, but burns not; a pleasing pang, whose agony delights: a sylph-like form, that spreads its gossamer-wing in the eye of beauty; and feeds on the balmy sighs of hope, and is chilled and dissipated by the cold breath of indifference. I am aware that I am here treading on dangerous ground, and may provoke a spirit of opposition to all I have advanced, or may advance. I dare say there are few among you, who have not already conceived a passion, which, to him that feels it, seems immortal. Few arrive at full manhood, without having contracted a disease of the heart, which the victim expects to carry to his grave. And why not? Who would not die so sweet a death? How can the passion cease, when he hugs it to his bosom as the joy, not the torment, of his life? The thing is impossible. But when Coquetry throws aside her mask; when the art that was employed to ensnare the suitor, is no longer exerted to retain the disregarded lover; “when nods and becks and wreathed smiles,” are exchanged for slighting neglect—what then? What though the “Sapphire’s blaze may cease to shine” beside the eye of Phillis?—what though it is “jet black, and like a hawk, and winna let a body be?” Is there not something more touching, more tender, in the dewy glance that steals from the half transparent lid of Chloe’s, “like the clear blue sky, just trembling through a cloud of purest white,” or as if a violet peeped out from beneath a new-fallen snowflake? Is there no reaction in offended self-love, to kindle resentment, and suggest the thought

“If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?”

Is there nothing in the testimony of the flattering mirror to remind the graceful youth, that if she went, another will? In short, whatever be the force of youthful passion, is there nothing in the versatility of youth to divert its energy, or elude the destroying blow? Who would sacrifice life, health, honor, peace of mind, self-respect, or even the cold sense of duty, for any *one* object, when surrounded by ten thousand others, all lawful, all within reach, all glittering with the dews of life’s young morning, all sparkling in its rosy light?

Gentlemen; the passage from childhood to age is the transition from the belief that all is bright and beautiful and good, to the conviction that all is vanity. In this transition, the passions, one by one, wither and perish, as the worthlessness of their respective objects is made manifest by experience. But the desire of happiness remains, and the heart, as eagerly as ever, asks, “who will show it any good?” Thus the force of each expiring passion is distributed among those which survive, until at last, when only one remains, that one burns with all the intensity of all the rest. The difference between him who has lived to know that there is nothing good under the sun, and him who has but ascertained the worthlessness of all

things *but one*, on which alone his hopes of happiness are centred, is the difference between a soul prepared for heaven, and one ready to sell itself to perdition. Look at AMBITION as it flames in the breast of a man, who, having accomplished all the subordinate purposes of life, has outlived every domestic enjoyment, without having outlived his powers. In the heart of the husband and father, it held divided empire. To the widowed and childless old man, it is the fierce and remorseless tyrant that prompts him to trample on the hopes and hearts of others. "What he inflicts he feels." Look at AVARICE. Why is it sordid and craving, just in proportion as the miser has none to love, none to inherit his wealth? The reason is the same. All other passions have been lopped away, and the whole vigor of the mind has gone to nourish this.

Now turn to the other extreme of life. See childhood's furious rage and clamorous grief! If Passion have power to kill, shall that boy live to manhood? Even while you ask the question, it is answered in a beaming smile of love and joy. Some new and cheap delight has soothed his grief, and won his heart. So truly says the poet—

"The tear, down childhood's cheek that flows,
Is like the dew-drop on the rose;
When next the summer-breeze sweeps by
And waves the bush, the flower is dry."

In short, the business of education is, *at first*, to play off the passions and appetites against each other. When Reason dawns, her light is well employed, to show the essential difference between objects until then equally coveted, because equally valued. But it is long before Reason becomes strong enough to contend alone with Passion. She must engage the alliance of rival passions, till, having used them to conquer, and finally to destroy each other, she may establish her serene empire over the mind.

The most important, and the most hopeful struggle, is that which takes place in the season of life commonly devoted to academic education. The heart just then begins to perceive beauty and attraction in objects, which can only be attained by virtuous effort. The newly awakened spirit of independence urges to those exertions which are necessary to secure it. The nascent love of Fame points to her temple, seated on an eminence which none can climb without toil—approachable only by a path which none can thread, unless led by the hand of Virtue. Then too, is first felt the charm of Beauty's favoring smile; and even this, intoxicating though it be, prompts, as I have said, to all that is decorous—all that is graceful—all that is honorable.

At such a moment, when the prevailing passions of the hour covet the guidance of Reason, and offer themselves in aid of her instructions, is it fit that she should decline the proffered alliance, and commit the whole discipline of the mind, during that

most critical season, to a system of coercion? Should she not rather seize the occasion to imbue the heart with a lively scorn of every thing that is base, with disgust and loathing at every thing that is impure, brutal, or degrading? Is not that the moment to place before generous and aspiring youth the Circean cup, that transforms the image of God into a beast, that, with his own hands, he may dash it to the ground, and trample on its fragments?

Thus we reason. It is in this spirit, that those who have charge of the education of youth, choose to commit the regulation of their own conduct, in great measure, to the youth themselves. We think it enough to bring in aid of Reason, and their own nobler passions, our candid advice, and frank admonitions; and, in the last resort, to apply the extreme measure of our academic censures, and to cut off, and banish from among us, those whom these admonitions, *aided by Reason*, and AMBITION, and the LOVE OF HONORABLE INDEPENDENCE, and the LOVE OF WOMAN, cannot keep from the foul sty of brutish debauchery. Let them go! Such is the sentence of law, and I am persuaded there is not one among you, whose heart does not ratify it.

Why am I thus persuaded? It is because you have had some little experience of the evil. It is because you have been permitted to taste for yourselves of the apples of Sodom, and to find that, though fair to look upon, they are ashes to the taste.

But is this all? No gentlemen. You have achieved a triumph over yourselves. You have gained the present mastery over an appetite, which, whatever may be said of other passions, grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. He who yields to it in youth, may vainly contend against it in after life. You can never know that you are safe, unless, like the strong man of Crotona, you daily try your strength upon it. If you shrink from the weight of the calf, you must be crushed under the burden of the full grown ox.

After all that I have said, you will hardly be surprised when I add, that I am more pleased than otherwise that your association is temporary. It is long enough to give you experience of its benefits; and, while the sense of these is fresh in your minds, it is to be hoped it may be renewed. It is long enough to serve as an exercise of self-denial, self-command, and fortitude. You will be perhaps the better for an early opportunity of making a new trial of yourselves. It is perhaps as long a term as it may be prudent to engage for. You cannot determine too soon, nor bind yourselves too solemnly to conform in all things, and through life, to the law of God, and to the laws of your country. But when a man proposes to devise for himself a rule of action going beyond these, and to impose on himself restraints not prescribed by these; it becomes him to consider whether the youth of eighteen has a right to bind, by a law of his own

making, the conduct of the man of forty. It is prudent to consider whether the mature man will not think of this, and absolve himself by the plea of infancy. He who, in early youth, makes such an engagement, will not be long in discovering, that to this conclusion he may come at last; and, anticipating that his pledge will, sooner or later, be recalled, he has the less difficulty in making up his mind to recall it at once.

Thus you may see, gentlemen, that when I say that I like your association for being temporary, it is because I have more confidence that it will live out its allotted time, than if it professed to be perpetual. Irrevocable resolutions, eternal friendships, and unchangeable love, all belong to the same category. Had your association been of that character, I should not have been surprised if some few members had already renounced the pledge, finding their excuse in the thought I have just expressed. As it is, all are left without excuse. And yet, in my view of your pledge, its great value is that you are free to break it from day to day, and that it is thus from day to day an ever-recurring trial of your strength, fortitude, and self-command. In violating, or renouncing it, you will injure none but yourselves. You have but to plead *infirmity of purpose, impotence of mind, a want of self-respect*, and of a *proper sense of honor*, and an *indifference to the opinion of the world*, and none can complain that you do *him* wrong. All that can be said will be, "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that washed to her wallowing in the mire." And what of that! To him who can make up his mind to lie in such a bed, what others may say must be a matter of small moment.

Gentlemen; I hope better things of you. For, in view of the circumstances that surround you, how can I fear that you will be so unwise, so imbecile, so dead to honor, as, for the most paltry of all enjoyments, to forego the advantages of your present position—to lose the opportunity of intellectual improvement and academic distinction—to disappoint the cherished hopes of parents and friends at home—to forfeit the respect of your associates—to lose your place in a society which tasks its resources to minister delight to the student's life—and to exchange the favoring smile of beauty for the glance of scorn and the frown of disgust? When good and evil are both set before you—not in remote prospect, but in immediate enjoyment or suffering, you cannot hesitate which to choose. "You have begun well: what hinders you to continue?" Go on then. "Be not weary of well doing." Persevere to the end; and, if you carry away nothing else from this place, you will bear with you the honors of victory in the first struggle of that long warfare between Reason and Passion, which is to continue through life, and on the event of which depend all hopes of happiness in this life, and in the life to come.