THE STATE. ORATION AN BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND ALPHA OF THE PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY, AT BROWN UNIVERSITY, SEPTERMBER 2, 1862

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The state. oration An before the Rhode Island Alpha of the Phi beta kappa society, at Brown university, Septermber 2, 1862 by Thatcher Thayer

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AT BROWN UNIVERSITY,

SEPTEMBER 2, 1862,

By THATCHER THAYER, D. D.

PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER, 17 WESTMINSTER STREET.
1862.

THE STATE.

Thomas H. Webb

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ORATION.

THERE seems no choice of themes at this time. One overmastering thought constrains us, and letters must be subordinate in the scholar's mind to that whose idea is essential to the completeness of all letters and philosophy and religion itself. For God himself, in a very terrible way, is educating us up to the doctrine and appreciation of that noblest form and fruit of society,—THE STATE. Whatever it was needful to think and do for individual development, now plainly, since by great exigencies we are forced to act, is it reverential to think in the direction of the whole. Indeed, the Divine method proceeds in large part by unities, and doubtless one significance of this moment in our history is a recoil from individualism and a vindication of social unity. We are obeying a mighty conservative instinct to preserve and confirm the State. Better, certainly, is it to pray for it, and die for it,—but it is also well to think it out, and enunciate it in high places.

So, then, the State is not a soulless aggregate of individuals, but is itself a noble Life, and we are living in it and out from it. This day we are not so

many men and women with names, baptized or unbaptized, fools or wise, workers or lazy, only; not so many members of families or of college merely, not even born only in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. No, thank God, we are participants of a higher National Existence. Its larger, deeper pulsations throb within us. Ours is this lofty State consciousness, becoming more distinct, and, please Heaven! we do not mean to part with it, come what may. This is the moment for us to be in sympathy with the worthiest minds of every age upon this grand theme, from the great Athenian downward, and, with John Milton, to conceive of the State as of "one huge Christian Personage, one mighty growth and stature of an honest man, as big and compact in virtue as in body."

It is a great thing, and worth great sacrifices, to attain the full conception of this. With a comprehension enlarged by the views opening upon us, and made more luminous by their contrasts; with an earnestness becoming more intense through the tragic realities of this hour, let us then apprehend it, First, as directly authorized in its origin, alike by the revealed word and the natural law of God, not as asking leave to be through some supererogatory compact of men; but through a certain divine necessity working in the constitution of things, whereby society must crystallize into State forms. Scope enough is left for the human will to act in all responsibility, yet with no exception in the highest of all spheres,—the moral,—allowed to mar the universal order, but anarchy made as impossible as chaos; and this from honest rudiments, up to most complete po-

litical organization, manifested as a condition of social being, into which men come without being committed as to whether they agree to be governed, any more than whether they agree to be born at all. Secondly, Set before the mind the substance and functions of the State. Its substance is summarily government; legislative, in that it enacts laws out of existing obligations; judicial, in that it discriminates according to those laws; and executive, in that it secures the observance of law. Then its functions,—How high are these? Towards God, it is, whether expressed or not, the mightiest illustration of the Supreme Divine State in which men exist. All our great ideas need to be educated; and this most comprehensive one, that we are subjects of God's moral government, is taught us through the ages by the State. For, notice how it makes us familiar with intelligent will, moving and controlling immense activities, and inculcates upon us, through the compression of our swollen individuality, and the suggestion of our accountability to administered law, that we were formed to be under government, and that true liberty is harmony with law.

But the function of the State towards men is the aspect most immediately concerning us. Observe how various and essential this is. It restrains, ever so gently or violently, with consciousness or unconsciousness on our part. Oh, what would not men do and be but for this restraining force! Again, it protects. Think how the State guards us! Asleep or awake, we are within its outstretched arms, and its watchful eye is ever upon us and ours. Abroad, its mere touch on wax acts like a talisman, and means