

# Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

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

## Documents Online

**Title:** Farewell Address by John Wilson to His Students

**Date:** August 27, 1793

**Location:** I-BlackT-1954-3

### Contact:

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

717-245-1399

[archives@dickinson.edu](mailto:archives@dickinson.edu)

Seeing the time has now approached that  
I must leave you and cease to be your Teacher,  
I have a few things by way of Instruction  
rather than for the sake of Declamation  
to communicate w<sup>ch</sup> may remain as the  
last evidence of my attachment to your future  
Prosperity, on which no small part of my own  
must necessarily depend.

The things w<sup>ch</sup> I mean to treat of are  
principally confined to your Studies and  
moral conduct. — And first with regard  
to your Studies. That you endeavour to  
retain and make further advances in those  
Branches of Literature in w<sup>ch</sup> you have just  
been initiated. You have just come up to  
the porch, now cease till you have visit'd  
the temple itself. You have laid the foundation,  
Let not men say hereafter, that such were  
not able to finish. It is cause of sorrow,  
that after Years spent in acquiring useful  
Knowledge, we should suffer it to slip from  
us when a small attention might save the loss.  
Instead of this, seek to make improvement and  
particularly in your profession; whatever it  
may be, be emulous to excel. Some parts

of School Learning and particularly the higher  
Branches, you <sup>may</sup> not find immediately necessary  
in common life, and it may be proper not to  
pursue them too far. It is not expected that  
a divine should be a Lawyer, or a Lawyer a  
Physician or a Physician a mechanic. The  
Scholar indeed ought to know the general prin-  
ciples of all; but with his particular  
profession, every one ought to be thoroughly  
acquainted. This is expected and it is all that  
ought to be expected.

Some parts of ~~school~~ Learning, particularly  
the knowledge of the dead Languages, not being  
essentially necessary in many employments in  
life, it has become even fashionable to decay.  
However plausible such arguments may be,  
nevertheless they are dangerous and founded on  
Laziness and want of information. Adopt  
not this sentiment, much less turn advo-  
cates for such pernicious doctrine. ~  
That men may be qualified to be useful and  
respectable in the world without the assistance  
of Greek and Latin, nobody will deny. That  
many who attempt to learn them make so

little proficiency as not to be bettered, is too true; but that they ought to be excluded from a system of education, is yet to be proved.

Some of the most eminent men in every profession have been accurate scholars in those Languages, and have besides understood their native Language better than others. Yea, what is it that enables the writers of our Day to combat so successfully this mode of education, but this very education which they have received?

They ungratefully sneer at arts which caused themselves to rise. In fine, Language is a science, the study of which improves the mind and is the study of human nature, which is ever truly important.

But we trust, the precious fees that we have made acquainted with those languages will not turn their own weapons against themselves.

If you would wish to make any progress in useful acquisitions, & to become eminent in your profession, above all, acquire the habit of Industry. This is almost every thing.

Be not discouraged, though difficulties  
& disappointments may ensue — persevere  
and you will certainly succeed, — Strive  
with animated exertion and you will  
surely conquer. — The best talents without  
application and Industry will not be  
successful; and, on the contrary, moderate  
talents with application will achieve  
wonders. — You may be assured the great  
difference between men is not caused so  
much by their natural genius as by atten-  
tion and application. The manner in  
which you spend every moment of your time  
now is pregnant with future consequences  
of great importance, and will certainly  
cause a month of sorrow, or of pleasing  
reflection, when we shall be overtaken  
by the torturing hand of old age. No time  
is like the present, so powerful, so well suited  
for animated exertion. Deferring our  
Business till tomorrow, or until we feel  
a stronger inclination to do it with ease

4

is of all others, the most pernicious practice.  
I myself have tried it with most wretched  
success indeed. We may rest assured of the  
truth of Dr. Young's remark - "Procrastina-  
tion is the thief of time; Year after year it  
steals, till all is gone". - Though every  
experiment will teach us caution and every  
miscarriage will daily shew, that attempts  
are not always crowned with success. -  
As Dr. Johnson says, "The most precipi-  
tate Gardener will, in time, be taught the  
necessity of methodical gradation and pre-  
paratory measures; and the most daring  
confidence be convinced that neither O-  
mnipotence nor abilities, can command  
events." - Nevertheless, diligence with-  
out order cannot always be victorious. -  
Regular and fixed portions of your time  
ought constantly to be given up to the  
particular art or science you would  
wish to understand. Judicious method &  
a constant adherence to it is most essenti-  
ally necessary to an immediate attain-  
ment of whatever end we have in view.

But above all, we should always suffer  
experience to correct the errors of Theory.  
Yet, beware of too frequent changes for new  
objects without mature consideration;  
always remembering the loss of time &  
which they generally create and the confu-  
-sion which they are too apt to occasion;  
and as Hooker thought — "Change even from  
worse to better, is not always made with-  
-out inconvenience". — Although  
you may say, that you do not mean  
to become illustrious among the catalogue  
of authors, notwithstanding you ought to  
be  
accurate and attentive.

The rapidity with which improvements  
are advancing makes it highly necessary  
for everyone to exert his best faculties,  
not for the sake of eminence alone, but  
to escape insignificance & contempt. —  
Nothing less than attention and regular  
application will save you from disgrace,  
but these heightened by the powers of the  
mind may render you illustrious. —

Without them, we know you will in vain  
depend upon the natural faculties of the  
mind. But while we are speaking of  
diligence as being so essentially necessary in  
studious and literary occupations; Let  
us recommend it as equally necessary in  
the more servile and low; as in those  
which have been honourably stigmatized  
so that you must not think to pass away  
your time respectably in one continued  
stupor and drowsiness, although you  
may relinquish your studies and resolve  
to engage in the more mechanical calling  
of life. — Besides, an indolent and  
inactive life is one of the most wretched and  
unhappy you could possibly choose: it will  
insensibly precipitate you into innumerable  
vices and follies from which you will find it  
almost impossible to extricate yourself, <sup>even</sup> but  
from which you might have been preserved  
by diligently attending to some useful occupation.  
But of all opinions, there is none more  
effectually mischievous than an opinion that  
every kind of knowledge requires a peculiar



genius constitutionally framed for the  
reception of some Ideas only and the utter  
exclusion of others; and that to him who  
pursues any particular Study to which  
his genius is not peculiarly adapted,  
all labour shall be vain & every Endeav-  
our fruitless. — How do we know that  
some men were marked out by an extraordi-  
nary Designation of Providence for one pro-  
fession and others for another, untill we make  
sufficient trial, whether we ourselves enjoy  
it. Our genius, it is true, is like fire in the  
flint, only to be produced by collision  
with a proper Subject, yet it is the Duty  
of every one to try whether his faculties may  
not happily cooperate with his desires; then  
what mighty effects may we not expect, seeing  
that the Proficiency which we so much admire  
is only known by the event and that the ends  
are not to be looked for, but by making use of  
the means.

And lastly with regard to your moral con-  
duct. Let me recommend to you, in the  
strongest terms, the government of your passions  
on which your greatest comfort and prosperity

in this world must necessarily depend.

By long indulgence in young life, the passions grow unruly & unhappily gain the mastery over reason. Avoid all sudden gusts of anger which is in fact a temporary madness; avoid a sullen and envious disposition; but above all, be careful to guard against that most fatal of all passions jealousy, and let reason and good sense guide your conduct and point out the way to our terrestrial happiness. Be courteous, affable and obliging to all men. Bear with their infirmities, be ever ready to advise and relieve the miserable. Should superior <sup>talents and</sup> advantages fall to your share; suppress an elation of heart. Avoid an arrogant and contemptuous deportment towards others, but let all your endeavours unite to improve their knowledge and happiness in y<sup>e</sup> world. Let no overstrained complaisance take place of truth and sincerity. Openness & simplicity of behaviour will recommend you before all the studied forms of address. Mankind ought to find confidence in you beyond mere profession; otherwise you cannot maintain your character.

and influence among them.

However illustrious parts of Learning may render you among men, let it never be forgotten that these are only secondary titles to religion and morality, which alone can attract the favour and protection of the Deity. That you should act with such spirit and firmness as characterize the man of worth; that you should despise and nobly resist the allurements of vice and the corrupting principles of abandoned Libertines. This is your true Interest — This is your most indispensable duty. In vain shall we acquire Learning and the esteem of mankind, unless we learn to know ourselves.

Despicable indeed is that man, on whom his parents and friends have bestowed their choicest cares, and whom they have indeed made a scholar; but whose perverseness and total neglect of moral duty have immersed him into almost every species of Licentiousness. Part light! —

part darkness! How ungratefully has he  
abused the fairest opportunities! —

As some of you have had, or probably  
will have, better opportunities of knowing  
more than a great majority of mankind;  
evidence your superior knowledge by  
your superior good conduct and be not  
chargeable with the faults of others, ~~but~~ <sup>led</sup>  
astray through your Influence. —

With affections rightly informed and minds  
highly improved, should you possibly escape  
the notice of men, and live all your days  
without preferments; the satisfactory joys  
of a conscientious integrity which a man of  
real virtue and knowledge always finds  
in the contemplation of his own thoughts  
and the comforts which a well spent youth  
yields to old age are mighty and unspeakable  
and only to be known by real experience.  
These are the glorious rewards; these are

H

The noble compensations for the Labours  
of youth, from growing pale in the Study  
of nature and reason of things and in the  
Investigation of truth. May this be  
the peculiar concern of each of you, may  
you acquit yourselves like men, and  
give your Country cause "to hail &  
you with deserved acclaim"; is the  
strongest desire and most ardent wish  
of yours &c. &c. J. M. Wilson.

---

Southampton Bucks County —  
August 27<sup>th</sup> Anno domini 1793

---

