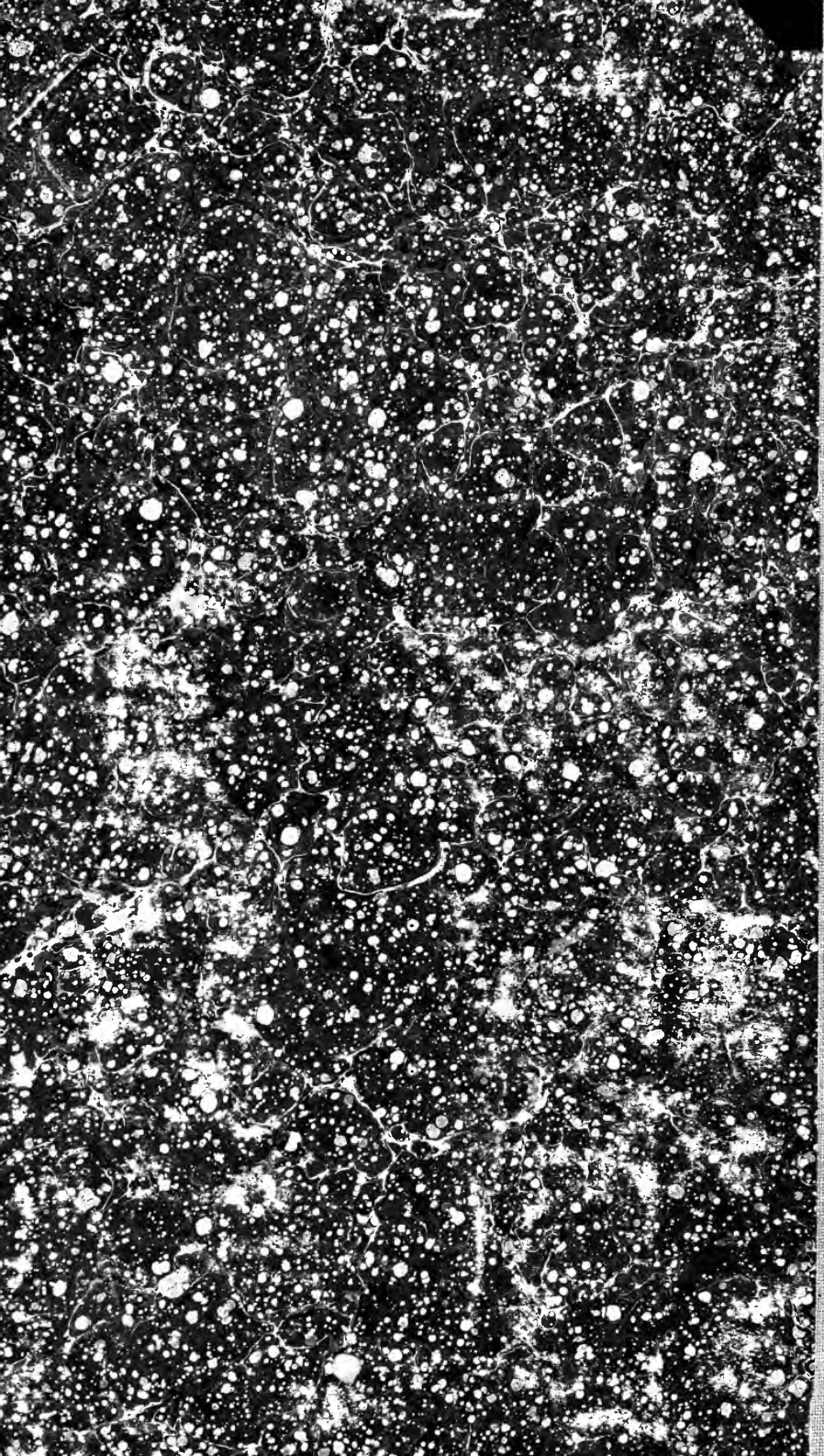


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T H E

Raison d'Être of the Public High School.

By GEORGE STUART, A.M.,

Professor of Latin in the Central High School of Philadelphia, Pa.

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THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL.

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OUR ordinary ideas of the ground on which the public high school rests and of its relation to the body politic are too often loose and shifting. At one moment the institution is regarded as the result of a kind of benevolence on the part of the State, and the money appropriated for its support as a public gratuity. At another, the institution is looked upon as one in which the children of a well-to-do favored few may, for their own individual advantage or distinction, add a few finishing touches or some ornamental appendages to the education acquired in the lower schools. Too rarely is the public high school regarded as an essential part of the social structure, and in the same sense in which halls of legislation and of justice or systems of police are parts of the same structure.

To fix and focalize our loose and shifting ideas on this subject, let us ask and answer the following questions: 1. What is the reasonable ground upon which the public high school rests? 2. What is its relation to the body politic? 3. What are its functions and how should it perform them?

In what we have to say on this whole subject, let it be understood that by body politic we mean a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people," and that reasoning which may be irrefragable when used in reference to such a government may fail utterly when applied to other forms of government; and that by public high school we mean any public institution imparting superior as distinguished from elementary instruction; and that institution in which the principles of art, literature, and science

are explored to their farthest limits is our ideal public high school, whether it be called academy, school, college, or university.

The application of the argument herein presented is necessarily limited to a popular government; for under other forms of government there are privileged classes, with class prerogatives and strongly guarded barriers separating the classes. But it is the peculiar glory of a free people that the individuals of whatever classes exist pass freely from class to class, or rather gravitate from class to class under the attraction of conspicuous fitness, and he who is governed to-day may be a governor to-morrow.

What, then, is the reasonable ground on which the public high school rests? We shall begin the answer by showing that the State does not establish charitable or benevolent institutions from motives of charity or benevolence. On the contrary, the principal motive is undoubtedly selfishness. In proof of this assertion it is not necessary to say that charity cannot be predicated of States or that corporations are soulless. The State simply aims at compassing a certain end for its own well-being. It cares not whether A or B is to be the beneficiary; its purpose is that those who are to be beneficiaries shall be the best fitted to be beneficiaries. It recognizes that there always will be beneficiaries entailing burdens and discomforts upon the citizens, and it believes that it is best for the body politic *not to leave to chance* the relief of such persons; and, notwithstanding the expense incurred, society is the gainer in decency, in comfort, and in safety. The State neither gives, nor has the right to give, value for nothing. It always expects at least an equivalent; and if the equivalent be not received, or forthcoming, it either miscalculates or is defrauded. The existence of private charitable and benevolent institutions does not alter the case with the State; these depend on chance, upon which society must not depend; and thus while they lessen, they do not remove, public responsibility.

We shall next observe that the State does not establish prisons and penitentiaries from motives of vindictiveness. Here again the principal motive is selfishness. The State does not care one whit whether A or B is to be imprisoned; its intention is that those who are to be imprisoned shall be the best fitted to be prisoners. It recognizes that the violation of law and the commission of crime will be constant, and it believes that it is best for society *not to leave to chance* the removal of this constant menace

to its well-being; and notwithstanding the expense incurred in supporting penal institutions, society is the gainer in good order, peace, and safety. The existence of private reformatory institutions does not alter the case with the State. Such institutions aid in the work of repression and reform; but the State believes that while they lessen, they cannot remove, public responsibility, and it finds solid foundation for its belief in the irresponsible atrocities of lynch law and vigilance committees.

Similar arguments may easily be framed in defence of other institutions established by the body politic for its own well-being; as the lazaretto, quarantine, public sanitation, illumination of cities, coinage of money, regulation of commerce, etc. In each instance the decision of the State is that the welfare of society demands that the object which the institution has in view *shall not be left to chance*, whatever private enterprise may contribute to its accomplishment.

It is wholly in recognition of public responsibility that common schools are established by the State, and the almost universal consent with which this responsibility is acknowledged is evidence of its weight. Equality of civic rights, equality of civic responsibilities, and equality of civic duties belong to all the citizens of a free State. Without a full enjoyment of rights, a full comprehension of responsibilities, and a full discharge of duties, either the State or the citizen suffers. If the State suffers, the rights of all are menaced; if the citizen suffers, his equality is impaired. Hence the citizen must know; he must receive the elements of education; his intelligence must be awakened and his mind developed; he must learn his relation to the body politic, and while he learns how to enjoy his civic rights, he must also learn not to neglect his civic responsibilities and his civic duties. Hence the popular verdict is that the education of free citizens for citizenship *cannot be left to chance*, and that the public school system stands in precisely the same relation to the body politic as other great institutions established for the well-being and safety of society. The existence of numerous private schools cannot alter the case with the State; these aid in the dissemination of knowledge and the broadening of intelligence, and while they lighten, they cannot remove, public responsibility. They are schools for such of that small, rich minority as may prefer them. The failure of any State to establish free public schools lessens the citizen's

responsibility. But recently, in the city of Naples, during the prevalence of the cholera, some soldiers sent to apply disinfectants as a means of sanitation were assailed and either killed or wounded by an ignorant and superstitious mob, who imagined that the disinfectants were in some strange way responsible for the cholera. Such ignorance and superstition cannot exist by the side of the free public school. The pupils of such a school soon learn that heaven never helps a man when he can help himself, and that it is vain at such a time to pray against the force of inertia.

At this point we make the digressive remark that the efficiency of the American public school in training for citizenship is likely to be severely tested in the near future. Until within recent years, the immigration into our country was nearly homogeneous and largely sympathetic, and assimilation was comparatively easy. But recently there has appeared in our midst an element peculiarly alien in race and sympathies, or revolutionary in tendencies, and in numbers sufficiently large to disturb the calm posture of our social forms and the settled traditions of centuries. Against the subversive influence of this element our common school is our tower of strength, and civics as a branch of instruction assumes paramount importance.

We come now directly to the public high school. How is its existence as a part of the social structure justified? How does it appear that society receives far more than an equivalent for its cost and is the gainer by it?

To genius and superior abilities is due the progress of the centuries. The thousand comforts that solace modern social life and the many artificial beauties that surround and adorn it are all the products of art, literature, and science, and due to the directive power of genius and superior abilities. We are in almost every way immeasurably better off than were our forefathers. Blot out that progress and measure the distance separating the two social planes. Does the difference startle you? How does your rush light compare with yon arc light shining like a nascent sun? The difference in power between those two lights is the exact measure of the amount of benefit that the directive power of genius and superior abilities has conferred upon society. Now sum up the whole cost of developing and utilizing those abilities and compare it with the benefit to society. Shall we retain the cost or the

benefit? Nay, it is the constantly accruing benefit that enables society to pay the cost and still have a rich surplus.

Society has manifold need of directive power. It is needed in executive, legislative, and judicial seats. It is needed in State, Church, and School. It is needed in the administration of finance and in the conduct of social institutions. It is needed in the development and application of art and science, in journalism and in literature. We need inventors and discoverers to give us the best that nature has for us; and we need a whole army of literary workers to form our judgments, guide public opinion, cultivate our tastes, and minister to our intellectual and moral wants. And when these needs are supplied, it is not merely the whole body politic that is benefited, but it is in an especial manner that great majority of it which is not gifted with superior abilities. In the parable of the talents, he that received five talents and he that received ten each returned with splendid usury the trust committed to him; while he that received the one talent could do nothing but bury it in the earth and stand and fold his arms. What would he have done and what would have been done for him under competent directive power? "Education is growth, and develops a force that presses outward, ever enlarging its sphere, until it pervades all the region of thought and carries its inquiries into every field of enterprise and speculation. It does not unify, but diversifies our ideas, sentiments, and convictions. To teach men to think alike is compression. To teach men to think apart is expansion. The force of education is not conservative; it is radical."¹

Genius and superior natural abilities are the inheritance of comparatively few. Rich indeed is that State which has the largest endowment of them, for it has the prime elements of greatest material, moral, and intellectual strength. We cannot create them, but we can develop, train, and utilize them to the maximum of their potential, and we can create an hereditary tendency to the transmission of them. Any loss of superior natural ability through lack of the proper development or training is a loss of wealth and power to a community. But great natural abilities are the rare inheritance of rich and poor alike; and the poor (or those who would be unable to pay for higher education) in every State always constitute a very large majority of the

¹ Allen Andrews.

people; and, what is noteworthy in this connection, the rich lack the spur of necessity, which is the proverbial mother of invention. That a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people" should be without the public high school, and should look for its manifold directive power to *chance* and that quota of superior natural abilities furnished by a small rich minority is a paradox reaching the climax of folly and the eclipse of reason.

Whither, then, can the State or society look for directive power but to its public high school, college, or university? It is needless here to enlarge upon the value of individual directive power. The total directive power of society is always a whole greater than the sum of all its parts. Yet in times when physical strength in battle counted much more than at present, the directive power of Regulus was rated at a thousand common soldiers. Newton gave a new basis to the solar system and a sure foundation to the nautical almanac. One electric arc light may be equal to six thousand candle-power. At one electric touch the earth contracts her ancient dimensions and New York confers with London at call, London with Calcutta. The Psalm of Life is a perpetual soul-building homily radiant with heavenly philanthropy. The discovery of electric welding during the present year by Prof. Elihu Thomson, a graduate of a public high school, will, it is estimated, save in time and material millions of dollars annually; and to the State of which he is a native it will certainly save in the same way an annual sum far greater than that appropriated to the high school of which he is an alumnus. The military and naval academies of our country furnish additional illustration of the value of directive power and of its benefit to the State. The cadets, admitted on tests and subjected to wholesome mental strain and discipline, are the foster-sons of the government. For their costly maintenance and education the State expects a *quid pro quo*. Is this cost a gratuity? With what golden usury it is returned let Lundy's Lane and the Constitution and the Kearsarge bear witness; let the fate averted at Gettysburg bear witness; let Appomattox Court House bear witness, while it twines the olive-branch around the laureled fasces.

The public high school thus stands on solid ground and becomes an essential part of the social structure. It is not merely an essential part, but it is the essential part which originates, moves, and directs all the other parts. It is the eye and senso-

rium of the body politic and the State's perpetual policy of insurance. The money appropriated for its support is not a gratuity, but a public investment which elevates and enriches society and makes the intellectual greatness and the material strength of States.

The argument which thus necessitates the public high school also prescribes its character. Consider the word *high* in this connection; emphasize it a little; give it voice and a tongue and it will speak eloquently. In order that the resources of art, literature, and science may be realized in ever fresh benefit to society, their underlying principles must be explored to their farthest limits. Equipment, appliances, and corps should be thorough and complete, and instruction in principles sufficiently extensive to lead the student up to original research. Mediocrity in these respects is mental stagnation; inferiority, intellectual starvation and death. Preparation for college or any other private institution is not a necessary function of the public high school, which should either be in itself, or culminate in, a state university. This ideal public high school has already been realized in several parts of our country, and reveals the destined trend in which all our educational lines are surely moving to convergence.

The existence of private high schools, colleges, and universities cannot remove public responsibility. These supplement, in some degree, state delinquency, and have in the past furnished considerable directive power. But they are institutions for a small rich minority, and the sum annually paid for higher education in them is a convincing proof of the value of that education in developing and utilizing great natural abilities. And let us not forget that we are speaking for a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people."

Notwithstanding the directness of the reasoning which thus constitutes the public high school an important part of the body politic, a few objections to it are still urged. Of these some are trivial, some specious, but none of them true. The rich man without children, or sending them to private institutions, objects to paying the high school tax because he does not directly participate in the benefit. O for Menenius Agrippa to relate again, as once at the Sacred Mount, the fable of The Belly and the Members. For, dullard that he is, this rich man must then either consent, or refuse to pay the tax for street-lighting because

a public lamp has not been placed before his own door, or the poor tax, because none of his family is in the poorhouse. This rich man is, however, rapidly disappearing.

The remaining objections may all be classed together as those resulting from so-called over-education. These are the most specious and the most dangerous because they are urged by respectable journals and newspapers. The crying evils of this over-education are all summed up in the following extract from one of our most influential journals: the students in our public high schools are "aiming at something beyond and above their social rank and condition." Do you, Mr. Editor, really need to be informed that the object of the most rational system of education is to develop and utilize to their maximum all the child's inherited abilities? Or is it for you to tell us, contrary to reason, just how much of his abilities it will be best to develop and utilize? Do you, an expounder of democratic principles, need to be told that it is the freeman's inalienable right to do that work in society to which his conspicuous fitness is his best title? Or do you mean that it is a serious objection to be too skillful a machinist, too able an engineer, or perhaps too clever an editor? But, pardon us, Mr. Editor; we mistake your meaning. You mean that by some hook or crook society may appoint the graduate to some field of labor for which he is not qualified. That would indeed be a serious blunder; and so much the worse for the society committing it. Now listen to us, Mr. Editor, while we address the same students: "Young men, it is a praiseworthy ambition in you to be aiming to better your condition. Strive to develop and utilize all your inherited abilities. Society has a just right to expect this of you. Conspicuous fitness is the American citizen's only title to superiority. Let great examples stimulate your activity. Recall the big-hearted Lincoln, the rail-splitter, whose pen gave the whole country freedom; and the silent Grant, the tanner, whose sword gave it peace." Is there any demagogism in this, Mr. Editor?

From the reasoning which necessitates the public high school and determines its relation to the body politic we are enabled to deduce, as natural and easy corollaries, its functions, and the manner in which they should be performed. The State recognizes that all its directive power must be selected from those of its citizens having the best natural abilities according to their conspicuous

fitness, and that, as it is the developing and utilizing power of higher education which gives to directive power its greatest value and efficiency, it can look with confidence and justice for this higher education only to its public high school or state university. It therefore follows that the chief function of the public high school is to furnish the State with the directive power necessary for its political and social well-being.

A secondary function of the high school in each State or subdivision of it must necessarily be to stimulate into greater activity and keener competition all the lower schools, and to act as a radiating center of thought and mental activity, and thus to elevate and refine the general tone of the community. For "the force of education is centrifugal." The location of the school should always be near the source of largest supply, or in centers of population. The exclusion of everything partisan or sectarian from the course of study tends to develop a character without prejudice or bias, and free intercourse on a plane of entire equality gives to that character a breadth and homogeneousness in harmony with the spirit of our government quite unattainable in private institutions, where the pride of wealth and social distinctions based thereon too often build around themselves a narrowing wall of exclusiveness.

The doors of the public high school are open to rich and poor alike. The State does not care whether A or B is to be admitted. Its purpose is that those who are to be admitted shall be the best fitted to be admitted. Conspicuous fitness is the only title to admission, and this fitness must be determined by competitive examination. The quota system of admission is wholly illogical and is based on a misconception of the functions of the school. Socrates justly ridiculed the Athenians for choosing some of their public officers by lot. Promotion in the school should be determined by the same criterion. Tests should increase in severity with the progress of the course. Wholesome mental strain sustained by wholesome exercise is a wholesome hygiene. When the limit of capacity in any case is reached, a vacancy should be declared. Limit of capacity is a safe indication of limit of fitness. The public high school is neither a reformatory nor an asylum for feebleness. The State builds its greatest expectations on the survival of the fittest.

The curriculum or course of study should connect closely with

the studies of the next lower schools. The reason for this is obvious. The educative process is a succession of ascending steps connected like the links of a chain.

“From nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten-thousandth breaks the chain alike.”

Until within recent years higher institutions of learning had a single undivided curriculum, in which the classics and the humanities played a dominating part. These served mankind long and well. But an evolution was in progress mightier than classic veto or papal bull or warning voice of Cassandra. The latent forces of material nature began to be utilized, and science clamored for recognition. A fierce struggle ensued. Science thrust and the classics parried, and the issue seemed doubtful, until science, opening its subterranean and celestial armories stored with wondrous wealth and power, led its Titan forces, steam, heat, light, electricity, geology, and the wonder-working analyses of chemistry into the field and drove the classics and the humanities from more than half the educational arena. Then they compromised, joined hands, and divided all mastery between them. To science fell directive power over matter; to the classics and the humanities, directive power over mind. Thus, directive power is utilized

ON THE MATERIAL SIDE, in mining, metallurgy, engineering, architecture, ship-building, applied chemistry, applied physics, manifold manufacture, applied mechanics, etc.

AND ON THE HUMAN SIDE, in law and legislation, judicature, politics, police, sociology, journalism, literature, theology, painting, sculpture, music, oratory, etc.

Hence all our higher institutions of learning now divide the curriculum into two main branches, which may be called scientific and literary. There is, of course, even in the highest university courses, a frequent overlapping of these branches, and each becomes contributory to the other. This division of the course became a necessity resulting both from the vastness of the intellectual field and the utility of the economic principle of division of labor. The field demands almost infinite energies; yet, by the distribution of finite energies to its several parts, this almost infinite demand is readily supplied. It is better to know everything of something than something of everything.

At what point in the curriculum of the public high school this division may be safely made depends upon the quality and quan-

tity of the requisites for admission. The average stage of preparation attained in our public grammar schools makes necessary a common curriculum for some time after admission, and for obvious reasons. Some studies have a high disciplinary value, some a high culture value, and some have both. For example, higher mathematics, aside from high scientific value, has also a high disciplinary value; language studies, literature, and history have a high culture value; and the study of a cultivated language not vernacular has both a high disciplinary and a high culture value. Such studies give roundness, fullness, and symmetry to mental development, and avert that one-sidedness which results from the pursuit of special courses without due preparation for them. We do not mean that *all* such studies are necessary. We believe that in a curriculum of four years, common studies for the first two years would be ample preparation for special scientific and literary courses. The arrangement of curricula for the latter courses presents little difficulty, and the only limitation in it is the element of time.

There are sometimes taught in public high schools subjects which have no relation whatever to the end in view. Such subjects are book-keeping, type-writing, phonography, sewing, and cooking. The criterion of fitness in any subject to be a branch of instruction is extensive application of principle and prospective benefit to society. Benefit that remains wholly with the individual or individual interests can find no claim to public recognition. Judged by this criterion, how can any of these subjects be justified? The mathematical principles of book-keeping are taught in arithmetic, and balancing accounts may very properly be taught as a practical application of them. Type-writing and phonography are manual operations involving no principle whatever, and have just the same title to public recognition as shoe-making and tailoring. The benefit remains wholly with the individual. Sewing and cooking can be justified as branches of instruction only on the ground that those who are taught will either sew and cook or teach sewing and cooking for the public, and that society will be benefited thereby. The normal school is justified as a public institution solely on the ground that its function is to furnish teachers for the public schools.

And now in conclusion. The scientific movement before mentioned advanced with ever-widening flow. Matter, material force,

and mechanism became the ruling deities. They open vistas richer than the wealth of Ormus or of Ind. Their products choke the avenues of trade and line all the ways of commerce. The prospect of riches stimulates every activity. The altars of Mammon smoke with a perpetual sacrifice, and too often the sole object of our vows is the golden though fatal gift of Midas. Money is at last our supreme good, because in it we have found the measure of a man, the next of kin to heaven. "In fact, if we look deeper, we shall find that this faith in mechanism has now struck its roots deep into man's most intimate, primary sources of conviction; and is thence sending up, over his whole life and activity, innumerable stems, fruit-bearing and poison-bearing. The truth is, men have lost their belief in the invisible, and believe and hope and work only in the visible; or, to speak it in other words, this is not a religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the beautiful and good, but a calculation of the profitable."²

Against these poison-bearing stems and against a tendency so materialistic our methods in scientific training should provide some preservative. The neglect of pure culture studies,—the neglect of the humanities,—especially the neglect of them in scientific education, is in some measure responsible for much of our materialism. Education means vastly more than a mere whetting of the intellectual faculties; it also means spiritual growth, a sensitizing of the moral faculties, and the molding of character for manhood. But let us not therefore undervalue science and its golden freightage of blessing. "Science is noble and good, but the progress of the soul is better. Genius is a bird of morning, and its song is always the exponent of the most recent pulse of human passion, human knowledge of beauty, human sympathy with the joys and sorrows of the world. The rocks may give up the last secret of their hearts; the sea, too, may disgorge its treasures; but at last it is the soul of man that is the poet's field of study—the soul that walked with God upon chaos in the dark hour before the dawn of creation, the soul that still walks with him as the morning twilight slowly broadens into perfect day."³

² Thomas Carlyle, in *Signs of the Times*.

³ Maurice Thompson, in *Birds of the Rocks*.

Mere science, without cultivation on the human, the moral, and the spiritual side, is apt to be unimpassioned, unimpressive, and unimaginative. No mere science ever writes poetry, and no pathos heaves the diaphragm of the phonograph. Let not science be made ignoble by the clod of materialism. Let it roam the macrocosm in full sympathy with the microcosm. While it finds melody only in sonorous vibrations, still let the golden planets, beating against the tides of ether, peal out to fancy's ear ethereal chimes; and while it sees the birth of dewy morning only in luminous undulations, still let its eye of poesy behold the steeds of Aurora, breaking from the barriers of night,

“ arise,

And shake the darkness from their loosened manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.”





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