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FOR THE PORT FOLIO.

A SKETCH OF THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT STATE OF
DICKINSON COLLEGE IN CARLISLE.

ON the happy termination of our revolutionary conflict, the patriots and statesmen of America, though relieved from the fatigues of a camp, and no longer exposed to the dangers attendant on the profession of arms, were not permitted to repose from their labours. The country which their wisdom and valour had rescued from external domination, was now to be improved in its internal resources. The arts of peace were to be cultivated, the vast and complex machinery of civil government was to be erected and put in motion, and every necessary mean devised and employed not only to maintain the liberty and independence recently achieved, but to render them a blessing to the then existing and to future generations. Among these thousand objects of attention and deliberation, the education of youth claimed and was admitted to a distinguished place.

Whether we consult the history of nations, or listen to the more familiar but not less instructive lessons of experience and observation, we will be convinced that, under Providence, the sound and correct education of youth constitutes the true basis of the pre-eminence and happiness of kingdoms and states. And this is particularly the case in those communities and among those people distinguished by the blessings and immunities of civil liberty. It is still more emphatically the case in places under the direction of representative governments. For where every man has a suffrage either proximately or remotely in the affairs of the nation, unless that suffrage be enlightened by wisdom and guided by virtue, it cannot but fall out that those affairs must go wrong, and that misrule, anarchy and despotism will be the tragic result. If we again recur to history, that faithful and universal teacher and monitor, we will again learn, that the decline and downfall of empires, kingdoms and states, has been generally preceded, and to reflecting minds foretold, by a marked deterioration in the discipline and education of youth. With regard to the Roman empire, in particular, the most august monument of human grandeur the world has ever be-

held, the decline of letters is known to have accompanied *pari passu* the decline of civil power, and to have had a material influence on it as a cause.

If from the advantages of sound learning to the state we turn to its influence on the characters of individuals, we will find its effects to be no less striking. We will find that, though without much learning man may become useful and respectable, yet that he cannot without it become polished, enlightened, distinguished and great—he cannot ascend to that grade in the scale of his Creator's works to which his powers are intended to exalt him. If to this rule a Franklin, a Rittenhouse, and a Washington present exceptions, they are to be regarded *as mere exceptions*, and therefore do not amount to an infraction of the rule. They were *prodigies*, which necessarily implies a departure from and an ascendancy over common principles.

Actuated by these or similar considerations, those patriots who had directed the councils and fought the battles of America during the difficulties and perils of her struggle for freedom, could not look without an anxious mind towards her future destinies. Nor of this anxiety was the part inconsiderable which bore relation to colleges and seats of learning.

Hitherto many of the American youth, those more particularly on whom devolved the management of state affairs, had been accustomed to receive their education in foreign countries. But this practice was justly regarded as exceptionable and dangerous. Apprehensions were entertained, not without foundation, that the youth thus educated would inevitably contract certain European habits and manners, and imbibe certain foreign opinions relative to matters of civil polity, and ecclesiastical privileges and establishments, unsuitable and even unfriendly to the state of things in their own country. As all plants are known to acquire most perfection when suffered to flourish in their parent soil, and to receive the sun and breezes of their native climate, it was, in like manner, conceived, that seminaries of education established at home would be most likely to prove distinguished nurseries for supplying America with those to whom she might in future confide her destinies, whether in the forum, the senate,

the cabinet, or the field. It was motives like these that led to the establishment of Dickinson College.

Carlisle was fixed on as the seat of this institution for various and solid reasons. The situation is healthy, the adjacent scenery picturesque and beautiful, the surrounding country abundantly fruitful, and every article of subsistence plentiful and cheap. In addition to this, the inhabitants of the place as well as of the neighbourhood in general are remarkable for the decorum of their manners, the purity of their morals, and their uniform observance of the duties of religion. Advantages like these are truly invaluable in relation to an academical establishment; for to prepare youth to become either great men or good and useful citizens, their education must include not only literary and scientific acquirements, but health of body and rectitude of mind.

The college in Carlisle was originally the offspring of individual patriotism, bounty, and enterprize. Pre-eminent among those who interested themselves in its behalf was the late honourable John Dickinson, a distinguished revolutionary patriot, the celebrated author of the "Farmer's Letters," and president, at the time, of the supreme executive council of Pennsylvania. Possessed of an ample fortune and a liberal heart, he made the infant college a donation so munificent, and rendered it in other respects such important services, as to be justly regarded as the father of the institution. He had accordingly the honour of bestowing on it his name.

In the year 1783, the college received a charter, and the legislature of the state adopting it, then, in some measure, as their own, made a small endowment in its favour, and encouraged it further by a promise of future protection and support. The original number of trustees was forty, of whom the charter required that fourteen should be clergymen. It may with truth be said, that the charter-trustees were among the most worthy and distinguished characters of the state. Besides being many of them conspicuous for talents and learning, they possessed in an eminent degree all the qualities and endowments, both physical and moral, requisite to constitute good men and useful citizens. It belongs to time to produce changes and re-

volutions in all that is sublunary. We cannot, therefore, be surprised to learn that at the expiration of twenty-seven years only *fourteen* trustees of the original number survived. Of these eight are clergymen and seven laymen.

The first meeting of the trustees was held in Philadelphia on the 15th of September, 1783, when his excellency John Dickinson was unanimously elected president of the board. Their first meeting in Carlisle was on the 6th of April, 1784, when the occasion was celebrated with a solemnity corresponding to the importance of the object in view. After the performance of divine service, the president delivered an eloquent and admirable address on the importance of education, and the motives which had led to the establishment of the institution. On the following day the board of trustees proceeded to the election of a principal and a professor of languages. To the former office was chosen the reverend doctor Charles Nisbet, of Montrose, in Scotland, a character alike pre-eminent for piety and literature, and to the latter, Mr. James Ross, now of Philadelphia, who justly takes rank with the first classical scholars of America. The college was now organized, and continued under the special direction of a committee of the trustees, till the month of July of the same year, when Dr. Nisbet arrived, and entered immediately on the duties of his station.

The funds of the institution were at this time low. Private munificence, though in many instances conspicuous, had not yet been exercised on a scale of sufficient extent to meet the exigences of the establishment, nor were the public finances such as to enable the state to supply the deficiency. But, though struggling under the weakness of infancy and the embarrassments of poverty, the school acquired both rank and reputation.

Till the year 1803, the exercises of the college had been held in a small and inconvenient building. But individual contributions keeping pace with the increasing wealth of the county, the trustees were by this time enabled to erect for the institution a spacious edifice. Soon, however, were the flattering prospects arising from this source completely blasted. For, in the course of the same year, the edifice was unfortunately destroyed by fire. Happily, the library, globes, maps, and

apparatus, not having been removed from the old building, escaped the conflagration.

Public misfortunes afford opportunities for the display of public virtues. And such a display was very honourably made on the present occasion. The College edifice was scarcely reduced to a ruin, when a subscription was opened for the erection of a new one. And in twenty-four hours this subscription was filled with great liberality by the inhabitants of Carlisle. An example so noble and praiseworthy, could not be lost—could not be inoperative on those who beheld it. Accordingly a spirit of contribution equally liberal, pervaded the surrounding country, till, in a short time, the trustees were enabled to erect another College superstructure, on an enlarged scale, and an improved plan. On this occasion a sum of money was also granted on loan, by the Legislature of the State.

It is with public institutions as with individuals. Misfortunes frequently visit them in quick succession. This truth was very mournfully confirmed in the instance under consideration. In January, 1804, Dickinson College sustained a severe and afflictive loss in the death of the Rev. Dr. Nisbet, its distinguished and much beloved principal.

The trustees of the institution were soon afterwards convened to adopt such measures as might be rendered necessary by this calamitous event. On that occasion, after the most feeling expressions of regret and sorrow, for so afflicting a dispensation, a resolution was unanimously passed, that the trustees, professors and students, should wear crape on the left arm, for the space of thirty days, in token of respect to the memory of the deceased. The liberal and benevolent reader will pardon a momentary deviation from the more immediate track of this paper, to pay a just, though humble tribute to exalted worth.

Dr. Nisbet was, in the true sense of the word, a great man. He possessed a memory capacious and retentive, almost beyond belief. His judgment was solid, his taste correct, and his reasoning powers most acute and forcible. These had received all the cultivation and improvement that could result from the most unwearied application, continued throughout the course

of a long life. He was among the best classical scholars of the age. He could, with a facility truly surprising, repeat all the beautiful and striking passages of the classic authors. The ease with which he acquired languages, surpassed belief. He was familiar not only with the learned and oriental languages, but also with most of the modern languages of Europe. Though his mind was stored with all the knowledge that books could impart, yet was he most unassuming and humble. There was no pedantic display, no fastidious exhibition of talents—nothing dogmatic or magisterial in his manner or conversation. While he instructed all around him by the extent of his information, he delighted them by the style and manner in which it was communicated. As a Divine he had few equals, and certainly no superiors. His discourses were solid, argumentative and perspicuous, abounding in moral truths, and enriched by precepts of practical piety. His Lectures on Theology contain a complete body of Divinity. As a teacher he seemed to open a new mine of knowledge, on every subject to which he turned his attention. And such was the peculiar happiness of his manner, that he gave life and interest to the driest topics.

On the death of Dr. Nisbet, instead of proceeding immediately to the election of a successor to the place he had so long and so honourably filled, the trustees committed the superintendance of the College to the Rev. Dr. Davidson, under the title of "President of the Faculty." In this situation the doctor continued with great credit to himself, and no less advantage to the institution, till the autumn of the year 1809.

In the early part of the same year, a meeting of the trustees had been held, with a view to definitive arrangements for the appointment of a principal. On this occasion, the eyes of the board were directed to the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Atwater, then president of Middlebury College, in the state of Vermont. He was regarded as a character worthy to become the successor of Dr. Nisbet, and to be intrusted with the destinies of an institution once under the direction of that distinguished scholar. Proposals on the subject were accordingly made to him, which, after due deliberation, he thought proper to accept, and was in-

ducted into office in the month of September, 1809. He delivered on the occasion, an inaugural address, which did equal honour to his head and his heart—to his knowledge of letters, his acquaintance with academical discipline, his regard for morality, and his veneration for religion.

Dr. Atwater received his education at Yale College, and having both there and in the state of Vermont, acted in the character of a teacher, is perfectly familiar with the excellent discipline of the schools and colleges of Newengland. Nor is he a disciplinarian only in theory. He has a peculiar fitness for the practical government of youth.

Conscientious in the discharge of his duty, and ardent in the prosecution of a favourite pursuit, he is exclusively devoted to the interests of the institution over which he presides. And thus far have his exertions been rewarded with the most flattering success. Under his direction the discipline of the College has been very signally improved, and the number of pupils increased in a ratio far beyond the calculation of the most sanguine. Should nothing occur to check its present career of prosperity, it furnishes fair and ample promise of rivalling, in a short time, the most distinguished seminaries of learning in the United States.

To the citizens of Pennsylvania, this should be a proud and precious consideration. It ought to inflame their patriotism, awaken their honest state-partialities, and determine them to promote with parental solicitude, the interest and reputation of Dickinson College.

The institution contains at present, about an hundred pupils, and its officers are,

The Rev. Jeremiah Atwater, D. D. Principal and Professor of Logic, Metaphysics, Moral Philosophy, &c.

James M'Cormick, A. M. Professor of Mathematics.

Henry Wilson, A. M. Professor of the learned Languages.

Dr. Aigster, Lecturer on Natural Philosophy and Chemistry.

John M'Clure, A. M. Tutor.

Claudius Berard, Professor of Modern Languages.



From a sketch by A. Brinkley

DICKENSON COLLEGE.

B. Tanner, F.S.A. sculp.