

An Address

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BY THE REV. JAMES R. NARRAWAY.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—

Were I here to discharge a debt of gratitude to a fondly-loved Alma Mater—were I one of the privileged band whose members from time to time have issued forth from the portals of yon Academic Hall, mentally armed for the battle of life, I should esteem myself doubly qualified for the duty I am about to perform—animating memories of generous rivalries in the common pursuit of learning would awaken every energy, kindle the imagination, and fill the heart with feeling to vivify thought. No such memories are mine. Not the less, however, do I sympathize with the object that engages your attention—not the less do I prize the genial light of learning, in whatever degree it visits me, that brightens on my path. In addressing you on this interesting occasion, I feel myself possessed but of one qualification in any measurable degree—it is the love of knowledge which glows in my heart as fervently as the love of existence itself. With the views I entertain of true learning, and of effectively combined mental and moral training, I cannot deem the position of educated men other than one of lofty and precious privilege; for to have laid broad and deep the foundations of a liberal education, to have become conversant with those facts and principles which constitute real learning; and to be endowed with various mental powers thoroughly trained to classify and reason upon those facts, and justly to apply those principles to the various pursuits of human life, must be advantages of incalculable value. My address to you will be an attempted illustration of those truths by descending on the pleasure, the power and the possibilities available.

And this knowledge never be the great purpose of life. Truth, Justice and duty are alone worthy aims. Holiness not happiness fits man for his destiny in a brighter world; and holiness is the right exercise of all the powers of the soul under the guidance of righteous motives. Yet hath it pleased the Benevolent Creator to endow us with large capacity for enjoyment on earth, and to administer to its cravings by a profusion of objects productive of pleasurable emotion. Of these sources of earthly happiness there are none so pure and abiding as those of a richly-stored, highly-disciplined intellect. Wealth apart from its national and charitable appropriation is but a sordid possession, incapable of meeting the demands of the nobler faculties of man's more exalted nature; rarely identified with the objects which summon to action the capacities that connect intelligent beings with the infinite and eternal; and in as precarious in its tenure, as, when loved for its own sake, it is ignoble in its influence. Physical health and strength with their boisterous accompaniment of gushing animal spirits, may disport themselves with hilarious energy, and glory in exemption from pain and decrepitude; but the unheralded assaults of accident and the exactions of toil, the ravages of disease and the irresistible approaches of age bring down the stately form, cause the keepers of the house to tremble, and the strong men to bow themselves. The festive enjoyments of convivial life are always grovelling, unless redeemed by circumstances of an intellectual or benevolent nature not at all essential to the social gathering; and even then to be productive of pleasure must be sparingly distributed among the sober and earnest pursuits of mortal life. The sacred amenities of domestic bliss, with the whole train of endearing social friendships, blessed gladdeners of sorrow-worn hearts, may be weakened by protracted separations, marred by evil passions or rent to fragments by the unsparring hand of death. But the gratifications drawn from the inexhaustible sources of knowledge are of a higher character than these—they flow in upon the divinity that is within us from the infinities and eternities which encircle us in every direction; they float the souls of men far up above the level of the animal, the perishing and the base; they wake to ecstasy the wondering heart; they purify and expand the understanding; they fill the imagination with gorgeous imagery of grandeur, glory and magnificence; they people the memory with moving recollections of the prophetic past; and under the renewing power of that mighty Spirit who "creates anew in Christ Jesus," they bear onward to the throne of God, preparing the rapt learner for his transcendent inheritance of joy throughout the measureless cycles and successive dispensations of endless duration.

Young Ladies and Gentlemen,—In various degrees the sublime gratifications of Literature and Science are within your reach: yours is an enviable lot! Education is anointing the eyes of your mental vision, and uttering her imperative *Ephphatha* in the ears of your once slumbering faculties—new worlds are revealing themselves to you—thrilling symphonies and primeval harmonies, the swelling echoes of Creation's

matin song roll their cadences over your tremulous hearts. Language, the vocal symbol of thought, the wondrous medium through which man influences man—the interpreter of emotion, the instrument of the Creator, and the Poet, the Historian and the Philosopher—the great highway upon which the minds of far-distant centuries travel, and upon which those of widely separated climes do meet and interchange greetings—Language hath unfolded to you its laws, its mysteries and its triumphs.

Under the leading of Mental Science you are brought within the dread precincts of your own being; you pass the threshold and enter court of material organization and enter the Temple of God. There you behold the altar of feeling upon which blazes passion's unquenchable flame. There glow the golden lamps of intellect, throwing chequered light around the many-chambered galleries of the imagination. There, too, is the inner sanctuary of the conscience where ought to be enshrined the sacred Oracles, as well as the mementos of a spiritual exodus. Nor are ministrant spirits wanting—now of evil, now of good—now to purify, now to pollute.

Geography unrolls at your feet the splendid Panorama of all the kingdoms of the world and all the glory thereof—vast continents, vaster oceans, gleaming isles, glittering mountains, pass before your eyes—great lakes and mighty rivers diversify the scene. Orange groves, olive gardens and purple vineyards intermingle with verdant meadows and waving corn fields. Terrible deserts of burning sand contrast with awful deserts of eternal ice. The lion roareth for his prey. The deadly serpent glides through the rustling foliage of tropical forests. The wild gattelo bounds with flying feet over the far-stretching plain. The ponderous elephant shakes the earth beneath his tread. The cattle are upon a thousand hills or lie down in green pastures, or low beside the still waters. Life is everywhere in the waves of the air, in the waves of the sea, on every dust atom that rises on the wings of the wind. Ships are skimming the waters—like a thing of life, or plowing fiercely through the created billow, sped onward by the God-demon that possesses them.

Ones of marbled clay, or sun-burnt brick, of enduring marble pass in bewildering procession. Grecian porticos and pillars, Byzantine domes, Porcelain towers with myriad chimneys, and Gothic spires and arches alternate with mud hovels, snow cabins and bark tents. The clatter and whirl of the steam-mill blend with the noise of the ringing anvil, and busy dockyard. Men of all climes and colors come and go—clad in silks or in the finest fabrics of the loom—clad in the skins of wild beasts or unclad, roaming in unreclaimed ferocity through ancient forests. Languages which flow in upon the brain like the gliding of a gentle rivulet, without impediment, without a ripple—an unceasing current of soft vowels, and languages which sound like a rush of rocks—all consonants, commingle with those that are as flexible as the tendrils of a climbing plant, or as uncohesive as a rope of sand. All this picturesque vision of sights and sounds sweeps past you at the bidding of mental cultivation.

The reconcile secrets of which History is the custodian are given up to your inspection. In the spacious halls in which she treasures up the monuments of perished peoples, of fallen empires and of ancient arts, beneath the wand of mental cultivation, the fading memories of earlier races kindle into life. Phantoms of far-gone times, and far-distant places start into being as you gaze. Buried cities rear their prostrate walls, and exhume their sepulchred dead. Forgotten dynasties revive, and reconstruct their thrones, their palaces, their pyramids, their temples. Ancient Warriors lead forth countless armies to the shock of battles; and Marathon and Cannae, Pharsalia and Chalons redden again with human blood; while blazing cities, desolated countries, vanquished captives fainting beneath the yoke, and whitening bones cleaned by the vulture's beak disclose the horrors of former days. Ancient Sages look out upon Chaldean skies, vainly attempting to decipher the decrees of Fate written by the gorgeous constellations that stud those cloudless heavens, clad in priestly robes they paint their hidden lore in sacred symbols on the temples of Delos and Nineveh, or they walk the Academic groves amid the wonder and reverence of Athenian youth. Ancient Poets recite in burning verse the marvels of the heroic age. Ancient Orators wield at will the fierce democratic of Greece and Rome.

The scenes rapidly change; from the Nile to the Euphrates, from the Jordan to the Tiber, from the Rhine to the Danube, from the Rhone and the Seine to the Thames and the Boyne, the Ganges and the St. Lawrence.

The actors rapidly change—now it is the first human pair wending from Eden their solitary way—and now it is the Second great Father of mankind descending from the lofty peaks of Ararat—now it is Ninus building a city—now it is Alexander conquering a world.

The mighty empires that have in turn held lordship over the fairest portions of the earth, alternately excite your admiration, your sympathy and your hatred. You draw nearer to catch a glimpse of the hidden principles and influences which have successively changed the face of