Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

http://archives.dickinson.edu/

Documents Online

Title: "Manifest Destiny," by Zebulon Dyer

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: July 14, 1859

Location: Orations-1859-D996m

Contact:

Archives & Special Collections Waidner-Spahr Library Dickinson College P.O. Box 1773 Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Manifest Desting.

Thans most emportant Study is the history of his own sace. It is also a diffcoult study, and without the idea of an all-loving and over- ruling power Conducting the course of human desting, it presents an inexplicable mystery, a meaning less Lucussion of generations, a great drama without lelation of frasts. But viewed from the proper- sland point it shows that the human race, through vice, misery & Corruption, has ever- steadily accended in the scale of existence.

Humanity is an individual. Ito every condition and period of life is preparitory, as youth is preparitory to man hood & man hood to the repend ma. Turity of age, What is once learned Can never be forgotten trisdom and experience do not purish with the ages that in labor and bravail ham brought them forth, but remain as the common fund and capital of the universal inteligence. Thus inder the Levere Into-ship of its own expurience humanily is being educated, is ever growing wisesand better -.

That the race is

advancing intelectually all readily admit, but many of contracted views, who look continually on the dark side of life, would consignently see only its musiries, imagine Mil it is Ladly degenerating in morals. Let us su if This is the case. It is said that buth is the offspring of line. Mit 20, it is however, the work of line to descoverand destinguish it from error. Fronal truth is as Jeroperly Que subject of dis-Covery as any other. Hone It is not all contained in revelation, nor is it recogouzed imediately a intentively,

it comes not as the spark from the smitten steal or the leg htnings flash from the refted storm cloud, but is the result rather of the slow and patient gleanings of the Centuries. The genius of every age is concentra. ted upon the subject of moral Is hilos of hy, and new bruths are Constantly bung deservered. The Shadowy conceptions of omage become bright living realities in the next, much with which we are familiarly conversant was entirely unknown in the frast. Evidently then we term more, we enjoy superior-moral light. how we do not believe with Socrates that to acquire

Semowledge is absolutely to become better, but since the mind is naturally disposed to receive bruth, the cirtainly the more clearly it is freezen led the more of it will be received; the more a man knows of his duty, carteris franchers, the more of it will be fur from. There is one fact that more particularly and positively de -Claves the superiority of their age; it is the wide spread and universal dessemmation of bruth, Science and religion are Churished now with Relfish esoleric spirit, but with a philanthropy as broad as The earth and as universal

as the race, they have been Rent for the energeture to disfeel by their - united fromes - the night of ignorance and super Stilien that has hillies to hung over the masses. This and this alone evinees line progress. Humanity is a complete whole, a collection unit, and thurfore can only advance as the race, the whole mass of Lociety is elevat ed. It is the highest gloney of this age, that it is more Man any precuding, contrib uting to the consumation of this desired end. Buth as Rown broad Cast in the hundly wil of the great

heart of humanity, where it will ever live a lasting memorial of the eningy, Zeal and rightly directed labors of the present. If then the race is now in a state of progressive developement endently it is destined to conlinue so as long as it exists, til humanity is purfected and man has regard is lost original Condition, when he associated with angels and held close converse with Drily. But we cannot be assund of the continued progress of the Face amless it have an object

to aim at, a model afterwhich to fashion iself. man has no originality, he is essent eally unnulation and cannot work without a pullern. One of his own creation well not do for it must needs be like himself uniperfect | and it is difficult to attain furfection by aiming at im-Justection, It hat and when then is this model, this quar enty of the complete final development of humanity? It is the conception of Deity that lives in the Roul. Here is an ideal Inodel do Justed that it may be approximated yet seever equaled. As the

assymtole ever-approaches neaser and neares The parabolic curre, though of indefinitely produced cannot become Tangent to it, so humanity may and is destined to ap proach in likeness the Char acter- of God throughout eternity. Zebulon Dyer July 14 1859

Commencement Oration of Zebulon Dyer, Class of 1859
Transcribed by Michael Geduldig, June 2009
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

Manifest Destiny

Man's most important study is the history of his own race. It is also a difficult study, and without the idea of an all-loving and over-ruling power conducting the course of human destiny, it presents an inexplicable mystery, a meaningless succession of generations, a great drama without relation of facts. But viewed from the proper standpoint it shows that the human race, through vice, misery & corruption, has ever steadily ascended in the scale of existence.

Humanity is an individual. Its very condition and period of life is peparitory, as youth is preparitory to manhood & manhood to the ripened maturity of age. What is once learned can never be forgotten. Wisdom and experience do not perish with the ages that in labor and travail have brought them forth, but remain as the common fund and capital of the universal inteligence. Thus under the severe tutorship of its own experience humanity is being educated, is ever growing wiser and better.

That the race is

advancing intelectually all readily admit, but many of contracted views, who look continually on the dark side of life, and consequently see only its miseries, imagine that it is sadly degenerating in morals. Let us see if this is the case. It is said that truth is the offspring of time. Not so, it is, however, the work of time to discover and distinguish it from error. Moral truth is as properly the subject of discovery as any other. [illegible] It is not all contained in revelation, nor is it recognized imediately & intuitively,

it comes not as the spark from the smitten steal or the lightnings flash from the rifted storm cloud, but is the result rather of the slow and patient gleanings of the centuries. The genius of every age is concentrated upon the subject of moral philosophy, and new truths are constantly being discovered. The shadowy conceptions of one age become bright living realities in the next. Much with which we are familiarly conversant was entirely unknown in the past. Evidently then we know more, we enjoy superior moral light. Now we do not believe with Socrates that to acquire

knowledge is absolutely to become better, but since the mind is naturally disposed to receive truth, the cirtainly the more clearly it is presented the more of it will be received; the more a man knows of his duty, caeteris paribus, the more of it will he perform.

There is one fact that more particularly and positively declares the superiority of this age; it is the wide spread and universal dissemination of truth. Science and religion are cherished now with no selfish esoteric spirit, but with a philanthropy as broad as the earth and as universal

as the race, they have been sent forth everywhere to dispel by their united power the night of ignorance and superstition that has hitherto hung over the masses. This and this alone evinces

true progress. Humanity is a complete whole, a collective unit, and therefore can only advance as the race, the whole mass of society is elevated. It is the highest glory of this age, that it is more than any preceding, contributing to the consumation of this desired end. Truth is sown broad cast in the kindly soil of the great

heart of humanity, where it will ever live a lasting memorial of the energy, zeal and rightly directed labors of the present.

If then the race is now in a state of progressive development evidently it is destined to continue as long as it exists, til humanity is perfected and man has regained is lost original condition, when he associated with angels and held close converse with Deity.

But we cannot be assured of the continued progress of the race unless it have an object

to aim at, a model after which to fashion itself. Man has no originality, he is essentially accumulation and cannot work without a pattern. One of his own creation will not do for it must needs be like himself imperfect, and it is difficult to attain perfection by aiming at imperfection. What and when then is this model, this guarenty of the complete final development of humanity? It is the conception of Deity that lives in the soul. Here is an ideal model so perfect that it may ever be approximated yet never equaled. As the

[assymtole?] ever approaches nearer and nearer the parabolic curve, though if indefinitely produced cannot become tangent to it, so humanity may and is destined to approach in likeness the character of God throughout eternity.