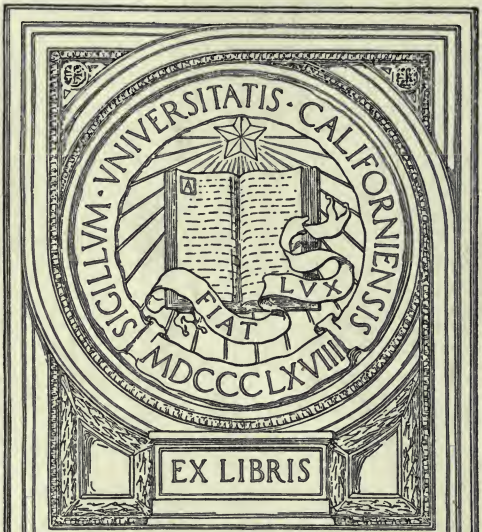

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Self-Cultivation in English

AND

The Glory of the Imperfect

BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER, LL.D.

ALFORD PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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SELF-CULTIVATION IN ENGLISH

The following paper is a Commencement Address, delivered at the University of Michigan.

G. H. P.

English study has four aims: the mastery of our language as a science, as a history, as a joy, and as a tool. I am concerned with but one, the mastery of it as a tool. Philology and grammar present it as a science; the one attempting to follow its words, the other its sentences, through all the intricacies of their growth, and so to manifest laws which lie hidden in these airy products no less than in the moving stars or the myriad flowers of spring. Fascinating and important as all this is, I do not recommend it here. For I want to call attention only to that sort of English study which can be carried on without any large apparatus of books. For a reason similar, though less cogent, I do not urge historical study. Probably the current of English literature is more attractive through its continuity than that of any other nation. Notable works in verse and prose have appeared in long succession, and without gaps in-

tervening, in a way that would be hard to parallel in any other language known to man. A bounteous endowment this for every English speaker, and one which should stimulate us to trace the marvellous and close-linked progress from the times of the Saxons to those of Tennyson and Kipling. Literature, too, has this advantage over every other species of art study, that everybody can examine the original masterpieces and not depend on reproductions, as in the cases of painting, sculpture, and architecture; or on intermediate interpretation, as in the case of music. To-day most of these masterpieces can be bought for a trifle, and even a poor man can follow through centuries the thoughts of his ancestors. But even so, ready of access as it is, English can be studied as a history only at the cost of solid time and continuous attention, much more time than the majority of those I am addressing can afford. By most of us our mighty literature cannot be taken in its continuous current, the later stretches proving interesting through relation with the earlier. It must be taken fragmentarily, if at all, the attention delaying on those parts only which offer the greatest beauty or promise the best exhilaration. In other words, English may be possible as a joy where it is not possible as a history. In the endless wealth which our poetry, story, essay, and drama afford, every disposition may find its ap-

propriate nutriment, correction, or solace. He is unwise, however busy, who does not have his loved authors, veritable friends with whom he takes refuge in the intervals of work, and by whose intimacy he enlarges, refines, sweetens, and emboldens his own limited existence. Yet the fact that English as a joy must largely be conditioned by individual taste prevents me from offering general rules for its pursuit. The road which leads one man straight to this joy leads another to tedium. In all literary enjoyment there is something incalculable, something wayward, eluding the precision of rule, and rendering inexact the precepts of him who would point out the path to it. While I believe that many suggestions may be made, useful to the young enjoyer, and promotive of his wise vagrancy, I shall not undertake here the complicated task of offering them. Let enjoyment go, let history go, let science go, and still English remains — English as a tool. Every hour our language is an engine for communicating with others, every instant for fashioning the thoughts of our own minds. I want to call attention to the means of mastering this curious and essential tool, and to lead every one who hears me to become discontented with his employment of it.

The importance of literary power needs no long argument. Everybody acknowledges it, and sees

that without it all other human faculties are maimed. Shakespeare says that Death "insults o'er dull and speechless tribes." But Life no less than death insults over the speechless person. So mutually dependent are we that on our swift and full communication with one another is staked the success of almost every scheme we form. He who can explain himself may command what he wants. He who cannot is left to the poverty of individual resource; for men do what we desire only when persuaded. The persuasive and explanatory tongue is, therefore, one of the chief levers of life. Its leverage is felt within us as well as without, for expression and thought are integrally bound together. We do not first possess completed thoughts, and then express them. The very formation of the outward product extends, sharpens, enriches the mind which produces, so that he who gives forth little, after a time is likely enough to discover that he has little to give forth. By expression, too, we may carry our benefits and our names to a far generation. This durable character of fragile language puts a wide difference of worth between it and some of the other great objects of desire,—health, wealth, and beauty, for example. These are notoriously liable to accident. We tremble while we have them. But literary power, once ours, is more likely than any other possession to be ours always. It per-

petuates and enlarges itself by the very fact of its existence, and perishes only with the decay of the man himself. For this reason, because more than health, wealth, and beauty, literary style may be called the man, good judges have found in it the final test of culture, and have said that he, and he alone, is a well-educated person who uses his language with power and beauty. The supreme and ultimate product of civilization, it has well been said, is two or three persons talking together in a room. Between ourselves and our language there accordingly springs up an association peculiarly close. We are as sensitive to criticism of our speech as of our manners. The young man looks up with awe to him who has written a book, as already half divine; and the graceful speaker is a universal object of envy.

But the very fact that literary endowment is immediately recognized and eagerly envied has induced a strange illusion in regard to it. It is supposed to be something mysterious, innate in him who possesses it, and quite out of the reach of him who has it not. The very contrary is the fact. No human employment is more free and calculable than the winning of language. Undoubtedly there are natural aptitudes for it, as there are for farming, seamanship, or being a good husband. But nowhere is straight work more effective. Persistence, care, discriminating

observation, ingenuity, refusal to lose heart,—traits which in every other occupation tend toward excellence,—tend toward it here with special security. Whoever goes to his grave with bad English in his mouth has no one to blame but himself for the disagreeable taste; for if faulty speech can be inherited, it can be exterminated too. I hope to point out some of the methods of substituting good English for bad. And since my space is brief, and I wish to be remembered, I throw what I have to say into the form of four simple precepts, which, if pertinaciously obeyed, will, I believe, give anybody effective mastery of English as a tool.

First, then, "Look well to your speech." It is commonly supposed that when a man seeks literary power he goes to his room and plans an article for the press. But this is to begin literary culture at the wrong end. We speak a hundred times for every once we write. The busiest writer produces little more than a volume a year, not so much as his talk would amount to in a week. Consequently through speech it is usually decided whether a man is to have command of his language or not. If he is slovenly in his ninety-nine cases of talking, he can seldom pull himself up to strength and exactitude in the hundredth case of writing. A person is made in one piece, and the same being runs through a multitude of perform-

ances. Whether words are uttered on paper or to the air, the effect on the utterer is the same. Vigor or feebleness results according as energy or slackness has been in command. I know that certain adaptations to a new field are often necessary. A good speaker may find awkwardnesses in himself when he comes to write, a good writer when he speaks. And certainly cases occur where a man exhibits distinct strength in one of the two, speaking or writing, and not in the other. But such cases are rare. As a rule, language once within our control can be employed for oral or for written purposes. And since the opportunities for oral practice enormously outbalance those for written, it is the oral which are chiefly significant in the development of literary power. We rightly say of the accomplished writer that he shows a mastery of his own tongue.

This predominant influence of speech marks nearly all great epochs of literature. The Homeric poems are addressed to the ear, not to the eye. It is doubtful if Homer knew writing, certain that he knew profoundly every quality of the tongue,—veracity, vividness, shortness of sentence, simplicity of thought, obligation to insure swift apprehension. Writing and rigidity are apt to go together. In these smooth-slipping verses one catches everywhere the voice. So, too, the aphorisms of Hesiod might naturally pass from mouth

to mouth, and the stories of Herodotus be told by an old man at the fireside. Early Greek literature is plastic and garrulous. Its distinctive glory is that it contains no literary note; that it gives forth human feeling not in conventional arrangement, but with apparent spontaneity—in short, that it is speech literature, not book literature. And the same tendency continued long among the Greeks. At the culmination of their power, the drama was their chief literary form,—the drama, which is but speech ennobled, connected, clarified. Plato, too, following the dramatic precedent and the precedent of his talking master, accepted conversation as his medium for philosophy, and imparted to it the vivacity, ease, waywardness even, which the best conversation exhibits. Nor was the experience of the Greeks peculiar. Our literature shows a similar tendency. Its bookish times are its decadent times, its talking times its glory. Chaucer, like Herodotus, is a story-teller, and follows the lead of those who on the Continent entertained courtly circles with pleasant tales. Shakespeare and his fellows in the spacious times of great Elizabeth did not concern themselves with publication. Marston, in one of his prefaces, thinks it necessary to apologize for putting his piece in print, and says he would not have done such a thing if unscrupulous persons, hearing the play at the theatre, had not already printed corrupt ver-

sions of it. Even the "Queen Anne's men," far removed though they are from anything dramatic, still shape their ideals of literature by demands of speech. The essays of the *Spectator,* the poems of Pope, are the remarks of a cultivated gentleman at an evening party. Here is the brevity, the good taste, the light touch, the neat epigram, the avoidance of whatever might stir passion, controversy, or laborious thought, which characterize the conversation of a well-bred man. Indeed, it is hard to see how any literature can be long vital which is based on the thought of a book and not on that of living utterance. Unless the speech notion is uppermost, words will not run swiftly to their mark. They delay in delicate phrasings while naturalness and a sense of reality disappear. Women are the best talkers. I sometimes please myself with noticing that three of the greatest periods of English literature coincide with the reigns of the three English queens.

Fortunate it is, then, that self-cultivation in the use of English must chiefly come through speech; because we are always speaking, whatever else we do. In opportunities for acquiring a mastery of language, the poorest and busiest are at no large disadvantage as compared with the leisured rich. It is true the strong impulse which comes from the suggestion and approval of society may in some cases be absent, but this can be compen-

sated by the sturdy purpose of the learner. A recognition of the beauty of well-ordered words, a strong desire, patience under discouragements, and promptness in counting every occasion as of consequence,—these are the simple agencies which sweep one on to power. Watch your speech, then. That is all which is needed. Only it is desirable to know what qualities of speech to watch for. I find three,—accuracy, audacity, and range,—and I will say a few words about each.

Obviously, good English is exact English. Our words should fit our thoughts like a glove, and be neither too wide nor too tight. If too wide, they will include much vacuity beside the intended matter. If too tight, they will check the strong grasp. Of the two dangers, looseness is by far the greater. There are people who say what they mean with such a naked precision that nobody not familiar with the subject can quickly catch the sense. George Herbert and Emerson strain the attention of many. But niggardly and angular speakers are rare. Too frequently words signify nothing in particular. They are merely thrown out in a certain direction, to report a vague and undetermined meaning or even a general emotion. The first business of every one who would train himself in language is to articulate his thought, to know definitely what he wishes to say, and then

to pick those words which compel the hearer to think of this and only this. For such a purpose two words are often better than three. The fewer the words, the more pungent the impression. Brevity is the soul not simply of a jest, but of wit in its finest sense where it is identical with wisdom. He who can put a great deal into a little is the master. Since firm texture is what is wanted, not embroidery or superposed ornament, beauty has been well defined as the purgation of superfluities. And certainly many a paragraph might have its beauty brightened by letting quiet words take the place of its loud words, omitting its "verys," and striking out its purple patches of "fine writing." Here is Ben Jonson's description of Bacon's language: "There happened in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speech. No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough or look aside without loss. He commanded when he spoke, and had his judges angry or pleased at his discretion." Such are the men who command, men who speak "neatly and pressly." But to gain such precision is toilsome business. While we are in training for it, no word must unpermittedly pass the portal of the teeth. Something like what we mean must

never be counted equivalent to what we mean. And if we are not sure of our meaning or of our word, we must pause until we are sure. Accuracy does not come of itself. For persons who can use several languages, capital practice in acquiring it can be had by translating from one language to another and seeing that the entire sense is carried over. Those who have only their native speech will find it profitable often to attempt definitions of the common words they use. Inaccuracy will not stand up against the habit of definition. Dante boasted that no rhythmic exigency had ever made him say what he did not mean. We heedless and unintending speakers, under no exigency of rhyme or reason, say what we mean but seldom and still more seldom mean what we say. To hold our thoughts and words in significant adjustment requires unceasing consciousness, a perpetual determination not to tell lies; for of course every inaccuracy is a bit of untruthfulness. We have something in mind, yet convey something else to our hearer. And no moral purpose will save us from this untruthfulness unless that purpose is sufficient to inspire the daily drill which brings the power to be true. Again and again we are shut up to evil because we have not acquired the ability of goodness.

But after all, I hope that nobody who hears me will quite agree. There is something enervating

in conscious care. Necessary as it is in shaping our purposes, if allowed too direct and exclusive control consciousness breeds hesitation and feebleness. Action is not excellent, at least, until spontaneous. In piano-playing we begin by picking out each separate note; but we do not call the result music until we play our notes by the handful, heedless how each is formed. And so it is everywhere. Consciously selective conduct is elementary and inferior. People distrust it, or rather they distrust him who exhibits it. If anybody talking to us visibly studies his words, we turn away. What he says may be well enough as school exercise, but it is not conversation. Accordingly, if we would have our speech forcible, we shall need to put into it quite as much of audacity as we do of precision, terseness, or simplicity. Accuracy alone is not a thing to be sought, but accuracy and dash. Of Patrick Henry, the orator who more than any other could craze our Revolutionary fathers, it was said that he was accustomed to throw himself headlong into the middle of a sentence, trusting to God Almighty to get him out. So must we speak. We must not, before beginning a sentence, decide what the end shall be; for if we do, nobody will care to hear that end. At the beginning, it is the beginning which claims the attention of both speaker and listener, and trepidation about going on will mar all. We

must give our thought its head, and not drive it with too tight a rein, nor grow timid when it begins to prance a bit. Of course we must retain coolness in courage, applying the results of our previous discipline in accuracy; but we need not move so slowly as to become formal. Pedantry is worse than blundering. If we care for grace and flexible beauty of language, we must learn to let our thought run. Would it, then, be too much of an Irish bull to say that in acquiring English we need to cultivate spontaneity? The uncultivated kind is not worth much; it is wild and haphazard stuff, unadjusted to its uses. On the other hand, no speech is of much account, however just, which lacks the element of courage. Accuracy and dash, then, the combination of the two, must be our difficult aim; and we must not rest satisfied so long as either dwells with us alone.

5 But are the two so hostile as they at first appear? Or can, indeed, the first be obtained without the aid of the second? Supposing we are convinced that words possess no value in themselves, and are correct or incorrect only as they truly report experience, we shall feel ourselves impelled in the mere interest of accuracy to choose them freshly, and to put them together in ways in which they never co-operated before, so as to set forth with distinctness that which just we, not other people, have seen or felt. The reason why

we do not naturally have this daring exactitude is probably twofold. We let our experiences be blurred, not observing sharply, nor knowing with any minuteness what we are thinking about, and so there is no individuality in our language. And then, besides, we are terrorized by custom, and inclined to adjust what we would say to what others have said before. The cure for the first of these troubles is to keep our eye on our object, instead of on our listener or ourselves; and for the second, to learn to rate the expressiveness of language more highly than its correctness. The opposite of this, the disposition to set correctness above expressiveness, produces that peculiarly vulgar diction known as "school-ma'am English," in which for the sake of a dull accord with usage all the picturesque, imaginative, and forceful employment of words is sacrificed. Of course we must use words so that people can understand them, and understand them, too, with ease; but this once granted, let our language be our own, obedient to our special needs. "Whenever," says Thomas Jefferson, "by small grammatical negligences the energy of an idea can be condensed, or a word be made to stand for a sentence, I hold grammatical rigor in contempt." "Young man," said Henry Ward Beecher to one who was pointing out grammatical errors in a sermon of his, "when the English language gets in my way, it

doesn't stand a chance." No man can be convincing, writer or speaker, who is afraid to send his words wherever they may best follow his meaning, and this with but little regard to whether any other person's words have ever been there before. In assessing merit, let us not stupefy ourselves with using negative standards. What stamps a man as great is not freedom from faults, but abundance of powers.

6 Such audacious accuracy, however, distinguishing as it does noble speech from commonplace speech, can be practiced only by him who has a wide range of words. Our ordinary range is absurdly narrow. It is important, therefore, for anybody who would cultivate himself in English to make strenuous and systematic efforts to enlarge his vocabulary. Our dictionaries contain more than a hundred thousand words. The average speaker employs about three thousand. Is this because ordinary people have only three or four thousand things to say? Not at all. It is simply due to dulness. Listen to the average school-boy. He has a dozen or two nouns, half a dozen verbs, three or four adjectives, and enough conjunctions and prepositions to stick the conglomerate together. This ordinary speech deserves the description which Hobbes gave to his *State of Nature,* that "it is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The fact is, we fall into the way of thinking that the wealthy words are for others and that they do not belong to us. We are

like those who have received a vast inheritance, but who persist in the inconveniences of hard beds, scanty food, rude clothing, who never travel, and who limit their purchases to the bleak necessities of life. Ask such people why they endure niggardly living while wealth in plenty is lying in the bank, and they can only answer that they have never learned how to spend. But this is worth learning. Milton used eight thousand words, Shakespeare fifteen thousand. We have all the subjects to talk about that these early speakers had; and in addition, we have bicycles and sciences and strikes and political combinations and all the complicated living of the modern world.

Why, then, do we hesitate to swell our words to meet our needs? It is a nonsense question. There is no reason. We are simply lazy; too lazy to make ourselves comfortable. We let our vocabularies be limited, and get along rawly without the refinements of human intercourse, without refinements in our own thoughts; for thoughts are almost as dependent on words as words on thoughts. For example, all exasperations we lump together as "aggravating," not considering whether they may not rather be displeasing, annoying, offensive, disgusting, irritating, or even maddening; and without observing, too, that in our reckless usage we have burned up a word

which might be convenient when we should need to mark some shading of the word "increase." Like the bad cook, we seize the frying-pan whenever we need to fry, broil, roast, or stew, and then we wonder why all our dishes taste alike while in the next house the food is appetizing. It is all unnecessary. Enlarge the vocabulary. Let any one who wants to see himself grow, resolve to adopt two new words each week. It will not be long before the endless and enchanting variety of the world will begin to reflect itself in his speech, and in his mind as well. I know that when we use a word for the first time we are startled, as if a fire-cracker went off in our neighborhood. We look about hastily to see if any one has noticed. But finding that no one has, we may be emboldened. A word used three times slips off the tongue with entire naturalness. Then it is ours forever, and with it some phase of life which had been lacking hitherto. For each word presents its own point of view, discloses a special aspect of things, reports some little importance not otherwise conveyed, and so contributes its small emancipation to our tied-up minds and tongues.

But a brief warning may be necessary to make my meaning clear. In urging the addition of new words to our present poverty-stricken stock, I am far from suggesting that we should seek out

strange, technical, or inflated expressions, which do not appear in ordinary conversation. The very opposite is my aim. I would put every man who is now employing a diction merely local and personal in command of the approved resources of the English language. Our poverty usually comes through provinciality, through accepting without criticism the habits of our special set. My family, my immediate friends, have a diction of their own. Plenty of other words, recognized as sound, are known to be current in books, and to be employed by modest and intelligent speakers, only we do not use them. Our set has never said "diction," or "current," or "scope," or "scanty," or "hitherto," or "convey," or "lack." Far from unusual as these words are, to adopt them might seem to set me apart from those whose intellectual habits I share. From this I shrink. I do not like to wear clothes suitable enough for others, but not in the style of my own plain circle. Yet if each one of that circle does the same, the general shabbiness is increased. The talk of all is made narrow enough to fit the thinnest there. What we should seek is to contribute to each of the little companies with which our life is bound up a gently enlarging influence, such impulses as will not startle or create detachment, but which may save from humdrum, routine, and dreary usualness. We cannot be really kind without being a little

venturesome. The small shocks of our increasing vocabulary will in all probability be as helpful to our friends as to ourselves.

Such, then, are the excellences of speech. If we would cultivate ourselves in the use of English, we must make our daily talk accurate, daring, and full. I have insisted on these points the more because in my judgment all literary power, especially that of busy men, is rooted in sound speech. But though the roots are here, the growth is also elsewhere. And I pass to my later precepts, which, if the earlier one has been laid well to heart, will require only brief discussion.

Secondly, "Welcome every opportunity for writing." Important as I have shown speech to be, there is much that it cannot do. Seldom can it teach structure. Its space is too small. Talking moves in sentences, and rarely demands a paragraph. I make my little remark,—a dozen or two words,—then wait for my friend to hand me back as many more. This gentle exchange continues by the hour; but either of us would feel himself unmannerly if he should grasp an entire five minutes and make it uninterruptedly his. That would not be speaking, but rather speech-making. The brief groupings of words which make up our talk furnish capital practice in precision, boldness, and variety; but they do not contain room enough for exercising our constructive faculties.

Considerable length is necessary if we are to learn how to set forth *B* in right relation to *A* on the one hand, and to *C* on the other; and while keeping each a distinct part, are to be able through their smooth progression to weld all the parts together into a compacted whole. Such wholeness is what we mean by literary form. Lacking it, any piece of writing is a failure; because, in truth, it is not a piece, but pieces. For ease of reading, or for the attainment of an intended effect, unity is essential—the multitude of statements, anecdotes, quotations, arguings, gay sportings, and appeals, all "bending one way their gracious influence." And this dominant unity of the entire piece obliges unity also in the subordinate parts. Not enough has been done when we have huddled together a lot of wandering sentences, and penned them in a paragraph, or even when we have linked them together by the frail ties of "and, and." A sentence must be compelled to say a single thing; a paragraph, a single thing; an essay, a single thing. Each part is to be a preliminary whole, and the total a finished whole. But the ability to construct one thing out of many does not come by nature. It implies fecundity, restraint, an eye for effects, the forecast of finish while we are still working in the rough, obedience to the demands of development, and a deaf ear to whatever calls us into the by-paths of caprice;

in short it implies that the good writer is to be an artist.

Now something of this large requirement which composition makes, the young writer instinctively feels, and he is terrified. He knows how ill-fitted he is to direct "toil co-operant to an end;" and when he sits down to the desk and sees the white sheet of paper before him, he shivers. Let him know that the shiver is a suitable part of the performance. I well remember the pleasure with which, as a young man, I heard my venerable and practiced professor of rhetoric say that he supposed there was no work known to man more difficult than writing. Up to that time I had supposed its severities peculiar to myself. It cheered me, and gave me courage to try again, to learn that I had all mankind for my fellow-sufferers. Where this is not understood, writing is avoided. From such avoidance I would save the young writer by my precept to seek every opportunity to write. For most of us this is a new way of confronting composition—treating it as an opportunity, a chance, and not as a burden or compulsion. It saves from slavishness and takes away the drudgery of writing, to view each piece of it as a precious and necessary step in the pathway to power. To those engaged in bread-winning employments these opportunities will be few. Spring forward to them, then, using them to the full. Severe they

will be because so few, for only practice breeds ease; but on that very account let no one of them pass with merely a second-best performance. If a letter is to be written to a friend, a report to an employer, a communication to a newspaper, see that it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The majority of writings are without these pleasing adornments. Only the great pieces possess them. Bear this in mind, and win the way to artistic composition by noticing what should be said first, what second, and what third.

I cannot leave this subject, however, without congratulating the present generation on its advantages over mine. Children are brought up to-day, in happy contrast with my compeers, to feel that the pencil is no instrument of torture, hardly indeed to distinguish it from the tongue. About the time they leave their mother's arms they take their pen in hand. On paper they are encouraged to describe their interesting birds, friends, adventures. Their written lessons are almost as frequent as their oral, and they learn to write compositions while not yet quite understanding what they are about. Some of these fortunate ones will, I hope, find the language I have sadly used about the difficulty of writing extravagant. And let me say, too, that since frequency has more to do with ease of writing than anything else, I count the newspaper men lucky

because they are writing all the time, and I do not think so meanly of their product as the present popular disparagement would seem to require. It is hasty work undoubtedly, and bears the marks of haste. But in my judgment, at no period of the English language has there been so high an average of sensible, vivacious, and informing sentences written as appears in our daily press. With both good and evil results, the distinction between book literature and speech literature is breaking down. Everybody is writing, apparently in verse and prose; and if the higher graces of style do not often appear, neither on the other hand do the ruder awkwardness and obscurities. A certain straightforward English is becoming established. A whole nation is learning the use of its mother tongue. Under such circumstances it is doubly necessary that any one who is conscious of feebleness in his command of English should promptly and earnestly begin the cultivation of it.

My third precept shall be, "Remember the other person." I have been urging self-cultivation in English as if it concerned one person alone, ourself. But every utterance really concerns two. Its aim is social. Its object is communication; and while unquestionably prompted half-way by the desire to ease our mind through self-expression, it still finds its only justification in the ad-

vantage somebody else will draw from what is said. Speaking or writing is, therefore, everywhere a double-ended process. It springs from me, it penetrates him; and both of these ends need watching. Is what I say precisely what I mean? That is an important question. Is what I say so shaped that it can readily be assimilated by him who hears? This is a question of quite as great consequence, and much more likely to be forgotten. We are so full of ourselves that we do not remember the other person. Helter-skelter we pour forth our unaimed words merely for our personal relief, heedless whether they help or hinder him whom they still purport to address. For most of us are grievously lacking in imagination, which is the ability to go outside ourselves and take on the conditions of another mind. Yet this is what the literary artist is always doing. He has at once the ability to see for himself and the ability to see himself as others see him. He can lead two lives as easily as one life; or rather, he has trained himself to consider that other life as of more importance than his, and to reckon his comfort, likings, and labors as quite subordinated to the service of that other. All serious literary work contains within it this readiness to bear another's burden. I must write with pains, that he may read with ease. I must

> Find out men's wants and wills,
> And meet them *there*.

As I write, I must unceasingly study what is the line of least intellectual resistance along which my thought may enter the differently constituted mind; and to that line I must subtly adjust, without enfeebling, my meaning. Will this combination of words, or that, make the meaning clear? Will this order of presentation facilitate swiftness of apprehension, or will it clog the movement? What temperamental perversities in me must be set aside in order to render my reader's approach to what I would tell him pleasant? What temperamental perversities in him must be accepted by me as fixed facts, conditioning all I say? These are the questions the skilful writer is always asking.

And these questions—as will have been perceived already—are moral questions no less than literary. That golden rule of generous service by which we do for others what we would have them do for us, is a rule of writing too. Every writer who knows his trade perceives that he is a servant, that it is his business to endure hardship if only his reader may win freedom from toil, that no impediment to that reader's understanding is too slight to deserve diligent attention, that he has consequently no right to let a single sentence slip from him unsocialized—I mean, a sentence which cannot become as naturally another's possession as his own. In the very act of asserting

to do. My friend seemed puzzled by my remark, but after a moment's pause said, "I don't think you know how we work. I have nothing to do with the character. Now that he is created, he will act as he will."

And such docility must be cultivated by every one who would write well, such strenuous docility. Of course there must be energy in plenty; the imagination which I described in my third section, the passion for solid form as in my second, the disciplined and daring powers as in my first; but all these must be ready at a moment's notice to move where the matter calls and to acknowledge that all their worth is to be drawn from it. Religion is only enlarged good sense, and the words of Jesus apply as well to the things of earth as of heaven. I do not know where we could find a more compendious statement of what is most important for one to learn who would cultivate himself in English than the simple saying in which Jesus announces the source of his power. "I speak not mine own words, but the words of him who sent me." Whoever can do that, will be a noble speaker indeed.

These, then, are the fundamental precepts which every one must heed who would command our beautiful English language. There is, of course, a fifth. I hardly need to name it; for it always follows after, whatever others precede. It is that

we should do the work, and not think about it; do it day after day and not grow weary in bad doing. Early and often we must be busy, and be satisfied to have a great deal of labor produce but a small result. I am told that early in life John Morley, wishing to engage in journalism, wrote an editorial and sent it to a paper every day for nearly a year before he succeeded in getting one accepted. We all know what a power he became in London journalism. I will not vouch for the truth of this story, but I am sure an ambitious author is wise who writes a weekly essay for his stove. Publication is of little consequence, so long as one is getting one's self hammered into shape.

But before I close this address, let me acknowledge that in it I have neglected a whole class of helpful influences, probably quite as important as any I have discussed. Purposely I have passed them by. Because I wished to show what we can do for ourselves, I have everywhere assumed that our cultivation in English is to be effected by naked volition and a kind of dead lift. These are mighty agencies, but seldom in this interlocked world do they work well alone. They are strongest when backed by social suggestion and unconscious custom. Ordinarily the good speaker is he who keeps good company, but increases the helpful influence of that company by constant watchfulness along the lines I have marked out.

So supplemented, my teaching is true. By itself it is not true. It needs the supplementation of others. Let him who would speak or write well seek out good speakers and writers. Let him live in their society,—for the society of the greatest writers is open to the most secluded—let him feel the ease of their excellence, the ingenuity, grace, and scope of their diction, and he will soon find in himself capacities whose development may be aided by the precepts I have given. Most of us catch better than we learn. We take up unconsciously from our surroundings what we cannot altogether create. All this should be remembered, and we should keep ourselves exposed to the wholesome words of our fellow-men. Yet our own exertions will not on that account be rendered less important. We may largely choose the influences to which we submit; we may exercise a selective attention among these influences; we may enjoy, oppose, modify, or diligently ingraft what is conveyed to us,—and for doing any one of these things rationally we must be guided by some clear aim. Such aims, altogether essential even if subsidiary, I have sought to supply; and I would reiterate that he who holds them fast may become superior to linguistic fortune and be the wise director of his sluggish and obstinate tongue. It is as certain as anything can be that faithful endeavor will bring expertness in the use of Eng-

lish. If we are watchful of our speech, making our words continually more minutely true, free, and resourceful; if we look upon our occasions of writing as opportunities for the deliberate work of unified construction; if in all our utterances we think of him who hears as well as of him who speaks; and above all, if we fix the attention of ourselves and our hearers on the matter we talk about and so let ourselves be supported by our subject,—we shall make a daily advance not only in English study, but in personal power, in general serviceableness, and in consequent delight.

THE GLORY OF THE IMPERFECT

THE following Address was delivered at the first Commencement of the Woman's College of Western Reserve University and printed from stenographer's notes. As it is now to assume permanent form, it has been revised and in some parts rewritten.

G. H. P.

A FEW years ago Matthew Arnold, the eminent English critic, after travelling in this country and revising the somewhat unfavorable opinion of us which he had formed earlier and at a distance, still wrote in his last paper on Civilization in the United States that America, in spite of its excellences, is an uninteresting land. He thought our institutions remarkable. He pointed out how close a fit exists between them and the character of the citizens, a fit so close as is hardly to be found in other countries. He saw much that is of promise in our future. But after all, he declares that no man will live here if he can live elsewhere, because America is an uninteresting land.

This remark of Mr. Arnold's is one which we may well ponder. As I consider how many of you

are preparing to go forth from college and establish yourselves in this country, I ask myself whether you must find your days uninteresting. You certainly have not been finding them uninteresting here. Where were college days ever dull? It is a beautiful circumstance that, the world over, the period of youthful education is the period of romance. No such thing was ever heard of as a college student who did not enjoy himself, a college student who was not full of hope. And if this has been the case with us prosaic males of the past, what must be the experience of your own hopeful sex? I am sure you are looking forward with eagerness to your intended work. Is it to be blighted? Are you to find life dull? It might seem from the remark of Mr. Arnold that it would probably be so, for you must live in an uninteresting land.

When this remark of Mr. Arnold's was first made, a multitude of voices in all parts of our country declared that Mr. Arnold did not know what he was talking about. As a stupid Englishman he had come here and had failed to see what our land contains. In reality, every corner of it is stuffed with that beauty and distinction which he denied. For that was the offensive feature of his statement: he had said in substance, the chief sources of interest are beauty and distinction. America is not beautiful. Its scenery, its people,

its past, are not distinguished. It is impossible, therefore, for an intelligent and cultivated man to find permanent interests there.

The ordinary reply to these unpleasant sayings was, "America is beautiful, America is distinguished." But on the face of the matter this reply might well be distrusted. Mr. Arnold is not a man likely to make such a mistake. He is a trained observer. His life has been passed in criticism, and criticism of an extremely delicate sort. It seems to me it must be rather his standards than his facts which are at fault. Many of us would be slow to believe our teacher had made an error in observation; for to many of us he has been a very great teacher indeed. Through him we have learned the charm of simplicity, the refinement of exactitude, the strength of finished form; we have learned calmness in trial too, the patience of duty, ability to wait when in doubt; in short, we have learned dignity, and he who teaches us dignity is not a man lightly to be forgotten or disparaged. I say, therefore, that this answer to Mr. Arnold, that he was in error, is one which on its face might prudently be distrusted.

But for other than prudential reasons I incline to agree with Mr. Arnold's opinion. Even though I were not naturally disposed to credit his judgment, I should be obliged to acknowledge that my

own observations largely coincide with his. In Europe I believe I find beauty more abundant than in America. Certainly the distinguished objects, the distinguished persons, whom I go there to see, are more numerous than those I might by searching find here. I cannot think this portion of Mr. Arnold's statement can be impugned. And must we, then, accept his conclusion and agree that your lives, while sheltered in this interesting college, are themselves interesting; but that when you go forth, the romance is to pass away? I do not believe it, because I question the standard which Mr. Arnold employs. He tells us that the sources of the interesting are beauty and distinction. I doubt it. However much delight and refreshment these may contribute to our lives, I do not believe they predominantly constitute our interests.

Evidently Mr. Arnold cannot have reached his conclusion through induction, for the commonest facts of experience confute him. There is in every community a certain class of persons whose business it is to discover what people regard as interesting. These are the newspaper editors; they are paid to find out for us interesting matters every day. There is nothing they like better than to get hold of something interesting which has not been before observed. Are they, then, searchers for beauty and distinction? I should say not.

Here are the subjects which these seekers after interesting things discussed in my morning paper. There is an account of disturbances in South America. There is a statement about Mr. Blaine's health. There is a report of a prize fight. There are speculations about the next general election. There is a description of a fashionable wedding. These things interest me, and I suspect they interest the majority of the readers of that paper; though they can hardly be called beautiful or distinguished. Obviously, therefore, if Mr. Arnold had inspected the actual interests of to-day, he would have been obliged to recognize some other basis for them than beauty and distinction.

Yet I suppose all will feel it would be better if the trivial matters which excite our interest in the morning journal were of a more beautiful, of a more distinguished sort. Our interests would be more honorable then. These things interest merely because they are facts, not because they are beautiful. A fact is interesting through being a fact, and this commonest and most basal of interests Mr. Arnold has overlooked. He has not perceived that life itself is its own unceasing interest.

Before we can decide, however, whether he has overlooked anything more, we must determine what is meant by beauty. Let us analyze the matter a little. Let us see if we can detect why the

beautiful and the distinguished are interesting, and still how we can provide a place for the other interests which are omitted in his statement. If we should look at a tree and ask ourselves why this tree is more beautiful than another, we should probably find we had thought it so on some such grounds as these: the total bunch of branches and leaves, that exquisite green mass sunning itself, is no larger than can well be supported on the brown trunk. It is large enough; there is nothing lacking. If it were smaller, the office of the trunk would hardly be fulfilled. If larger, the trunk would be overpowered. Those branches which extend themselves to the right adequately balance those which are extended to the left. Scrutinizing it, we find every leaf in order, each one ready to aërate its little sap and so conduce to the life of the whole. There is no decay, no broken branch. Nothing is deficient, but at the same time there is nothing superfluous. Each part ministers to every part. In all parts the tree is proportionate —beautiful, intrinsically beautiful, because it is unsuperfluous, unlacking.

And when we turn to other larger, more intricately beautiful objects, we find the same principle involved. Fulness of relations among the parts, perfection of organism, absence of incongruity, constitute the beauty of the object. Were you ever in Wiltshire in England, and did you visit

the splendid seat of the Earls of Pembroke, Wilton House? It is a magnificent pile, designed by Holbein the painter, erected before Elizabeth began to reign. Its green lawns, prepared ages ago, were adapted to their positions originally and perform their ancient offices to-day. Time has changed its gardens only by making them more lovely than they were planned. So harmonious with one another are grounds and castle that, looking on the stately dwelling, one imagines that the Creator himself must have had it in mind in his design of the spot. And when you enter, all is equally congruous. Around the central court runs the cloistered statuary gallery, out of which open the several halls. Passing through these, you notice the portraits not only of past members of the family—men who have been among the most distinguished of England's worthies—but also portraits of the eminent friends of the Pembrokes, painted by notable artists who were often themselves also friends of the family. In the library is shown Sidney's *Arcadia,* written in this very garden, with a lock of Elizabeth's hair enclosed. In the chief hall a play of Shakespeare's is reported to have been brought out for the first time. Half a dozen names that shine in literature lend intellectual glory to the place. But as you walk from room to room, amazed at the accumulation of wealth and proud tradition, you perceive

how each casual object makes its separate contribution to the general impression of stateliness. A glance from a window discloses an enchanting view: in the distance, past the cedars, the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, one of the most peaceful and aspiring in England. All parts—scenery, buildings, rich possessions, historic heritages—minister to parts. Romantic imagination is stirred. It is beautiful, beautiful beyond anything America can show.

And if we turn to that region where beauty is most subtly embodied, if we turn to human character, we find the conditions not dissimilar. The character which impresses us most is that which has fully organized its powers, so that every ability finds its appropriate place without prominence; one with no false humility and without self-assertion; a character which cannot be overthrown by petty circumstance, but, steadfast in itself, no part lacking, no part superfluous, easily lets its ample functions assist one another in all that they are summoned to perform. When we behold a man like this, we say, "This is what I would be. Here is the goal toward which I would tend. This man, like Wilton House, like the beautiful tree, is a finished thing." It is true when we turn our attention back and once more criticise, we see that it is not so. No human character can be finished. It is its glory that it cannot be.

It must ever press forward; each step reached is but the vantage-ground for a further step. There is no completeness in human character—in human character save one.

And must we, then, consider human character uninteresting? According to Mr. Arnold's standard perhaps we ought to do so. But through this very case the narrowness of that standard becomes apparent. Mr. Arnold rightly perceives that beauty is one of our higher interests. It certainly is not our only or our highest, because in that which is most profoundly interesting, human life, the completeness of parts which constitutes beauty is never reached. There must obviously be another and a higher source of interest, one too exalted to be found where awhile ago I sketched it, in the mere occurrence of a fact. We cannot say that all events, simply because they occur, are alike interesting. To find in them an intelligent interest, we must rate their worth. I agree, accordingly, with Mr. Arnold in thinking that it is the passion for perfection, the assessment of worths, which is at the root of all enduring interests. But I believe that in the history of the world this passion for perfection, this deepest root of human interests, has presented itself in two forms. The Greek conceived it in one way, the Christian has conceived it in another.

It was the office of that astonishing people, the

Greeks, to teach us to honor completeness, the majesty of the rounded whole. We see this in every department of their marvellous life. Whenever we look at a Greek statue, it seems impossible that it should be otherwise without loss; we cannot imagine any portion changed; the thing has reached its completeness. Before it we can only bow and feel at rest. Just so it is when we examine Greek architecture. There, too, we find the same ordered proportion, the same adjustment of part to part. And if we turn to Greek literature, the stately symmetry is no less remarkable. What page of Sophocles could be stricken out? What page—what sentence? Just enough, not more than enough! The thought has grown, has asserted its entirety; and when that entirety has been reached, it has stopped, delighted with its own perfection. A splendid ideal, an ideal which never can fail, I am sure, to interest man so long as he remains intelligent!

And yet this beautiful Greek work shows only one aspect of the world. It omitted one little fact, it omitted formative life. Joy in birth, delight in beginnings, interest in origins,—these things did not belong to the Greek; they came in with Christianity. It is Jesus Christ who turns our attention toward growth, and so teaches us to delight in the imperfect rather than in the perfect. It is he who, wishing to give to his disciples a

model of what they should be, does not select the completed man, but takes the little child and sets him before them and to the supercilious says, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." He teaches us to reverence the beginning of things. And at first thought it might well seem that this reverence for the imperfect was a retrogression. What! is not a consummate man more admirable than a child? "No," Jesus answered; and because he answered so, pity was born. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, I think we may say that the sick, the afflicted, the child,—shall I not say the woman?—were but slightly understood. It is because God has come down from heaven, manifesting even himself in forms of imperfection, it is on this account that our intellectual horizon has been enlarged. We may now delight in the lowly, we may stoop and gather imperfect things, and rejoice in them,—rejoice beyond the old Greek rejoicing.

Yet it is easy to mistake the nature of this change of standard, and in doing so to run into grave moral danger. If we content ourselves with the imperfect rather than with the perfect, we are barbarians. We are not Christians nor are we Greeks, we are barbarians. But that is not the spirit of Jesus. He teaches us to catch the future in the instant, to see the infinite in the finite, to watch the growth of the perfect out of the im-

perfect. And he teaches us that this delight in progress, in growth, in aspiration, in completing, may rightly be greater than our exultation in completeness. In his view the joy of perfecting is beyond the joy of perfection.

Now I want to be sure that you young students, who are preparing yourselves here for larger life and are soon to emerge into the perplexing world, go forth with clear and Christian purpose. For though what I have been discussing may appear dry and abstract, it is an extremely practical matter. Consider a moment in which direction you are to seek the interests of your life. Will you demand that the things about you shall already possess their perfection? Will you ask from life that it be completed, finished, beautiful? If so, you are doomed to dreary days. Or are you to get your intellectual eyes open, see beauty in the making, and come to rejoice in it there rather than after it is made? That is the question I wish to present to-day; and I shall ask you to examine several provinces of life, and see how different they appear when surveyed from one point of view or from the other.

Undoubtedly all of you on leaving here will go into some home, either the home of your parents or—less fortunate—some stranger's home. And when you come there, I think I can foretell one thing: it will be a tolerably imperfect place in

which you find yourself. You will notice a great many points in which it is improvable; that is to say, a great many respects in which you might properly wish it otherwise. It will seem to you, I dare say, a little plain, a little commonplace, compared with your beautiful college and the college life here. I doubt whether you will find all the members of your family—dear though they may be—so wise, so gentle-mannered, so able to contribute to your intellectual life as are your companions here. Will you feel then, "Ah! home is a dull place, I wish I were back in college again! I think I was made for college life. Possibly enough I was made for a wealthy life. I am sure I was made for a comfortable life. But I do not find these things here. I will sit and wish I had them. Of course I ought not to enjoy a home that is short of perfection; and I recognize that this is a good way from that." Is this to be your attitude? Or are you going to say, "How interesting this home! What a brave struggle the dear people are making with the resources at their command! What kindness is shown by my tired mother; how swift she is in finding out the many small wants of the household! How diligent my father! Should I, if I had had only their narrow opportunities, be so intelligent, so kind, so self-sacrificing as they? What can I do to show them my gratitude? What can I contribute to-

ward the furtherance, the enlargement, the perfecting, of this home?" That is the wise course. Enter this home not merely as a matter of loving duty, but find in it also your own strong interests, and learn to say, "This home is not a perfect home, happily not a perfect home. I have something here to do. It is far more interesting than if it were already complete."

And again, you will not always live in a place so attractive as Cleveland. There are cities which have not your beautiful lake, your distant views, your charming houses excellently shaded with trees. These things are exceptional, and cannot always be yours. You may be obliged to live in an American town which appears to you highly unfinished, a town which constantly suggests that much still remains to be done. And then are you going to say, "This place is not beautiful, and I of course am a lover of the beautiful. How could one so superior as I rest in such surroundings? I could not respect myself were I not discontented." Is that to be your attitude? It is, I am sorry to think, the attitude of many who go from our colleges. They have been taught to reverence perfection, to honor excellence; and instead of making it their work to carry this excellence forth, and to be interested in spreading it far and wide in the world, they sit down and mourn that it has not yet come. How dull the world would be had

it come! Perfection, beauty? It constitutes a resting-place for us; it does not constitute our working-place.

I maintain, therefore, in regard to our land as a whole that there is no other so interesting on the face of the earth; and I am led to this conviction by the very reasoning which brought Mr. Arnold to a contrary opinion. I accept his judgment of the beauty of America. His premise is correct, but it should have conducted him to the opposite conclusion. In America we still are in the making. We are not yet beautiful and distinguished; and that is why America, beyond every other country, awakens a noble interest. The beauty which is in the old lands, and which refreshes for a season, is after all a species of death. Those who dwell among such scenes are appeased, they are not quickened. Let them keep their past; we have our future. We may do much. What they can do is largely at an end.

In literature also I wish to bring these distinctions before you, these differences of standard; and perhaps I cannot accomplish this better than by exhibiting them as they are presented in a few verses from the poet of the imperfect. I suppose if we try to mark out with precision the work of Mr. Browning,—I mean not to mark it out as the Browning societies do, but to mark it out with precision,—we might say that its distinctive fea-

ture is that he has guided himself by the principle on which I have insisted: he has sought for beauty where there is seeming chaos; he has loved growth, has prized progress, has noted the advance of the spiritual, the pressing on of the finite soul through hindrance to its junction with the infinite. This it is which has inspired his somewhat crabbed verses, and has made men willing to undergo the labor of reading them, that they too may partake of his insight. In one of his poems—one which seems to me to contain some of his sublimest as well as some of his most commonplace lines, the poem on *Old Pictures in Florence,*—he discriminates between Greek and Christian art in much the same way I have done. In *Greek Art,* Mr. Browning says:—

You saw yourself as you wished you were,
  As you might have been, as you cannot be;
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there;
  And grew content in your poor degree
With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
  And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
  And your little date, by their forms that stay.

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?
  Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.
You would prove a model? The son of Priam
  Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.
You're wroth — can you slay your snake like Apollo?
  You're grieved — still Niobe's the grander!
You live — there's the Racers' frieze to follow:
  You die — there's the dying Alexander.

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length
You learned — to submit is a mortal's duty.

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start—What if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they !
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature ?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature ;
For time, theirs—ours, for eternity.

To-day's brief passion limits their range ;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect — how else ? they shall never change :
We are faulty — why not ? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us ; we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished :
They stand for our copy, and once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

You will notice that in this subtle study Mr. Browning points out how through contact with perfection there may come content with our present lot. This I call the danger of perfection, our possible belittlement through beauty. For in the lives of us all there should be a divine discontent; not devilish discontent, but divine discontent,— a consciousness that life may be larger than we have yet attained, that we are to press beyond what we have reached, that joy lies in the future, in that which has not been found, rather than in

the realized present. And it seems to me if ever a people were called on to understand this glory of the imperfect, it is we of America, it is you of the Middle West; it is especially you who are undertaking here the experiment of a woman's college. You are at the beginning, and that fact should lend an interest to your work which cannot so readily be realized in our older institutions. As you look eastward upon my own huge university, Harvard University, it probably appears to you singularly beautiful, reverend in its age, magnificent in its endowments, equable in its working; perhaps you contemplate it as nearing perfection, and contrast your incipient college with it as hardly deserving of the name. You are entirely mistaken. Harvard University, to its glory be it said, is enormously unfinished; it is a great way from perfect; it is full of blemishes. We are tinkering at it all the time; and if it were not so, I for one should decline to be connected with it. Its interest for me would cease. You are to start free from some trammels that we feel. Because we have so large a past laid upon us we have not some freedoms of growth, some opportunities of enlargement, which you possess. Accordingly, in your very experiment here you have a superb illustration of the principle I am trying to explain. This young and imperfect college should interest you who are members of it; it should

interest this intelligent city. Wise patrons should find here a germ capable of such broad and interesting growth as may well call out their heartiest enthusiasm.

If then the modes of accepting the passion for perfection are so divergent as I have indicated, is it possible to suggest methods by which we may discipline ourselves in the nobler way of seeking the interests of life?—I mean by taking part with things in their beginnings, learning to reverence them there, and so attaining an interest which will continually be supported and carried forward. You may look with some anxiety upon the doctrine which I have laid down. You may say, "But beauty is seductive; beauty allures me. I know that the imperfect in its struggle toward perfection is the nobler matter. I know that America is, for him who can see all things, a more interesting land than Spain. Yes, I know this, but I find it hard to feel it. My strong temptation is to lie and dream in romance, in ideal perfection. By what means may I discipline myself out of this degraded habit and bring myself into the higher life, so that I shall always be interested in progress, in the future rather than in the past, in the on-going rather than in the completed life?" I cannot give an exact and final receipt for this better mind. A persistently studied experience must be the teacher. To-day you may understand

what I say, you may resolve to live according to the methods I approve. But you may be sure that to-morrow you will need to learn it all over again. And yet I think I can mention several lines of discipline, as I may call them. I can direct your attention to certain modes by which you may instruct yourselves how to take an interest in the imperfect thing, and still keep that interest an honorable one.

In my judgment, then, your first care should be to learn to observe. A simple matter—one, I dare say, which it will seem to you difficult to avoid. You have a pair of eyes; how can you fail to observe? Ah! but eyes can only look, and that is not observing. We must not rest in looking, but must penetrate into things, if we would find out what is there. And to find this out is worth while, for everything when observed is of immense interest. There is no object so remote from human life that when we come to study it we may not detect within its narrow compass illuminating and therefore interesting matter. But it makes a great difference whether we do thus really observe, whether we hold attention to the thing in hand, and see what it contains. Once, after puzzling long over the charm of Homer, I applied to a learned friend and said to him, "Can you tell me why Homer is so interesting? Why can't you and I write as he wrote? Why is it that his art

is lost, and that to-day it is impossible for us to awaken an interest at all comparable to his?"— "Well," said my friend, "I have often meditated on that, but it seems to come to about this: Homer looked long at a thing. Why," said he, "do you know that if you should hold up your thumb and look at it long enough, you would find it immensely interesting?" Homer looks a great while at his thumb. He sees precisely the thing he is dealing with. He does not confuse it with anything else. It is sharp to him; and because it is sharp to him it stands out sharply for us over thousands of years. Have you acquired this art, or do you hastily glance at insignificant objects? Do you see the thing exactly as it is? Do you strip away from it your own likings and dislikings, your own previous notions of what it ought to be? Do you come face to face with things? If you do, the hardest situation in life may well be to you a delight. For you will not regard hardships, but only opportunities. Possibly you may even feel, "Yes, here are just the difficulties I like to explore. How can one be interested in easy things? The hard things of life are the ones for which we ought to give thanks." So we may feel if we have made the cool and hardy temper of the observer our own, if we have learned to put ourselves into a situation and to understand it on all sides. Why, the things on which we have thus

concentrated attention become our permanent interests. For example, unluckily when I was trained I was not disciplined in botany. I cannot, therefore, now observe the rose. Some of you can, for you have been studying botany here. I have to look stupidly on the total beauty of this lovely object; I can see it only as a whole, while you, fine observer, who have trained your powers to pierce it, can comprehend its very structure and see how marvellously the blooming thing is put together. My eyes were dulled to that long ago; I cannot observe it. Beware, do not let yourselves grow dull. Observe, observe, observe in every direction! Keep your eyes open. Go forward, understanding that the world was made for your knowledge, that you have the right to enter into and possess it.

And then besides, you need to train yourselves to sympathize with that which lies beyond you. It is easy to sympathize with that which lies within you. Many persons go through life sympathizing with themselves all the while. What unhappy persons! How unfit for anything important! They are full of themselves and answer their own motion, while there beyond them lies all the wealthy world in which they might be sharers. For sympathy is feeling with; it is the identification of ourself with that which at present is not ourself. It is going forth and joining

that which we behold, not standing aloof and merely observing, as I said at first. When we observe, the object we observe is alien to us; when we sympathize, we identify ourselves with it. You may go into a home and observe, and you will make every person in that home wretched. But go into a home and sympathize, find out what lies beyond you there, see how differently those persons are thinking and feeling from the ways in which you are accustomed to think and feel; yet notice how imperfect you are in yourself, and how important it is that persons should be fashioned thus different from you if even your own completion is to come; then, I say, you will find yourself becoming large in your own being, and a large benefactor of others.

Do not stunt sympathy, then. Do not allow walls to rise up and hem it in. Never say to yourself, "This is my way; I don't do so and so. I know only this and that; I don't want to know anything else. You other people may have that habit, but these are my habits, and I always do thus and thus." Do not say that. Nothing is more immoral than moral psychology. You should have no interest in yourself as you stand; because a larger selfhood lies beyond you, and you should be going forth and claiming your heritage there. Do not, then, stand apart from the movements of the country,—the political, charitable,

religious, scientific, literary movements — however distastefully they may strike you. Identify yourself with them, sympathize with them. They all have a noble side; seek it out and claim it as your own. Throw yourself into all life and make it nobly yours.

But I am afraid it would be impossible for you thus to observe, thus to sympathize, unless you bring within your imperfect self just grounds of self-respect. You must contribute to things if you would draw from things. You must already have acquired some sort of excellence in order to detect larger excellence elsewhere. You should therefore have made yourself the master of something which you can do, and do on the whole better than anybody else. That is the moral aspect of competition, that one person can do a certain thing best and so it is given him to do. Some of you who are going out into the world before long will, I fear, be astonished to find that the world is already full. It has no place for you; it never anticipated your coming and it has reserved for you no corner. Your only means of gaining a corner will be by doing something better than the people who are already there. Then they will make you a place. And that is what you should be considering here. You should be training yourself to do something well, it really does not matter much what. Can you make dresses well?

Can you cook a good loaf of bread? Can you write a poem or run a typewriter? Can you do anything well? Are you a master somewhere? If you are, the world will have a place for you; and more than that, you will have within you just grounds for self-respect.

To sum up what I have been saying throughout this address merely amounts to this: that the imperfect thing—the one thing of genuine interest in all the world—gets its right to be respected only through its connection with the totality of things. Do not, then, when you leave college say to yourself, "I know Greek. That is a splendid thing to know. These people whom I am meeting do not know it and are obviously of a lower grade than I." That will not be self-respectful, because it shows that you have not understood your proper place. You should respect yourself as a part of all, and not as of independent worth. To call this wide world our own larger self is not too extravagant an expression. But if we are to count it so, then we must count the particular thing which we are capable of doing as merely our special contribution to the great self. And we must understand that many are making similar contributions. What I want you to feel, therefore, is the profound conception of mutual helpfulness and resulting individual dignity which St. Paul has set forth, according to which each of us is

performing a special function in the common life, and that life of all is recognized as the divine life, the manifestation of the life of the Father. When you have come to that point, when you have seen in the imperfect a portion, an aspect, of the total perfect, divine life, then I am not afraid life will be uninteresting. Indeed, I would say to every one who goes from this college, you can count with confidence on a life which shall be vastly more interesting beyond the college walls than ever it has proved here, if you have once acquired the art of penetrating into the imperfect, and finding in limited, finite life the infinite life. "To apprehend thus, draws us a profit from all things we see."