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Classical Oration What is the true progress of the age? William Chilson New London Chester Co Inly 11° 1850

This is an age of progress is an expression rendered Jamilian by everyday's repetition. The hear it from all classes & conditions of men. all unite to show the praises of this the glorious musteenth Century. But should me skepti. cally ask, "what is the Frogress of the age + where are its evidences?" men at once point us to the rapid increase of nealth & representato the munderful developements of science. to the triumphs of ast over the difficulties of nature, to Telegraphs & Locomotives, that bear intelligence on the mings of lightening & hims marie & Texas together to steam pressest Steam ships, that spread knowledge & make the old of the new world neighbors, & significantly say "these". But is this all This of itself is no evidence of real progress At may be hat the developement of man's Relish nature: it is consistent with & may be made conducive to the greatest moral degredation. Rome in her greatest mag. inficence, amid all the glories of her An. gustan age, nos but the marble palace of comption, the splended mansoleum of departed wheely, and the flowing strains of her Manteran Burd neve two the Levan Rong of her dying greatureds. But man pissesses

a higher + a holier nature - that which truly makes him what he is a man. He is capable of a nobler progress - a progress ton ands a laftier manhood. This is the great end of his existence, to which all other progress is but the means. His intellectual should always he subservient to his moral improvement, othermse it becomes. But the sad evidence of his depravity. Then Ed Jiss "heathed into man the heath of life & he be came a living soul" he stamped upon that soul the impress of simily & placed him in communion with himself but little lower than the angels " By the fall man's communion with the seit naston the Godlike impress on his heart defaced. Ever since then, though nandering in daske. ness & error his asperations have ever heen Leavennard. His whole history has been but one continued struggle to regain his first estate - to serve the long lost mage in his heart. It is this upward tendency that constitutes the grand unity, the Philosopphy of Distry & makes it intelligible. Though all past ages the tide of progress has flowed annuard. Though nor & pestilence, rebellion + revolutions the rise of fall of empires have disturbed the

surface of human affairs, yet timenth & though all the current, slow, silent & deep has sever rolled on its seestless course; and thus it mill continue to roll on as succeeding ages circle away; and as man approaches neases & nearer to his original perfection, the defaced impression on his soul will serve Jeature after feature, till it again becomes. as it originally was. The bright refection of the Godhead. where are the signs of this swine Progress in this land & in this age? he can see them. ne can feel them around & within us continually. It is manifested in the miden. ing sympathies, the expanding thoughts & feelings of mens. he are beginning to see I feel more July the time dignity & high desting of manhood, to act + think more like men, to live & respect a man more, not because of his class or his sect, the color of his skin atta sport of his list, In Lecause he is a man & a wother. The contemptions epithets of "Radicalism" & Heterodery" have no longer the potent sufference they once has, to check pee. dom of throught & frighten the sixing energies of the soul back into the contracted shell of what Bigity chooses to call Oxthodory. Then. are beginning to respect less. the abstract, freezing doctrines of sectarion dogmas

to love more the living truths of the Euspel; To seek more for the spirit of Chrish the april of Loundless live, Liciety is beginning to live when the Lash & the Gallon's as List the bloody relices of a barbarens age, as only The means to restrain brutes, not men. It Legins at last to feel that Punishomens not the only presing ative of the Ivverment of a tehnistian people, That all restraint when him must consult his Hope's sunshive linger on his prison nall, And twe look in upon his solitude" These + other signs of progress, though in. comprehensible to the narrow minded high I granght with terror to the timed Conservative are cheering to the heart of the true Philauthropist. But the end is not yet ather struggles are get to be met & other trumples gamed in the cause of right. Though the dawn Lyins to brighten over the distant Hill-tops, the misto I shadows of the night still envelope the plains below: Though from the lofty more. tain top of Faith me catch bright glimpses of the Promised land our nanderings in the desert are not yet ended. In this civilized land the generous Zailor's back still recks under the gory lash. In this free land the slave still clanks his chain. In this

Christian land the Hangman still plies his in-Jernal trad & the wholesale Butcher of his race is the absurdly called a stero. But these houry abuses. Thingh sanctioned by the presquetices of their, sustained by influence & supported by Gower, cannot always stand before the projects of Fresth. They may, it is true, continue to disquace humanity for ages yet; how the progress of the past inspires us with hope for the peture; the natchmend of the age is "Refirm", and the time will come when the chains that bind the limbs, as well as the narrow presidents that chacke the fords of men will be cast off. Heartless Dem agrands may attempt to justify popular crimes I pander to the rasest passions of men- even the ministers at Eod's sacred altar, jugetting the Arliness of their calling way turn aside to suffer the king down of darkness + neglecting the mild spirit of Lesns, may pervert End's holy mord to san ctify Institutions. the most about. inable + practices at which every Jeeling of Annunity serolts, but it will be in vain; Itill hies for earth which frends so long have tros. The great hope resting on the truth of Endwil shall clase & violence pass away. (day" And the tired world breathe free through a long Sabbath He who contributes to the intellectual improveme. mt & increases the material comports of men. may be a benefactor of the world; but he who advances the cause of Burnamity, who midens the circle of human sympathies, who enlarges the feelings & earnbles the mind of men, is the divinest blessing of Bearen to his race, Franklin & Fulter may be bright name in our beauting's sesting; but future generations whom their earnest labors will have contributed to bless, will repeat with grateful reverence the names of Burit & Chairing, look in the other page

(lass page) The mission of the true Refumer, though Divine has ever heen a hard & painful one This manly opposition to old pregudices & long. extablished abuses may beget how the hatreet scom of their supporters. Contemptions Bude may ence at him, hellish Bigity may dog his fortstips with the claurowns cry of Touthesiast & Infidel & Jone Persecution huns him to the grave; yet Despite of sneess like these, of faithful fen. Who dane to hold god's mord & nitness time, Still Reep the path which duty bids you tress Though wildly medens shake its contions head. No truth from seaven descends upon on sphere Without the greeting of the skeptie's snew, Denied & mocked at till its blessings gall Sike den & sunshine over all. Then o'er Earth's narfield till its stripe shall cease like horren's harpers, sing your sings of peace bothilson.

Commencement Oration of William Wilson, Class of 1850

<u>Transcribed by Tristan Deveney, May 2008</u>

Edited by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, June 2008

What is the true progress of the age?

"This is an age of progress" is an expression rendered familiar by everyday's repetition. We hear it from all classes & conditions of men. All unite to shout the praise of this glorious Nineteenth Century. But should we skeptically ask, "what is the Progress of the age & where are its evidences?" men at once point as the rapid increase of wealth & refinement – to the wonderful developments of science – to the triumphs of art over the difficulties of nature, to telegraph & Locomotive, that bear intelligence over the wings of lightening & bring Maine & Texas together – to stream-presses & steam ships that spread knowledge & make the old and the new world neighbors, & significantly say "these". But is this all? This of itself is no evidence of real progress. It may be but the development of man's selfish nature: it is consistent with & may be made conducive to the greatest moral degradation. Rome in her greatest magnificence, amid all the glories of her Augustan age, was but the marble palace of corruption, the splendid Mausoleum of departed liberty, and the flowing strains of her Mantaun Bard were but the "swan song" of her dying greatness. But man possesses

a higher & holier nature – that which truly makes him what he is - a <u>man</u>. He is capable of a nobler progress – a progress towards a loftier <u>manhood</u>. This is the great end of his existence. to which all other progress is but the <u>means</u>. His intellectual should always be subservient to his <u>moral</u> improvement, otherwise it becomes but the sad evidence of his depravity.

When God first "breathed into man the breath of life & he became a living soul" he stamped upon that soul the impress of Divinity & placed him in communion with himself "but little lower than the angels." By the fall man's communion with the Deity was lost, the Godlike impress on his heart defaced. Ever since then, though wandering in darkness & error his aspirations have ever been heavenward. His whole history has been but one continued struggle to regain his first estate – to revive the long lost image in his heart. It is this upward tendency that constitutes the grand unity, the Philosophy of History & makes it intelligible. Through all past ages the tide of progress has flowed onward. Through war & pestilence, rebellion & revolution, the rise & fall of empires have disturbed the

surface of human affairs, yet beneath & through all the current slow, silent & deep has ever rolled on its resistless course; and thus it will continue to roll on and succeeding ages circle away: and as man approaches nearer & nearer to his original perfection, the defaced impression on his soul will revive feature after feature, till it again becomes as it originally was, the <u>bright reflection</u> of the <u>Godhead</u>.

Where are the signs of this Divine Progress in this land & in this age? We can see them — we can feel them around & within us continually. It is manifested in the widening sympathies, the expanding thoughts & feelings of men. We are beginning to see & feel more fully the <u>true dignity</u> & high <u>destiny</u> of <u>Manhood</u>, to act & think more like <u>men</u>, to love & respect a man more, not because of his class or his sect, the color of his skin or the spot of is birth, but because he is a

man & a brother. The contemptuous epithets of "Radicalism" & "Heterodoxy" have no longer the potent influence they once had, to check freedom of thought & frighten the rising energies of the soul back into the contracted shell of what Bigotry chooses to call <u>orthodoxy</u>. Men are beginning to respect less the abstract, freezing doctrines of sectarian dogmas

& to love more the living truths of the Gospel to seek more for the spirit of Christ – the spirit of boundless love. Society is beginning to look upon the Lash & the Gallows as but the bloody relics of a barbarous age, and only the means to restrain brutes, not men. We begin at last to feel that <u>Punishment</u> is not the only prerogative of the Government of a Christian people,

"That man is holier than a creed

That all restraint upon him must consult his good

Hope's sunshine linger on his prison wall,

And love look in upon his solitude."

These & other signs of progress though incomprehensible to the narrow minded <u>bigot</u> & fraught with [one word illegible] to the timid <u>conservative</u> are cheering to the heart of the true Philanthropist. But the end is not yet. Other struggles are yet to be met & other triumphs gained in the cause of right. Though the dawn begins to brighten over the distant Hilltops, the mists & shadows of night still envelope the plains below; Though from the lofty mountain tops of Faith we catch bright glimpses of the Promised land our wanderings in the desert are not yet ended. In this <u>civilized</u> land the generous [one word illegible] back still reeks under the gory lash. In this free land the slave still clanks his chain. In this

<u>Christian</u> land the Hangman still plies his infernal trade & the wholesale Butcher of his race is still absurdly called a <u>Hero</u>. But these heavy abuses though sanctioned by the prejudices of men, sustained by influence & supported by Power, cannot <u>always</u> stand before the progress of Truth. They may, it is true, continue to disgrace humanity for ages yet; but the progress of the past inspires us with her hope for the future; the [one word illegible] of the age is "Reform", and the time will come when the chains that bind the links, as well as the narrow prejudices that shackle the limbs of men will be cast off. Heartless Demagogues may attempt to justify popular crimes & pander to the basest passions of men even the ministers of God's sacred altar, forgetting the Holiness of their calling may turn aside to support the kingdom of darkness & neglecting the mild spirit of Jesus, may pervert God's holy mind to sanctify institutions. the mask abominable & practices of which every feeling of Humanity revolts, but it will be in vain,

"Still lives for earth which fiend so have trod,

The great hope resting on the truth of God –

Evil shall cease & violence pass away.

And the tired world breathe free through a long sabbath day"

He who contributes to the intellectual improvement & increases the material comports of men may be a benefactor of the world; but he who advances the cause of Humanity, who widens the circle of human sympathies, who enlarges the feelings & enables the mind of men, is the divinest blessing of Heaven to his race. Franklin & Fulton may be bright names in our country's history; but future generations whom their earnest labors will have contributed to bless, will repeat with grateful reverence the names of [one word illegible] and Channing.

(last page)

The mission of true Reformers though <u>Divine</u> has ever been a hard & painful one. This manly opposition to old prejudices & long established abuses may reject him the hatred & scorn of their supporters. Contemptuous Pride may sneer at him, hellish bigotry may dog his footsteps with the clamourous cry of "Enthusiast" & "Infidel" & [one word illegible – final?] Persecution hunt him to the grave; yet

"Despite of sneers like these, oh faithful [Gen.?] who dare to hold God's word & witness true, Still keep the path which duty bids you tread Though worldly wisdom shake its cautious head. So truth from Heaven descends upon our sphere Without the greeting of the skeptic's sneer. Denied & mocked at till its blessings fall Like dew & sunshine over all. Then o'er Earth's warfield till its strife shall cease, Like Morven's harpers, sing your songs of peace"

W. C. Wilson