Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

http://archives.dickinson.edu/

Documents Online

Title: "Salutatory Oration: Extent of the Duty of Obedience," by George Coffey

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: July 9, 1840

Location: Orations-1840-C674s

Contact:

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

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Salutatory Oration.

Delivered at the Commencement.

Dickinson Collège!

Thursday July 9th 1870. Seorge Alexander Goffey.

Salutatory Oration.

Salutation.

Lucies and Gentlemen:

The time has come, which terminates the Collegiate course of the Class who will this day appear before you, and which confers on us the honors of our Alma Mater: For years we have been secheded from the world, and have passed our quiet days in learning the lessons of knowledge and virtue. We have heard not the many voices of the busy multitude, but the gentle accents and friendly counsels of our teachers we have held converse not so much with the present age, as with the variet and silent past. Our Spirits have wandered far from our own time and country, and have communed with the gifted the wise and the mighty of other days and other climes. Securely guided by our teachers, we have looked with curious eye into the brocks of the earth. with awe-struck attention we have con templated the massive machinery of the heavens, we have peered

prondered those principles of right which build the throne and away the sceptre even of the Omnipotent. And now our studies are finished. We leave our retired rooms, and come for the mingle in scenes new and various. But the we go, those who have taught us, bestow on as the testimonials of three approbation.

Many pleasant faces are here, to greet the ceremonies of this clay. The citizens of this ancient borough favorus
with their presence. Our sojourn with you has been preaceful
and pleasant. We have shared your hospitality and the delights
of your firesides. Many a pleasant ramble have we taken
through the shiets of your lovely town, and amid the sweet
scenery by which it is surrounded that you are come to witness
our reception of those honors, which among you we have gained
be give you a hearty welcome.

tude they have observed our progress, with tender joy they have heard of our success, and now they have come to recieve us from the bosom of our Alma mater, and press us to three our hearts. Welcome, we forme our fathers and our mothers! be with in a few short hours, return with you to our our homes. In the privacy of those homes, we will pour out our thanks for the care which watched our help less in fanly

and the love which quands our slippery youth.

Sentlemen of the Board of Trustees:

We tender

has furnished the means of Education. Your care and labor has furnished the means of Education, by which we have profited. It few years ago, Dichens on College was closed. Iter halls were silent, her broks by dusty on shier dark shelves. But now she echoes once more the students footstep and the professor's vorce. To this change, your generous exertions have greatly contributed. And now you reap the fruits. Our lovege is a healthful fountain of learning and fielts. May she forever flourish! And may success ever count he action of your body.

Honored President and Faculty:

you our most respectful salutation. For a long time your gentle hands have led us by the still waters and green pastures of literature and sevence. You have assisted our moral and interestive development - your bindness has directed, your en couragement has invigorated our sleps. And now you are about to give us the tokens of our success in study, the honors of which you think us worthy. For these testimonials we thank you. May we ever do credit to them, may our life be a favorable comment (on your distrimination,) on the principles and opinions, which you have so carefully instilled.

Extent of the duty of Obedience

Severament is established to restrain the passins and promote the confert of mankind. In order to protect the weak, curt the string, and give efficiency to combined effort, men bind themselves together by law. And as law addustus our fears, her some an chosen to carry out its sancting and requirements who are invested with the power of punishing offenders and of directing the energies of the general. They can levy true, rain many and demand assistance in applying the laws. In these for whose benefit they act, yield them obtdiened. This conditioned is necessary, for without it law would be of no effect and government would be useless.

But although when government to doing its duty obudience is hogen all donot proper, there may be occasions to how it is not proper. Under some circumstances, we may not be bound to submit to rules, who trampte on law and opening the people. But under what circumstances thouse obtained end! The dissolution of government is attented with so many evil, that a mation should be cardines about swolving itself into a state of awarchy - In general it is better to ender the evils of arbitrary power, than to grean under the honors of a lardy revolution. Accepting alone, should imply

lifethour Men who ought to know better, broach this dogmes and it received with a ridity. But it is a false doctrine. If a people wish to preserve this muincipal regulations, ought they to set at month there very regulations which it is there of just to keep in full force?

De a representative government, the menter of legislation and the circumstance that by the fuguency of dections they are amonable to their constituents, are sufficient to defend every popular night - Could our Matinas executive sinudo the Constitutions and not be hurled back by one 242 representatives? Has a Cabinet, maral or military of vien ever get cluded the vigilent ego of lingues! But a short how die of the west the secrets of the treasury department invertigated by a Committee raised on more suspicion? And if the Agistation leave its proper sphere the legis latin can be pringich at the fallet boxer. Should it become a tool of the executive the flighte can east from office, President & long cefs. Thould altempt be made to lam for with the fruity of elections, such allempts could be crushed by the Indiciony and judicial fairnet, can be seemed by the life terene, the legislative power of impeachment, and the trial by Juny - The act of Habeas Copies, the right of petition and of proceable assemblage the freedow of speech, & debate in the ligestature are strong & impregnates bulivarks of liberty

If there the people have legal means of protections they should keep public officers in the path of duly by these means. And every legal means every authorised way supposes the continuance of soldience to government, for otherwise why would popular powers be received, soby would constitutional checks be invented? What is a constitutional check? Verm left in the hands of the people, or their agents to autrain without disobeying their rulers.

It would seem that in a constitutional growment then move can be any occasion for dischedience. But in a desperience the people may sindicate then rights by rebettion. They have no privileges solver new with matte them to resist tyrany - their law is a despots capier their furtestion them to resist tyrany - their law is a despots capier their furtestion them to resist tyrany - their law is a despots capier their furtestion the circumstances were simplified to proper for the Russiants or the China if circumstances were simplified to refuse allegiance. But if a three chance are Englishman or an American, were to disober his ruler, he would be a base pebel. He would be a violative, that we constitution, which declares by its grant of privileget, that no one must ever refuse entirely the three appointed to fulfit its provisions.

The doctrino that we Americans may under some circum stances peter, is fraught with vill - Its tendency is shown by seems which have how enacted in this minen not long age Infuriated men have here ready to time in prices, old and valuable usage, mently because in this opinion officers departed from the spirit of the laws They would not consider that all their deins might

he datisfied by the elective franchise, by the courts of Sustine - Mr. They acted as if their magistrates processed the period of an autotrat, and as if they were a set of thratted bondmen - Such conduct to enicidal of resistance to regular authority randy produces aught but more opposition or a horide an archy swore a thousand times there the mest much ling byraning.

Leorge Alexander Coffy.

Commencement Oration of George Alexander Coffey, Class of 1840
Transcribed by Sarah Skalak, June 2008
Edited by Tristan Deveney, July 2008

Salutatory Oration

Salutation

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The time has come, which terminates the collegiate course of the Class who will this day appear before you, and which confer on us the honors of our *Alma Mater*. For years we have been secluded from the world and have passed our quiet days in learning the lessons of knowledge and virtue. We have heard not the many voices of the busy multitude, but the gentle accents and friendly counsels of our teachers; we have held converse not so much with the present age, as with the varied and silent past. Our Spirits have wandered far from our own time and country, and have communed with the gifted the wise and the mighty of other days and other climes. Securely guided by our teachers, we have looked with curious eye into the bowels of the earth, with awe-struck attention we have contemplated the massive machinery of the heavens, we have peered

into the dark and teeming chambers of the soul, we have pondered those principles of right which build the throne and sway the sceptre even of the Omnipotent. And now our studies are finished. We leave our retired rooms, and come forth to mingle in the scenes new and various. But ere we go, those who have taught us, bestow on us the testimonials of their approbation.

Many pleasant faces are here, to greet the ceremonies of this day. The citizens of this ancient borough favor us with their presence. Our sojourn with you has been peaceful and pleasant. We have shared your hospitality and the delight of yor firesides. Many a pleasant ramble have we taken through the streets of your lovely town, and amid the sweet scenery by which it is surrounded. And you are come to witness our reception of those honors, which among you we have gained We give you a hearty welcome.

Our parents and friends are here. With fond solicitude they have observed our progress, with tender joy they have heard of our success, and now they have come to receive us from the bosom of our *Alma Mater*, and press us to their own hearts. Welcome, Welcome our Fathers and our Mothers! We will in a few short hours, return with you to our own homes. In the privacy of those homes, we will pour out our thanks for the care which watches our helpless infancy,

and the love which guards our slippery youth.

Gentleman of the Board of Trustees:

We tender you our respectful salutation. Your care and labor has furnished the means of education, by which we have profited. A few years ago, Dickinson College was closed. Her halls were silent, her books lay dusty on their dark shelves. But now she echoes once more the students footstep and the Professor's voice. To this change, your generous exertions have greatly contributed. And now you reap the fruits. Our College is a healthful fountain of learning and piety. May she forever flourish! And may success ever crown the action of your body.

Honored President and Faculty:

We beg leave to tender you our most respectful salutation. For a long time your gentle hands have led us by the still waters and green pastures of literature and science. You have assisted our moral and intellectual development – your kindness has directed, your encouragement has invigorated our steps. And now you are about to give us the tokens of our success in study, the honors of which you think us worthy. For these testimonials we thank you. May we ever do credit to them, may our life be a favorable comment on your discrimination, on the principles and opinions, which you have so carefully instilled.

Extent of the duty of Obedience

Government is established to restrain the passions and promote the comfort of mankind. In order to protect the weak, curb the strong, and give efficiency to combined effort, men bind themselves together by law. And as law addresses our fears, persons are chosen to carry out its sanctions and requirements, who are invested with the power of punishing offenders and of directing the energies of the governed. They can levy war, raise many and demand assistance in applying the law. And these for whose benefit they act, yield them obedience. This obedience is necessary, for without it law would be of no effect and government would be useless.

But although when government is doing its duty obedience is beyond all doubt proper, there may be occasions when it is not proper. Under some circumstances, we may not be bound to submit to rulers, who trample on law and oppress the people. But under what circumstances should obedience end? The dissolution of government is attended with so many evils, that a nation should be cautious about resolving itself into a state of anarchy – In general it is better to endure the evils of arbitrary power, than to groan under the horrors of a lawless revolution. Necessity alone should impel

men to destroy the most complex, and the most valuable of human institutions -- The duty of obedience loses its obligation, only when rulers have departed from their lawful functions. But the people may have certain powers by the use of which they may protect themselves, and bring back public officers to their duty, such powers are reserved in every constitutional government. The Romans and Athenians could reject those laws which were framed by their Senates. The British House of Commons enjoys the exclusive privilege of imposing taxes and of granting supplies to the sovereign. In our Union, the ballot box is a security against flagrant official misconduct. When the constituted authorities violate the the laws, then the people should seek first legal remedy And if legal remedy can be found, they have no right whatever to disobey. For a legal remedy implies conformity with, that is obedience to law, and of course obedience to those who are its administrators – obedience to rulers – And common sense teaches that the correction of governmental abuses without annulling the obligation to obedience, is infinitely more consonant with the happiness and stability of society, than disobedience rebellion and their invariable attendants civil war – The idea is popular, that when rulers do wrong, the ruled are released from all ob-

ligations. Men who ought to know better, broach this dogma and it received with avidity. But it is a false doctrine. If a people wish to preserve their municipal regulations, ought they to set at nought those very regulations which it is their object to keep in full force?

In a representative government, the number of legislators and the circumstances that by the frequency of elections they are amenable to their constituents, are sufficient to defend every popular right – Could our national executive invade the Constitution and not be hurled back by our 242 representatives? Has a Cabinet, naval or military officer ever yet eluded the vigilant eyes of Congress? But a short time since, were not the secrets of the treasury department investigated by a committee raised on mere suspicions?

And if the legislature leave its proper sphere the legislature can be purified at the ballet boxes – Should it become a tool of the executive the people can cast from office, President and Congress. Should attempts be made to tamper with the purity of elections, such attempts could be crushed by the Judiciary. And judicial fairness, can be secured by the life tenure, the legislative power of impeachment, and the trial by jury – The act of *Habeas Corpus*, the right of petition and of peaceable assemblage, the freedom of speech, & debate in legislature are strong & impregnable bulwarks of liberty.

If then the people have legal means of protection they should keep public officers in the path of duty by those means. And every legal means every authorised way, supposes the continuance of obedience to government, for otherwise why would popular powers be reserved, why would constitutional checks be invented? What is a constitutional check? Power left in the hands of the people, or their agents to <u>restrain without disobeying</u> their rulers —

It would seem, that in a constitutional government there <u>never can be any occasion for disobedience</u>. But in a despotism, the people may vindicate their rights by rebellion. They have no privileges whose use will enable them to resist tyranny - their law is a despots caprice their protection must be the sword – It would be proper for the Russians or the Chinese if circumstances [were <u>impervious</u>?] to refuse allegiance. But if a Frenchman an Englishman or an American, were to disobey his rulers, he would be a base rebel. He would be a violator of his country's constitution, which declares by its grant of privileges, that no one must ever refuse submission, to those appointed to fulfill its provisions.

The doctrine that we Americans may under some circumstances rebel, is fraught with evil – Its tendency is shown by scenes which have been enacted in this Union not long ago Infuriated men have been ready to tear in pieces, old and valuable usages, merely because in their opinion officers departed from the spirit of the laws They would not consider that their desires might

be satisfied by the elective franchise, by the courts of Justice – No. They acted as if their magistrates possessed the power of an autocrat, and as if they were a set of thralled bondmen –

Such conduct is suicidal, resistance to regular authority rarely produces aught but more oppression or a horrid anarchy worse a thousand times than the most unrelenting tyranny.

George Alexander Coffry Huntingdon County Penn.