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**Title:** Address after a Vacation by Charles Nisbet

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October \_\_\_ 1787.

Gentlemen,

After a short interval of vacation, we are now called to resume our usual studies. If you have made a good use of your recess, you will return to your College exercises with new vigor. The interchanges of labor & rest serve to diversify life & to render it more agreeable.

If you have spent part of the time of vacation in reviewing your former studies, or in reading good authors, you will embrace the present opportunity with eagerness, but if you have kept bad company, or listened to ~~naughty~~ pernicious advice, the return to your studies will seem a grievous punishment, in which case, little hopes of profit can be entertained.

Some of you have no doubt met with fools, old or young, who have endeavoured to discourage you from your studies, & gravely told you that no money is to be made by the study of dead languages. If making money be the chief object of a young man, it is not probable that he will be successful in learning, or that he will adorn any profession in which he may be engaged. The arts & opportunities of acquiring wealth must vary according to the state & circumstances of every society, & in a new country these must be subject to more frequent fluctuations. It is rash, however, to say that Letters even in a new Country will not

be gainful to the possessor. If we consider the dignity & true interest of human nature, learning must always be gainful, & if we reflect on the present circumstances of this country, it is possible that it may be soon be a ready way to lucrative & honorable offices.

One of the Grecian generals being asked why he had married his Daughter to a man without money, replied that he had much rather give her to a man without money, than to money without a man, intimating that Riches without talents & education cannot make a man, & that money without wisdom & virtue to employ it properly, is no object to a man of spirit & discernment.

What is the rich miser, with all his stores, without learning, virtue & dignity of mind? He may be called a mere money-bag, or iron-chest, in which wealth is secured for the use of his heirs, but he is of no significancy to his own age, for all his money, not being blest with the art or skill to use it with propriety.

On the other hand the ignorant spendthrift is but for a short time distinguished, even as a man of money. For want of frugality & consideration, & conceiving dignity to consist in profusion, he has barely the credit of parting readily with what he is conscious that he cannot enjoy

with dignity, or use with wisdom.

Wealth, like liberty, requires wisdom to use it with propriety, & without it proves a curse, instead of a blessing. Youth affords a proper season for acquiring wisdom & virtue, which cannot afterwards be so easily acquired. Mature life affords many opportunities of acquiring wealth, but when youth passes in ignorance & neglect, or in the greedy meditation of money, for little money can be acquired in that period, it is not to be expected that so favorable opportunities will occur for acquiring wisdom & virtue, as those that have been foolishly lost.

We have already had a large trial of illiterate & unexperienced governors & legislators, & the great & the manifold difficulties into which their folly has plunged us, if properly considered may excite the people to be more desirous of men of letters & knowledge in the offices of

government. Extremes often succeed one another, & if the fondness of the people for learning prove as strong as their antipathy has been hitherto, young men of parts & cultivated understanding will have the fairest hopes of being elected into the offices of government.

Besides, as a federal government is proposed, & may probably take place, letters & knowledge will be

undoubtedly necessary in those, who are to share its Dignities, which will open a higher object for the ambition of youth than they have had hitherto. The ~~offices of Legislation & Execution~~ offices in a particular state are indeed in themselves honorable, but they have been shared of late by so many weak men & fools, that a person of honor & virtue can scarcely think them worthy of his ambition.

To have a share in conducting the Counsels, or promoting the happiness of a large, united & rising empire, is surely an object capable of exciting the ambition of all who have any, & such an object the federal government holds up to every young man without distinction, who by learning & experience shall qualify himself for it.

The Equestrian & Senatorial Dignities among the Romans required a certain portion of wealth, in order to be capable of obtaining them, but the plan of federal government now proposed requires capacity & reputation only in those, who are to be chosen into the offices of government;--- a circumstance which ought to incline all the poorer citizens to wish for its introduction.

But, if learning is not an efficacious means of

getting money, it would seem that the neglect or want of it is not an infallible method of acquiring it. The general complaint of the scarcity of money is rather an argument that not even the greatest ignorance is able at all times to make any considerable acquisition of that kind.

We have said thus much concerning money, only because it is a popular & frequent objection against letters that they do not tend immediately to the acquisition of it. It were easy to show, if time allowed, that the possession of learning in many cases may lead to the acquisition of Wealth, in so far as it can be an object to a rational man, & that the greatest wealth without knowledge is tasteless or pernicious to the possessor. We might likewise show that learning & virtue may lead a man, in a free country especially, to stations of the greatest dignity, wealth & usefulness, by the free choice of his countrymen & fellow citizens.

If men were made only for the purpose of getting wealth, it might seem specious or excuseable at least, to neglect learning, but as the happiness of a rational nature depends principally on the talents & state of the mind, knowledge will be found to be a valuable acquisition in

itself, & capable either of making us happy without the possession of riches, or enabling us to use them with dignity & propriety.

We have often recommended to you the careful study of the Classic Authors as an useful exercise of your faculties, & an introduction to the study of philosophy & science. The wisdom of many centuries has not been able to discover a better preparation for them than this, & those, who have begun to relish Science without the study of languages, have found themselves

obliged, at an inconvenient time, & at a more advanced period of life, to apply themselves, even with disadvantage to the study of languages, to endeavor at least to put themselves on a level with others, who had begun with the study of languages in youth.

It may be objected, perhaps, that the Greeks & Romans had no dead languages to study, these languages being respectively their mother tongues; but to this it may be replied that the Greeks, who despised all the rest of mankind as Barbarians, were obliged to apply themselves for a length of years, before they could make any progress in the study of philosophy; & the Romans, to whom the Greek was the learned language, according to the testimony of Cicero & Quintilian, applied them-

selves to the study of it, even before they fully understood their mother tongue.

It is readily owned that the mere knowledge of words without that of Men & Things, can be of little service to the human mind, but this is not what is to be understood by the study of the ancient languages & Classic authors. To learn to call the same thing by two or three different names, is barely an exercise of memory; & to know the different phraseology or mode of expression of different nations, is only the acquisition of criticism & minute literary history. But as the ancient languages contain the thoughts of men of the greatest abilities on the most important subjects, & are next to the Sacred Writings, the most valuable treasure of ancient wisdom & history, they become valuable as an authentic history of the human mind, & of its application to the most important studies & arts in life, in very different ages & places of the World, & are therefore most desirable as well as useful to all who would wish to be acquainted with the nature & affairs of men.

To despise the acquisition of others, & to think that we can discover every thing for ourselves, is a vanity of mind little different from distraction; but if we are

convinced that we cannot discover every thing for ourselves, the best way must be to avail ourselves as much as possible, of what has been already discovered by others, & for this end to learn the language, & endeavour to enter into the mode of thinking of those, who have been most eminent for knowledge among men. None of those, who are acquainted with the ancients will pretend that the moderns can be put in the least competition with them, as those of the moderns, who have had the greatest merit, & have approached nearest to the ancients, are those who hold them in the greatest admiration, & frankly own the highest obligations to them.

The circumstances in which these were placed, & the scenes that operated on their minds, & contributed to make them what they were, are such as succeeding times cannot equal. Had they enjoyed the advantage of the labor of former ages, they would not despised them, & consequently would not have needed to exert those amazing talents, which have so justly procured them the veneration of succeeding ages. Situated in the dawn of Science, they entered on the pursuit of it with that avidity with which men penetrate into an unknown region replete with various riches, & their success

in their application was such as excites surprise in all who consider their actual situation.

The knowledge of the Ancients to be acquired by translations, compared with that which is to be attained by reading them in their own tongues, is like the knowledge we gain of a man by

seeing his picture, compared with that which we acquire by conversing with him in person. The picture may be pretty artfully done, & apparently expressive, so as to attract the admiration of mere gazers, who would be thought to have taste, but even the likeness of it can be known only to those who are acquainted with the Original.

Some men have so much vanity & affectation as to despise the acquisitions of former ages, & to pretend to apply their unexercised & unassisted faculties in what they call the Search of truth, but in reality is an endeavour to avoid it, as they refuse to survey the many truths which have been already successfully discovered, & chuse rather to wander in darkness & error, than to accept the assistance of the best & ablest guides. That such men should be enemies to Letters, is not surprizing; but when it is considered that they are the children of Sloth, ignorance & libertinism, it is to be hoped, that few will

follow their example. They wish for darkness to cover their vices, & endeavour to doubt of the principles of religion & morals, to avoid the reproaches of their conscience for disregarding both.

Nothing is more hurtful to youth than indolence, & prejudices with regard to the nature of learning. Some come to the Seminaries of learning under the influence of prejudice, & with certain foolish plans in their heads, which they have either devised themselves, or received from some other persons equally ill instructed, & haughtily require the Masters to put these plans in execution. Before acquiring learning, they pretend to judge of its nature, & come to College to teach, instead of being taught. To such persons we would recommend a little modesty & consideration, & that they would reflect a little on the absurdity of pretending to judge of any thing before they are acquainted with it. Your Masters, if they are equal to the task they have undertaken, which we hope is the case here, are the properest persons to give you instruction, & to direct & determine what Class you ought to join, & what studies you ought to prosecute, after a candid examination of your abilities & acquisitions. We have

no interest surely in depreciating your talents, or keeping you back in the course of your studies. On the contrary, if we were able to communicate to you all the stores of learning, in a little time, we would gladly do it, as our success would be of the greatest consequence to a new Seminary; but as the thing is impossible, we must be excused for promising no more than can be actually accomplished in the time you have to spare for study.

To promise wonders & impossibilities may perhaps be agreeable to the romantic imaginations of some men, who love to deceive & to be deceived; but it is unkind as well as unfair in Teachers to promise what cannot be accomplished by the utmost exertion of the human faculties. What can be done for your emolument & improvement, shall be faithfully done, & more than this will not be required or expected by rational men.

We can never too often or too earnestly recommend private study & application, as well as careful meditation on what you have learned. The exercise & excitement of its faculties is the riches of the human mind. Our memories cannot hold all the history of the World, or retain at once all the useful things about which

we have been employed; but taking notes of our acquisitions may prevent us from losing them, & the exercise of our faculties is a habit which once gained, will not forsake us, unless through our indulgence of indolence & vice.

The ready & proper exercise of our faculties is a sort of anticipated experience, & serves to constitute & perfect the talent of observation, which is of so vast use to us in the study of learning & life. The faculties of the human mind, though the gift of nature, exist only potentially, as the man does in the child, or the statue in the block out of which it is framed, but time labor & art are requisite to bring them into actual existence. Practice & exercise are especially necessary; we learn to walk, to sing, or to play on an instrument, only by frequent endeavours, long practice & timeous assistance, & the qualities of the mind must necessarily be developed in a similar manner.

Supposing that the faculty of thinking, imagination, perception, reasoning, taste & the like are actually existent in the minds of all men, yet how shall these be excited, or the different degrees of each of them in different minds be discovered, except by exercise & application? Accordingly we find that those who have

thought most, are most expert in the faculty of thinking, that those who have reasoned most, are the most expert reasoners, that those who have read most, are the ablest readers, & the best judges of literary compositions, that those who have cultivated their taste most by considering proper models, have the most correct taste, & that those who have most exercised their memories, possess that faculty to a greater extent than others.

Now as Children are possessed of all these faculties, it is the business of education to strengthen & perfect them by presenting the proper objects, & affording helps & directions for that purpose. The first essays of beginners in every art must be rude & imperfect, but by discovering our faults we learn to avoid them, & by exercising our faculties we learn to improve them, to the highest degree of which they are capable.

It is not possible indeed to give the young & raw student an adequate idea of the dignity importance & usefulness of science, but if he hopes to be able to judge of it one day, he must have confidence in his master & approach the heights of Science by those steps, & in that way in which it has been found practicable to reach them. *Oportet discentem credere.* A man would surely be ill qualified

for instructing others in learning, if he did not know a great deal more of the matter, than those, who offer themselves to his instruction.

But as in the order of human things no profit of any kind is to be acquired without labor, so the acquisition of learning must be the result of the personal application & painful exertion of the student: We say the personal application, because some appear willing to throw all the labor on the Master, reserving to themselves only the profit & pleasure of the acquisition; but the nature of human things does not admit of the fulfillment of such expectations. Men might as rationally expect to be taught in their Sleep, as to learn without their own exertions, & while their minds are as inactive as the body is in Sleep. The Master cannot be blamed for want of success, when the scholar refuses labor & application.

We cannot possibly think or study for other people, or communicate to them the principles of Science against their will, any more than we can communicate them to them without their knowledge. When men have Slept the Sleep of death, they will immediately be

possessed of a great deal of knowledge, which they had not formerly, but it will be too late to profit by it: If we would be possessed of knowledge for minding our present & eternal concerns, we must acquire it just now, & in those methods by which it is attainable. The minds of youth are flexible, & easily susceptible of impressions, & when not enervated by indolence are capable of great exertions. Their faculties are lively & restless, & need only to be directed to proper objects. If there is a native force of mind, it will need little excitement, & only require a just direction. The vigor of the mind, if not employed, in the pursuit of knowledge & virtue, will waste itself in trifles, & be abused to the purposes of vice. Those who have little activity of mind, can be but of small use in life, & will never distinguish themselves in the world. They may be peaceable & innocent members of society, but will never be objects of public esteem.

Those who think that the time is lost which is spent in the study of the Classic Authors, do not consider that they cannot be better employed at that age. The exercise of our faculties is an art, & must be learned as well as others. Young minds cannot immediately enter into

the study of abstract Science, or explore the hidden nature of things, but must be trained to it by previous preparation. Grammar is an Art, which requires application, attention, judgment, memory & taste; & the exercise of these faculties in the study of it is one of the chief acquisitions of youth. To analyse the nature of speech, to reduce it to rule & system, & to discover its analogy to the nature of things; to investigate the relations, combinations & dependences of words & ideas, to discover the connexion betwixt words & thoughts, & to judge of the propriety, order & justness of them, are exercises that awaken the faculties of youth, & afford them an opportunity of displaying & exercising all the talents they possess. Quickness of perception, exactness of attention, accuracy of judgment, & a sense of propriety, grandeur & beauty; in a word all the faculties that youth are possessed of will be discovered to advantage in the study of ancient languages & authors.

But as moral qualities are justly in the highest esteem with all wise men, the study of the ancient

languages will be found proper to excite & cultivate all the good qualities of the heart, as well as those of the Understanding. Where can we find the maxims of reason & good sense, the beauty of virtue & the deformity of vice so distinctly & accurately described as in the Classic Authors. Magnanimity, generosity, kindness, friendship, patriotism & piety are no where so well delineated, except in the Sacred Writings. The greatest characters are exhibited for our imitation, the strongest images & most nervous language are employed to awaken our attention. We are admitted to converse with Heroes, & may become such by imitation, if we are not wanting to ourselves. The admiration of what is great & praise-worthy is the first dawn of virtue, & if properly improved, will lead to the love & imitation of it.

It is true that in the Classic Authors one may likewise meet with the workings & expressions of unlawful passions, dressed in smooth phrase, & full of dangerous attraction. But it is not there

alone that we may find such sentiments & descriptions. The world is a school of wrong, & the most guarded &

private education will not save youth from being exposed to temptations, & having their imaginations polluted by improper objects, images & descriptions. The Moderns in this respect have fairly outdone the Ancients, & the common romances & works of sentiment, so generally in fashion, & to be found in every house, are much more dangerous to the virtue of youth by lasciviousness of language, & mischievous amplification on forbidden objects, than all the works of the Ancients that have descended to our times. Besides, a discreet Master will pass over certain passages, or convey the antidote with the poison, & warn youth against the temptations to which they are exposed.

It is not to be expected that young men should delight in meditating on the value of money, or in calculating interest upon interest, or contriving how to provide for themselves & their future families. Ideas of this kind are unnatural in youth, & when they are found, exhibit unfavorable presages. But in the Classics they will become acquainted with men remarkable for every kind of virtue, & discern frugality, industry & contentment in great Characters, connected with magnanimity, bravery, patriotism, & generosity;---- qualities that

most naturally excite the admiration of youth.

We have unwillingly said thus much on the excellency & usefulness of Classical learning, merely on account of the prejudices against it, which prevail in so many parts of this new country. These prejudices, in people of advanced years, generally proceed from ignorance, but in youth are the effect of indolence, cowardice & inactivity of mind. The character of youth is boldness & enterprise, & it looks exceedingly ill in a young man to be afraid of entering on any study for fear of the labor & application that are necessary to succeed in it. The youth, who has not resolution to master the Classics, will never be an expert Mathematician, nor a successful inquirer into the nature of things. The same sluggishness of understanding, the same sleepiness of soul & aversion to labor, which keep him ignorant of languages, will render him equally ignorant & unsuccessful in every branch of science.

The careful improvement of time can never be too anxiously recommended to youth. To rise early and sit up late are marks of anxiety,

zeal & desire of success: Nothing truly great & valuable is to be got without pains, & knowledge, which is the riches of youth, well deserves all the labor we can take in the pursuit of it.

..... "Vos exemplaria Græca

"Nocturnâ versate manu, versate diurnâ. Hor.

As the attainment of virtue is the ultimate object of knowledge, youth ought to be careful to exhibit in their life & manners a specimen of what they have learned. Meekness, good manners, orderly & peaceable behaviour are the marks of an erect & elevated mind. The practice of truth, justice, friendship & kindness, & the avoiding every thing that is base & shameful, are as necessary to you as progress in your studies, or the exercise of your faculties.

If the mind is kept always awake, & applied to some useful study, great progress may be made in a little time, but listlessness, languor & inactivity consume the time, as well as they



retard the progress & destroy the happiness of youth. To the student who applies to his business, time passes swiftly

& unperceived, but existence is a load to the indolent & inattentive, who have no object to occupy their thoughts agreeably or usefully.

If you do not conceive a high idea of the importance & dignity of knowledge, we despair of your ever making great progress in the pursuit of it. Youth naturally aim at what they conceive to be great & honorable, & if knowledge be not considered in this view by them, it is irrational to suppose, that they will take much trouble in the acquisition of it.

The industry & cultivation, as well as the policy, & government of a new Country, require great exertions of the human faculties. Knowledge is equally necessary to every man, & when attained, will be equally profitable to him, whatever be his condition or employment in life. It may be said that we have need of husbandmen, tradesmen & manufacturers, rather than men of taste, poets, philosophers & politicians. It is true that we need more of the first than of the last classes, but knowledge is necessary to all of them alike. If we observe the

state of things in those countries that have reached the highest degree of improvement, we will find that it has been owing to the cultivation of the human faculties, & the application of knowledge & philosophy to the ordinary business & useful arts of life. Art has abridged & assisted labor, & the joint efforts of science & industry have produced the most surprising & beneficial effects. The husbandman, the tradesman & manufacturer have cultivated their faculties with equal advantage, & their success in conjunction with the liberal arts produces the greatest political happiness.

But above all things Religion & Morality derive the highest benefit from the improvement of the human faculties, & without these the greatest political happiness can barely enable us to pass a very short time agreeably. These relate to our eternal concerns, as well as produce the most beneficial consequences in the present life. Law, which is the guardian of liberty, property, & all the enjoyments of life, is the fruit of study, experience, meditation & acquaintance with the nature, history &

interests of men. When we are a little awakened from the dream of admiration of our present constitution, we will probably find that our liberty is but ill secured at home, & that we have been more solicitous to have our laws of our own making, than to have them well made. We have adopted in the lump the legal system of an old Country, which boasts of having the most voluminous & perplexed laws in the whole world, & where law has arisen from custom & precedents rather than from reason & common sense. What benefits we have derived from this choice, our present condition abundantly testifies, by the great uncertainty of Rights & multiplicity of suits, which prevail amongst us.

Religion is the only sure road to present or future happiness; but this requires knowledge, consideration & application of mind. Indolence, dissipation & the reign of the passions, disorder & undermine human society, as well as expose mankind to the punishments of Divine Justice in another world. Neither the natural distinctions of right & wrong, nor the knowledge of that revelation, which has been given us from heaven, can be

acquired without careful study & the cultivation of our faculties. To discern the order, & trace the origin of the universe, to behold all things as the effects of one first cause, is the privilege only of those who have studied & meditated with care on the nature of things, with all the assistance they could derive from improved faculties, & the collections of ancient wisdom. The ignorant, the thoughtless & the vicious are not sensible that there is a God in the world, & live as if no such Being did actually exist. Without knowledge, without hope, & without God in the World, they live at random, the victims of their passions, & at last drop unprepared into an awful eternity, which they have never thought of, & into the avenging hands of a just & holy God whom it has been the business of their lives to affront & disobey.

The life of reason is a life of faith. The just shall live by faith. Truth is the light of the soul, which proceeds from heaven & leads to it. By discovering the truth of things, the order of the universe, & the dependence of all things on God, we learn our true interest, which is to know, believe, love & serve him,

whose will must necessarily prevail, & whose power & wisdom control Universal Nature. While an ignorant & wicked man lives as if there were no hereafter, the good man, who seeks & loves the Truth, adjusts his conduct to it, & seeks above all things the friendship & protection of that Being whose favor is better than life & whose displeasure is more to be dreaded than death in its horrid form.

To be ignorant of the truth of things, or to despise & disregard it when offered to us, is to extinguish Reason, & to live the life of Brutes. The knowledge of things as they are, is the riches of the mind, & enables it to follow its true & lasting interests. The greatest pleasures of which our Nature is capable, are of the intellectual & moral kind, & require knowledge & the exercise of our faculties. The Nature & history of man, the perfections & attributes of God manifested in the frame of the Universe & the volume of Revelation, the unspeakable rewards of piety & the beauty & harmony of the works of God afford such unexhaustible sources of pleasure, as cannot be equaled by all the possessions of the world, though they were

destined to the gratification of a single person.

Though you are destined to very different professions, occupations, & pursuits in life, yet if you mean to be useful, if you wish to be good men & good citizens, in a word, if you wish to be happy in any station or profession whatever, knowledge is equally necessary & desirable to you. To know yourselves, & him who made you, to know your actual situation, wants, duties, dangers & advantages, must be necessary to enable you to pursue your true interest, & to attain as much happiness as your nature is capable of. God has given you the means of knowledge, & if you are not wanting to yourselves, you may attain that immense happiness to which it points the way.

God has testified the value of knowledge by appointing one day in seven, for thought, meditation & religious employment, for which purpose alone he has enjoined a cessation from the ordinary labors of life. Those who spend the Lord's day in idleness, trifling & animal gratifications, contradict the divine Will, & keep the Sabbath of the Ox & of the Ass. It is that

we might remember God, & his works of Creation & Redemption, that we might meditate on his love, praise him for his goodness, learn his will, & conform ourselves to it, that God has commanded us to rest from our ordinary employments. A mere cessation from labor may be a good political institution, & contribute to the preservation of beasts of burden, but the rational improvement & proper use of the Sabbath is religious worship, converse & meditation, which feed the mind, & strengthen it for the duties & trials of life, as well as afford it the most rational pleasure, joy & hope. It is expected, therefore, that those who are professedly engaged in the pursuit of knowledge will be strict observers of the Lord's day, & not neglect that opportunity, which God has blessed & appointed for the exercise of his worship, & the public profession of our obligations to his Bounty. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, & to sing praises to the name of the Most High God. And those, who thus employ the Sabbath, are the most wise & rational, as well as the most grateful, respectable

& happy persons in the World. To spend the Sabbath in idleness & vice, & to despise the public ordinances of religion, is to be ignorant of our duty & enemies to our happiness. An account of the employments, which men prefer to the public & private Worship of God on the Sabbath, would be the greatest & most severe satire on human nature that ever was written, & would show what mean, childish & vicious amusements wicked men prefer to their greatest pleasure, dignity & happiness.

If knowledge be an excellent thing, as it certainly is, it ought to be sought with eagerness, diligence & application. If thou seekest her as silver, & searchest for her as for hid treasures. Not even the care of the miser to gain money by all possible means, ought to be greater than that of young men in the pursuit of useful knowledge, which may be of the greatest advantage here & hereafter. We live indeed in a Republic, where there are no different ranks of man established by law & custom, but this very equality is favorable to natural distinctions, & opens the way to those of an external kind. Where there are no distinctions of birth,

& all citizens are deemed equal, there industry, knowledge & virtue may lead to esteem, gain & honor. It ought to be your study, by reading & meditation, & the careful exercise of your faculties, to pursue useful knowledge, & to be assured that the attainment of it is the true way to honor & happiness. A son that causeth shame by his foolishness is a heavy affliction to his parents & friends. We shall endeavour to give you all the assistance in our power for the attainment of knowledge, & the direction of your conduct, & conclude by praying the father of lights to give you that wisdom, that may guide you into all truth, & make you useful members of society here, & heirs of eternal life in the world, which is to come.