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Title: Address from the Second Commencement by Charles Nisbet

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Carlisle, 7th. May 1788.

Gentlemen,

You have now gone through the usual exercises & course of study, that are required previous to receiving a degree, & are to go out into the world in sundry capacities, & destined to different to different professions as choice & convenience may direct. It will necessarily appear in your future conduct in what manner you have spent your time here, & what improvement you have made of that education, which your parents & friends have procured for you.

In any number of students enjoying the same advantages, unequal progress will be made, & unequal attainments & capacities must necessarily be discovered, as marks of destination for different departments & offices in society. In that beautiful order of things established by the great Author of nature, every kind & degree of Capacity has its proper place & value, & all are useful for the benefit of the whole, as the various wants of society call for talents of every kind & degree.

There is one thing, however, in which we earnestly wish that you may be all equal, according to your different capacities, we mean, in Moral & social affections, in which no man can excel another, who is sincere, though by Superior

capacity, he may be able to give more extensive proofs of them.

As this is the ultimate end of education, we have spared no pains to keep its importance in your view, & to exhibit it to you in its proper light. The cultivation of the understanding we have uniformly considered only as a mean for the improvement of the heart, & the amendment of your conduct.

It has been our earnest desire to excite & improve your faculties as far as possible, & to introduce you to the knowledge of your own Nature & the nature of things, that you might learn to pursue your own true interest, & might be convinced that benevolence, justice, truth & uprightness are the chief & surest guides to public & private happiness.

When we are now to take leave of you, & when you are to make your way in the world in various lines of business, we would wish to concentrate all our wishes for your welfare, & all our former instructions, if it were possible, into one address, & we would wish it to rest with its full force on your mind, that you might be enabled to remember & practise for your own advantage & that of the public all the good instructions, that

you have received in the course of your education here.

Your minds have been led successively over a very large field, & you have had a pretty extensive opportunity of exercising your faculties & enlarging your ideas. The Roman & Greek languages have been explained to you, not only on account of their elegance, regularity & antiquity, but likewise with a view to excite & exercise your taste & judgment, & to introduce you to the acquaintance of the most cultivated Nations & the most polished ages of the world.

If you have made a proper use of the pains, that have been taken with a view to your advantage, you will have discovered men of a larger size, & sentiments & actions of much greater magnanimity, than can be found in the present dregs of time. You will have conversed with sages & heroes, the inventors of arts, the founders of States & empires, the wonder of the

World, & the friends of mankind. You must have discerned the dignity & beauty of virtue, the horror & ugliness of vice, & been convinced that virtue comprises in it all that can make men great, honorable, wise or happy, all that can strengthen, improve or aggrandize society, & all

that can render man the image of the Deity, who is the source of life, wisdom, excellence & happiness.

As the circumstance of having kept good company, has an assimilating effect on the manners of men, & teaches them by imitation & the principle of society, to give honor to merit, to show pity to weakness, to detest & abhor vice, disorder & indecency, & to exercise justice & benevolence to all, we hope that you have been in some degree assimilated to those great personages to whose acquaintance you have been introduced, & that you have imbibed something of their spirit & elevated sentiments.

As the ancients were famed for their policy, & their due acquaintance with the virtues of Society, we hope you have learned from their examples & lessons the dignity of Patriotism & public spirit, the meanness of selfish passions, & the honor & utility of public virtue & private integrity. The ancients had a high sense of honor, & a great regard to character & reputation, though they were very well acquainted even by experience, of the baseness & ingratitude of mankind, & their propensity

in every age to extol their enemies & destroyers & to persecute their real friends and benefactors.

Amidst the base & ungrateful mob of mankind, we hope you have learned to distinguish a generous few, a disinterested public, who sooner or later will do justice to worthy characters, & cover the vicious with deserved reproach & indignation. And as you know the ingratitude & baseness of men, we hope you will be stimulated to generous & patriotic conduct, not merely in the view of sharing their applause, which is indeed worth nothing, but because such conduct is suitable to the nature & dignity of man, & apt to procure him the approbation of his own conscience, which is more to be desired than the unmeaning applause of ignorant Multitudes, which the most base & mischievous of men often obtain, & because such goodness is an imitation of the Supreme Being, who makes his Sun to arise on the evil & on the good, & who sends his rain on the just & on the unjust.

By surveying the fates & history of ancient states & kingdoms, you might have discerned the causes of their rise and fall, & you must have seen that virtue, industry, truth, uprightness, public spirit & submission to law & order have

been the uniform causes of the aggrandisement of states, & that selfishness, cowardice, ignorance, indolence, intemperance & dishonesty have undermined the greatest empires, & rendered nations, that were once glorious, slavish & despicable, the refuse of the world, & the sport of a tyrant.

The study of the mathematical sciences has led you to consider the nature of quantity, to contemplate in the material world the eternal relations, analogies, connexions & dependencies of things. Your minds have been accustomed to abstract reason, & the relations of general ideas. You have been led to discern the nature of intuitive certainty, & of the manner in which secondary truths may be demonstrated from their necessary connexion with axioms & primary

truths. In the certain & determined relations of numbers, lines & figures, you have been led to discern a specimen of that nice order & exact proportion in which God has created all things, & which we may trace in all the works of nature, in proportion as we are acquainted with them.

By being acquainted with the properties of lines & figures, which do not vary on account of size or position, you have been led to the knowledge of this great globe, which we inhabit, its position in the solar system,

its motions, divisions, dimensions & laws, & the proportion & relation it has to the other great Bodies of the Universe. You have been instructed in the causes of the succession of seasons, the vicissitudes of day and night, heat and cold, the wonderful works of him, that is perfect in knowledge.

You have, by the instructions & experience of others, made the tour of this great Globe in all directions, & have been led to discover man in all states, from the grossest barbarity to the highest degree of civilization; you have surveyed the provisions, that providence has made for his happiness & for the excitement & exercise of his faculties, by means of the conveniencies & inconveniencies, with which he is every where surrounded, & you must have seen that however seemingly various the situations of men are, yet all of them may be happy, if they are wise, & are not wanting to themselves; that virtue always leads to happiness & that vice in every form, & in every situation, leads infallibly to certain & unavoidable misery.

Your thoughts have likewise been elevated in the course of your studies to the greater bodies of the universe, the magnitude of which startles imagination, & their distance almost defies the powers of calculation. You may have been led to conclude, from certain & indubitable principles, that

these are the regions of order, & that they constantly obey the laws of their creator, that other Suns, infinite in number, enlighten other planets, few of whom have yet been discovered, that it is probable that all are pregnant with various degrees of life & teeming with creatures of different kinds, who praise their great Creator, & serve the ends of their creation in a more perfect manner than the degenerate inhabitants of our diminutive planet.

If the works of God are this immense in their extent, & possessed of unknown degrees of perfection, how great & how venerable must he himself be, to whom all these globes are as nothing, & from whose happiness the extinction of them & all their numberless inhabitants could make no diminution, as they are also incapable of adding to it in the least degree!

You have been likewise instructed in the manner of computing time, & led to discern how the great lights of Heaven serve for Signs & for Seasons, for days & for years, & in this as well as all the Works of God, you have seen the order & exactness that prevails throughout, & that he has created all things in number, weight & measure.

In examining the properties & powers of matter,

you have been led to discern the great laws to which it is subject, & that wonderful power by which its several parts are kept together, the mixture of the four elements in all bodies, the nature of fluid substances, the properties of air, light & fire, & the laws of vision both by refraction &

reflexion. In this part of your studies, you have discovered the first principles of the Mechanical Arts, as well as those of Medicine & Chemistry.

You have also been taught to investigate the nature of the human mind, & its principal operations of perception, judgment & reasoning; you have been led to discover the source of simple ideas by perception of material objects, & the manner in which the mind multiplies its ideas by reflexion, comparison, inversion, addition, gradation, negation & abstraction; you have investigated the nature & qualities of propositions, & the different ways in which affirmation & negation may be varied, the theory of artificial reasoning, & the manner in which propositions may be arranged to form artificial arguments, & truth discovered by artificial & alternate comparison of ideas. In a word, you have been led to discover those laws of nature, according to which the mind exercises its rational powers & in what manner it is af-

ected by truth & falsehood.

You have likewise been led to consider the general & abstract properties of beings, & to discover the first principles of all the Sciences in the doctrine of Metaphysics. You have discovered the origin of abstract ideas, & in what manner we acquire them. You have surveyed the relations & external denominations of Being, which are the foundation of those primary truths commonly called Axioms, on which all our speculations, arguments & conclusions in science ultimately rest, & by the help of which alone other truths can be demonstrated. These have led you to discern the necessary existence & inseparable attributes of the Deity, his eternity, immensity, infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, wisdom, truth, justice, goodness & mercy. You have traced all the perfections of the creatures to their infinite source in the Deity, & discovered the impossibility of the existence of any creature whatever, without the will, power & agency of a Supreme being, on whom all creatures, as such, are necessarily & constantly dependent, & according to their relation to whom they are either happy or miserable. While ignorant men affect to despise metaphysical speculations

as useless & obscure, because they have never entered into them, you may laugh at their ignorance, because you have discerned that this Science is the field of certainty, & that the truths discovered by it are all possessed of the highest degree of evidence, & constitute the foundations of all other science. In an age of infidelity & corruption of Manners, you may meet with ignorant & corrupt men, who may either pretend to deny the existence of a Deity altogether, or that his nature & attributes are extremely uncertain. You are now in a condition to refute these vain & foolish men by the acquaintance you have acquired with the nature of things, so that you can shew them that of all other truths the existence of a Deity is the most necessary & evident, that it is a matter of perception, & not properly of argument, as without it, it is impossible that either we ourselves, or any other creature could exist. You have seen that his physical & moral attributes, which are the foundation of the worship & obedience we owe him, are characterised so deeply in all his works, that they are inseparable from his nature, so that a rational mind cannot even conceive him to exist without them in the highest degree. You have seen

that those, who attribute the origin of any thing to Chance, talk unconsequentially & unintelligibly, & that their words cannot convey any precise or consistent idea. In surveying the nature & properties of the human mind, you have been led to discern its dignity & destination to

immortal duration, with as much evidence & certainty, as we can discern in the frame of inferior Animals, a destination & fitness for the several situations in which we see them placed, & that a future state of rewards & punishments is as discernible, as any of the objects of sense, in the preparations, that nature has made for it, & its influences & forebodings in the moral sense of mankind. You have seen that theology, in its fundamental principles, is a part of natural science, & capable of the most formal demonstration, & that even the Faith, that is required of a Christian, on the supposition of God's declaring his will, is a duty of natural, no less than revealed religion, as the infinite veracity of the Deity is equally deducible from both.

In investigating the principles of Morals for the direction of the Will, you have been led to discover those

properties that distinguish man from other animals, & point out a difference of nature & destination; you have been made to discern in every part of the history of Man, both with regard to the species & the individual, the body & the mind, that vestiges of his original glory, & a capacity of improvement & tendency to perfection, which is the foundation of all virtue & moral worth, & without which his misery would be totally incurable.

You have been led to discover the physical laws of the human understanding & will, in the due union whereof the perfection of moral conduct consists, & from the nature, capacities, situation & prospects of man, you have seen that he is made to find his happiness in the exercise of benevolent affections, in keeping his due place & order in the Universe, which whenever he endeavors to abandon, pain, disgrace, fear, shame & self condemnation press upon him from all quarters.

From the congeniality of the human mind to truth, & the delight it feels in discovering it, you have been led to perceive the importance of just notions & opinions, & the folly & futility of those, who suppose that all opinions are indifferent, & of equal tendency to produce a right moral conduct & the happiness of

society.

You have likewise been made to discern the error of those, who endeavour to erect the foundation of moral obligation on single & solitary principles, & that we must combine all those that have been mentioned with this view, in order to make it capable of answering the purposes expected from it.

You have traced the history of Man up to the first natural society, which is that of a family, & discovered the duties of the Head & members of it, derived from their several situations & interests, & the preservation of the Society; & you have seen that all the duties of Civil or adventitious societies are derived from the same principles, & are directed to the same end; that truth, honor & justice are the necessary bonds of human society, without which it cannot exist & be supported, far less flourish, or become respectable.

Virtue is the true dignity as well as the happiness of human nature, as it comprehends in it all that is grand, becoming, proper & useful to man both in their single & social capacity, & expresses according to the capacity of our nature the image of the Deity, the source of all perfection. Human society is supported by a multitude of transactions amongst men, in consequence of which they mutually supply each others wants, but if these contracts are not reciprocally observed, all intercourse must cease, & all the

benefits of society must be immediately forfeited & at an end.

The object of Civil government is to maintain the rights of men, by the application of force to oblige them to fulfill their engagements, & by restraining & punishing those that encroach on the rights of others. You have been taught the nature of true liberty, which is not an impunity of Crimes, or an extinction of truth & justice among men, as is commonly held, but the privilege of possessing all our rights & defenses free from external restraint, & the power of improving our nature, & pursuing our happiness without hurting others. You have seen that liberty comprehends justice, truth & fidelity to our engagements, which qualities are the ornaments of human nature, as their contraries are the marks of baseness & depravity. Private virtue is the foundation of public spirit, & all pretensions to the latter without the former are base, absurd & hypocritical.

A boundless liberty is no doubt agreeable to those, who have been long in prison, or who are conscious that they ought to be there; but virtue & benevolence approve of the restraints of law, the power of the magistrate, & the rights of government & private persons; nay it is a law to itself,

& a man of honor, though living in a country without government, will take the same care to speak truth, to do justice, to perform his engagements & to hurt no body, as if he were surrounded by all the restraints of regular & efficient government. The man, who takes advantage of the want of government, to lie, cheat & deceive with impunity, is a knave in grain, who would cheat & injure others, even under a regular government, if he could escape its vigilance or elude its punishments.

We have been the more careful to inculcate on you the practice of truth, faithfulness, justice, a sense of honor & regard to character, because you have the misfortune to live in a country where the science of government is but very little understood, & the practice of it almost totally unknown. By the abuse of liberty & independency since the late revolution, all outward restraints have been taken away from men. You have had Rulers to please you instead of executing justice. The laws have been treated with ridicule, because the magistrates dare not execute them for fear of losing their places. Men have been left to do just what they please, & the greatest knave has had nothing to fear except from the rivalry of those of his own profession. Men have learned

not to be ashamed even when known to be knaves, liars & cheats in the most public manner, & no vice can now render a man infamous, or hinder him from being elected to any office or dignity in the gift of his Countrymen, nay his chance for preferment may be even greater than that of the most virtuous man in the State.

In the midst of this deep corruption & depravity of manners, you are to go abroad into the world in different professions, & to be exposed to all the temptations of an infamous & degenerate age. We hope you are yet untainted with the contagion of vicious customs. Let me intreat you to watch over your moral conduct, & beware of yielding to the temptations, which you will certainly meet with. You will every day see men pretending to virtue & claiming respect, nay perhaps making high professions of patriotism, though destitute of truth, honor &

justice, & entirely callous as to all sense of Shame. Beware of viewing such objects with indifference, lest you learn to behold them with approbation. Let them be the objects of your Contempt & aversion, & keep at the utmost distance from imitating their conduct. The Man, who does not heartily hate & despise a knave has already ceased to be an honest man. Let truth govern all your words, & observe the strictest honor & justice in all

your dealings with men, both in great & small matters. All habits increase by degrees. The man, who can allow himself to cheat & lie in small concerns, will soon learn to do the same in greater matters. He that is faithful in little will be faithful also in much, & he that is unfaithful in little will be unfaithful also in much. Above all things, abhor the contemptible arts & shuffling excuses of knaves, with which they endeavour to cloak their knavery. Despise their vile hypocrisy, & observe how mean & contemptible they look when their lying is detected, & how by adding lie to lie they plunge deeper into guilt & meanness, while they struggle to avoid the imputation of it. You have been taught the principles of virtue & religion, which are the true dignity & ornament of man. Beware of losing the advantages of your education, or becoming insensible of moral obligation. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil & the good, the evil with abhorrence, & the good with approbation & delight. Amidst that moral depravity, which you will daily witness, commend yourselves to the divine protection, & beware of following a multitude to do evil. While a sense of honor, justice, decency & commercial honesty appear to be extinct in the minds of the most of men, let them always be found in those,

who have received their education in this seminary. We appeal to yourselves if we have not dealt faithfully with you in inculcating on your tender minds the principles of virtue & religion. We have endeavoured to set them before you in their native beauty, dignity & utility. We have illustrated their excellence by the history & experience of mankind, & endeavoured to show you, that vice is the ultimate & sole cause of human misery, & that the man, who departs from the paths of virtue only lays a snare for his own soul. Compare only the characters of virtuous & vicious men together, & let your own feelings pronounce which of them is worthy of approbation. Consider on the one hand a person of virtue & honor, who loves & reverences his Maker, who respects the dignity of human nature, & the order of the universe, who loves mankind, & wishes to promote their happiness. Such a person will have the most sacred regard to truth, & will make no engagements, which he does not strictly perform. He will avoid the odious imputation of a liar as the deepest disgrace & the greatest misery. He will do to others as he would think it just that they should do to him. He will regard justice & the rights of others, he will obey the laws of God & his Country, & will learn to do the least

injustice, though it were in his power to do it with secrecy & even with impunity. Consider on the other hand a sneaking, sharpening, shuffling & shameless knave, who uses words only as snares to entrap the unwary, who has left all sense of honor, decency & integrity, & when his falsehood is detected, endeavours to cover it with additional falsehood. Such an one will presume to use the language of virtue to promote the purposes of vice. He will take the sacred names of honor, truth & justice in his dirty & polluted lips, while he meditates the vilest knavery & imposition. He will pay his debts with excuses & when put in mind of his promises will give hints that

others ought not to have trusted him. In comparing these two opposite Characters, will not your conscience & moral feelings immediately pronounce, that the first is worthy of esteem, veneration & imitation, & that the last is most base, hateful & abominable.

Consider the influence of virtue on the happiness of society. Imagine a nation of virtuous men, & consider how their condition would be influenced by their character. As they would all speak truth, they would have the greatest confidence in each other: As they would

all be just & benevolent, none would encroach on another's right, nor claim any thing that was not his own. Their reciprocal engagements would be performed with fidelity, & none would have reason to complain of each other. All the seeds of division would be excluded, & they would enjoy a kind of Heaven on earth.

Imagine on the other hand a nation of cheats, liars, sharpers & hypocrites, or consisting for the most part of such characters. Here no one could adventure to trust another, so that all transactions will cease, or be carried on with fear, jealousy & perplexity. No man could call any thing his own, if he knew that there were any one that could cheat more successfully than himself. Among such men there could be no friendship of social affection, nor could they join together in promoting their common interest. Estranged, indifferent & hostile to each other, they would feel the greatest mutual aversion to each other, as a knave hates another knave whom he cannot impose on. They could neither be rich, respectable, nor powerful, but must soon turn their arms against each other to obtain by force what was impracticable by fraud. Despised, abhorred & shunned by all nations, as a knot of Convicts that had broke prison, they would only be fit for Botany Bay or Rhode Island.

Let it be your care to support the reputation of learning, which is not without its enemies among the ignorant. Let the World see that you despise vice as debasing & degrading to your nature, as you abhor it as hateful to the Deity, & hurtful to your interest & to the order of the universe. In making friendships & connexions in life, have always the highest regard to virtue & religion. Avoid the infectious company of sinners, & beware of learning their ways. In discharging the duties of the professions, which you may embrace, endeavour to distinguish yourselves by faithfulness, prudence, justice & honor. Strive to redeem the lost character of your Country as far as in your power, that American faith may not be the proverb of another century. Neglect not to adorn your minds with knowledge, especially that which belongs to your several professions. Avoid indolence, as the mother of all vice, & exercise your faculties on honorable subjects. Beware of contracting debts, which you cannot pay. Regulate your expenses according to your ability, & keep at the greatest distance from dishonesty. To contract debt thoughtlessly, rashly, or with a design

to deceive is base & villanous, & leads to legions of other crimes. Lying, shuffling, deceit & perjury are the natural & common effects of such conduct. The wicked borroweth & payeth not again, but the righteous sheweth mercy & lendeth. Beware of laying aside all regard to character. This is the last stage of corruption, & gives no hopes of reformation. When you have lost shame, you have lost every thing, that can restrain you from the extreme of vice. "The man, that blushes, is not quite a brute," says the poet, intimating that he is one indeed, who does not.

In your behaviour to others let Civility & Politeness dictate your language & conduct, & if you are sincerely virtuous, the language of these will be the language of your heart. Revere the Deity, & neglect not the duties of religion. Seek the Lord while he may be found, & call upon him while he is nigh. As the practice of religion & virtue leads upwards to the greatest perfection of which human nature is capable, so the neglect of religion leads downwards to the deepest imaginable corruption & depravation. Some modern infidel philosophers pretend that a Nation

once civilized will never again become barbarous, but in this they contradict history & experience, though historians by profession. We all know what has happened to many parts of Asia & Africa once seats of science. And in our own times we may see men, who were born in civilized countries, yet by neglect of religion, ignorance, insolence, lawless liberty & depravation of character, sink to a degree of barbarity equal to that of our Indian Neighbours; nay what is still more sad, some have sunk to the level of the beasts of the field, by impiety & contempt of religion & the Lord's day, & they have claimed kindred with them by propagation, which by the deserved indignation of the Deity produced before our eyes a monster, the true image of a barbarian, a brute in human shape. Beware of the first transgressions of duty, & never reckon it a light thing to sin against God. Remember what you have been taught, & preserve the dignity of your nature & education.

We can appeal to yourselves that your several teachers have dealt faithfully with you, & we hope you will acknowledge their zeal & diligence. I can say for myself, & my conscience bears me witness that

I have labored, prayed & studied earnestly to promote your welfare in circumstances most distressing, discouraging & calamitous. Removed far from my friends & country where I was known & respected & lived independent, groaning under disappointment, vexation, uncertainty & unperformed promises, almost totally forsaken of man, I looked up to my God & prayed that I might be enabled to do my duty faithfully, in whatever manner men might think proper to behave with regard to theirs. And my daily studies to promote your welfare have been under God my chief resource against melancholy & despair in a situation so gloomy & uncertain, as to upset the strongest minds. Amidst all these discouragements I have been persecuted by the lying letters of unknown persons, & vile attempts have been made to deprive me of my good name, which it is not in the power of all this Continent to rob me of, being already established where much better judges of merit are to be found.

We hope you will consider as an additional argument to virtue, diligence & good behaviour, that you are charged with no small part of the reputation of a seminary to which you acknowledge obligations & which

is an object of pity in many respects. Your improvement, your virtuous & good conduct may do more for its support than many have done, who have been its friends in words. If it appear that you are well educated, that you have learned to fear God, to speak truth, to do justice, to despise villainy, to conduct yourselves so as to do honor to your country, your teachers will share in that honor & others will be desirous of sending their children to a seminary that can produce bright

examples of moral conduct & of the virtues of public & private life, which may tend to its support, when all its other resources appear to be shadowy & deceitful.

By an arrangement probably well intended, but unfortunate in the issue many persons of different characters & principles, who live at great distances, were introduced to the management & patronage of this Seminary, but the most part of these have made light of their engagements & proved mere cyphers. Indeed they might as properly call themselves Cardinals of the Roman Church, or officers of the Ottoman empire, as Trustees of the College, for which they have done nothing. The

election of others in the room of some of them, who have given a specimen of their honesty by resigning without performing their engagements, may be attended with some success. At least we hope that they will not follow the example of their predecessors. But your behaviour, attainments & good conduct may greatly aid the few remaining friends of this forlorn Institution, to extend its usefulness & continue its support.

Let me intreat you, therefore, by the regard you owe to God & your own souls, & the reverence you owe to your Parents, who certainly intended to do good to you by giving you a liberal education, by compassion for the reputation of your sinking country, by the generous indignation you must feel for her blasted Character, & by your regard to us & this Seminary, which we are persuaded is sincere, that you would do honor to yourselves & all that are related to you, by an uniformly decent, just benevolent, upright & religious conduct. You have enjoyed advantages for which some may envy you, & others affect to despise you. Let your conduct declare that you have been well instructed, & that you have not

been instructed in vain. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works & glorify your father, which is in heaven.

Perhaps the time may come when the inhabitants of this Country may have sense enough to discover that in order to establish a Seminary of this nature, it is not sufficient to endow it with a large fund of empty promises, & waste paper, but that active exertions, real services & honorable & faithful performance of engagements are also necessary, unless men could be found fit to teach, who could live on promises, or who were stupid enough not to know any difference betwixt justice & injustice. We hope we say that such a time will come, but we know certainly that it is not yet come. While we wait & pray for it, be you careful to support the society by a good life, & labor to merit a good name, which is more to be chosen than great riches.