

**NEW YORK DELTA
OF PHI BETA KAPPA.
ANNUAL ORATION**

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New York Delta of Phi Beta Kappa. Annual Oration by Charles Sprague Smith

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CHARLES SPRAGUE SMITH

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ANNUAL ORATION

BY

PROF. CHARLES SPRAGUE SMITH, A.M.

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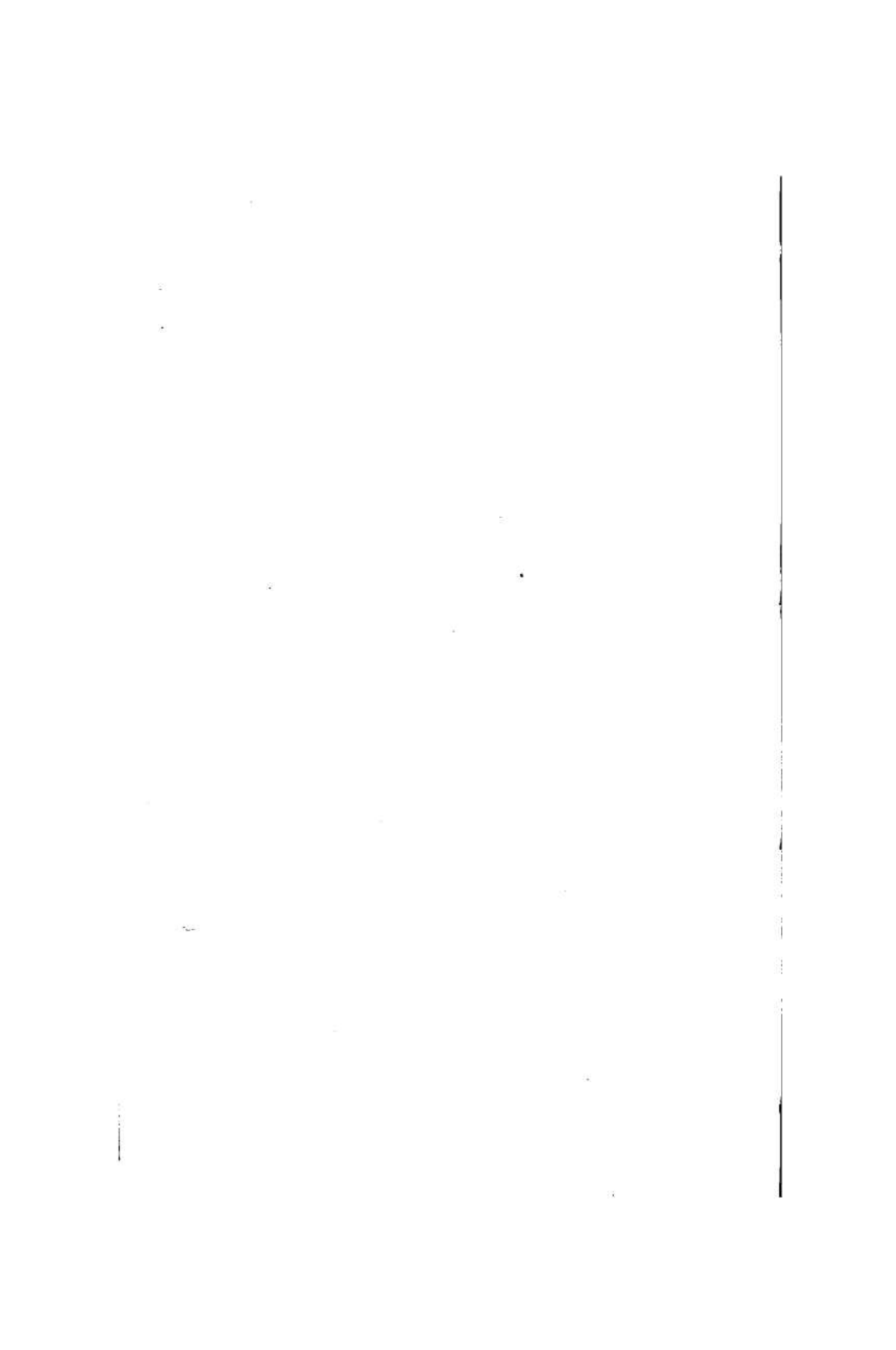
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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY.

The Muse of Hellas stood upon Olympus, looking southward. At her feet lay a block of Parian marble, formless and stained with soil. Before her wingéd vision space yielded, and Egypt's Art, once free, but now bound by artificial laws, ranging in order its creations, exclaimed, "Lo, the highest ; lo, the unsurpassable !"

But that prescient spirit saw the fetters, and turned away. Musing, she lifted the coarse block, and, shaping it first in uncouth lines borrowed from the south, sought then, in the image of the ideal visible to her inner eye, to form the unformed, removing every fetter, every clinging chain, until the marble rose and spoke.

Stand where thou wilt, lover of thy country, and, looking backward and forward, thou shalt recognize the opportunity placed in our hands of giving to the world a truer, fuller expression of the ideal in government, in art and in religion than any history records. But how act in view of this our responsibility ? Is the morn breaking, and shall we await her coming upon the eastern hills ? The morn is not breaking ; our eyes may not behold the day when, the insatiate thirst for gain in a measure stilled, the worship of the material become less all-engrossing, Art, the noble, the majestic, shall come and the old forms receive a new and higher life.

The river, green-walled beside, and barred by nature or by man before, loiters that it may gather depth and strength. A Lessing lifts away obstructions and traces with wearying toil a path, o'er which a Schiller and a Goethe shall run. Ah! but there is an inspiration in such quiet, patient endeavor. The tiniest brooklet, that merges its separate life in the sea, lives on in its waters—nameless, but immortal; the humblest human life, whose energy is given to the ideal, lives on immortal in its silent influences. That thy lot falls in the days when those who toil may not inscribe their names deeply upon time's tablets should give a more abiding inspiration.

A period of transition, a period of preparation, such, if we err not, is the historical position assigned to our age. A sense of halting and of questioning pervades the universal consciousness. For humanity may not drift on and away, like the impassive stream, recking not of its whence and whither; anon a self-consciousness awakes, demanding imperiously of the present its sources and law of progression, in order that, with clearer vision and ordered march, society may move toward the morrow.

Whence have we come and whither are we bound? This is the ever recurring interrogation to-day in sociology. A single phase of this vast problem forms the theme of our present consideration, namely, the future of our higher education as fore-indicated by its past; or, in other words, the American University—its nature and functions.

According to those best informed, the path to the professional schools no longer crosses the college portals.

The explanation of this phenomenon is to be found mainly in the lack of adaptation to existing needs of our system of higher liberal education. The evils arising therefrom in the decadence of true science, with the resulting

tendency to rate all mental activity according to a purely material standard, have been observed and commented upon by all. The urgent necessity of some kind of reorganization, a necessity ever more clearly and universally recognized, has voiced itself on more than one occasion in the demand for the creation of an American university.

Thus a score of years since, in 1889, the National Teachers' Association appointed a committee, in which every state was represented, to formulate a plan of organization, and lay the foundations of such an institution.

That such need of reorganization exists is indisputable. Admitting it then as a premise, how shall the desired transformation be effected? In other words, is the university to exercise this reformatory function, and, if so, what is to be its structural plan, and upon what foundations is it to rest?

Etymologically and theoretically the word "Universitas" implies a system of instruction embracing the whole of human knowledge; in practice, however, it defines, usually, simply and solely the highest grade of the actual scholastic curriculum; though in France the entire system of pedagogics, from Alpha to Omega, from the elementary school to the licentiate, during the first half of the present century, was styled "The University." In our argument we shall accept the word with its customary limitations.

Before proceeding to our inquiry let us establish a few principles:

First. There is in every clime and country a process of development social, political, educational, which, having its *raison d'être* in the past, may be styled historical and national. Any force that is to make toward perfectionment must be applied in the line of this historic growth.

For, though comparative science shows man the world over progressing along parallel lines from the stone age to