

**THE HAPPY LIFE;
AN ADDRESS**

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The happy life; an address by Charles W. Eliot

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CHARLES W. ELIOT

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AN ADDRESS**

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THE HAPPY LIFE.

AN ADDRESS

BY

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DELIVERED AT

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ON COLLEGE DAY

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INTRODUCTION.

THE WOMAN'S COLLEGE, of Baltimore, celebrates the first Thursday of November as an anniversary occasion which it entitles "College Day." The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees is held at that time, and the visitors, officially designated by the various conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, meet and organize for the purpose of acquainting themselves with its affairs and reporting them to the next session of their respective conferences. Receptions are held, in which the Trustees and friends of the College, the visitors and the students may meet each other; and on the evening of College Day there is an assembly of the students to listen to an address upon some appropriate topic. The anniversary this year came upon November 7th, and the speaker was President Charles W. Eliot, LL.D., of Harvard University, who delivered the following address upon "The Happy Life."



THE HAPPY LIFE.

My subject is "The Happy Life." I address here especially young people who have passed the period of childhood, with its unreflecting gayety, passing shadows, gusty griefs, and brief despairs, and have entered, under conditions of singular privilege, upon rational and responsible living. For you happiness must be conscious, considerate, and consistent with habits of observing, reading and reflecting. Now reflecting has always been a grave business,

"Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs";

and it must be confessed that our times present some new obstacles to a life of considerate happiness. Until this century the masses of mankind were almost dumb; but now their moans and complaints have become audible through telephone, telegraph and rotary press. The millions are now saying what the moody poets have always said:

"The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies.
All that we wish to stay
Tempt and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright."

The gloomy moralist is still repeating: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The manual laborers of to-day, who are much better off than the same classes of laborers have been in any earlier times, are saying just what Shelley said to the men of England in 1819:

"The seed ye sow another reaps,
The wealth ye find another keeps,
The robes ye weave another wears,
The arms ye forge another bears."

They would adopt without change the words in which that eminent moralist, Robinson Crusoe, a century earlier, described the condition of the laboring classes:

"The men of labor spent their strength in daily struggling for bread to maintain the vital strength they labored with; so living in a daily circulation of sorrow, living but to work, and working but to live, as if daily bread were the only end of wearisome life, and a wearisome life the only occasion of daily bread."

Matthew Arnold calls his love to come to the window and listen to the "melancholy, long withdrawing roar" of the sea upon the moonlit beach at Dover; and these are his dismal words to her:

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
No certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

The poets are by no means the only offenders ; the novelists and scientists take their turn. The fiction of this century deals much with the lives of the wretched, dissolute and vicious, and with the most unjust and disastrous conditions of modern society. A fresh difficulty in the way of natural happiness is the highly speculative opinion, lately put forward by men of science and promptly popularized, to the effect that external nature offsets every good with an evil, and that the visible universe is unmoral, or indifferent as regards right and wrong, revealing no high purpose or intelligent trend. This is, indeed, a melancholy notion ; but that it should find acceptance at this day, and really make people miserable, only illustrates the curious liability of the human intelligence to sudden collapse. The great, solid conviction which science, within the past three centuries, has enabled thinking men and women to settle down on, is that all discovered and systematized knowledge is as nothing compared with the undiscovered, and that a boundless universe of unimagined facts and forces interpenetrates and encompasses what seems the universe to us. In spite of this impregnable conviction people distress themselves because, forsooth, they cannot discern the moral purpose or complete spiritual intent of this dimly seen, fractional universe which is all we know. Why should they discern it ?

It is, then, in spite of many old and some new discouragements that we are all seeking the happy life. We know that education spreads, knowledge grows, and public liberty develops ; but can we be sure that public