

ments into a more concrete shape. Perhaps this cannot be better done than by reminding you of the life of a typical student, who "followed his star" with a faithful persistence that enabled him to enrich the world with the undying products of his genius. I purposely select a man of the first rank, because I desire to emphasize the truth, that even with the highest natural endowment a man can do little for his kind without much hard labor. I refer to the great poet who has expressed, in what Tieck calls "mystic, unfathomable song," the whole spirit of the middle ages. Why does Dante continue to exercise over the best minds so powerful a fascination? Is it not because, obsolete as are the forms into which his thought is thrown, his conception of life is so true in its essence that it affords the richest spiritual nourishment? We reject the imagery by which, in the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* the three ideas of retribution, repentance and blessedness are bodied forth; but after all reservations the truth remains untouched, that evil brings its own punishment, and can be expiated only by a repentance that leads to a new birth. Thus Dante built upon a foundation that stands firm for all time, high above the ebb and flow of our changing creeds; and his great poem rises before us as a stately world-wide edifice. He was no "idle singer of an empty day," no manufacturer of smooth and polished conceits, but a man of ideas, who "saw life steadily and saw it whole." He was a thinker of wide and varied experience, who took his work seriously, and was determined to see things as in reality they are. "This book of mine," he says, "which has made me lean for many years." Boccaccio tells us that, in his boyhood, Dante was a hard student, and had the most intimate acquaintance with all the famous poets. "Taken by the sweetness of knowing the truth of the things concealed in heaven, and finding no other pleasure dearer to him in life, he left all other worldly care, and gave himself to this alone." And Leonardo Bruni says, that "by study of philosophy, of theology, astronomy, arithmetic and geometry, by reading of history, by the turning over of many curious books, watching and sweating in his studies, he acquired the science which he was to adorn and explain in his verse." The result of this "watching and sweating in his studies" was that Dante made himself master of all the science of his age. He was not under the strange delusion that originality must rest upon ignorance. True originality, as he saw, presupposes the assimilation of the best thought of all time. He would have endorsed the wise words of Goethe: "If thou wouldst penetrate into the infinite, press on every side into the finite." It would be easy to multiply instances, but this one may suffice. The lesson for us which Dante's life suggests is obvious. Such are the men who make a people great and noble. We all desire to see our own people take their place worthily beside the older nations, and contribute something to the education of the world. But such a consummation, devoutly as we may wish for it, will not

come unless we take pains to make it come. A nation does not grow with the easy spontaneity of a plant; its development is its own act, and involves infinite labor and patience. Canada is giving manifest signs that the higher intellectual life is not indifferent to her. Perhaps she still exhibits something of the immaturity and over-confidence of youth, but she has also its hopefulness, its buoyancy, its enthusiasm. The universities will be false to their trust if they do not turn this abundant energy to fruitful issues. It is their function, not to produce men of genius—no university can do that—but to prepare the soil out of which genius may spring. Our universities ought to have a large share in the process of moulding the character of our people. Great scholars, thinkers and men of science do not arise by chance; they are the natural outgrowth of fit conditions. Now, it is vain for us to disguise from ourselves that our universities have not hitherto done for Canada what Oxford and Cambridge have done for England, Leipzig and Berlin for Germany. With slender means, and as a consequence with an insufficient body of teachers and inadequate equipment in other ways, they have helped to keep the torch of learning alive, but they have not to any extent produced a race of scholars and thinkers and men of science. When our young men have wished to carry their studies to a higher point, they have been forced to go to the universities of the old world, or to those universities of the new world where a higher conception of the vocation of the scholar has prevailed. Surely the period of dependence should now come to an end. There is good hope, I think, that we are entering upon a fuller life. Our universities are gradually becoming easier in their financial condition, and have begun to add to their teaching staff. Many of our young men now aim at something higher than a mere pass, and of late years they have even entered with enthusiasm upon a course of post-graduate study. This is as it should be. The ordinary graduate of a Canadian university leaves college with less knowledge of certain subjects than that with which most English boys enter. The first two years of a Canadian student are usually spent in doing work that ought to have been done, and one may hope will yet be done, in the high school. One reason for this no doubt is that parents are so eager to have their boys enter upon what is called the "practical" work of life that they send them to college in a lamentably inadequate state of preparation. In many cases, a boy comes to college at the age of sixteen, with an imperfect knowledge of his Latin grammar, with no knowledge of prose except what is enough to enable him to write a little dog-Latin, and with a superficial acquaintance with a book of Virgil and a book of Caesar. At the end of his classical course it is still a struggle for him to make out without aid the simplest piece of Latin. How can it be expected that he should have any enthusiasm for Latin literature, or any real comprehension of the part which the Roman people have played in the civilization of the world? Naturally, he associates the name of