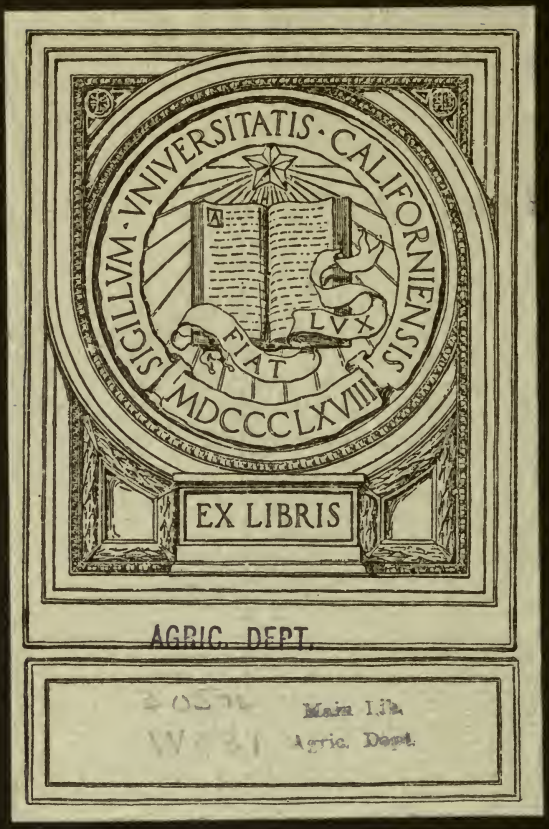
A Broader Mission for
Liberal Education
J.H. Worst



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Baccalaureate Address,
Delivered in
Agricultural College Chapel,
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AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE P. O.,
North Dakota.

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BY J. H. WORST, LL. D., PRESIDENT.

In America we recognize no aristocracy except that of genius or of character. Our countrymen are all citizens. Our government was founded upon the principle that "all men are created free and equal" and though intellectual endowments differ widely in individuals, yet special privileges are accorded to no one as a birthright. Therefore the college graduate, as well as any other aspirant, must carve his way to fame and fortune by energy and perseverance, or lose his opportunity in the tremendous activities going on about him. His only advantage is superior training which must nevertheless be pitted against practical minds in strenuous rivalry for every desirable thing he would accomplish. The mere fact of education is considered no badge of merit. Education represents power, but until it manifests itself in action, it is merely static, not dynamic, potential, not actual. It conveys to its recipient no self-acting machinery which, without lubricant or engineer will reel off success or impress mankind, as a matter of course.

The question is no longer asked by practical men "what does a man know" but "what can he do?" Knowing and doing have thus become so intimately associated by common consent as to be inseparable; for knowing without doing is indolence and doing without knowing is waste of energy. The former is sinful, the latter wasteful. For many years progressive educators have been striving against the culture-alone theory and advocating the education of the whole man—hand as well as head, body as well as mind. As a result the ancient educational structure is pretty well broken

down, and the erstwhile curriculum has become a reminiscence. Many wealthy parents still educate their children for the larger pleasure which they believe education of the old type will afford them in life, but parents generally have come to look upon life as a period of intense activity rather than a brief round of pleasure, and hence provide an education for their children that will fit them for the every day demands that duty or necessity may make upon them. Since it is a matter of common observation that wealth is easily dissipated, especially when inherited, farseeing parents prefer an education for their children that is adapted to some useful end rather than the education that is largely ornamental or fashionable.

The vicissitudes of life are many. Fortune is fickle and but few young people can hope to command perpetual leisure even should their bad judgment make such a thing desirable. There can never be real independence of thought and action apart from one's conscious ability to cope with others on equal terms in any human emergency. The young man who rejoices in the provident hoardings of his ancestors which exempt him from strenuous exertion on his own part has but a small mission in life. Work is the normal condition of man. The stern necessity that compels him to labor, to think and to plan, lifts him into the pleasurable atmosphere of usefulness and imparts zeal and ambition to his energies. There can be no "excellence without great labor", and "hard work is only another name for genius."

A young man cannot begin life with a richer heritage than good health, good habits and a liberal education—an education that imparts culture to his mind and power to his body. If he should never have occasion to use his hands in some useful vocation, the training they have received will never prove burdensome. On the other hand, the fact of being in possession of reserve powers will prove a source of pleasure. It will dispel many a dark cloud and remove positive forebodings of possible want. The world is strewn with the wrecks of men who inherited fortunes before they had developed the mental poise or business experience necessary to estimate money at its true value. If they had earned their money by honest effort they would not have fallen into habits that led to unbridled extravagance and ultimate disgrace. The inheritance of unearned wealth quite frequently proves a curse rather than a blessing.

God never intended, however, that parents should provide a property inheritance for their children that will deprive them of the natural advantages which reasonable labor and its restraining influence afford both body and mind. Parental drudgery and self-denial for the purpose of relieving children from the necessity of wholesome effort is mistaken generosity. It makes parent and child alike fall short of the high purposes for which life is given. For life is intended for more important purposes than mere money-getting or the pursuit of objects from which man is utterly divorced at death. Poor indeed must be the soul if, at death, it must part from all it loved in life. But this frenzy of excitement in which parents live in order that their children may be heirs leaves no time for the consideration of higher and better things. How much more lamentable, too, is such striving in the light of the fact that those who are to be benefited by these inheritances are in reality harmed and checked in their development. Said Senator Dolliver: "If I had a son and $100,000. I would keep the two apart."

Every man owes a duty to God, to his country, to his family and to himself. To discharge these obligations honestly, fearlessly and with credit should be his earnest purpose. No ambition should be entertained that does not embrace these fundamental duties and no career should be considered worthy that even underrates their sanctity. The fact that men occasionally become prominent in business, social and political affairs by subordinating conscience and character to position or gain should not swerve a young man from the strict path of rectitude. Victories won by strategy or injustice, whether in business or politics, seldom remain permanent and never afford substantial enjoyment. Society has but little use for the man who wears a mask.

In this busy world there is honest work for every man to perform. Civilization has multiplied human wants and also developed the ingenuity necessary to gratify them. But it requires labor. Not such, however, as was performed by the slave, but skilled labor—labor where the hand is guided by an intellect, quickened by the agency of class-room and laboratory for the task assigned; labor, such as will reflect credit upon and elevate a gentleman. For there is no honest work a gentleman may not do. Work elevates a man. It perpetuates the manhood he inherited, which was built up by labor and thought in the flesh and blood of

his ancestors. The necessity for labor, therefore is heaven's blessing and to repudiate it is to invite physical and mental decay.

Liberal education should take a far wider range than has ever been assigned to it and exert an influence affecting matter as well as mind. It has a double mission, that of facilitating earning power to provide for physical comforts and also to prepare them to live.

In a republic where every able bodied citizen is an equal factor and where one is possessed of mutual privileges and obligations, society demands that each shall do his part. To be consistent society also should afford equal educational facilities for all; facilities having as direct bearing upon vocation as upon profession, and for those desiring it, an educational training as liberal for manual pursuits as is required for law, medicine or theology.

The standard of manhood must advance to meet the new conditions and the tremendous responsibilities of the century we have entered upon. Within the present boundaries of the United States there exists the requisite area, soil fertility and other resources sufficient to support a government of five hundred million people. Our patriotism, therefore, must be directed toward realizing the largest possible destiny for our country. We should strive so to conserve the natural resources of the nation that with six or seven times our present population there will be no abridgment of opportunity to make a living and to fulfill the purpose for which life was created. The experiment of self-government will have to withstand severer strains in the future than in the past unless our education is as democratic as our politics. The educational energies of the nation must be so diffused as to uplift all classes, reducing to the smallest possible minimum the army of unskilled workmen. Through skill and training, labor must become pleasure. Steam and electricity must take the place of human energy, lessen waste of raw material and elevate the hand that guides the machine.

The present generation is sinfully extravagant. Forests, mines and soil fertility are wasted with wanton prodigality. We speak of our coal deposits and oil and gas wells as inexhaustible. We simply mean that it will be impossible for this and probably for the next generation to exhaust them. But coal mines are not inexhaustible. Oil and gas wells are problemetical as to the length of time they will yield their products. To such an extent have the

forests been destroyed that substitutes for timber are already sought for building purposes and manufactures. Timber that would be worth millions of dollars to our grand children is burned in a day to provide a sheep pasture on some western mountain. We seem determined to waste and destroy what we cannot consume or turn into ready money.

European countries abound in sad memories of wasted soil fertility and forest destruction. Slowly but surely they are rebuilding and rehabilitating worn out tracts at tremendous expense. The ruin which ignorance accomplished with alacrity, education is slowly and painfully undoing. Americans should heed the lessons of history and profit by the mistakes of other countries. The production of food, clothing and other necessaries of life which is of vital importance to a nation, cannot, with safety, be left to blind forces or to revered but ignorant traditions. For it is a singular fact that science had quite as much to do with ridding agriculture and the manufacture of commodities of debilitating superstitions that not only retarded progress but were positively injurious to both man and material, as it had to do with the introduction of rational ideas. The rapid increase of the world's population and the very general occupancy of arable lands throughout the world, presupposes that the maximum of food production will soon be reached. A liberal and general diffusion of scientific information among agriculturists alone can augment the productive power of the soil and at the same time conserve its fertility for the support of future generations. This subject demands a real awakening of public sentiment as to its importance. Provision must be made for thorough training that will direct the labor which produces the fruits of the earth. Thus to broaden the scope of liberal education it must be divested of all aristocratic limitations and rendered sufficiently democratic to meet the wants of the sons of toil.

The question naturally arises, will the general introduction of science studies in American schools tend to lower the standard of scholarship? If so, will the more democratic and hence utilitarian influence it exerts, compensate for the change? To the first question the classical schools will quite generally and naturally give an affirmative answer. But the answer must not be considered as conclusive in settling the question even if believed to be true, in

view of the contention that surrounds the second question. More than scholarship is needed to direct and control the affairs of men. Mere scholarship—book-learning—is seldom effective in the solution of intricate national and economic problems. For profound judgment and constructive ability, such as frequently become imperative in great crises are qualities which are not evolved through classical investigations. They are born rather of experience and contact with the rugged every day affairs of life. To exert a guiding influence in the affairs of state one must feel the throb of living forces and come in touch with the great heart of humanity.

The study of ancient languages has long held the honored place in the universities of Europe and America as peculiarly essential to mature scholarship. They answered the purpose intended, for the sciences were unknown or in the infancy of their development and there was but little besides the ancient languages with which to train the student mind. But should they dominate the curricula of the twentieth century? Do they meet the requirements of this intensely practical age?

Whatever may be said against the materialistic tendency of the present time, the scholarship of the idealists at least did not retard its growth. Materialism abounds everywhere at present. The object sought by introducing scientific in lieu of classical studies in some of the higher institutions of learning is that facilities may be afforded the children of the productive classes, such as they can accept and which will have a directing influence upon labor. Whether such change will tend to increase or lessen materialistic tendencies, remains to be seen. The conditions will certainly be made no worse. For to balance educational forces and more nearly to equalize educational opportunities can only result in improvement. Equilibrium of intelligence tends to unify and harmonize American interests and to strengthen patriotism. And should liberal scientific education thus extend its beneficence to all conditions of men, especially to those hitherto unprovided with facilities for preparation for their vocations, we can at least endure the innovation, for it does not aim at the impairment of educational opportunities so long maintained for students able or desirous to take classical training. Some of the foremost educators of the day admit that the study of the sciences possess as much disciplinary

value as that of the ancient languages, and the information obtained, even though incidental to the culture sought after is of inestimable value in the practical affairs of life. The fact that but few instructors are prepared to teach the sciences as creditably as they are to teach the ancient languages, does not weaken the claims set up for scientific education. In the opinion of many sound educators, the cultural advantages of the dead languages, all things considered, are received at the expense of more important subjects. Says The World's Work: "The easier and better way of retaining, restoring and greatly broadening the culture-studies of a college course is to recognize the culture of our own language and literature. A broader and saner and more humane and thorough and loving study of the literature of our own race is the obvious way out of the dilemma. And it is more than an escape from a dilemma. It is a better means of broadening and deepening our culture than we have ever utilized or tried."

The ancient classics as taught in high schools are of but little cultural value. Not one student in a hundred reaches the degree of attainment that presupposes a positive benefit. If the time were devoted to acquiring a more thorough understanding of our mother tongue it would be more creditable. To give time to translating good Latin into poor English is paying an extravagant homage to a fetish. Training in the ancient languages must be long-continued and far-reaching, or it seems to be of little value. The needs of culture cannot be satisfied by mere discipline any more than they can be satisfied by merely utilitarian subjects. But where the training is essentially practical and directly helpful in discharging the highest of all human duties, that of providing the necessaries of life, while at the same time affording abundant opportunity for the study of the language and literature of our own race, the blending thus of cultural and practical training should possess a clientage immeasurably larger, because more useful, than where only the purely cultural is sought. Where the head is educated away from the hand and the number fitted for ministerial and professional duties far overruns the demand for service, a heavy burden is imposed upon the producing masses. At the same time thousands are graduated every year for positions that have only a prospective existence. The professions are overcrowded to a degree that challenges the sanity of the country's educational

energies. And were it not for the gravity of the theme, the strenuous defense that is set up for the system and the efforts put forth every day to still further augment the number of neophites for professional honors, it would seem ridiculous.

But why this overcrowding? Because the atmosphere of the professional institution fills the student with prejudice against physical labor. It is menial. His education has fitted him for something nobler than to toil in the field or in the work-shop. Institutional rivalry also does its share, sending out alluring advertisements and thus filling the college classes with recruits from the farms and from the homes of labor with candidates for positions in life of greater respectability than their parents were able to enjoy. The seeds of prejudice against rural life and manual labor are often scattered in the country schools by teachers innocently imbued with the "ideal condition." The fascinations and allurements of the city readily impress themselves upon the youthful mind, and the fact that facilities for liberal education were not offered for the relief of the toiling millions, unless to transform them into a different social element, naturally turned the eyes of those who were able to obtain a liberal education toward the cities.

It remained for the federal government to attempt to turn the tide that was setting too strongly toward urban life. The government's remedy is not prohibitive legislation, but what should have been afforded without direct government interference— a liberal education with a direct bearing upon agriculture and the mechanic arts for those who naturally desire to fit themselves for such pursuits; to place the farmer and the artisan upon an intellectual and social plane that will attract rather than repel those who would develop the country's resources. At the same time no effort should be made, for the sake of patronage or for institutional advantage to influence a student from the calling his heart honestly indicates as the one for which natural taste and native ability, quickened by educational training, fits him. The thing to be avoided, rather, is the inculcation of prejudice against useful vocations and desirable pursuits as being undignified and consequently beneath the notice or ambition of a gentleman.

Do scientific inquiry and scientific knowledge generally diffused augment human greed? Do they tend to promote avarice? Most certainly they do not. The man of science can see so

much beyond—so much of beauty and design that even the drudgery of toil is forgotten in contemplation of the forces which he aids or controls.

No thoughts can arise above the thoughts of God as written in the growing plant or painted upon the bow that arches the sky. To the man of science, even the raw material which he reconstructs into useful commodities contains a revelation in every grain and fiber. The swelling bud, the opening flower, the growing plant, the greeting shower, each is a chapter from Nature's open book, full of inspiration. Beyond them and above them he sees the hand and hears the voice of God. And since he lives and works thus close to Nature's throbbing heart and in close communion with forces that link the finite to the Infinite, who dares to spurn the dignity of his toil or characterize his associations as menial.

To live is man's first duty; to live well his privilege. But the world has its severe as well as delightful aspects. The divine law which commands man to subdue and replenish the earth is not less mandatory than that other law which commands him to "lay up treasure in heaven." And just as material wants antedate the soul's awakening or reason's dawning, so throughout all life. physical well-being precedes and contributes to the growth of the higher life.

But, in the language of Herbert Spencer: "That increasing acquaintance with the laws of phenomenon which has through successive ages enabled us to subjugate Nature to our needs, and in these days gives the common laborer comforts which a few centuries ago, kings could not purchase, is scarcely in any degree owed to appointed means of instructing our youth. The vital knowledge—that by which we have grown as a nation to what we are, and which now underlies our whole existence, is a knowledge that has got itself taught in nooks and corners; while the ordained agencies for teaching have been mumbling little else but dead formulas."

But we may hope for better things. We may, some of us, live even to see liberal education divest herself of exclusive restrictions and eighteenth century idealism and walk hand in hand with twentieth century progress; this will be when the "overwhelming influence of established routine" shall give way to practical knowl-

edge and love for the ornamental in education shall no longer override the useful.

E. P. Powel, in The Arena for April, most beautifully and expressively contemplates the schools which are to be. He says: "I will picture what I believe to be the common school of the twentieth century. There will be handsome schoolhouses in abundance, placed in the center of large gardens. The children will study books half a day, and things the other half. The brain will not get any more training than the hands. Manual culture which is already a part of the school life of a few towns, will be a part of school life everywhere. The school will have its shops and its gardens—and to use tools will be the chief end of culture. Man got away from the monkey by his power to make and use tools. He goes back to the ape when his hands have to be cased in gloves and his brain is ashamed of decent labor. In these school-gardens botany will be applied to horticulture. In the shops our boys and girls will learn to create things. The trouble with education now is that it divorces knowledge from work—the brains from the hands. In the twentieth century the glory of American education will also be a thorough knowledge of economics, civics and history, applied to good citizenship. Colleges will surely be a part of the common school system, and just as full of modern life. I believe we shall see the day when boys and girls who are in the common school together, without damage, can be co-educated in all other grades of school life. The farmer will then not have a separate and specific college for agriculture, while the rest have one for 'mental culture;' nor will college boys in those days be ashamed to look ahead to farming as a profession. There is no occupation that requires so much wit and educated tact, and so much positive knowledge as farming. When we get the schools, we shall get a style of farming that will be as keenly intellectual as our present style is wasteful and unintelligent."

And yet, strange as it may appear, the mission and purpose of an agricultural college must be constantly defended in a state almost wholly devoted to agriculture.

In conclusion I quote from Herbert Spencer again: "How to live?—that is the essential question for us. Not how to live in the material sense only, but in the widest sense. The general problem which comprehends every special problem is—the right

ruling of conduct in all directions under all circumstances. In what way to treat the body; in what way to treat the mind; in what way to manage our affairs; in what way to bring up a family; in what way to behave as a citizen; in what way to realize all those sources of happiness which nature supplies—how to use all our faculties to the greatest advantage to ourselves and others—how to live completely. And this being the great thing needful for us to learn, is, by consequence, the great thing which education has to teach. To prepare us for complete living is the function which education has to discharge; and the only rational mode of judging of any educational course is, to judge in what degree it discharges such functions."