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COMMENCEMENT ORATION

"The Education Which Our Country Needs." President Northrop of Minnesota.

More than sixty years ago Edward Everett in an address at Yale College described most felicitously the spirit and purposes of an occasion like this. He said:

"The great utility of occasions like this, and of the addresses they draw forth, is not to impart stores of information, laboriously collected; not to broach new systems, requiring carefully weighted arguments for their defence, or a multitude of well-arranged facts for their illustration. We meet at these literary festivals to promote kind feeling; to impart new strength to good purposes; to enkindle and animate the spirit of improvement in ourselves and others. We leave our closets, our offices, and our studies, to meet and salute each other in these pleasant paths; to prevent the diverging walks of life from wholly estranging those from each other who were kind friends at the outset; to pay our homage to the venerated fathers, who honor with their presence the return of these academic festivals and those of us who are no longer young, to make acquaintance with the ardent and ingenious who are following after us. The preparation for an occasion like this is in the heart, not in the head; it is in the attachments formed, and the feelings inspired, in the bright morning of life. Our preparation is in the classic atmosphere of the place, in the tranquillity of the academic grove, in the unoffending peace of the occasion, in the open countenance of long-parted associates, joyous at meeting, and in the kind and indulgent smile of the favoring throng, which bestows its animating attendance on our humble exercises."

Mr. Everett chose as his topic on the occasion referred to, "The Nature and Efficiency of Education, as the Great Human Instrument of Improving the Condition of Man." By education he meant the higher education then common in England—essentially the same everywhere and for all. It is a striking commentary on the changes which have come in the last half century that today while I admit all that Mr. Everett claimed for education in the olden time, I ask your attention to a subject which distinctly implies that education no longer is and no longer should be the same for all—even for all who are found in the same college.

I shall offer no apology for speaking to you upon a plain and practical subject—the Education which our Country needs. I emphasize in this subject the expression which our Country needs.

I believe that different peoples require different education—and that the same people may require different education at different stages of their development. There are peculiar conditions both of population and of development in this country, which justify departures in education from the lines of work which may be the most desirable in some other countries. I need mention only two or three.

First: Our population is not homogeneous. It is not changed merely from time to time by the death of the fathers and the succession of the children, but on the contrary it is constantly receiving accessions in large numbers from other countries and races, and other civilizations.

Second: Our people are all equal in political rights and political power. It is as necessary for the day laborer to know what is best for the country as it is for the man of any other position. In many countries political power is vested in a few, and only these few have anything to say as to national policy. Practically it makes no difference whatever to them whether the millions know anything about political science, history, sociology or not. They are simply to tread in the steps of their fathers, and the king and nobility take care of the state. But with us this is all changed. The power is with the people. Legislation is determined ultimately by the people. If the people are intelligent and wise, there will be consistency and continuity in legislation, but if the people are not intelligent and wise, they will go like an avalanche one year against a McKinley bill, and the next year grow frantic to reverse their former verdict and shout "Great is protection and McKinley is its prophet."

Third: Our country is not yet fully settled and our population is exceedingly movable. Not only is there a regular movement from the old states to the new ones, but there is an irregular movement of population in all directions—from the west back to the east, to the south, to the southwest, in any direction if there seems a chance of benefiting one's condition. The country has not yet been subdued.

Comparatively a small area of the country is inhabited by people among whom can be found three generations of the same blood in the same place. Recklessness and change are our present characteristics. What we shall do next is uncertain. When a family's destiny is practically settled at birth you can educate them for their work according to established rules of training. It is easy to do this in many thickly settled parts of Europe where generation after generation from father to son the occupations are the same. But when as in this country the children of a family are destined to be scattered, and each child may in the course of his life live in a dozen different grades of civilization, and quite probably pursue a dozen different employments, from school keeping in New England to running a cattle ranch in southern California—the conditions are seriously changed—and the problem how to harmonize this over-moving population with its constantly changing environments, and to assimilate it with the steady influx of a purely foreign element from every nation under heaven, becomes more difficult and more discouraging. It is at once seen that it is going to take time, to make this mixed mass, the splendid people that shall ultimately occupy this country and live restfully and peacefully with their kinsfolk and acquaintances in that part of the country in which they have been born, keeping up the interests and promoting the works in which their fathers before them have been actively engaged.

The situation, as may be seen, is not an ideal one. There is a tremendous waste of force in all directions; and not a little of the educational work done under these conditions is like the training of a sportsman, who, having fired at a calf, supposing it to be a deer, and having failed to hit it, explained his lack of skill by saying that he fired so as to hit it if it were a deer and miss it if it were a calf. Quite frequently it is a calf, and perhaps it is fortunate that we miss it as often as we do.

This very hasty sketch of the shifting elements of our country suggests the fact that the training of large numbers of our people must be and is exceedingly superficial. We are an ingenious people, an inventive people, a people with wonderful adaptability. But there are altogether too many jacks of all trades and good at none. Our mechanic arts, our agriculture, our business interests of every kind have suffered from being undertaken by men with no adequate training for their work. The thorough knowledge of his business possessed by the artisan of Germany, would put our American artisans to the blush, if they had not long ago got past blushing. The Germans are trained for years to do what men in this country will undertake to do after acting as a helper for a few weeks. This results from our freedom which lets men do whatever they think they can do whether they are qualified for it or not. As for spending years to learn a trade or business when one can get just as good wages if he has merely learned a smattering of the business, the American is not such a fool as to do that. In brief, our whole system of industry is wasteful. Work that should be done once for all, is done over a dozen times because never done as it ought to be, and as it would be if every man in every occupation were not so free, but were required to know thoroughly the trade or profession which he undertakes to follow.

I suppose there has been enough money wasted on trying to get milk from beef cattle and to make beef of milk cattle, to pay off our national debt—all from ignorance—an ignorance only equalled by that of the lady who kept poultry and wondered how it was that with ten hens she only got one egg a day. Nine of her hens were roosters, who cannot be relied on to lay with regularity.

There is today a demand for educated men in a multitude of occupations that formerly had no existence or were conducted by uneducated men. The whole world of labor is to be engaged in the application of scientific principles to mechanics or to agriculture, to transportation, to social life or municipal life.—The haphazard method of doing things by guess has got to stop—and the laws of nature are to be applied to nearly every thing that invites human labor—our education must fit men for all these varied occupations—for which in the olden time there was no call to fit any one. The situation of itself would require a revolution in the scope of our educational work. Our whole country would be indignant if any one should say that we had not made great progress in education in the last half century; that our colleges and universities were no better than those of fifty years ago; that our schools were not doing larger and better work than the schools of former times; and that our

system of education did not really educate; and I think that the indignation of the country at such a statement would be just.

Yet I do not by any means believe that we have reached an educational millennium. If any college officer or any teacher of a public school contemplates with perfect satisfaction the results of the training given to the average student, all I have to say is that he is easily satisfied.

For myself, I frankly admit that, while guiding an educational institution in the best way I can, so as to make it most serviceable to the state from which it draws its life, and so as to keep it at least, from being left high and dry on the shore, while the rest of the educational world sails proudly on, I am far from being certain that we are headed for the right port, that we are using the best forces in the best way, or that we are likely to be entirely satisfied with the results when our voyage is ended.

But while admitting that our education is not perfect, I am far from thinking that most of the evils in our country are to be charged to defects in our educational system. They are evils which would exist under our present conditions—no matter what might be our theory or plan of education—but they are also evils which I am sure our educational work, faithfully continued, will remove.

It has been customary to divide literature into two kinds—the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. I would divide education in the same way. Every one who knows anything about the matter, will admit that in respect to the amount of knowledge imparted, our institutions of learning are incomparably superior to those of former times. The sciences are practically the product of the present century, and the thorough and systematic teaching of the sciences has been possible but little more than a generation. History and literature were never taught as they are today until comparatively a few years ago. Other branches of learning might be named of which the same could be said. The student when he completes his college course now, knows a great deal more certainly than the graduate knew fifty years ago. But how is it in respect to power—in respect to real intellectual vigor and the ability to impress others with his ideas and to guide the thought of the age. James T. Field, the great publisher, the friend of authors and scholars and no mean author and scholar himself, said some years ago, that no man of very marked power had graduated from any colleges of the country since 1855. All the eminent American authors like Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell and Holmes, preceded this date of 1855. Yale college has the honor to have three of its graduates at the present time on the bench of the supreme court of the United States. They have all been appointed in recent years, and they were all worthy of appointment; but they were all in college before 1855, and the latest to graduate was in 1856.

The Venezuela commission appointed by President Cleveland, was composed of five distinguished citizens, three of whom are graduates of Yale college—Gillman, White and Brewer; all three were in college before 1855. Was Mr. Field's dictum correct, that the age of developed power in colleges ended, so far as appears, in 1855?

Even if the dictum were true, it need not fill us with alarm. What Mr. Field especially lamented, I suppose, was the disappearance of the creative power as represented in oratory, poetry, and prose literature. But men write and think as clearly now as they ever did. The country needs today a good many things more than it needs a great poet. I say it even at the risk of being called a Philistine. What this age needs is knowledge. What this age wants to use for its own advancement to the highest civilization is knowledge. What this age, therefore, is trying to get is knowledge—knowledge not for a favored class, but for the world—every important fact and principle discovered—to be used for the good of the race.

It is not, therefore, necessarily discouraging if we are compelled to admit that in our efforts to broaden the field of study and to satisfy the very general demand of the age for a more practical education, there seems to have been a certain loss of power to the individual student. It is more in the seeming than in reality; more in the method of its application than in the power itself, and it does not by any means follow that there is in the aggregate a loss to the community.

Modern scholarship, despite its tendency to specializing, is no longer a deep and narrow stream sweeping everything before it in its well-worn channel; it is rather a countless number of streams ever dividing into new and smaller ones, and ever seeking for themselves new channels, and these streams though they may show

little power, are nevertheless forever and unceasingly irrigating and fructifying broad territories that would otherwise be barren and unfruitful.

The irrigating ditches that can make a sage brush desert bear abundantly orange and lemon, prune and apricot, grape and olive, are not as suggestive of power as the noisy stream, whose falling waters turn the wheels of a great mill, but they are not less beneficent in their work, and their power, judged by results, is not less. That inexplicable power which lifts the sap from the roots and forces every branch and twig to bud and blossom until all nature is clothed in the garments of spring, is a silent force whose movements are unheard, but whose effect in transforming the world of nature, all the hurricanes in the universe cannot equal. Power and noise are not synonymous terms.

You remember that the seven liberal studies which the scholastics of the middle ages called the trivium and the quadrivium, were grammar, logic and rhetoric, the triple way to eloquence; and arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music, the quadrivium way to whatever else in culture was deemed desirable. We have not abandoned a single one of these studies, but we have added a great variety of other studies which the present age requires. Every student must choose as wisely as he can what will contribute most to his own success in life.

When an institution provides instruction in every department that can reasonably be desired, there is no antagonism created between the old education and the new. Both are provided, you take your choice, the refreshments are served on the European plan. If you want to attain to eloquence, the old path is open to you with the foot-marks of many generations still visible. On the other hand, in every well endowed university, the single subject of biology, animal and plant life, is so broadly and minutely studied, that it might easily occupy the undivided attention of the student for the whole four years of college life, and the student might graduate an accurate observer of nature, a master of the scientific method of investigation, but with no knowledge of the principles of eloquence, and no power in its practice. Here, doubtless, would be a loss, not indeed without great gain, but a loss if eloquence is to be regarded as the chief end of education. But the world for half a century has ceased to regard eloquence as the chief thing to be desired even in a statesman, and much less in a scholar. Chatham and Burke no longer thunder in the British parliament, but men in parliament today discuss the budget and home rule as practical questions very much as they would discuss the value of different breeds of cattle, or of rotation of crops. Facts have taken the place of tropes, and common sense fills up the void created by the departure of Greek and Latin quotations. The rhetorician is at a discount even in congress. The man who can tell all about the effect of taking the tariff off wool and putting a tariff on hides, of making lumber free and of putting a duty on coal, who can lay down any one principle of finance which will be accepted as true by both the gold and the silver men of the country, he is the man for the times, while the eloquent declaimer on the abstract rights and wrongs of capital and labor, is of little account. Legislation is no longer a matter of feeling and emotion. It is a practical matter coming home to men's business and bosoms, and to be decided largely by evidence gathered by the patient student of statistics in the field of political science.

Edward Everett spoke two hours at Gettysburg—a pellucid stream of classical eloquence—and not fifty men in the country today either know or care what he said. Abraham Lincoln followed Everett with a speech of three minutes, a plain statement of facts appealing to the highest patriotism, and today thousands of Americans, from the child in school to the old man in the chimney corner, can tell what he said. The world has ceased to care much for mere words, however choice and elegant.

Macaulay's catalogue of the achievements of modern learning is inspiring. It shows what man has done. But it does not touch the question as to what man is to be. Is he to be sweet or bitter in his temper? Is he to be refined or coarse, a gentleman or a boor, a Gladstone or a Gradgrind, in sympathy or out of sympathy with mankind, a glad listener to the voices of love, and beauty, and harmony, and art, and nature which is the art of God, or insensible to everything which his eye can not see nor his hand handle.

We must not neglect the culture which will determine which of these the student is to be, while we grow wild over studies which may determine what the student shall be able to do. There is still left in the world a divine sense of beauty and poetry as contributing to something in man to

which bread and butter do not contribute. We want to make human life comfortable. We want to save men, if possible, from hunger and cold and misery. But we do not want to reduce universal human existence to a dead level of mere comfortable animal life. As Lear well says: "Allow not nature more than nature needs; man's life is cheap as beast's."

There is something to man besides body. The mind, the soul, is itself to be cultivated. Taste is to be refined and gratified. Music, art, literature, none of these do for man what food does, but they create and direct far-

reaching longings, aspirations, aptitudes; they contribute to his growth and perfection and happiness, and they must never be excluded from our system of education as things not needed. Old Homer with his divine epic, and his words that echo the voices of nature in the most entrancing way, is as refining in his influence as ever; the Greek tragedies are as grand as ever. Virgil is as delightful, Shakespeare is as thousand-souled, all of these if permitted to do their legitimate work for the student, will do for him something that the mere education of knowledge cannot do.

The glory of our modern education is its adaptation to the wants at once of the race and of the individual. It provides for both the material and spiritual wants of the student. It does not reject poetry and literature because chemistry and physics are more important; nor does it reject science because literature gives a different kind of culture or a better culture. It furnishes whatever will help man to do the best work, and also whatever will help him to be the best man. And that is just what is needed. This provision for both culture and knowledge is today the most marked feature of university life in this country. Harvard has in some respects taken the lead; John Hopkins was the pioneer and the other universities willingly or unwillingly, have followed. Even venerable old Oxford, where tradition has so long been the law, has now, according to a recent writer, fallen into the hands of the moderns. As an unassuming writer says, substituted for the old idea of a liberal education, a multitude of narrow and technical schools, for cramming the memory and starving the intellect. The old education may have been defective, adds this writer, but at least it was an education and not an apprenticeship.

In all of our universities of today, a student if he wishes an education can still get it; or if he wishes what this writer calls an apprenticeship, he can get that. That is the best education which fits a man for his greatest usefulness. No man is likely to be very useful who does not observe accurately and reason correctly, however much he may know. The man who cannot draw just conclusions for his own guidance is not likely to be a safe guide for others in any field of complex human activity. Whatever discipline to the intellect can possibly be given should be given, whether the intellect is to be applied to creating, inventing, adapting, using matter; or inspiring, invigorating, or leading mind. In either case utility is the controlling consideration. Very few men can afford to use their brains merely as an object lesson of what discipline can accomplish, or as an article for the storage of antiquated facts. Most men must therefore get what they can use. No doubt a plumber who cannot read Latin and Greek will answer our purpose very well, if he will keep our water pipes from bursting, our gas pipes from leaking, our sewerage from setting back into our laundry tubs, and the family from dying in consequence of unsanitary conditions produced by himself. If we cannot have both culture and mechanical skill in our plumber, let us by all means have that which is essential to his doing well the one thing which he proposes to do. The same thought applies to the whole body of engineers, and students in technical schools. If they are to be masters of their technical work they must forego to some extent general culture, as the classical student for culture foregoes the world of practical science. The most important and fundamental rule of education is not to leave out, whether in foundation or in structure, the one thing necessary to fit us for what we propose to do. And the most important rule for educational institutions is the corollary of this. Make it possible for every student to get what is necessary for the best foundation at least in his future work. But the subject which the student in college needs especially to pursue is, not necessarily that which appears to be most closely related to his future work. I have no doubt that chemistry and botany and mechanics are much more important to a farmer than Latin and Greek.

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