

## Literature and Science.

EXTRACTS FROM THE SPEECH  
OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, DELIVERED  
NOVEMBER 8TH, 1886, ON THE 250TH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

It seems an odd anomaly that, while respect for age and deference to its opinions have diminished and are still sensibly diminishing among us, the relish of antiquity should be more pungent and the value set upon things merely because they are old should be greater in America than anywhere else. It is merely a sentimental relish, for ours is a new country in more senses than one, and, like children when they are fancying themselves this or that, we have to play very hard in order to believe that we are old. But we like the game none the worse, and multiply our anniversaries with honest zeal, as if we increased our centuries by the number of events we could congratulate on having happened a hundred years ago. There is something of instinct in this, and it is a wholesome instinct if it serve to quicken our consciousness of the forces that are gathered by duration and continuity, if it teach us that, ride fast and far as we may, we carry the Past on our crupper, as immovably seated there as the black Care of the Roman poet. The generations of men are braided inextricably together, and the very trick of our gait may be countless generations older than we.

I have sometimes wondered whether, as the faith of men in a future existence grew less confident, they might not be seeking some equivalent in the feeling of a retrospective duration, if not their own, at least that of their race. Yet even this continuance is trifling and ephemeral. If the tablets unearthed and deciphered by Geology have forced us to push back incalculably the birthday of man, they have in like proportion impoverished his recorded annals, making even the Platonic year but as a single grain of the sand in Time's hour-glass, and the inscriptions of Egypt and Assyria modern as yesterday's newspaper. Fancy flutters over these vague wastes like a butterfly blown out to sea, and finds no foothold. It is true that, if we may put as much faith in heredity as seems reasonable to many of us, we are all in some transcendental sense the coevals of primitive man, and Pythagoras may well have been present in Euphorbus at the siege of Troy. Had Shakespeare's thought taken this turn when he said to Time,

Thy pyramids built up with newer might  
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;  
They are but dressings of a former sight?

But this imputed and vicarious longevity, though it may be obscurely operative in our lives and fortunes, is no valid offset for the shortness of our days, nor widens by a hair's

breadth the horizon of our memories. Man and his monuments are of yesterday, and we, however we may play with our fancies, must content ourselves with being young. If youth be a defect, it is one that we outgrow only too soon.

Mr. Ruskin said the other day that he could not live in a country that had neither castles nor cathedrals, and doubtless men of imaginative temper find not only charm but inspiration in structures which Nature has adopted as her foster-children, and on which Time has laid his hand only in benediction. It is not their antiquity, but its association with man, that endows them with such sensitizing potency. Even the landscape sometimes bewitches us by this pathos of a human past, and the green pastures and golden slopes of England are sweeter both to the outward and to the inward eye that the hand of man has immemorably cared for and caressed them. The nightingale sings with more prevailing fashion in Greece that we first heard her from the thickets of a Euripidean chorus. For myself, I never felt the working of this spell so acutely as in those gray seclusions of the college quadrangles and cloisters at Oxford and Cambridge, conscious with venerable associations, and whose very stones seemed happier for being there. The chapel pavement still whispered with the blessed feet of that long procession of saints and sages and scholars and poets, who are all gone into a world of light, but whose memories seem to consecrate the soul from all ignobler companionship.

Are we to suppose that these memories were less dear and gracious to the Puritan scholars, at whose instigation this college was founded, than to that other Puritan who sang the dim religious light, the long-drawn aisles and tattered vaults, which these memories recalled? Doubtless all these things were present to their minds, but they were ready to forego them all for the sake of that truth whereof, as Milton says of himself, they were members incorporate. The pitiful contrast which they must have felt between the carven sanctuaries of learning they had left behind and the wattled fold they were rearing here on the edge of the wilderness is to me more than tenderly—it is almost sublimely—pathetic. When I think of their unpliant strength of purpose, their fidelity to their ideal, their faith in God and in themselves, I am inclined to say with Donne that

We are scarce our fathers' shadows cast at noon,

Our past is well-high desolate of æsthetic stimulus. We have none or next to none of these aids to the imagination, of these cogns of vantage for the tendrils of memory or affection. Not one of our older buildings is venerable, or will ever become so. Time refuses to console them. They all look as if they meant business, and nothing more.

And it is precisely because this College meant business, business of the gravest import, and did that business as thoroughly as it might with no means that were not nigardly except an abundant purpose to do its best—it is precisely for this that we have gathered here to-day. We come back hither from the experiences of a richer life, as the son who has prospered returns to the household of his youth, to find in its very homeliness a pulse, if not of deeper, certainly of fonder, emotion than any splendour could stir. "Dear old Mother," we say, "how charming you are in your plain cap and the drab silk that has been turned again since we saw you! You were constantly forced to remind us that you could not afford to give us this and that which some other boys had, but your discipline and diet were wholesome, and you sent us forth into the world with the sound constitutions and healthy appetites that are bred of simple fare."

It is good for us to commemorate this homespun past of ours; good, in these days of a reckless and swaggering prosperity, to remind ourselves how poor our fathers were, and that we celebrate them because for themselves and their children they chose wisdom and understanding and the things that are of God rather than any other riches. This is our Founder's Day, and we are come together to do honour to them all: first, to the Commonwealth which laid our cornerstone; next, to the gentle and godly youth from whom we took our name—himself scarce more than a name—and with them to the countless throng of benefactors, rich and poor, who have built us up to what we are. We cannot do it better than in the familiar words: "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through His great power from the beginning. Leaders of the people by their counsels, and, by their knowledge of learning, meet for the people; wise and eloquent in their instructions. There be of them that have left a name behind them that their praises might be reported. And some there be which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been. But these were merciful men whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance. Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes."

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The fame and usefulness of all institutions of learning depend on the greatness of those who teach in them.

Quis arte benigna,  
Et meliore luto finxit præcordia Titan,

and great teachers are almost rarer than great poets.

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But the chief service, as it was the chief office, of the college during all those years