

Latin Speech at Westminster Election¹ (1726)

Charles Wesley first began attending Westminster School (i.e., Saint Peter's College of Westminster) in April 1716, at eight years of age, as an external student. He lived with his brother Samuel Wesley Jr., who was an usher at Westminster. In 1721 Charles took the exam and was admitted a King's Scholar at Westminster. Then, as he was completing his studies, in 1726 Charles competed for and was elected to one of three studentships reserved each year for graduates of Westminster at Christ Church, Oxford. The competition included a public forum in which students recited speeches or verse in Latin. The speech which Charles recited remains among his surviving papers, held now at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (WCB, D6/1/162). The label "Speech at Westm[inste]r Election" appears in Wesley's hand.

The transcription of the Latin original which follows was made by Dr. Owen Ewald, of Seattle Pacific University. Dr. Ewald also advised on the translation, but the final form below is by the present editor.

Latin Original

Si a laboribus interdum conquiescere abque aliquibus intentis animis relaxationem dare viris semper sapientissimis usitatum fuerit, occupatissimis concessum; si nemo videatur liber vivere nisi qui aliquando nihil egerit; ne nobis sit pudori. Maecenatis amplissimi studiis severioribus paulisper intermissis rebus ludioribus inissere atque in hāc arenā certaminum puerilium spectatores arbitrosque considerare. Vacant hodie animi Vestri, publicis negotiis iam diu exercitati: abjicite timores si quos vobis incusserit armorum sonitus a longinquo auditus, et apparatus belli, Vobis, usque quibus vos praestis. Dictatis et Lollerarum studiis alienissimis, volat ultra metu ore Rex serenissimus, qui omnem quacunq̄ impendet. Dimicationem sibi subeandam procellarum molas, siqui ingresserint curandos sibi et componendos deposcit. Ille ad reipublicae commodum toto pectore incumbens omnem Europam sollicitā mente pervagatus. Penitus explorat quid possit magnaequae gens, quid agat, quid paret, quid meditetur. Diligentissime perpendit qui populo suo hinc percipiendi sint fructus, qua inde pericula propulsanda. Paratus tranquillitatem faelicitatemque huius aequi aquis foederibus stabilire, sive opus est. contra foederum violatores, gloriam una cum salute, sumptis armis vindicare.

Sed tamen inter haec munera tanta iam negotiosa obeunda res domesticas ita administrat quasi eis solis vacaret, adeo suos amore et benevolentia universos complectitur, ut bona ad se derivata singuli experiantur. Nos etiam, Nos inquam peculiari illius gratiā abque indulgentiā usi hos hodie ludos instauramus. Ipse hunc diem, habitā ratione commodi nostri, manu regiā festum designavit, otio, laetitiae, iucunditati sacravit.

At quid nobis optatius potuit evenire? Quod omen fortunis periclitantibus exitum faeliciorem sponderet aut dubiis animis spem faceret uberiorem? Unde exitium potius duceret, nova rerum series iam nobis processura, quam ab hoc die auspiciatissimi quem faustum et

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faelicem esse voluit Princeps Vobis colendissimus Vestri amantissimus. Minime limen, dum est, ne diem tam faelici notā signatum ulla a Vobis orta maestitia contaminet, maxime sperandum ut qui per Vos hodie apud Regem gratiam inivimus, novo honore ab illo affecti, Vobisque etiam quodammodo commendati, parem apud Vos gratiam obliniamus. Si Rex potentissimus nos respectaverit, vos, Maecenates Optimi, non repudiabitis. Si ille variis operosisque negotiis foris implicatus domi impeditus, nobis tamen caram impenderet, Vos non indignos existimabitis, quibus otium Vestrum tribuatis. Studium quidem laboresque Vestros iure suo sibi assumunt iuvenes academici ad omnem virtutem Vestrā Disciplinā instructi, optimarumque artium et scientiarum gloriā florentissimi. De illis quoties cogitatis, eandem voluptatem percipitis, quam capit peritus aliquis architectusque dum Domum Augustam a se ipso designatam ac fabricatam contemplatus. Quo ille gaudio perfusus Columnas suspicit iusto ordine surgentes, et eximio artificio decorata ac perpolita laquearia. Requaeramus in his, quae summa sunt, ita totus occupatus, ut inferiora quibus haec nituntur, omnino praetermittat. Vos pariter, cum Vobismet gratulemini eorum recordatione qui operā Vestrā ad famam assumpserunt, demittite paulisper animos, atque Nos respicite, quasi iacta fundamenta novi cuiusdam aedificii, Vestris demum manibus extruendi. Nolite vero splendidum aliquid in nobis aut magnificum desiderare. Levia sunt studia, et nihil splendoris prae se ferentia, quibus nos insuevimus, ita tamen levia, ut ab his pendeant, his suffalciantur ea qua sunt gravissima. Haud itaque nullo consilio veteres quidam legislatores, liberos publicā curā atque impensā alendos educandosque decreverunt. Patres inter clarissima reipublica munera habuerunt puerorum institutionem. Recte enim intellexerunt nihil laude dignum viros assecuturos, cuius non aliquem saltem usum studiis puerilibus prolibassent.

Vos etiam Viri amplissimi veniam dabitis affirmanti ab his initiis deductam his radicibus niti dignitatem atque existimationem Vestram. Interque illud arduum pueris Vobis esse susceptum quod tantā cum gloriā Viri confecistis. Ab his fontibus profluxit Tua, Vir Doctissime, multiplex eruditio, atque immensa litterarum scientia, cuius fama a Cantabrigiā Tuā exorsa extremos usque orbis Litterati terminos peragravit. Tu Phaedro fictis jocanti fabulis puer arrisisti, Te puerum delectārunt argutae Davi Terentiani fallaciae. Tu Horatium delicias tuas in sinum olim recepisti, et a teneris unguiculis amplexus es. Clementia denique infinita Tuae doctrinae atque incredibilis illum linenorum amorem iis scriptoribus debuisti, qui Tibi invicem nitorem suum puritatem et se ipsos tandem ingenii Tui lumine conservatos ac institutos debent.

Si vero Theologiam Disciplinarum omnium perfectissimam atque utilissimam spectemus, ad hanc etiam aliquid momenti afferunt studia puerilia. Neque enim Tu Cathedram illam Tuam ita exornares, neque Viri admodum Venerandi quos in hoc Tribunali suspicimus munus Episcopale. cum tanto purae religionis emolamento tantā cum suā gloriā [non?] tractarent, nisi linguarum scientia teneris annis percepta sacros fontes recluderet et dua[s] finitissima[m] costam indagandae veritatis viam tenebris ostensam, vero impeditam aperiret.

Ab longe absit a nobis ea confidentia, ut quicquid Vos spurium consecuti estis. Id nos sperare audeamus. Vos qui Viris Litteratis tam longe antecessistis, aequalibus natu et pueri praestititis. In Vobis etiam tum aliquod enituit futurae dignitatis praesagium. At quamquam in his est in nobis quod animos nostros ad tantam spem erigat, non tamen ita abjecti sumus, ut nihil nos huius diei splendor, nihil promissa praemia nihil denique vestra maecenates ora vultusque commoveant. Nobis etiam aliquid tentandum est, nobis in praeclaro illo itinere aliquatenus procedendum. Vos modo ignotos calles ingredientium primos risus levate, dubiosque ac labantes gressus ductu vestro regite et praesidio firmate.

Translation

If he sometimes rests from his labors, it has always been the custom of the wisest men to give relaxation to certain intent minds, allowed to the most busy; if no one seems to live free except he who on occasion has done nothing, let us not be ashamed. Those most occupied with rather serious literary studies have entered into less serious things, as brief pauses, and have sat in this arena of youthful contests. Today your minds are at ease, after having been trained for a long time already by public duties. Cast away fears, if the sound of weapons and machinery of war, even heard from far off, should have assailed you, insofar as you surpass yourselves. To the most alien pursuits of dictation and Lollerani,² the most serene king [George I] flies beyond the fear of fear, which hangs over everyone in any way. He demands that the millstones of the storms be subjected to the battle, as if they had entered to be taken care of and composed. That man, leaning into the advantage of state with his whole heart, has wandered all Europe with a troubled mind.³ He explores deeply what a great people can be, what it does, what it prepares, what it plans. Most carefully he weighs what fruits are to be reaped from this for his people, and what dangers are to be warded off. He is ready to establish peace and happiness with treaties of these fair waters. If there is a need, he is ready to defend glory against transgressors of treaties, together with safety, once weapons have been taken up.

But still, in the midst of these duties, he manages his domestic affairs in such a way that he has time for them alone, to such an extent that he embraces all his people with love and benevolence, so that each one may experience the goods derived to himself. We also, I say, by the special grace and indulgence of that one, are renewing these games today. He himself, having regard to our convenience, designated this day as a festival with his royal hand, and consecrates it to leisure, joy, and pleasure.

But what could turn out more pleasing for us? What sign would produce a happier outcome if our fortunes were put to the test, or would make hope more abundant for those in doubt? Whence it would lead to destruction, a new series of events would now proceed to us, rather than this most auspicious day which the most worshipful and most loving prince himself willed to be happy and prosperous. At least while the interval lasts, so that a day marked with such a happy note should not be tainted by any sadness arising from you, it is most to be hoped that we who have entered into favor with the king today, having received a new honor from him, and being commended to you in a certain way, may express our gratitude to you. If the most powerful king has regarded us, you, the best patrons of literature,⁴ will not reject us. If he, engaged abroad in various laborious affairs, and hindered at home, should nevertheless spend dearly on us, you will not consider them unworthy to whom you bestow your leisure. Indeed, your studies and labors are taken up by the young students, since you were equipped for all the virtues of your discipline, and are most flourishing in the glory of the best arts and sciences. Every time you think about them, you perceive the same pleasure that a skilled architect takes

²Perhaps CW's Latinized form of the Middle-English word "loller"; for one who is idle.

³George I toured parts of Europe, including his home in Hanover in 1725.

⁴Orig., "best Maecenas". Gaius Cilnius Maecenas of Rome was an important patron for a new generation of Augustan poets.

when contemplating the royal house designed and built by himself. Whereupon he, overflowing with joy, beholds the columns rising in regular order, and the ceiling decorated and polished with outstanding craft. Let us focus on those things which are highest, so entirely occupied as to completely overlook the lower things on which these rest. You too, when we congratulate you on the memory of those who have gained fame through your work, lower your spirits for a while and look upon us, as if the foundations of a new building had been laid, to be built up by your own hands. But do not long for something magnificent in us nor grandiose. Our studies are trivial and bearing no splendor before them, to which we have become accustomed; yet so trivial that they depend on these, that those which are most important are propped up by these. Some of the old legislators, therefore, not without counsel, decreed that children must be brought up and trained at public concern and expense. Our ancestors considered a school for boys among our most famous republican institutions. For they rightly understood that men would achieve nothing worthy of praise, of which they had not at least made some use of childhood studies.

You also, very generous men, will give pardon to one [me] who asserts that your rank and respect was derived from these beginnings, rests on these roots. Moreover, that struggle, which you completed with such great glory as men, was taken up by you as boys. From these springs, most learned man, flowed forth your manifold learning and capacious knowledge of literature. Your reputation, having risen from Cambridge, has spread to the farthest boundaries of the learned world. As a boy you laughed at Phaedrus, making jokes with fictional stories; and the deceptive arguments of Davos, the character in Terence, delighted you. You once received the poet Horace, your favorite, into your bosom, and were embraced by his tender claws. Finally, by the infinite mercy of your teaching, and that incredible love of books you owe to those writers; who in turn owe their power and purity to you, and the fact that they themselves were at length preserved and taught by the light of your genius.

But if we should see theology as the most perfect and useful of all disciplines, youthful studies also bring something important to this discipline. For neither would you so adorn your [academic] chair, nor would the very venerable men whom we see in this tribunal hold the episcopal office. They would not behave with so great an advantage for pure religion, with such great glory for themselves, unless knowledge of languages, taken up in tender years, were to disclose the sacred springs and open both the most restricted coast and a path for searching for truth, shown in darkness, but formerly obstructed.

Let the thought that whatever you have obtained is spurious be far away from us. Let us dare to hope it. You, who so far outpaced lettered men, excelled your equals in birth even as boys. Even then there appeared in you some premonition of future dignity. But although it is in these things that we raise our spirits to such hope, we are yet not so dejected that the splendor of this day is nothing to us; no promised rewards, in short nothing [but?] your patronizing mouths and countenances move us. We must also make the attempt, to advance to some extent on that glorious journey. But raise your foremost laughs for those following unknown paths, and direct with your leadership and strengthen with your protection their doubtful and tottering steps.

Source: holograph; Methodist Archive and Research Centre, WCB, D6/1/162.