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PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE CONFERENCE

THIS Conference is called to secure a concentration of expert opinion on the question, What obligation towards organized society rests upon the universities of the present day? It is called because of the manifest need of a reëxamination of this question, in view of the widespread unrest of our time, and the conviction that such unrest involves some measure of university responsibility. It might have been called by any influential institution. It has been called by New York University for an historical reason.

The Fathers of this University, a century ago, sought for expert advice regarding their new undertaking. They arranged a significant "convention" of one hundred leaders in American education and public affairs to render such advice. In his opening address before this convention, the Reverend Dr. James M. Mathews, later the first Chancellor of the University, declared,

We feel that we have . . . much to do in devising and maturing a system of government and instruction, adapted to the state and wants of our country. It is on these topics that we are desirous of having the views of such gentlemen as are here present; and we have been induced to invite this meeting, believing that we should both enjoy and bestow a benefit, by the measure. Whatever knowledge any of us can throw into the common stock must be for the advantage not of one institution, but of all. . . . From the first, it was contemplated that this meeting should be introductory to others which should draw together in still greater numbers our leading men in the republic of letters.

With little change of phraseology, this statement may be taken over by us today, as representing our present spirit and purpose. This Conference, indeed, may be regarded as the second of the series which Chancellor Mathews contemplated. How far the series may be continued down the centuries is not for us to say. It is enough to say that