

LC174

J7



---

UNIVERSITY OF THE UNITED STATES.

---

DECEMBER 21, 1896.—Referred to the Committee to Establish the University of the United States and ordered to be printed.

---

Mr. SHERMAN, from the Committee to Establish the University of the United States, presented the following

COMMUNICATION FROM DAVID STARR JORDAN, PRESIDENT OF LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY, TRANSMITTING THE SUBSTANCE OF HIS ARGUMENT BEFORE THE COMMITTEE TO ESTABLISH THE UNIVERSITY OF THE UNITED STATES, DECEMBER 17, 1896.

[To accompany S. 1202.]

---

WASHINGTON, D. C., December 17, 1896.

DEAR SIR: As requested by you, I send herewith the substance of my remarks before your committee this morning on the need of a national university. The manuscript as here inclosed is for the most part identical with an article prepared by me for the January number of *The Forum*, to which magazine full credit should be given should these remarks be printed.

Very truly yours,

DAVID S. JORDAN.

Senator KYLE,

*Chairman Committee to Establish the University of the United States.*

---

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE UNITED STATES.

The most important event in the history of modern Germany has been the foundation of the University of Berlin. The unification of the German Empire was a matter of tremendous significance. The success of the German armies has widened the sphere of Teutonic influence, while the recent adoption of a uniform code of laws throughout Germany has been an event of far-reaching importance. But much more important has been the growth of a great center of human wisdom in Germany's chief capital. The influence of the University of Berlin shows itself not only in Germany's preeminence in scientific investigation, not only in the wide diffusion of liberal culture, but it is felt in every branch of industrial effort. There is no trade or handiwork in Germany that has not been made more effective by the practical application of investigations made in the great university. There is no line of effort in which men have not grown wiser through the influence of the noble body of men brought together to form this institution.

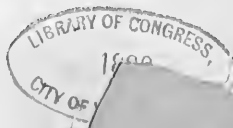
W.C. 174  
J7

is the... the university confined solely or even mainly the boundaries of Germany. The great revival of learning in America which has shown itself in the growth of universities, in the use of the spirit of investigation, and in the realization of the value of truth, can be traced in large degree to Germanic influences. These influences have not come to us through German immigration nor from the presence of German scholars among us, but through the experience of American scholars in Germany. If it be true, as Mr. James Bryce avers, "that of all institutions in America" the universities "have the best promise for the future," we have Germany to thank for this. It is, however, no abstract Germany that we may thank, but a concrete fact. It is the existence in Germany of universities, strong, effective, and free, and first among these we must place the youngest and greatest of their number, the University of Berlin.

In the history of our Republic this century has had its epoch-making events. The war of Union, the abolition of slavery, one and the same in essence, mark the movement of the Republic from mediævalism to civilization. But the great deed of the century still remains undone. Ever since the time of Washington our lawgivers have had in contemplation the building of a university at the nation's capital. They have planned a university that shall be national and American, as the University of Berlin is national and German; a university that shall be the culmination of our public-school system, and that by its vivifying influence shall quicken the pulse of every part of that system. For more than a century wise men have kept this project in mind. For more than a century wise men have seen the pressing need of its accomplishment. For more than a century, however, the exigencies of politics or the indifference of political managers have caused postponement of its final consideration.

Meanwhile, about the national capital, by the very necessities of the case, the basal material of a great university has been already gathered. The National Museum and the Army Medical Museum far exceed all other similar collections in America in the amount and value of the material gathered for investigation. The Library of Congress is our public library, and, in the nature of things, it will always be so. The Geological Survey, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, biological surveys of the Department of Agriculture are engaged in investigations of the highest order, conducted by university training, and possible to no other men. The United Fish Commission is the source of a vast part of our knowledge of sea and of sea life. Besides these, are many other bureaus and commissions in which scientific inquiry constitutes the daily work. The work of these departments should be made useful not only in its conclusions but in its methods. A university consists of investigators teaching. All that the national capital needs to make a great university of it is that a body of real scholars should be maintained to train other men in the work now so worthily carried on. To do this would be to bring to America all that American scholars now seek in the University of Berlin. Students will come wherever opportunities for investigation are given. No standards of work can be made too high, for the severest standards attract rather than repel men who are worth educating.

It should not be necessary to bring arguments to show the need of a national university in America. A university, we may remember, is not a school for boys and girls, where the elements of a liberal education are taught to those who have yet to enter upon the serious side of



occupy. In doing so it would furnish a stimulus which would strengthen all like work throughout the land.

Graduate work has yet to be taken seriously by American universities. Their teachers have carried on original research, if at all, in hours stolen from their daily tasks of plodding and prodding. The graduate student has been allowed to shift for himself, and he has been encouraged to select a university not for the training it offers, but because of some bonus in the form of scholarships. The free-lunch inducement to investigation will never build up a university. Fellowships can never take the place of men or books or apparatus in developing the university spirit. Great libraries and adequate facilities for work are costly, and no American institution has yet gathered together such essentials for university work as already exist at Washington.

If a national university is a national need, it is the duty of the people to meet and satisfy it. No other power can do it. As well ask wealthy manufacturers or wealthy churches to endow and support our supreme court of law as to endow and support our supreme university. They can not do it; they will not do it, and as free men we would not have them do it if they would. As to this, Mr. John W. Hoyt, a man who has for years bravely led in the effort to establish a national university, has these strong words:

#### WHAT SHOULD THE NATION UNDERTAKE TO ACCOMPLISH?

What the citizen has not done and can not do is our answer. The citizen may create a very worthy and quite important private institution, some of which may be named to-day, but no citizen, however great his fortune, and no single commonwealth, much less any sectarian organization or any combination of these, can create an institution that shall be so wholly free from bias of any and every sort; that shall complete our public educational system; that shall exert so nationalizing and harmonizing an influence upon all portions of our great country; that shall be always ready to meet the demands of the Government for service in whatsoever field, and that shall at the same time secure to the United States an acknowledged ascendancy in the ever-widening field of intellectual activity.

A university bears the stamp of its origin. Whatever its origin, the university ennobles it. But a national university must spring from the people. It must be paid for by them and must have its final justification in the upbuilding of the nation. Whatever institutions the people need the people must create and control. That this can be wisely done is no matter of theory. With all their mistakes and crudities, the State universities of America constitute the most hopeful feature in our whole educational system. Doubtless the weakness and folly of the people have affected them injuriously from time to time. This is not the point. We must think of the effect they have had in curing the people of weakness and folly. "The history of Iowa," says Dr. Angell, "is the history of her State university." The same thing is grandly and emphatically true in Dr. Angell's own State of Michigan. In its degree the history of every State is molded by its highest institution of learning.

As I have had occasion to say once before—

Many trials are made in popular government; many blunders are committed before any given piece of work falls into the hands of competent men. But mistakes are a source of education. Sooner or later the right man will be found and the right management of a public institution will justify itself. What is well done can never be wholly undone. In the long run, few institutions are less subject to partisan influence than a State university. When the foul grip of the spoilsman is once unloosed it can never be restored. In the evil days which befell the politics of Virginia, when the fair name of the State was traded upon by spoilsmen of every party, of every degree, the one thing in the State never touched by them was the honor of

**life.** A university is not a school maintained for the glory or the extension of any denominational body. In its very definition, a university must be above and beyond all sectarianism. Truth is as broad as the universe, and no one can search for it between any artificial boundaries. As well ask for Presbyterian sunshine or a Baptist June as to speak of a denominational university.

It is said that we have in America already some four hundred colleges and universities, and that therefore we do not need any more. Quite true. We need no more like these. The splendid achievement and noble promise of our universities, to which Mr. Bryce calls attention, is not due to their number. Many of them do not show this promise. If such were to close their doors to-morrow education would be the gainer for it. Many of these institutions, as we know, are not universities in fact nor in spirit. Most of the work done in the best of them is that of the German gymnasium or preparatory school. The worst of them would, in Germany, be closed by the police, but in a certain number of the strongest and freest of these is found in the highest degree the genuine university spirit. For more of these good ones there is a crying demand. Their very promise is a reason why we should do everything possible to make them better.

A school can rise to be a university only when its teachers are university men—when they are men trained to face directly and effectively the problems of nature and life. To give such training is the work of the university. In an educational system each grade looks to the one next higher for help and inspiration. The place at the head of our system is now held by a university of a foreign land. It is not the needs of the District of Columbia which are to be met by the University of the United States. The local needs are well supplied already. It is the need of the nation. And not of the nation alone, but of the world. A great university in America would be a school for the study of civic freedom: A great university at the capital of the Republic would attract the free-minded of all the earth. It would draw men of all lands to the study of democracy. It would tend to make the workings of democracy worthy of respectful study. The New World has its lessons to men as well as the Old, and its material for teaching these lessons should be made equally adequate. Mold and ruin are not necessary to a university, nor are traditions and precedents essential to its effectiveness. The greatest of Europe's universities is one of her very youngest. Much of the greatness of the University of Berlin is due to her escape from the dead hands of the past. It is in this release that the great promise of the American university lies. Oxford and Cambridge are still choked by the dust of their own traditions. Because this is so men have doubted whether England has to-day any universities at all.

The national university should not be an institution of general education with its rules and regulations, college classes, good-fellowship, and football team. It should be the place for the training of investigators and of men of action. It should admit no student who is under age and who has not a definite purpose to accomplish. It has no time or strength to spend in laying the foundations for education. Its function lies not in the conduct of examinations or the granting of academic degrees. It is not essential that it should give professional training of any kind, though that would be desirable. It should have the same relation to Harvard and Columbia and Johns Hopkins that Berlin University now holds. It should fill in with noble adequacy the place which the graduate departments of our real universities partially

the University of Virginia. And amid all the scandal and disorder which followed our civil war, what finger of evil has been laid on the Smithsonian Institution or the Military Academy at West Point? On that which is intended for no venal end the people will tolerate no venal domination. In due time the management of every public institution will be abreast of the highest popular opinion. Sooner or later the wise man leads, for his ability to lead is at once the test and proof of his wisdom.

Some of the half-hearted friends of the national university have been fearful lest partisan influence should control it. They fear lest it become a prey to the evils which have disgraced our civil service; that the shadow of the "boss" will darken the doors of the university with the paralyzing influence which it has exerted on the custom office. I believe this to be a groundless fear. All plans for a national university provide for a nonpartisan board of control. Its members ex officio are to be chosen from the ablest jurists and wisest men of science the country can claim. Such a board now controls the National Museum and the Smithsonian Institution, and no accusation of partisanship or favoritism has ever been brought against it.

A university could not be otherwise than free. Its faculty could respond only to the noblest influences. No man could receive an appointment of national prominence in the face of glaring unfitness, and each man chosen to a position in a national faculty would feel the honor of his profession at stake in repelling all degrading influences. Even if occasionally an unwise appointment should be made, the action would correct itself. To a university men and women go for individual help and training. A pretender in a university could not give such help. His presence is soon detected by his fellows and by his students. The latter he could not harm, for he could not retain them. By the side of his fellows he could not maintain himself. No body of men is so insusceptible to coercion or contamination as a university faculty. A scholar is a free man. He has always been so. He will always remain so. The danger that a body of men such as constitute the university faculty of Harvard, or Columbia, or Chicago, or Yale, or Cornell would be contaminated by Washington politics is sheer nonsense. Such an idea has no basis in experience. It is urged only for lack of better arguments. Such opposition to the national university as has yet appeared seems to rest on distrust of democracy itself or on the concealed hatred of secular education. To one or the other of these influences can be traced nearly every assault yet made on any part of the system of popular education.

The fear that the university should be contaminated by political associations is therefore groundless. But what about the hope from such associations? An educated politician may become a statesman, and we may look for tremendous results for good from the presence of trained economists and historians and jurists and scientific investigators at the national capital. It would in itself be an influence for good legislation and good administration greater than any that we know. "The worth of educated men in purifying and steadying popular sentiment," says President Cleveland at Princeton, "would be more useful if it were less spasmodic and occasional. Our people readily listen to those who exhibit a real fellowship and friendly and habitual interest in all that concerns the common welfare. Such a condition of intimacy would not only improve the general political atmosphere but would vastly increase the influence of our universities in their efforts to prevent popular delusions or correct them before they reach an acute or dangerous stage."

The scholars and investigators now maintained at Washington exert an influence far beyond that of their official position. If the Harvard

faculty and its graduate students met on the Capitol Hill; if their influence were felt in the departmental work and their presence in social life, Washington would become a changed city.// To the force of high training and academic self-devotion is to be traced the immense influence exerted in Washington by Joseph Henry, Spencer F. Baird, and Brown Goode. Of such men as these are universities made. When such men are systematically selected from our body of university professors and brought to Washington and allowed to surround themselves with like men of the next generation, we shall indeed have a national capital. By this means we shall create the best guarantee of the perpetuity of our Republic; that it shall not, like the republics of old, "go down in unreason, anarchy, and blood."// In the long run, the voters of a nation must be led by its wisest men. Their wisdom must become the wisdom of the many, else the nation will perish. A university is simply a contrivance for making wisdom effective by surrounding wisest men with the conditions most favorable for rendering wisdom contagious. There is no instrument of political, social, or administrative reform to be compared with the influence of a national university.// (From *The Forum*, January, 1897.)

DAVID STARR JORDAN,  
*Leland Stanford Junior University, California.*







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 029 479 545 5