

stand dismayed to find ourselves growing no older, always as young as the information of our most numerous voters. The danger does not lie in the fact that the masses whom we have enfranchised seek to work any iniquity upon us, for their aim, take it in the large, is to make a righteous polity. The peril lies in this, that the past is discredited among them, because they played no choosing part in it. It was their enemy, they say, and they will not learn of it. They wish to break with it for ever; its lessons are tainted to their taste.

In America, especially, we run perpetually this risk of newness. Righteously enough, it is in part a consequence of boasting. To enhance our credit for originality we boasted for long that our institutions were one and all our own inventions, and the pleasing error was so got into the common air by persistent discharges of oratory, that every man's atmosphere became surcharged with it, and it seems now quite too late to dislodge it. Three thousand miles of sea, moreover, roll between us and the elder past of the world. We are isolated here. We cannot see other nations in detail, and looked at in the large they do not seem like ourselves. Our problems, we say, are our own, and we will take our own way of solving them. Nothing seems audacious among us, for our case seems to us to stand singular and without parallel. We run in a free field, without recollection of failure, without heed of example.

It is plain that it is the duty of an institution of learning set in the midst of a free population and amid signs of social change, not merely to implant a sense of duty, but to illuminate duty by every lesson that can be drawn out of the past. It is not a dogmatic process. I know of no book in which the lessons of the past are set down. I do not know of any man whom the

world could trust to write such a book. But it somehow comes about that the man who has travelled in the realms of thought brings lessons home with him which make him grave and wise beyond his fellows, and thoughtful with the thoughtfulness of a true man of the world.

This, it seems to me, is the real, the prevalent argument for holding every man we can to the intimate study of the ancient classics. All literature that has lasted has this claim upon us—that it is not dead; but we cannot be quite so sure of any as we are of the ancient literature that still lives, because none has lived so long. It holds a sort of leadership in the aristocracy of natural selection.

Read it, moreover, and you shall find another proof of vitality in it, more significant still. You shall recognize its thoughts, and even its fancies, as your long-time familiars—shall recognize them as the thoughts that have begotten a vast deal of your own literature. It is the general air of the world a man gets when he reads the classics, the thinking which depends upon no time, but only upon human nature, which seems full of the voices of the human spirit, quick with the power which moves ever upon the face of affairs. "What Plato has thought he may think; what a saint has felt he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man he can understand."

I believe, of course, that there is another way of preparing young men to be wise. I need not tell you that I believe in the full, explicit instruction in history and in politics, in the experiences of peoples and the fortunes of governments, in the whole story of what men have attempted and what they have accomplished through all the changes both of form and purpose in their organization of their common life. Many minds will receive and heed this systematic in-