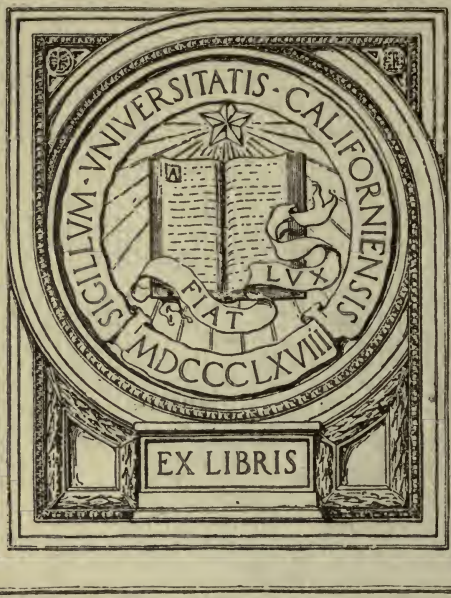

Quarter-Centennial Address

Delivered at the Commencement of Mills College, May 26th, 1897, by Wm. C. Bartlett, LL. D.

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When a German naturalist in exploring the valley of the Amazon came suddenly upon the *Victoria Regia*, he saw for the first time amid the uncultured affluence of nature, the one supreme blossom of the world. We have come after a quarter of a century into this valley, rimmed by these encircling hills, where art and culture have touched the landscape and a nobler inspiration has touched many hearts, molding them to inward and outward grace, to find our *Victoria Regia* here. For in the closing days of the nineteenth century, the one supreme blossom of our civilization is in that culture and higher education of women which this institution illustrates to-day.

A quarter of a century ago, or more, the site of this institution was little more than a cow-pasture. The coyotes barked in the hills, the note of the wild dove accentuated the isolation; birds sang among the alders and the brook rippled its undertones as it went down to the sea. So it had been for a thousand years. When the founders came with anointed eyes, they took account of all this beauty of environment. The hill sides bourgeoned in gold, and the valley blushed in many shades of pink and scarlet. But there was no *Victoria Regia* here. There were long years of patient toil. There was not a college dedicated to the higher education of women from the Rocky Mountains to the shores of the Pacific. It is not less a marvel to-day that two consecrated persons working as a unit should, with no large fortune, and with no large gifts from outside sources, have founded a college, given it to the public, and have witnessed a maturity which elsewhere might have been the slow ripening of a century.

Said Daniel Webster in his famous argument for Dartmouth College, with suffused eyes, "Sir, it is a small college, but we love it." If to-day there are some to say this is a small college, there are more to say, But we love it for what it has been, what it is now, and what it will be in the unfolding future. We love it also for all its associations. For the granite monument that crowns yonder hill top—the symbol of the imperishable work of Mills, and for the associations of Haight and Eldridge, of Eells, Dwinelle, Bryant and Meek—of Harmon and Pearce, who having accomplished their work in this behalf, have gone home in the ripeness of their years to eternal rest.

It falls in with the spirit of the day to group with the names of Atkin and Mills, those other pioneers of education Durant and Brayton, Veeder and Sill, and to say of this noble brotherhood what one has uttered of another :

> Oh, my comrades! Oh, my friends!
> If this parting be the end,
> Then will I count my life divine
> That I have known such souls as thine.

It is related that in one of the fiercest battles of the civil war fought by General Thomas, as that patient and invincible soldier saw one of his brigades as it was marching up a hill in the face of a withering fire, their ranks melting away, exclaimed for once in the bitterness of his soul: "They can't do it! They can't reach that hill top!" When one of his staff approached, laid his hand on the General's shoulder and said: "Time, General; give them time." And then his eyes filled with tears as he saw his brave men stand victoriously on the summit. Some of our friends have fallen by the way, but the hill top has been reached. Time, patience and an overmastering faith have been the elements of victory. The days of small things have made up an aggregate of great things.

Emerson somewhere relates that his greatest veneration was for an old Quaker lady who said, yea; and when all the world said nay, she still said, *yea*. For more than a quarter of a century, while some part of the

community have put their doubts into a nay, the President of this College has always said *yea*. All things worthy to go on record to-day have been done with a yea. It has been supplemented, as it were, by a divine affirmative. The everlasting no strikes no chord of permanent achievement. Said a noted chieftain to one of his subordinates, if you are defeated, you will return by such a route. I shall return, said he, by another road, with God and victory.

By virtue of this yea, the landscape has become more than a picture; roses climb lovingly to porch and window, stone has been laid upon stone, academic walks invite to high communion, and there is an annual going forth of trained minds to put a nobler stamp upon the life and thought of the State.

All higher culture, as represented here, exalts the office of home-maker and bread-winner. The two are inseparably joined; for where the one is not found, neither is the other, save in some intermittent way. The home is the foundation of the State. Every new and well-ordered home strengthens that foundation. And the supreme excellence of home is that a cultivated taste therein is inseparable from morals and from religion itself. And this taste is sure to find expression as well in the cottage as in the most costly mansion. The most exalted ministry of life goes with the educated woman, whose creative genius has filled the house with sunshine and song, with art and inspiration, and with beauty and love. Ten thousand homes are needed in this State, molded to these finer issues.

Numbers do not determine the character and greatness of any educational institution. But rather the quality of the training which sends men and women out to make their record in the world.

There is a substantial advantage in being well born. Good lineage, with a little blue blood, is never at a discount if an ancestral name has been worthily borne.

Oberlin College, chartered in 1834, gave four years later, the first collegiate diploma granted to any woman in the United States. From that college a few years later went Mary Atkins to Benicia, and there established the

school which became the germ of this institution. That is one line of descent.

Mary Lyon had already planned the Holyoke Seminary and placed it in advance of all others for the facilities it furnished for the education of young women at the smallest cost. She had planned it for higher education, putting on record that she "cherished the hope that the school should be to young women what the college is to young men." Although for many years that institution was content with the modest name of seminary, it accomplished the essential work of a college, and was the first for the exclusive training of young women in that respect in all the land. Long before it took the chartered name of a college its classical standard was so high that it needed no advance in the final transition. Better than all, it was born of water and of the spirit. From that institution came the President of this college with the same plans, purpose and spirit. The seminary should one day, as Holyoke, slowly ripen into a college; at the same time conserving all its more elementary advantages. These are the lines of descent. There could not have been a better lineage. It is good enough for ancestral worship. All memories are fragrant as rosemary and rue. Over in western Massachusetts, in that most picturesque county of Berkshire, hardly two hundred miles from Holyoke, Mills, one of the founders of this institution, was preparing for his life work at Williams College. He had caught the inspiration of that other Mills who a few years before, with his companions, behind a haystack, had prayed the American Board of Foreign Missions into existence.

These associations are fitly grouped on this quarter-centennial day. It may be that they count for less here than they would near some of the older seats of learning. They will count for more here in the fullness of years, when other walls have been reared and a greater throng of alumnæ come here to keep the day.

At the close of the last century the standard of education for women was very low in this country, if, indeed, there was any standard at all. Mrs. John Adams, wife of one of the early Presidents—herself a woman of many

accomplishments—said that "female education in the best families, went no further than writing and arithmetic, and in some few and rare instances, music and dancing." That condition had not essentially changed up to the first quarter of the present century. Even in the New England academies—the preparatory schools for the colleges—it was not thought quite the thing that any girl in those days should follow hard after her clumsy big brother in the study of Greek and Latin. If by virtue of an indomitable will she went further, the college door which admitted the one was barred against the other.

The first High school established for girls in Boston, was closed for a time, because there were so many applicants for admission. The public was as much astonished as if an epidemic had suddenly broken out. What was the world coming to when young women wanted to know as much as young men? It was an early symptom of that coming recognition of the equality of educational rights. One after another the barriers would be broken down. Even at old Harvard there would some day be an annex where young women could look over into the college preserves, and if after years of study they were found to know as much or more than young men, they could have a diploma instead of a degree.

A quarter of a century, or more, after Mary Lyon had expressed the hope that Holyoke would be for young women what the college was for young men, Mathew Vassar, as if inspired by that very declaration, in the same language, expressed the hope that in founding Vassar College, it "should accomplish for young women what our colleges are accomplishing for young men." The spirit of Mary Lyon finds expression in this wealthy and uncultured business man.

"Our chief want in life," says Emerson, "is somebody who shall make us do what we can. That is the service of a friend. With him we are easily great. There is a sublime attraction in him to whatever virtue there is in us. How he flings wide the doors of existence!"

The declaration of equality of educational rights was the herald of the new era in the last half of the nine-

teenth century. Men and women emerged from the bondage of old traditions and went out into the broader fields of human activity. Equality of educational rights would sooner or later evolve equality of political rights. There was a time of blossoming for a new intellectual fruitage. From that springtime blossoming came Holyoke and Vassar, Bryn Mawer, Wellesley and Smith, and Barnard and Mills. The newer universities adopted the system of co-education. But that expedient, so far from meeting the new demand, only made these separate colleges for young women a greater necessity.

You cannot tell how much light a diamond will reflect until all the facets have been cut and polished. It is not the half-round culture which the new era demands for young women, but many-sided and symmetrical as to the whole; and every angle so polished that it makes for sweetness and light. That culture consists not only in having, but in being, and imparting and in working up to the noblest ideals of life. It makes for the largest increase of life. It takes account of gracious manners, of winning conversation, of art in all its forms and colors, of philosophy which gives the reason of things, of the wealth of classic tongues, of the symbols which represent the small dust in the balance and which may stand for the measurement of a star in the heavens; and, more than all, for the friendship of God which lifts faithful and steadfast souls up to His communion and love. If there is any lower ideal so that heart culture is left out, womanhood is eclipsed by a selfish isolation.

There is a symphony of Haydn full of rich expression at first; but one by one the players cease and go silently out until only one is left upon an empty stage, in solitude and darkness. The last note is the climax of emptiness and desolation. There is the literal fulfillment of Haydn's symphony where isolated selfishness becomes the highest ideal of life. Sympathy and love die, the notes fail on many strings, and the richer music of life subsides into a wail on a desolate stage. Fullness of life—the full orchestra of the soul responsive to human interests—the ministry of souls making a better world

through sacrifice and love and eternal hope. That is the ideal of rounded and symmetrical culture.

It is not many years since the proposition was boldly challenged that what was good for men in the way of attainment, was good for women. How can you expect delicate young women to endure the hardship of college study and discipline? They will all break down or fail by the way, said many a conservative holding fast to his ancient traditions. It was reserved for a woman to furnish this pungent answer:

"I would like you to take thirteen hundred young men, and lace them up, and hang ten to twenty pounds of clothes on their waists, perch them on three-inch heels, cover their heads with ripples and chignons, and stick ten thousand hair pins into their scalps. If they can stand all this they will stand a little Latin and Greek."

What is most needed to-day is a new and incarnated public conscience. Never before have thoughtful and educated women grasped the great public questions of the day as now, nor have they touched the questions of social life with such plastic force. Without a ballot, they are shaping legislation and furnishing new ideals of citizenship. What a large place there is to-day for this potential and beneficent work!

Said a notable scholar and critic not long ago: "The prevailing spirit of the country as shown in its public utterances, in its journals, in its poetry, and in its politics, is not promising, it is not modest, it is not serious, it is not large minded, and it is not high minded. It is evolved from lower ideals which have made mediocrity the rule, and excellence in all the walks of citizenship the exception."

There is a day coming when there will be new and nobler ideals of citizenship. Back of this coming revolution is the trained and thinking woman. Hardly a recognized force in molding public opinion a quarter of a century ago, to-day bringing her conscience and quickened intelligence to the solution of some of the most vital problems of the age. The new investment of civil rights will come as sure as there is the slow march of a clarified justice and a divine judgment in the world. Social science

is the order of the day; but it may not illustrate its best equipment by clamoring from platforms, nor by the exhibition of imported freaks for the delectation of popular assemblies. The great moral and social forces of the world are not the less potent that they work silently and beyond the range of common observation. If we cannot trace the rivulet in the crevices of the rocks, has it less creative power when it heads in the spring and carries its line of life down to the making of gardens in the desert?

All higher education, as illustrated here and elsewhere, is a training for leadership in thought and action. It may not extend beyond the small town or village. But what potency it may have there, where in many instances the sorcery of Circe counts for more than the winning power of the saint!

Said a Greek philosopher, I dwell in a small city that it may not become less. Wherever one of these who has been trained here shall abide the little city or town shall not be less, but more for her presence. Nor may her leadership be less that it is veiled by the beauty and fragrance of a life toward which the young are drawn with rythmic steps for gentle ministries—for words that are like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

The end of all training is consecrated power. When Michael Angelo became old and blind, he asked his servant to lead him forth that he might touch the marble torso of Phidias. Passing his hand over the statue, he entered into the life, the thought and the inspiration of this greatest of Grecian masters. Not the touch of any marble, not the broken statue, nor the mold of divinest form can inspire these highest ideals. That inspiration comes when we are led forth to enter into the life and spirit of Him whose ideal of citizenship is of both the earth and the heavens. Working in that spirit, for teacher and scholar, for singer and sayer, the horizon lifts and broadens, and evermore there is the promise of the life that now is, and fruit unto life eternal.