

THE SCHOLAR IN POLITICS

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The scholar in politics by Richard Olney

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RICHARD OLNEY

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IN POLITICS**



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BY HON. RICHARD OLNEY
SECRETARY OF STATE

Philadelphia
HENRY ALTEMUS
1896

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**HENRY ALTEMUS, MANUFACTURER
PHILADELPHIA**

THE SCHOLAR IN POLITICS.

*An Address delivered before the Alumni of
Brown University.*

IN responding to the flattering invitation of the Alumni Association, I may properly recognize at the outset its distinctive character as well as the class of topics specially befitting the occasion. This association does not exist without a worthy end in view, and does not meet year by year except in the effort to make some progress towards that end. What the end is, the nature of the association itself determines. Its members are part of the educated men of the country. They belong to the only privileged class which the institutions of the land tolerate, and they are clothed with the powers and burdened with the responsibilities necessarily inherent in every such class. If it be asked

what those powers and responsibilities are, the best definition of them, at once concise and exhaustive, is furnished by two words which have come down to us from the days of chivalry, and which no advance in the art of expression is likely to improve upon, *Noblesse oblige*—nobility compels—superiority in station and in power involves corresponding obligations. The true knight of chivalry, indeed, belonged to an order which may well be taken as justly typifying the privileged class of all ages and all countries so far as such a class can have a rightful existence or a legitimate sphere of action. His select destiny being recognized from his birth, the future knight began his probation in early youth, and until he came to man's estate never ceased to be the subject of rigid bodily and mental discipline. As he lived in an age when right and justice were foolishness unless championed by successful valor, he necessarily made ascendancy in arms a prime object of his care. But the peculiarity of his tuition consisted in the principles by which

his martial prowess when attained was to be guided. He was to spurn inglorious ease and pass his days in one round of laborious duty. He was to be moved neither by fear nor favor and was to be ruled solely by the voluntary promptings of his own heart and conscience. Without hope or thought of personal aggrandizement, he was to devote himself to public duties of transcendent importance—he was to champion the weak, to redress the wronged, to vindicate justice, and to oppose and defeat tyranny and oppression against all odds and at whatever sacrifice. In an age of the reign of physical force, when the many seemed to have come into the world ready saddled and bridled for the few to ride; when brute strength was lord paramount and even religion but slightly mitigated the harshness of its rule—in such an age the existence of a privileged class, animated by the sentiments and professing the principles of chivalry, formed a meliorating and civilizing influence, the value of which cannot be easily overestimated. Burke but justly characterized chiv-

alry as "the unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise." It unquestionably responded to the most urgent want of its own time. It tempered the lawlessness and cruelty of a semi-barbarous age. And in the principles it inculcated, however imperfectly applied in the day of their origin, every historian and philosopher finds the prolific seeds of modern civilization.

Chivalry, in its primary manifestations and in its original picturesqueness—the chivalry of prancing steeds and waving plumes, and glittering armor, of personal adventure and heroic feats of arms, of jousts and tournaments before high-born "ladies whose bright eyes rain influence and judge the prize"—chivalry of that form has forever disappeared.

"The knight's bones are dust,
His good sword is rust.
His soul is with the saints, I trust."

But though the form was fleeting, the essential principle of chivalry was permanent