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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

SCHOLARSHIP AND LIFE

AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the

THIRD ANNUAL HONORS DAY  
CONVOCATION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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BY

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## SCHOLARSHIP AND LIFE

WE ARE TOLD in the University catalog that by a certain system "the University gives official public recognition to such students as attain a high grade of scholarship." Part of this system is that "an annual University Honors Day" is observed, with a University convocation. This assemblage is that officially called convocation. It is unnecessary to say much about either the purpose or the method whereby the University carries out this plan. The significance of the occasion lies less in what any speaker may say than in the fact of its occurrence and in the acts of the members of the University in the discharge of the important duties connected with the convocation. In short, our *presence* here is more significant than anything that I can say. Your presence is evidence of your recognition of certain important facts. In the first place, it is evidence of your interest and belief in the occasion and its purpose. It is even more important that the student body should give evidence of this belief than that the faculty should. For it is the recognition of one's peers which is in the long run of most importance. Public opinion for those whom we are to honor today is mainly the opinion of their fellows. That opinion they value most.

The recognition that is expressed as the public opinion of your fellow students is supplemented with that of the faculty and their opinion is accepted by the world at large as the judgment of those whose longer experience and wider view make them able to judge of the value of scholarly activity in the daily affairs of life.

We need to define our terms when we speak about educational matters in these days. I have, myself, seen or heard very few statements about our educational system, very few criticisms of our educational procedure or ideals or purposes, which will bear analysis. They are too often indefinite expressions of opinion or prejudice instead of inferences from facts carefully verified and logically an-

alyzed. Therefore, it behooves us to ask ourselves what we mean by scholarship which we are assembled to honor.

Quoting again from the University catalog, we are told that "the basis of award is the attainment of the student, or group of students, as shown by the scholastic records on file in the office of the Registrar." The attainments of the student as shown by scholastic records! This means, I presume, that we award honors on the basis of the grades received by the students for their class work and other exercises devised to determine how thoroughly they have done the work assigned them. Our action, therefore, is recognition of thoroughness as well as of volume of attainment. It can mean nothing else, for the recipient of the honors has not yet had that long experience nor attained that wide range and depth of knowledge which come with the passage of many years, and which we have in mind when we use such terms as "distinguished scholar," "ripe scholarship," etc. Nevertheless, there is an implication that the kind of work done by the student is that which leads in the end to ripe scholarship and a scholarly life.

The opinion is frequently expressed that thoroughness of work by college and university students is of secondary importance. Students are constantly told not to be "grinds," to do their studies well but not *too* well, to participate largely in activities, so-called. There is a certain element in and out of the University which affects to despise those who devote themselves earnestly to the work for which they came here. These people say to students, in effect: "If you stand well in your studies, you are a 'Grind' and will not succeed in 'practical' life! And if you have ability enough to win the valedictory, you are doomed to failure and obscurity." To express opinions and to give advice of the kind referred to is simply telling young men and women, as they enter upon the duties of life, not to take things too seriously. It is to say: "Do the work you have to do well but not too well! Do not attempt to 'shine' in the work to which you set yourself! Do not attempt to be conspicuous! Do not attempt to do so well that you will be a marked man or woman! In short, do not attempt to

rise above the common herd in the matters in which you and they are engaged and in pursuit of which you have set your heart!" The records of college graduates do not bear out the statements. They are false to the facts and the philosophy of life implied is vicious. No advice could be more destructive of certain qualities of character necessary not only to individual success, but to the progress of society. Certainly the application of such a doctrine in any affairs excepting those of education would very soon eliminate the individual applying them from consideration or success! The main business of the college or university student is to study. It is his duty and should be his pride to do his studying so well that he will be looked on as a master, for his age, of the subjects that he is studying. The age-old advice, "Whatsoever thy hand find to do, do it with thy might," is as sound today as it ever was. It is a strange doctrine that when you are doing your university work you should "take things easy," but that when you are settled in your profession or vocation you should spend yourself in it to the utmost.

A second common mistake is a belief that acquiring knowledge, becoming trained, getting education, attaining scholarship, is easy. As a recent writer remarks, after quoting from one of the short-cut-to-education magazines:

There you have it . . . . . Mastery of the tricks which bring early success; belief that there is somewhere a secret magic, knowledge of which will immediately transform one's personality;—the short cut . . . . . Education is on the air; in this enlightened time one can get it anywhere—like bootleg whiskey. It is proposed now to give adult education by radio. All you need do to achieve scholarship is to turn it on, close your eyes, and go to sleep. You can get it without effort, without knowing that you are getting it, or just who is educating you.<sup>1</sup>

The illusion referred to is fostered not only by laymen, but by some colleges and universities. They have inspirers who walk through the groves and radiate culture, furnish an atmosphere of refinement, supply the impetus of inspiration. The student has only to look to be inspired; to listen

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<sup>1</sup>E. D. Martin, *The Meaning of a Liberal Education*, p. 18.

to be entranced; to touch to become a poet or a painter. There is much to be said about the influence of a great personality on the young. But that influence is not felt, certainly not in any great degree, under such circumstances as I have just described. The individual must come *into close contact* with a great personality if he is to understand in what the greatness consists and to be inspired to strive to its attainment.

Thoroughness in your work, then, evidence of appreciation on your part of the value of knowledge, evidence of your development as an individual personality as a result of your studies, are the things that we recognize today. Thoroughness implies accuracy, truth, and other qualities which make men dependable in what they say and write. But scholarship, in the large sense, imports more than thoroughness. It implies a development of personality through the acquirement of a knowledge of the world's experience. It implies a person's ability to appreciate and adapt himself to all relations of life.

We are told in our dictionaries that scholarship means accurate and well-disciplined learning, especially in the liberal studies. Again, scholarship is contrasted with the knowledge or attitude of what are called "men of affairs." Again, in the words of Charles Sumner: "By scholar I mean a cultivator of liberal studies, a student of knowledge in its largest sense, not merely classical, not excluding what is exclusively called science in our days, but which was unknown when the title of scholar was first established."<sup>1</sup>

There is truth in these statements, but they are not satisfying, to me at least. Scholarship is all of these things, but it is more. By scholarship I mean that accumulation of varied knowledge in many lines of culture, set in such relationship with one another, under the logical control of a well-balanced judgment, as will produce a personality independent, individual, yet in harmony with its social environment; a personality emancipated from control by herd opinion, self-mastered, self-critical, with balanced judgment and urbanity.

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<sup>1</sup>Sumner, *Orations*, Vol. I, p. 137.

Someone has called education a "spiritual revaluation of human life." The finest spiritual revaluation of human life can be made by those of richest and ripest scholarship, in the sense in which I have attempted to describe or define it. For it is such a volume of knowledge of human values and relations, such experience of their operation, as produces in the individual a ripened and just judgment which enables its possessor to decide what is best worth knowing, what is best worth doing.

Scholarship is to be distinguished from knowledge and investigation and research, although these terms are sometimes confused.

"Scholarship," someone has said, "represents the accumulation of knowledge that has resulted from wide reading and from acquaintance with what others have done; it is a passive condition, not an active force; it represents attainment rather than achievement; it is negative rather than positive, receptive rather than creative. Investigation presents a point of departure for research, scholarship represents a broad level plane affording rest, peace, and refreshment; both are amicably related to research though not to be identified with it."<sup>1</sup>

However, there is no necessary incompatibility between scholarship and research. A scholar may not be a research man; a research man may not be a scholar, because his field of research may be so narrow that he fails to coordinate it with the rest of the field of knowledge. As Professor Whitehead remarks,

The modern chemist is likely to be weak in zoology, weaker still in his general knowledge of the Elizabethan drama, and completely ignorant of the principles of rhythm in English versification. It is probably safe to ignore his knowledge of ancient history. Of course, I am speaking of general tendencies; for chemists are no worse than engineers, or mathematicians, or classical scholars. Effective knowledge is professionalised knowledge, supported by a restricted acquaintance with useful subjects subservient to it.

This situation has its dangers. . . . The directive force of reason is weakened, the leading intellects lack bal-

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<sup>1</sup>Miss Lucy Salmon, *Vassar Quarterly*, December, 1926.

ance. They see this set of circumstances, or that set; but not both sets together. . . . Wisdom is the fruit of a balanced development. It is this balanced growth of individuality which it should be the aim of education to secure.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, scholarship is entirely compatible with the pursuit of a vocation or profession by which one makes his living. For the pursuit of a vocation or a profession implies only such detailed knowledge of it as is necessary to success in its pursuit. But aside from this knowledge one may have the wider knowledge that is the foundation, as well as the rich background, of personality and happiness in life. Indeed, that wider scholarship may well be the basis on which the vocational or professional specialization is built. For one cannot know everything. The part of scholarship is to select what is of most worth. To quote the old song referred to by Herbert Spencer in his discussion of this same subject:

Could a man be secure  
That his days would endure  
As of old, for a thousand long years,  
What things might he know!  
What deeds might he do!  
And all without hurry or care.

The relation of scholarship to life is the relation between what Aristotle calls the "good life" and the causes which produce the good life. Scholarship, as I have remarked, produces or develops personality—rich, diverse, profound, well-balanced, harmonious internally and externally. In the scholar the intellectual, the moral, and the physical capabilities are in harmony. He, as an individual person, is in harmony with humanity, justice, and love. Scholarship brings to the scholar's life peace, serenity, helpfulness, idealism, in proportion to the richness and ripeness of his scholarship. It contributes, therefore, to his happiness in life and to his success in his calling, because success in one's calling is likely to be greater, the finer the equipoise of the individual character. Scholarship promotes all these results, therefore, in the life of the individual scholar and in his relations to his fellow men. He is able

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<sup>1</sup>E. D. Martin, *The Meaning of a Liberal Education*, p. 15.

to look on the world and its doings with serenity, and yet with the kindly interest and desire to serve, which are strongest in the minds and hearts that know most about men and their doings, and therefore most fully understand the touches "of nature which makes the whole world kin." The scholar builds for himself a house upon a rock, in which he can find himself undisturbed by the waves of ignorance that beat against its foot.

Upon the top of this wooded hill  
The temple we have builded stands serene,  
Stately and fair, with sunlit colonnades  
That open out for us on all the world.<sup>1</sup>

In recognition of your partial attainment of this state of mind and heart, of your progress so far in your career towards this ideal, this state, this developed personality; in recognition of your evident understanding of these things and your desire to attain them, we honor you today. That is to say, we honor you not only for the thoroughness with which you have done your work, but also for the knowledge you have gained and for at least the partial development of that well-rounded personality, examples of which we see in the lives of the great scholars of the world.

Who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail  
Against her beauty? May she mix  
With men and prosper! Who shall fix  
Her pillars? Let her work prevail!

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<sup>1</sup>S. B. Gass, *Lover of the Chair*, p. 23.