

THE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS.

THE PLACE OF THE SCHOLAR IN AMERICAN LIFE.

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There is an old British legend which tells of a Welsh harper who was summoned by a French king to appear at his court and exhibit his skill. Arriving at the monarch's court, the rude Briton was conducted through long lines of lackeys into the royal presence and bidden to wait his turn. Preceding him had come a group of French minstrels, and these, as he entered, were filling the air with the witchery of a music such as he had never heard before. For a few moments the old Briton listened, at once smitten, entranced and humbled, and then glancing about him at the kingly and unfamiliar splendors by which he was surrounded, and then down at the worn and shabby instrument which stood beside him and which through so many vicissitudes had been his cherished companion, he sadly drew his plaid over his battered and rudely strung lyre and turned to go away. "Come!" he said, as though his harp had been his living friend, laying his hand upon it, "this is no place for you and me. There are cottages where we may still be welcome, but what have such as we to offer to princes and palaces such as these!"

I confess, ladies and gentlemen, that a stranger who comes among you for the first time may well echo the old Welchman's words. This imposing assembly, these stately surroundings, this great and powerful University, with its throng of students, its halls and libraries, its learned and distinguished teachers of almost every science, in almost every tongue; all these confront a stranger in proportions which may well impress his imagination and chasten his local pride. In the beginning of our Christian era the wise men set out to go toward the West, and one may well believe, as he stands in this presence, that he has found in this newer West the home of their true descendents!

But though a stranger may not hope to bring to those who are already so richly endowed any worthy addition to their stores, he may yet venture, perhaps, during the few moments that belong to

this occasion to give expression to those current and common thoughts which are the property of all who think, and which may find in these surroundings their appropriate if inadequate expression.

This is the home of scholars and here there are wont to come those American young men and women who have come to believe that education is something more than the training of the hand and the eye, even as they have also come to believe that life is something more than the power to see a trail or wield a weapon. In other words, those who are here, in whatever relation of pupilage or discipleship, are here because they have come to believe that there are in them powers of intelligence and reason and imagination, which as they ally them, not to the brutes that perish, but to a realm which is higher and nobler than that in which the brute moves, so they demand a training and nurture which the brute can never receive and which the savage has never dreamed of.

Yes; but to what end? This University, these gifted professors and instructors and all the various apparatus of this complex academic life stand for that thing which we call scholarship, and to make of men and women scholars. But scholars with what aim and for what uses; or, to state the question somewhat more largely and generally (for it is my theme during the moments that remain to me), *What is the Place of the Scholar in our American Life?* I think you will agree with me that it is a question not alien to this hour or these surroundings.

I. For first of all we want to recognize that the conditions of our American life are in almost every respect unique and peculiar. We have indeed celebrated the hundredth anniversary of our national existence, but what, after all in the history of nations, is the brief space of a century. Still we are in the raw, crude, unformed, half-grown. And out of this fact there arises a certain necessity which creates in its turn a demand which is everywhere urgent and imperious. The first work of a new people in a new land is to possess the earth and subdue it. They are to create a commerce and the arts and manufactures where before none of these have existed. They are to subdue the wilderness and to plant the valleys and to people the hillsides. They are to tunnel the mountains for their hidden treasure, and to rear the forges and furnaces which shall convert those treasures into the marketable and serviceable instruments of agricultural and industrial life. And all the while that they are doing this, they are forced to recognize the superiority of the man not only of ideas

but of education over the man without education. Sneer as some people may, at the inferiority of the theorist to the man of practical experience, it does not take a great while to teach the least educated among us that he who knows, for instance, something more of metals than may be learned at the mouth of a blast-furnace or in the glare of a rolling mill, has a distinct advantage over him who does not. And so we have a very large class of people who, however little learned themselves, are frank to own that knowledge *is* power and that the learning of the schools has its rightful place in the activities of a manufacture and in the triumphs of an art.

But at this point we are met by a spirit which it is time I think that we recognized, as there is a need that it should be challenged.

We Americans are, of all peoples under the sun, supremely a practical people. No mechanism is invented, no book is written, no theory is propounded, but that straightway there is a voice denouncing: Well this is all very interesting, very novel, very eloquent, but what after all is the good of it? To what contrivance, to what enterprise, can you hitch this discovery, this vision of yours, and make it work? How will it push, pull, pump, lift, drive, bore, so that employed thus it may be a veritable producer? Yes, we want learning for our young men, our young women, but how can it be converted by the shortest road and in the most effectual way into a marketable product? "The man of the north," says DeTocqueville, writing of our North, "has not only experience but knowledge. He, however, does not care for science as a pleasure and only embraces it with avidity when it leads to useful applications." And the worst of such an indictment, ladies and gentleman, is the fact that it is true.

May I ask you to consider with me for a moment why it is to be deplored that such a statement should be true? Ours is an age of the rapid growth of wealth, and with it of luxury and the ever-greatening lust of wealth. To have money and to build with it a fine house, and to drive fine horses and buy fine pictures whether we know who painted them or what it is in them that makes them worth buying, this has become the chief ambition in our generation of a larger number of people than ever before. We look back with something of a fine condescension upon those nations and ages who in other lands spent their time in warfare or the chase, and whose history is little more than a record of territory won and lost and won again, the whole being besmeared with blood and dishonored, too often, by plunder and rapine. I deplore the bar-

barism of such ages and such enterprises as much as any man. But we may not forget that in these rude struggles great ideas of right trembled sometimes in the balance, and that men rode into battle, often, because there was a clansman's wrong to be avenged and a serf's injustice to be righted. In other words, there were great instincts of liberty, of righteousness, of loyalty to a cherished principle that struggled thus roughly for expression and thus taught the world that there were men who could prize a principle more than peace, and equity more than gain. "We have changed all that now-a-days," we say. Yes, we have; but whether we have altogether changed it for the better, or no, is a question about which, at any rate, there may well be two opinions. We are in the midst of the utilitarian dispensation, in which not only warfares of the older sort are voted unedifying and unprofitable, but in which also warfares of another and very different sort are not always looked at with less impatience and distaste. Here is a vast realm of ignorance to be conquered, by the assaults of the *truth* and the *right*. At every side these open doors of fresh enquiry leading into the regions of the unknown. But, "what can you make, by entering them?" This is the cry of the hour. These studies of yours in a dead language—these speculations in the domain of philosophic thought, these nightly star-gazings through the small end of a telescope, what is the good of them all? Tell us that astronomy has a distinct and helpful relation to navigation, and we can understand what makes it plain to some rich man that by building an observatory he will ultimately make it safer for a ship loaded with hogs or shovels to sail to Liverpool or Calcutta, and he will put his hands in his pocket; but "I am a practical man, and want a university which shall give the youths who come to it a practical education." This is the pompous and plethoric protest that we hear until one is almost ready to declare that of all detestable people a "practical" man is the most thoroughly and odiously detestable.

Forgive your speaker this heat, which indeed you can well afford to, for those who know him at home will tell you that, among his fellow-ecclesiastics, he is one who is most commonly described as "practical;" but, indeed, men and brethren, I am persuaded that a little reflection will convince you that for something of warmth "there is a cause." I am not here to preach nor to remind you of that spiritual side of a man's nature which, beside all other aspects of it, must needs be to some of us who are here, supreme; but I am here to remind you—the very conditions of this occasion demand it—that beside bodies to be clothed, and tastes

to be cultivated, and wealth to be accumulated, there is in each of us an intellect to be developed and truth to be discerned, which beside all other understandings to which the mind of man can bend itself, should forever be foremost and supreme. The gratification of our physical wants and next to these the gratification of our personal vanity or ambition may seem to many people, at once the chief end of existence and the secret of the truest happiness. But there have been men who have neither sought nor cared for these things, who have found in learning for its own sake at once their sweetest rewards and their highest dignity. Off our coast, as the traveller nears its chiefest sea-port, there is a magnificent light which flashes its clear radiance across the dark and stormy seas and lifts its tall form to be a beacon by day and by night. I can imagine a New York importer scanning its stately outlines with a snug satisfaction that in it he had one more guarantee that his cargoes of silks or teas would find their way safe to port. But I can imagine another voyager catching its welcome rays for the first time as he neared the longed-for shore, and seeing in it the harbinger of that home of love and peace wherein dwelt the treasures of his best affections. And I can imagine too that he who invented that light, when at last he saw the vision of his brain transmitted into that pillar of fire by night lifted his thought in a joy which was not born of the reflection that he was to receive a decoration from the French government or five hundred thousand dollars for his invention. For it is Fesnel himself, the inventor of that splendid light which gleams from the shores of Fire Island, who wrote: "For a long time that sensibility or that vanity which people call love of glory, has been much blunted in me. I labor less to catch the suffrages of the public than to obtain that inward approval which has always been the sweetest reward of my efforts. Without doubt, in moments of disgust and discouragement, I have often needed the spur of vanity to excite me to my researches. But all the compliments I have ever received from Arago, De la Place and Biot never gave me so much pleasure as the discovery of a theoretic truth or the confirmation of a calculation by experiment."

It is a dark day, ladies and gentlemen, for any people when they have not among them men who can say that. It is a dark day for any land when, no matter what the institutions that it rears and the libraries that it multiplies, it has not among its students of whatever department of learning men to whom the rewards of wealth and fame, and "practical results," as these words are ordi-

narily used, are not wholly secondary and indifferent considerations. Indeed it might readily be shown that those boasted practical results, of which we Americans make so much, would, any one of them, have been impossible, if, before the ingenious minds that have turned our knowledge of whatever kind into so many utilitarian channels, there had not gone those other and greater minds, to whom the utilitarian instinct has been wholly wanting, but who have been those original investigators who have discovered the hidden mines of truth and brought its precious ore to the surface. Turn where you will in literature, in art, in science, you will find those pioneers of inquiry, who have asked the primal questions, on the answer to which all that came after has turned. What Cuvier said of science is as true of criticism, of philosophy, of theology, of mathematics: "Those grand-practical innovations are the mere applications of truths of a higher order, not sought with a practical intent, but which were pursued for their own sake and solely through an ardor for knowledge. Those who applied them could not have discovered them; those who discovered them had no inclination to pursue them to a practical end. Engaged in the higher regions, whither their thoughts had carried them, they hardly perceived these practical issues, though born of their own deeds. These rising work-shops, these peopled colonies, those ships which furrow the seas, this abundance, this luxury, this tumult" (how the picture fits our American life, as though the great Frenchman had seen it from afar with the vision of an inspired seer). All this comes from discoveries in science and it all remains strange to them. At the point where science merges into practice they abandon it; it concerns them no more."

It is a question for us who are here to-day, whether in our American life we are to have any place for scholars who shall be the like of these. I know there are those who will tell you that we have neither place for them nor need for them. They will tell you that to us belongs a task at once vast, unique and imperative. As in the domain of law, we have not invented a system of our own, but contented ourselves chiefly with borrowing from our English ancestors as they in turn borrowed from that Roman jurisprudence which was ripe and whole before England as a nation had even begun to be, so in the domain of letters, of metaphysics of scientific investigation, we are bidden to be content to reap when others have sown, and to utilize those abundant resources which we have neither the leisure nor the learning to originate or discover, I protest against such a suggestion, not merely because it

to begin your work in life there must needs be many to whom the nature of that work, and in some sense the aims of it, are foreordained by the conditions under which they are compelled to do it. I do not forget, in other words, that with many of you the stern question of earning your bread is that which already challenges you, and which you can not hope to evade. But there is no one of you who may not wisely remember that in the domain of the intellect as in the domain of the spiritual and moral nature the life is more than meat and the body than raiment, and that the hope of our time or of any time is not in men who are concerned in what they can get but in what *they can see*. Frederick Maurice has well reminded us how inadequate is that phrase which describes the function of the scholar to be the *acquisition* of knowledge. Here is a man whose days and nights are spent in laborious plodding, and whose brain before he is done with life becomes a storehouse from which you can drain out a fact as you would take down a book from the shelves of a library. I would not speak of such a scholar disrespectfully, and in a generation which is impatient of plodding industry, and content as never before with smart and superficial learning, we may well honor those whose rare acquisitions are the fruit of untiring labor. But surely, his is a nobler understanding of his calling as a *scholar* who has come to see that in whatsoever department of enquiry, it is not so much a question of how much learning he is possessed, as rather how truly anything that he has learned, has possessed *him*. There are men whose acquirements in mere bulk and extent are, it may be neither large nor profound. But when they have taken their powers of enquiry and investigation and gone with them to the shut doors of the kingdom of knowledge, they have learned there in stillness and on their knees, waiting and watching for the light. And to these has come in all ages, that which is the best reward of the scholar, not a fact to be hung up on a peg and duly numbered and catalogued, but the vision of a truth to be the inspiration of all their lives. It is possible to sit down before the Madonna di San Sisto, and discourse glibly of the school of Perugino and Raphael, of the growth of mediæal art and its secret of mixing colors until your listener shall have been smitten dumb with a sense of his own ignorance and of your own phenomenal attainments.

And it is possible, too, to stand before that incomparable picture, a mere tyro in technical art, but with a soul so full of awe, and an eye so eager for a vision that the child of history shall seem to be alive again and the mother that bore Him the messenger to your soul of an imperishable truth! Believe me, my friends,

the parable is of infinite application and of enduring appropriateness. There must be some among us who are *watchers and seekers for a vision*. The page of history unrolls its chequered scroll not that we may arrange its dates and facts in parallel columns and be able glibly to answer when Nero reigned and when the princes in the tower were murdered, but rather that we may see in the crimes of kings and the schemes of unscrupulous ambitions what forces have made or marred the men and the races of the past. "I have no hope" wrote one of the most gifted minds of our century* "of acquiring even a small portion of the smallest history. But I feel that I want the light which history gives me,—that I cannot do without it. I find that I am connected in my own individual life with a past and a future as well as a present, I can not make either out without the other. I find that I am connected with a nation having a past as well as a present, and which must have a future. I am confident that our life is meant to be a whole; that its days, as the poet says, should be linked to each other in natural piety. They fall to pieces very easily; it is hard, often it seems impossible to recover the links between them. But there comes an illumination to us ever and anon over our past years and over the persons gone out of our sight who worked in them. * * *

Thus it is with the ages gone by. Every one of them is tottering upon us; every man who has thought and worked in them has contributed to the good or evil which is about us. The ages are not dead; they cannot be. If we listen, they will speak to us."

Yes; if we listen. And here is the calling of the scholar in our time. In an age which threatens to believe only in what it can touch and grasp, his vocation and privilege it is to trace the influence of those unseen forces which, whether in nature or in society, are the mightiest and the most enduring of all. But to do this, he must first recognize the greatness and the dignity of his calling, and then he must not shrink from its conditions. In an address before the University of St. Andrews, Mr. Froude declares: "If a son of mine told me that he wished to devote himself to intellectual pursuits, I would act as I should act if he wished to make an imprudent marriage. I would absolutely prohibit him for a time till the firmness of his purpose had been tried. * * * I would remind him that in all callings nothing great will be produced if the first object be what you can make by them. I would show him that while the present rule on which authors are paid is by the page and the sheet, it ought to be exactly the re-

*F. B. Maurice, *Acquisition and Illumination*, p. 358.

verse. I would remind him that great poetry, great philosophy, great scientific discovery, every intellectual production which has genius, work and permanence in it, is the fruit of long thought and patient and painful elaboration. I would impress upon him that work of this kind done hastily would be better not done at all. When completed, it will be small in bulk; it will address itself for a long time to the few and not to the many. The reward for it will not be measurable, and not obtainable in money, except after many generations, and when the brain out of which it was spun has long returned to its dust." Is there not profound wisdom in counsel such as this? Is it not a demonstrated and indisputable truth that "only by accident is a work of genius immediately popular in the sense of being widely bought. No collected edition of Shakespeare's plays was demanded in Shakespeare's life. Milton received five pounds for his "Paradise Lost." The distilled essence of the thought of Bishop Butler, the greatest prelate that England ever produced, fills a moderately-sized octavo volume. Spinoza's works including his surviving letters fill but three; and though they have revolutionized the philosophy of Europe have no attractions for the multitude.

Surely the significance of such facts as these is not hard to read. The scholarship that has moved the world has not been the scholarship that wrought for a guinea a page nor for a thousand pounds a volume. It has been the scholarship that has been content to be poor, and to be accounted obscure, that has not been in haste to speak, nor eager to rush into print, but which has revered supremely the truth, and has sought for it often with tears.

And such a place and rank, lofty, self-poised and serene, is that which should be occupied by the highest scholarship of our time. Of second-rate learning, as of handbooks and excerpts and laborious but mechanical compilations, we have enough and more than enough. To make a book that will sell—to ransack England and Germany and France, and with scissors and paste-pot and scrap-book to make a volume that will catch the popular eye and allure the vagrant dollars, with all these we are indeed sorely afflicted. And yet every now and then, there comes a voice from out some quiet retreat, (more than one such has been heard in these halls), which tells us of the scholar who has ascended to his true place and is filling it with equal dignity and power. No noisy plaudits may clamor at his heels. No swelling bank-account may witness to his wealth, but the gift of vision is his, and to such a soul the curtain is parted a little and the light streams full upon it!

I do not forget—already I have reminded both myself and you

of the fact that opportunities for these highest tasks of scholarship were, perhaps, never so rare as to-day. The world does not want—and is too ignorant to perceive that it needs—the services of men who can give to learning its highest place, and make the class-room and the study the fount from which shall spring the pure stream of original thought and profound speculation. “Away with these dreamers,” it cries, and give us a serviceable culture. And so we see every day of our lives the finest gifts harnessed to some sordid drudgery and plodding its mechanical mind because it can be made to pay. But I believe that a brighter day is coming—a day in which scholarship shall have its true position and be lifted to its rightful sovereignty. There lives the story of a slave in a French galley, who was one morning bending wearily over his oar, just as the day was breaking, and revealing, rising out of the gray waters, a line of cliff, the white houses of a town, and a church tower. The rower was a man unused to such service, worn with toil and watching, and likely it was thought to die. A companion touched him, pointed to the shore, and asked him if he knew it. “Yes,” he answered, “I know it well. I see the steeple of that place where God opened my mouth in public to his glory, and I know how weak soever I now appear, I shall not depart out of this life till my tongue glorify his name in that same place.” Ladies and gentlemen, that white cliff was the white cliff of Scotland, the speaker was John Knox, and we know that his prophecy was fulfilled!

And so I know—for I believe in the nobler aspirations and the loftier possibilities of this great land and race of ours, that the time will come when the American scholar will ascend to his true place, and when released from the toil of the galley-slave he shall be set free to glorify God and speak his illuminating truth, because first of all he has been set free from the sordid drudgery and the coarse materialism which makes such speech impossible!

But, meantime, it belongs to you and me to ask ourselves what we can do to hasten such a day and to give to our scholars and their work, their due and rightful place.

Two things we need to do, and they are neither of them beyond our research. And first of all, we can esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake. There is but one true aristocracy in all the world—and it is rather odd that the only place in which they recognize that fact is China—and that is the aristocracy of character enriched by learning. We want an aristocracy of America, and we shall have it whether we will or no. But if we would not have it one of hereditary descent nor of ecclesiastic or political

rank, let us see to it that, spurning these things, we do not descend to that lowest deep and make it merely one of money. And that we may not do this, let us own and honor our *αγιστοι*, and give them their true place. As between the clever retailer of other men's ideas, and the silent, undemonstrative origination of his own, let us make a sharp distinction. If we will not always be careful what we buy in the way of literature, let us take care what we seize and keep. There are voices, I verily believe, that wait to speak to us nobler truths than yet the age has learned, but if we would not miss them, we must make a space and silence in which they may be heard, and then we must listen reverently!

And this brings me to that other thing which we may do if the American scholar is to take his true place, and when I have named it I shall be done. If the scholar is to have his true place in our American life he must have his true home. It is too soon for us to expect that in a world so new as ours we can have those cloistered nooks which in older lands are at once the retreat of the student and his reward. But surely the time has come when we may ask ourselves whether enough has not been spent in planting institution of learning, and whether now something may not well be devoted to enriching them. I am no foe to small colleges, and it is easy to see that in a land like ours, colleges, both small and great, may each have their place. But already I venture to submit we have sufficiently multiplied the outlines of institutions of learning, and may well begin to think about filling them up. The want of our American people to-day in the direction of a higher education is not new institutions, nor more buildings, nor, as I believe, more free instruction. Of all these things experience, I venture to submit, is every day showing us there is enough and more than enough. But we want space and place for men, who whether as fellows or lecturers, should in connection with such a university as this, be free to pursue original investigation and to give themselves to perform study, untrammelled by the paltry cases, the irksome round, the small anxieties which are sooner or later the death of aspirations and fatal obstacle to inspiration. It is with processes of thought as it is with processes of nature. Crystalization demands, we are told, stillness, equanimity, repose. And so the great truths which are to be the seed of forces that should new-create our civilization must have have a chance first of all to reveal themselves. Some mount of vision there must be for the scholar, and we, who have the material treasures, out of which came those wonderful endowments and foundations which have

lent to England's universities some elements of their chiefest glory—we must see that they have this mount of vision!

And it is at this point, therefore, that we may well invite the co-operation of those more practical minds whose place and work I would by no means wish to disesteem. Said one of these in my hearing not long ago, "I want my son to be a classical scholar, not because I can read the classics or ever expect to, nor because I anticipate that he will devote his life to classical studies. But I am told by those whose means of knowing are better than mine that no drill or discipline of the mind can be so permanently helpful as the study of these so-called dead languages which furnish the sterner and therefore more wholesome discipline just because they are dead, and I want my son to have a mental training which shall most thoroughly discipline the mind, and so make him fit for the best and most difficult work." There was rare insight, I think, in such a remark as that, and it showed that a so-called "practical" man could recognize the relation of the best intellectual opportunities to the best intellectual work. Are there not among those to whom I speak to-day who will consent to see the necessity of giving to our American scholars, in another way, the best opportunities for doing the best work? To create an adequate foundation, and then to place upon it the best man that can be commanded in all the land, and then—for a time at any rate, to let him alone—not to burden him with conventional tasks, nor to exact from him so much a month or a year, but to leave him conscious that he has a noble opportunity and that the eyes of his brother scholars are upon him to see how he improves it; this I am rash enough to believe will open the door to imperishable work and to imperishable honor. There are men among us who have come to be like Fesnel. Not indifferent to the approval of their fellows, they are not living for it and still less are they living for any sordid reward. To them truth is a mistress so shy and coy and yet so irresistibly attractive that they would fain follow her at all hazards. But how can they hope to do so, so long as they are plagued with the anxieties of bread-winning or tied to the drudgeries of what men are wont to call profitable employment? And therefore I can imagine no higher privilege, no nobler opportunity, than comes to one who has it in his power to go to some such seeker after truth, to take him by the hand and say: "Come, my brother, with me! Here is leisure, here is retirement, here are books and implements; be at ease here in this scholar's home which I have created for you, and wait for the coming of the light. I do not bid you to hurry your task, or to

force your powers. Bide your time, and when at length you have a word to speak to your age, come forth, and, in the name of God, and of His truth, do not be afraid to speak it."

And thus we see, ladies and gentlemen, how, in their common aim and purpose the practical men and the theoretical men need not be so far apart, after all. In the history of this noble University may they draw closer and closer together as the days go by. May there never be wanting here true seekers for the light, and in this great commonwealth may there not be wanting, either, men who will consecrate their wealth to noble uses by making it the foster-mother of scholars and the reward of a genuine learning! It is Charles Mackay who has sung a strain which here we may surely echo:

Men of thought be up and strong,
 Night and day!
 Sow the seed, withdraw the curtain,
 Clear the way!
 Men of action, aid and cheer them
 As ye may!
 There's a fount about to stream,
 There's a light about to beam,
 There's a warmth about to glow,
 There's a flower about to blow,
 There's a midnight blackness
 Changing into gray;
 Men of thought and men of action,
 Clear the way!
 Once the welcome light has broken,
 Who shall say
 What the unimagined glories
 Of the day?
 What the evil that shall perish
 In its ray;
 Aid the dawning tongue and pen,
 Aid it, hopes of honest men;
 Aid it, paper; aid it, type;
 Aid it, for the hour is ripe,
 And our earnest must not slacken
 Into play:
 Men of thought and men of action,
 Clear the way!