

**LIBERAL EDUCATION; AN
ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE
PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY OF
HARVARD COLLEGE, JULY 22,
1858**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649174867

Liberal education; an address delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College,
July 22, 1858 by Thomas Hill

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THOMAS HILL

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PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY

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JULY 22, 1858.

BY

REV. THOMAS HILL,
OF WALTHAM.

CAMBRIDGE:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN BARTLETT.
1858.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
MONROE C. GUTMAN LIBRARY

LB 41
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CAMBRIDGE:
ALLEN AND FARNHAM, PRINTERS.

A D D R E S S .

Brethren of the Phi Beta Kappa Society ; Ladies and Gentlemen who have honored us with your presence : —

THE motto of our society, and the avowed objects for which it was instituted, must be my apology for the seeming abruptness of entering, without any prefatory remarks, upon the subject to which I intend to invite your attention. The "promotion of a sound literature" depends, in a large measure, upon the promotion of a sound education. The natural tastes of a young student are so much modified and so unequally cultivated in the course of his preliminary and collegiate education, that his choice of a special pursuit is frequently determined more by his culture than by natural attraction ; and his proficiency in the chosen pursuit is also largely affected by the character of his preliminary study.

To what more important and more interesting question, therefore, could I invite your attention than to this : What principles should guide us in the selection

and arrangement of studies in the academic course, — that is, in the whole course previous to the student's entering upon the particular special pursuits to which his tastes or his choice of a profession will finally lead him?

What branches are essential, and which are not essential? How far should the essential branches be carried? How far should non-essential branches be permitted to occupy the student's time? What powers of the mind most need education? How shall it be given them? What principles should guide us — this is the discussion to which I invite your attention — what principles should guide us in deciding these various points?

I do not propose to discuss this subject as a question of policy for our own Alma Mater, nor with reference to the success of the student in after-life; but, so far as my powers may suffice, in the broad light of duty, — of the relations of the soul to the universe and to its Maker.

The principles which should regulate the course of collegiate study may evidently be reached by three independent lines of approach, and the identity of the results attained by these three independent methods would be a sufficient proof of their correctness.

We might first survey the literature, arts, and science of the historic races, and from the various success of their attempts at liberal culture, compared with the various modes in which they attempted it, draw our

conclusions as to the wisdom of these modes, and the soundness or unsoundness of the principles on which they were founded. Or we might, in the second place, observe the course of Divine Providence in its dealing with us, the children and scholars of the heavenly teacher, and draw from the studies and discipline of the school of life, the principles which should govern the schools of men.

Either of these modes of inquiry will lead to the same results as those which may be obtained from a survey of the powers of the human mind and of the objects on which those powers can be exercised.

The passive powers of the human soul may be divided with sufficient accuracy for the purposes of the present discussion into three groups: sensational, emotional, and intellectual. I have named these groups in the order of their connection with, and dependence upon, the physical frame and the material world. All these are in various degrees under the control of the active power, that is of the will, and all are conjointly employed in nearly every ordinary act of life. A perfectly trained man must therefore have all his powers cultivated. They are all capable of improvement through proper education, and the culture of any one set of powers will, of necessity, in some measure improve the rest. A scholar should cultivate even the powers of simple sense; for without accurate perception and delicacy of muscular action, there can be no high executive power in the arts, and no great attainment in the sciences of

observation. That the intellectual powers need a careful training is conceded by all men. The emotional powers stand in no less need of culture, without which both morals and art (which are the expressions of the higher emotions, the one in life, the other in artistic work) must suffer. Most of all does the will need self-imposed restraints, or rather need to subject itself voluntarily to the discipline which the Father has appointed. Religion is the education of the will, to teach it to submit to the laws of reason and of duty.

And since there can be no perception through simple sense without intellectual effort; no emotion without consciousness, more or less distinct (and consciousness is thought); and, finally, no volition without motive, either based on judgment or emotion; it is manifest that a full enumeration of the objects of human thought will include all the objects that can influence the culture of the man. Nor do I consider it necessary in our rapid review of the objects on which the human powers can be exercised, to do more than to attempt a rough classification of things actually in existence, and concerning which we may attain to more or less of knowledge.

I am accustomed to regard the hierarchy of sciences as composed essentially of five different grades, according as the sciences deal with one or another of the five series of existing things. For the universe, so far as it can be the object of our knowledge, consists of only these five portions: first, the Infinite Spirit, the Supreme

Will at the head of all; secondly, men, the finite spirits, the limited wills; thirdly, the acts of these finite creatures; fourthly, the actions of the Infinite Being, beside those included in the formation and guidance of our spirits; fifthly, and finally, the field and space of time wherein these works are wrought. Thus I would include all possible sciences under these five heads: Theology, which refers to the Divine Being; Psychology, using that word to include all that belongs to the human powers of thought, feeling, or perception; History, extending the signification of the term to include all the thoughts and achievements of men; Natural History, in which I place also the chemical and the mechanical sciences; and, fifthly, Mathematics. I shall, during the remainder of the time which your indulgence may grant me to-day, use the words history and natural history in these extended senses.

I am aware that there may be some difficulty in deciding to which of these five divisions some of the special sciences belong, and we may be tempted to say that they belong to several at once, or that they are not included in any of the divisions. But I believe nevertheless that this primary classification will stand a close examination, and that the whole range of the objects of scientific study is included in, and divided between, theology, psychology, history, natural history, and mathematics.

And these five departments are so connected that one continually leads to the other, and cannot naturally