

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE GRADUATING CLASS OF
THE LAW DEPARTMENT OF
HAMILTON COLLEGE: JULY 16,
1856**

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An Address Delivered Before the Graduating Class of the Law Department of Hamilton College:
July 16, 1856 by William Curtis Noyes

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WILLIAM CURTIS NOYES

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*Memoir from
W.^m Curtis Noyes Esq.*

An Address

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Graduating Class of the Law Department

OF

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JULY 16, 1856,

BY

WILLIAM CURTIS NOYES.

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A D D R E S S .

YOUNG GENTLEMEN:—

NEARLY half a century ago, a young man, born on the western border of Massachusetts, and just graduated from one of her colleges, made his way, poor and unprotected, to one of the pleasant villages nearest this ancient seat of learning. What were his emotions on leaving the dear home of his childhood, and what his plans and purposes as he skirted that beautiful stream, which

"From its western source,
Where silently and calm it flows,
To where it takes a torrent's force,
And dashes down the dark Cohoes,"

we may more than conjecture, from the completed history of his life, and of his death. His native hills and valleys were endeared to him by the tenderest recollections. His parents, his sisters, were names interwoven with every emotion of his heart, and in separating himself from them many bitter tears bedewed the sad parting. He was called, however, to do his duty in the battle of life, and chose this then comparatively remote region, as the scene of his labors, and it might be of his triumphs. Placing himself under the guidance

of one whose name is historical in the bar of Oneida County, and who never neglected merit however humble, and whose memory is still revered and beloved, he pursued the study of the law with untiring assiduity; and although straitened in means, and supporting himself in part, at least, by laboring as a journalist, he never faltered in heart or hope; and after the ordinary period of probation,—which then was more than nominal, involving a severe course of study for six years,—was admitted to the bar as an advocate and counsellor. Hard as had been his early struggles, and much as they had tried his faith and fortitude, they had as yet scarcely commenced. He was now upon the threshold only, of the difficulties which beset the young lawyer in his professional career. He was without clients, without patronage, without pecuniary resources; and even if an occasional case came in his way, he was to encounter that severe trial of his intellectual strength which assuredly awaits every candidate for forensic honors, and the stern competition of those distinguished men who then adorned and dignified the bar. It is no cause of wonder, therefore, that for some time he avoided and deferred the contest; seeking in the pursuit which had contributed to his support during his preparatory studies, not only the discipline of mind and the opportunity for the acquisition of the large learning essential to success, but an increase of fortune and an enlargement of his ability for doing good. These, he happily attained,—the former in much the

largest measure,—and to such an extent that the duties of an editor gave way to the more congenial engagements of the forum. Having made a successful business connection, and removed to your chief city, then a simple, but thriving village, as a theatre for greater activity and usefulness, clients in numbers crowded his doors, and the path of honorable distinction was open before him with its wealth and honors.

I need not say with what ardor and industry, with what self-denial, he pursued it for many years; how he toiled day and night; how critical he was in his pleadings; how careful in his preparation; how accurate in his facts; how abundant in his research and examination of the law, how he cultivated and improved a most wonderful memory with which he was endowed, and how he extended and brought to their full perfection and strength his intellectual powers, and enriched his capacious mind with vast stores of learning, in the various departments of human knowledge;—in short, how he became one of the most prominent leaders among his associates, and one of your most learned, respected, and influential citizens. Many who hear me, know and were the witnesses of these facts in his history.

How he surrendered himself to his work—to the one great purpose of his existence—may be seen in this: he surrounded himself with none of the luxuries, and few of the comforts of life. Endowed with the kindest sympathies, and a heart responding quickly to the tones

and offices of friendship and affection, he created no ties which could divert him from his great object. That portion of his time not given to his profession, was passed in comparative seclusion. His habits were strictly economical; and, although liberal in answering the calls of duty, his moderate accumulations were guarded with honest care and prudent pains-taking. None of the sweet influences of wife or children or home, were his; and many wondered what end was intended to be accomplished by one who thus labored and thus lived.

Political distinctions opened before him; they were sought and attained. He became a Senator and Judge of the Court of last resort. Still he was the same earnest, laborious, but disinterested, impassive, isolated, incomprehensible man; in both departments of his new and extended sphere of action, at once, and by general consent, *primus inter pares*.

For nearly four years, he discharged the duties of his exalted station with a devotion and ability rarely surpassed. His speeches upon topics of public interest and importance, attest the soundness of his judgment, and the scope and breadth of his forecast, as well as his talents and learning. His opinions as a judge are models of judicial discussion,—resting the decision of each case upon broad and general doctrines, free from all technicality productive of injustice, combining with a critical analysis of the authorities bearing upon the question before him, an accurate deduction of the prin-