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THE GOSPEL OF WORK

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THE GOSPEL OF WORK.

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Horace Greeley is said once to have made the remark :
“Of all horned cattle, the college graduate is the most to be feared.”

There still lingers in some quarters a decided prejudice against the college graduate. You who are going out from us to-day as graduates will no doubt be made to feel this. It rests with you, in part, to determine whether the next class that goes from the University shall find this prejudice greater or less than you will find it. It is not very difficult for us to see some of the reasons for this lack of confidence. In the first place, I do not believe that it is in most cases a prejudice against a higher education or against educated persons, except as it is owing to a confusion of terms. It is common to assume that the college graduate is necessarily an educated man or woman, but this is a fundamental error. It has thus far been found impossible, even in our best and most thorough colleges and universities, to devise any system of exercises, requirements, or examinations which will make it perfectly certain that the holders of their diplomas shall be educated men and women.

An education is, in one respect, like a contagious disease—not every one who is exposed to it takes it. The diploma which you receive to-day is merely a certificate that you have been exposed to an education ; whether you have taken it or not, your future life alone will determine. Undoubtedly a great part of the prejudice against the college graduate comes from direct contact with the uneducated college graduate, and in so far as this is the case, I believe

Horace Greeley was right,—such college graduates are, to say the least, to be viewed with suspicion.

The chances are that any young man who has spent four of the best years of his life in college and has neglected to make good use of his opportunities, will continue to follow the same course after he graduates; and such are not the kind of people for whom “the world stands aside to let pass.”

The most important principle for our guidance in life is a thorough realization of the law that nothing that is worth having is to be had without work. When this law has been completely accepted and becomes part of our moral fibre, other things will be added unto us:—we have started on the right road.

Ignorance of this law or the effort to evade it is the cause of much disappointment, misery, and crime. There are no short-cuts to knowledge, to power, or to happiness. “Eminence in any great undertaking implies intense devotion thereto, implies patient, laborious exertion, either in the doing or the preparation for it. “He who fancies greatness an accident, a lucky hit, a stroke of good fortune, does sadly degrade the achievement contemplated and undervalues the unerring wisdom and inflexible justice with which the universe is ruled.” Those who are continually seeking an unearned happiness are the people that the world can best spare.

An education which is itself acquired by hard work cannot be considered as a device for getting along in the world without work: it merely makes our work the more effective, it enables us to work at the long end of the lever,—but work we must. Genius is sometimes looked upon as a substitute for hard work, but this too is an error, as we shall quickly recognize when we read the biographies of a few men of acknowledged genius. In fact, most men of this class have exhibited an astonishing capacity for work. On the other hand, it is really surprising how closely the results of application and energy resemble the results of genius.

Any system of education which fails to develop in the individual a clear recognition of this great law of work must

remain unsatisfactory. The individual who fails to recognize this law or who does not act according to it cannot be considered as educated.

The old system of education, in which the time was spent in studying Latin, Greek, and mathematics, was an excellent system for those to whom it appealed, as is proved by the grand characters that have been developed by it. It was, however, a very wasteful system, as many of the young men who went to college did not become interested in this particular kind of work. Some of this latter class, however, were nevertheless educated by the contact with earnest and educated men and by the countless other educational forces continually at work outside of the classroom at every college.

But too large a number of men succumbed to the habit, formed by four years' practice, of doing lifeless things in a listless way.

An abundance of leisure is a trial to which few men are equal; it is a trial that should not needlessly be thrust upon young people before habits of work have been established.

As the weakness of the old system came to be recognized, new subjects were added to the college curriculum to make it more generally attractive, or, as some would say, to make it "broader." There were added a little modern language study, a little history, a little political economy, a little science, and so on, until the older college course was so diluted that it offered very little training in serious scholarship, and the results very well illustrated the old adage, "He who embraces too much, holds but little."

While the old difficulty was far from being overcome by these changes, a new difficulty, a lack of thoroughness, was introduced. "A broad education,"—what crimes have been committed in that name!

The demand still frequently voiced for a fixed course of study which shall best fit the "average man" for the life of to-day is wholly irrational. It is not worth while to exchange the tyranny of the old fixed course of study for the tyranny of a new fixed course of study.

Owing to the endless variety of human characters and human tastes, and owing to the present extent of human knowledge and human activities, such a course of study is an absolute impossibility. Such a process for producing machine-made men would be prodigally extravagant of human material. In thus attempting to produce a uniform product, the very best part of the mental equipment of many men would be cut away or hindered in growth to make them fit into a system which at best is artificial. The best preparation for the life of to-day is to know well something worth knowing,—if possible, to know it better than any one else knows it. Such a knowledge is attained only when the work necessary to it strikes a responsive chord in the individual mind.

Our American universities are tending in the right direction, it seems to me, in offering the student a wide range of studies and then allowing him to select for himself those to which he will devote his attention. A university with unlimited means should extend knowledge and offer instruction in every worthy subject. A subject to be worthy must be, first, such that its serious study offers good mental training, and second, such that a knowledge of it tends toward human advancement. But the university with unlimited means is an ideal which has no realization.

It is the first duty of a university to do *well* that which it undertakes. There is no doubt but that much of the criticism which has been called forth by this introduction of "electives" into the university curriculum is more than justified by the consequent crippling, owing to inadequate means, of work previously undertaken, and to an equipment wholly inadequate to do justice to the new work. The expansion of the curriculum under such conditions is thoroughly dishonest, and the results are most deplorable. It is a vulgar form of self-advertisement to which no university should stoop. Desirable as it is to have a wide range of studies from which the student may select, expansion of the curriculum in any given institution is justifiable

only when the work already undertaken is adequately done.

Since all universities are hampered from a lack of funds, it is eminently desirable that all universities should cooperate in this expansion of their curricula, and instead of following the old and narrow policy, dictated by petty jealousies, of establishing new departments because they have been established elsewhere, let each university look to develop where other universities have not developed, so that somewhere, here or there, the student will be able to find the thing he needs for his highest development.

With ample opportunities for studying worthy subjects the student should be able to find in the university that thing which will best enable him to find his sphere of greatest usefulness in the world, that thing which awakens his enthusiasm, — and it is not of great importance what the thing is; it is the *awakening* that is of supreme importance; *that* is the first great step towards a sound education.

One student will gain inspiration from the great epics of Homer, Dante, or Milton; another will be thrilled and incited to higher effort by reading the earth's history in the earth's crust; a third will have his soul stirred and be able to detect nature's immutable laws by the study of the venation in the wings of insects. Any work which is thus capable of inspiring men to new and nobler effort can ill be spared from our educational system.

James Russell Lowell is reported to have said that his admiration for Dante lured him into the little learning that he possessed; while the direction of Darwin's work was determined by his desire to know all about coral reefs. As often as not it is the teacher, and not the subject taught, that first arouses the interest of the student.

Thomas Jefferson said of one of his old teachers, that the presence of that man on the faculty of the College of William and Mary fixed the destinies of his life. The university that has a Mommsen, a Lowell, or an Agassiz in its faculty is in the possession of a power for good that is beyond estimation. How important it is that the student

should be able to arrange his work so as to come into intimate contact with such men!

The fear is often expressed that with such possibilities of choice the student may not choose wisely, — that he will overspecialize, that he will be too narrow in his selection; and, strangely enough, this fear is most frequently expressed by those who look back to the older classical system as probably, after all, the golden age of education, and who look upon the new changes as an unwise catering to a popular demand. Will there ever again be such magnificent specialization as when the student pursued the study of Latin for three years in the preparatory school, for four years in the college, and as much longer as his schooling extended?

Indeed, it was, in my opinion, just this specialization that enabled the older system to produce such excellent results. The thorough and extended study of a subject produces the best kind of training.

“The only true enthusiasm lies in specialization, and the effort to compass the whole realm of knowledge ends in bewilderment and failure.” The fear of narrowness that leads to a scattering, that kills enthusiasm and produces superficiality, is far more to be dreaded than narrowness.

It is serious study that broadens; not the study of any specific subject or of many subjects. Thorough knowledge of any kind begets respect for, and sympathy with, thorough knowledge of every kind. The mastery of one subject gives strength to master another.

So long as universities refuse to give place in their courses to the trivial, the superficial, and the sham, overspecialization is a danger that need have no terrors.

The student who enters the university and selects his studies with a view to their bearing upon his future calling is pursuing a thoroughly rational course. After spending four years in the serious study of things, even though they have a direct bearing upon his life-work, if the mind of the student is still narrow, then there is no implement in the

educational workshop with which it can be broadened. It is well for us to remember in this connection that there are minds which no system of education yet devised seems to broaden, minds which never gain the power to look upon any subject except from the bread-and-butter point of view.

In an address, delivered not long since, Professor Charles Eliot Norton deplored the tendency of our times as exhibited in the decay of principle in our public men, and as an antidote to this he recommended a more universal and a more thorough study of English literature. Even among those who believe the evils pictured to be true, many would be inclined to smile at the remedy suggested.

Yet the remedy is a good one. Its value lies not in any specific quality of English literature as distinguished from other branches of knowledge, but rather in the inspiration, the uplift, and the appreciation of truth that comes from earnest and thorough study of any worthy subject.

The advocates of the older system of education are now for the most part ready to admit that recent changes are perhaps justifiable upon purely utilitarian grounds. Indeed, when we look about and note the wonderful material advancement made possible by a more general and a more exact knowledge of natural laws, it would be captious to deny this. But many of them still believe that, when it comes to the development of real culture, the new education can only helplessly appeal to the old.

In consequence, we hear much about so-called "culture studies" as distinguished from others, which, by implication at least, stand on a distinctly lower plane. In this connection allow me to quote from a recent editorial in the *Nation* called forth by certain changes in the entrance requirements of Columbia University intended to permit the substitution of an increased amount of mathematics for some of the Latin previously required.

"President Low's recommendation," says the writer in the *Nation*, "will certainly be cited and appealed to as a

precedent by lesser colleges and universities; and in many a Western faculty Columbia and Cornell will be held up as bright examples of modern tendencies in the education in the East. . . . We have before us the problem of articulating the public school with the college. It is no easy task. Western universities (most of them are really colleges), growing up under local conditions and holding utilitarian or scientific ideals before them, have not been vexed by the problem, but our stronger Eastern universities and colleges have it still to work out.

“While these institutions have met the modern demand for scientific training, they have also sought to retain their ideals of culture, and most of them have succeeded in the effort. The modern public school, being nearer the popular heart, has sacrificed ideals of culture to those of science, so that, while the ordinary public schools can send up to the college or university students prepared to continue their education along scientific lines, most of them are unable to furnish the necessary propædeutic for culture. President Low’s idea of a solution is simply and frankly to follow Western experience; to unify the two along the line of physical science and utilitarian aims — a line of least resistance — and let the culture go. . . . Thus, when we are forced to the conclusion that our classical machinery of elementary culture is inadequate to modern intellectual life and to our modern educational conditions, we think we must abandon culture, at least elementary culture, altogether, and devote the earlier years of training to a preparation for the pursuit of science. Small wonder if those of us who cannot ignore the value of culture are thus compelled to oppose the development of science as the only means of retaining what culture there is in our educational system.”

According to this writer, it would appear that culture is something that cannot possibly be attained by the study of any science. Does culture, then, consist of a certain number of definite attainments, the possession of which means culture, and the lack of which excludes culture? Is it possible

that a certain prescribed course of study produces in all minds the uniform results which we call culture, while in all other things we observe the most striking differences in the ways in which different minds react toward one and the same discipline?

Is not culture rather a combination of character and attainments? A true basis for culture in the individual is a sincere love of truth, and a firm belief that all truth is safe.

Emerson says of the possessor of culture: "He must have a catholicity, a power to see with a free and disengaged look every object." Culture is found among men of the most widely different training, and it is also frequently lacking in men whose training has been all that thought could suggest.

May we not therefore justly conclude that there are many roads leading to culture, and that, owing to the great diversity of minds and characters among men, when we limit the number of these roads we simply diminish the number of persons who attain culture? The evidence seems clear that there are many who attain culture by a study of the ancient languages and literatures who never would attain it by a study of the physical sciences; likewise there are many who reach culture through a study of the physical sciences who never would reach it by a study of the classics.

Why not leave both avenues of approach unobstructed?

The folly of keeping a Pasteur at writing Latin verses is quite equalled by the folly of keeping a Tennyson at peering through a microscope.

The notion is prevalent that such freedom of choice, which renders possible the easy following of one's own inclination, cannot possibly furnish the same discipline as may be had by the student's being forced to pursue some line of work that may perhaps be more or less distasteful. It is doubtless true that human beings, like other things in nature, tend to follow the line of least resistance. Yet it is by overcoming resistance that we gain strength. There is here a real danger to the student which can be avoided

only by the constant vigilance of the university authorities.

Only worthy subjects adequately cared for should be found in the university curriculum.

As has been already stated, the most important thing to be acquired in a general education is the habit of work, and this is most easily and most surely acquired by doing work that is congenial. This habit once acquired, all work assumes a different aspect, and growth in all directions is henceforth possible. On the other hand, the attitude toward work and the habits acquired by enforced contact with uncongenial work are apt to dull enthusiasm, to stifle ambition, and future growth becomes much more problematical.

It is quite human for the man who has enjoyed the privileges of the older classical education and who has drawn therefrom inspiration, pleasure, and appreciation of the beautiful, to look upon the trend of modern education with misgivings and suspicion and to raise his voice in a cry of warning. It is perhaps equally human for the scientist who has likewise drawn from his work, and without the aid of the classical education, inspiration and pleasure and appreciation of the beautiful, to lose patience with the claims of superior excellence advanced for the classical training. Is it not time, however, for educators to borrow a page from one another's experience, and to recognize once for all that the desirable qualities that we class under the head of education and culture are not produced in different minds by identical processes? May we not welcome every new field of knowledge and recognize its power for training youth? May we not look upon it as some new tool in our workshop by means of which we may be able to reach some minds that it has been impossible to reach with the old implements?

This joining of hands upon the part of educators will require some exercise of culture, some "power to see with a free and disengaged look every object." We must make some effort in order to understand one another. We must remember that our estimate of the relative importance of

things is largely a result of our point of view, and that the same things appear quite differently from different points of view.

Human knowledge has now vastly outgrown the grasp of any single mind ; ignorant in some departments of knowledge the most scholarly and the most industrious must remain, and that without shame. Let no one deceive himself with a superficial omniscience. The next best thing to knowing a thing well is to know that we do not know it.

Why should educators waste time and energy in trying to compare the values of different forms of knowledge, when their lack of omniscience renders them incapable of forming just judgments? Our own specialty is obviously to each of us the most important form of knowledge ; let us show this faith that we have in our specialty not by criticising or ridiculing other forms of knowledge which we are incapable of understanding, not by hindering and checking the growth of other things, but rather by advancing that specialty to our utmost by honest work and earnest endeavor.

Many of the faults ascribed to over-education and its unfitting of people for their true spheres in life can be directly traced to the undue importance which has in the past been attributed to particular forms of knowledge and activity and to a consequent implied degradation inflicted upon equally meritorious forms of knowledge and activity. Aristotle's dictum that "all manual work is degrading," that "all paid employments are vulgar," has cost the world dear by the long maintaining of false ideals.

Slowly, however, more just views are prevailing, and already the men who do the world's work are meeting with the esteem due them from all right-minded persons.

The student who is graduated from a university where he has had large freedom of choice in the selection of his studies has less excuse for remaining uneducated than one who has been forced through a prescribed curriculum, much of which may have possessed no interest for him. Upon you, therefore

as graduates of Stanford, rests the increased responsibility of proving yourselves to be educated men and women. It may safely be assumed that a considerable majority of you have formed the habit of work, that you have accumulated a fund of useful information, and that in accumulating it you have learned how knowledge is obtained. You are then prepared to walk on your own feet and to think your own thoughts. But no one supposes that your education is ended. If that were the case this would have been called "Ending Day" instead of "Commencement Day."

In closing, I will, if I may, leave with you this short prescription for happiness: Choose your life-work with care, with deliberation, if need be; but when it is chosen, enter upon it with zeal. Let your attitude toward your work be such as was recently advised by President Hadley from this platform, "Not how much you can get out of it, but rather how much you can put into it." Be not over-particular about the importance of your first position — the important thing is not where you begin but where you end. At first the chief thing is to begin. Do not flatter yourself or discourage yourself by comparing your own progress with the progress of your neighbor or your friend, but rather live up to your own best all of the time, and that best will constantly grow better and your progress and ultimate success will take care of themselves. Fix your eyes upon the advantages that you have, rather than upon those that you have not.

Finally, "Look forward, not backward; look up, not down; and lend a hand."