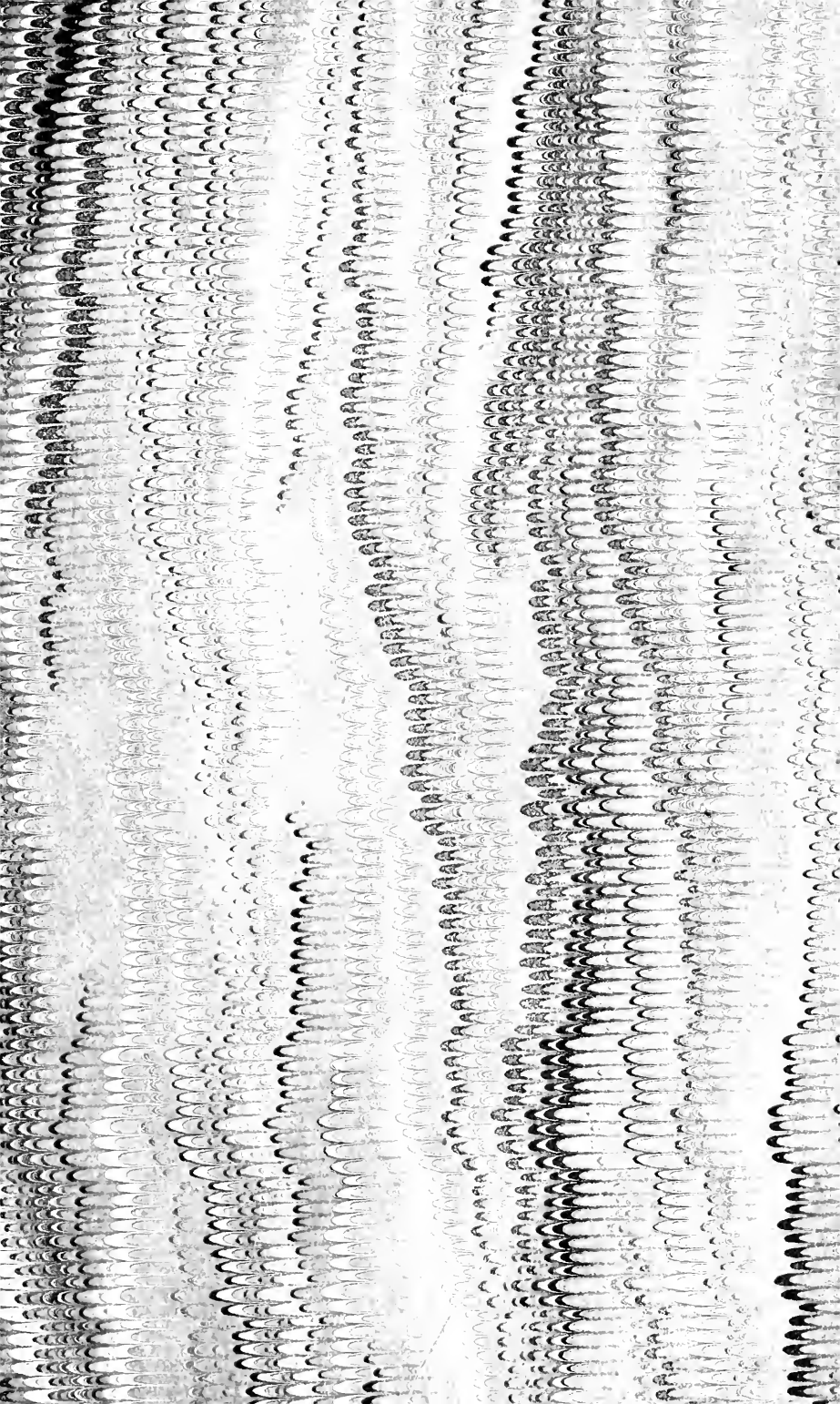


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ON THE
CHARACTER
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PUBLIC SERVICES
OF
DEWITT CLINTON.



A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES
OF
DEWITT CLINTON,

DELIVERED
BEFORE THE ASSOCIATION OF THE ALUMNI OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE,
AT THEIR ANNIVERSARY, 6th MAY, 1829;

BY
JAMES RENWICK, M. A.
Professor of Natural Experimental Philosophy and Chemistry.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE ASSOCIATION. *of Conv.*

NEW-YORK:
G. & C. & H. CARVILL.

1829.

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SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW-YORK, ss.

*****L. S.*******B**E IT REMEMBERED, That on the nineteenth day of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine, and in the fifty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America, G. & C. & H. Carvill, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:—

“A Discourse on the Character and Public Services of Dewitt Clinton, delivered before the Association of the Alumni of Columbia College at their Anniversary, 6th May, 1829; by James Renwick, M. A. Professor of Natural Experimental Philosophy and Chemistry, Published at the request of the Association.”

In conformity to the Act of Congress of the United States, entitled, “An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned.” And also to an Act, entitled, “An Act, supplementary to an Act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

FREDERICK J. BETTS,
Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

Ludwig & Tolefree, Printers.

DISCOURSE.

ANOTHER anniversary of our association has arrived. We are again assembled in these halls to renew the ties that bind us to our common Alma Mater, and those, not less dear that exist among us as alumni. The associations of our youth are here to be revived; and we here meet to hail as brothers, not only those who along with us pursued the paths of learning, or followed us in them, but those who held out the example our young exertions were once proud to emulate.

Here, at least, however varied may be our pursuits or opposite our callings—nay, although political opposition may divide, or rivalry separate us, we can unite in the feelings of a common interest, and congratulate each other on the return of the epoch of our union, and of the day whence our elder brethren date the commencement of their honourable and useful career. Permit me to join in these friendly salutations, in the greetings of those who

often far estranged by the business of life, are yet happy to re-awaken the tender recollections of juvenile intimacy. Brother alumni, allow me to express the satisfaction I feel at seeing so many of my former associates, so many of my younger friends, so many, may I say it, of my affectionate pupils here assembled ; while the venerable band of our elder brethren also appears to honour our celebration, undiminished in number since our last anniversary.

Such at least would have been my greeting, had this address been delivered a few hours sooner. But at this very moment, a train of mourners is conveying to the tomb of his ancestors, one of the few survivors of that venerable band,* the last of a name illustrious in the ancient annals of our province, but in whom the conscious dignity of high birth, was tempered and illustrated by polished manners, and the graces which a finished education can alone bestow.

Gratitude that we count numbers but little diminished, is a feeling too earnest to be controlled ; and, indeed, the pleasure we experience in saluting those whom we find present, is not more intense than the anxiety with which we inquire for the fate of those whom we miss in this assembly. Have any of our number suffered in health or happiness since our last meeting ? Has death called from the path of usefulness, the ripened growth of manly talent, or nipped the bud of youthful promise ? If so, then before

* Frederick Philipse, Esq. of Philipstown.

we enter into the festivities of the day, is our tribute of mournful recollection, or of affectionate admiration due.

Of all the objects which an association such as ours can propose, none is more useful, none can be more interesting, than thus annually to commemorate the worth of the departed. Subjects of general and public interest are not indeed unsuited to the purposes of our meeting ; our institution has produced those who have filled with honour to themselves, and advantage to the country, the most exalted stations of public life, or have risen to the height of reputation in those professions emphatically called the learned. Such men it is to be hoped will still continue to issue from these halls ; and when they shall be called upon to address you, the scope of the institution admits—nay, their associates will expect, that they shall treat of subjects with which the business of their life has rendered them familiar. Instruction and eloquence have thus flowed from the discourses of my predecessors in the honourable appointment of orator of your anniversary. But to lament the untimely fate of youthful talent ; to rescue from oblivion the deeds of modest and unobtrusive usefulness ; to celebrate the praises of public benefactors ; are topics which seem to be exactly suited to the day and its associations. It cannot in truth be a day of unalloyed pleasure. If it recall to our recollection the happy period when young, ardent, and impetuous, we entered the arena of the more than Olympian contest, where not only bodies but minds struggle for the honours and rewards, which

fortune often bestows with no impartial hand ; if it bring to mind the hopes, that thought no office too high, no wealth too enormous, no literary glories too lofty to be reached by our exertions. It also recalls the memory of the chilling of those youthful aspirations, the checking of those lofty hopes, and the gradual intrusion of the dark realities of life, into the picture coloured in rainbow tints by our youthful imaginations.

In a more especial manner does this celebration awaken the remembrance of those with whom we jointly received the instructions of the same teachers, but who have been snatched from the world before the expectations of their Alma Mater were realized ; or of those of more advanced standing, who, although full of honours and glory, have been called from the fields of their usefulness, too soon for their friends and their country.

If such thoughts are excited by the very nature of our meeting, let them not be repressed. The value of the living friend is enhanced by the memory of him that it is dead ; and we now hail with more of intense pleasure the few survivors of a numerous class, than we should some years since have greeted the whole. Here, as in all other cases, our sorrows tend to heighten our enjoyments ; and the temperate conviviality of our banquet will be the better relished, that we have paid our just tribute of respect to those whose places know them no longer.

Such are the views with which I acceded to the request of your committee, to deliver before you on this occasion a

discourse in honour of one of our departed associates ; departed indeed before our last meeting, but at too short an interval to admit of his worth being then commemorated. Many of you there are, more competent than I to this task ; more learned, more eloquent, more in the habit of addressing a public assemblage ; many more intimate with the illustrious deceased, the close associates of his private life, the followers of his political fortunes. But why such a one was not selected, it became not me to inquire ; and the very sense I entertained of my own unfitness enhanced the compliment paid me, and precluded my declining what I feel as an honour of the most gratifying description. To be asked to address you ere so many of my seniors have performed that task, to be the first to whom an opportunity has been offered of fulfilling this interesting but mournful duty of our association, and more than all, to have such a theme assigned me, are favours for which I am far more indebted to your kindness than to my own merit.

It has then become my melancholy privilege, to be the organ to express your regrets at the loss of the most distinguished of our members, who, if he had lived long enough for glory and an enduring reputation, died in the pride of his strength, and the acme of his mental vigour. If, indeed, it be not only a matter of duty, but of feeling, that we shall commemorate our departed associates, rarely will occasions present themselves where the tribute is so appropriate or so justly due. No alumnus of this institu-

tion has ever filled a greater space in the eye of the public than the late Dewitt Clinton ; none has contributed more to the honour of his country, none so much to the prosperity of his native state ; while we of the younger order of graduates, whose acquaintance with our alma mater, even by tradition, hardly extends beyond the time of her change of name, look up to him as the first matriculated student of Columbia College.

What however render our expressions of respect most appropriate, his public acts and national services, make the task an arduous one. Every quarter of the Union has teemed with eulogies of our departed associate ; and it is hopeless to attempt to elicit new views of his character, or invent new expressions to emblazon his exalted worth. Nor would a simple biographical sketch possess either novelty or interest, were I to have recourse to such a mode of occupying your attention. The task of writing a memoir of the life of Clinton, has already been performed by one, who, by long personal intimacy, by constant observation of his character, and by the most industrious research, has done all that talent, affection, and zeal could perform.* To this duty he was called by the united voice, of the literary and scientific institution of which Clinton was so long the illustrious head ; of the fathers of our city, over whose deliberations Clinton had long presided ; and of the citizens at large, who mourned the loss of the most conspicuous of their number.

* David Hosack, M. D. F. R. S. whose memoir is already before the public.

His family has conferred the appointment of Biographer of Clinton, upon one distinguished alike by station and by talent, with whose duties it would be improper in me to interfere, with whose talents and opportunities it would be presumption in me to compete.*

But although his literary and scientific fellows, his former civic compeers, and the public in general, have paid their tribute of remembrance through so appropriate a channel ; although the affection of his family has named a biographer to record those services which will form to his remotest descendant an escutcheon of honour ; the Alumni of Columbia College have a duty to perform in their collective capacity, and owe to their alma mater that they shall not refrain from bearing their part in the general mourning at his loss ; their testimony of regard for their illustrious brother ; their assent to the general acclaim which pronounces him first and worthiest of their members.

Like the beautiful and delicate insect, which for a single day in each year whitens our trees with its pinions, and at eve strews the ground with the snowy relics of its short-lived happiness, our association has but an ephemeral existence ; on but one day can it act or move, assume the livery of sorrow, or bear the badges of joy. This short and fleeting life it for the present year devotes to the remembrance of Clinton.

* The Hon John C. Spencer.

Universal custom might lead me first to speak of his descent and lineage. The industrious research of the author of the memoir to which I have already referred, traces these to an English gentleman who espoused the royal cause, in the time of the first Charles, and losing his property in the failure of the fortunes of that monarch, sought new fields of enterprize in Ireland. Other circumstances would lead us to infer, that a heraldic antiquary might deduce the line from those whom Englishmen consider as the founders of their nobility, the conquerors of Hastings. But our country admits no such titles to honour, rarely can the merit of the progenitor advance the interest even of a worthy descendant; never can it be permitted to palliate the failings, or cast a veil over the vices and degeneracy of the unworthy.

Yet so far as our country will admit of pride of birth, the family of Clinton was as illustrious as a republic can know. His father, and still more his uncle, had distinguished themselves in times of danger, difficulty, and dismay, as soldiers, patriots, and statesmen. In a country where every man must be the maker of his own character, and in most cases the architect of his own fortune, one's immediate progenitors are all that can influence his fate, or determine his usefulness. Thus far Clinton may have been considered fortunate, but far more so, in having been born soon enough to enjoy the advantage of the example of these two illustrious men, and in having witnessed their labours and exertions, while the success of the honourable cause they had espoused

was yet doubtful; while their united energies of mind and body were strained to the utmost, in order to obtain a happy issue to the enterprize in which they were engaged.

If then the birth and connexions of Clinton had any influence in determining his future usefulness, it was rather by shewing him illustrious examples of devotion to the cause of his country, and models of perseverance through good and evil report, than by facilitating his introduction into public life—Nay, had he entered it without the benefit of such experience, his early attainment of office and honours might have had the effect of blighting his talent, and obscuring his fame. So far then from attributing the high celebrity to which Clinton attained, to his early advantages, we may rather ascribe to his great strength of mind the merit of being able to withstand the dazzling effect of premature success; and in this very circumstance the candid inquirer will find a full apology for the errors to which he like all other mortals was sometimes exposed. Of his errors, however, it is not my business to speak, nor have they left any trace behind them, in the shape of permanent injury to his country. Whatever they were, they recoiled upon his own head, and an impartial posterity will not record them against him.

Clinton received his early education at a period extremely unfavourable. The long revolutionary contest had driven from their quiet occupations to take a share in active struggles, on one or the other side, nearly all who were eminent in the profession of instructors. Of the ancient academies of the state, but one was kept even upon a tolerable footing, and even this felt for a moment the devastating effects of the struggle. In this, although crippled of its means, was Clinton compelled to seek the foundation of his future usefulness. His literary productions may, notwithstanding, be quoted as splendid instances of the power, that genius and industry can exert in forming the taste and improving the style ; yet, it must be admitted that the critical eye will occasionally detect a want of those graces, that an early and accurate acquaintance with classic models can alone bestow.

If the subject of our eulogy, the near relative of the chief magistrate of our state, and the son of one of its most distinguished citizens, were thus condemned to suffer from the want of sufficient means of elementary education, what, may we stop to inquire, must have been the condition of the mass of the people ? How highly ought we to appreciate the advantages we now enjoy, in means of instruction diffused through every section of our state, and brought to the doors and within the means of the humblest of our citizens. To attain this happy state of things, Clinton lent his powerful aid ; and if not the first to propose the present system, his voice was not unimportant in obtaining the

munificent endowments our common schools now enjoy. It is, perhaps, to be lamented that the enlightened mind of Clinton should not have entered more fully into the detail of these establishments, for he would unquestionably have seen and obviated the odious distinction that now exists between those educated in them, and those taught in our higher seminaries, in consequence of the exclusion of the ancient languages from their course of instruction : a feature, which it would take but little argument to show to be pregnant with evil, and even subversive of the great ends to which they might be rendered applicable.

If, however, the boyhood of Clinton were doomed to be spent without a perfect enjoyment of all those aids and facilities which experience has shown to be so important in training the mind, brighter prospects dawned upon his youth. The halls, in which we are now assembled, had been closed to the student of literature and science during the whole period of the revolutionary war. In the place of the youthful aspirant for academic honours, the dormitories and lecture rooms had been filled in turn, with the wounds, the disease, and the misery of two contending armies. But no sooner was the struggle at an end, than the fathers of our freedom* turned their attention to the

* Among these it would be an act of injustice were I not to name particularly ; the late Hon. James Duane, then Mayor of the City of New-York, whose services in the re-establishment of the College were all-important.

restoration of the building to its original purposes, and strove to fill the vacant chairs with the ablest men within their reach. The subject of our eulogy, burning with honourable zeal, first presented himself to demand the privilege of matriculation, and thus stands at the head of the catalogue of the revived institution. To his successors he furnished a most honourable example of diligence, industry, and application. The influence of emulation, which is in many minds almost essential, as a stimulus to exertion, was indeed wanting, for the number of those who joined him in his collegiate career was too small to call it forth; yet this was not necessary to excite him. He in consequence left behind him a character for sedulous improvement of the opportunities within his reach, that has never been surpassed by any of his successors.

The very atmosphere of an ancient seminary of learning, brings to a well regulated mind a series of associations, that often conduce to eminence, even when the teachers themselves have degenerated from the former glories of the institution. But Clinton was fortunate in meeting with instructors qualified to appreciate and cultivate his talent, and to direct it to advantageous ends. The classical department was directed by the Rev. Dr. Cochran, a ripe and eminent scholar, who still fills the office of an instructor of youth in the honourable and elevated station of President of King's College, Nova Scotia. Of another of the teachers, it is in this building sufficient to mention the name, to convey to all a clear idea of the advantages that

must have been derived by his pupils from his instructions. This was the late Rt. Rev. Benjamin Moore, whose services to this institution every alumnus will at once appreciate; and who in a wider field of usefulness, diffused blessings upon all who came within the sphere of his active piety, and mild benevolence.* To these useful and learned instructors Clinton was fond, to the latest period of his valued life, of acknowledging his obligations. But I cannot help believing that his own future character, and that of his public services, were influenced in a greater degree by another professor. One, who for a quarter of a century filled with distinguished ability and usefulness, what his powerful exertions finally rendered the most important of the chairs. Many who hear me will at once recognize the useful and valuable instructor to whom I allude—the late Dr. John Kemp, to whom they, with myself and many others, are under the deepest obligations.

Under the tuition of Dr. Kemp, Clinton laid the foundation of that acquaintance with the true principles of internal improvement, and I may add, acquired the basis of those clear views of national policy, which he afterwards so fully developed, and applied with such advantage to his native state, and the Union at large. The capabilities of the interior of this state for the opening of internal navigable communications, early attracted the attention of this able instructor, and were annually illustrated by him in his

* See Note A.

courses of lectures. The author of the memoir of Clinton has cited a letter written by Dr. Kemp to his friend and instructor the celebrated Dr. Beattie, wherein these natural facilities were described. At that early period, and with anticipations of the rising prosperity of our country less sanguine than one of her own sons would naturally have felt, he probably did not proceed as far as a more developed state of our resources, and a more enlightened view of the progress of our state, enabled Clinton to do. But in the general features of his opinions, there was a strong resemblance, as many who now hear me cannot fail to remember, to those leading principles that were afterwards so ably argued by Clinton in a more public manner.

With these enlightened ideas both of the value of canals, and of the true means of providing for their construction, Dr. Kemp took a most lively interest in the measures adopted by the state for exploring the route of the western navigation; and in 1810, when the surveys were in progress, his anxiety led him to make a tour to the shores of Lake Erie,* the object of which was to ascertain, for his own satisfaction, whether a direct communication with that great inland sea, and the vast bodies of water connected with it were practicable or not; for he felt such intense interest in the subject that he was not content to wait, until the more slow progress of a regular survey, should make the feasibility of this all-important feature of

* See Note B.

the project known to the public. Of the practicability of this he was at once satisfied by the use of that tact which is the characteristic of those who are habituated to examine a country in reference to its physical geography.*

It is in truth the privilege of elevated science, to take in at a single glance, circumstances and results, that the ordinary observer only reaches through painful and laborious examination. He returned with a conviction that the scheme, such as his most sanguine hopes had depicted it, was practicable, and rejoiced in the prospects he believed to be opening to his adopted country. Hence he felt and expressed in the strongest terms his disappointment at the tenor of the report made by the commissioners to the legislature in 1811—a report which from the wildness and extravagance of the plan it proposed, he considered as likely to defeat the whole object, and fitted to postpone for years a scheme he knew to be practicable.

This report was drawn up by Gouverneur Morris,† who, by his age, his long public service, his talent, and his eloquence, exercised a sway among his colleagues that was most unfortunate in its effects, and for a time caused the utter abandonment of all hopes of uniting the lakes to the Hudson. In this report the language of fancy and imagination was substituted for the cool course of argument which can alone carry conviction to those who are qualified to judge of the merits of such an enterprise ; and it pointed

* See Note B.

† See Note C.

out principles and modes of execution so erroneous, that even the tyro in engineering could not fail to pronounce them impracticable.

I may be thought to have digressed beyond the scope of my present duty in dwelling upon the character and views of Dr. Kemp. But as I am satisfied that his instructions had a most powerful influence in determining the direction, in which the transcendent talent of Clinton became at length most useful to his country, I could not refrain from thus stating his merits. It is besides due to you as alumni, and to your Alma Mater, that these circumstances should be made known. In thus naming, and urging the merits of his teacher, I cannot depreciate the merits of Clinton. These stand upon their own ground, and are supported by the happy issue of his labours. In the present state of the world, when the principle of the division of labour is carried to such an extent, not only in the works of body, but in those of mind, the most laborious and successful teacher, can rarely be directly instrumental in the execution of any great work. It is enough both of glory and reward to him, that his pupils shall, in their future life, apply to valuable purposes the elementary principles with which he has imbued them. Although he may have struck the spark by which the future blaze has been enkindled, no part of its brightness can illumine his own humble and laborious path; but in the fame and honours of his pupils, he will feel himself rewarded in a manner even more grateful than he could have been, had

he himself achieved all which has been accomplished by their separate labours.*

When Clinton, in the year 1816, was called upon to draw the memorial of the citizens of New-York, and when he assumed the responsible and active direction of the new board of commissioners, which in compliance with the request of that memorial was appointed, the value of his correct and true view of the principles of internal communication, and his enlightened estimate of state policy became apparent. His course was no longer shackled by the preponderating influence of one to whose opinions, although far less worthy of respect than his own, he had with a characteristic modesty, I may almost say diffidence, deferred on the former occasion. Deviating now, alike from the bold and imaginative views of Morris, and the timid policy of the engineers, the first report of this new board, presented to the legislature a plan feasible and practicable in all its parts ; no prominent feature of which has it been found necessary to alter. In spite of the vague and crude notions that some entertained upon this subject, nay, even of the clear and enlightened views of others, and which are now brought forward in order to dim the lustre of Clinton's actions, as the sources of his information and the basis of his arguments, I cannot but see in that memorial, and in this report, the application of correct and true

* See Note D.

principles early implanted, in his rich and vigorous mind, where by careful cultivation, and great labour on his part, they finally produced ripe and glorious fruit.

Here let me again digress, to express the honest pride I feel as an alumnus of Columbia College, when I reflect that we can reckon among her sons those who have been the principal instruments in completing the two improvements that have done more for the prosperity of the United States, than all the other and innumerable mechanical inventions of which our country can boast. Need I say that I mean the canal policy of the State of New-York, and the application of steam to navigation. That the world will ascribe the chief honour of the first of these to Clinton, is a point I shall hereafter attempt to illustrate. The second might still have been wanting, had it not been for the liberal and enlightened views which directed the inquiries of our departed brother Robert L. Livingston, and which still animate our living associate John Stevens, of Hoboken. To the first, Fulton was indebted for an opportunity, and the means of bringing his genius into useful employment; to the second, in addition to the most liberal and spirited application of his private fortune to experiments on steam navigation, we owe the devotion of the rising talent of his son to the same great object; and the latter has carried the steam-boat to a state of perfection that Fulton, in his most sanguine moments, never anticipated, and which the latest European book on the subject has pronounced to be impossible. Between these two

great schemes, there is this important difference, that the one was an application of ancient and well established principles to new and valuable ends ; and hence the efforts of the mere engineer can hardly be considered as having had much influence upon the success of the project ; while in the other, new and untried, the genius of the engineer obscures the merit of those who had the intelligence to foresee his success, and stimulate him to the enterprize. Hence, in the former case, the name of Clinton will alone be quoted in after ages ; while in the other, that of Fulton may obscure the fame of Livingston, and that of the elder Stevens merge in the honours of his son.

Emerging from our College with its highest honours, and fraught with all the learning its then slender establishment could furnish, Clinton entered, after no long interval, into active life. His manhood was spent in public services of the most varied and important character. We see him by turns, the eloquent and enlightened legislator, the active and zealous municipal officer, the learned and impartial judge, the dignified and public-spirited chief magistrate. We find him at every step, the advocate and supporter of all schemes of charity and benevolence ; the promoter and leader in works of internal improvement ; and by a rare combination of pursuits, see him devoting his hours of leisure, and the intervals, when by political vicissitudes he was left out of the public service, to the cultivation of science. In this, the mere solace and amusement of those

hours not devoted to the direct service of his country, he made a progress that raises him far beyond the herd of amateur *savans*, and places him in the rank of the professional naturalist. His success in this branch of knowledge was such as to show, to what a high eminence he might have attained, had he devoted himself entirely to scientific investigations. But had he done so, his more important labours would have been lost to his country. Still he may be cited as an example of the value of a taste for science, which forms a sure and safe resource for the most active mind, in times of despondency, and the failure of long cherished hopes.

No politician in truth ever experienced more of fluctuating fortune in his career ; yet in the practice of a sound philosophy he bore his successes and reverses with the same equanimity : an equanimity the more remarkable when we consider the aspiring ambition with which he was actuated.

Ambition, even ill directed, has been well denominated the infirmity of noble minds. But when it seeks its gratification, by the promotion of measures, and plans, that diffuse wealth and happiness throughout a whole nation, it becomes a virtue of the highest description. Such was the ambition of Clinton, which although urged against him by his political opponents as almost a crime, has left indelible traces of its happy influence upon the fate and fortunes of a mighty nation.

Next to his philosophic equanimity, would I commemorate his disinterestedness. The era of Clinton's public services was one, wherever mere party questions were not concerned, as venal and corrupt as perhaps any age or country has ever witnessed. In the schemes that interested men so frequently brought before our legislature, the name and influence of Clinton might at all times, whether he actually swayed a vast majority, or were merely supported by a small band of devoted friends, have been of the utmost value ; yet, while hardly any other prominent party leader escaped the suspicion of acting from unworthy motives, while several were actually proved to have been participaters in gross and unprincipled corruption, no breath of reproach tarnished the reputation of Clinton. His enemies, and even the passive, but heated instruments of party violence, never ventured even to intimate that any act of Clinton had ever been influenced by mercenary motives.

So also, the position Clinton so long held as a Canal Commissioner, enabled him to have foreseen changes in the value of property, before others could have anticipated them, or to have been a hidden participater in lucrative contracts. Yet there is no case where it can even be suspected, that the idea of making an undue use of the advantages of his position ever entered into his mind.

To those who know the weakness of our nature, the readiness with which principle yields to temptation, and the facility that often exists for hiding such yielding from the world, no praise can be more exalted than that of a

strict adherence to integrity in such cases, particularly when the moral sense of the community appears, in some measure, blunted by general corruption, and the temptation held out by opportunities is enhanced by the pressure of pecuniary difficulties. To such difficulties, this very disinterestedness had, we lament to say, exposed Clinton. Although holding, at times, offices and perquisites, that in the hands of a covetous person might have been made sure sources of wealth, we find him, throughout his life despising those gains which required a sacrifice of his lofty principles, and devoting his whole energies of mind, in the midst of honourable poverty, to the service of his country.

But the most remarkable and prominent feature in the character of our late distinguished associate, and which in truth separates him from nearly the whole tribe of professional politicians, is this: in determining his plans and fixing his principles of action, he always looked to the great public ends of his measures; canvassed their merits upon a broad view of their relations to the general prosperity, and left out of sight their immediate bearing upon mere party questions. We hence find him pursuing in all cases a steady and unvarying course to his purpose; and while the waves of party ebbed or flowed, alternately bearing him forward with accelerated impulse, or retarding him with impetuous resistance, straining with equal energy to the accomplishment of his great and patriotic designs. A politician from his childhood, and engaged in some of the most

desperate struggles for power, that have ever been witnessed in our country, it would be arrogating to him a character more than human, to say, that he never was compelled to move with unworthy associates, never bore the badge of a mistaken policy, or that his ardent and ambitious temperament was never hurried into acts, that his own cooler judgment would have disapproved. But this much can be asserted without dispute, that whenever measures were coolly planned by himself, they looked to no ephemeral or party object, and were steadily pursued, to the loss frequently of his popularity for the moment, and the temporary destruction of his political influence. The same party which in 1812 rejected him from their ranks, joined, in 1816, in his almost unanimous election as governor; again abandoned and loaded him with contumely in 1818, and finally at the close of his life, clustered around him as their leader and most distinguished ornament.

In all these changes of popular feeling, there was no change in the policy or practice of Clinton; the fickle multitude, which, at one time lauded him as a god, and at another covered him with obloquy, had leaders who directed, and partizans who trimmed to the breeze of varying opinion; but Clinton had a soul too lofty, a spirit too independent to barter principle for popularity. Had he been inclined to suit his measures to the popular sentiment, to abandon his own schemes upon the first breath of discontent, he might have lived the idol of a party, spared himself many a shock from the estrangement of those he fancied friends, and

even bequeathed wealth to his family. But the more noble inheritance of character, of the reputation of the first citizen of the first state in the union, and made so principally by his own exertions, would have merged in the paltry title of a successful demagogue, who had attained his ends by pandering to the vitiated taste of the mob.

Brief as the time allowed me is, I cannot refrain from illustrating this point of his character. The first instance I shall choose is from the records of our own institution. Many honourable men, some of whom perhaps now hear me, were partakers in the generous but mistaken zeal, by which a fancied case of oppression was met by a forcible resistance to the authority of the college, and an interruption of its most solemn exercises. There was something in the time and circumstances that made this otherwise unjustifiable act, appear almost like a correct expression of indignant public feeling. The high, and no doubt honourable motives, that occasioned this disturbance have long since obliterated its memory as an offence; were it not so, I should not have ventured to mention it here, even to enhance the character of the subject of my discourse. It fell to the lot of Clinton to investigate this matter as judge, and to take cognizance of it in his official capacity. His sound reason stripped it of the character of manly resistance to oppression, and left it naked to view, a criminal and illegal attempt to interrupt a necessary although painful act of discipline; the tide of

public sentiment was turned, and our discipline restored to that standing in opinion which is its sole support.

I believe there is now no dissent to the views he took of the merits of this case, even those who bore a part in the act have made a manly acknowledgment of their error; yet during the heat of the moment, and at a time when a change in the government of the College had just occurred, which was felt as a wrong committed against those teachers whom he, in common with all other alumni, venerated and esteemed, it required, no small powers of discrimination to see it in its proper light, no small force of character to act in relation to it as duty and a just view of its merits dictated. These powers of discrimination, and this force of character enabled him to see and pursue the proper course, but it was at no small expense, causing the temporary rupture of ties both private and political, which however he did not hesitate to sacrifice to public duty.

Clinton had from his youth acted with a party, to which, in the course of the charges, which were made mutually by it and its opposing interest, the character of being more particularly opposed to the measures of Great Britain was ascribed. Nobody at the present day believes, but that the leaders of these great bodies were actuated in their foreign policy, merely by different estimates of the true interest of the country. But this ascription of character to the party in which Clinton was enrolled, drew to it vast accessions of strength, from those in whom the wounds of the revolutionary struggle remained unhealed. Of these all had

suffered in various ways in that embittered contest, and some bore upon their bodies the marks of the chains and shackles of floating prisons. The same course of events had thrown into the ranks of the opposite party, and even made personally obnoxious to Clinton, a few individuals who had borne office under the British government, during the long occupation of our city.

On the breaking out of the late war these persons were threatened in person and property, by those who desired to avenge upon them the injuries received from the royal arms. Threats and murmurs proclaimed the approaching crisis, and an hour's supineness in the civil authority would have seen the dwellings, and perhaps the persons of the obnoxious, a prey to popular fury. But the civil arm was then wielded by Clinton, who on this occasion, forgetting his early hostile impressions, the long continued struggle for power, and the feeling of almost personal wrong, saw in them only citizens of the same country, equally entitled with those of the purest political faith, to protection from all penalties the law did not award. Thus, and entirely through his energy and influence, the riots that disgraced some of our sister cities, had here no parallel, although here only were the still aching wounds of the revolution in actual contact with the instruments by which they were supposed to have been inflicted. Nor must it be forgotten that temporary political purposes might have been subserved by yielding to the popular clamour, and permitting the excitement to take its course.

Another instance I may cite from my own correspondence with the illustrious deceased. The revisers of our laws had reported an amended system of weights and measures. Any change in these, even for the better, would be sure to meet with opposition; and although in the system proposed by the revisers, no alteration had been made that was not imperatively called for, or could be avoided without important sacrifices, still the opposition that has since broken out, on the part of those who were gainers by the uncertainty in which the question was involved, was anticipated. To be prepared for meeting this, the powerful aid of Clinton was sought, and immediately granted, in a manner which showed how little he valued temporary popularity, where great public interests were at stake. Had he lived, we should probably now have seen our state holding out its standards, for the imitation of the others and of the Union in general, instead of being compelled to witness this system mangled, as it has just been, to make it suit the private ends of interested individuals. Yet the very proposal of this law had anticipated, and consequently frustrated, a favourite scheme of Clinton; and the revisers who had reported it were all enrolled in the ranks of his political opponents.

It is, however, in the case of the canal policy of our state, that this feature of Clinton's character exhibits itself in the boldest relief. From the time at which the question was first started, until these great public works were fully accomplished, he showed himself the steady friend of all

the measures necessary to carry them into effect, and his aid gradually became so important to the success of the scheme, and his clear and enlightened views came to exercise such a preponderating influence, not only upon the great general principles, but even upon the minute details, as to throw into the shade the most important services that any other individual, or even that all the friends of the canal system united, had rendered to the general cause. In these exertions he persevered steadily, neither abating his efforts when the credit of the canal system had sunk to the lowest ebb, nor relaxing them when its universal popularity seemed to remove the necessity of further watchfulness. Throughout the whole history of the canal system, he seems to have considered it in its great general bearings upon national prosperity; while some supported the project in consequence of its being likely to benefit certain districts, it was again opposed by others from local motives of a contrary character; while some rejected it as likely to clog the state with a debt, to meet which, its income would be far from sufficient, others urged its completion, as a probable source of vast revenue; or converted by the growing popularity of the measure, rushed, from the extreme of enmity, into that of injudicious and hasty friendship; Clinton looked upon it, independently of local circumstances, of questions of finance, or of party policy; as the surest bond of union between states, likely under other circumstances to become estranged from each other; and as the means of promoting the wealth, the industry, and

the general prosperity of the State of New-York. His views are so clearly set forth in one of his messages to the legislature, that I shall quote them instead of attempting any illustration of my own.

“ Considering the high reputation, and the great name, this state has derived from her internal improvements, it is equally astonishing and mortifying to observe elaborate and systematic attempts to depreciate their utility or arrest their progress. It is manifestly a superficial and uncandid view of the subject, to confine an estimate of its benefits to an excess of income over the interest of expenditure ; and yet this standard of appreciation has been adopted. Artificial navigation was established for public accommodation, for the conveyance of articles to and from markets, and revenue is a subordinate object. It was never intended as a primary object to fill the coffers of the state, but to augment the general opulence, to animate the springs of industry, and to bring to every man’s door an easy and economical means of access to the most advantageous places of sale and purchase. To narrow down this momentous and comprehensive subject, to a mere question of dollars and cents, is to lose sight of the great elements of individual opulence, of public wealth, and national prosperity. It excludes from consideration the hundred millions of dollars which have, in all probability, been added to the value of real estate, the immense appreciation of all the products of agriculture, which were formerly shut out in a great degree

from market, the solid and extensive establishment of inland trade ; the vast accessions to our marketable productions ; the unbounded augmentation of our marine navigation, and external commerce ; the facility, rapidity, and economy of communication ; the creation of a dense population, and the erection and increase of villages, towns, and cities ; and the most efficient encouragement of agriculture and the arts, by a cheap supply of materials for fabrics, and of markets for accommodation.”

Actuated and animated by such views, need we wonder that in distant parts of our country, and in foreign nations, no other name is known in connexion with the canals of the State of New-York, except that of Clinton ; and the verdict of these remote districts, is the type of what will be the sentence of posterity. Other men have no doubt been eminently and especially useful ; their respective acts have been ably set forth and impartially argued in the memoir to which I have more than once referred, and among them all no name appears more conspicuous than that of our venerable chairman.* It is fair and proper, nay, an act of duty that their several merits should be commemorated ; but although it may appear invidious—nay, even dangerous, to celebrate the acts of the illustrious dead, when there are many living who may claim a part of his honours, I must not fail in my duty, nor refrain from boldly expressing my

* See Note E.

conviction, that while the name of Clinton is united by bonds that no lapse of time can sever to the greatest public work of modern times, those of all his coadjutors, however meritorious, must gradually sink into oblivion.

Such is the course of things. In all great human works, the physical strength, or mental energy of any one individual is far from being competent to their successful accomplishment, or even to their advantageous commencement. There are innumerable instances, where, without the most minute and extensive division of labour, the work would be incapable of execution, yet in them all there is some definite and distinctive action of some one superior mind ; to this we on all occasions ascribe the credit, however laboriously or skilfully, the rest of the task may have been performed. Of this truth we find innumerable instances in every department to which human industry is directed. A few will suffice for our purpose.

A chronometer is the perfection of human mechanical skill. Not less than twelve different sets of artists are employed in the original manufacture of its parts, each being confined to one particular piece. More than thirty different persons are afterwards engaged in fitting together these isolated portions, taken promiscuously from as many heaps, and in polishing and finishing them. Yet to none of these is the epithet of maker applied, but to the directing mind of the whole, to a person who may, perhaps, never have taken a tool in his hand, or even touched any part of

the mechanism. Yet the characteristic mode of his working is so impressed upon the machine, that it is considered unsafe to send it for repair to the workshop of any other artist.

Those who have seen a splendid picture, which recently and perhaps still decorates the gallery of the Luxembourg, have, even if unskilled in the handling of great masters, been compelled spontaneously to acknowledge in it, a grace and ideal beauty, that of all the Flemish school Vandyck alone could bestow ; a decided character in the animals that are introduced in the composition, never attained except by Snyders, a finish and labour in the execution of many of the parts worthy of a Teniers. Yet to none of these hands can be ascribed the entire work, in which these varied excellencies appear as mere accessories to the perfection of art it exhibits. Still each of these artists, and others now nameless, have borne their share in the labour ; upon none of them however, nor upon all united, is the name of painter bestowed. This glorious epithet is the attribute of Rubens alone, whose directing mind united the various talents of his pupils, into one consistent and harmonious whole—the Triumph of the Christian Faith—but which may, even more justly, be entitled the triumph of the pictorial art.*

* See Note F.

In the hall of the Belvidere stands a statue, the admiration of the civilized world. Scores of labourers toiled to extract the mass from the quarry, numerous stone cutters united their exertions to dress it into a more shapely form, and artists of enviable skill and talent must have borne their share of labour, in fitting it for the last touches and finish of the master. Yet to the last alone do we ascribe the honour, and search with painful interest through the annals of the ancient world, for the name of that unrivalled sculptor who stamped the dignity of a deity upon the human form, in the semblance of the Pythian Apollo.

A fire destroyed the ancient Basilic of the Vatican. Successive popes and architects toiled among the ruins, each with a different object, and their works were without any general plan, heterogeneous, and unconnected. At length Michael Angelo, surveyed the incongruous mass, and warmed by the contemplation of the finest remains of Roman splendour, exclaimed "I will raise the Pantheon upon the temple of peace!" From that instant, the discordant parts combined in harmony, the varying and fluctuating designs of his predecessors were made to unite in advancing one common end; and the bad taste, the vanity and the presumption of succeeding architects, the caprice of an ever-varying elective, yet despotic government, have failed of depriving it of that grandeur of conception, which makes the Church of St. Peters the most sublime edifice ever erected by the hand of man.

Parallel illustrations might be multiplied without number; every branch of art or science would furnish them; in every case there is room for the preponderance of the mind of a single individual—the Sun of the system, around whom planets with satellites perform their regular course, and comets wheel their eccentric orbs; all conducing to advance the great and single purpose, but with brightness dimmed, or rendered invisible, by the presence of the central luminary.

Such, in the work which has illustrated the annals of our state, and obtained for it a proud pre-eminence in the confederation, was Clinton—the master-spirit who gave his impress to the design, conceived in part by others, improved and extended by men of the first ability and highest patriotism; but which in its finished aspect, its national character, and its paramount importance, will be known in after ages by the name of our lamented brother.

Did not even-handed justice insure this, the very acts of his enemies have fixed his fame in such intimate connexion with the Canal that no effort can now separate them. When Clinton was removed from the office of Canal Commissioner, and when his children were refused the compensation justly earned by the labour of their father, the jealousy that was evinced defeated its own object.

His envious countrymen subjected Aristides to the ostracism, because they were tired of hearing him called the just, and thus attached an epithet to his name that must

descend with it until man ceases to read, or to seek for knowledge; and when an envious legislature, tired of hearing Clinton's praises, as the great leader of the Canal policy of our state, deprived him of any share in the management, they affixed a seal to his merit that ages cannot efface.



NOTES.

A.

Benjamin Moore, D. D. Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New-York, an alumnus of our College, graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1768, and Master in 1771; held the office of President of the College *ad interim*, in 1775; was appointed on the revival of the institution, in 1784, Professor of Rhetoric and Logic, which appointment he held until 1787; and was chosen President in the year 1801, which office he laid down in 1811. Dewitt Clinton entered the Junior Class in 1784, and graduated Bachelor in 1786; Bishop Moore was therefore the only Professor in that department during the undergraduate course of the former.

B.

Before that part of our state which lies west of the Genessee river was explored, it might well have been doubted, whether lake Erie were accessible by an artificial navigation, except through the gorge worn by the Niagara river. The great mountain ridges of our country run in four continuous chains, nearly parallel to each other, through the States of North Carolina and Virginia. The easternmost of these, a primitive range, continues separate, and crosses the states of Pennsylvania and New-Jersey to New-York, where it is pierced at a great depth by the Hudson, forming what are called the Highlands of that river. The other three ridges become intermingled in the State of Pennsylvania, and assume the form rather of a vast table land with deep vallies, and a few isolated peaks, than of

distinct mountain chains. The Susquehannah alone pierces this elevated region, but is so much embarrassed by rocks and rapids as to be unfit for the purposes of navigation. This high table land terminates to the northeast in the Shawangunk and Kaatskill mountains. The first finishes what is called in Pennsylvania the Blue Ridge; the second turns suddenly to the westward, and is seen from the heights near Albany, extending in a succession of lofty peaks as far as the eye can reach. But one important spur is set off by them to the north, which is pierced by the Mohawk at the Little Falls of that river. Thus by the deep tide channel of the Hudson, a natural navigable passage is opened through the most formidable, if not the highest of our mountain ridges, while the only remaining barrier between the ocean and lake Ontario is pierced by the valley of the Mohawk, and thus gives room for an artificial navigation. But a person, who knows only the valley of the Hudson, and has seen the Kaatskill range turning suddenly westward, might, on inspecting the map, be led at first to infer that the Falls of Niagara were caused by the continuation of this line of mountains. But this is not the fact. The great Allegany range is not seen to the westward of lake Canandaigua, and lake Erie occupies a shallow basin in a great table land, through the edges of which its waters have worn their way; and thus the Niagara river offers the rare spectacle of a fall far from any mountain range. Other, but far smaller streams, fall from this table land in the same manner; and as a river which pursues, for a long time, a level nearly the same with several of them, turns towards the southwest, and runs into the Niagara above the falls, it was not difficult to infer that there was more than one practicable pass, wherein locks might be established, to permit a navigation to pass eastward without entering into lake Ontario, or being compelled to enter the chasm worn by the Niagara. Such an examination turned out to be the case; and two practicable routes were actually reported by the engineers, of which that by Lockport was preferred.

C.

Gouverneur Morris was also one of those alumni in whom Columbia College takes a just and honourable pride. The classmate of Benjamin Moore, John Stevens, Peter Van Shaick, and Gulian Verplanck, he was the cotemporary at College of Richard Harrison, John Jay, Egbert Benson, Robert L. Livingston, and Henry Rutgers, and even in such a constellation of useful talent and brilliant genius, shone with no common splendour. My remarks, it will therefore be at once seen, were made with no view of derogating from his great and acknowledged merit, as a scholar, an orator, a statesman, and diplomatist. He has in truth so much of honour, really and fairly merited, that his fame can afford to part with the claims that have been urged for him, in relation to the canal policy of our state, without losing any of its splendour. At the time of his education, Science had not yet taken its just and proper standing by the side of Literature in Columbia College; it cannot therefore derogate from his character, that he should have treated questions of internal improvement, in strains of classic and almost poetic eloquence, rather than in the cool method of philosophic discussion.

D.

As it appears that this part of my discourse was misunderstood by some of my auditors, some explanation may perhaps be necessary. It certainly was not intended by me to arrogate for Dr. Kemp honour other than that which any able teacher may claim in the subsequent honours of his pupils.

The policy of opening a direct navigable communication to lake Erie was spoken of by him as early as 1805, when I attended his lectures on Geography, and probably before that date. But this was accompanied by a strong expression of doubt whether the face of the country would admit of it. When he assured himself that his doubt was ill-founded, he communicated the fact, at the moment, to no other person but myself, who had the good fortune to be his travelling companion. It was no doubt communicated to his class in 1811, but before that

time the report of the commissioners was made public, and his conviction, however agreeable to himself, had no influence upon the subsequent operations. No communication ever took place on the subject with Dewitt Clinton; for it unfortunately happened that these two men, who mutually esteemed each other, had become estranged by the conflicts of party. For Dr. Kemp, although he had, from personal attachment to Gov. George Clinton, moved with the Republican party up to 1799, became, in consequence of early impressions in favour of the policy of maintaining a respectable military and naval force, and from other predilections, that might now perhaps be called aristocratic, a decided Federalist.

E.

Robert Troup, Esq. who at one period in the history of the canal policy of the state, was second in the character of his useful services to Clinton alone, having been the main instrument in awakening the minds of the people of the Western District of the state, to the importance of the work. For an account of his valuable labours see the Appendix to Hosack's Memoir.

F.

The fact that the *Atelier* of Rubens was a great workshop, in which pictures were fabricated under his direction, receiving frequently no more of their mechanical execution from his own hand, than the mere finish, is too well known to need illustration. The picture which is here referred to was painted for the Duke of Olivares, prime minister of Philip IV. of Spain, and was originally placed in the Church of a Carmelite Convent, built by him at Locches, near Madrid. During the occupation of Spain by the French it was removed to Paris, and placed beside the other pictures of Rubens, painted for Catharine of Medicis, in the Gallery of the Luxembourg. Its merit, however, far eclipses any of these, and of all pictures I have ever seen, it is calculated to give the highest opinion of the skill and science of the painter.

A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES
OF
DEWITT CLINTON,

DELIVERED
BEFORE THE ASSOCIATION OF THE ALUMNI OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE,
AT THEIR ANNIVERSARY, 6th MAY, 1829;

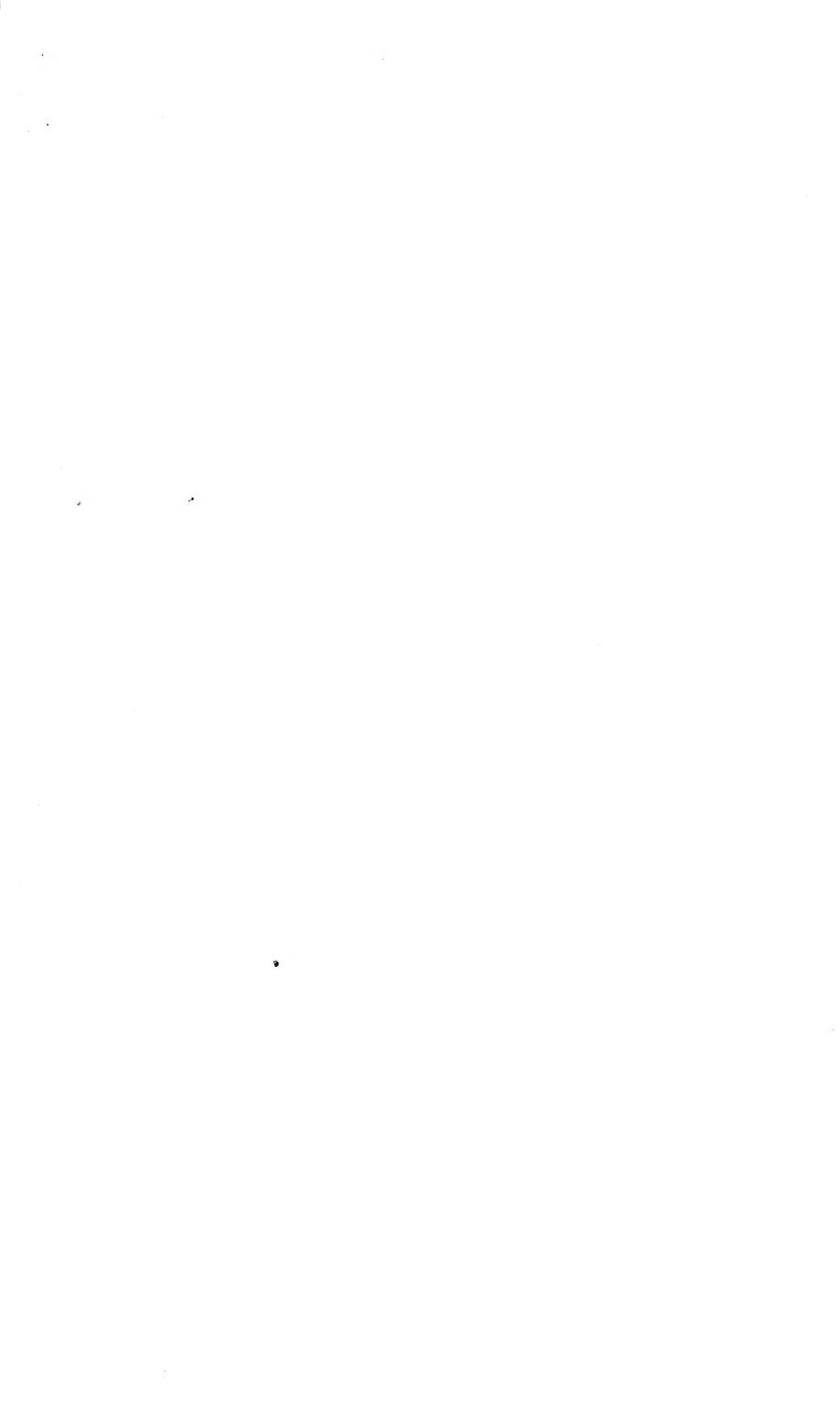
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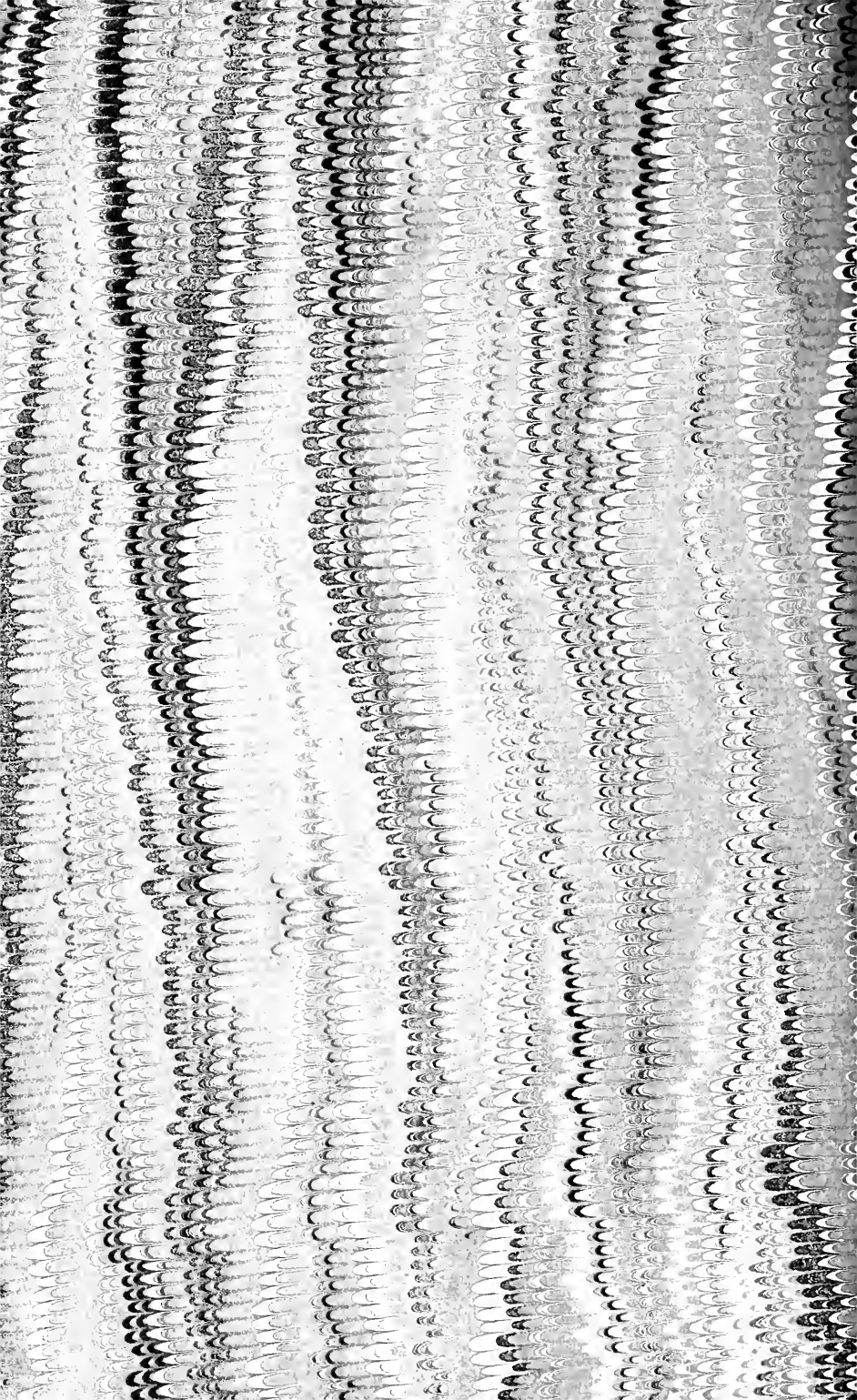
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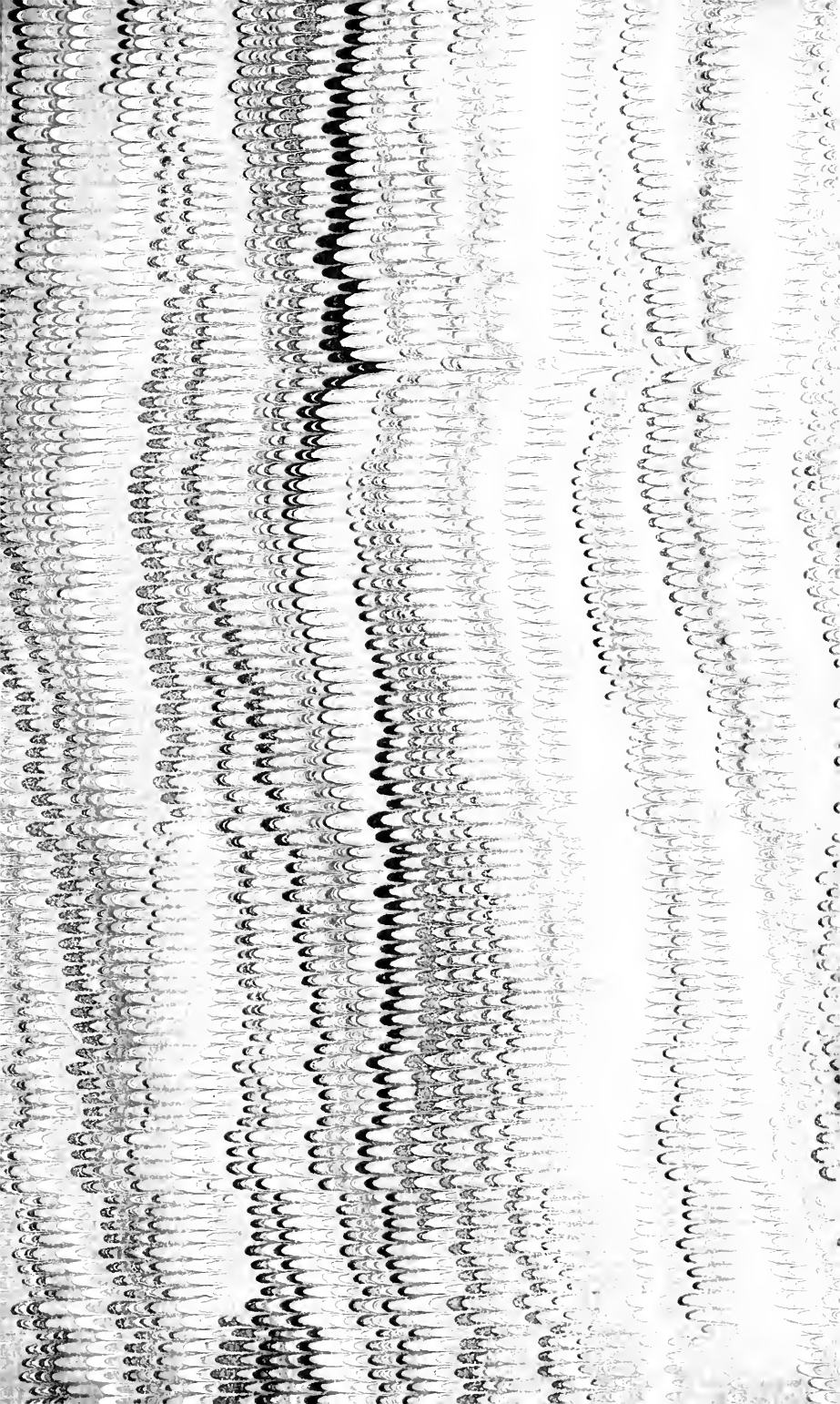
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