

**THE BENEFITS WHICH
SOCIETY DERIVES FROM
UNIVERSITIES, AN
ADDRESS**

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The benefits which society derives from universities, an address by D. C. Gilman

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D. C. GILMAN

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The Benefits which Society derives from Universities

AN ADDRESS

BY

D. C. GILMAN

President of the Johns Hopkins University

BALTIMORE

PUBLICATION AGENCY OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

1885

NOTE.

The following address was delivered before the officers, students, and friends of the Johns Hopkins University, on Commemoration Day, February 23, 1886. Part of it was subsequently given before the Literary Societies of Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and before the Convocation of the Regents of the University of the State of New York in Albany. In issuing this pamphlet, I had intended to add some illustrative notes, but the delay occasioned by the repetition has diverted me from this purpose, and I leave the text, without comment, in its original form.

D. C. G.

ADDRESS.

Ladies and Gentlemen :

TO be concerned in the establishment and development of a university is one of the noblest and most important tasks ever imposed on a community or on a set of men. It is an undertaking which calls for the exercise of the utmost care, for combination, coöperation, liberality, inquiry, patience, reticence, exertion and never ceasing watchfulness. It involves perplexities, delays, risks. Mistakes cannot possibly be avoided; heavy responsibility is never absent. But history and experience light up the problem; hope and faith give animation to the builders when they are weary and depressed. Deeply moved by these considerations, I desire to bring before you, my colleagues in this work, without whose labors all would be a failure, you who are Trustees, and you who are teachers, before the citizens of Baltimore, and before this company of students pressing forward to take the places of authority in the work of education and administration—before you all, my

friends, I wish to bring some aspects of university life, which, if not new, may perhaps be stated in terms which are fresh, with illustrations drawn from our own experience.

I ask you to reflect at this time on THE RELATION OF UNIVERSITIES TO THE PROGRESS OF CIVILIZATION, and I begin by assuming that we are agreed substantially on the meaning of both these terms. The word university, as applied to a learned corporation, is several hundred years old, and in all times and lands has embodied the idea of the highest known agency for the promotion of knowledge and the education of youth. Civilization is a new word, hardly introduced a century ago, though the idea which it embodies is as old as organic society. Guizot, to whose eloquence we owe the popularity of this term, avoids its formal definition, declaring in general terms that civilization is the grand emporium of a people, in which all its wealth, all the elements of its life, all the powers of its existence are stored up. "Wherever," as he goes on to say, "the exterior condition of man becomes enlarged, quickened or improved, wherever the intellectual nature of man distinguishes itself by its energy, brilliancy and its grandeur; wherever these two signs concur, and they often do so, notwithstanding the gravest imperfections in the social system, there man proclaims and

applauds civilization." Assuming, then, that by university the highest school is understood, and by civilization the highest welfare of mankind, let us inquire into the influence which the advancement of knowledge by means of superior educational establishments has exerted or may exert upon the progress of society.

A little reflection will remind us of five great agencies by which modern Christian civilization is helped forward: first, **THE FAMILY**, unit of our social organization, recognized by Aristotle as the basis of society, and styled by modern philosophers "the focus of patriotism" (Lieber) and the very "starting point of social morality" (Maurice); next, **TRADE or COMMERCE**, the exchange of one man's products for another's, the traffic between communities and nations; third, **LAW and CUSTOM**, written and unwritten, the enforcement of duties and defense of rights, the equitable adjustment of conflicting claims; fourth, **RELIGION**, the acknowledgment of personal responsibility to an infinite and all controlling Power. The last to be named is **KNOWLEDGE**, the recorded observations and experience of our race in ancient and in modern times, or in other words **SCIENTIA**, science in its broadest significance.

These five influences working in dwelling houses, market places, state houses, churches, libraries and schools, control our modern life; and

that state of society is the best, in which domestic virtue, mercantile honor and the freedom of exchange, obedience to law, pure and undefiled religion, and the general diffusion of knowledge, are the dominant characteristics. We are only concerned at present with the last of these five factors.

The means by which our race has acquired knowledge and preserved its experience are manifold. The inhabited world is a great laboratory, in which human society is busily experimenting. Observation, exploration, and reflection have been allied in interpreting the physical characteristics of the globe, ever since the primeval law, Subdue the earth, was heard by primitive man; experiments in social organization have also been made on a colossal scale, and in little microcosms; war has taught its pitiful lessons; superstition, irreligion, vice and crime as well as literature, art, law, religion and philosophy have all been teachers; customs, traditions, epics, creeds, codes, treaties, inscriptions, parchments, books, pyramids, temples, statues, museums, schools, pulpits, platforms have all been employed to perpetuate and diffuse the knowledge which has been acquired; but ever since Europe emerged from the darkness of the middle ages, UNIVERSITIES have been among the most potent of all agencies for the advancement and promulgation of Learn-

ing. Their domain, the republic of letters, has been wider than the boundaries of any state; their citizens have not been restricted to any one vocabulary; their acquisitions have been hid in no crypt. They have gathered from all fields and distributed to all men. Themes the most recondite, facts the most hidden, relations the most complex have been sought out and studied, that if possible the laws which govern the world might be discovered, and man made better.

In one of our halls, there hangs a diagram which I never pass without pausing to think of its significance, listening as I would before the sphinx to discover if it has any message for me. It contains a list of European universities founded since the dawn of modern states,—a period of more than seven centuries, a list of over two hundred names. Every state in Europe, every great city, has its high school. Popes, emperors, kings and princes have been their founders; ecclesiastics, reformers, republics, municipalities, private citizens, munificent women have contributed to their maintenance. Wherever European civilization has gone, the idea of the university has been carried with it, to North and South America, to Australia, even to India, China and Japan; it came with the Virginians to Williamsburg, with the New Englanders to