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Liberal Education.

By Rev. Dr. C. P. Chouquette, of the College of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, on the subject of "Liberal Education," Rev. Dr. C. P. Chouquette, of the College of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, said:—

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club, Toronto,—I must confess that I have been sorely perplexed and hesitating, when I received the kind invitation of your secretary. I, a French-Canadian, whose knowledge of the English language has been picked up on the benches of a rural French college only, how could I come and dare speak in English in this attentive City of Toronto? But I have felt something sympathetic in the wording of the invitation. I have assumed that, in general intercourse, you are looking to what brings men nearer to each other. I, too, feel that it is most desirable. I declare, however, that I hold against you a recourse, a right of action which requires, as an adequate satisfaction, that either your honorable president or your secretary should come to my province of Quebec and give us a lecture in French; I affirm that you will find, if you need it, the cordial indulgence which I expect from you in this moment. I am pleased to mention that the college of St. Hyacinthe, from its very beginning—that brings us back to a hundred years ago—has kept in touch with the Province of Ontario. Sir Alexander Campbell, a once honored Governor of your province, was a student in my College, as well as some other citizens of this city, and my predecessor in office, the Right Rev. Caum Ouellette, was an Ontarian, born in Essex County, from an old French family, who settled years ago, with many others, in this beautiful part of your province.

Now, gentlemen, in choosing the subject of this lecture, I have taken advantage of a recent event. Some weeks ago, as you know, the honourable ambassador of England to Washington, Mr. Bryce, came to Canada. Mr. Bryce knows us for forty years. Three-quarters of his work is taken up with the affairs of Canada and, of course, he takes much interest in our future. He praised us for the extraordinary development of our natural resources. He told us that the

people of Europe are turning their eyes towards Canada. With the advantages derived from the common stock, of two such great nations as Great Britain and France, he regards it as inevitable that, in the fulness of time, Canada must produce great things. Very well. But the honorable gentleman is a diplomat. Diplomacy allows one to suspect behind the words used more than the words mean, and I suspect that these words of the diplomat convey, through an evident sympathy, the most important and fully measured advice. Anyhow, I am thankful to the honorable gentleman; I rejoice over his words and I will be satisfied if I can prolong their accent in being their echo here.

It was not, said Mr. Bryce, the nations which had acquired wealth most rapidly that have achieved lasting fame, but rather those which had contributed most to the intellectual wealth and enjoyment of the world. Some fine books, some statues perpetuate in the memory of men, powerful people, now utterly destroyed. The greatness of a nation was ultimately measured by what it had done for arts, poetry, literature, learning and science. These words appear to me as a strong lesson, given in the most gentle manner. The lesson reads thus: You, Canadians, you have incalculable elements of material prosperity; you aspire to be a nation. Bear in mind that you must not confine your activity to what is useful only; do not neglect the cultivating and refining of mind. In two words, work for posterity, and posterity requires that you should *cultivate liberal education.*

As a preface to these words as well as an approval of the same, I take pleasure in noting the opinions of men such as the presidents of Harvard, of Cornell, of Princeton Universities. I have read these opinions in a daily paper, but I have every reason to think that they are authentic. We have missed, said the president of Princeton, the true inner meaning of education. We have been trying a series of reckless experiments. The young men of our colleges, of the last few decades, have not been educated. Information is not education. The trouble is that we are trying to teach a little of everything. We should reduce education to a small body of great subjects. In other words, and to be explicit, I submit, following this opinion, that instead of cramming our minds with facts, we should aim at cultivating the mind, at purifying and refining the taste, at supplying true prinicples to enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration. And this is what I call liberal education in opposition to other educa-

tion, very valuable, assuredly, but which leads primarily to our physical comfort and enjoyment.

Strange and paradoxical as this may appear, I find in the writings and sayings of the greatest educators of our time a tendency to approve and recommend the pursuit of knowledge irrespective of what it produces, for its own end only. That may seem going many years back. It is one more confirmation of the saying of one of your philosophers, who wrote that the swinging of a pendulum—as all movement is rhythmical, that of human opinion included. After going to the extreme, a reaction in course of time carries it to the other extreme, and then comes eventually a new reaction. Opinion which prevails is seldom quite right, and it is only after numerous actions and reactions that it may settle into the rational mean." This applies to education and specially to liberal education. And indeed pursuits which produce nothing, and still maintain their ground for ages, which are regarded as admirable, although they have not as yet proved themselves to be immediately useful, must have their sufficient end in themselves, whatever it turns out to be, and it is no wonder that we should return to it.

What is really meant by liberal education? It is usual to speak of liberal arts and studies and of liberal knowledge in opposition, as the word implies, to servile work, that is to bodily labor, to mechanical employment and the like, in which the mind has less part or exerts less strain. Indeed, there are bodily exercises which are liberal and mental exercises which are not. For instance, in ancient times the practitioners of medicine were commonly slaves. Yet it was an art as intellectual in its nature, in spite of the pretence, fraud, and quackery with which it might then, as now, be debased, as it was heavenly in its aim. And so in like manner we contrast a liberal education with a commercial education, or an industrial, or a professional education. Yet no one can deny, that commerce, industry and the professions afford scope for the highest and most diversified powers of mind. These are the words of one of the greatest scholars of the last century, Cardinal Newman: "Then that alone is liberal knowledge which stands on its own pretentions, which is independent of sequel, expects no compliment, refuses to seek for any end or to be absorbed into any art, in order only to present itself to our contemplation and admiration. The most ordinary pursuits have this specific character, if they are self sufficient and complete—the highest lose it when they minister to something beyond them. And so even of the learned professions altogether considered

merely as professions; although one of them be the most popularly beneficial, and another most politically important, and the third the most intimately divine of all human pursuits, yet the greatness of their end, the health of the body or of the commonwealth, or of the soul, diminishes, not increases, their claim to the appellation in question, and that still more, if they are cut down to the strict exigencies of that end." In other words, and to repeat: any education which is used for the purpose of personal fruit is transferred from the order of liberal pursuits to—I do not say the inferior,—but to the distinct class of the useful. Of possessions, said the Greek philosopher, more than 2,000 years ago,—those rather are useful, which bear fruit, those liberal which tend to enjoyment. By fruitful, I mean, which yields revenue; by enjoyable, where nothing accrues of consequence beyond the use. Milton writing the "Paradise Lost" and giving the poem for 10 pounds; Newton in framing the laws of the universe, did work, not for fruit, but for the delight of the mind.

Please notice that the same ideas and conclusions find a confirmation in the arts. The end of the arts is the attainment of beauty, not of utility. Utility is often the greatest enemy of beauty. To utilize is to sacrifice. When it was thought that the Roman monuments could be useful, they were turned to ruins. But what is admirable, the very ruins became more beautiful and impressive than the monuments themselves. The tourist who stands, thoughtful amidst the ruins of the Roman Forum feels an enchanting emotion never to be forgotten, and to him, the Arch of Titus, the Coliseum, have never been more beautiful than since they have become useless ruins. And so it is for things of every day use. Many nations use tea and coffee, and consider them very useful—yet who will say that these substances are beautiful?

Perhaps you remember the history of the elder Cato, when the young Greek scholars, on the occasion of their embassy, were charming the Roman youth with their eloquent exposition of knowledge. Cato, as a fit representative of a practical mind, estimated everything by what it produced. He despised that refinement of mind of which he had no experience.

Are there many Catos amongst us? For my part, I confess that my name, once, could appear at the head of the list. For twenty-five years, I have devoted all my efforts and my enthusiasm to the study of sciences. I can tell the origin of chemistry and of electricity. I know the name of the great inventors. I know the development of their work. I can run a dynamo, and an X-ray machine; I can build a wireless

telegraph and turn a microscope to the study of minutest beings. But I feel now that my mind, to use a vulgar comparison, is a kind of bookseller's shop only, in which I could find a large variety of facts and events. It recalls to me what is said of the eyes of the infant opening upon the world. The reflected rays of light which strike them from the myriad of surrounding objects present to him no image, but a medley of colors and of shadows. They do not form a whole with foregrounds, groups, persons; they have no intelligence and convey no story, any more than the wrong side of some rich tapestry. If I wish to write something else than a business or a practical scientific letter, I will sit paralyzed in front of my paper. I hesitate, I erase, I add, I suppress. I lack invention, clearness, accuracy, precision. Words won't come out or won't come aright; in fact there is a dimness in my mind's eye, and I feel it so bitterly.

The reason is that I have not listened enough to the great orators; I have not read enough of the great writers; I have not conversed, I have not meditated with the great thinkers, I have not kept society to the great authors altogether. On the other hand, how after, in reading a good old country writer, either French or English, I happen to fall into admiration at the ease and charm of his style, at his picturesque expressions, at the originality of his views, reflections, conclusions! I live in another world. It is an illumination. Such a writer has no age. He condenses the good sense of all generations, he profits by their experience, he learns by their faults, he breathes all the aspirations of the most noble hearts. He converses with Homer, Plato, Raphael, Shakespeare, Bossuet, Racine, Milton—he adds to these treasures collected among human minds all what Christianism has given us—"He has the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things, as far as the finite mind can embrace them. He is almost prophetic from his knowledge of history; he is heart-searching from his knowledge of human nature, he has almost supernatural charity on account of his freedom from bitterness and prejudice; he has the beauty and harmony of heavenly contemplation, so intimate is he with the eternal order of things and the music of the revolving spheres." Such a man possesses the resources which contribute to the framing of a nation; and the art which tends to make a man all this, though less susceptible of method, and less tangible, lest certain, less complete in its results, such an art, I say, is, in the object which it pursues, as useful as the art of wealth or the art of health. And this art is liberal education.

How is this liberal education acquired? By the study of letters; the study of letters is the study of authors called classic—Greek, Latin, English, French and others. These are the interpreters of what is high, grand, virtuous, beautiful, in the feelings of the human heart. It is through letters that beauty and good, as they were imprinted in the soul of man, find the brighest and most perfect manifestation. This excellency grants them supremacy in the kingdom of intelligence.

Glory to sciences, honor to scientific schools, honor to the patient minds who study, with power and love, all that God has submitted to the investigation of the human mind.

Sciences add, without a doubt, to the strength and to the richness of a nation.

"I like sciences," said Napoleon, " each one of them is a beautiful partial application of the human mind, but letters are the whole human mind altogether, the whole fruit of civilization."

When I put my hand on these time-honored classic books, I think of all the great ideas which are therein deposited. When I contemplate this precious collection of the archives of intelligence and thought, I cannot but feel a profound emotion. There are "the voices of the dead and songs of other years," as the poet says. The same thing should be said about arts. Art, such as painting, architecture, is the sensible expression of what is grand, is noble, is beautiful in the estimation of the honest and high-minded man.

Letters and arts form the intellectual nobility of humanity.

But, Mr. President and gentlemen, I hear the objection. Perhaps, I could see on some lips an expression of pity, if not of disdain, for such an education.

You have read "Tom Brown's School Days." You remember that his father did not care the least bit for Greek and Latin. What is the use, said the old man, for gammas and omegas? No use in fact. What is the use of the baby in the cradle? The young man who has perused the whole curriculum of classics in order to attain a liberal education, could probably speak Latin or Greek. He could recite the orations of Tacitus or of Cicero, sing the verses of Virgil. He could discourse upon logic, ontology, psychology, ethics, but he will be neither an electrician, nor a chemist, nor a machinist, nor a stockbroker. What is he then? He is a scholar. To use an ancient saying: his "classes are over, his studies begin." He will be, say, a literator, he will be a poet. He will sing the beauty of our country, the majesty of our mountains, the magnitude of our lakes, the virtue of our people. He will be the Burns, the

Lamartine, the Longfellow, the Shelley of Canada. As a Walter Scott, he will tell the tales of our Canadian folk-lore. He will be an historian. He will relate the formation of our nation. As a philosopher he will point out the peculiar physiognomy of the Canadian population. He will note how the heirs of the two greatest nations of the world unite, here, their efforts. How the dualism, the warlike emulation, often too fierce, between France and England, which makes the texture of the history of modern Europe, has caused the development of faculties and resources that have contributed so largely to the greatness of the two empires; and how this same dualism and emulation, in a pacific way now, might be the condition of the vitality and of the originality of our own nation. Such and many other considerations written, I suppose, in the style of Macaulay or of Carlyle, will call attention upon us and bring to us consideration. That will be working for posterity. After all, what remains of nations except what they have contributed to the expansion and refinement of human mind? Particularly, what remains of individuals? Think of Mr. Carnegie, for instance. Mr. Carnegie has millions of dollars; he has built libraries, his name appears in large letters on the frontispiece of hundreds of these important constructions. What will this same name tell in fifty years, in the next century? Nothing more perhaps than many names of our streets which bear now no signification even to the minds of a worthy alderman. But Mr. Carnegie knows the true conditions of surviving. He knows what gives an everlasting reputation. He knows that the pleasure of putting his name on a cheque has no comparison with the glory of signing a book, and he may rest assured that his book "In the World of Business" will keep his name honored through future generations.

Very few indeed, if any, can spend the largest part of their life in the pandemonium of business, gathering millions, and, when getting old, sit and write philosophical and economic speculations. It is such a wonder that some uncharitable people think that Mr. Carnegie has paid more for what will take a one-inch space, under the form of a book, on the shelf of the library, than for the whole building!

The fact is, gentlemen, that if many writers and thinkers have written their names in the heaven of their own nation, there is a larger number of such names written on the registers of hospitals.

"Straight to the hospital does Pegasus convey his rider," is an old proverb.

This would be specially true as regards our country. There are so very few readers of solid literature! The poor fellow who has been bitten by the passion of writing is too often obliged to live and feed on glory only, and glory is a meagre diet, indeed!

Lebrun de glaire se nonruit,
Aussi noyz comme il maigrit!

And before reaching glory what an immense amount of work must be done! I dare say, that we do not know, even more, we have but a slight idea, of the every day task of the one who aspires to be a writer. I am still filled with emotion when I think of some young men whom I knew in Paris more than 20 years ago. They begin only now to be known; in a few years they will be academicians. That will be the reward of their tenacious labor. For ten hours every day they have kept a sacred company to books. M. Rene Bazin, whose works are in such a favor to-day, was almost fifty years old when renown came to him. He wrote 20 books before he could draw the attention of his countrymen. But he was courageous; he clung to his purpose. Glory smiles on him now, and—what is not altogether to be despised—rivulets of gold pour into his pockets.

Gentlemen, what are the conclusions to be drawn from these words of mine? The conclusions are that we must, at first, aim at a higher education for our young men in order to foster and assure the future of Canada. Of course, I hardly need to tell that this higher education, this aim to a liberal knowledge, cannot be the lot of the mass: Nay, I know that in all countries, this high standard of education is reserved, by its very nature, to the very few. But there must be some; there must be, in Canada, an aristocracy of potent intelligence either in literature, in arts or in science. The necessities of life, the struggle, the natural disposition of minds, will necessarily bring a selection and prepare the survival of the fittest. Let these young men who feel enthusiasm for great thoughts, who have ambition, who aspire to intellectual honors, who look for the future of the country, receive, *at first* our *moral support.* I mean, encouragement and consideration. This condition is the first in order. The second condition, which I consider to be the necessary practical condition, is this one: Let these young men have our *material support.* The French writers of whom I spoke, who study and work over books the whole day, are rich men, they have money, they have revenues. They are not troubled by the exigencies of their own life or the life of their family.

Can we find such conditions in our country? Very few, if any.

The fact is, as you know perfectly, that every one of us is bound to work, from the very beginning, for his living—*primo vivere*. As long as this state of things will continue, so long the number of our intellectual men, men of letters, artists, scientists, philosophers will be counted on one's fingers. I blame no one. I know that this is due to our peculiar social condition. It is known, however, that since the most remote times, under every literary latitude, there have been men endowed with material richness and other men who were rich by the treasures of their mind only. We have seen sympathies between the former and the latter. We have noticed this kind of silent, tacit understanding taking place between them. Give me the living, I will give you glory and perhaps immortality.

"Easily an Augustus begets Virgils.

Let Mecedes abound. Virgils shall swarm."

Oh! these scholars, these intellectuals, they require very little usually. They are satisfied of what is strictly necessary, Corneille, Boileau, Molière, Racine, Shakespeare, Dryden, prepared their immortal glory in relying on pensions of some hundred francs. It seems a law that masterpieces appear neither in extreme poverty nor in excessive richness. It is an old aphorism, that says: Equi'et paetae alendi sunt non saginandi,—Feed horses and poets, do not fatten them.

I conclude: let us have endowments, let us have pensions, rewards, situations; let us give good time and good living to our intellectual aristocrats. Leisure is the tenth muse of inspiration. A voice has been heard in the Federal Parliament and outside, asking for such favors. Let many voices join it. There are millions of surpluses in the budget. Let us unite, let us press the Honorable Minister of Finance to write down this sacred appropriation: One hundred thousand dollars for literature, arts and sciences, one hundred thousand dollars for the future of Canada. Who should say that the one thousandth part of the Dominion's annual expenses is too large a sum for this sublime purpose? I know that education is reserved to provinces, but, I fancy no one would object to a pure gift.

Then our young men will work for academic honors with the same ambition with which they work to-day for professional advancement and excellency. There will be a new career, and what a noble career!

You know how, in the province of Quebec, we are preparing our young men. You know that the classical course, which is the necessary road to a liberal education, is in great honor. Three thousand boys from 12 to 20 years old, study

Latin, Greek, literature, philosophy. Some may think that there are too many. I am not here to discuss this point. We might reasonably look for a new departure towards studies and practices which are immediately useful and enjoyable, such as industrial pursuits, business and the like. But it has been said that we have not a business head. Our French blood, our qualities, our defects, our ideals, all this constitutes a peculiar mentality which forces us to let others run for supremacy in this line; and truly, gentlemen, I confess ingenuously that, for my part, I do not think that there is any reason to be ashamed or to be sorry over it.

We will continue to stick to the essential lines of our programmes. Please bear in mind that these programmes are the programmes of such English institutions as Rugby, Harrow and Eton. It you happen to visit these world-famed colleges, you will find by the sides of the children of Dukes and Lords the son of the commoner, the son of the shop dealer of the city, the son of the manufacturer of Sheffield. There they are, the future citizens of the great empire, studying Greek and Latin in order to prepare themselves either for business or trade, either for army or navy, either for letters, a literary career, or for the art of governing a nation.

Gentlemen, I must put an end to these reflections. I feel confident that you have understood the object of this lecture. I sum up in two words: higher education, higher consideration for our men of letters.

Allow me to wish cordially that in this rich province of Ontario there may be found many a Lord Derby, who could translate as a mere matter of recreation the immortal verses of Homer; many a Gladstone who could turn the classical odes into English poetry; many a Beaconsfield who will master the literature of every age, many Elgins, many Dufferins who could answer addresses of welcome in Latin as well as in Greek. You will raise no envy. Your glory will enlighten the whole Confederation. Such is the wish of a true Canadian.