

# A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE  
CHAPEL OF HARVARD COLLEGE,

JUNE 17, 1794,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE  
SENIOR CLASS OF STUDENTS,

ON OCCASION OF THEIR  
APPROACHING DEPARTURE FROM THE UNIVERSITY,  
PREPARATORY TO THEIR RECEIVING  
ITS PUBLIC HONORS.

BY DAVID TAPPAN, A. M.  
HOLLIS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY in said COLLEGE.

*Published by Desire of the Hearers.*



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# To the STUDENTS of HARVARD COLLEGE, especially the Members of the SENIOR CLASS.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

*THE desire of gratifying your wishes, and contributing to your moral improvement, has induced my ready consent to the publication of the ensuing Discourse. The respectful and solemn attention with which it was heard, and the zeal which many of you have manifested for its appearing in public, encourage a pleasing hope that the perusal of it may, under the divine blessing, promote that virtuous and Christian sobriety, which is the first ingredient in a truly great and excellent character. At the same time, the unusual haste, in which it was composed, and is now sent to the press, pleads strongly for the indulgent candor of its readers.*

*THOSE of you, at whose request, and for whose special service this address was prepared, will receive it as a small but friendly legacy from one who ardently wishes your increasing honor, satisfaction, and usefulness. That the principles, which it recommends, may be deeply wrought into your understandings and hearts, and shed their happy influence upon the whole of your future existence, is the fervent prayer of,*

YOUR DEVOTED FRIEND,

DAVID TAPPAN.

*The Names of the SENIOR CLASS, to whom the following DISCOURSE was especially addressed, are presented to the public, at their desire, in the following alphabetical order.*

DAVID ABBOT,  
OLIVER AINSWORTH,  
TIMOTHY ALDEN,  
GEORGE WASHINGTON APPLETON,  
CHARLES HUMPHREY ATHERTON,  
JOHN ATKINSON,  
WILLIAM BIGLOW,  
JAMES BOWERS,  
THOMAS BOWMAN,  
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DANIEL BROOKS,  
LUKE BROWN,  
FRANCIS DANA CHANNING,  
WILLIAM CROSBY,  
CHRISTOPHER CUSHING,  
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DAVID KENDALL,  
JOSEPH MACKEAN,  
JESSE OLDS,  
STEPHEN PEABODY,  
JOSEPH PERKINS,  
SAMUEL STEARNS,  
HALL TUFTS.



## A DISCOURSE, &c.

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**T**HE importance of the rising generation must forcibly strike every attentive and feeling mind. What solemn and momentous consequences are wrapped up in those impressions, which are early stamped upon their understandings and hearts! On these impressions are probably suspended their own future honor or disgrace, happiness or misery; the comfort or grief of their immediate connexions; the character and fate of their intimate companions; and the most important interests both of human society and unborn posterity. These great interests peculiarly depend on that part of our youth, which is formed by the hand of science in our public seminaries. As this respectable University is soon to resign a considerable number of her sons into the arms of their country, I feel myself impelled by duty and affection, as well as by their united request, to introduce the affecting scene with a parting monitory address.

I CAN think of no better guide to a discourse of this kind, than those words of Paul in the SECOND CHAPTER OF HIS EPISTLE TO TITUS, THE SIXTH VERSE—

*YOUNG MEN LIKEWISE EXHORT TO BE SOBER MINDED.*

SOBRIETY of mind is an emphatic and comprehensive expression. It denotes a state of mind, which is sound and healthy, regular and tranquil. It imports an habitual aptitude of the mental powers

for such exercises and enjoyments, as are worthy of a rational and immortal being. It stands opposed both to intellectual and moral distraction and folly ; and therefore includes a serene and enlightened understanding, a duly regulated will and affections, a temperate and decent, a manly and elevated deportment. It will be useful to consider this sobriety, as it respects the leading faculties and operations of our compound nature, and to point out some opposite vices, which are peculiarly incident to the rising age, especially to young men of a learned education.

SOBRIETY in reference to the UNDERSTANDING is a right use of reason in the investigation of truth ; and accordingly implies an impartial and diligent pursuit of it, with a ready assent and firm adherence to it upon rational evidence. It therefore comprises a well founded and unshaken belief of those moral and religious truths, which hold up the essential and everlasting difference between virtue and vice ; the existence, perfections, and government of the Deity ; the high character and destination, yet present degraded condition of man ; and the consequent necessity, the abundant proof, and unrivalled excellence of the Christian revelation. These truths are at once so interesting and so manifest, that a sound and good mind will readily perceive and embrace them. The supposition, therefore, of a soberminded atheist or deist in an enlightened Christian country, and especially in the bosom of the liberal arts, appears absurd in theory, as well as contrary to evident fact. For as reason, soberly exercised, clearly discovers the prime truths and obligations of natural religion ; so these discoveries of nature, honestly and consistently pursued, will conduct the mind to the full belief and welcome entertainment of divine revelation ; as they induced the best heathen philosophers to desire and hope for such a favor. The avowal, therefore, of sceptical or irreligious principles, which undermine the foundations of piety and morals, evinces a strange

ly perverted and disordered mind. Such sentiments are commonly produced by the arrogant pride or vain affectation of superior abilities and learning ; by an ambitious desire of raising the wonder and applause of the world by bold, soothing, or singular doctrines ; by a fond attachment to human reason and philosophy as the universal standard of truth ; and above all, by a heart and life opposed to virtue, and devoted to sensuality and vice. Infidelity is at once the offspring and the nurse of moral depravity ; as too plainly appears from the characters and writings of its principal advocates, and from the general spirit and manners of its votaries.

THE members of a University, and other young gentlemen of literary characters, are in some respects peculiarly liable to this dangerous mental intoxication. For the course of their studies and reading, and the genius of their daily company, frequently give them such a taste for the beauties of the heathen classics, for the artificial graces of composition, or for the subtilties of metaphysical disputation, as insensibly betrays them into a disrelish and contempt of that artless simplicity, which marks the general doctrine, spirit, and style of the gospel. This circumstance, joined with the fashionable liberality, dissipation, and impiety of the age, and those charms of wit and erudition which surround some of the champions of infidelity, loudly calls on you, my young friends, to pay an early and sacred attention to your religious and moral principles, and to fix them on a deep and immoveable foundation. To this end think modestly of your own abilities. Cherish a spirit of humble and fair inquiry after religious truth. Listen to the uncorrupted voice of reason and conscience. Mark the native dignity, and the present moral weakness and corruption of human nature. Attend to the striking analogy between natural religion and revealed, and the admirable correspondence of both with the general constitution and course of nature, and with the evident

frame and condition of man. Endeavour with a candid and serious temper, and with a good moral taste, to examine the contents of revelation. Compare these with its external proofs, and with the obvious sentiments, ~~wants~~, and feelings of your own minds. Such a procedure in a case so important is dictated by sober reason, and must produce an enlightened, steady and practical adherence to the Christian religion.

This leads us to observe that sobriety involves not only a rational and firm conviction of important truth, but a governing care to regulate the temper and conduct by it. It is the worst species of madness to contradict in our practice principles and obligations, whose certainty and unspeakable moment are seen and confessed. This madness is peculiarly shocking in characters illuminated with the beams of science. A sober mind, favoured with Christian knowledge, must imply the choice and pursuit of Christian virtue. It must include right affection and action towards the various objects which religion places in our view. It must, therefore, embrace every suitable disposition and expression of piety towards our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; every proper feeling and proof of humble penitence for our past follies and sins; every sentiment and office of fervent universal charity to our fellow-beings, joined with the various exercises of a regular affection to ourselves. A sober, christian self-love will induce a vigorous and unwearied pursuit of our own highest perfection and happiness: It will consequently subject the inferior powers of appetite and passion to the dominion of enlightened reason, and studiously preserve such a constant regulation of body and mind, as may best fit each for its destined service and enjoyment. Sobriety, in this view of it, coincides with personal virtue or a proper self government, to which the term is often restricted; and accordingly implies moderation, purity and self denial; meekness, contentment, and fortitude; prudence, humility, and

diligence ; and in a word, the assiduous cultivation of those spiritual and heavenly dispositions, which are congenial to the nobler and immortal part of our frame, and which tend to ripen it for complete and endless felicity.

THE vices, which stand opposed to christian sobriety, are too obvious to require a particular enumeration. I cannot, however, forbear to mention a few, which are too prevalent at the present day, especially among inconsiderate youth : I wish we could except some whose literary advantages and acquirements should render them superior to such aggravated folly and baseness. The light and wanton abuse of the name of God ; the neglect or irreverent treatment of his worship ; the prostitution of his sacred day to idleness or sportive recreation ; the practical contempt of the leading truths and institutions of Christianity, and particularly of the mediation and redemption of the Savior ; the careless omission, or pointed ridicule of that strict and sublime virtue, which the gospel enjoins upon us in our private and social capacities ; an unlimited taste for scenes of pleasure and dissipation, for corrupting and pernicious amusements, for expensive show and magnificence ; a slothful waste of time, and impatience of close and useful application ; a disrespectful and ungovernable spirit and deportment towards superiors ; the allowed prevalence of proud and vain, of angry and envious passions, or of sordid, impure, or extravagant appetites ; these and other similar follies and vices are inconsistent with a sober mind, and disgrace at once the man and the Christian.

THAT I may, by the divine blessing, excite your detestation and careful avoidance of these evils, and engage you to think and act in the truly rational manner represented above, let me place before you the beneficent operation of christian sobriety upon the characters and prospects of young men, who are preparing, by a learned education, for the higher departments of society.



FIGURE to yourselves a youth commencing and prosecuting his collegiate course under the influence of those manly principles, which we have described. See what decorum, what dignity of character these principles produce ! How do they lift him above every thing trifling and vicious, especially above those excesses, which directly lose the man in the brute ! With what contempt and abhorrence does he regard that insipid indolence, that thoughtless levity, that vulgar, profane, or riotous amusement, which have sometimes intruded into the hallowed temple of science ! In what a rational and advantageous manner does he adjust his studies, his reading, his social intercourse, and even his innocent diversions ! Possessing a solemn and delicate sense of responsibility to his Maker and his own mind, to his friends and the public, for the use which he makes of his superior advantages, he is conscientiously diligent in his literary applications, as well as regular and amiable in his civil and moral deportment. He considers it as a base and treacherous abuse of parental affection to prostitute the fruits of its confidence and liberality to such gratifications, as would tend to wound his connexions and benefactors, and entail infamy and ruin upon himself. He labors to excel in those branches of science, which are most congenial and improving to his own mind, and which may render him most useful to his fellow men ; which may enable him to hold out a directing and cheering lamp to a benighted and erring world. Sensible that the best interests of society are essentially connected with those of piety and virtue, and that the lower classes of the people are greatly influenced by the sentiments and manners of literary characters and public nurseries of science, he is careful to exemplify the various branches of universal goodness in his own temper and life, and to promote them among his fellow students.

IN a word, his understanding, his modesty, and his moral feelings are too sound and accurate to per-

mit him to be either a pedant, a dogmatist, or a sceptic, especially in the sublime and important science of religion. While he is too wise and sober either to dispute or attempt to prove first and self evident principles, especially on moral subjects; he will not absurdly require mathematical proof or a full comprehensive view of points, which, though manifestly true and momentous, are incapable either of strict demonstration or adequate solution.

HAVING accompanied our sober minded student through his academic course, let us follow him into the great theatre of human society. The favor and estimation which he has already acquired by his assiduity, proficiency, and virtue, go before him as an herald to introduce him with advantage to the confidence and service of the public. His enlightened, prudent, and religious principles assist him to a happy choice of his future profession, and engage him to such preparation for and behavior in it, as promise him reputation, comfort and success. These principles fortify him against the numerous attacks of temptation, and preserve him steady and secure in the delicate path of fidelity and honor. They consecrate all his abilities and opportunities to some worthy and profitable end, especially to the Godlike purpose of advancing the credit, and extending the influence of christian sentiments and morals; which his own delightful consciousness, as well as the concurrent voice of reason, observation, and scripture, assures him are the main pillars both of private and social felicity.

IN a word, christian sobriety is in every view friendly to the votaries of science. It gives consistency and perfection to their literary and civil, as well as to their moral and religious character. It at once strengthens the intellect, refines the taste, exalts the affections, and dignifies the manners. It conduces both to inward peace and outward prosperity. It engages the esteem and confidence of men, and the far more

important approbation and blessing of God. It insures a useful life, a happy death, and a blessed eternity.

THIS imperfect delineation of the superior excellence and unspeakable advantages of a sober mind should peculiarly recommend it to the young members of this University. You are looking forward, my friends, with pleasing but anxious emotions to manly life. You are ready to anticipate scenes of distinguished honor, usefulness and happiness, as the due reward of your present expensive and laborious preparation. Many of you hope, after a few years, to fill stations of dignity in civil or religious society, and in them to be the directors, the rulers, and the patterns of mankind.

THAT your fond anticipations may be realized, I must earnestly exhort you to cultivate the sentiments and dispositions above described.

THIS is the sure, the only path to DIGNITY AND HONOR. For what is true honor, what is substantial glory, but the native and reflected lustre of moral worth, or the magnanimity and splendor of conscious, resolute, victorious goodness? Without this, the most shining intellectual or exterior accomplishments will neither merit nor enjoy the respect of those, whose approbation confers real credit and satisfaction. If a comprehensive and enlightened understanding were a sufficient title to honor, the prince of malignant spirits would be a most noble and illustrious character. Or if the polite, the brilliant and graceful qualities rendered their possessor honorable, who would stand higher on the roll than \* a late noble author, whose writings and manners were elegant and charming, yet hollow, deceitful, corrupting, and therefore truly mean and disgraceful? O guard, my young hearers, against the dangerous fascination of false or mistaken honor. A just sentiment of dignity will make you studiously ambitious of copying the moral excellencies of the Deity, of possessing his unerring approbation, and of contributing to the

happiness of his rational offspring. Which leads me to add, that

WITHOUT religious sobriety you cannot expect to be eminently **USEFUL**. For nothing short of a commanding principle of piety and benevolence can insure a faithful adherence to duty, or a steady line of useful conduct in scenes of pressing temptation. The greatest capacities and means of usefulness, not directed and animated by religious goodness, will too probably be either indolently neglected, riotously wasted, or directly perverted into engines of mischief and ruin.

MUCH less can you expect to derive solid and permanent **HAPPINESS** from any other source. For a sober mind, and that only, constitutes the health and perfection of the soul. This fits its several powers for their proper functions, conducts them to their adequate objects, and thus fills them with the most refined and satisfying enjoyment. But the greatest combination of natural, literary, or external advantages can never answer these purposes; they can yield only a superficial and fanciful, an interrupted and toilsome satisfaction. The choicest sweets, which learning, wealth, splendor, power, and sensual indulgence united can afford, were long since extracted by the wisest of men: The result of his experiment, a result echoed by constant and universal experience, is, that all these, without religion, are vanity and vexation of spirit.

If the irreligious man be thus inwardly poor and wretched even in his best estate, what must he be in the trying scenes of adversity, in the agonizing hour of death, and in a future state of impartial and endless retribution? The united voice of nature and reason, of experience and scripture proclaims the final misery of impenitent vice. A moral character contrary to religious sobriety carries in its own bosom the seeds and beginnings of future wretchedness, and is righteously condemned to it by the natural and revealed constitution of heaven. It is therefore equal-

ly foolish and impious for any to **pretend** that the belief and **practice** of religion are proper and necessary only for the ignorant and superstitious populace: They are equally and infinitely important both to the learned scholar and the illiterate vulgar; but with this striking difference, that the guilt and condemnation of the former, if found destitute of them, will be heightened by all his literary advantages and accomplishments; so that the doom of the untutored savage will be an enviable fate compared to his.

THIS solemn train of thought applies with peculiar force to those students of the University, who are soon to venture on the untried scenes of a busy and seducing world. To these, therefore, I will now address the remaining part of my discourse.

I TRUST, my young friends, that you feel emotions of gratitude for the distinguishing kindness of divine Providence in giving you opportunity to lay a broad foundation for future excellence and usefulness. It is my earnest wish and hope that you may on this foundation erect a consistent and honorable superstructure; that it will be your emulous and constant endeavour that your accomplishments and manners may comport with your superior education, and with the progressive state of American refinement. You cannot forget that the reputation and interest of learning in general, and of this seminary in particular, will, under God, greatly depend upon you; that a sober and discerning public reasonably expect a greater dignity of sentiment and behaviour, a more nice and sacred regard to every rule of decorum, of probity, of honor and of religion in you, than in the rude mass of uncultivated mortals. You will also remember that your country has high claims to the enlightened and powerful aid of her learned sons in supporting and improving her order, freedom, and glory; and that the part which they shall act, will greatly affect the general cause of human liberty, virtue and happiness.

To fulfil the just expectations both of Heaven and earth will, I hope, be the constant object of your ambition and zeal. To this end your deportment in society will be a studious and pleasing display of unaffected modesty, condescension, and courtesy, joined with inflexible honesty, cautious prudence, and manly virtue. To acquire the important art of serving mankind in the most acceptable and useful manner, you will cultivate an intimate acquaintance with human nature and life in their various forms. For this purpose, you will occasionally mix with the several classes of society, and carefully attend to their diversified capacities, sentiments, passions, and infirmities; that by these avenues you may gain access to their understandings and hearts, and, by the blessing of God, conduct them to knowledge, virtue, and happiness. By a prudent and endearing intercourse with mankind, and by exemplifying in their view the meliorating influence of a learned and christian education, you will contribute to remove unfortunate prejudices against this our ALMA MATER, and recommend her to the public esteem as the nursing parent of every thing amiable and happy. At the same time your filial respect for her, and wise regard for your own reputation will restrain you from frequently amusing the unlettered circle with exaggerated or exulting tales of youthful follies committed by a few of her inconsiderate sons.

You will seek to honor yourselves and your friends, and to increase your general usefulness, by a nice selection of your familiar associates; by the purity and dignity, the ardor and constancy of your attachments; by the rational yet fervent spirit of your devotions; by your conspicuous reverence for the doctrines, institutions and ministers of the gospel; by your exemplary practice and encouragement of every virtue, which cannot ill adorn our rising republic.

You will be ever on your guard against the dangerous ambition of creeling or following the standard



of religious or political faction. You will never seek popular fame or promotion by exciting ignorant and envious clamors against those to whom the people have confided their important concerns. In a community so young, so free, and enlightened as ours, real talents and merit have no occasion to employ measures so base and mischievous to raise themselves into notice and employment. A recourse, therefore, to such expedients is a shrewd symptom, at least in most cases, that their authors are conscious of a worthless character, and are seeking to varnish and emblazon it with the false glare of affected superior sagacity, patriotism, or religion.

As most of you, on your entrance upon active life, contemplate the serious yet pleasing task of instructing and forming our children; you will endeavour to improve the common methods of education into a more rational and moral culture of their understandings and hearts. While you are storing their memories with words, and teaching their lips an accurate and graceful pronunciation; you will aim to enrich their minds with valuable ideas, and especially to plant in their tender bosoms the early sentiment and love of order and moral beauty, of republican virtue and scriptural piety.

AND now, my friends, may God Almighty bless you! Under his heavenly benediction may you shine as lights in the world! May each of you exhibit the scholar, the gentleman, the patriot, and the Christian, in every station which Providence may assign you! May the lustre and good influence of these combined excellencies be seen and felt by thousands both of the present and succeeding generations! May conscious fidelity and usefulness give comfort and dignity to your existence here, and through the merits of the Savior introduce you to exalted felicity and honor in the regions of bliss.