1839

A Lecture, Delivered to the Law Class of William and Mary College, June 17, 1839, Being the Last of a Course of Lectures on the Philosophy of Government and Constitutional Law

N. Beverley Tucker

Repository Citation
Tucker, N. Beverley, "A Lecture, Delivered to the Law Class of William and Mary College, June 17, 1839, Being the Last of a Course of Lectures on the Philosophy of Government and Constitutional Law" (1839). Faculty Publications. 1345.
https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1345

Copyright © 1839 by the authors. This article is brought to you by the William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository.
https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs
A LECTURE,
Delivered to the Law Class of William and Mary College, June 17, 1839, being the last of a course of Lectures on the Philosophy of Government and Constitutional Law. By Judge Beverley Tucker.*

I know not, gentlemen, whether a desire to recall some of the thoughts presented in the course of lectures which I am about to conclude, is suggested by a sense of duty to you or to myself. It may be due to both. Among you, I flatter myself, there are some whose partial friendship might dispose them to adopt my opinions with too much confidence. These, I am especially bound to guard against any evil consequences of a sentiment which so justly deserves my gratitude. On the other hand, it has been often my duty to present considerations favorable to opinions which my own mind does not decidedly adopt; and in the minds of those who reject them I may stand charged with errors from which I am free.

In the progress of these lectures, I have endeavored to guard against both of these evils. You will remember, that in the outset, I said, that I would not flatter you with a promise, that political truths which have eluded the investigations of the most candid and enlightened of all ages, should be laid open to you. These words were perhaps understood, at the moment, as the more common-place of modesty—real or affected. But they had a far deeper meaning. They were uttered under a conviction, which all subsequent investigation and reflection have but confirmed, that researches into the philosophy of government promise, at best, but an approximation to truth; and that, to him whose mind cannot be brought to rest content in doubt, they promise nothing at all. If there be any such among you, he will be sensible that he has derived no benefit from me. The only service I could have rendered such a one, would have been to effect such a change in the temper and disposition of his mind, as to prepare him to enter, an humble and teachable pupil, in the school of experience. If I have failed in this, I have failed in every thing. With such, I fear, I am particularly liable to misconstruction. To such, every suggestion calculated to throw a doubt on any cherished opinion, might seem like the avowal of the opposite opinion. In politics, as in religion, to him whose comfort requires an infallible guide, any doubt of his infallibility seems equivalent to a direct contradiction of all his doctrines. To the bigot, all others are bigots. To doubt, is bigotry. To hesitate—to pause and reflect, is bigotry. All who are not for him, are against him, and he against them.

Against this unwelcome temper—the parent of so much

* Published at the request of the Class.
error, so much faction, strife, contention, and bitterness of heart—my labors have been particularly directed. It is a temper that can serve no purpose but to make him who cherishes it the ready instrument of party, the easy tool of any who will repeat his creed, and tincture his ear with the plausible formulas which he habitually receives as complements of political truth. At the same time he is ready to denounce all who will not repeat this creed and these formulas. Hence, men distinguished for that thoughtful sobriety of understanding which reflects patience and judges wisely, can have no place in his confidence. He has reduced the science of government to a system of maxims, and the man who hesitates to adopt any one of them, is set down in his mind as devoted to another system, the opposite of his in all things. Thus it is, that the discreet and conscientious are condemned by bigots and system makers of all parties; and thus it is, that the affairs of nations are given up to the blundering misuse of the rash and unscrupulous, while the men most competent to manage them are condemned to inaction and obscurity. Belonging to no party, they are charged with the sins and errors of all parties. Having the wisdom to perceive that they do not know everything, they are set down by the confident and presumptuous as knowing nothing.

Thus it is, that the discreet and conscientious are condemned by bigots and system makers of all parties; and thus it is, that the affairs of nations are given up to the blundering misuse of the rash and unscrupulous, while the men most competent to manage them are condemned to inaction and obscurity. Belonging to no party, they are charged with the sins and errors of all parties. Having the wisdom to perceive that they do not know everything, they are set down by the confident and presumptuous as knowing nothing.

Thus it is, that each country has its own political creed, which no man dare assail. So true is this, that, turn where you will, you will find the prevalent opinion of every people, favorable, in the main, to their own institutions. Abuses may indeed be perceived; but, for the most part, radical defects are mistaken for abuses. The spirit of revolution, too, sometimes suggests innovation and change; but, in the calm and healthy condition of every community, the beau ideal of a perfect government seems to consist in something not widely different from its own. The authority of numbers is so evident that any of these is right; for, numbers decide one way in a republic, and another way in a monarchy. Precisely thus, at this moment, do the most enlightened men of the two most enlightened countries in the world differ from each other. Yet in each the authority of numbers supervises the researches of the political philosopher; and the love of fame, which is the incentive to all other investigations, does but awaken a more lively dread of the scourge with which public opinion stands prepared to punish the unlucky discoverer of any unpardonable truth.

You will see, gentlemen, that if, like most men, I have a zeal for my art, I take a poor way to recommend it. It might, perhaps, be thought that the ideas I have just suggested, are at the bottom of the doubting and undecided character of almost everything that we see around us. But though it may seem safer to doubt than to err, yet this idea is often deceptive. Error may be condemned; and truth may pass for error. But he who teaches either, will not stand alone. He will always have some to concur with and countenance him. But he who doubts has all the world against him. If is at the centre of the magnetic card, and there is no point of the compass from which he does not appear to be at the opposite edge of the horizon. He will not even obtain the praise of candor. To question the perfection of the institutions of his own country, is, at home, supposed to indicate a secret preference for a government as different as possible: while abroad, he is regarded in every nation, as having a glimmering perception of the excellence of the institutions of that particular nation, without daring to avow it.

You see, then, gentlemen, that the temper of mind which I have endeavored to inspire, is of all the most unfavorable to popularity and advancement. But the end is not yet. We do not live for ourselves, nor even for our contemporaries alone. "Diis immaterialer sein" was the noble saying of the aged Roman, as his gray hairs fell over the plough, while putting in a crop which
he could not live to reap. Our country is not a thing of a day: and fame is immortal. And remember, gentle- men, that they whose speculations on government have purchased for them an interest in that immortal thing, are they whose respect for the opinions of their countrymen, did not deter them from correcting their errors and rebuking their prejudices. To those who may be disposed to accompany me in the study of polit- ical science in this spirit, I am bound, in candor, to say, in the words of the Apostle, that "if in this life only we have hope, we are, of all men, the most miserable." Our doubts, if unreasonable, will only excite contempt; if well founded they will provoke the resentment of those whose speculations on government but power in multitudes, makes for itself what is easily mistaken for the opinion of the world. There is nothing so ruthless, nothing so dead, alike to conscience and to reason, as a licentious crowd unrestrained by authority.

When we come, then, to inquire how far the present enjoyment of liberty may consist with those conven- nient and self-imposed limitations on the right of self government, which may be necessary to its preservation, we enter on a task which any man may well trem­ ble to undertake. To him who would dogmatize here, the adjustment of the balance between those powers contending yet harmonious, on which the order of the planetary system depends, would seem an easy pro­ blem. The countless worlds, revolving, each in its ap­ pointed path, implicitly obey the law impressed on them at creation. Not so the moral universe, the world of will and passion. With those the Omniscient himself must part; tolerating much present evil for the sake of ultimate and greater good; yielding that he may conquer. When we say, that no man can confidently decide how far a people jealous of the right of self government should voluntarily limit its exercise, we do but affirm that human institutions are subject to the necessity inhering in the nature of things, which is one of the conditions of the moral government of the uni­ verse. Step forth, philosopher! you who have disco­ vered the great error—you who have ascertained how best to reconcile the present enjoyment of happi­ nesses with its perpetuity; the present exercise of free­ dom with security against its tendencies to self destruc­ tion—step forth, and read a lesson to the Most High! He shall hear you gladly! He shall descend from the throne of his power, and, taking the place of the learner, shall meekly seat himself at your feet! For my part, while I see the nature of all earthly blessings; while I mark their liability to perish in the using; while I wit­ nesses the hard servitude of those who yield themselves to the dominion of passion, I shall believe that none are capable of freedom, who are not disposed to put moral chains upon their own appetites, and who are not more inclined to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, than to the flattery of knaves. When, therefore, the question arises, "what does wisdom teach, and what are the proper and salutary restraints to be imposed?" I am not ashamed to be baffled by a difficulty which for six thousand years has taxed the resources of al­mighty Power and all seeing Wisdom. The discipline of life,—the hopes of heaven,—the terrors of hell,—all have been employed to this end, and its accomplishment is yet remote.

"He is a freeman whom the truth makes free;" and the truth that thus emancipates him, is that which teaches that there is no freedom for him, in whom there is not an abiding disposition to bring appetite and passion under the dominion of fixed laws, whose authority freedom must not dare to question. To him who is not content to be free on these terms, "chains under dark­ ness" is the appointed lot in this world, as in the next. To this the Word of God and the experience of all mankind alike bear witness. This is all that can be known with certainty. This is the truth, from which the wisest of ancient sages learned that he knew no-
thing. Beyond this all is darkness. On the unsurpassable mystery which lies buried in the depths of that impenetrable abyss of years, we can but muse and marvel at the presumption which pretends to have fastened it. But while the pride of human wisdom stands thus rebuked, we find consolation in the thought, that the truth which thus baffles our researches, is of the number of the hidden things that belong to God. To him we leave it.

But it is not alone of the great fundamental principles common to all free institutions, that I have ventured to speak with confidence. In the application of these principles to our own institutions, we have the aid of light sufficiently clear to guide us to certain conclusions.

Thus, when we affirm, "that man has a right to live exempt from all human authority, to which he has not consented to submit, either by express compact, or by legitimate and fair implication," we perceive the necessity of showing the existence of that power, in virtue of which we ourselves are governed. Here we speak from the record, and we speak boldly. We find the cluster which, more than two hundred years ago, constituted Virginia a body politic. We find the unanimous declaration of all the members of that body, solemnly proclaimed, sixty-three years ago, "that all power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people; that magistrates are their trustees and servants, and at all times amenable to them; and that, when government shall be found inadequate to their happiness and safety, a majority of the community hath an inalienable, unalienable and indefensible right to reform, alter or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the common weal."

These propositions, thus affirmed by all whom it concerned, are true, because they have affirmed them, if for no other reason. They form the basis of the compact which they prefaced, and afford a clue to its interpretation. Guided by this, we arrive at the conclusion, that sovereignty, whether sleeping or awake, whether near or in repose, is in the people: that sovereignty cannot, therefore, be rightfully predicated of any government; and that where there is no people, there is no sovereignty.

Proceeding to analyze these principles to the structure of that great federal compact, which is the talisman of security, power, prosperity, and happiness to the people of these states, I have shown you the recorded evidence of its binding authority over you. I have laid before you the solemn act of Virginia, declaring "that no other authority but mine for his answers. My business has been to teach you to observe; to compare; to think; and he who, applying my lessons, arrives at results different from my own, will do me credit with the wise and candid instructor, I have done you wrong; and I beseech you, in justice to yourselves, and to me, to endeavor to divest your minds of all impressions, which you can never find, than to implant there even those most cherished opinions, which can never be eradicated from my own. By a different course, I might have led you to conclusions in which you might rest satisfied, forgetful of the arguments by which they had been deduced. You would thus only add yourselves to the number of those whose mouths are full of dogmas unsupported by reason, who, knowing nothing, claim to know every thing, and render their ignorance more conspicuous, disgusting and offensive, by misapplied presumption. Where certainty is attainable, it may be criminal to doubt. In matters of high moral or political duty, it is always so. But on questions in which mere expediency is an important condition, experience is the only teacher. If I have at any time forestalled the lessons of that faithful and candid instructor, I have done you wrong; and I beseech you, in justice to yourselves, and to me, to endeavor to divest your minds of all impressions, which you do not feel yourselves prepared to vindicate by reason. I should promise myself more honor from a pupil, who, dissenting from me, should be always found ready to give a reason for his faith, than from a hundred who might answer, by the book, every question in a political catechism of my own framing, giving no reason and no authority but mine for his answers. My business has been to teach you to observe; to compare; to think; and he who, applying my lessons, arrives at results different from my own, will do me credit with the wise and candid, even in exposing my errors.

But I have proposed to myself a higher honor. When, instead of announcing an opinion, and enforcing it by argument, I lay before you the considerations that belong to both sides of any disputed question, or furnish your minds with thoughts and reflections susceptible of being variously applied by yourselves in the investigation of more than one truth, I establish for myself a
claim to some part of the credit of all you may discover or be persuaded to adopt, you must remember the arguments for and against it, or you re-
member nothing. Not having made up your minds how to decide a question, you cannot extricate yourselves into the belief that you understand it. So long as it remains a subject of doubt with you, so long will you continue to meditate and reflect, and memory will tenaciously cling to every consideration, which, when first presented, seemed to throw light upon the subject. Your opinions thus formed, will be your own; yet, while you enjoy the pleasure of having arrived at truths by your own researches, you will perhaps be ready to attribute some part of the credit of all you may discover of the truth. Why, then, should I have introduced into those party leaders who claim to monopolize the confidence of the people this precious wisdom? I shall we find them in the fabulous and unhoped-for labors of a wish to insinuate into your minds some of the truths they have been induced to meditate and reflect upon? I have not been without painful misgivings that I have sometimes disregarded the duty of leading you to conviction, in cases wherein it might be criminal to doubt. The idea that such convictions may, at any time, be prejudicial to your advancement or your usefulness in life, is one which I cannot contemplate without anxiety. Should this apprehension be realized, you will be too generous to blame me; but I shall find it hard not to blame myself. Yet in even that event, we shall both enjoy high consolation. The perception of truth is sweet: the love of truth is ennobling; and an uncalculating devotion to truth is honorable even in the eyes of its enemies.

In these thoughts you may perceive the reason, gentlemen, why I have carefully avoided any remarks which might influence your inclinations in favor of any of those party leaders who claim to monopolize the confidence of the people. I presume it cannot be unknown to you, that I am not remarkable for indifference to the political occurrences of the day. I am aware too, that I am unfortunately, supposed to be much addicted to personal predilections in favor of distinguished men. In this particular I need not, at this day, tell you that I have been misunderstood. Such predilections I do not feel. filius jamus in vobis, in the cardinal maxim which I have held in my early life, from the first moment of my existence to the present moment of my existence. But thank God, I am not so experimentally prejudiced as to place myself in the power of any man, who ever possessed my entire confidence. But though not only unprejudiced, but indisposed to follow any political leader, I am certainly not without our aversions and antipathies. With these, however, it was no part of my business to infect you. I have certainly not endeavored to do so; and hence it has always been with reluctance, that I have touched on topics connected with the characters and public history of political aspirants. You may, one of these days, be surprised to discover, that I have, in some instances, been careful not to advert to transactions which came directly within the scope of my remarks, on subjects of the most absorbing interest. But it would not have been just to you, to have invited or provoked the corroboration or resistance of any political prejudice which you might have already entertained. My business was, to lay my thoughts before you, and by fair and candid arguments to lead you into the light of the truth. Why then, should I have introduced into the discussion an element which might have induced you to adopt my views without a well founded conviction of their correctness, or to reject them, alike without reason? On the other hand, how un candid and unworthy of the relation I bear to you, to take advantage of my position for the purpose of infecting you with my partialities or disqualifications. If, at any time, I have fallen into this error, gentlemen, I beg you, in consideration of my inadvertence, to pardon me for it.

Sometimes, indeed, it has been my duty to express myself in a way, which, to the unceased, might have served as an apology. In this case, indeed, we learn all that can be known. Here it is, that we discover the connexion between events and their causes, and how these are sometimes even, in the most interesting circumstances of history, the result of accident, which, when first presented, may mislead us. But must we necessarily stop there? If, at any time, we learn that an event has been the result of an accident, which the historian has been unable to trace, we are at liberty to conclude that the event was not the consequence of an accident, which the historian has been unable to trace. Here, then, it is that we learn to contrast the profession of the agnostic, with the practice of successful ambition. As the experienced seaman augurs the storm from the slumbering clear that precedes it, and, in the cloud on the horizon, "no bigger than a man's hand," detects the tempest that may whirl him in the deep, so he who reads the future in the past history of man, is sometimes enabled to discover the approach of danger at the moment when the watchman on the wall is crying "peace, and all is well."

But, where shall we look for those facts which furnish this precious wisdom? Shall we find them in the fabulous legends of remote antiquity? Shall we seek them in histories more modern, perhaps more authentic, but which may mislead us, because we know not enough of the manners, habits and circumstances of ancient states, to determine all the conditions that may have influenced the production of any result? Coming down to modern times, shall we take all our examples from the nations of Europe and Asia, at the greatest advantage of being misled in the same way? In short, gentlemen, when, at any time, the history of our own country—the history of events happening in our own time, and under our own eyes, in which all that is done is the work of men whom we personally know and understand in all their relations—when this sure, authentic and ungarbled evidence discloses facts of which the political philosopher in other lands would be glad to avail himself, shall we alone be denied the advantage of it? We may speak of Miltiades and Camillus, of Pericles and Caesar, of Alcibiades and Catiline—we come down to Elizabeth and Henry the 4th, to Cromwell and Bonaparte, to Chatham and Bury—we may even cite the example of Washington, connected to the use of all the world by liberty and virtue—and we may speak of Arnold and of Bury, whom the hangman, Infamy, has delivered up for distinction: But must we necessarily stop there? If, at any time, the best means of explaining and illustrating an impor-
asses the Constitution, who stand most conspicuous as candidates for public favor, and public honors, at whose hands it has not received a wound. I have often indeed endeavored to give the history of the fact without naming the actor. Yet I have, from time to time, had occasion to name them all, and though I have never attempted to excite your indignation, yet there is not one of them whom I have forebore to censure. I have felt it to be right that I should censure them: for, one of the most important lessons you can learn is the danger of yielding yourselves up to the impulses of that confidence, so natural to inexperienced and aspiring youth. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the sons of men." If you go into life prepared to pin your faith upon the sleeve of any leader, to follow the fortunes and devote your selves to the service of any political aspirant, my conscience ought to acquit me of having failed to warn you against conduct so dangerous and so criminal. It does not avail me, if such are the purposes which will accompany you into any station, to which your country may call you, the fault will not be mine. I have done what I could. With other powers I might have done more: and had I the eloquence which might inspire you with a just zeal for your country's rights, and a righteous indignation against all who invade them, I am not sure that it would not have been my duty to lay aside all reserve; to strip off all concealment; to show the assassins of the Constitution "hacking each other's daggers in its sides;" expose its bleeding wounds, and "bid them speak for me."

You must not mislead you, gentlemen, by withdrawing your attention from the fact, that he, who, in political life would act alone, must always act without effect. His efforts must often be associated with those of men who do not fully possess his confidence, and to secure their cooperation, he must frequently tolerate, and sometimes support measures which his judgment condemns. This is one of those hard conditions, "twin born with greatness," which gives the successful aspirant so much cause to envy him, who, in the independence of private life, chooses his company and regulates his conduct by the dictates of his own conscience.

In this, gentlemen, as in many other particulars, you will find that the ideas I have endeavored to inculcate, are not such as will qualify you to take an early and a prominent stand in the service of your country, or to win your way at once to the honors and emoluments of office. But if these be the objects to which you purpose to devote yourselves, nothing that I have said will stand in your way. The political adventurer is never at a loss to divest himself of any inconvenient opinions, which might retard his progress in the career of ambition. Besides, there are no imaginable opinions which it may not at some time suit him to adopt. The devoted adherent of Cromwell the Protector, would have awkwardly paid his court, by echoing the sentiments of Cromwell, the commander of the army of the Parliament. So long as parties retain their names, their watchwords and their leaders, their principles may vary indefinitely; and the very men who might now denounced as criminal, any sentiment expressed in this discourse, may, at a future day, take it as the watchword of their party.

But after all, gentlemen, the prize most worthy to reward the toils of him who gives himself to the service of his country, is one which does not depend on the conspicuous coincidence of public opinion with his fixed principles and convictions. The ostentation was the crowning glory of the life of Aristides. The exile of Camillus made him the admirer of his country; and the fame that lives and will live, when all the honors that contemporary approbation can bestow, shall be forgot, is the need of that virtuous constancy, that alike defies the tyrant's power, and resists the unbridled passions of the multitude. The man of virtuous wisdom cannot be withheld from the service of his country. Condemned to retirement, his unambitious life affects a pledge of sincerity, which gives sanction and authority to his known opinions. The man of virtuous wisdom cannot be hid. His brightness shines through the cloud that would obscure him, and, glided with his beams, he is not. I almost say he is, the gift of him, whose approbation is the only true honor. Without the 'vantage ground of high station, he utters his voice, and it is heard by the listening ear that means to catch his words. His post is the post of honor, whatever it be, and he occupies it without fear of change. Man conferred it not, and man cannot take it away. And above all, gentlemen, when that day shall come, which comes alike to all; when the warrior's wreath, and the statesman's civic crown, alike shall wither at the touch of death, the garland that decks his tomb shall bloom in immortal freshness, watered by the pious tears of a grateful country, and guarded by the care of him to whom the memory of the just is precious.

ADDRESS ON CIVIL ENGINEERING.

On Tuesday, July 2nd, Professor Millington completed the course of instruction, which he gives on the subject of Civil Engineering in William and Mary College, by a public examination of his class, and concluded with the following remarks, which are here published at the request of the class.

"Having closed this examination, my functions, as your teacher, cease for the present session, and we shall shortly have to part. I cannot, however, permit this event to take place, without some expression of my feelings on the occasion. After your experience, gentlemen, I need not tell you that the acquirement of knowledge is a dry and laborious occupation; and there is no doubt but that many (particularly among the juniors) who attend college, will look upon their instructors in the light of a set of tormentors, who are perpetually goading them onwards, in a rough and disagreeable path, to which they see no end; and even
ward to recompense them for their toil.

savnge warrior sinks into impotence bcfol'o tho armed

tho Inbors

world Ivldvallces in civilization, the sillewy nrm of the

happiness of those around them; nnd by which,

not only individunls, but whole nations are mndo to rise

Powers oro tho clemonts of power, by which men cnn not

nly individunls, but whole nations are mndo to rise

hllve put them ill possession of the facts, that ns tho

spiril in tho breasts of instructors to promote the ad­

vancoment of theh' pupils, so' long us they find their

For'I can, without flattery, stato to you, that the con­

winds

only merits, bl)t commands my admiration nnd up­

to inherit my philosophical and engincel' c1asscs, and of

the majol' part of my junior clnss, has been such as not

try

upon my opinion alone, but upon the very excellent

science in which they have embal'ked.

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,

minute

years for the plant to an'ive at maturity. We may

perhaps, our course of instruction may appear long and

is not sufficient to make tlie perfect man. To some,
the execution of a large work. Still, however, in a subordinate capacity, or while acting under a more experienced master, he will have many opportunities of evincing his proficiency and obtaining preferment. Independent of this, the genius of the young aspirant is free to digest new plans, and many of the most useful works both of this country and of Britain have originated in this way. The public mind is seldom excited to action until some object is brought before it, on which it can operate. And if a young engineer can suggest plans for the improvement of his country and is able to show their benefit and advantage, it seldom happens that they are brought forward in vain. They only require to be known that they may be adopted, and then in justice to the inventor he is rewarded by being made the superintendent or executor of his own designs.

The next difficulty in which the engineer is involved, arises from his great responsibility. He is frequently employed not only to design but to execute large and national concerns, in which vast capitals may be involved. His master or employer, from the nature of the concern, is seldom a single individual, but generally a board or committee, consisting of many persons, all of whom he has to conciliate and please. His original design, therefore, requires intense thought and consideration, for it is subject to the revision and annulment of all his employers, and the almost impossibility of pleasing every body is universally admitted. It is therefore, necessary, that he shall be prepared with sound arguments to support every part of what he is about to execute, unless he sees good reason in the discussion of his plans for altering or amending any part of them. Firmness and decision of character will here prove of great value to him.

Another difficulty the engineer has to contend with, arises from the durability of his works. Men of all professions are liable to err; but it happens, fortunately for most of them, that unless their errors are very glaring, they are soon forgotten and fall into oblivion, and consequently do not leave an indelible stain on their professional reputation. Not so, however, with the engineer—his works are, in their very nature, permanent—and they are frequently large and open to public view—so that they become monuments which proclaim the skill or incompetency of their constructors to future generations, in languages that cannot be disguised or misunderstood. Errors of construction, such as have just been alluded to, frequently arise from a desire on the part of the engineer to please his employer, (even at the risk of his own reputation,) a practice that every engineer should solemnly avoid. His skill should be such as will enable him to determine the least quantity of material which he can use with safety for a given construction, and if he swerves at all from rule, it should be on the side of additional strength rather than of insufficiency. If he introduces more material than what is palpably necessary for the strength of his construction, he will be justly blamed for a lavish expenditure of his employer's money. The error is, however, frequently on the other side; because, with the view of courting public favor or that of his employer, or for bringing his work within the first estimated cost, he frequently economizes materials and labor to such an extent as to introduce insecurity; and should a failure occur in consequence, he is never thanked for his laudable endeavor to diminish expense; but is universally blamed for want of skill, and perhaps loses his professional reputation forever.

The last point to which I wish to call your attention, regards your treatment of and demeanor towards contractors and workmen, who may be employed under your directions. In this respect, the engineer has a very important and responsible duty to perform, for he is in almost all cases the arbiter or judge between the employer and the employed. In making contracts, or valuing work after it has been executed, it becomes his duty to regulate all prices in such manner that they may be fair and equitable between both parties, without favor or affection to either. Contractors, and those who have spent years upon public works, you will in general find to be cunning and over-reaching, and ever ready to convert every thing, both in measure and price, to their own advantage. But I have always found, that when they meet a man who understands his business, and who is firm in his resolution to do justice to them, and no more, they are submissive, and ever ready to yield to what is fair and right. It has been the practice with some engineers, to grind down their workmen to the lowest cost, and barely to allow them living profits, for the sole purpose of currying favor with their employers; but such conduct never fails to lead to neglect and instigation to the work, as well as endless disputes and disagreements; and you may rest assured, on my own experience, that the only sure way to command the respect of the employer and workmen, is to observe the most strict and impartial justice between them.

It frequently happens, that the works of the engineer place him and his workmen in thinly populated, or even unfrequented places; and, as man is naturally gregarious and fond of society, intimacies may arise which ought never to be carried beyond the limits of propriety. Contractors, and the lower order of laborers under them, are naturally prone to indulge in drinking and idle habits; and if these are once joined in, or sanctioned by the engineer, there will be an end of all future order and subordination—consequently, such practices should be scrupulously avoided. Public contractors are ever ready to stand treat, as they call it—that is to provide entertainments at their own cost; yet they probably never do so, but for the purpose of serving their own interests, by establishing friendships, in order that their omissions and defalcations may pass unnoticed, or that they may take advantage in some shape or another. Above all, the practice of borrowing money from contractors or workmen cannot be too much deprecated, for this is in fact giving up all hold upon the workman, and yielding him a degree of power which it is not right he should possess. The only true way of gaining the esteem and confidence of your workmen, is to set them a good example in your own conduct and demeanor. To be courteous and civil without being too intimate—be punctual in all your own appointments and duties, and to exact a like return on their parts—never to find fault unless there is just cause for doing so, and then to be firm and resolute in having that which is wrong amended—to show strict and impartial justice and integrity in all your proceedings, and such a thorough knowledge of what you are about, as will give confidence in the propriety of your orders, which you must
never fail to see promptly executed. Such conduct will not only gain you the good will and esteem of your workmen, but of your employers and the public at the same time.

I have trespassed longer on your time, in laying these hints before you, than I had at first intended, but shall now conclude.

To you, gentlemen, of the engineer class, and of all my classes, I now beg to tender my warm thanks for the kind attention I have met with from you all, during the past session, and to hope that the instructions I have endeavored to lay before you, may ripen into fruit of usefulness in your after lives. And as our relation of master and student here ceases, I wish you all health, happiness and prosperity, and trust that the friendship that has been engendered between us during our intercourse in the present session, may endure to the end of our lives, as I assure you it will do to the end of mine."

ADDRESS

Delivered before the Students of William and Mary College, on the 31st of July, 1839, by Professor Robert Saunders. Published at the request of the Students.

Gentlemen of William and Mary—

At the close of another college session, it becomes us to offer you a few words of farewell at parting, of congratulation at your success, and of cheering on your onward course. There can, indeed, be no more worthy cause of congratulation than the simple fact that you enjoy the privilege of education—that the mysteries of your own nature have been revealed to you—that the high endowments, the far-reaching aspirations, the vast capacities, which are the immortal heritage of man, are unveiled to your view, and put in action. While you enjoy the privilege of education—that you are not of the mass who exist, with delightful radiance. Then call the cultivated treasures they possess, but that you have been adjudged worthy of kindling fires on the altar of science and philosophy—of opening the portals beyond which lie the hidden things of nature. Such being the magnificent results of intellectual cultivation, it would seem but necessary to place them in view of the youthful aspirant, to ensure uniting energy, and a sustained and sustaining ardor in their acquisition—and it would appear an infinitesimal slight short of madness, were he to turn aside, or linger on his path. Could we, indeed, see things as they are—were nothing obscured from our sight by the mists of familiar error, or weakened in its influence by the force of accident and habit, we should be able to set a proper value upon the glorious privileges of education. But such is our constitution, that those who possess it have their perception of its value blunted by its possession—and those who possess it not, require its aid to invest them with the very knowledge of their deficiency. For these facts, this is indeed a wise and benificent provision. In this sense, but in this alone, the oft quoted line is true—that "If ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." That those, however, having this inestimable gift, should yet esteem it not as it deserves to be esteemed, but should advance with a slow and uncertain step (if indeed they advance at all), in the career of requirement, unless some powerful incentive be applied to urge them forward, is one of the innumerable evidences before us, that there is no good provided for man which does not demand voluntary exertion to acquire and to retain it. You have, my young friends, so far manifested a perfect appreciation of the value of knowledge. You have commenced your career most auspiciously. The time which you have passed with us, has afforded to you moments of golden opportunity, which most of you have grasped and made your own. But the impressions which you have thus received, will be weakened, and ultimately effaced, by contact with the world. Time itself will wear them out, unless they are constantly renewed and deepened by that continued exertion of which I have spoken as the only price of learning. Are you capable of this exertion? I will not flatter you. It is arduous. But its very difficulty should arouse your pride to achieve it. This difficulty is, however, greatest on the threshold. Action is unpleasant only to the mind which is unused to it. Soon it becomes a habit—and finally, (each is the happy constitution of our intellectual nature,) what was once an irksome and a weary task, becomes the source of the purest and most exalted gratification—and the mind is gradually led to the highest stage of cultivation of which it is susceptible, by receiving as the reward of each additional effort, a corresponding increment of pleasure.

The tumultuous amusements, the evanescent pleasures, and exciting employments of youth, may cause you to go unheeded the reckless workings of the unsatisfied spirit; but age will come, to which those amusements will be as childish toys, on whose taste those pleasures will fail, and for whose strength those employments are too fervent; then, when the bright lutes which floated in the atmosphere of life's morning, have faded away, and given place to the gray of its twilight, will the mild lustre of intellectual attainments beam with delightful radiance. Then can the cultivated mind look back upon itself, and find in its ample storeroom a solace for that heartless want of sympathy with which the world are wont to regard old age. How blank and dreary, then, is the life of one who has neglected the opportunities of his youth—who, in the hey-day of enjoyment grasped the tinsel and the dross, and cast away or heeded not the pure gold. The mind of such a man, waste, uncultivated, and barren, compared with the same material glowing with magic tints and embodying the immortal conceptions of the painter. Can you, under the influence of these considerations, and with the lofty destiny of the intellect fully revealed to you, be satisfied with yourselves, if you press not on to the fulfillment of that destiny? Can you consent to the degeneration, after having been within view of the sacred vane, of having it again hidden from your sight, by falling back upon those who, in the language of the Roman historian, "Habitat tranquillus, adeo potens?" 15

Will you not rather hold fast what you have gained, and be able hereafter to say, with the Roman orator, "Quantum adeo tributae temperatis custodia, quantum

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
efficency in promoting and perfecting mental culture, let unheeding alike the blandishments of the courtier and me recommend to you to

Innocence of thinking, consists in the circumstance that it alone valuable to your country. Far more efficient will
tentility, and of the determining of the demagogues. As yet, though, then, I call upon you to devote yourselves to your

The man who adopts, without examination, the for action is more dazzling to men than thought. You

require independent action of the mind, and thereby be your aid if you shall render your mind capable of directing the public course of others.

permits his fellows to think for him. The great import-

of the will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

will alone is wanting to elevate them before the

rectitude of whose people is perverted, or their

w...
within your own control, resolve, my young friends, to be known to your generation. Exert the energy which adorns a man; let pride sustain the exertion, and you must succeed.

"On reason build a column of true majesty in man," is fraught with wisdom, short only of inspiration. But, alas! all this has been said "many a time and oft"—and with how little effect, we all know. What has been many times repeated, falls upon the ear like snow upon the water. The rich rewards of mental exertion have been too often set before youthful hearers, without effect, that it would seem as if language had lost its force; and yet, strange perversity of the human character! nothing is required of them but to appreciate themselves. Familiarity is the deadly foe of respect. It is our very familiarity with ourselves which prevents us from being great. Could men view themselves as they view others; free from the influence of narrow vanity on the one hand, and of want of self-confidence on the other, how many of those who die unknown, would fill the world with their fame; and yet this requires but the will. This cannot be too often reiterated. That young men could but be persuaded of this; that some master spirit,—some one whose high privilege,—whose illustrious appanage it is to arouse and command the human intellect,—would but compel young men to look inward upon themselves; and would exhibit to them, as though a crystal, the noble capacities with which they are endowed, and the results which flow from their exercise!

May we not hope, however, my young friends, that the peculiarity of your situation, to which I have already alluded, will cause our counsels to be not altogether unheeded by you? that the evidences which are every day gathering around you, of the absolute necessity of exertion imposed upon you, will urge you to gird on your armor with a high and holy determination not to falter in the glorious cause?

If you are capable of forming this determination, in order that you may keep it inviolate, shun, as you would a pestilence, "improba Sirena Desidia," the foul siren Sloth, and resist, with iron firmness, all her blandishments—for in her train marches every vice which degrades the soul. Let no portion of your time pass without improvement; stop the moments in their flight and extract from each all that it can bestow—for remember that the present only is your own; that time, like the folded Paestus, yields its treasures to those only who arrest its course, but, if unheeded, bears them on to the great ocean of the past. Remember too, that your sojourn here is but the commencement of your career—that you have here learned only to use the weapons with which you are to contend on the arena of the world, and that if you relax your exertion, not only will your weapons rust, but your hand will forget its familiar use of them.

To those of you, then, who have taken the high honors bestowed by our venerable institution, I would say—consider those honors as the champions in the olympic games regarded the voices of friends—cheering them to victory—and to those whose first efforts have received their appropriate rewards, I would liken those rewards to the trumpet-note, calling the combatants to the contest. To both, let the goal be your own honor and your country's good.

And now, my young friends, we must part. The allotted portion of instruction which it was at once our duty and our pleasure to bestow, has been accomplished. The intimate relation which has existed between us is at an end, and now it only remains for us to express to you as a body, our admiration of your conduct, which has rendered this relation (so often one of ennui and discord,) a relation of friendship and good feeling, and which has reduced college discipline to the grateful task of treating gentlemen as they deserve to be treated. So long as the students of William and Mary sustain the character for talent, for industry and gentlemanly demeanor, which has distinguished them during the past session, and which has never been excelled, there will be no fear that our beloved and venerable alma mater will lose the lofty character she bears. And now, my young friends, on behalf of each one of us, I wish each one of you a happy meeting with your friends at home, and bid you an affectionate farewell.