

1847

Judge Tucker's Address

N. Beverley Tucker

Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "Judge Tucker's Address" (1847). *Faculty Publications*. Paper 1564.
<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1564>

JUDGE TUCKER'S ADDRESS.

[Published by request of the Students.]

Once more, young Gentlemen, it has devolved on me to speak the parting words, which William and Mary is accustomed to address to her Sons, when, leaving her sheltering walls, they prepare to enter on the bustling scenes of Life. The occasion is always interesting. The thought that so many that we have known in all the intimacy, that characterises the intercourse between the Professors and Students of this Institution, are about to leave us forever: that of these not a few may never again cross our path in life, and that of some perhaps no tidings for good or ill may ever reach us, impresses the mind with sad and solemn awe. Add to this the great probability that I may not live to perform again the task to which I am now called—the probability indeed, (for, at my age it is not at all improbable,) that my voice may be now heard for the last time within these walls, and that none of you may ever see my face again, and you may readily believe that I feel more than common responsibility in now addressing you. There are moments and circumstances in every man's life calculated to give more than common weight to his words; and none so imposing as when, standing on the verge of time, he gives his last breath in warning and admonition to those he leaves behind. Death is eloquent though dumb; and, when he speaks through lips already touched by his consecrating, truth-inspiring hand, what ear is not bent to hear his words, what heart is not alive to the faint breathings of his eloquence! How solemn the responsibility of the father in using that last opportunity to speak the words of wisdom to his children! How solemn the responsibility of those who hear them! How solemn is mine at this moment!

Gentlemen; of all the associations which have connected me with life one only now remains which has endured so long as my relation to this institution. No spot on earth can call up so many recollections of the distant past as that where I now stand. The sports and strifes of my boyhood, the emulations of youth, the labors of declining age—this room is the scene of all. It was my grammar school. About the time I passed into the higher classes it became the lecture room for these. It

was the chamber of our debating societies; and here have I heard the first essays at eloquence from men whose voices have since influenced the destinies of nations, and whose names are famous in the world's history. The cogent reasoning of Johnson; the fervid eloquence of Leigh; the acuteness of Stanard; the logic of Barbour; the sound good sense of one whom it may not become me to name, but who even then united the simplicity of the boy, which he has never lost, with the wisdom and prudence of age, all these rise up before me in their accustomed places, as my eye glances around the room. Jurists, Statesmen and Warriors—here was the nursery of their greatness: here was the arena of their first struggle for fame. The most distinguished ornaments of the bar and bench; the men who have been prominent in the councils of the State and of the Union; the chieftain whose triumphant banner now hangs, like a thunder-cloud, on the brow of the Sierra Madre, threatening destruction to the City of Montezuma, all were my compeers here. How can the scene of such recollections be other than a hallowed spot to me? How can the institutions, around which they cluster, ever cease to be an object of deep and unabating interest? Why else am I here? I who had made myself a home in a distant land, and identified myself with the rising fortunes of a State now great and prosperous—Why am I here? It is that I had left behind me here, the scene of all these reminiscences, and also something yet dearer to my heart than these, and something for which I looked in vain elsewhere.

What was that?—Gentlemen there is a peculiarity common to the character of this Institution and to that of the State of Virginia, which has often attracted observation, and provoked the enquiry which of these might be considered as the cause of the other? To my mind the answer is to be found in the history of the events which were passing in the mother country just 200 years ago. It was then that the banner of loyalty, which, in the beginning of the great rebellion, had waved triumphant over the enemies of the crown, began to droop—ere long to be trailed in the dust—trampled down and dishonored. It was then that multitudes of gallant men who knew no compromise of honor, who could not learn how to palter in a double sense, to unswear allegiance, and to show their fidelity to their king by warring against his life, were borne down in the strife, and, driven from their native land, sought shelter in the ever loyal colony of Virginia. More than half the inhabitants came over about that time and they brought with them all the chivalrous gallantry, all the self-renouncing generosity, all the unwavering fidelity to plighted faith, to which they had sacrificed every thing at home. They had their faults, but falsehood was not among them. They had their weaknesses, but fickleness and fear were not of the num-

kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom"—deeply imbued with "that sensibility of honor which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage while it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness."

Gentlemen; it was by these men and for the education of the sons of these men that William and Mary College was founded. That it might not disappoint their wishes, it was indispensable that, whatever else was taught, it should be a school of HONOR. Without this it might have wasted its resources in the hopeless attempt to impart the benefits of education to the Indian; but it could receive no countenance from that class of men whose confidence is indispensable to the success and usefulness of an academic institution. Thus did William and Mary College receive the impress of their character, and take the lead in that great experiment in the discipline of the youthful mind, which substitutes candid appeals to the better feelings of the pupil, and a frank reliance on his honor, for espionage, severity and the restraints of the cloister. The experiment has succeeded so well that the example has to a certain extent been every where followed. But William and Mary still kept in advance of all the rest. Emboldened by success, she went on steadily, to establish a system altogether her own. You, Gentlemen, need not be told what that system is. You need not be told of the unreserved confidence reposed in the honor of the Student who is thereby made a co-worker with his preceptors in the moral training and discipline of his mind. While nothing is required of him but attention to his studies, nothing is forbidden but duelling, which might be fatal to his life, and gambling and drunkenness and tavern-haunting, which must be pernicious to his health, his intellect and his morals. To his own sense of duty and interest, fortified by his plighted word, the enforcement of this scanty but important code is committed, while academic censures are only resorted to in extreme and rare cases. How faithfully the Professors fulfil the implied engagement on their part, to rely confidently on the honor thus pledged, is known to all who have come under their discipline. Were they so disingenuous as to establish covertly a system of espionage—did they themselves act, in any degree, the part of spies,—did they not even wink hard, lest they might seem to doubt the honor on which they profess to rely, they would have had no right to complain if their plan had proved a complete failure. But while they openly and in good faith acted on the professed conviction, that the son of a Virginia Gentleman must be incapable of forfeiting his plighted word, they had a right to feel assured that their reliance on his honor would not be disappointed. Gentlemen, *it has not been disappointed.* It is not given to all to do credit to

their instructors by their attainments in *Literature and Science*—but when have the Sons of William and Mary dishonored *her*, by dishonoring *themselves*? Which of them has at any time shown himself *base, false to his word, treacherous to his friend—dishonest in his dealings*? The result of the experiment has been as brilliant as its conception was grand and noble.

But, Gentlemen, I repeat that William and Mary is not to be accounted the *author* of this experiment. In making it she did but become the exponent of the character of the People to which she owed her existence. She *could* not do otherwise; nor *while Virginia remains what she was, can she* do otherwise. Some sort of preparation is required to qualify a Student to enter any academic Institution. In some it is a smattering of the Classics—or a knowledge of the rudiments of Mathematics. William and Mary true to her original vocation, demands only a *love of truth, and a sense of honor.* These are all she asks. To him who comes thus prepared, she holds herself ready to afford all the benefits of Education. All not so qualified *mistake their place*, when they enter an institution founded on such principles. They can get nothing here but disgrace and ruin of body, mind and purse. But God be thanked, the spirit of the Gentleman reigns, as it ever has reigned, paramount in the minds of Virginians; and far—far from us be the day, when fathers shall cease to imbue the minds of their sons with principles and sentiments which shall make a breach of faith,—the forfeiture of the plighted word,—an abuse of confidence,—or any other form of baseness possible to the Youth of this proud old State. Should that day ever come, the glory of Virginia will have passed away forever; and William and Mary must then govern herself by those grim maxims which make up the code of all power "not standing on its own honor and the honor of those subjected to it." No longer a school of Honor, she must be given over to prying Yankee pedagogues, with their spies and domiciliary visits, and their petty regulations extending to the down-lying and the uprising—the cut of the coat and the color of the hat, and all those vexatious minutiae which are meant to make the Student sensible of his mistake, if at any time he should fancy himself a gentleman.

Gentlemen;—William and Mary is what Virginia made her. Virginia *continues* what she is in part because the spirit of her ancient chivalry *continues* to act on her through William and Mary. Each is at once cause and effect, and each is necessary to the other. William and Mary is the Palladium of Virginia, to be guarded as the ark of her safety. Let her distribute to others the hoarded wealth of her literary fund—let her build up other universities and foster other colleges, and waste her resources in the unprofitable scheme of

establishing free-schools which none will attend—*We shall not complain.* Let but the *Virginia Gentleman*, true to the untarnished honor of his lineage, train up his Sons to walk in the footsteps of his fathers and emulate their character—courteous and manly—gentle and not fearful—incapable of falsehood or prevarication, and animated by an ever wakeful vigilance of Honor—let this be so, and *William and Mary* will stand, and *Virginia* will stand—and the *principles* so long held *sacred* by *Virginia* will stand—and all will stand together in Prosperity and Honor.

Amen—So be it.

You, young Gentlemen, are our Epistle to *Virginia*. Go forth and proclaim to her Sons that in this Temple of Honor, the sacred fire snatched by our fathers from the altar on which they had offered up their all, is still preserved. Let your lips speak it. Let your lives proclaim it; and may your success in all things be a new illustration of the great truth, “that he who will save his life shall lose it, but he who will lay down his life for the truth, to him shall be added Honor and Peace and Happiness, both here and hereafter.” Honor is the Shield with which your Alma Mater bucklers you for the strifes of the world, and like the Spartan Mother, her words are “Return with it or on it.”