At the age of fifteen, Theodore Dwight Woolsey entered Yale following a long tradition on both sides of his family. His mother was a granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards and a sister of President Timothy Dwight, and Benjamin Woolsey, his great-grandfather, graduated from Yale in 1709. Woolsey’s academic interests were in English poetry, classics, and theology. After graduating as valedictorian in 1820, he studied law for one year in Philadelphia with Charles Chauncey (Yale 1792), and then enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary in November 1821. Woolsey returned to Yale as a tutor and completed his theological studies at the newly opened Divinity School. Although he started to preach in 1825, his strong interest in the classics spurred him to go abroad and study in the great intellectual centers of Europe. When he returned to the United States in 1831, Woolsey was appointed by the Corporation to the new Yale Professorship of Greek Language and Literature. He became the most eminent Greek scholar in the country.

Overcoming serious misgivings about his own fitness for the presidency—and for ordination, which was still a prerequisite for that position—Woolsey was “Ordained to the Ministry of the Gospel” and then inaugurated as President of Yale on October 21, 1846. He served for twenty-five years, through a tumultuous period for the school and the country wrenched apart by a Civil War. Woolsey changed his field of instruction from Greek literature to political science and international law while President, and became a recognized authority in these fields. He also wrote several notable books on both subjects. Enormous changes occurred during his administration. When Woolsey joined the faculty in 1831, there were only six professors, the President, and seven tutors. The student body numbered 331. By the time he resigned on October 11, 1871, such distinguished faculty as Noah Porter, James Dwight Dana, Josiah Willard Gibbs, Daniel Coit Gilman, Othniel C. Marsh, Gustave Jacob Stoeckel, and William Dwight Whitney had been appointed. William Graham Sumner taught political and social science, Henry A. Beers was a tutor in English, and the total number of faculty had reached fifty-seven. The first American Ph.D. degree was awarded in 1861, the planning and construction of the Peabody Museum of Natural History had begun, the first indoor gymnasium opened, and Farnam Hall was built. The School of Fine Arts opened in 1869 as the first college-connected art school in the United States and admitted women as well as men. Tremendous expansion was taking place across the University.
Once again, the Corporation elected to have the retiring Yale President remain as a member of the Corporation. Woolsey served until 1885, when he retired at the age of eighty-four. Alfred Bellinger, a distinguished member of the Yale faculty, wrote of Woolsey: “His name is familiar to every son of Yale, but his influence is far deeper than his fame, for he was one of the earliest and one of the very greatest apostles among us of teaching and learning, those twin pursuits whose goal is wisdom.” Two years before his death in 1889, the Connecticut General Assembly passed an act renaming Yale College as Yale University, a measure Woolsey had strongly favored. It is altogether fitting that so significant a figure was honored with a bicentennial building, Woolsey Hall, built in 1901-02 to serve as an auditorium for concerts, lectures, and official University functions.

1 R. D. French, The Memorial Quadrangle, 369.
DISCOURSE
THEODORE DWIGHT WOOLSEY, OCTOBER 21, 1846

When an individual, who has served his college half a generation, is simply transferred from one post to another, it seems hardly necessary that he should set forth his views of college education, or explain the principles according to which his own conduct is to be shaped. As for him, he has been known and read of all men acquainted with the institution where he is placed: as for college education, it is to be presumed that he will merely carry out, according to his ability, principles already established. If revolutionary changes in discipline or teaching were demanded, the guardians of the college would call in from abroad some stranger, whose views had not been formed in the institution itself. To select an important officer within the bosom of the college, and from the number of the faculty, is a proof that persons best acquainted with the seat of learning expect no radical changes,—no improvements, even, but such as result from the system already received. And certainly, if such were not the case, it would be necessary to seek for an entirely new faculty. I speak in the name of the corps of teachers, when I say that, while we are sensible of imperfections adhering to us as individual teachers, and of other imperfections arising from want of means to carry out our system to its legitimate results, and of other imperfections still, derived from the newness of our country and the small demand here for the most finished education; we are also well convinced that the principles of our system are sound; and that its results, small as they are, are enough to encourage perseverance, and to discourage experiments in an opposite course. Yale College is from of old at once a conservative and an enterprising institution,—conservative of great principles, and of a system which long reflection and experience have approved; and enterprising in carrying forward that system towards its perfection as fast as its means and powers will allow. And so well convinced have its officers been of the general correctness and success of the scheme, that any thing like want of harmony, or important difference of opinion upon leading measures is almost unknown; we are all of the same college politics;—if I may so express myself, progressive conservatives, aiming at carrying out and carrying forward the principles understood and put in practice during the two administrations which have lasted for more than fifty years.

But although the circumstances under which I enter into this new office may not render it necessary to explain my views of the best practicable college system; it may yet be not unsuited to this occasion to enquire what the leading features of such a system will be, as contemplated from the

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1 In justice to himself, the author of this address ought to say that it was composed in the leisure of about a fortnight, at the busiest period of the College year, and under the first influence of the responsibility of a new office, in wearying mind and body. Nor has he had time, since it was delivered, to read it over—Dec. 11, 1846.
highest point of view. In other words, what does Christianity say respecting
the training of youth at the time of life, and in that state of their progress,
when they become members of our higher institutions? To what conclu-
sions must a Christian teacher come with respect to the effect on the minds
of the young to be reached by him as a teacher, when he looks in the light of
Christianity at science, at man, and at the ends of living here below? And I
wish it to be observed that I speak of such a teacher in his vocation as a
teacher simply: as a man and a Christian man, he may have important rela-
tions to his pupils, which arise from the fact that he is among them and in
contact with them as a teacher. These relations I have nothing to do with
now, and will leave them out of sight. They belong to a wider division of
Christian morality; and are so far dependent upon the peculiarities of the
individual, that they cannot altogether be brought under general rules.
What I aim at is a matter which, if it can be ascertained at all, must have an
application to all teachers, notwithstanding their special traits of character;
to all colleges, notwithstanding special differences of organization; to train-
ing every where, notwithstanding the peculiarities of national institutions
and manners. It is to find out, if possible, what a mind thoroughly trained
itself, and taught by experience, would say respecting education in colleges,
when it looked at them from a Christian sphere, and contemplated them in
their bearings on the best interests of man.

And in the very terms of this enquiry, I fear that there is something
contained, which shows that I am not the fittest person to pursue it. If the
subject fell to your part, Sir,1 after the experience of nearly fifty years, and in
the evening of what we all believe to be a truly Christian life, we should
receive what you said as a legacy suitable to your character as a Christian
instructor. It would indeed still be an ideal;—for who feels that in education
we have reached the just measure of things, even so far as the theory is con-
cerned? But it would be an ideal shaped by much thought, harmonizing
with long experience, and sketched at an age when the false gloss of life and
the tide of popular opinion have lost their sway over the mind of the mature
Christian. I feel, Sir, that the best thing I can do is to climb with difficulty to
a position, where I may have that view of my subject, which is an easy and a
natural one for you.

The result aimed at by Christianity will be differently regarded,
according as the passive or the active element predominates in the nation or
the individual. To some it will appear as the purification of a vitiated
nature,—the effort to reach perfection. And where this way of thinking pre-
vails, there will be comparatively little inclination in the Christian to go out
of himself in efforts to benefit his race. His virtues will be those of self-
government, self-denial, and inward communion with God. His turn of

1 President Day, who was sitting by the side of the author of the address.
mind will lead him to retirement; meditation and tranquil repose. To others, again, it will appear that to do good to mankind is the end which Christianity seeks to effect. Those who embrace this view of goodness, will spend their strength out of themselves. Their virtues will be benevolence and self-sacrifice. Their propensity will be to live in restless activity, to be urged forward by hope, to despise whatever is merely theoretical, and to look away from themselves. When this tendency becomes extreme, the principles by which the life of the soul is nourished, dry up; and the character becomes bustling and superficial, full of zeal, but deficient in true earnestness.

The man of well balanced mind will not, on the one hand, be too exclusively dazzled by a beautiful idea of perfection, nor, on the other, hurried forward by fervent longings for the accomplishment of good out of himself; but will unite both these views of character, and attempt to realize both in his own case. In him neither the passive nor the active element will predominate. He will feel that passive virtue is not the whole of virtue; that contemplation and solitude, not being the state for which man is made, will prevent rather than further his perfection; that truth itself needs the contact of society to be tested and rendered impressive. And yet, on the other side, he will feel that self-purification principles, and frequent meditation upon them, are necessary even to sustain active habits of an elevated range; and that perhaps the worst state into which a man or a nation can be brought, is to become exclusively practical; since without constant recurrence to fundamental truths, the good pursued becomes earthly instead of heavenly, and the mind loses its faith and its power.

If our remarks are just, the Christian teacher will try to avoid both of these extremes—that of overvaluing theory and the improvement of the individual; and that of ascribing value only to the practical results of education in society. The pursuits of a teacher give him naturally the first of these tendencies. He cannot help regarding science as of value in itself, and the communication of it, for its own sake, as a noble employment. Into the other of these tendencies, however, he may be led by the pressure of men without the walls of his seclusion; if he live in a practical age, and among a people of an active, energetic character, he may be led to believe that the exclusive aim in education is to fit young men for useful and respectable stations in life. Now Christianity comes in to correct the deficiencies of both of these views. It says to the teacher, “the means which you employ have immense power upon the character which you form. Those means are truth in the form of science. If you mistake your means and teach science falsely so called, instead of true, your end cannot be attained, for your means are corrupt at the core. But your end is of immense importance also.
If you aim at qualifying young men to get a living merely, or to shine before others, to persuade and to govern them, you have an unworthy, groveling object in view; you degrade education; and your end must react upon your means, which will necessarily be divorced from truth and allied with sophistry. Your true end is to store the minds of your pupils with true principles, and fit them to discern, arrange and retain truth, in order that they may themselves be and may make others truly good.”

For let it not be imagined that Christianity, in its highest manifestations, despises the useful. Even the philosophy of Plato did not go as far as that. The useful, properly understood, is the very point at which Christianity aims. The truly useful is the good, or the means to attain to the good. The utilitarian, so called, is not faulty in the direction which he takes; he goes towards the right point of the compass, but keeps on a dead level, while the progress of the man who seeks the truly useful is always upwards.

These remarks furnish the basis of several principles touching the office of the Christian teacher, which, for the sake of impressing them upon the memory, we will enumerate under several heads, offering upon each the appropriate considerations.

In the first place, the Christian instructor will value training more than knowledge. For every use which we can make of our minds, a principle is worth far more than the knowledge of a thousand applications of the principle; a habit of thinking far more than a thousand thoughts to which the habit might lead; the increase of a power far more than a multitude of things accomplished by the power. For the principle, the habit, and the power, once possessed, are a part of the mind and go with it in its never ending progress, while the knowledge and the attainments may be soon forgotten or become useless. So it is in this world, and so it may be in the next. He who enters into another life with a great stock of knowledge only, may find it all superseded by higher forms of knowledge which he has no power to acquire; while he who should begin a new existence with his mind a mere blank leaf, but with perfectly disciplined powers, would soon be grappling with the philosophy of heaven. Just as the principle of goodness is more desirable than a million good acts without it, if you could suppose such a thing,—and that because the principle is eternal and the acts mere passing events,—just so the principles of sound thinking are more desirable than the greatest attainments of the most knowing among mankind. The mind is not to be thought of in education as a reservoir, as something merely receptive, but as a living spring, capable, under proper management, of throwing out larger and better streams.
The mind too, as trained, is fitted to explore higher truths with safety, while mere knowledge puffs up, leads to nothing better and indeed in the early periods of life tends to exclude better things. The highly disciplined man never thinks that he knows every thing, never thinks that every thing can be known, and is therefore modest, teachable and believing. The man who has stores of knowledge without a well trained mind can hardly escape from self conceit, and is liable to credulity or skepticism. It is needless to say, which of these habits is most allied to the truly philosophical spirit or most favorable to Christian faith,—to the reception of the gospel as a little child.

There are views of education current in a part of society which go quite wide of the mark we have set up. Some, and among them, “quicquid est hominum elegantiorum,” think the value of a college life to consist in a certain polish of mind derived chiefly from familiarity with the ancient classics. If a man can know so much of them as to be supplied with apt quotations in public speaking or in the company of men of taste, if the graceful Epicureanism of Horace for instance, or the antique simplicity of Homer, is so permanent in his mind, that his memory can furnish him with allusions or with passages suited to every circumstance and character, the end of education is thought to be accomplished. He is now qualified to move in a certain refined sphere for which no perennial fountain of principles would ever fit him. Such a view of education may be borne in lands where the minds of the upper classes are stagnant, where principles are established by law, and the liberty of thinking like that of “prophesying” is dreaded as the source of revolutions by the rulers; but it is intolerable in this country, where some more serious use must be made of our minds, if we would not have strong-minded but undisciplined men ride over us, and laugh at the little reach and application of our knowledge.

There are others, and not a few in this country, who would lay aside the old plans of education, and study, chiefly or exclusively, the natural sciences on account of the stores of knowledge which they contain. I am by no means willing to undervalue these branches of knowledge, and I shall presently point out one noble use to which they may be turned. But in the early training of the mind they are fitted to perform no great part: being built on observation and experiment, rather than on primary truths discerned by the reason, and assuming the form of systems chiefly according to the principle of resemblance and not through the exercise of the higher logical power, they do not tend to discipline our most important faculties. Hence very properly they are deferred to the later period of college life, where the training is nearly completed. I congratulate our College on the accession which we have lately received to our corps of instructors in these sciences; and I hope to see the time when a school in all these branches of knowledge

1 ille profecto reddere personae scit convenientia cuique.—Hor.
shall induce many to reside here after finishing their college course. But it would be an injurious thing, if the option were left to students to devote themselves to such studies extensively at an earlier period. It would be to substitute knowledge for training, and by the kind of pursuit to prevent the greatest good for which colleges exist.

I cannot forbear, here, to mention another defective view of a collegiate education, referable to the same head, which however exists rather among students themselves, than among any of the various sectaries, who discuss the question how colleges should be managed. It is that the four years life within these walls is one of elegant leisure, in which the reading of works of genius, rather than study, is to be the occupation of each passing day. This heresy in education finds believers almost only among those, who indolently dread the conquest of difficulties which lie in the student's path, and are yet ambitious of shining before their fellows, as having extensive acquaintance with polite modern writers. Our large libraries, to which all have free access, promote the growth of this heresy; and it is therefore our especial duty to counteract it by urgent warnings and motives. This is not the occasion to utter those warnings. It is enough to say that such persons are most imperfectly trained, and will find out that they are so, when they see themselves falling behind their sound-minded competitors who have taken another course. Nor is this strange, for they bear blossoms when they ought to be gathering internal strength. They not only do not grow, but positively weaken their minds and their moral powers. If they could understand what planning, what balancing, what attentions, if not on paper yet in the mind; how beauty and nature and sound thought in the arts require years of pain for their ripeness; they would see that it is not so easy a thing after all to comprehend critically a work of genius.

In fact, the hard study requisite to understand principles, does good to our characters as well as our minds. He who by close attention has mastered one branch of exact science, or who balancing probabilities decides at length how a written document is to be interpreted, becomes better fitted for the duties of self-government. Patient of labor, cautious, sagacious, exact, he can look with new eyes upon character, and is less prone than others to weariness in contending with his faults. He on the contrary who merely devours knowledge, leaves his moral powers at the end of his course as he found them, if he do not even vitiate them by overloading his mind.

In the second place, the Christian teacher will study to improve all the parts of the mind. No one can doubt that a wise man will feel the necessity of this: it may be less evident that it must be a result of Christianity. Yet a little reflection will make this obvious. Christianity is the great harmony in this world of God. It causes a harmony between the soul and him: it causes
a harmony in the soul, between the reason and the desires. Can it be doubted then that it calls us to polish this “bright jewel of the mind” on all sides. It is the grand, beautifying principle; and as in the moral system, it aims at making a beautiful whole out of rightly arranged members, so in the micro-cosm of a single mind, must it aim at the production of beauty,—at a union and unity of proportionately developed parts. Furthermore, if God has formed all the powers and capacities of the soul, Christianity must evidently recognize it as his will, that they should all be cultivated so as to go on towards perfection together. He who thinks otherwise, who from wrong religious views, for instance, would neglect the mind for the heart, or repress some powers of the mind because they are dangerous, will be revenged upon by that same neglected or distorted intellect. It will attack him like a savage, in whom force has grown without reason. It will run into bypaths of monstrous error or folly, because when it cried for improvement in a particular power, its voice was unheeded.

Perhaps there never was an age when men were so much exposed to the mischiefs of one-sidedness in religion, politics, and taste, as this. It is an age of cliques and parties, each of which commands its own press, and throws out reading matter enough to take up the leisure of its members. How can a man with his sectarian magazines, his party papers, his poetry of a particular school, in this publishing age, help being one-sided in some thing or other; and as religious ideas, political views, and art, have sympathies or antipathies to another, it follows that one-sidedness, if admitted, must run through the man. What we call ultraism in this country—where the abundance of the thing seems to have given birth to the name,—is but the one-sided tendency of minds not fully educated in all their parts, in which truths have not yet found their order and due proportion. One dwells only on human rights, and democracy or philanthropy takes an extravagant form. Another recoils from such extreme views, and because he thinks they flow from the theory, receives another more baseless, thus becoming a conservative of the English school, that is to say, a destructive at home. One is an ultra Calvinist, because he looks at a part of human nature; another an ultra Arminian because he looks at the opposite. How rarely do we see a man who adheres to that mesōteis which Aristotle regards as the finish of character. Such a one, when he is to be found, may have indeed no prominent points to strike the eye, no great originality, it may be, to interest us; but by his balance of mind and moral powers he towers above us in calm majesty, like some pyramidal peak reaching up into the clouds.

And so if we confine our attention to the powers of the mind, we shall find that to train some to the neglect of others, is fraught with evil of the worst description. This evil is twofold. First, the person who is thus unim-
proved is felt to be deficient somewhere, and even if men cannot tell what
the precise deficiency is, his power over his fellows is abridged. Next, the
power thus unimproved thirsts for employment, and being ungratified,
raises, so to speak, a rebellion in the mind,—a commotion of feelings which
burst away from the restraints of education, and if strong enough, subdue
the mind to that one power. He, for instance, who has some imagination,
and whose taste in his early training has been neglected, will be apt to dis
gust one part of society and fail of influencing another part by his want of
polish, or, if held down exclusively to studies of the logical sort, will feel an
insuperable aversion to his pursuits, and when he can, will wholly neglect
them. We do not indeed suppose that all minds are alike, or can be equally
improved in all their powers. Sometimes a power is imperfectly developed
but capable under good training of a moderate expansion; sometimes,
again, a power is developed more than all the rest, as in the case of those
who have a genius for the fine arts, and then there is need of a particular
training suited to the individual; a college for such a one is an unfortunate
place. But for the mass of minds an education nearly uniform may be
adopted with success. And the obstacles to that success arise from the moral
rather than the intellectual nature.

The evil of one-sidedness in education never appears to great, as when
you take one kind of studies by itself, and think what must be the tendencies
of a mind trained by their exclusive influence. The most important single
department in our course is the mathematics, pure and applied. It justly
claims this superior place, and far be the day, when the officers of this seat
of learning shall think otherwise. I would sooner enlarge its sphere and
increase its weight in determining college honors, than rob it of any of its
present importance. But who does not see that if education were pursued
only in a mathematical direction from the earliest years, the mind would
fail to perceive the force of moral reasoning, and be liable to skepticism on
the most momentous subjects; and that the judgment, which is strength-
ened now by another branch of study, would be left weak and unfit for the
purposes of life. In the same manner the exclusive study of moral truth,
might train the mind to search chiefly after final causes, and feel as Socrates\(^1\)
did, that there is no science but that of the end and design of things. The
natural sciences, occupying all the attention, would improve the inductive,
but not the deductive powers. The cultivation of the taste alone, by the
study of art, would spoil a mind for usefulness and enjoyment. The entire
devotion of the mind to historical pursuits would lead it away from prin-
ciples to mere events, and might even incapacitate it to see the principles of
the historical science itself.

\(^1\)Plato’s *Phaedo*. 
I cannot leave this topic without noticing a defect in our system of education, which does not at present admit of a complete remedy, and which must be felt in order that a remedy may be provided. I refer to our imperfect training of the feeling for the beautiful, to our neglect of the important field of literary criticism. What we do is to open the fountains of elegant writing in prose and verse which the ancients have left us; to accustom the student to a correct style, by pointing out his faults in composition; and to teach the art of rhetoric, both in the theory and in the examination of one of the masterpieces of antiquity. But our teaching in the classics does little else but call into use those faculties which are concerned in discovering the sense of an author; and leaves the taste to imbibe that insensible and unconscious improvement, which grows out of familiarity with the beautiful; our exercises in composition can be only the exemplification of the rules of grammar and rhetoric; while our rhetoric itself, having a practical end—persuasion—in view, concerns itself rather with the most effective arrangement of words, thoughts, and arguments, than with the laws of perfection in art. And indeed we are able to do but little more; for strange as it is, there is a woeful deficiency of works in the science of the beautiful in our language. The French school of taste and its English imitators are now exploded; the last century and its philosophy produced no works on taste, which at this time satisfy our minds; while the few specimens of just criticism with which the present age has supplied us, are chiefly oracular fragments of writers, who either judge intuitively and have no theory, or who have never published their theory to the world. And then even in the lower department of the history of literature, there are, I believe, no text-books accessible, which meet all our wants. As for the laws of the beautiful in music, architecture, sculpture, and painting, they are quite out of our view; we have scarcely contemplated them as having anything to do with the training of that “divinae particula aurae,” which might in this world be educated to behold, both here and hereafter, the wondrously beautiful and grand forms which fill the creation of God. The result of all this is that the logical faculty has too much preeminence in our education; we train up those who will reason correctly, and it may be forcibly, at the bar and in the pulpit; but they become hard dry men, men who will neither receive nor give pleasure from their elegance of taste, and refined appreciation of art. This evil is not likely to be soon corrected, as is made probable by its universality, and by the fact that the still reigning philosophy has another end—the useful—almost exclusively in view. But we can still make some resistance, even if it be an imperfect one, to the evil. We can teach the classics more with reference to elegance of style and artistic arrangement. We can bring the fine arts within the range of education. We can make use of sound
works on the laws of taste as they arise, and thus oppose the influence of that unhealthy and unreflecting school, which decides every thing by feeling only, without being aware of a single law. And when we have a system in this neglected department which will bring it to the level of the others, we may expect the happiest results. There will then be a class of educated men, whose minds, through the study of the beautiful in art, will be brought into unison with the beautiful in conduct and morals, who will be alive to impressions derived from the harmony of a perfect nature, and averse to those discords which oppose the Christian spirit of love. What the ancients meant to do by the element of music in their system, will then be accomplished. We cannot doubt, if a number of men of a delicate ear for musical sounds, were suddenly, in the midst of an altercation, to hear some noble harmony, that it would compose, subdue, pacify, and tend to unite them. And in the same way, a body of men, of tastes at once delicate and healthy, would mitigate the fierceness of political and theological strife in our country, and by their elevated standard would tend to make us feel that kind of cultivation to be necessary in which we are now most deficient. That the taste must be more and more cultivated in this country is apparent. But the danger now is that the vocation will fall into bad hands; that either a taste will be promoted which has only to do with externals,—with sensual and not with spiritual beauty; or that an erratic wildfire, miscalled taste, without laws or rationale, will seat itself in the throne of criticism.

In the third place, we wish to speak more at length of a subject which we have already touched upon in passing, that the Christian teacher in a college, will estimate education not so much by its relation to immediate ends of a practical sort, as by its relation to higher ends, far more important than success in a profession, and the power of acquiring wealth and honor. He will value science to some extent for its own sake. He will value it also as a necessary means for the formation of a perfect mind, and of an individual fitted for high usefulness. As for such results as success and reputation, he will by no means despise them, but regarding other ends as nobler and more important, he will believe that according to the system of God in this world, the attainment of the better, will involve that of the less worthy. Just as we most secure our happiness when we are most willing to sacrifice it, while he who saveth his life shall lose it, just so do we make most certain the lower purposes of education when we aim at the higher. And if we fail of the lower, there is still remaining after all the priceless mind,—all ready for usefulness, strong in its love of truth, imbued with the knowledge of principles, unwilling to stoop to what is low, and containing within itself a fountain of happiness.
Few will question, I think, that these views are in accordance with the spirit of Christianity. Whether we regard the end of living here below, which it proposes, as being benevolent action or the perfection of the individual, these views are equally demanded by a religion which postpones our material to our spiritual interests, and teaches that both usefulness and character are dependent on a healthy discipline of the mind. It is certainly against the genius of Christianity to make the speedy or the easy result of a thing the measure of its value, or to think the mind itself of less importance than its condition in life. If a truly good training made a man poor instead of rich, despised instead of honored, Christianity would not hesitate to say that it must be preferred. She is indeed far from fighting against the practical, after the fashion of some natures, who dread the thought of any thing to be done, and admire the unattainable as they do the absolute. No! She is much more humble in her pretensions, and mightier in her results, than if she encouraged this manner of thinking. But then on the other hand, she is hostile, and by her very nature hostile to the practical, so understood as to refer only to time, worldly interests, and professional success. She is hostile also to that habit of making the common mind the measure and judge of usefulness and truth, which reacts upon education to lower its sphere. Just as experience opposes miracles and the understanding mysteries,—two things which Christianity will not part with unless she is robbed of them,—just so a worldly mind, burning to act its chosen part in life, opposes a reference to any higher end; and a common understanding, perceiving how little science has to do with ordinary affairs, disbelieves in science and sees in it no dignity or worth. In all these four cases, Christianity corrects misimpressions by raising the soul above its wonted earthly level. To experience she says, that there is a higher world, and if so, that it is not strange that communications from it to this world of ours should be needed and should be made. To the understanding she says, that it was not intended to be the measure of all things; and that if there are mysteries, they need to be known that we may recognize our position as finite creatures. And in the same way she says to the worldly mind, that there are higher things with which it ought to be brought into communication; and to the practical understanding, that science, which is of God, is of infinite use, and is needed by our nature if we would not fall into credulity or skepticism.

This consideration that the highest end in the training of the mind involves the lower—that an education which common minds would not call practical, is the most practical after all, is one of no small importance. If it be true, it tends to reconcile all the views of education and all the ends of living, which can be called, with any justice, conformable to our nature. If it be not true, there must be a clashing of our higher and lower natures on so
momentous a point as the moulding of an immortal mind; and either two
types of education must be provided—one for those who have success in a
profession before their eyes, and the other for those who seek the improve-
ment of their powers as something good and great;—or if there be but one
mode of education, the youth will have a discord of feelings within him,
which nothing can allay. I can think but of two objections to it, both of
which are shown to be without foundation. The one is of a general nature;
that great scientific attainments, and great cultivation of mind unfit men
for the duties of the world, both by disinclining them to the society of their
fellow men, and by shaping their habits of thought and style of expression
into something estranged from unlettered life. You form, it will be said, a
caste, whose sympathies, whose very language is removed from commu-
nion with mankind. This would be true, if education continued, in the
sense in which we have used it, throughout life; if habits of association with
others—formed under the influence of duty or self-interest,—did not cor-
rect whatever tendency to the passive, the shrinking and the incommunica-
tive, a cloistral discipline may have produced. We all know that a literary
man is not usually the person to act immediately upon the mass of men;
and that when he originates something good, his thoughts need to be trans-
lated into other language for the use of the world. But we are not aiming to
give a decidedly scientific tendency to the mind, nor to overcultivate the
taste:—that would fall under the condemnation of one-sidedness, of which
we have just spoken. We aim rather at this—to fit young men for what is
truly useful in practical life, at the same time that we keep a higher end in
view. The other objection to the principle laid down is one of a particular
kind, and partly involved in the former. It is said, or at least felt, that attain-
ments in scholarship, philosophical training, the love of truth, are rather
obstacles in the course of political advancement. He who has attained to
power over the multitude, and the young man who learns from the anxieties
of political parties that such power is a great good, must feel that thor-
oughness and soundness in any thing, even in moral principles, do not aid
in that kind of promotion so much as power of expression, unblushing
confidence, knowledge of mankind, and a certain self-command. Armed
with these powers, and nothing else, he can outrun any philosopher or man
of taste or learning, who is without them. To this objection, we answer by a
confession of its justice. We much doubt whether a college training is at all
necessary for political success, and whether the name of an education is not
more advantageous than the thing itself. A little knowledge, gathered at
small expense of toil, a kind of philosophy about human rights, if we must
call it so, which the most simple can understand, a seeming readiness to
submit to the popular voice, united with a dexterity in leading it,—these are
not intentionally fostered, I take it upon me to say, in any respectable institution in our country. And far be from us such a tendency in education. Rather than train so, I would—to use Plato’s words—whisper to two or three young men in a corner, or even walk through empty halls. I should not like to die with this weight on my soul, that I had taken into my hands a block of the finest marble, and cut it into the form of a demagogue.

If we needed to see the evils of the lower practical views of education, when pursued to the neglect of the higher, we might find them in the history of a class of men, who played no small part in their times, and turned a name, before held in honor, into a by-word. The sophists of Greece, as a body, were by no means wanting in talents, and their great influence is shown by the important posts in their respective states which several of them were called to fill. They almost monopolized the knowledge of the time, especially in the infant sciences relating to nature. They cultivated style and external grace to such a degree as to fill their countrymen with admiration, so that while Socrates subsisted poorly upon a few oboli a day, contributed by his friends, they sometimes received a talent for a single lecture. It is wonderful that such great men would condescend to be teachers of youth, but condescend they did, because their practical spirit told them that a rich young Athenian, of high descent, or a Thessalian noble, was not to be taught for nothing. Now with what aims did they approach these young men, and what attractions did they hold out? They began with denying the existence of science and the possibility of a scientific training. “There is no truth,” they said, or “man is the measure of all things, and whatever seems true to him, that is true,” or “science is the same as sensation.” Next they discarded the study of philosophy, as unfitting its students for political life. There was no motive for pursuing truth, because the true was less fitted to persuade than the probable. To this would naturally succeed the choice of such studies as were likely to make men persuade, dazzle and govern. Rhetoric, the use of the poets, a smattering of knowledge of various sorts,—these were the means, and a place of influence, the power to control the people, the supremacy in the courts, the ends. And we must do them the justice to say that they understood their calling. But then they educated in such a way, that the young lost all moral principle under their instructions, and became frivolous, shallow and skeptical; that ancient reverence and fidelity disappeared; that chicanery increased; that the creative branches of literature died out. And had not a reaction, begun by one remarkable man of nobler aims, stayed in part the mischief, it is not unlikely that the sophists would have taken from the Greeks the power to excel in philosophy and the plastic arts.
A result of the lower views of education, naturally suggested by this example of the sophists, is seen in the undue estimate which is attached by many to ready and fluent speaking and writing. I fear that there is something in our form of government to encourage this view, and that our seats of learning, if they do not favor, cannot effectually oppose it. But it appears to me to be disastrous in its effects, both on the mind and the character of a young person. Let us suppose him to possess this readiness in an extreme degree; that he has become dexterous enough to take either side of a question, and, without preparation, manage it so as to astonish men by his rapidity and cleverness; and that, standing before an audience, he will not be terrified, but go through to the end in the full possession of his intellect. Let us suppose that his teachers or his fellow-students regard it as an important end of a college life to acquire this skill. Now must not the effect on him be to give him an instrument, before he is thoroughly trained or stored with knowledge, by which he can set off to the best advantage the smallest quantity of thought? Will not this accomplishment, if it may be called so, if acquired thus early, lead him to undervalue truth, of which, as yet, he knows but little, and overvalue the instrument by which he may shine at once, and, as it were, enter into life while yet on its threshold? And with his reverence for truth, must he not lose his modesty, seeing that he has an instrument which he can wave about and make glitter in everybody’s eyes? And with the two, must he not lose his solidity of mind and character, his patience of labor, his faith in the far-reaching value of a thorough education?

The same undue estimate of the value of a practical discipline inclines many to introduce into the college course, studies which belong to the professional life. This pressure must be resisted altogether, if an instructor wishes to adhere to the idea of a solid education, or to see any fruit of his labors. It is one of the most obvious and serious evils in our country, that men rush into the ultimate pursuit for which they design themselves, long before they are ready. In this way immaturity, the habit of grappling with subjects beyond one’s reach, want of caution, self-conceit, and a superficial acquaintance with the principles of the profession are produced; and the professions are crowded with men who feel, when it is too late, that they have built without a foundation, that they have neither compass nor accuracy of thought. The course which is at once most for the advantage of a young man and for the interests of learning, is to make him feel that his education needs rather to be prolonged than contracted; and that it will be greatly for his usefulness to continue improving himself by studies extraneous to his profession, both while he is acquiring it and after he has entered upon his career. I know it is said that a man who would succeed in his pursuit, must be “wholly given to it,” but no maxim could be more false, if it be
intended to exclude the acquisition, as a subordinate thing, of knowledge in which all well educated men may partake. Under proper regulations it consumes no time, for it is a relaxation of the mind from the monotony of one pursuit: it does not interfere with progress, by cultivating other habits of mind, for every power of mind is needed in every profession for the highest usefulness: it does not injure professional thoroughness by acquaintance with other branches of knowledge, for as all the sciences have relations to one another, these unprofessional accomplishments will be an important help in understanding the studies to which one has given himself. An instructor, therefore, will inculcate on his pupils, not that they can mingle the pursuits of the college and of after life together, in the years of preparation; but on the contrary, that education never ends, and that, when they are their own masters, they should carry out, in some direction or other, a course of training as long as they live. In the higher sense of the word education, it never ought to end; the only difference in the various stages of it depends on the maturity of judgment of the individual, and his necessary employments. At first it goes forward without his option, and when no motives drawn from the immediate results of his studies disturb his mind. Next, he submits to the law of division of labor, which governs all employments, but needs not to confine his mind to the narrowness of one pursuit. Afterwards he can and ought so to govern his time, that the injury to his mind from the belittling cares of a single employment shall be prevented, and its growth promoted in whatever is good. He who feels that his education is at an end when he leaves college, or even when he enters into his profession, is in the condition of one who thinks he has reached moral perfection. The mistake in the latter case arises from self-ignorance, or from ignorance of the exceeding broadness of the moral rule. Ignorance is equally the cause of the former mistake, but it is more venial, because we all use language upon this subject which overlooks the future and higher results of education.

In the fourth and last place, a Christian instructor will, as far as lies within the range of his department, lead the minds of his pupils up to God. I speak now, it will be observed, not of what he may do as a benevolent individual, aside from his teachings in the sphere where he moves, to amend or establish those over whom he has an influence, but of the general spirit of his teachings, which will connect science or learning wherever it has a connection with the author of science and of our minds. That Christianity demands as much as this, will not be doubted. There are indeed some departments where this can be done but in a small degree or not at all. Thus instruction in heathen literature, seldom finds good opportunities of raising the thoughts to God; and the same is true in a much greater degree of
the pure mathematics, which have to do with abstract and necessary truth, such as does not even involve the divine existence. But mixed mathematics, and especially astronomy, all the natural sciences, psychology and morals, furnish a noble field for a devout mind to enforce the relations of the highest truth to truths of the lower order. When they are not thus enforced, when nature is treated by the philosophical man as a dead carcass, when he teaches that he has nothing to do with final causes, or marks of grandeur of conception in the universe, he not only fails of doing a great good, but he positively allies himself with a spirit which would banish God from the creation. If philosophy aim only at practical results in relation to material interests, or only at the mere development of science, her mission is fulfilled much in the same way as some parents fulfill theirs, by teaching no religious principles to their children, and leaving them to form their own faith when they grow up. Philosophy necessarily allies itself in the mind of the man of science with some view concerning a creation and a providence, either one which runs into atheism and materialism, or one which finds in God the source and end of all things. Neutrality here, it appears to me, is impossible. The Christian teacher of a science where contrivance and final causes can be traced, will feel somewhat as the great Architect himself must have felt in the arrangement of things; that the end is the thing of most importance, and where it can be traced, he will listen devoutly to its voice as a revelation concerning the great Designer. I know that some discard the search after final causes, on the ground that every new discovery in science tends to carry us back to some higher law unknown before, from which the final cause, as it is called, must necessarily arise. I know, too, that what we call final is not in reality so, and that we must allow that there are infinite depths in the divine mind which we cannot explore. But is it any the less a proof of a divine intelligence at work, that what we have called a contrivance is the evolution of a law? Or must we refrain from wondering at the divine counsels until we have explored them all,—that is, until we become infinite ourselves. Or rather does it not present to us a higher idea of God, that his wisdom manifests itself through laws which rise in their generality until they span round the creation, and that his purposes ascend, as we behold them, one behind another, until to our eye they are lost in the clouds. We need not fear, then, that any new form of science will take away from the teacher his privilege of conducting his pupils up to God, any more than we need fear that some new light, or rather new darkness, will show that this great temple of nature is without a divinity, this immense body without a soul.
And to what most estimable habits of mind ought not this mode of contemplating nature and man to open the way. No blind and unconscious dynamics—no “méchanique céleste”—but celestial law, emanating from the highest intellect, controls the world; and being understood, awes the mind into reverence and harmony. The laws of nature introduce the mind to the laws of the moral world, and the two systems are seen to assume each other’s existence, and to be from one author. Nothing now appears fortuitous or arbitrary or irrational. The perception of great designs in the universe, makes the mind unwilling to act without a plan worthy of its capacities. It is unable any longer to feel astonishment at the puny efforts of man; and instead of that hero-worship, that stupid gaze at men of genius which is so common and so much fostered at this day, it worships the almighty architect, the author of beauty, the law-giver of the creation.

It might be asked here, whether a corps of Christian teachers having thus guided their pupils in the study of divine wisdom, as displayed in the universe, ought not to go beyond the vestibule, and enter in procession into the inner temple, which is full of the presence of Christ. Or must they, as profane, stop without, and leave it to other guides, whose calling it is, to show the wonders within? Is it a fruit of the lamentable jealousies among Christian sects, that instruction ex professo in the Christian religion cannot be given in colleges unless we seem to make them sectarian, and thus increase distinctions, which are great enough already. These are grave questions, which it comports not with this time to answer fully. At present, the science of sciences lies neglected by almost all except ministers of the Gospel. It forms, properly speaking, no branch of education: even the Scriptures themselves are little studied out of voluntary classes. Meanwhile, causes are at work to undermine the religious faith with which young men have been imbued by their fathers, causes, too, which must have the more influence, as the literary cultivation of our young men increases. The tendency to materialism on one side, and to pantheism on another, the literature of atheistic despair and sensualism, and the historic engines battering the walls of fact, must cause a multitude of minds in the next age to be assailed by religious doubts; and snares seem to be set for faith in revelation on every side. How desirable, if all this be not mere alarm, if the fears of many portending some crisis, in which the old shapes of things shall be broken up, be not entirely idle; how desirable, I say, that our educated young men should be taught a theology so liberal—if that might be—as not to pertain to the party, but to universal Christianity, and so majestic in its outlines as to recommend itself to the consciousness, and make it own the presence of God.
How elevated, then, is the post of a Christian teacher in one of the most frequented and influential places of learning in this great country. For my part, I must avow the conviction that all executive functions and names of authority by which one college officer is severed from the rest, sink into insignificance before this office of teacher, which is common to all. And this equality has led, in this College, and ought to lead, to a theory of government which precludes every thing arbitrary on the part of one man, and divides the labors and the responsibilities of administration among a whole faculty. To have carried out this theory in almost perfect harmony, is the boast of this College: is a secret of its success, and a pledge of what it may accomplish hereafter. Such harmony implies a harmonizing principle,—that same tone of moral feeling which is necessary to qualify a man for the office of teacher in the highest sense. Let us keep this in view, Gentlemen of the Faculty, that our true success, nay, even that our outward success depends much upon the purity of our aims. If a man is a truer philosopher, he is also a better teacher and disciplinarian for being governed by Christian principles. As for myself, in taking upon me this undesired office, it is an unspeakable strength to feel that I am among men whose principles, after long acquaintance, I can trust. And something of that same trust you extend towards me, or you must, for the first time, have deceived me. We have, then, a source of union in common views and mutual confidence. We have united together in lamenting that the time had come, when our beloved Head felt it too much for his strength to be one of us longer, and gladly, as in the case of King Hezekiah, would we have seen fifteen years of vigorous health added to the days of his Presidency. We will unite, I doubt not, in carrying forward and improving our system, as fast as the means within our reach will allow. It is wonderful what progress this institution has made within the last nine and twenty years. It will not be wonderful, but rather an easy result of past success, if, in the years now to come, we make even a greater progress. If God help us, and if our graduates stand by us with the same cordiality which they have shown hitherto, it will be our fault and our shame, if we stay still or go backwards. Let us, with the highest ends of education in view, and with a fervent desire to have Yale College a light and a blessing to our land, act faithfully our appointed parts, and I doubt not that God will be with us.