

# THE 'VARSITY:

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## "CLOISTERED SCHOLARSHIP" AND POLITICS.

"The thought has been abroad in the world a great deal," said the United States President elect, in reply to an address of the students of Oberlin University, "that there is a divorce between scholarship and politics." While Mr. Garfield exonerated Oberlin from having taken part in the advocacy of that divorce, he deprecated the "sort of cloistered scholarship, in the United States, that ever stood aloof from active participation in public affairs;" and he declared with pride that he knew of "no place where scholarship has touched upon the nerve centre of public life so effectually as at Oberlin." The complaint has often been made that the best men keep aloof from politics, on account of the objectionable concomitants of public life, in a community Democratic in the nature of its origin, and especially the abuse to which public men are subjected. The tendency of yielding to this sensitiveness must be to throw the management of the affairs of the nation into the hands of the more unscrupulous and less competent; and if carried far it must be productive of serious public injury. A knowledge of politics, embracing the highest interests of the nation, is not intuitive. It must be acquired at some period of life; and if the acquisition is postponed till a late date, the student finds himself at a very great disadvantage. The most difficult period of the history of a nation to master is that of the last twenty-five years. It is for the most part unwritten, and all the subtler parts are apt to elude the grasp of the student who is willing to content himself with a rapid survey of the last quarter of a century. If a man allows himself to be absorbed in some calling, wholly unconnected with politics, till he is forty, or till he acquires a certain amount of wealth, and then takes the path of a public career, he finds himself at a great disadvantage compared with one who, from his youth, has carefully watched the political current. The apprenticeship of the statesman should commence early; when it is deferred to a late period in life he may constantly find himself put to the blush by men who are very much his inferiors in intellect and scholastic acquirements.

A knowledge of political economy is of first importance to the statesman; but if political economy be studied under the belief that it embraces the whole art of the statesman, the student will afterwards find that he has built on too narrow a foundation. Theoretically, the ball from a rifle describes a parabolic curve; but the theory is true only on the supposition that the ball passes through a vacuum and meets with no resistance from the atmosphere. The marksman who follows the theory strictly will miss his aim; he only who makes allowance for the resisting medium will hit the mark. A student should be taught early that social interests, national security, and considerations of humanity constantly modify the theories of political economy, correct in themselves, in action. This single illustration will serve to show the necessity of political science receiving its due share of attention at the hands of students from whose ranks our future statesmen will be largely selected. At the same time, it shows that the application of the principles of political economy cannot safely be made in a narrow and exclusive spirit.

The politics of any country can be studied only by keeping clearly in view its past history. The child is father to the man; the young colony to the fully developed nation. Colonial history, so far as it is a struggle to overcome physical obstacles, may be very dull; but the history of the development of the principles of government should surely interest the descendants of those who were engaged in the struggle that marked the course of pro-

gress, and who are themselves living under the established order of things. The student of that history, taking into view the principles by which other colonial governments belonging to the same empire were guided, will learn the mistakes that were made, at one period, in framing Downing Street mandates for Canada, and the consequences to which they led; mistakes for which there was no excuse, since history told in the plainest way how they could be avoided. There is in our political history, unimportant as it may seem to affected or supercilious indifference, something which it imports us all to know, and without a knowledge of which a liberal education must be sadly incomplete. When we look at the little encouragement given to the study of Canadian history, in University College, it is impossible not to feel that there is want to be supplied. There is also room for some better test of the knowledge of political economy which students acquire. The want of funds must doubtless excuse many defects; and when means are devised of supplementing the present income, may we hope for a chair of political science, or some course of lectures in which a knowledge of the principles of that science will be inculcated?

Between national politics and party politics there is a wide difference. The authorities of University College, fearing that evil might result from the students engaging in the latter, prohibited the discussion of Canadian politics in the Debating Society. But is it necessary that Canadian politics should be looked at through party spectacles? Anything that would tend to produce, in the students, independent habits of thought, on public questions, would be a great benefit. They would carry those habits of thought with them wherever they went from the University to act their several parts in real life. If those habits be not formed during their student life, they will often not be formed at all; for men to whom politics have been a prohibited luxury, and who have no self-formed habits of thought on this subject for a reliance, will be in some danger of falling, without a struggle or enquiry, under the domination of the whip of one political party or the other. To one or the other side most of them will go, in the long run; but it is better that the choice should be made on intelligent grounds than that they should drift helplessly to either shore.

The remark is often made of the United States, and sometimes of Canada, that the best men hold back from public life; shrinking from what is disagreeable in the battle, and fearing to encounter the calumny which is assumed to be the lot of every aspirant for public position. Whatever truth there may be in the observation, we think it passes for more than it is worth. Men who have spent their lives in making fortunes by devotion to commerce or law, may, in the decline of their days, well feel their incapacity for taking a prominent part in public affairs; and their own estimate of what they can do in a new sphere is probably truer than that with which a too confiding public is willing to credit them. Achieved success, in one line, is far from affording a guarantee of success in another and entirely different direction; and the successful man gives proof of wisdom when he shows that he possesses this knowledge. Real diffidence, which is not wholly mistaken, causes many to hold back from public life; and the diffident strangely get credit for being too good for an arena for which they feel they have no vocation. We must expect that in politics the trained politicians will succeed best; for why should the conditions of success in this field be different from what they are in any other? The training may be bad; the school in which it is obtained may be unequal to its mission, and politics may too frequently show a tendency to