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A N A D D R E S S

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AMERICAN WHIG AND PHILOSOPHIC SOCIETIES

OF THE

COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

SEPTEMBER 27, 1836.

BY JOHN M. SCOTT, Esq.

Princeton:

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1836.

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE AMERICAN WHIG SOCIETY, AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING, SEPT. 28, 1836.

RESOLVED unanimously, That a Committee be appointed to present the thanks of this Society to JOHN M. SCOTT, Esq., for the able and eloquent Discourse pronounced by him on the 27th inst., and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

Committee to communicate to Mr. Scott the above resolution :

WILLIAM C. ALEXANDER, Esq.
DR. J. HAMILTON WHITE,
MR. LOUIS PERRINE.

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE CLIOSOPHIC SOCIETY, AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING, SEPT. 28, 1836.

RESOLVED, That the thanks of the Cliosophic Society be presented to JOHN M. SCOTT, Esq., for the eloquent Discourse pronounced by him on the 27th inst., and that a Committee be appointed to request him to furnish the Society with a copy for publication.

Committee to communicate the above to Mr. Scott :

PROF. ALBERT B. DOD,
DR. GEORGE M. MACLEAN,
DAVID N. BOGART, Esq.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE AMERICAN WHIG AND CLIOSOPHIC SOCIETIES:

WHIGS and CLIOS! My ancient friends, my former gallant adversaries. What thronging recollections, what tumultuous sensations press upon the mind and the heart of one who, reared among you, returns, after the lapse of long, long years, to be once more an actor in your stirring scenes—to behold, if not to participate in the strife of former days—an honourable strife never remitted—handed down from generation to generation—still struggling for the ascendancy—still grasping at the high prizes of literary labour and scholastic supremacy. There, too, I see the accustomed badges: the blue ribbon—the pink scarf; the banners under which you do battle. Emblems like those of the ancient circus of Constantine, of never-dying rivalry; but, unlike those, free from every stain which can dishonour or degrade. That blue ribbon! how often has my heart beat responsive to its successes: and the pink! how often have I beheld with dismay its proud march to victory. And now how infinite the pleasure to see them united under the common banner of our Alma Mater, in the annual celebration which upholds her fame, rallies her children around her, and while renewing their early affections, enlarges the sphere of her usefulness, and prolongs the period of her triumphs.

And the interior of your halls, Gentlemen, do they exhibit the same scenes as in ancient days? the same ardent cultiva-

tion of the muses? the same struggle for oratorical pre-eminence? the same ambitious climbing to the posts of honour and chairs of state? Have you factions among yourselves; some aspiring Junior, supported and upheld by his admirers, treading upon the tardy and lagging heels of the haughty Senior; while he is himself watched and elbowed and thwarted by some congenial spirit of his own standing? I doubt it not. The human heart is the same in all ages. Each generation inherits the feelings and repeats the actions of that which preceded it. As was the interior of your halls thirty years ago, such it doubtless is at present, and the same will it be to your sons and grandsons. Noble institutions are they; with their mysteries guarded with the jealousy of honourable secrecy; with their friendships strengthened and deepened by devotion to the badge of fellowship; with their generous rivalries among themselves, and their manly hostilities with each other: and fine schools too of preparation for the world, in which, on a larger scale, you are soon to play more extended parts, with feelings and passions more fully developed, but still the same, as those which now expand your bosoms. Few hereafter will be your excitements or your struggles, of which you may not trace a prototype in the history of the years of your collegiate life; and assuredly your character and conduct, and probably your fortunes in that world, will be closely analogous to the developments of these your early and your blissful days. It surprises those who have gone before you, to perceive how accurately the progress in life of their early companions had been shadowed forth by their course in the halls of the college and the recesses of the "society;" how slight the difference in character between the youth and the man; how closely connected final results, with causes originating or first developed on this classic soil. It is in truth the game, the stern game of life which you have already begun to play—under skies more bright, amid airs more genial, with spirits more buoyant than those which

will attend your future career. But still the game is the same; it is begun here; you have started in the race, and he who is laggard now, will have hereafter to stretch every fibre and muscle to overtake his more alert competitors. Such is the lesson of experience; such will be the confirmation of futurity.

The world then, Gentlemen, for which you are preparing—upon which you have already partially entered—into which a portion of you are about to make the irrevocable plunge—what do *you* think of its fairy prospects and bright temptations? What are your day dreams and waking visions of its pleasures, its perils, and its honours? In your young imaginations, young and therefore vigorous, you paint them all in the brilliant hues of the rainbow. Blessed with unimpaired health, with fresh and expanding minds, and with hearts upon which sin and suffering have not yet laid their heavy and palsying hand, there is no effort too great for the grasp of your anticipation, no flight too high for the aspirations of your ambition. Glorious era of man's life! In our after joys there is none to be compared to its boundless elasticity of spirits; its sensations of almost physical immortality; its self-confidence, inspired by sound frames and teeming intellects, which makes us feel as if there were nothing too great to dare, too difficult to accomplish.

Nor shall it be my ungrateful task to repress your bright imaginings, to quench the ethereal fire of your early days. Rather would I bid you give it free scope, and teach you to cherish the generous flame, as the harbinger of an honourable and prosperous career, bringing distinction to yourselves and benefit to your country.

For such a career, in this our great republic, there is "ample room and verge enough" for each and all of you. The combined collegiate institutions of the union do not send forth annually more educated men than the country requires to fill the various departments of life, to which knowledge and talents are essential. Even for the purposes of legislation alone, the

necessities of the state exceed the limits of production. Reflect for a moment how many men are occupied in every year, in the six and twenty states of this union, in the great duty of constructing and cementing the social edifice by salutary laws; how great must be the annual supply to fill these posts with competent men; how far exceeding the graduates in the arts. And although it is not intended to imply that classical education is indispensable to the duties of a legislator, it will be readily admitted, and by none more readily than those who are deficient, that where other qualifications are equal, the possession of this will confer a superiority difficult of resistance. Of such an education the lessons of history constitute a part: teaching us the fate of man under the various forms of association which have been adopted by our race; most especially instructing us in the perils which beset republican government; forewarning us of the arts of the demagogue, and tracing clearly the progress from licentiousness to anarchy, and from anarchy to despotism. To exhibit these lessons to the attention, and to commend them to the consideration of our companions in the halls of legislation, eloquence lends her aid: imbibed from the fountains of antiquity; rendered pungent, polished, and efficient by familiarity with the great masters of the art in all ages; gathering lessons of wisdom from the statesmen of the land of our ancestors, and drinking deep inspirations of freedom from the impassioned oratory of our own revolutionary lore. How august, how impressive would be an assemblage of men thus instructed, thus trained; the moral sense quickened by the intellectual culture; the independence of the representative sustained by consciousness of personal worth; the only impulse to action, love of country; the only object, that country's good. To a body thus constituted of what consideration would be the interests of an individual separated from the interests of the nation; of what moment the elevation of a single citizen, unless identified with the lasting welfare of the people. Where among such men

could the fury of faction, or the subserviency of party, find a resting place? To which of them, would existing power dare to offer reward for abandonment of opinion; or ambition, prospective in its aim, hold out the incentive of future favour? Where among such men could timidity, fearful of denouncing the invasions of power, hide its dishonoured head; or flattery, feeding upon the wages of adulation, find congenial spirits to divide her shame? Our country *has* witnessed assemblages of men, whose moral grandeur the wildest imagination cannot surpass: and amid her various vicissitudes the eye of omniscience alone can tell, how soon her fortunes may again require the manly aid and self-devotion of another band of patriots.

Indeed, under a political organization like that of the United States, it is not possible that any lengthened period of inaction can occur—that many years can ever elapse consecutively, without presenting occasions demanding the exertion of the best talents of her sons. Republics are of necessity turbulent. It is a part of the price we pay for that blessing beyond all price—republican freedom. To despotisms belong calms; there one overruling mind thinks for all the nation, and regards the exercise of that faculty by others as treason against its own supremacy. To the atmosphere of republics political storms seem to be congenial. Among them intellect is in perpetual fermentation, teeming with Utopian schemes for the general good, or with less praiseworthy efforts for personal aggrandizement. The mass therefore, constantly agitated, is sometimes in danger of dissolution. Its elements may be irrevocably disunited, and the organization which wisdom has framed, and experience approved, may be jostled from its base, and in its fall overwhelm us with ruin. We are a restless people—always experimenting; as we suppose, improving, our models of government. Constitutions can scarcely be permitted to survive their framers, before they are placed in the crucible, fused,

and reproduced in an altered shape. The danger is, that some of the precious metal may be lost in the change, and its place be supplied with dross. Hence arises a feeling of doubt and uncertainty as to the stability of our institutions, and a general apprehensiveness of coming events, injurious to the relations of property, and diminishing the reputation of our republican model. The spirit of change is rife, even in the calm, majestic, well-poised, and firmly seated Pennsylvania. A state whose resources have developed into gigantic magnitude; whose population is as free as the "chartered libertine the air;" whose sons are hardy as the rocks of their mountains; whose wealth is agricultural and mineral, permanent as the foundations of the earth; whose existing constitution was framed by men, who have handed down to their children hereditary worth and names known and revered in every corner of the commonwealth. Even there, "organic change" is in contemplation; and the doctrine is averred from high and distinguished pens, that it is competent to a convention to "re-organize our entire system of social existence, terminating and proscribing what is deemed injurious, and establishing what is preferred; to restore the institution of slavery among us; to make a penal code as bloody as that of Draco; to withdraw the charters of the cities; to supersede a standing judiciary by a scheme of occasional arbitration and umpirage; to prohibit particular professions or trades; to permanently suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, and take from us the trial by jury."

If this be the true theory, then is the whole structure of society subject to alteration, even to the form of the government itself. Nay, in the very heart of a democracy a new avenue is opened, by which *might* enter arbitrary and individual power. It is true that by the constitution of the United States the confederation is bound to guarantee to each state a republican form of government. But the theory is, that a convention may

undo all that former conventions have done. They may *release* a *guarantee* as readily as restore the institution of slavery, suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, or destroy the right of trial by jury. And if they should declare that an elective executive for life, and an elective senate for life, and an elective house of representatives for life, would be a republican form of government, who, according to the theory, could gainsay the construction. In the language of the theory, "*what may a convention not do?*" To establish a law of primogeniture, handing down all the ancestor's property to the eldest son; to prohibit the direction of property after death, and leave it to the seizure of the first occupant; to declare a community of goods, making some central treasury the general depository of all production, and the distributor of individual shares; to transfer a proportion of the many acres of the industrious farmer, and add it to the smaller number of his less fortunate or industrious neighbour, would, under the theory, be acts of the simplest and easiest enactment. The erudite projects of Solon might be tried again, or an experiment made of the simpler constitutions of Lycurgus; and while coarse and humble fare supplied the appetite, bars of iron might form the convenient currency of the people. And when all was fitted upon the regenerate plan, and the vessel of state once more fairly launched, another convention might bring her again into dock, to try new experiments upon her trim, her equipments, or her model.

It is not proposed to examine the soundness or the imperfections of this theory. That is precisely the task to the execution of which your own powers are invoked. It is the production of an able pen; is elaborately and eloquently set forth; and has found many and able advocates to enter the lists with its no less able and talented opposers. Its existence, the indefinite consequences which may result from it, and its promulgation as a rule of action, are presented to your attention,

merely as an incident of the times; to forewarn you of the species of work in which you must be engaged when you leave the groves of your Alma Mater; and to instruct you in the necessity of making preparation here, which will fit you to grapple with men hereafter. *If* this theory be true and sound, it will not pillow its head upon the soil which gave it birth. Its march will be onward; and its influences felt, and its doctrines be wrought into action, from the northern extremity of Maine, to the southernmost cape of Florida; and from the Atlantic to—we should formerly have said the Rocky Mountains; but now, since the roving spirit of our countrymen has found in steam an agent almost equal to their locomotive propensities—we may say at once, to the Pacific Ocean.

Already has this spirit of change invaded another of the elder sisters of the confederacy. Ancient, hospitable, high-bred Maryland begins to question the wisdom of her past ways, and to exhibit symptoms of longing for untried paths. The mode which this spirit has there assumed of making known its wishes and accomplishing its purposes, is altogether curious, unprecedented, and worthy of being presented to your attention as a novel instance of those extraordinary political events so frequently occurring in our country, and requiring upon each occasion a new supply of talent, of sagacity, and of patriotism to guard and protect the public weal.

The chief executive officer of that commonwealth is elected by a joint ballot of its senate and house of delegates; and to him, aided by a council of appointment, chosen in the same manner, belongs the appointment of the chancellor, the judges, the attorney-general, the officers of the militia, and of all the civil officers of the government. The senate is created by the votes of a body of electors, previously chosen by the people; and of the electors four and twenty are required by the constitution to form a college competent to the choice of senators. Of the electors lately chosen, nineteen gentlemen have regarded

it as their duty to abstain from taking their seats in the college, and have, it is said, resigned their electoral office. The remaining electors are less in number than the constitutional quorum; and the framers of that constitution not having foreseen, have not provided for so extraordinary an emergency.

What then is the position of Maryland? It is a question agitated in every palace and in every cottage within her own boundaries, and to which the rest of the union lends an anxious and inquiring attention. Has she a government of any description, or is society there resolved into its original elements? Is, or is not, her legislative department destroyed? and has, or has not, the executive perished with it? If they have both expired, can the judiciary survive? If that remains, can uncommissioned sheriffs summon jurors or enforce sentences? Or is the existing governor and the existing senate to remain in power upon the principle that a *de facto* possession is to be treated as a legitimate possession? Is it in the power even of the people to apply a remedy by a change or modification of their constitution, in any other manner than that which is provided in the instrument itself, which prohibits all change except by a bill passed by one general assembly, submitted by publication to the people, and confirmed, after a new election of delegates, by the next succeeding assembly? And if a component part of this assembly is destroyed, and the machinery provided by the constitution cannot be brought into operation, and there is a dissolution of the government, does the state present any other attitude than that of a vast assemblage of men, without law to direct, or authority to control them? What becomes of property? Does, or does not, its tenure expire with the law and the government? Is, or is it not, a state of things in which every man must be his own protector, and depend upon his own hand to preserve his own head?

It is not for me, Gentlemen, to answer these questions, nor to express a sentiment upon these events. But they belong