

**BACCALAUREATE SERMONS;  
PRESIDENT M. WOOLSEY  
STRYKER TO  
THE GRADUATING CLASSES OF  
HAMILTON COLLEGE, 1893-1905**

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*Morgan H.*  
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HAMILTON COLLEGE, 1893-1905

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## SEEING THE UNSEEN

TO THE GRADUATING CLASS, JUNE 18, 1893

*He endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*

Hebrews, 11:27.

THE Letter to the Hebrews was both an argument and an appeal. With its array of fact and its august consolations, there blended an unfaltering and personal trust in God. That confidence in and commitment to Him is of the very essence of true religion. Religion is either the fulfilment of a real relationship, or it is a fond dream. The spirit of constancy is so sustained and illuminative thro this whole writing as to make it, concerning faith, the classical source both of definition and instance.

Not in any special phase or exercise, but absolute and generic, faith is affirmed as the basis of life and the warrant of all rational hope. The book deals with the apparent vicissitudes of an ever-moving process, and at the same time with the consistency and constancy of Him who guides this, — mutability and the Immutable. By broad retrospect it would prepare men to recognize and meet ungrudgingly the disciplines of change. At the eleventh chapter the argument proper culminates with the resonant citation of preeminent believers. Certain of the venerable roll are named, souls of altitude, and classes are summoned, of those who having won their rest, make up the celestial part of that holy alliance and comradeship in which all souls are one who love and seek the will of God.

“Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” — they who were once the spectacle and who now are the spectators — we have the tremendous appeal increased. The clenching thought is that these veterans are to have their work perfected in those things provided for later days and riper faith.

Fascinating and rewarding as the whole analysis and various aspect of this great epistle must be found, let us press in toward that core-idea which rules it all.

What was that "wherein the elders had witness borne to them"? What is the theorem upon which this chapter moves? At the outset, it is given,—a definition which inspires our whole instinct of flight, and lifts our eyes past the hills, beyond the path of the eagles, up the ways of the angels! "Now faith—(and there the writer leaves the ground and takes the wings of the morning)—*faith is the proving of things not seen*"—the "*assurance of things hoped for.*" Faith is itself a proof, a conviction. This eleventh chapter is that proposition amplified by instance. It begins at the beginning (as Genesis and John begin) with "the word of God." We know "that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear," that is, "*that which we look upon did not come from phenomena.*" Spirit and life are behind objects. First-cause precedes second causes. Word is back of world. The seen is the result of the unseen. The Creation is that over and thro which the Creator lives and moves, and the creature who knows this and so lives joins the triumphs of those great Hebrew men.

It is upon the thought that our text condenses, that this roster of great and effectual men proceeds. At the point where we station our meditation Moses is the immediate instance. Our text analyzes his life and sums it. Unmatched and solitary that life stands above all the lives of the old Testament: forty years in Egypt, forty years in Midian, forty in the Wilderness,—"*endurance,*" all the way from Nile side to Pisgah top!

Such enduring, under such burdens, borne by such a man, must be accounted for! It must have "*assurance*" and "*proof*" under it. And thus the writer to the Hebrews (and so to all souls perplexed by ages of transition and mental disturbance) utters this epitome of all that Moses was and did—



strikes the chord in which all his life was one of displacements. It was also one of submissions because of convictions. He accepted the loneliness of leadership. He became therein a type, at once of the sorrow and the grandeur of a prophetic soul. He did not fear Egypt's king; for face to face he knew the "blessed and only Potentate, eternal, immortal, invisible," who made poor both the riches and the wrath of Pharaoh.

This contrast is in our text, but the very Greek states even more broadly the secret of faith — it is generic not personal — "*τοι γαρ ἀόρατον ἵκε δῶν*" — "*as seeing the unseen*," — God, and all else secured in God — the ruler, and the whole realm beyond present vision. We keep both the euphony and the paradox of the holy page when we say that *faith is the sight of the unseen*. That then for our theme. Transcendental as the statement is, it announces the real wisdom and the real life of the soul. All uplifted and uplifting souls have endured *as seeing the unseen*. Would that this penetrative beam of truth might scatter the vagueness with which we think of Faith! It is the vision of the invisible — the "heavenly vision." This "conviction of things not seen" is a test and organon. What the eye is to sense, that confidence in God is to the soul! Sense is not the last of us, we are hyper-physical — we are made to touch the impalpable, to hear the inaudible, to see the unsighted.


It is this idea of the soul's true function and self-prophecy that speaks in many another New Testament expression. This very word *ἀόρατα* marks that other great statement "the *unseen* things of Him are seen by the things made." Nature is a telescope!

Paul speaks of Christ as "The image of the unseen God."

"The things seen are for a while and the things unseen are forever."


If we "have the eyes of our hearts enlightened" we shall look for the reality that underlies all that is but apparent, and find that —

"Earth's crammed with Heaven."



Faith is a "spirit of seeing," spiritual second sight. It is logical. It reasons from the consistency of God. The child clutches his father's hand in the night and so walks homeward thro the dark, and "we go by faith, not by what we see." It is faith to go out "not knowing whither," because we know with Whom.

Faith is always this — *confidence in and commitment to a person*. It is not guessing, arguing, taking chances,—it is trusting someone who is trustworthy. Trust is more than a persuasion from visible evidence, it is self-proving. It is not merely one emotion or attitude out of many, it is a total and vital connection with what lies beyond the boundary of the five senses — "the masterlight of all our seeing"; — the response of our life to His life who gave us ours — and who made outer light the universal parable of the inner. Soul at last can be satisfied only with soul. We "thirst for the living God", and surrendering to the compulsions of an irresistible hope we find suddenly that faith *guides* reason. Without it reason is not a safe leader, for it is not sane. Certainty is more than sight, it is insight. All progress, all skill, comes by trusting ourselves to that next step which is ever just beyond present knowledge. It is not as a mere optigraph of Heaven that these scriptures are holy; but because they prompt that trust in a trustworthy God, which is life eternal already begun. Nor is it only in man's relation to God, but also in his relation to every other person with whom he has to do, that faith is indispensable. In all matters, ocular evidence is neither final nor chief. "Without faith it is impossible to please" anyone! The soul itself, and its impartiality, count in all convictions. Everywhere we have to reckon with what lies below the horizon. In all things good faith is more than compulsion. There is no sphere of thought or action in which it is rational to "dwell only in things seen", to inspect only "the things before the face." The apostle Peter uses the very word "myopy" when he speaks of those who are spiritually "*near-sighted*."



Everywhere the unseen presses for recognition. Whether in the laboratory, or the garden, on the judge's bench, or upon one's knees — reverence and expectancy toward the "things not seen as yet" are indispensable to great result.

To go on from observation to classification, from consequences to cause, from instance to rule,— all assortment and all synthesis,— means faith.

The quest alike of the eager mind and of the longing heart is for that ultimate unity in Whom power and pity meet. We are not in fear of too much learning, but of too little! The legal cannot be too exact: but that it may be exact it must be loyal. We are carefully to look down that at last we may fervently look up! Love is the way of prospect.

We are already in what we call "the other world", for God's realms are one. Only now we are withheld from the upper light. We are shut within the shell of sense, and, with sense, can see only its smooth and hard limitations: but we have equipments for which those walls are too narrow, tho now *in embryo* we reckon that wings mean something, and with an act which stakes itself upon the conviction of accessible tho as yet unperceived realities we use the beak upon the fragile and temporary wall!

We are sure that the vast is not a void, that derivative life answers creative life, that longing is the clue whereby to track love to its source, that conscience is a 'right line' between man and his Maker, that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," that these things of sight are "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,"—and so, the deep within us calling to and answering the deep above us, we make God's statutes our songs, pitch our pilgrim tents toward the apocalypse, and rejoice in Him "Whom not having seen we love."

But let us come to the fact that the perception of that which is out of sight is not an exceptional but a normal function. In every growing and advancing life men "hope for that which they see not." All lofty imagination is of a