

**THE RELATIONS OF  
YALE TO LETTERS  
AND SCIENCE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649299003

The Relations of Yale to Letters and Science by Daniel C. Gilman

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# The Relations of Yale to Letters and Science

AN ADDRESS

PREPARED FOR

THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

New Haven, October 22, 1901

BY

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There is  
One great society alone on earth:  
The noble Living and the noble Dead.  
*The Prelude, Canto xi*

BALTIMORE  
PRIVATELY PRINTED  
1901



LDG319  
G6

W. F. Schuman

JOHN MURPHY CO., PRS  
BALTO.



## ADDRESS

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IN the mediæval convents, from which our academic usages are derived, there were annalists who noted the passing events. Dry and meagre are such records,—dry and meagre will our annals seem unless we see in them the working of principles and methods during a period of two centuries. It will be my endeavor to set forth the relations of Yale to science and letters in such a way that with historic insight you may discover the tendency and the influence of the school in which we have been trained, and may thus appreciate its benefits more fully than ever before. I shall not follow closely the order of chronology, and under the circumstances of this address, I must omit the praise of living men, however richly deserved, nor can I mention many of the departed, however honored and beloved. Law, medicine and theology must be avoided; “it is so nominated in the bond.” It will be good for each one of us to bear in mind the seven searching questions of an ancient critic,—

*Quis, Quid, Ubi, Quibus auxiliis, Cur, Quomodo, Quando,*

and to remember also that there is no process by which we can draw forth in forty minutes the rich vintages stored up in a period of forty lustrums.

The Collegiate School of Connecticut began well; Yale College improved upon the Collegiate School; Yale University is better than Yale College. The process has been that of evolution, not of revolution; unfolding, not cataclysmic; growth, and not manufacture; heredity and environment, the controlling factors. What we are, we owe to our ancestry and our opportunities. Hence the Relation of Yale to Letters and Science cannot be adequately treated without looking outside the walls, as well as inside,—by considering the wilderness of Quinnipiac; the dependence of the colony upon the mother country; the bicephalous State of Connecticut; the prosperous city of New Haven and its proximity to the great metropolis; and especially by considering what has been going on in the macrocosm of literature and knowledge where we represent a microcosm. Such a survey I shall not attempt, for I must keep close bounds. Yet even brevity must not suppress the fact,—that among the original colonists of New Haven, the real progenitors of Yale College, were three broad-minded men of education,—John Davenport, a student of Oxford and a minister in London; Theophilus Eaton, the King's ambassador at the Court of Denmark; and Edward Hopkins, a merchant of enterprise and fortune, and an early benefactor of American learning. Their successors also, the men of 1701, James Pierpont at the front, were worthy exponents of the ideas they had inherited; they were the wisest, broadest and most learned men of this region in



that day. Liberal ideas were then in the advance, and thank God, are not yet in the background.

New England brought from Old England the customs, the studies, the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, not those of Scotland or France or Germany. The exotic germs were nurtured by Harvard for more than sixty years before the times were ripe for a second college in this region. Harvard instructors, laws, courses, phrases, were then adopted by the Collegiate School of Connecticut, and our alma mater began her life as a child of the new Cambridge and a grandchild of the old. "Harvard has nourished Yale eighty years kindly ordered in Providence," are the words of President Stiles. Yale has never ceased to be grateful for this noble ancestry, nor broken the chain of historic continuity. Yale does not forget that an honorable pedigree is its priceless possession, and delights to-day to honor its ancestry.

The seventeenth century was not the most brilliant period of university education in the mother country. The functions of universities had been usurped by colleges. Their scope was restricted; their regulations rigid and petty. Science and letters were subordinate to logic and grammar, and the maintenance of orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the new school made the best of it,—and while still without a fixed habitation or a name, acquired both influence and reputation. It began with books, not bricks; with teachers, the best that could be had; and with ideas in respect to intellectual discipline which soon bore fruit in the service of Church and State.

The division between our first and second centuries, corresponding with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of our era, is not simply determined by the calendar. There are two periods to be considered as well as two centuries, each deriving its characteristics from the spirit of the age. In the first of these, our fathers went through the good old colony times of dependence upon England; the Revolution; the establishment of constitutional government; and the enlargement of national life and hope. It was the period too when a free church was to be established in a free state, when christianity was to be promoted without the rule of hierarchy. The business of a college was to train two sets of leaders, those who would develop and administer republican government under new conditions, and those who would be ministers of the word of God among a Christian people separated from the establishment. For scholastic discipline the books and methods approved in the mother country and adopted in Harvard were the only instruments. Such words as letters and science were not in their vocabulary. Religion and law, or as they said, the church and state were the dominant concerns of patriot and sage.

Days of privation, anxiety, dispute, apprehension and experiment, introduced a time of stability, prosperity and union,—years of plenty after years of want,—and the second century opened with courage equal to opportunities. It is true that the ideas of original research, of experiment and observation, now so familiar, were hardly perceptible, but

science had begun its triumphal march, and the humanities, in a broad sense, were destined to engage more and more the attention of educated men.

In the first decade, our record of "the noble living and the noble dead" includes the name of one who was trained by alma mater for more than provincial usefulness and fame, Dr. Jared Eliot, who like the sages of antiquity, had the cure of souls and the care of bodies. A physician as well as a presbyter, living in a country town, preaching constantly, traversing a wide district on errands of mercy, he showed the qualities of an original investigator. He could ask hard questions and proceed to search for their answers; he would make no assertions that were not based upon observation or experiment, and he submitted his conclusions, by the printing press, to the scrutiny of the world. These are his sayings;— "Entering on the borders of terra incognita I can advance not one step forward, but as experience, my only pole-star, shall direct. I am obliged to work as poor men live, from hand to mouth, and as light springs up before me, as I advance." Again:—"As all theory not founded upon matter of fact and that is not the result of experience, is vague or uncertain, therefore it is with great diffidence that I have offered anything in way of theory which is only conjectural and shall always take it as a favor to be corrected and set right."

It is not too much to claim that he made the first contribution, from this land of iron and gold, to the science of