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HAVERFORD COLLEGE

BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

OF

PRESIDENT ISAAC SHARPLESS

DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF HAVERFORD COLLEGE,
SIXTH MONTH 26TH, 1888

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BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT ISAAC SHARPLESS.

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MY YOUNG FRIENDS:—I am very glad to introduce you into the guild of College Graduates. It is a guild which certainly does not contain all of the merit or goodness which exists in the world, but it does contain a very large share of it. Membership in it is not necessarily a guarantee of character, or force, or even of scholarship; but for all these things it ranks far ahead of any other guild of equal size. A relatively very large proportion of all men eminent in politics and science and letters have one day stood where you stand now. You will find among its members in this country, presidents, congressmen and judges; the writers of books which are worth writing, and the sayers of good things which are worth saying; the most of the best lawyers and doctors; practically all the college professors; many of those who are weekly preaching Christianity to this country, and daily exemplifying it; many—not so many—of our merchants, and not a few of those who take hold of the mechanical problems of our century and solve them for the world. It is a worthy community, then, who inhabit the building across whose threshold you have just stepped, and the better you become acquainted, the more satisfied you will be that you have earned, at no small cost of time and effort, the right to claim equality in it. Nor, as time passes on, however great victories you achieve, do I think you

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will say that Haverford has been anything but a faithful and honest mother, who kindly and intelligently watched over your course, and who will be very proud of all you may do henceforward. Nor would I have you to belittle what you have done. Of the thirty-two men who have been at various times associated with you in your course, just sixteen of you now receive the degree. From various causes, some of them in no wise discreditable, an equal number have failed wherein you succeed. It requires four years of honest work, a very fair amount of mental force, and a good share of moral rectitude to bring you to the place where you can be made Bachelors of Haverford College. And I am glad to believe that *you* will not hurt this honorable body by lowering its standard in any of these respects. It goes without saying that we part from you with regret, and that we look forward to your future, with solicitude it may be, but with much confidence. I know your loyalty to the college, and I suggest that the best test of it will be that you live out the principles it has endeavored to instil; that you adapt to the various circumstances of your lives the practical results of your discipline here; that you preach truth and do righteousness, as you have been taught, whereinsoever that teaching may commend itself to your consciences and your judgments. For your consciences and your judgments we have not sought to bind, and see you to it, that no other institution, no political party, no social circle, no religious organization, no pet ambitions, put such chains on you, as would tempt you to sacrifice one iota of the moral freedom of your consciences, or the intellectual freedom of your judgments. This individual liberty of thought and action does not prevent one from entering heartily into the harness of organization, to accomplish those purposes which commend themselves to him, but it will result that he will carry into it enthusiasm and energy. I am inclined to believe a remark I have recently heard, "That

just as men are voting enthusiasm bad form, women are taking up the work men are too limp or too selfish to perform." I will let that go for what it is worth, but if there is any ground for it, I believe it is caused by a feebleness of individual conviction, an indifference to the requirements of individual duty or opportunity, a merging of personal conscience and judgment into the collective conscience and judgment of some party or sect, which, in my opinion, is sapping the strength of our American nation, just in so far as it is allowed to prevail. And, therefore, I say to you, Own yourselves—work unselfishly with organizations whenever you can, but never sacrifice your individuality to any of their requirements. The memento you have left on our walls, which your kindly hearts have conceived and your skillful hands executed, tells you and us that it is possible to feel loyalty to an institution which, even in the formative days of your early manhood, has encouraged great freedom of thought; and if you are honest to your best convictions, you will not lack friends and parties to which you can ally yourselves, and with which you can work in a way to bring out all that is in you.

In the organizations, the rules and conditions of work must be observed. It is no mark of independence to be disloyal or illegal. Personal wishes and views must often be sacrificed or waived; the machine itself, so long as you remain in it, must not run with friction through your negligence or opposition. This much I am sure you have learned here, not only in your relations with the college, but with your societies and athletic associations. The internal life of a dormitory college is a world in miniature.

I take it, then, that a college experience should and does develop these two things, not at all incompatible with each other—efficiency as members of organizations, and freedom in intellectual operations. The systematic training of the mental powers should

certainly create efficiency in any work to be wrought, and the large proportion of college men everywhere in prominent places proves that it does. These men are, I believe, not only the most energetic and wise, but the most deferential, the most humble, and they have the most of all those qualities which go to make agreeable co-workers. Omitting the baldest specialists,—a class which, however useful they may be, are not to me the most pleasant to contemplate—it is undoubtedly the conclusion derived from minglings with men that the better one is educated, the broader becomes his grasp of principles, and the more he towers above his fellows in intellectual force, the more truly humble he becomes. From his greater elevation, the more the fields of ignorance seem to open out before him, and the more he knows and confesses his poverty. Just as the increase of astronomical knowledge has degraded the place of the earth from the central, chiefest body of the universe to a small subordinate of a small star, so increase of mental culture reduces the relative importance of one's own accomplishments and exalts others. And not only has it seemed so to me, but I can show you many testimonies, from the well-known one of Newton, that he had only waded ankle deep into the edge of the sea, while the great ocean lay unexplored beyond, down to the humility which says, "I was not born for court or great affairs; I pay my debts, believe, and say my prayers;" that all truly great men are modest men. Let the profound wisdom of the man who did not write Shakespeare be heard: "Let no man think or maintain that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word or the book of God's works; but rather let them endeavor an endless progress or proficiency in both; only let them beware that they apply wit to charity, and not to groveling; to use, and not to ostentation.

"It is without all controversy, learning doth make the minds of men quiet, generous, amiable and pliant to government; whereas ignorance makes them churlish, thwart and mutinous."

Of all the charges against an advanced education, the one that it fosters intellectual pride seems to me the most baseless. The effect in theory and practice is just the reverse. There is no man more willing to go into the world's labors, with coat off and an open mind to learn to do, than the college graduate. There is no man more willing to serve as a private in the ranks, in any good cause in which he is interested, than the broadly-trained man, whether he be college graduate or not, and there is no man more tenacious of his own views, more proud of his own achievements, as Bacon expresses it, more "churlish, thwart and mutinous," than the ignorant man.

As your college education will promote efficiency and agreeableness in organized work, so it will promote freedom in your own moral and mental willings and doings. Some men have to think for the world—the world wants its thinking done for it—and you can take that place better than any other men of your generation; it may sound audacious, but no one will fail to recognize the fitness of the situation, or dare to call you usurpers, if in a truly scholarly and reverential spirit you quietly take up the burden.

I know you are cherishing in your hearts a desire and intention, each in the sphere in which he settles, to be reformers. The word *reformer* has a captivating sound to a young man, and especially to one with your possibilities. I am glad you are, and I know you are cherishing no Utopian expectations. Let me repeat the words of Horace Mann: "Let me ask whether among all the spectacles which earth presents is there one fairer and more enrapturing to the sight, than a young man, just fresh from his Creator's hands, with the unspent energies of a coming eternity wrapped up in his bosom, surveying and recounting in the solitude of his closet and the darkness of midnight, the mighty gifts with which he has been endowed, and the magnificent

career of usefulness and blessedness which is open before him; and resolving with one all-concentrating and all-hallowing word, that he will live true to the noblest capacities of his being, and in obedience to the highest law of nature." I would have every young man of fair opportunities make such a vow in very earnest, and I know he can live it out. With the multitude of good objects of personal and corporate endeavor, there is reformation enough needed to employ us all. If a man will only live up to his possibilities, and make his body, in Huxley's oft-quoted words, the ready servant of his will; his intellect a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order; no stunted ascetic; full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience;—if a man can do this, or any approach to it, then let him record his vow, that he will be felt in the efforts which make for righteousness in the world's progress, and will do what will justify to himself and his friends the title of reformer.

What is a reformer? A reformer is not a professional innovator who destroys old things for the sake of the joy of destruction, and the complacency of feeling that he has made his mark. He must clear much rubbish, but he is careful to hurt no tender growths of goodness,

" 'T is but the ruin of the bad,
The wasting of the wrong and ill,
Whate'er of good the old time had
Is living still."

He carefully measures his strength, and takes no cases he does not hope to master; he is not a mere theorist, who pushes an idea regardless of its bearings on others; he has firm convictions, but he holds them subject to revision with every new argument; he is not swayed by mere force of numbers against

him, and never backs down when he knows he is right ; he does not yield to discouragement, but quietly works away and bides his time ; he does not make enemies when he can avoid it, for he wants all the assistance he can in compassing his ends ; but he fears not to characterize meanness and vileness by their proper names ; he is not anxious for credit to himself, so his work goes on, but leaves to the future his meed ; he shares his friends' obloquy, but does not ask them to share his own, even though they may have caused it ; he seizes every legitimate aid, uses every pure instrument ; is fertile in his resources and vigorous in their application ; asks not quarter, but gives it ; obtrudes not himself, but his cause ; does his work quietly, and stays not his hand in the face of public opposition or misrepresentations ; seeks associates to help him, and shuns the bitterness of heart and loneliness of spirit into which defeat drives so many men ; shirks no responsibility, neither does he seek it ; uses alike well-meaning bigots and intemperate enthusiasts, and judges unerringly the capacities of every man, friend and foe ; in short, is as wise as he is zealous, and as pure and unselfish as he is energetic and powerful.

Such is my idea of a true reformer. If words of mine could impress on you the nobility and exceeding great rewards of such a career, I know you would turn modestly and determinedly into your task with an honest resolve, in greater or less spheres, to fill in the outline with your own lives. Do not allow physical or mental ease, or the fear of the cry of bad form, or anything else, to be in the way of taking your stand for what is right, and when the chronicles of the deeds of goodness are written by the impartial historian of the future, let many pages be given to the sons of Haverford.

One cannot but respect the literary as he also does the religious ascetic. Mental culture is a noble end as well as a

means. It affords resources of pure and elevating joys. The man who consigns his life to the quest of high scholarship is vastly higher in the plane than he who works for any selfish ends of a material or physical sort. A life of lettered ease has many excuses and much positive justification. Immortal fruits have occasionally been produced by such a life. But I take it that sometimes it may only be an excuse for laziness. Application does not weaken culture. How many of our scientists, from Newton to Newcomb, have used their talents at no expense to their power for administrative work. How many of our writers have efficiently performed a patriot's duty in foreign parts or in our halls of Congress, and have been none the less historians and essayists. One must steer clear of the rocks on both sides—on one he finds the ever-present pressing world tempting him away from intellectual exertion; on the other, he finds, if he takes pleasure in mental work, a desire, not less potent in some cases, to make himself ever a recipient of facts and a developer of powers of which the world has had no use. I need not say the former danger is by far the most harmful and seductive; the other, perhaps, need not be mentioned to you except in so far as to point this moral; That continual effort should be made to make whatever powers you have practical and useful, either to the world around you, or to the generations to come; that all your acquisitions should be continually seeking a place not only to develop themselves but to apply themselves to work. There is plenty to be done; the fields are very white; workmen are needed,—workmen that know how, and are willing to put hands and brains to their tasks. I cannot begin to tell you the causes that need your championship. You will have to find them in your work, in your rest, in your homes, your social circles, your business, your politics. When you see an evil, strike at it, and aim the blow with all the deftness of your acquired scholarship, and all the

force of your developed powers. When you see a struggling good, steady it and hold it up, and give it not only the efficacy of your inborn talents, but all the wealth of the intelligence and culture of collegiate training. Keep alert for chances to act.

The active life is the normal one. An old preacher has said that the boy who can sit still on a chair more than ten minutes ought to be shoved off; and somebody else, not a preacher, has expressed something that means the same,—that the man who can wear a paper collar a week is not good for anything else.

The boy aforesaid is no more abnormal than the college graduate who is not expecting activity to be his constant experience.

The active life is the useful and the happy one. Not merely the philanthropic worker, but the worker in any part of our machinery of the nineteenth century civilization, if he be honest and true to all his duties, and keep down selfishness, is furthering the cause of real goodness. It is no accident that the moral and material progress of the world advance together. It is no accident that our country is not only the most energetic in developing its resources of living, but the most righteous in the world. The scholar that toils over the solution of the complicated political and legal problems, that builds our great structures, that cures our physical ills; the merchant that brings face to face want and want, and satisfies both; the laborer that heaps the dirt or builds the wall, if all done in the true manly spirit, is pushing on the world in intelligence and righteousness, is developing himself as he ought to develop, and is enjoying his powers as he alone knows how to enjoy them.

We may respect the literary monks, and admire the ideal proportions of their intellects, but the cultivated brain put to work develops into a brawnier and more pliable organ than they can show.

And yet, O brethren ! what if God,
When from heaven's top he spies abroad,
And sees on this tormented stage
The noble war of mankind rage ;
What if his vivifying eye,
O monks ! should pass your corners by ?
For still the Lord is Lord of might,
In deeds, in deeds, he takes delight ;
The plough, the spear, the laden barks,
The field, the founded city marks ;
He marks the smiler of the streets,
The singer upon garden seats ;
He sees the climber in the rocks,
To him the shepherd folds his flocks.
For those he loves that underprop
With daily virtues heaven's top,
And bear the falling sky with ease,
Unfrowning caryatides.
Those he approves that ply the trade,
That rock the child, that wed the maid ;
That with weak virtues, weaker hands,
Sow gladness on the peopled lands.
And still with laughter, song and shout,
Spin the great wheel of earth about.
But ye ! O ye ! who linger still
Here in your fortress on the hill,
With placid face, with tranquil breath,
The unsought volunteers of death,
Our cheerful General on high
With careless looks may pass *you* by.

—*Robert Louis Stevenson.*

Now I have just one more thought to express,—a thought which you have often heard before, but which, if I could make it as fresh to you as it is to me as I write, you would not object to as trite,—that all we have been speaking of can be secured inside the lines of Christianity better than anywhere else. I

have great respect for the reverent and honest doubters concerning the claims of the Christian religion. I would not have even that forced into unwilling and resisting intelligences, only I would have them give it the vantage ground and the presumption which its position, as an established faith of civilization, entitles it to, and lay themselves open to all its subtle influences, and then it might take its chances.

First, as to self-ownership in one's own moral and mental operations—freedom of conscience and judgment. Has not every Christian, from Paul downward, rejoiced in the consciousness of it? Have not the bondage of sin, the thralldom of habit, the fear of public opinion, been very real things till Christianity drove them all out? The slave or prisoner in chains knows no servitude if he have the freedom wherewith Christ makes him free. The intellect clouded with false philosophy feels the mists clear away under its inspiring beams, which tell not only to prove all things, but to hold fast to what is good.

It supplements philosophical theories, lifts the mind above distracting, unprofitable speculations, and satisfies the reasonable intelligence seeking a solid ground of truth, and is a philosophy worthy a thinking mind, such as does not exist elsewhere. The benumbed conscience, too, recovers its spring, and joyfully takes its proper place when it removes the passing load.

Then as to efficiency in organized work. How Christianity develops on the one hand, deference to others' views, and, on the other, courage in the support of our own. How it ever preaches unselfishness, the key to all successful effort. "Look not every man after his own," has abundance of practical applications in this connection. The whole spirit of the New Testament is kindness and charity for all, earnest work for the general good, submission to the powers that be, elimination of self, membership in a

body so complete that no one can say to us, There is no need of thee.

Then take the sketch of a reformer, which we had a few minutes ago ; or, better still, write out your own ideal of one. Is there in it any component part which is not a component part of the Christian character? Can you base a real, wise reformation on a better standard than on the injunction to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves? Or on the example which not only stayed the rashness of Peter's sword, but also hesitated not to drive the profaners from the temple, and characterized the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees by its proper name.

And, lastly, as to asceticism. It is true that the pillars of the East, the deserts of Africa, and the retired mountain tops of Europe, tell the life which men have thought, in past ages, that Christianity demanded of them. Traces of monasticism still linger around our religion. But consider the Christian Church of the United States to-day, the best exponent of Christianity, taken as a whole, in any land, or any time; and it is a Church which puts to work every power of man. It leaves no evil unattacked; it searches the world over for worthy causes; it impresses the culture and the ignorance, the riches and the poverty, the strength and the weakness, into its service, and finds work for all. Its subtle spirit draws from his closet the dreamer, and he plunges into action; it takes hold of the selfish accumulator of knowledge or money, and the hoarded wealth goes into beneficent enterprises; it says to the ascetic, not only Cease to do evil, but learn to do well, and he comes down off his pillar, and plunges into the city's streets; it says to everyone, Work while it is day, and the bounds of knowledge are enlarged, the limits of evil and suffering are circumscribed, and truth and beauty prevail.

And so I say to you that the thinking, progressive, reformatory spirit, which I know you admire as I do, has ample provision for itself in the established religion of civilization, and loyalty to it is, I believe, the most hopeful attitude to secure intellectual freedom, conscientious living, and lives of power.



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