

**CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS IN PUBLIC  
LIFE: AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN  
SANDERS THEATRE BEFORE THE  
STUDENTS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY,  
HONOR DAY, NOV. 21, 1900**

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Conditions of success in public life: an address delivered in Sanders Theatre before the students of Harvard University, Honor Day, Nov. 21, 1900 by George F. Hoar

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**GEORGE F. HOAR**

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AN ADDRESS

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BY

GEORGE F. HOAR



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UNIVERSITY OF  
CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS  
IN PUBLIC LIFE.

CAMBRIDGE.

I AM not sure that the gentlemen to whom I am to speak account it always an undiluted pleasure to be sent for by the Dean. But I am glad to obey his summons. I am glad to have a fair excuse to visit the College and to behold again the face of my beloved Alma Mater. In my younger days the ladies who gathered here at Commencement, and Phi Beta, and Class Day were the great attraction. But for me that time is long ago gone by. I am in the condition of Campbell's sailor,

"I have no sweetheart, said the lad,  
But, parted long from one another,  
Great was the longing that I had  
To see my mother."

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I certainly do not come here to preach. It was the fashion many years ago to ask men in public life to the colleges at the Commencement season to deliver orations on the scholar's mission, or the relation of educated men to the State, or the higher education, or various kindred topics. They used sometimes to take advantage of the occasion to pay back the criticism which they get so abundantly from the University, when the scholar of the University gives his opinion upon matters in which he is no scholar, and the man in political life returns the compliment by giving educators his opinion about matters in which he has no education.

In general, the young men spent the hour devoted to the address outside on the grass or on the chains or the fence, while the speaker was listened to inside by their mothers, and grandmothers, and aunts. I am proud to say these ladies used to declare themselves to be much gratified by the sentiments of the discourse. But I have long withdrawn from that field of labor.

I have not found, in my experience, that the



new generations care much for the preaching of the old ones. If the youth find your example to his taste, he will sometimes follow it. But he will not alter his course for your preaching.

Perhaps I may, from the experience of a long life, report something which may be of use to you in the road you are to follow. I think that a liberal education is sometimes a great comfort to men who are good for nothing but the humblest manual occupations. It is a great solace under the misfortune of lifelong ill-health, or the curse of inherited wealth. But you are, in general, educated and expected to do the brain work of the Republic—to do high thinking in high places; to sit on the Bench; to be leaders at the Bar, and in public life, and in the pulpit; to become famous in literature and art; to conduct great business enterprises, which often demand all the qualities needed for the conduct of great States; to make science the healer of sickness and pain, or the handmaid of manufacture and of labor, and in that way to lift the burden under which humanity is bowed and bent. We hear a good

deal of late about the strenuous life. But your work in this world is to be done with your brains. The object of your education is not to fit you to hunt grizzly bears. Leatherstocking and Chingachgook are very attractive characters. But neither of them was graduated at Harvard. Boating, and racing, and football, and athletics are manly sports, and doubtless develop manly quality. But they belong to the period of youth, and belong to the body, not to the mind.

*“Non viribus aut velocitatibus aut celeritate corporum res magnæ geruntur sed consilio auctoritate sententia.”*

A great many men who are quite indifferent to their work in college apply themselves to it eagerly when they get into the law school or the medical school or study for their calling in life. They see the true value of what they are doing when they study for a profession, and that success in life is to depend on making the best use of their time then. But in my opinion the work of the undergraduate is of more consequence, if you think only of success in the

calling to which he is to devote himself, than even the work in a professional school. There are few of the high places in this country in which a good English style, the gift of speaking well, literary taste, knowledge of the best literature in our own and foreign tongues, the power of clear and orderly reasoning are not of the greatest value. You will, in all probability, get these here or will lay a foundation for them here, or nowhere. If you waste your time in the Law School and are a man of a generous ambition and good capacity, you can make up for it in a great degree after you open your office. You will be pretty sure to have some leisure then. But if you neglect the foundations which are laid in these four college years, they will never be laid, or certainly will never be well laid, at all.

I have in my time known many men famous in war, in statesmanship, in science, in the professions, and in business. If I were asked to declare the secret of their success, I should attribute it in general not to any superiority of natural genius, but to the use they made in