

K. U.

ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

ALUMNI OF KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY,

June 25, 1868.

One common call brings us here ,to-nigt, from various avocations and widely divergent places of abode. The return of the student's Commencement; the heightening fame that attaches to Kentucky University; and the generous grasp of the warm palm of a comrade Alumnus are the moving causes that prevail upon our hearts in assembling at this re-union of the graduates of three different colleges, now claiming a common mother of us all. To us, whether we hail from the tomb of Transylvania, or have our credentials covered with dust from the ashes of Bacon College, or acknowledge a more recent birth at the creative will of Kentucky University, the interests, the motives, the ambitions, the sympathies are the same. Gathered for a purpose having its origin in close intimacy with the ceremonies that will crown to-morrow's exercises and the protracted labors of a fruitful session, we no less commemorate the recollections of the past than honor the auspices of the future. Hours like this, indeed, assign to memory one of its sweetest offices. If the sight of his green isle is a thrilling vision to the returning emigrant; if the neat and comely cottage, "half-concealed, half-revealed" under the thick-

clustering woodbine is a memory shrine to the affections of the sailor; if the farmer home where the yule log burns brightly, or the "old oaken bucket hangs in the well" is dear to the bronzed veteran from the wars, may not the Alumnus claim the privilege, the honor, the authorized right of leaving for a time the multiplied pursuits of the busy age and paying just tribute to class and social memories.— While the graduate of Transylvania muses upon the long hours when he pored over the consolidated hieroglyphics of Thucydides, the heaven-reaching tangents and shadowy infinitudes of Calculus, or steered tremblingly in constant fear of ship-wreck between the rocky promontories of logical syllogisms; while the representatives of Bacon College repeat to such of their comrades as are here met the unforgotten story of their trepidous matriculation, the sinking, fainting sensation that clung to their first entrance into the class-room, or saunter away in an easy walk among the marriage statistics of the belles of the village who ruthlessly cut in twain their delicate heart-strings; we, their successors, have also somewhat to recall. How shall we forget the rigidly faithful mathematical faculties of a White, who could calculate to a hair's breadth or the hundredth part of a unit the merits of a student's recitation; or over his spectacles command the trembling disciple of Newton to draw an air line from the apex of the university steeple to the moon, and festoon it with ellipses and parabolas, sweeping the confines of the planetary world. It were sinful to omit, too, the acutely jocular smile that made sunset on the features of a Richardson, as he bade his class of wild blades observe closely an invisible gas that they might recognize it on a second inspection, or complacently turned on to their quivering joints a double shock of electricity. Need we go by the polished and erudite Graham, or the logical and gifted Pinkerton, dealing in the savage incantations of "Barbara," or delighting to bid us solve the dialectics of Plato

or to distribute an undistributed middle. If the benevolent philanthropy of a Robert Milligan gave us stilts to walk over the nine year's labor of Butler, who dug a deep grave for the student's pride; or if the finished and scholarly Neville distributed classical scalpels amongst us that we might make anatomical demonstrations on the dry bones of generations long since evaporated into thin air, is it to be supposed that a dutiful obedience to university discipline or a reverential regard for the authority of the fathers will permit us to forget these salient points in our college history. By no means. They are as closely linked with the more labored and serious features of the academic course as the grade book of a dull scholar is linked with his personal reputation. Whether we recall the argument of our humanitarian professors thundering the canons of moral and positive, divine and human, law against the profligate student who repeated the muscular feat of Sampson against the city of Gaza, or drew caricatures of his beloved professors on the smooth surface of a bench; or whether we remember the rich, ripe fruits they plucked from the tree of knowledge and presented to his taste, the reminiscence enters into the general Thesaura of the graduate, lettered, numbered and shelved.

The Alumnus loves no less than the old soldier to tell his battles o'er again. They belong to his life campaign, and when he buries them for a time in the bustle of other things, it is done with all the honors of war. They do not sleep. The rolling of a year turns them to sight when the bugle sounds the *reveille*. And thus they live on from cycle to cycle, never fading till the bubble of life bursts and the spirit is enfranchised for its final flight. They are the evergreens that hang along the gnarled and knotted forest trunk, giving a semblance of renewing youth to its wasting form—over which the tempests of years successively beat.

If we add that this hour brings back, with its tripping dactylic remembrances, somewhat of shadow, of cloud, of dark-visaged, sombre-clad melancholy,

"That from her wild, sequestered seat,
In notes by distance made more sweet
Pours through the mellow horn her pensive soul,"

We do but draw photographs of forms and features this day absent, but resting on our hearts. Unheeding the full-toned call of his *Alma Mater* or the festival pleasures of this hour, sleeps in the valley of the Tennessee, and beside its placid waters, a gallant youth who seven years ago started with us the life campaign. The hot breath of fever touched his slender frame and did the work that singing bullet, and screaming shell, and glistening blade and bayonet had failed to do, and Charles Harrison died, filling a soldier's grave. We recall his heart beaming with generous impulses, his spirit communing only with the honorable and the manly, quick at the touch of wrong and prompt at the call of duty, his eye flashing the fires of a vaulting genius, his step elastic and his soul as the soul of the hart—loving to breathe the free atmosphere of unbounded space. His premature fate teaches the "rustic moralist" a lesson and pages of truth reflect themselves from the lowly mound covering his dust and from the white marble tablets that stand, pale monitors, at his head and at his feet. Gifted, hopeful, sanguine, reaching towards the laurels that surmount the pillars of State, a few short, sharp hours broke the proud spirit and the gates of life closed upon him. Need we pass by, in these tributes to the absent, the unselfish heroism that fired the missionary spirits of a Gore and a Surber as they assay to plant the banners of truth and Christianity on the ocean-bound shores of Australia, and there in measureless power, teach the value of faith, the lesson of charity and demonstrate the sublime truth that there is a life beyond the present. All honor to them

in their noble work! They build a monument that caps the mausoleum of the Ptolemies or the costly, sculptured triumphal column of the French fatalist. In the silent watches of this night we send across the great waters the sweet evangel of our recollection, and the mute prayer that Heaven may grant a successful finality to their labors and restore them in undiminished health to the bosom of their friends.

Turning from this branch of natural responses suggested by the spirit of the occasion, shall we hesitate to manifest that strong degree of pride that moves us as we contemplate Kentucky University. But a few years in the past and its foundation stones were scarcely laid. Its present greatness and completeness was but a dream, a purpose in the mind of one* who deserves and will receive the title of the poor man's friend and Kentucky's benefactor. Like the pledge written on the cloud, Kentucky University suddenly erects its bow of promise over the State whose pioneer history is marked with the fiercest conflicts and whose every valley has flowed with blood. Rich in endowment, strong in talent, popular with the masses, growing, developing, aggregating—it unwraps each year the mystic roll of its fortune and its fame. It makes an era in the history of the Commonwealth. The era of the savage who besieged Bryant's Station, almost in hearing of this spot, making the deep woods to ring with his fierce war-whoop, has yielded to the era of the white hunter and the school-master, and this in turn is now merged in the era of the professor, the scholar, the man of science. Refinement tracks the retiring foot-steps of ruffianism; classical knowledge displaces the rugged family genealogies; and reason, under the tutelage of revelation, sur-

* John B. Bowman.

mounts the instincts and passions peculiar to uneducated minds. The infidelity that lurks in the primitive views of the back-woodsman, under the lens of revealed truth, passes into a reverential regard for deity. With knowledge comes protection and personal security with safety to property—the three great natural rights of man that are above law and on which government is built. The hunter need no longer take his gun to church, nor the matron bar her doors against the painted savage, nor the child fear capture and the cruel tomahawk. These are passed away. They adorn only the pages of romance or weave a strange thread in history. There is light breaking, and rays are streaming abroad. That light is penetrating the mountains that line our southern border and is glancing as a silver sheen across the bosom of the State. Shall we be startled if, ere long, the Valley of the Mississippi is illuminated with its beams. Shall we be startled again if, ere long, a continent feels its smile. With light there will be truth—moral truth, intellectual truth, physical truth.—Whether the infallibility of a divine canon of inspiration is established, or the accuracy of a law of solar influence, or the proportion of elements that enter into the composition of a stone, the result is the same—it is a truth. Whether one truth be greater than another is measured by its influence on human destiny. And we are not far from supporting authority when we affirm that the duty and the end of man combine in the discovery and the possession of light and truth. To attain both, Kentucky University rears its young but massive frame, and on these builds its reputation. If here on this spot, where a McKinley, in his narrow log school-room, in no poetic imagery but in actual struggle, taught the way to truth despite the sharp claws and envenomed lacerations of the wild beast, an institution of learning that pledges to equal a Yale or a Harvard, nor

blushes at the mention of ivy-clad Edinburgh or classic Berlin, lifts its commanding form, need we wonder at the change. Greater changes are before us. Kentucky is just feeling the strong pulse and vigorous heart-beat that tokens the coming giant. Asleep for a quarter of a century, she is ready to dash the dews from her eye-lids and lethargy from her lusty limbs. Her fertile valleys waving with rich grain harvests; her limestone hills perforated with ribs of iron, or concealing beds of coal; her muscular frame marked with blue veins of lead; her deposits of salt, of gypsum, of lime, of salt-petre; her shadowy forests making twilight under the eye of noon are elements fast instituting a marked influence in the marts and emporiums of trade. Within a twelve-month the railroad system of the State will have increased its proportion by a half, and the parallel bars will shortly after stretch eastward from your city to the cities and ports of the Atlantic sea-board. Manufacturing enterprise is gaining activity; capital is pouring in; labor systematizing itself; sober emigration turning its tide hitherward; and the vitalizing force of progressive civilization exerting its salutary influences. The farmer is gradually ceasing to rely on the supernatural agencies of the moon and the physical phenomena of the goose-bone, and to trust more to the fertilizing uses of guano, and the proper development of the chemical properties of the soil. The prophetic warning of the Commissioner of Agriculture at Washington that there is a retrogression imminent in American agriculture, that improvidence and reckless waste are stripping the fairest fields of their wealth of fertility, we are assured does not embrace Kentucky. There is improvement and progression here. The formation of agricultural clubs and societies are potent means of eliciting valuable information, and their number is rapidly increasing. The farmer more attentively husbands

his means and is careful to save that which months ago he suffered to waste. Skilled and professional labor commands a better price than before, and begin to assume that position and rank to which they are justly entitled. Some stumbling blocks yet lie in the way, but economy, industry, morality, the observance of good faith, and the distribution of equal justice in legislation will remove these and put us in the road to full-orbed success.

These are but the phases of material prosperity. There is work yet for the student, for the public educator. Superficial education has flourished long in Kentucky. Its chain has been difficult to break. That pastoral simplicity that peers forth from the printed rules of one of our academies of science that yearly issues a diploma to its graduates, prescribing as a line of duty to its pupils that "they shall retire at night and arise in the morning" is a strong picture to adorn the point of a correspondent's wit or serve as a shining example. The unsubstantial fabric of the human mind needs to strengthen its powers with the muscular food of experience, of judgment, of active, philosophic research, of practical operations, of right reason, of close analysis, and vigorous, determined thought. Moving on from crown point to crown point; staying its march only to master and man the works captured; bearing its triumphal banners, tattered and torn with a thousand close-contested conflicts; springing its mines under the feet of the enemy and leveling its cogent shafts in their very faces; driven back only to take fresh foothold; brighter and brighter gathering the glories of its achievements; on and on, still high advancing, it should stay not till the limit of the invisible is reached, and reason disappears in faith. Fashionable etiquette and Chesterfield accomplishments are lost in these pure battle-fields of thought. They

are out of place. Fill the mind and the mind will guide the graces of person and supply those social attractions and individual charms that are the light and admiration of the polished circle, the promiscuous audience and the Senate chamber. But there is a specific work cut out for the educator within our near proximity. Nearly forty thousand human beings of adult age claim a birthright in our Commonwealth who cannot sign their names to a legal document nor read the signpost that stands by the highway. Startling as this fact sounds to the ear of the educated Kentuckian, the records of the State departments demonstrate its truth. It is a fixed basis from which we must necessarily start in order to attain the desired conclusion. It is not an unconquerable barrier to science. Forwhile thunders mutter and threatenings flash from its dark cloud in the face of the advancing army of professional educators, time, labor, directness of means and united effort will contribute to dissipate its terrors. There need be no exaggerated hope as to the result. Swedenborg has long since died and his rapturous visions perish with him. The transcendentalism of Kane fails to make a power in the earth—his philosophy is dull and cold. We prophecy no millenium. But the lifting of the veil of ignorance that o'erhangs forty thousand children of the "dark and bloody ground;" the destruction of error with its hydra head and forked tongue; the ushering in of the dominion of reason in stead of the dominion of force; the arguing by rules of logic, and figures of rhetoric and axioms of revelation in stead of steel and lead and gunpowder; these—these are the attainments to be contrived.

If England convinces her Abyssinian opponent by razing his stronghold, taking his life, and subjugating his provinces, it is an example not reconcilable with Christian civili-

zation, if nevertheless authorized by the code of international law. We discern a more royal road to human development. A road that leads through a perfected common and grade school system; through a higher academic course; and through a more complete and enlarged university curriculum to those broad and boundless fields where rule the solemnly impressive principles of duty, right, justice, truth—where love spreads its silken wings and charity covers a multitude of faults. Here is a mission opened and a destiny to fill. If Kentucky University, in the hands of Providence, is the great agent to perfect that mission and measure herself equal to that destiny, reigning a queen of the intellectual Antilles, then, indeed, can we say that she has fought her fight, has run her race, has closed her triumphs, and is ready to be offered up.