

WHAT AN
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
SHOULD BE.

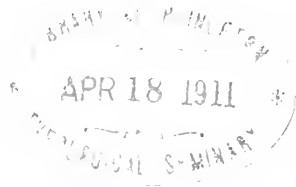
BY PRESIDENT JAMES MCCOSH, D.D., LL.D., L.D.,
OF PRINCETON COLLEGE.

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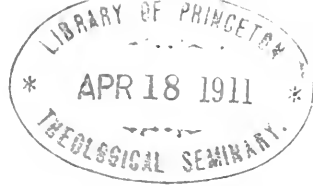
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WHAT AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SHOULD BE.*

BY PRESIDENT JAMES MCCOSH, D.D., LL.D., L.D.,
OF PRINCETON COLLEGE.

There are very loose ideas entertained in America, and I may add, in other countries, as to what is the difference between a college and a university, and what the relation of the one to the other. A modest institution like Princeton is contented with the title of college, whereas, she has sisters, who, with one-third the number of students and one-fourth the number of the instructors, call themselves universities. I will not name them, as their grand title proclaims their fame.

It is not so difficult to determine what a college is. It is an institution set apart to give instruction, not just to children—that is a school,—but young people about to enter on their life-work. The phrase is sometimes applied in a metaphorical sense to business colleges and tradesmen's colleges; but scholars claim that, from long usage, it should be confined to institutions giving instruction in the higher or learned branches and authorized by the State to give a degree of some kind.

It is not so easy to keep a university within due bounds. In the Dark Ages—but which I rather call the Twilight Ages between the ancient and modern days—they had Seven Liberal Arts, which they divided into a trivium and a quadrivium. The trivium embraced grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, in which youths were introduced to the use of language, and were taught to think and express themselves. These were the introductory studies (giving us the word *trivial*), but rising to the quadrivium, in which were geometry, arithmetic, music, and astrology—or the astronomy of the day, which gave a mystical meaning to the movement of the stars. These branches were taught by ecclesiastics in connection with

* An address delivered at Woodstock, Conn., on the Fourth of July, 1885.

monasteries and cathedrals, in a narrow spirit and technical form. Yet, the instruction, like the winter, kept alive the seed which had been dropped at the fall of the Roman Empire, till a spring arrived when they burst out. In the eighth century, institutions were founded to give instructions in these studies, and were called universities, while the branches taught were called *Studium Generale*. We are astonished to hear of the stimulus thus given to youths of all grades of society. In the fifteenth century, it is said that at Bologna there were fully 10,000 scholars, at Paris 25,000, and at Oxford 30,000; “an exaggeration,” says Hallam, “which seems to show that the number was very great.” The universities had different faculties giving instruction in different departments—the faculty of theology, the faculty of arts, the faculty of philosophy, the faculty of medicine, etc. These divisions have continued down to our day. At the renaissance of learning, and the reformation in religion, the branches taught were widened; ancient Greek, a variety of languages and literature, and the new sciences were introduced, and this enlargement has been going on ever since, and there is a strong demand that it be continued.

We see what is the difference between a college and a university. A college is a teaching body; a university is something higher; it embraces a number and variety of departments, it may be a number of colleges—Oxford has twenty-two—combined in a unity of government and aim, which is generally to promote a higher learning. I have first to say a few things about a college.

A college is fitted to do immeasurable good, though it should not rise into a university. Of the two, if we are obliged to choose between, a college well equipped and devoting itself to its work is of vastly greater use than a scattered university which spreads over a wide surface, and, professing to teach everything, teaches nothing effectively. The grand aim of our educationists, and, indeed, of all who love their country, should be to strengthen and improve the American colleges and make them fulfill their high end—that of imparting definite instruction, each to a body of promising young men spread all over the country.

Here I may state that I do not feel inclined to indulge in the disparaging language sometimes applied to the smaller colleges by our haughty Eastern professors, who forget that their colleges were babies before they became men, and were brought out of the land of Egypt, and came through the wilderness. Most of these younger colleges are serving a good purpose. They all do so, so far as they give solid, and not superficial, knowledge; so far as they teach thoroughly the fundamental and disciplinary branches of literature, science, and philosophy, and also impart religious instructions to give a high tone to the mind. They draw a number of young men from their vicinity who could never be allured to more distant and expensive places. If they cannot impart a wide and varied culture, they often give a substantial training.

It is a happy circumstance that in almost all these colleges religion is inculcated; and they may be the means of compelling our larger colleges not to abandon it, when they might be led to do so by the pressure of the times. I admit, as to some of them, that they seem to serve little other purpose than to keep back young men from better colleges, where they might get stimulus and true scholarship. But these will give way, by the force of that law of our world, "the struggle for existence," which demands that the weak die while the strong survive.

It is not noticed so often as it should be that, while our larger universities teach a greater number of subjects, they cannot teach all of them to every young man. Each student cannot take more than a certain number—say four, or, at the utmost, six—each year, and when the number of electives is large, he may be tempted to take what is easy or showy, rather than what is fitted to brace or strengthen the mind or prepare him for the hard struggle of life. The young man who in his senior year takes a century of history, music, art, and a criticism of French plays in a large college, of whose greatness he boasts, living upon its glory instead of his own exertions, may not be so well educated, after all, as one who, in a Western college, is required to take ethics, astronomy, geology, and political economy.

I hold, then, that we may retain all our colleges that impart real knowledge and culture. But there may, there should, also be universities. Every thinking man knows and feels that this country has now reached a stage at which it should look toward confirming, enlarging, and improving the universities already existing, and rearing a few new ones, it may be, on a better model. We have now to settle the question what should be the aim of a university.

1. It should combine and regulate the course of study in the several departments, or colleges, which make up the university, say art and science and theology and medicine and architecture, or whatever else. It is not necessary, perhaps it is not expedient, that every one of these should be independent of the others. They might always co-operate in a variety of ways, and so that a branch of knowledge which was taught effectively in one department might be available by a student in another. The same professor might teach chemistry in the arts and in the science department. A student in arts, wishing anatomy, might have it effectively taught him by the professor in the school of medicine. A student in law or medicine might have his mind enlarged by taking certain classes in arts. Each department of the building should have its separate place, while the university, as a tower, combines and crowns the whole.

2. It should establish what are called post-graduate, or graduate courses. In the under-graduate courses the studies are very much crowded, owing to the multiplied branches which an educated man has now to learn. It would be of great use if we could detain one in ten, or, better, one in five, a year after graduation, in order to study specially some special branch or branches. Post-graduate courses should be provided for these. In these, the very highest studies and investigations in the several arts and sciences should be pursued, say in languages or in science or philosophy. They might be taught as advanced courses by the under-graduate professors, or by special professors, of high gifts. They should be open only to those who have taken a degree in one or other of the collegiate departments, or by favor to special students who have reached high attainments in particular

branches. These would be eagerly seized by our higher minds, with a taste for higher work, and ready to go on with it. These are the youths who would conduct original research and make original observations, and advance learning and make discoveries, and bring glory to the place at which they received their education, and to their country at large. They should be encouraged by scholarships and fellowships, which would furnish partial support to those following these high pursuits, and be recognized and rewarded by degrees which would at once stamp those earning them as possessing high qualities, and entitling them to be chosen to positions of honor and influence. By this means, America could produce scholars and observers equal to those in Europe. This cannot be accomplished if students are constrained to give up learning as soon as they have earned their first academic degree, a state of things almost universal in this country.

3. It should have various sorts of degrees in which different kinds of studies culminate.

Every university should have a Degree in Arts. This, in my opinion, should be the essential one in all our universities, which might do without every other one degree, but should not be tolerated without this. This is the degree which implies, or should imply, that the person possessing it has culture. All students should be allured, though it may be they cannot be compelled, to take it before they enter any other school, such as that of law or medicine. Happily, it is required on the part of most churches before entering on the study of theology. In this way we might secure a body of truly learned men in all our learned professions. They have vastly more of this in the European countries than in America. Thus, in Great Britain (since I began to take an interest in public questions), a very considerable amount of general scholarship is required of those who would enter on the study of medicine; and, to my personal knowledge, the character of physicians has been greatly raised in this last age; their skill is acknowledged to be vastly greater, their manners have been refined, and the respect in which they are held greatly increased. In no way could the medical profession be so effectually elevated as by a provision of this kind.

But, in order to accomplish these and other good ends, the standard of scholarship should be kept up in the Arts Department. It should embrace the new branches as they become established; but it should also hold by the old. If it is to serve its end, and keep its high position, we must retain such branches as Greek and Logic and Ethics; and scholars must fight determinedly to hold this fort.

But while Arts ought to hold the essential place in a university, I am not prepared to maintain that it should be the only department allowed or encouraged. I hold that all true knowledge of an elevating kind, that all that is fitted to enlarge and refine the mind, may have a place in a university, and each group of studies may have its separate degree. I do not here speak of professional degrees, such as those of law and medicine, of agriculture and architecture, but rather of those intended to encourage learning and culture. There might be the degrees of Bachelor of Literature, Master of Literature, and Doctor of Literature. There should be Degrees of B.S., of M.S., and D.S. I have no objections even to degrees in painting and music. But let all these branches be taught in a scientific manner and spirit, and the degrees bestowed only after a rigid examination. Let no one be entitled to the honor merely because of his practical skill. This is its own reward, and needs no other than the money it brings. In every university there should be the various branches that cultivate the higher faculties of the mind. If there be degrees of literature which cultivate the taste, and of science which impart knowledge, there should also be degrees in philosophy, to encourage thought, especially reflective thought, embracing all departments of mental and social science, with the principles involved in historical investigation in art and in law. Care must be taken in grouping the studies to be taken in order to degrees, not to encourage narrow and exclusive study, which makes our minds one-sided and malformed. A degree of no kind should be given to any one whose mind is not stored with some sort of knowledge, and refined by some kind of literature, say that of his own country.

I have an idea that there is a point here at which the present controversy, as to whether Greek and Mental Science

should be retained as obligatory departments in a college, may terminate. I think we should fight to the death to keep these in the Department of Arts. They have been implied in the Arts Degree in times past. Great good is to be secured by continuing this in time to come. It will secure a breadth and comprehensiveness of mind among our educated men which will tend to advance our nation in all that is great and good. But, surely, there may be academic degrees bestowed in which Greek is not required, such as degrees in science, degrees in medicine. Above all things, it should be insisted that every degree has a meaning which all men can understand, and that it should be bestowed honestly. Master of Arts should signify that he who possesses it is a classical scholar and has a general knowledge of science and literature. Doctor of Philosophy should denote that the possessor of it is a thinker, inquiring into the fundamental principles of things without and within him.

4. The grand aim of a university should be to promote all kinds of high learning, in literature and science, in the liberal arts and in philosophy.

In particular, it should encourage and carry on original research. The question is sometimes discussed whether the chief office of a college should be to instruct the young or to advance knowledge. I take my side on that question very decidedly: I hold that it should be the primary aim, both of a college and a university, to educate the promising youth of a country. But I maintain, at the same time, that every high-class teacher should be carrying on researches of his own. This, as it becomes known, will stimulate his pupils powerfully, and make them more earnest and enthusiastic in pursuing their studies. As he asks them to join with him, they will feel that they are fellow-workers with him, and in a sense sharers in the glory that gathers round him.

In carrying out this idea a university should always seek to employ as professors those who are ready to undertake active work in their department and to widen the boundaries of knowledge. They might even include in their body a few persons not specially fitted to teach large classes, but who, in conducting their own researches, may give instruction to a

select few, who are determined to penetrate deeper into the secrets of Nature, and who are to advance the science of the world.

Suppose, now, that, in America, there is a person, or a body of persons—say a college,—wishing to establish a university. I may be permitted, without at all dictating to them, to throw out a few hints as to how they should proceed.

1. I would have them bear in mind that they do not require, in erecting a university, to proceed *de novo*. They should remember that the ground is already so far occupied. There are, at this moment, toward 400 colleges in America with the power of granting degrees. They are scattered over the country, and many of them supply able and efficient teaching. They have sprung up spontaneously in the country, and are suited to its genius and its circumstances. They have the instinct of life-preservation, and they shrink from annihilation. Most of them are doing good, and to kill them would be murder in the first degree. They are not to be swept away, but to be elevated. Some of them are to be made the basis on which our universities are to be built.

2. There are colleges which may be, and should aim to be, universities. I use this guarded language because I do not believe that every college should call itself a university or strive to rise to this elevation. A college may do boundless good for time and for eternity without striving to swell itself into more ambitious dimensions. It may educate a body of young men to occupy high positions as ministers of religion, as lawyers, as doctors, and, indeed, in all professions. No college should seek prematurely to be a university. For myself, I have, until the present time, resisted all attempts to designate Princeton by that name. But there are colleges which may legitimately and laudably aim to reach the higher status. They have been adding new departments and new professors, till they have now a *Studium Generale*, and they need only to mount one step higher and be organized into a university. But, in doing so, it is to be understood that they are to aim at accomplishing all the high ends implied in the name.

3. I argue resolutely that the American university should

not seek to mold itself upon any European model. The European universities are the growth of ages, most of them cherished by the Church and supported by the State, and adapted to this state of things. They differ from each other. The German ones differ widely from the British. The English do not give instruction in the same way as the Scotch : the former do it chiefly by tutors and text-books, the latter by professors and lectures. The American university should take a character of its own, suited to the circumstances of its birth and its growth. The scattered colleges would still have to do the work of giving higher education to the young men of America. But a limited number of universities, well-endowed and set up in favorable localities, would indefinitely extend the range of American scholarship and original investigation. It should be so arranged that a student graduated at any of our scattered colleges should be able to go on to the universities to receive the special instruction which he may wish.

4. The American universities need not be all alike. They might be all after one general model, but with a diversity along with their sameness, "just as, if a number of archers had aimed successfully at a mark upon a wall, and this mark were then removed, we could, by an examination of their arrow-marks, point out the probable position of the spot aimed at with a certainty of being nearer to it than any of their spots." (Ruskin.) Each might differ from the other according to its position, and the ends it sets before it, and the wealth committed to it. A university so situated as not to be within reach of law courts or hospitals, would not wish to have a law school or a medical school. Where there are no mines, we need not set up a mining school. A city university would find a school of agriculture to be an inconvenience to it. For myself, I feel that it would be quite beyond me to set up universities suited to every one locality. But of this I am sure, that, with the assistance of the friends of education and of the college, I could now establish an excellent university at Princeton.

I am of opinion that, in the university, both the faculty and the board of trustees should retain their place of trust. The discipline should continue, with the faculty divided, when

the college is large, into sub-faculties, to take charge of each class. The trustees should be the bond of connection between the outside world and the teaching body, serving much the same purpose as the Government does to the State-endowed universities of Europe. They should provide the funds, take a general oversight, and act as a jury in all educational discussions.

I have sometimes thought that a third body should be instituted, composed of elected members of the board of trustees, of elected members of the faculty, and of elected members of the alumni. It should be understood that the persons should all be scholars, and acquainted with the higher education of various countries. They might constitute a senate or council for the regulation of the education in the college, being always under the board of trustees. They should have the right to visit all lecture-rooms, to inspect all examinations, to report on the teaching of the college, and to suggest remedies for abuses. The president of the college should be president of this board. When it exists, it should have the power of arranging the courses of study in order to a degree, and for recommending to the trustees candidates for the degrees.

It is suggested to me here to propose two important reforms in university regulations, which should be carried out whether there is or is not a senate or council. In Europe the examination for degrees are all conducted by persons other than the professors. In some cases the examiners are entirely different from the instructors. In other cases (having acted under both systems, I prefer this) there are competent scholars associated with the professors. It stimulates professors when they know that their work is thus to be overlooked by competent men; and the best teachers always like the system. It stimulates students to know that they should have not only a knowledge of the teaching of their professor, but of the general subject which he has taught. It should always be understood that the ordinary teaching and recitations should be left with the professors, under the control of the trustees. But the examination for degrees should lie with impartial examiners, who are a guarantee to the public that the degrees are properly bestowed.

The public are demanding a reform on another point, and that is in regard to the mode of conferring higher degrees, and especially honorary degrees. The terms on which such degrees as Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science, Doctor of Literature, and the like, should be granted, might be reviewed with profit, and with public approbation. The general sentiment is that they should be given only after a course of study in a special department has been pursued, and an examination held upon it.

There is a deep and growing dissatisfaction with the mode in which honorary degrees are conferred at commencements and on other occasions. They are bestowed on no good principle that I can discover. The end intended by all academic titles is to call forth, encourage, and reward scholarship. They are prostituted when they are turned to any other ends. It is alleged that they are given, at times, merely from personal friendship; I believe that such cases are not numerous in our higher colleges. The avowed principle on which they are commonly bestowed is to secure friends to the college, in ministers of religion, in teachers, in wealthy or influential men. But this end is not always secured. The public are shrewd enough to see through the whole thing, and despise the action and the actors. Trustees should see the sneer that gathers on the face of intelligent people when they hear or read of a degree bestowed on some person who has done nothing to deserve it. A decent, respectable minister gets a D.D., and it is supposed that he is thereby pre-engaged to the college, to which he will send all the boys in his congregation. But he is surrounded by a half-dozen ministers who feel that they are quite as good as he is, and, having been overlooked, they are tempted to send their boys elsewhere.

Surely, a way may be devised by which these evils, about which the public is now sensitive, may be avoided, and honorary degrees given only to men who have promoted scholarship or done some great work fitted to elevate mankind. The recommendation for degrees should not be left with a common board, which has no means of making a scrutiny. It should proceed from a company of select men who make careful inquiry as to the qualifications of the persons nominated. It

might be left with the senate or council, when there is such a body; when there is not, the board of trustees might appoint a standing committee, consisting of its most scholarly members, to sift all applications and report to the board. As to American colleges scattering titles over the world, the practice might now cease, and every man be left to seek the honor from his own country, where they can best judge of him. This would certainly have one good effect: it would prevent American degrees from becoming the laughing-stock of Europe.

I have said enough. It is not for me to draw out the constitution of the American university. I am satisfied if I have furnished a good ground-plan. My hope is that I have scattered this day a few seeds which may germinate, possibly, in the minds of others.

No institutions are making greater progress at this present time than universities all over the world. If America is to keep up with other countries, it must advance with them. In practical invention—such, for instance, as reaping machines and sewing machines,—America is before other countries. In our ordinary college work we are equal to them. Our students are as hard-working and drink in as much knowledge as the English, the Scotch, or the Irish. But there are still certain superiorities in the Old World. The European universities still surpass us in rearing a few ripe scholars, and in producing a greater number of profound scientific men. Students have still to go to Europe—especially to Germany—for certain branches of study. America, while carefully keeping what it has got, should strive to equal the countries of our fathers' sepulchres on the points in which it is deficient; that is, in not only sending forth a large number of usefully educated youth, but in rearing a body of truly learned men, who advance scholarship and make scientific discoveries which lead to all sorts of practical applications.

This, as it appears to me, might best be secured by super-inducing universities upon a few of our more advanced colleges. In some respects, we are at a disadvantage when compared with Europe; in others, we are in a superior position. They have the prestige of ancestry and antiquity; but, on the

other hand, we have the spring and elasticity of youth. They have a larger experience; but we have a new life and a wider field. Except for the benefit of travel and of seeing other countries, it should no longer be necessary for our youth to go in troops to foreign universities to slake their thirst for knowledge; for they should have all the learning they need in their own land. The universities of Europe are cramped by antiquated laws and proscriptions, and by vested pecuniary rights which cannot be interfered with. America, not being so hindered, might stretch out wide as its own territory. This, however, is for the future; for the present, it is simply to be earnestly aimed at. But, according to a shrewd proverb of my native country, "A thing well begun is half ended."

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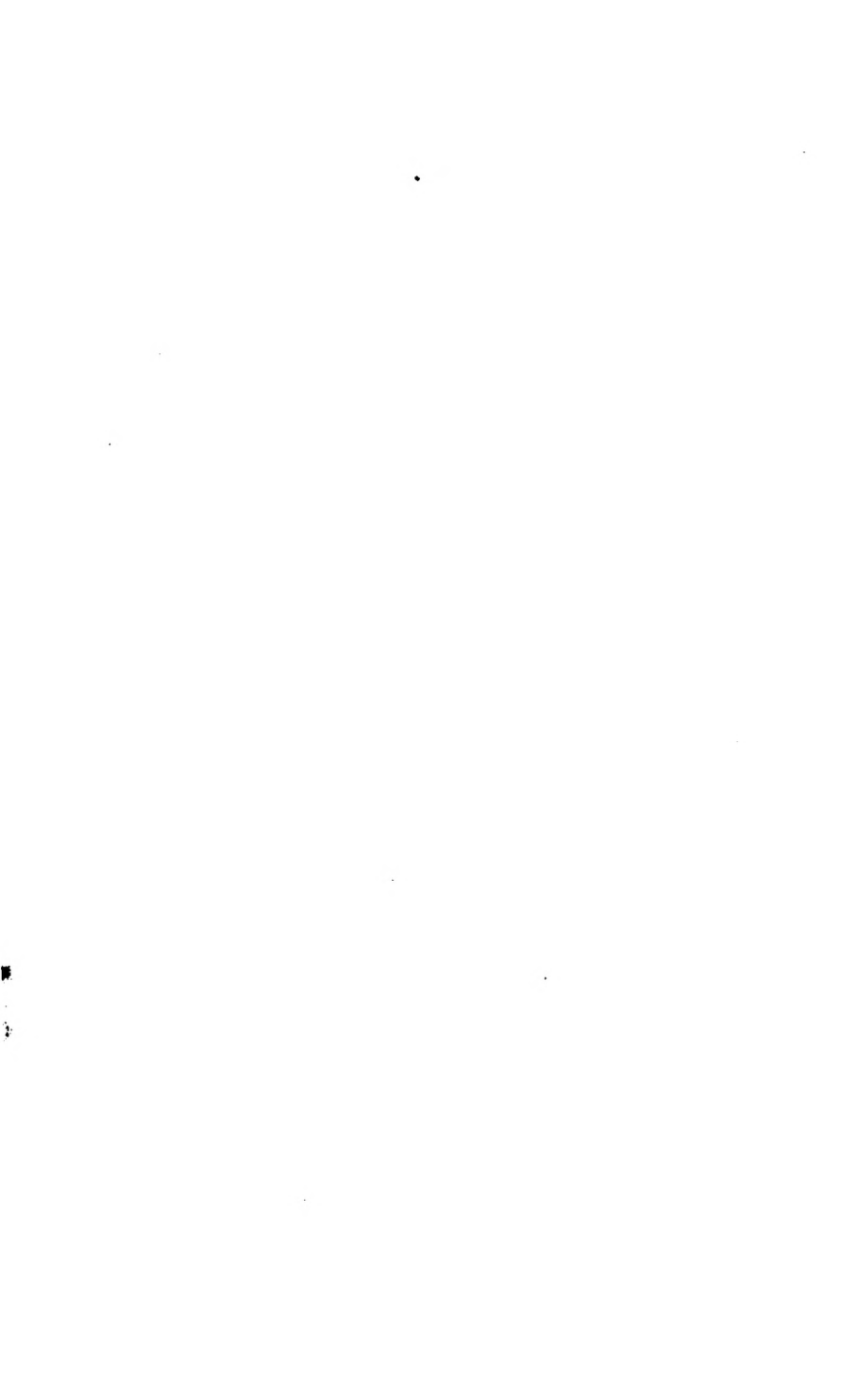
It now lies with the college authorities to determine whether they are prepared to make Princeton College a university. For myself, I am anxious that the Alumni should take an interest in and express an opinion on the subject.

All the late advances in this college have tended toward making it take a comprehensive character, such as is implied in the name "University." We have been enabled to do this by the munificent gifts of Mr. John C. Green, continued by his trustees; of Messrs. Robert L. and Alexander Stuart, and of Mrs. Stuart; of Mr. John I. Blair; of Mr. H. G. Marquand; of Mr. Libbey; of Mr. Robert Bonner; of Mr. John S. Kennedy; of Mr. Frederick Marquand's trustees, and others. We have been adding immensely to the subjects taught and the number of our professors, and we have secured erudite men to fill the chairs. We have now a large corps of professors and tutors, who have been distributed into three departments acting in unison: I., Language and Literature; II., Science; III., Philosophy. We have just added two young assistant professors, one in Mathematics and one in Physics. We have two German professors, and provision has been made for a professor of French Language and Literature, who will know the Romance languages and be ready to teach Italian and Spanish to those who wish it.

We need only take a step in advance to make the college a university. We do not need to add any new buildings to the fine ones we already have, except a fire-proof Museum of Art, for which we have a subscription of \$25,000. We are not proposing to set up either a Medical School or a Law School. But we add to the number of those studies which cultivate the mind, which rear educated gentlemen and fit them for the higher professions of life. There might be special courses, with special academic titles attached, in Literature, Science, and Philosophy.

In order to accomplish this we would require the endowment of a few new chairs, and room for an indefinite increase. We should also add to the salaries of some of our younger professors, and require them to conduct university courses, which they are perfectly competent to do. If we had this we could easily organize a university deserving of the name, keeping the A. B. and A. M. degree as they are, and requiring all seeking for it to take a high course of study, including Greek and Mental Science. We might have a variety of degrees, each with a distinct meaning, and implying special qualifications in Literature, in Philosophy and Science, in the Fine Arts, in Economic Studies, in Journalism, and in Statesmanship. In this way we could give instruction in every department of a liberal education.

JAMES McCOSH.



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