

**THE DANGERS AND DUTIES OF THE
MERCANTILE PROFESSION: AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE MERCANTILE
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, AT ITS THIRTIETH
ANNIVERSARY, NOVEMBER 13, 1850**

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The Dangers and Duties of the Mercantile Profession: An Address Delivered before the mercantile library association, at its thirtieth anniversary, November 13, 1850 by George S. Hillard

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GEORGE S. HILLARD

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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AN

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*Rooms of the Mercantile Library Association,
BOERX, NOVEMBER 19th, 1850.*

DEAR SIR,

I have the pleasure of informing you, that, at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mercantile Library Association, held Monday evening, 18th instant, it was unanimously voted, that the thanks of the Association be presented to you, for the able and highly instructive Address delivered on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, and that a copy be requested for publication.

Hoping that you will comply with the request, I have the honor to remain, with sentiments of respect, your obedient servant,

HENRY P. CHAMBERLAIN,
Corresponding Secretary.

Hon. George S. Hillard.

Court Street, November 20, 1850.

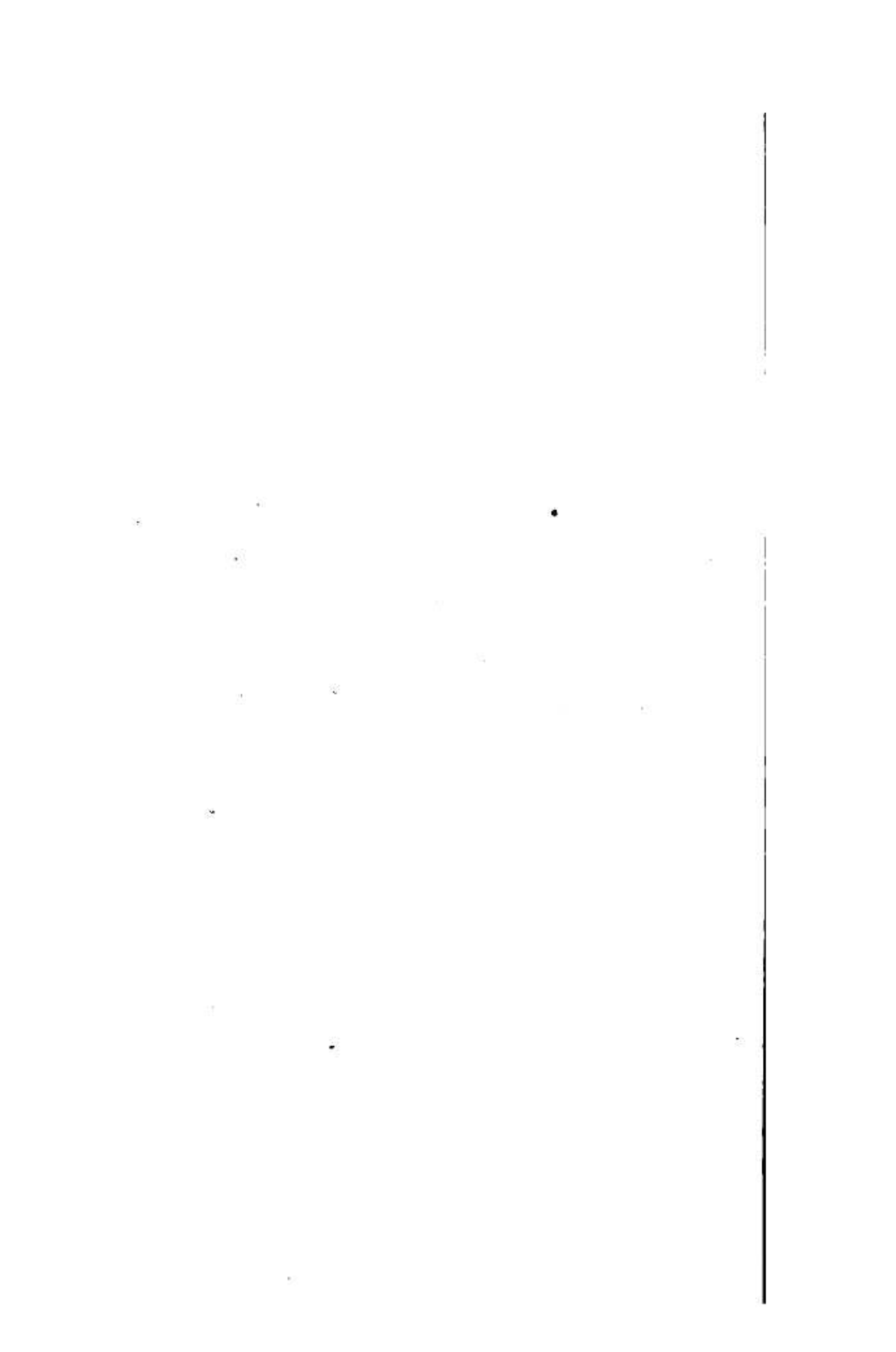
DEAR SIR,

The Address, a copy of which you have requested for publication, was prepared with exclusive reference to the position and claims of the young men composing your Association. I am induced to comply with your request, upon the assurance of those, whose judgment and candor I hold in equal respect, that the ends which I had in view in writing it will be farther promoted by its publication.

With my best wishes for the prosperity of your Association, and for the health and happiness of its members, I remain your friend and obedient servant,

GEORGE S. HILLARD.

Henry P. Chamberlain, Esq.



A D D R E S S .

THE various employments of civilized life may be divided into two classes, corresponding to the body and the mind in man. Trade and commerce minister to material wants, natural or artificial; science and literature, to intellectual growth. Thus, the merchant may be taken as the representative of outward or practical life, and the scholar, of inward or intellectual life. In this division, no disparaging comparison is involved. Each class of employments has its peculiar advantages and its peculiar dangers. The ideal merchant is, in my judgment, nowise inferior to the ideal scholar. Indeed, as each approaches the highest point of development, they draw nearer and nearer towards one another, as the opposite sides of a pyramid, far apart at the base, meet at the top. By the ideal merchant, I mean a man acting, but capable of thinking; by the ideal scholar, a man thinking, but capable of acting.

Politics, or the art of government, in this age of the world, includes both elements. The merchant and the scholar each contributes something to the composition of the statesman. He must be able to ascend to the highest generalizations from a solid basis of carefully selected facts. The homely details of business, as well as the laws which regulate and control its great movements, must be familiar to him. Speculation must suggest experiment, and experiment must confirm speculation.

No man can be said to be a finished man who has not both the power of acting and the power of thinking; and no community is truly powerful and prosperous which has not a fair proportion of men of action and men of thought. A country in which all men are either engaged in the acquisition of property, or steeped in the luxuries which property commands, — without books, without scholars, without ideas, — besides being the dreariest of deserts to the spiritual eye, contains within itself the elements of self-destruction, and is in constant danger of being shattered to pieces by the explosive force of its own selfish propensities. So, a country in which the intellectual energies of the people find no practical sphere, which is rich in universities, libraries, and picture-galleries, but poor in merchants, manufacturers, and engineers, can never have any considera-

ble amount of constitutional vigor, but is always in a state of what physicians call atony.

The world at this moment furnishes illustrations of each of these positions. It is one of the felicities of England, that, from her situation, her climate, her soil, her mineral wealth, and her political institutions, she has been able to furnish so great a variety of occupation to her sons, and to open a congenial sphere to every form of energy and enterprise. She has had universities, scientific associations, philosophers, poets, and artists, and, at the same time, ships, colonies, commerce, mines, and manufactories. Her literature and legislation both show the beneficial effects of this blending of the active and speculative elements. The literature of England is remarkable, not only for its variety and extent, but for its pervading characteristics of good sense, and good taste, which, indeed, is nothing more than good sense applied to æsthetics. It is an eminently healthful literature. In reading the books of England, we are walking in the open air, with the sights and sounds of Nature around us. Her writers do not look at life exclusively through the windows of a study. As the curve of the rocket and the silvery plume of the fountain are shaped by the earth's gravity, so, with them, the most daring flights of imagination and the most adventurous quests of the specula-