

**AN ADDRESS, DELIVERED JULY
20, 1830, BEFORE THE
PEITHESSOPHIAN AND
PHILOCLEAN
SOCIETIES OF RUTGERS COLLEGE**

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An Address, Delivered July 20, 1830, Before the Peithessophian and Philoclean Societies of Rutgers College by William Wirt

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WILLIAM WIRT

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED JULY 20, 1830,

BEFORE THE

PEITHESSOPHIAN AND PHILOCLEAN

Societies

OF

RUTGERS COLLEGE.

BY

HON. WILLIAM WIRT.

Delivered and Published at the request of the Peithessophian Society.



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PREFACE.

THE following ADDRESS was originally published by the Peithessophian Society in pamphlet form, for the special benefit of the Literary Institution before which it was delivered; but the distinguished reputation of the author, as a scholar and a patriot, together with the great merit which the work was found to possess, caused it to pass rapidly through three editions. In the meantime it found its way across the Atlantic, and was re-published in England. Soon after, it was translated into the French language, and published in Paris; and subsequently in Germany, in the German language. During all this time there has been a regular and an increasing demand for the work at home, which has induced the Society to put it in a more substantial and desirable form.

The prophetic language of the author, in relation to the future prospects and perils of our Republic, and the influence which the educated youth of our country may have upon its future destinies, will render this work, especially at this critical period of our history, a valuable acquisition to the library of every youthful patriot.

NEW-BRUNSWICK, *January*, 1852.

INTRODUCTION

BY

HON. THEODORE FRELINGHUYSEN, LL. D.,

PRESIDENT OF ROTGERS COLLEGE.

WILLIAM WIRT, the author of the following address, was one of the most distinguished public men of our country; a native of Maryland; born on the 8th of November, 1772, and died at the City of Washington, on the 18th of February, 1834. He was a man of noble and generous feelings, of rare and various learning, refined taste and vigorous intellect. The address which follows, especially in its counsels to young men, illustrates his character, and will embalm his memory. And to crown and adorn the whole, Mr. Wirt was a Christian; deeply read in the plagues of his own heart, and in the nature and glory of the way of salvation. His accomplished biographer* has given an interesting and graphic sketch of his religious character:

"As life advanced, his convictions of the truth and value of Christian revelation, and of the duties it imposed upon him, became more earnest and profound. He devoted a portion of his time every day to the reading of the Scriptures; engaged in a comprehensive study of theology; cultivated habits of prayer and meditation, which he promoted and encouraged throughout his family; and frequently employed his leisure in the composition of religious essays and records of private devotion. He took great interest in the promotion of moral and religious institutions, in the missionary labors of the churches, in the extension of the Sunday-schools, in the success of the Bible societies; and was, at the time of his death, the President of the State Bible Society of Maryland. He was a most effective friend of the cause of temperance, and often sought opportunity to testify to the great importance which he attached to the labors of the societies connected with it. 'I have been, for more than forty years,' he remarks, in a letter which has been frequently published, 'a close observer of life and manners in various parts of the United States; and I know not the evil that will bear a moment's comparison with intemperance.' In short, the latter years especially, of Mr. Wirt's life, furnish us the spectacle of a highly-gifted, thoughtful and accomplished mind, stimulated by a fervent and sincere piety, and employed in the promotion of every good work, suggested by enlightened benevolence or Christian duty.

His theological studies were systematically pursued through many years, in whatever leisure his profession allowed him. His favorite authors were Hooker, Baxter, Watts, Faber, Flavel, Robert Hall, Doddridge, and Jay. Massillon and Bourdaloue were frequently in his hands. Of Baxter, he says, in a letter to his daughter: 'I took up the *Saint's Rest* lately, and found it like an old sandal-wood box, as aish and fragrant as if it had just been made, although it has been exhaling its odor for one hundred and eighty years.'

"He had been a careless witness, in his younger days, to that prevalence of free-thinking, in reference to the authenticity of the Christian religion, which, at that period, had become somewhat notable in Virginia. The reflections of his riper age pictured this tendency of opinion to his mind as an insidious and fearful malady, which was not less destructive of the integrity of the social constitution, than it was perilous to the individual. He had himself read Voltaire, Bolingbroke, Hume, Gibbon, Shaftesbury, Rousseau, Paine, and Godwin, and other strong or striking writers of that school; but they had not shaken the ground-work of his faith. He could read and admire, discriminate and repel. He was, nevertheless, fully aware of the fascination which their learning, genius, wit and eloquence gave to their intrepid skepticism. He had often occasion to remark how brilliant paradox and bold assault upon common opinion, witty apothegm and dexterous satire captivate even vigorous minds, predisposed by education or by temper to assail whatsoever rests upon the authority of the past; and his personal experience had warned him how much more subtly these devices were calculated to enslave and capture the unfortified mind of youth. This conviction ripened into a painful solicitude, of which we have many proofs in his correspondence."

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ADDRESS.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN OF RUTGERS COLLEGE :

It is by your invitation that I am here, and to you, of course, that I am expected to address myself. Permit me, in the first place, to thank you for the honor of the invitation. You have done me justice in believing that I take a deep interest in the pursuits of my young countrymen, and that I would not, lightly, permit any consideration of personal inconvenience to disappoint the desire you have expressed to hear me. You will probably learn, from my compliance, one lesson of experience, at least—and lessons of experience cannot come too soon—which is, that in the intellectual as well as the material world, distant objects are apt to loom larger than the life, and that you are not to trust, with implicit confidence, to the Reports of Fame, whether they relate to men or things.