

**BACCALAUREATE  
SERMON, CLASS  
DAY ORATION,  
ETC., CLASS OF 1882**

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Baccalaureate sermon, class day oration, etc., Class of 1882 by Various

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**VARIOUS**

**BACCALAUREATE  
SERMON, CLASS  
DAY ORATION,  
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*HARVARD COLLEGE.*

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CLASS OF 1882.

BACCALAUREATE SERMON,

CLASS DAY ORATION, Etc.



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## BACCALAUREATE SERMON.

BY FRANCIS G. PEABODY, B.D.

"THE END OF THESE THINGS."

*Daniel, XII. 8. "Then said I, Oh, my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?"*

We are brought in these days to the end of many things—the end of another year of learning and of teaching, the end of many intimate companionships and many personal relations, hopes and fears. One inevitable question presses at such times upon every thoughtful mind: What has it all amounted to? What has been gained? What is the outcome of it in permanent possessions and resources? While we were busy moving with the moving year the interest of details shut out the final view. Now the end tests the whole. We gather the fragmentary results of our work and our companionship together. We see the whole sweep of the life we have been leading and ask ourselves what there is left that will stay.

But this is not all. You, who are finding this time most completely an end are finding it still more completely a beginning. Your first thought may be what there is left of the years that are passed; your next or more anxious thought is what then is ready for the years that are waiting. That which seemed like an end turns out to be only a means to a larger end. That which looked like a climax in life becomes only a fresh starting point. The experiences and conflicts which appeared so much like real warfare now seem more like preparatory drill and skirmishes and the battle of life still waits. Thus the fragment of life you have lived here takes its place in the whole of life. You are lifted out of an absorbing relation with one part of life and consider its whole sweep and purpose. A new end announces itself and you ask yourself what it shall be. Ask yourself—do I say? Nay, I believe that

in these days many of you are turning from your own ignorance to a better wisdom, and are laying before your God all the tendencies, pursuits, acquisitions and neglects of these years and are asking of him — it may be with an unspoken prayer — “Oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”

Now what does this mood in which you find yourselves to-day really mean? What does it mean—this repeated reference of the parts of life to the end of life and then the transfer of each end as it is reached into a means to a larger end? What does it mean—this repeated broadening of the horizon of one’s purposes as though one climbed what seemed a summit and saw on the one hand a larger world about him, and on the other hand a higher summit above? I ask you to see that it means a great deal. In the first place it is the secret of all sagacious, large, effective living. I suppose the very nature of a small life is its momentary fragmentary nature, its finding in piecemeal work a sufficient unity, its getting so bent down over one part of life that it cannot look up and see the breadth and beauty of the whole; and I suppose the very essence of a large life lies in this—that it is not overborne by details or absorbed in fragmentary interests, but that the scattered facts and materials of its experience take their place in the orderly structure of a permanent plan. Who is the small man of science? It is he to whom the acquisition of facts is everything and the meaning of facts is nothing; he to whom fragments of knowledge are sufficient and co-ordinated knowledge is a stranger. Such a man may be a learned man but he remains a small man. He is forever arranging his materials and collecting his specimens but he is in reality drying, pressing and labelling his own life among the rest. And who is the great naturalist? It is he who perceives in the slightest incidents of his pursuit not merely what they are but what they point to. Each aspect of Nature, however microscopic in itself, is eloquent with suggestions, each part ministers to the theory of the whole; each apparent accident reports the method of a general law. Such a student stands before the apparently trivial phenomena of the fertilization of a flower or the work of an earth-worm and inquires of them, like a Prophet of Israel:—What shall be the end of these things? Who is the small man of business? It is he for whom the immediate results of business are the complete results; for whom it is enough to gain and to thrive from day to day without much thought of what gaining and thriving are. Such a man is forever getting the means to live instead of living; and

so it comes to pass that instead of a career broadening with his enlarging means he finds himself more and more shut in by narrowing and converging walk. He is like a fish swimming unconsciously into the labyrinth of a weir. The net-work of his occupation hems him in closer and closer, until even in the element where he thinks himself most free he is held a prisoner and the possessions which he thought he had got turn out to have got him. And who is the wise man of affairs? It is he who in the midst of details remains aware of the purpose which details should serve; who in the midst of his getting gets, as the Scripture says, understanding; for whom the parts of life minister to the whole of life. Such a man comes to the end of his work and there is something there. He has not buried all his resources of content in the tomb of professional eminence. The work of his life contributes to the larger needs of his life. He anticipates old age and provides for himself resources which will not then fail. He observes the drift of his vocation and corrects it by refreshing avocations. From the beginning he sees the end.

Here, then, is the most serious question one can ask himself when he faces the choice of a vocation. Is it likely, on the whole and in its general sweep, to enlarge life or to stunt it? Do its lines converge to narrowness or open into breadth? Is it to be a constant addition of permanent resources or a slow impoverishing of the soul? This is not a question of the vocation alone; it is a question of the man in relation to the vocation. It is the question which a crew on the river has to ask itself — a question of putting what weight one has on the precise point where it will most tell; of sparing wasted force and saving some strength to finish with. Many a pursuit looks insignificant at the outset, but grows great as a man puts his weight into it and settles — so to speak — to its stroke; and, after all, it is not the start but the finish which counts. And if anything ought to lead a man into a wise answer to this question I think it should be the experience of his college life. Many a man, I believe, if he were asked to sum up what he had gained among us here would be forced to confess that his permanent acquisitions had been very few. He would look back with equal amazement at the amount he used to know and the promptness with which he had forgotten it, at his capacity of accumulating information for a pressing emergency and his still more marvellous capacity of shedding it all when the emergency was



past. But one thing, I think he would say, remained a permanent possession, — a certain demand upon life for resources beyond bare bread winning, and interest bred of discipline here in things which seemed to a large part of the world the merest rubbish, but which had given glow and color to his whole life, a sympathy for books, or research, or affairs and persons of intelligence, which had given meaning and use to his prosperity and soothed the sting of his reverses. He has had to work as hard as any man, he has been distanced by many; but the end of the work has not been wholly hidden from him. He has watched many another life starting, like a well-built vessel, on an apparently prosperous voyage. Swiftly she sails and quickly she arrives; yet when she draws up to the foreign dock and the hold is thrown open the voyage turns out to be a failure. For the hold is empty. It was all equipment and no result, all means and no end. Everything had been remembered except the cargo. No wonder that the fully-freighted vessel lagged behind.

What shall be the end of these things? I have spoken to you thus far as if this was no more than the question of worldly wisdom and prudent calculation; and it is the question of wisdom and prudence, — but it is much more than this. This view of life as given to use, as tested by its end, as strung with all its beads of many-colored circumstance upon one thread of a permanent design, — this is not only the wise, sagacious, effective view of life, it is in reality nothing less than the religious view, and it is wise and sagacious because it is religious. The view of Religion is precisely distinguished from all other views, either of the world without or of the life within, by this faith in a final Purpose linking the whole into a coherent unity. Religion sees in the outward Universe, not a chaos of straying atoms, but the Kosmos of an immanent God. Through the mechanism of physical phenomena runs one spiritual Purpose, through their apparent accidents are fulfilled the perfect laws of God. Religion sees the same thing in the inward life. The petty circumstances, the besetting details, the drudgery and trials of each human lot, — these are the inter-working atoms through which each mikrokosm finds its life and motion. Looked at apart, each may seem the most blind and purposeless of forces. A section cut through a life at any one point may be as meaningless as the combinations of a kaleidoscope. Yet, beneath these atomic agitations, working in and through

them, is the underlying, permanent immanent life of God. It takes up our purposes into its larger Purpose. It has a plan for each life and the wisdom of each life lies in discovering that plan. It is the life of God in us which is forever striving toward a plan, inquiring for the permanent, crying out for the end of things. If it were not for this indwelling, beckoning Purpose, true wisdom would be to live with as little fore-thought and anxiety as one could. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. If, on the other hand, it is true that a man's life is given to him to use, is a trust from God, then the way of wisdom becomes simply the way of obedience, and fragmentary, purposeless living becomes not merely practically foolish but religiously disloyal. Thus the view of Religion is simply this: My life is not my own. It has its part in a plan which holds its purposes, as the plan of a commander holds the faithfulness of each private in the ranks. If my body were my own, I might abuse it or defile it. But it is not my own. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? If any man defile the temple of God him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." If my daily work were my own I might well grow conceited in its success or despondent in its failure. But it is not my own. It is a much larger work than my own, a work in which my failures and my successes alike count for just what they are worth. If my joys and trials were for me to shape and for me to interpret, what a muddle my life would seem to be! But they are not all my own. Their disconnected incompleteness finds its meaning in a larger plan. Just as, in the life of nature about us each part ministers to the whole, and in the sequence of the seasons each in its turn serves its successor, so the successive experiences of life are taken up into the service of God's perfect purpose. One law controls the days of June and the days of January; one life invites the sap to climb and climb — the sap knows not why; — draws out the leaves to bud and spread — the leaves know not why; — touches them with frost and makes them tremble and fall — they know not why. One plan holds me with all the universe about me. Springtime and autumn are both alike its servants. Whether the leaves give shade above or enrich the earth below, they are still fulfilling their predestined part, and renewing the beauty and order of the whole.

I think you must see what a change and lift and transfiguration such a thought as this gives to the whole of life. The view of

common sense and the view of Religion turn out to be one view. That which we have talked of as the part of wisdom becomes nothing less than loyalty to the life of God. Instead of saying that we are environed by a net-work of circumstances, we say, as we have sung to-day, that

"Through the ceaseless web we trace  
His presence working all things well."

The very thought of a unity and plan in life reveals the whole of life as held in a larger unity, every man's life a plan of God, and underneath all life the everlasting arms.

And now turn back from these heights of contemplation to the common level of daily life and see what follows when we look at the whole sweep of life in this larger way. If life is wise so far as it is held to a definite purpose from end to end, and if, once more, this permanence of purpose is to be found only in the line of God's will, consider what this implies. It gives—does it not?—a wholly new meaning to the problems and decisions which beset us on any given day. They are to be estimated, not by what they seem, but by the course they indicate. Two ships sail side by side out of Boston Bay. No variation in their course or speed appears. Side by side they sink below the horizon. But —

"When fell the night up sprung the breeze  
And all the darkling hours they plied,  
Nor dreamt but each the self-same seas  
By each was cleaving side by side."

Slowly, imperceptibly, their paths from day to day diverge, and when the one is beating up the Irish Channel, the other is yielding to the gentle current that sweeps her into the Mediterranean. Two lives may begin their voyage with this same parallelism and likeness here to-day. No human eye can see why they should not come side by side at the same moment to the same port; but it may be that at the end a continent shall divide them. It is not a question of to-day's course but of permanent tendency. Slowly may fulfil itself the most sad and solemn of human spectacles. The paths which seem one may divide. The wavering rudder, the divergent purpose, forces souls asunder whether they desire it or not; and while the one is still fighting its way against the whole sweep of God's commands the other is borne along upon the favoring current of His purpose. Thus day by day the course presages