

**THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND
PROGRESS: ADDRESS AT THE THIRTEENTH
ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT OF THE
LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR
UNIVERSITY, MAY 18TH, 1904**

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ORRIN LESLIE ELLIOTT

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BY ORRIN LESLIE ELLIOTT
REGISTRAR OF THE UNIVERSITY

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**STANFORD UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

COMMENCEMENT
ADDRESS

*THE HIGHER EDUCATION
AND PROGRESS*

THE steady march of material progress is one of the most impressive phenomena in human history. There are some lost arts—arts practiced by peoples of a high degree of civilization whose names are all but forgotten. There has been great destruction of the handiwork of man—of his art, his literature, his palaces, his monuments, his accumulations everywhere. Yet how little of material advancement has been lost. Man has set himself resolutely to the task of mastering the world. He has studied its constitution, experimented with its forces, uncovered its secrets. The results are so familiar, so a part of our every day environment, that we hardly grasp the marvelous unfolding to which the ages bear testimony. From the first rude grappling with wind and wave to the latest triumphs of wireless telegraphy and

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the modern battleship there is comprehended an almost infinite advance. From Archimedes to Copernicus, from Galileo to Watt and Stephenson, from Gutenberg to Morse and Bell and the host of inventors and discoverers who have made our later times illustrious, there is one continuous record of achievement. From a period long antedating the Christian era to the beginning of its twentieth century there has been no break in this progress. What one civilization accomplished another inherits. The position reached by one generation becomes the starting-point for the next. It has been a progress that has ministered to the wants of man, making the conditions of life ever more agreeable, and leaping ahead to open wider and wider avenues of desire. It has made luxuries common, brought widely separated countries together, provided means of travel and rapid communication, improved dwellings, sanitation, clothing, and food. Through its wealth and leisure it has reacted upon science and philosophy, art and literature, promoting intelligence, refinement, and the endless quest for human welfare. Butchery and wars of conquest, cruel imprisonments, persecution for opinion's sake, oppression of woman — these have waned, while the humane virtues in individuals and states,

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the care for others and especially for the unfortunate, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, kindliness, have waxed and diffused themselves throughout the civilized world. The Brotherhood of Man and the Federation of the World are at last brought within the range of human vision.

This picture is a perfectly real one of the world in which we live. Who can contemplate it without a thrill of pride and exultation? Surely it is a good world in which to be and to work.

Yet this is not all of the picture. It is not the part which appeals to many; and in that other part there is enough to make all of us pause. Civilization builds our cities, it gives us ventilated, electric-lighted, steam-heated houses; but it cuts down our forests and turns us from outdoors and independence to shops and dependence. It gives us hospitals, skilled physicians and surgeons; it also provides the rasped nerves and weakened constitutions which need them. It brings leisure, aesthetic pleasures, wide knowledge, opportunities of travel; but it cuts us off from the elemental forces. It gives us mental poise, nice discrimination, critical taste, but God and duty are less real. It gives us wealth and the power of wealth, but not always the ability

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to escape from the artificial living, the immoral idleness which wealth invites. Consider the crass display of riches, the corruption in government, the easy tolerance of vice, the sordidness of much living. How much has this unprecedented material advancement accomplished for the permanent betterment of the world? Have we progressed so far from the time of Plato and Socrates? Is the ideal Republic so much nearer realization than it was two thousand years ago? What gladness there was in Greece! How free the human spirit! In what an empyrean of beauty, art, eloquence, philosophy the Hellenist exulted! In Attica art, literature, philosophy soared to heights which have never been outreached. In Rome government was more resplendent than the modern world has boasted. Yet it is the glory that *was* Greece and the grandeur that *was* Rome. One after another the best of ancient civilizations have passed away. Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, Greece, Carthage, Rome wrote their names and placed their monuments upon the splendid heights, but they could not transmit their spirit or their genius. Instead of going on to greater and greater achievements in beauty, in sanity, in right living,—instead of realizing the ideals of Socrates and Plato, the

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Gracchi and Marcus Aurelius, there came arrest and decay, the races degenerated, forgot virtue and sobriety, lost the sense of beauty and holiness, and the sceptre passed away.

It is such a survey as this which leads to the confident philosophy that neither material advancement, nor art, nor philosophy, nor culture has any necessary coincidence with lasting progress—rather that they arrest progress and finally accomplish its overthrow. Wealth, culture, refinement are the accompaniments of maturity and matured powers. May there not be, for nations as for individuals, a maturity which is only a stage on the way to decay and death? Other civilizations have had their day; our turn has come. The great Anglo-Saxon race passing now out of its virile youth is coming into its inheritance of wealth and culture. Even in America, latest come to maturity, busied still with exploitation, still the land of opportunity, the burden of civilization is becoming heavy. Wealth and art and culture, the choicest products of civilization, center in the cities. The cities eat out the virility of the race. Continually they must be fed from the country, and to this Moloch our youth are sacrificed in larger and larger numbers. Physical vigor is declining. The power of