

Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

Documents Online

Title: "College Life Its Lights and Shadows," by William C. Wilson

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: June 26, 1873

Location: Orations-1873-W754c

Contact:

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

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

73

8p

7

College Life Its Lights and Shadows.

Whatever may be our circumstances or position in life, from the poor, ragged beggar who dwells in the squalid hovel, where misdeeds reign - and reigns, up to the magnificent palace, whose superb surroundings attract the attention of every passer-by, where diamonds glitter, like dew-drops in the sun, where every want that money can satisfy is appeased, where the king dispenses laws for the government of the nation; - and to all intermediate conditions - and habitations joy and sorrow come. The good and bad, virtuous, and vicious, rich and poor, young and old, all are heirs to suffering; "For man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" but while all must drink from the cup of sorrow yet, some circumstances - all considered, - are more exposed to it than others. This being the general experience of mankind, and

most parents being older than their children and having the interest and prosperity of said children at heart, wish to put them in possession of what they believe will be the best antidote to sorrow, and give them competency without drugging, send them in different directions in pursuit of happiness, yet while there is no road so sure, none so direct to obtain it, as learning, few choose it.

Some having arrived the conclusion, after serious consideration, wakeful nights, gloomy days, and consultation with those whom they believe are able to give sound counsel, concerning the equipment of their noble boys for the voyage of life, at the conclusion to send them to college. The inexperienced youth full of joy at the thought of being brought in contact with the great minds of the nation, can

hardly maintain his equilibrium. His dear mother packs his trunk with shirts, towels &c and some eatables. He starts, the proudest, and swiftest man in the country in his own eyes, arrives at the town inquires the way to the college, enters through the front iron gates, the beautiful Campus, - at a few hundred yard a squad of students may be seen basking in the sun, if the weather is pleasant, and ^{he} as ~~he~~ advances they debate among themselves, whether he is a candidate for "Fresh man's" orders, - "a red shaken with the wind" or an evergreen, the decision for the time is mostly given in favor of the evergreen, and frequently it is a difficult matter for tender-eyed persons to decide, because his appearance is so verdant. But they soon initiate him into various orders, which are peculiar to colleges, thoroughly cleanse him from his former deeds, and quickly

on to newness of life. Then they move to the other extreme and overload him with kindness, for the purpose of ascertaining his suitability for their "Fraternity" or "Literary Society," he thought at first that they were very friendly to each other, but soon discovers that they are very hostile, why he cannot understand. However, in order to give peace to his mind, he joins the party that first take him in hand, which materially characterizes his college career, and moulds to a great extent his future life, hence the importance of a good decision, then the others pass him as if they had never seen him, and during his course is practically excluded from all other parties, So great is the influence which some of these parties exert that in some cases it is enough to mention his party to know his character.

Life is one of the greatest blessings that

could be bestowed upon us. To be brought from
 the dust of the earth, put in the capacity of
 holding communion with the God of the uni-
 verse, and finally of dwelling with Him
 in light is truly a theme on which glorified
 intellects may ponder, and for which glorified
 tongues will utter endless praise, but we
 must hasten to a close for we are tired already.
 The world is full of ^{beauty} ~~joy~~. It is seen not only
 in the sunbeam, the lightning, the glimmer
 of the distant star but also in colored life.
 Here we meet with consensual spirits, who
 ally themselves to us because of our natural
 disabilities, joys, and sorrows. In them we
 find our counterparts and affinities, who may
 be said in a sense to be "bone of our bone and flesh
 of our flesh," - at least they are true help-mates
 and being drawn into such intimate rela-

tions, at that season of life, when we are so free from
care, so pure in mind, and so susceptible of impres-
sion, that we most naturally, surrounded by such
jolly companions, forget our individual troubles,
and heartily take part in every kind of inno-
cent amusement, and needful exercise, at any
time, in any place. It is useless to go into a detail-
ed description of the life in the lecture room,
the society hall, the chapel, and on the Cam-
pus, yet we may mention one of the great thoughts
in general unappreciated and unobserved sources
of delight. It is to hear Dr. Haman, uncon-
scious of your presence, conversing now with
Abner or Isaac in Hebrew, then with Demo-
sthenes or Socrates in Greek, afterward with
Cicero, or Lactantius in Latin. Listening to this
dialogue one is almost compelled to doubt
his existence in the flesh, and as he looks

- 0
- around to see these mighty spirits of the universe, he beholds the doctor, with an ineffable smile, a mild luster in his eye, meekness, and simplicity depicted on his countenance, as he addresses him in his own vernacular, and narrates to him some incident that occurred to him in Egypt or Palestine. Now as this performance is never to see the light either in the way of speaking or printing it, and as I have no money to buy pen, paper, and ink I must conclude, with one lesson.

In general our daily life is not marked by ecstatic joy or inconsolable sorrow, yet most of the human family have experienced some of these sensations. He who sends them knows our frailty, that great pleasure would intoxicate and render us incompetent for the performance of our duties, and unmindful of the destiny awaits us when this world shall be burned.

up, when of its polluted existence no trace shall
be found, when it shall open up into that other great
mysterious world for which it was created and to
which it leads; whereas many sorrows would
submerge us beneath their dark and troublous
billows, quench our noblest aspirations, close our
eyes to the beautiful and good, rob us of the en-
joyments of life but by limiting our joys and tem-
pering our sorrows we are enabled with cheerfulness
and animation to accomplish our individual
attainments. This being the undisputed & evident
fact it follows, that the little troubles and dif-
ficulties, which we experience in college life, ought
to prepare us to bear with magnanimity the
greater trials that await us.

W. C. Wilson

Commencement Oration of W. C. Wilson, Class of 1873
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

College Life Its Lights and Shadows.

Whatever may be our circumstances or position in life, from the poor ragged beggar who dwells in the squalid hovel, where indecency lives and reigns, up to the magnificent palace, whose superb surroundings attract the attention of every passerby, where, diamonds glitter, like dew-drops in the sun, where every want that money can satisfy is appeased, where the king dispenses laws for the government of the nation; and to all intermediate conditions and habitations joy and sorrow come. The good and bad, virtuous and vicious, rich and poor, young and old, all are heirs to suffering, "For man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward" but while, all must drink from the cup of sorrow yet, some circumstances are considered, as more exposed to it than others. This being the general experience of mankind, and

most parents being older than their children and having the interest and prosperity of said children at heart, wish to put them in possession of what they believe will be the best antidote to sorrow, and give them competency without drugery, send them in different directions in pursuit of happiness, yet while there is no road so sure, none so direct to obtain it as learning, few choose it.

Some having, derived ~~the conclusion~~, after serious consideration; wakeful nights, gloomy days, and consultation with those whom they believe are able to give sound counsel, concerning the equipment of their noble boys for the voyage of life, at the conclusion to send them to college. The inexperienced youth full of joy at the thought of being brought in contact with the great minds of the nation, can

hardly maintain his equilibrium. His dear mother packs his trunk with shirts, towels &c and some eatables. He starts, the proudest, and greatest man in the country in his own eyes, arrives at the town inquires the way to the college, enters through the front iron gates, the beautiful campus, at a few hundred yard a squad of students may be seen basking in the sun, if the weather is pleasant, and as he advances they debate among themselves, whether he is a candidate for "Freshman's" orders, "a reed shaken with the wind" or an evergreen, the decision for the time is mostly given in favor of the evergreen, and frequently it is a difficult matter for tender-eyed persons to decide, because his appearance is so verdant. But they soon initiate him into various orders, which are peculiar to colleges, thoroughly cleanse him from his former died and quick-

en to newness of life. Then they move to the other extreme and overload him with kindness, for the purpose of ascertaining his suitability for their "Fraternity" or "Literary Society," he thought at first they were very friendly with each other, but soon discovers that they are very hostile, why he cannot understand. However, in order to give peace to his mind, he gives the party that first take him in hand, which materially characterizes his-college-career, and moulds to

a great extent his future life, hence the importance of a good decision, then the others pass him as if they had never seen him, and during his course is partially excluded from all other parties. So great is the influence which some of these parties exert that in some cases it is enough to mention his party to know his character.

Life is one of the greatest blessings that

could be bestowed upon us. To be brought from the dust of the earth, put in the capacity of holding communion with the God of the universe, and finally of dwelling with Him in light is truly a theme on which glorified intellects may ponder, and for which glorified tongues will utter endless praise. But one must hasten to a close, for we are tired already. The world is full of beauty ~~joy~~. It is seen not only in the sunbeams, the lightening, the glimmer of the distant star but also in college life. Here we meet with congenial spirits, who ally themselves to us because of our natural disabilities, joys, and sorrows. In them we find our counterparts and affinities, who may be said in a sense to be "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," at least they are true help-

mates. And being drawn into such intimate relations, at that season of life, when we are so free from care, so pure in mind, and so susceptible of impression, that we most naturally, surrounded by such jolly companions, forget our individual troubles, and heartily take part in every kind of innocent amusement, and needful exercise, at any time in any place. It is useless to go into a detailed description of ~~the~~ life in the lecture room, the society hall, the chapel, and on the campus, yet we may mention one of the great things in general unappreciated and unobserved sources of delight. It is to hear Dr. Harman, unconscious of your presence, conversing now with Moses or Isaiah in Hebrew, then with Demosthenes or Socrates in Greek, afterward with Cicero, or Tacitus in Latin. Listening to this dialogue one is almost compelled to doubt his existence in the flesh, as he looks

around to see these mighty spirits of the universe, he beholds the doctor, with an ineffable smile, a mild lustre in his eye, meekness, and simplicity depicted on his countenance, as he addresses him in his own vernacular, and narrates, to him some incident that occurred to him or Egypt or Palestine. Now as this performance is never to see the light either in the way of speaking or printing it, and as I have no money to buy pen, paper, and ink I must conclude this one lesson.

In general our daily life is not marked by ecstatic joy or inconsolable sorrow, yet most of the human family have experienced some of those sensations. He who sends them knows our frailty, that great pleasure would intoxicate and render us incompetent for the performance of our duties, and unmindful of the destiny awaits us when this world shall be burned

up, when of its polluted existence no trace shall be found, when it shall open up into that other great mysterious world for which it was created and to which it leads; whereas many sorrows would submerge us beneath their dark and troublous billows, quench our noblest aspirations, close our eyes to the beautiful and good, rob us of the enjoyments of life but by limiting our joys and tempering our sorrows we are unable with cheerfulness and animation to accomplish our individual allotments. This being the undisputed & evident fact it follows, that the little troubles

and difficulties, which we experience in college life, ought to prepare us to hear with magnanimity the greater trials that await us.

W. C. Wilson