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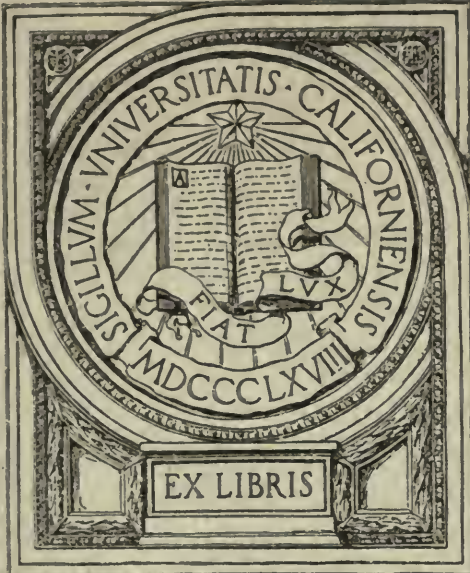
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A COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
BEFORE THE Φ B K SOCIETY OF VASSAR COLLEGE
JUNE 8, 1903

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THE THING TO DO

BY
WHITELAW REID



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THE THING TO DO

BY
WHITELAW REID

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GIFT KELLOGG

TO VINNE
AND SONS

THE THING TO DO

PHI BETA KAPPA ADDRESS AT VASSAR COLLEGE



BEFORE one word on the theme which has been announced, I want to express my grateful remembrance of the fact that this is the second, if not the third, successive year in which I have been invited to Vassar. Let me add the earnest hope that you may not repent of it before the evening is over, and conclude from this experience that, however it may be with a woman, it is always a mistake to give a man more than one chance to say Yes.

The brilliant President of a great California University has defined Wisdom as "Knowing What to Do Next," and Virtue as "Doing It." Responding to the call with which the young ladies of the Phi Beta Kappa have honored me, I shall try to merit your attention by speaking to you for a little of "The Thing to Do." In proportion, then, to any success in saying the right word to you on this subject, that word must come, however unworthy the voice through which it speaks, as the counsel of Wisdom and the command of Virtue.

The universal inquiry in the graduating class on Commencement Day is, What next? The mere man has no monopoly of it. The girl graduate too is absorbed in questions about what she shall do. Misty visions float before her eyes. Now, as always, the vague outlines are apt to shape themselves, to the first gaze alike of the simplest and of the wisest, into happy homes and home responsibilities. But in these days of broader horizons, many another purpose in life comes in to enlarge or to confuse the picture. Whether with the home or without a home, comes the thought of a career worthy of the capacities here discovered, the training here given; perhaps a literary, or artistic or scientific career, perhaps educational or professional, perhaps reformatory, perhaps social: but always a career, always the desire for a sphere in which to exercise the proper power of the trained abilities and enjoy their rightful influence, always the resolve to do something.

Let us first see now if there is not one especial thing which, in any career and whatever else may or may not be done, it is the duty of every girl graduate to attempt, in her respective sphere and to the full measure of her capacity.

“The
Excesses of
Democracy”

It was sixty-five years ago that a singularly acute French observer pronounced the legal profession the most conservative element in this country, and the greatest safeguard against the excesses, as he called them, of Democracy. But the intervening two-thirds of a century have shown many changes. We have seen no political craze, from secession to the payment of national debts in fiat money or in silver, no popular delusion, from spirit portraits to communism or to the right of some laborers to prohibit free labor, that has not been led by lawyers; and we have seen no depth of degradation to which, in pursuit of a fee, some members of this profession have not descended, and that, too often, without incurring the active repudiation of the majority.

Perhaps the dangerous tendencies in America of which De Tocqueville spoke are at the present time “the excesses of Democracy”; though perhaps again they may be merely the general tendencies of the age, exhibited here a little earlier or more freely because of the liberty of action Democracy affords. At any rate, there has never been a day in the history of the country when such a restraining influence as he attributed to the lawyers was so much needed as at present. Meanwhile the legal profession, through a not inconsiderable number of its members, has developed into one of the active means, not for restraining but for actually furthering the excesses; and, as a whole, it certainly exerts now a less conservative and restraining influence than was gratefully recognized in our earlier history.

When John Stuart Mill taught, in a little book less talked about now than his later publications, that women made contributions to the sum of human knowledge and consequent progress as important as those coming from men, though different in kind, being apt to be intuitional rather than logical, he may have furnished a hint as to the real safeguard against social disorders that in his time were hardly known. If the conservative influence which is hereafter to protect us from the excesses either of Democracy or of the spirit of the age is no longer to be surely and always found in the old quarter, it may still prove that we can turn for it to a class with higher inspirations and keener moral perceptions, to a class with deeper interest in the outcome, and capable of unquestionably greater influence, whenever aroused to exercise it. It may prove, in fact, that we can look to

the educated women of the country rather than to its lawyers for the true conservatism in principle, in methods and in constant application that is to save us from many of the most dangerous tendencies of the time. Hope, then, will not be lost for the future of our triumphant Democracy till the characteristic excellencies of educated women are corrupted or destroyed.

The reasons for such an expectation lie in human nature itself, and in that female ability which Mr. Mill demonstrated for such contributions to human knowledge and progress. All the instincts of the educated woman are toward good order and good morals and good life; all her interests are against rash experiments and revolutionary changes; the character alike of her judgment, her feelings and her needs gives promise of sound and sane views of life and of human conduct. Both by inherent qualities and by acquired relations, the rightly educated woman is a natural and necessary conservative. With her mental alertness and vivid perceptions, she can never be a drag upon the machinery of human progress; but, thanks to her special aptitudes, she may always be its moderator and its governor.

Conserva-
tism of
Educated
Women

This at least is clear, that the Twentieth Century woman has greater opportunities than were ever given to human creature of her kind before, in the eighty centuries of the world's history of which we are supposed to have some records; that she has been better prepared to improve them; and that she is more peremptorily called to the work,—this Twentieth Century woman to whom have been given the keys of knowledge, which are becoming almost the keys of life and death. The ferment and amazing discovery and development of the Nineteenth Century did not end when it closed;—they could be but the hotbed for starting the prodigious, myriad-formed, almost infinite growths to be confidently expected in the Twentieth. If, in the midst of these teeming and steaming activities, woman now possesses the real power which Mr. Mill attributed to her, then the imperative duty which her superior moral elevation, her nature and her surroundings impose, for the whole term of her existence and throughout the whole course of our bewildering progress, is to furnish this conservative force in American life, which two-thirds of a century ago De Tocqueville thought already necessary. Her Wisdom will point it out as the thing to do next, her Virtue will shine in doing it. Thus the subject to which I have ventured to invite your attention, "The Thing to Do," rises before you, attends your incoming and your outgoing, and henceforth forever entreats and commands you.

Loss of
Faith and
Purpose

Of specific excesses toward which our Democratic institutions may be tending, perhaps we do not need now to speak in any great detail. It may be enough to recognize that the American who colonized the Atlantic Coast and the great Middle West, who framed the Constitution, started the Government, developed the country under it, and fought a gigantic civil war to preserve it, is not the American who leads the popular movements of to-day. The type is changing; the beliefs are changing, and the aims.

He is neither Puritan any longer, nor Cavalier. He may outwardly deny the decay of faith, but he inwardly feels it. Nothing is more noticeable at the great centres of population and of national activity, or in any large section of what calls itself, and is often called, our best society, than this disappearance of the old foundation of character and action; this loss of profound, enduring, restful faith in anything. It is a *laissez-aller* age; an age of loosening anchors, and drifting with the tide; of taking things as they are, with cordial readiness to take them hereafter as they come; of an easy indifference, whose universal attitude towards each startling departure from old standards is "What does it matter, anyway?"—an age, in short, marked by a refined, "up-to-date" adaptation of the old Epicurean idea that there is nothing in this world to do but to eat and drink and make merry, for to-morrow we die. As Omar, prime favorite of the flower of this new school, has sung:

What boots it to repeat
How time is slipping underneath our feet;
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!

The loss of faith brings us by a short cut straight to the loss of purpose in life — of any purpose, at least, beyond purely material ones. To those who need money, the duty of getting it first and above anything else becomes the gospel of life. To those who feel the need of position, whether in society, business or elsewhere, their gospel drives them to all means within the law to attain that. To those who have both money and position comes the only remaining purpose in life, that of using them for an existence of amusement and enjoyment. Is it too much to say that never before in our history have such aspirations so completely dominated and limited such large classes?

The Madness
of Extremes

But this craze for mere amusement and enjoyment, like other perverted appetites, grows by what it feeds on. The amusement

soon becomes wearisome, the enjoyment soon palls, unless constantly more and more spectacular and bizarre. Perpetual change and constantly increasing variety of extremes seem to be the ever rising price of keeping amused. One never is for long where one wants to be, or doing what one desires; there must be incessantly a rushing to and fro, and a change of pursuits, all under the glare of electric lights and the blare of brass bands. If in the country, one must hasten to the city, where something is going on; if in the city, one must fly to the country, where the crowd is not so mixed and where pleasanter house-parties can be gathered; if in one's own land, one longs for the boulevards or the Alps; if abroad, one is eager to try the new steamer back; if at the sea-shore, one wants suddenly to know what the mountains are like, and can find amusement only in going to see, when clothed in leather jackets, protected by masks and goggles, and powdered with dirt, rushing through the dusty air on the highways at forty or fifty miles an hour in a Red Devil, and leaving the luckless rustics in the way to go to a fiend of any color they like.

Even then this vehement vacuity is not amusing unless it is talked about. One must be forever before the footlights, and, if possible, in the centre of the stage. Privacy is deadly dullness. Not to have your name every other day in the newspapers, and especially in the most hopelessly vulgar and inane of the newspaper columns, the so-called social ones, is to be out of the world, to be bored to death. Not to see every intimate fact about yourself or your friends thrust naked and shameless under the public eye is to feel that you are dropping out of the swim. If there is a steamer that has raced across the Atlantic in fifteen minutes less than any other, you suddenly realize that nothing is going on here, and you must immediately cross back on that steamer. If there is a White Ghost that has flitted over crowded country roads half a mile an hour faster than the last Red Devil, and has caused more runaways and killed one or two more people, you will be leading a very dull life till you have gone faster in that same or in some better and uglier machine, and have left a wider swath of disaster and terror behind you. Even then the amusement is stale unless the papers tell that you broke the record, if not somebody's neck also, print your portrait, and mention who your grandfather was, by way of showing how proud the presumably worthy old man ought to be of his hopeful, goggle-eyed descendant.

Gregariousness and glare are the irredeemably vulgar notes of it all. To seek enjoyment within yourself and your own circle,

in resources of your own, and without a fresh flash-light picture every day, becomes unendurable. A country residence is impossible unless a dozen others, "of our own set, you know," are within five minutes' call; and even then it is slow without a thronged race-track at hand. Thus Newport rather than Biltmore becomes the venerated and shiny national type for those who can, at will, command either. As for the babes that must struggle through childhood into precocious maturity in such surroundings, why, they are to live in this world, are n't they—not in the Happy Valley of Rasselas? Why should n't they get on without rest and real country life, as well as their parents?

Political
Fickleness

If loss of faith and loss of purpose have led to such changes from the decorous albeit a little provincial society of a hundred years ago, what transformations may not be expected from the same influences in our political life? Already we begin to note the same fever for variety and unreasoning change. We know now how Aristides was banished because the citizens were tired of hearing him called the Just; we have more than once given in modern phrases the same old Greek reason for our own banishments: "Oh, well, they've been in long enough; let's try a change." The steady persistence in policy of the Fathers and Founders of the Republic seems disappearing, and the political characteristics displayed are becoming noticeably less English, and even less Northern. "You are as fickle as the French, and as fond of sudden excitements," is a criticism of over-candid observers from the north of Europe which we hear with increasing frequency; and it must be confessed that of late we do show, oftener than could be desired, sudden and irresponsible popular movements which we are apt to look for in the Latin rather than the Northern races. A wave of excitement sweeps over the country, and throughout whole communities the very best and most conscientious of our people are stampeded with sudden fear of European domination, and alarm about the Pope of Rome, if we do not hurriedly erect legislative dams against foreign invasions on our Eastern shores. The Know-Nothings had a close race with the Free-Soilers for first place, and for a time were ahead,—seeming actually about to succeed in making hostility to the foreigner rather than sympathy with the slave the shibboleth of the new national party. Within my own experience a distinguished official and highly honored citizen of New York has vehemently arraigned me for neglect of duty, in my own modest sphere, in not trying to arouse the people against the peril to our liberties and the alarming violation of the Constitution of the United States

involved in the creation of a foreign prince in this country,—in the person of Cardinal Gibbons! But presently the wind is blowing from the exactly opposite quarter; sympathy for the sweet Emerald Isle in turn overpowers us; we raise money by the hundred thousand dollars, are hardly dissuaded from raising volunteers also for the Fenian army, and shout ourselves hoarse in pecuniary and rhetorical efforts to force on a friendly nation an acceptance of the solution *we* think best for her most perplexing domestic problem. Next a sudden fear of Asiatic competition stampedes us; and we instantly abandon, as to Orientals at least, our old boast that our land is the home of the oppressed of every clime, the land of opportunity for all who would better their condition. Straightway Congress is busy building dams on our Western coast to keep the waves of slant-eyed invaders out, while our people rush into excesses against those who are in, reaching sometimes to riot, but more often merely to such refinements of cruelty as cutting off their pigtailed or burning down their joss-houses.

A cry that the money that was good enough for us should be good enough for our foreign debtors carries half the people captive; a great National Convention comes near nominating the chief advocate of this notion for the Presidency, and the country is on the verge of paying the National Debt in greenbacks. A few years later a rather cheap rhetorician catches the fancy of an excited assemblage by talking about crucifying the people on a cross of gold, and straightway there sweeps over the land, like a prairie fire, a wave of excitement for persuading water to flow up hill, and silver to be as good as gold without the advice or consent of any other nation on earth. Next we plunge into municipal affairs; give away priceless franchises because we are in such a hurry we can't take time to see what they are worth; borrow till we have exhausted the limit, and then mark up the value of our property in order to be able to borrow more upon it, and chuckle over every fresh million of debt incurred, as if this were the end of that trouble. We turn out a reform Administration for not reforming fast enough, and install Croker and Tammany to improve the job. We grumble that the town has been too strait-laced, rejoice that at last it is blissfully wide open, then wake up to find it intolerably wide open, and once more put in a reformer, finally threatening to turn him out again because everybody that voted for him has n't in the first year got everything he wanted.

For a long time we itch to interfere in Spain's trouble with her chief colony, and at last, in a white heat over the explosion of a naval vessel, we do rush into war, but not before being caught in

the ebb of the same tide and swept by it into the sentimental declaration that we will never, no never, permit our country to reap, from this expenditure of its money and its young life, such security and advantage as every other nation which ventures on the solemn sacrifice of the treasure and blood of its people has felt bound to require from the beginning of time, and *was* bound to require. Next the whole country is up in arms in another gush of sentiment to protest that instantly, without safeguards of any sort, a little island off in the Atlantic, more than a fourth of the way over to Africa, must be given admission at once to all the rights and privileges of American citizenship. Presently the sentimental wave turns the other way, and another island, nearer, larger, far more important, with far greater claims, over which we have asserted a species of protectorate for three-quarters of a century and which we profess to be tenderly guiding into the family of nations, is kept waiting for months and years for help long since acknowledged to be our plain duty. Far from being a mother to this suffering orphan whom we have ourselves dragged to our door and dropped helpless there, we are exhibiting a capacity, colossal as our strength, for being a stepmother.

Next we forget all about these burning issues, put them behind us as if they had never existed, and plunge pell-mell, clergy, editors, laity and all classes and conditions of men, into a race with the politicians for the favor and the political influence of the down-trodden contract coal-miners who were only getting three dollars a day and had proclaimed against free labor in a so-called free country, lest competition might drive them to work for this wage more than six or seven hours a day, and so make coal cheaper for the multitude. Thus, between our own meddling and the dull inactivity of the employers, blindly dreaming that it will soon blow over, we prolong the industrial paralysis till winter is at hand and the President himself is forced to intervene in an irregular and unprecedented way to save us from a national calamity.

One day we go wild over a guest because he is the brother of an Emperor; the next we are in a pet because the same Emperor wants to collect money from an unwilling debtor who does n't pay his debts to us, either. One day we scoff at European opinion about the Monroe Doctrine, and the next we laugh with delight at what it pleases us to call the new European Monroe Doctrine for the Persian Gulf. One day we proclaim Russia as our dearest friend, and fret with but half-concealed contempt at Chinese complaints about the massacre of their countrymen in Wyoming, or Italian complaints about similar atrocities in Louisiana, or foreign comment generally on our burning of negroes at the stake;

and the next day we are demanding that our Government shall at once and officially serve peremptory notice on that same dearest friend at St. Petersburg that we won't stand his equally wicked persecution of Jews at Kishineff in the heart of Russia. We are bent on an isthmus canal at Nicaragua, and can hardly keep our hands off our ancient ally for attempting one at Panama; laugh loud and long at the De Lesseps collapse as proof of all we have said about the utter impracticability of the Panama route, then suddenly turn around, buy up the bankrupt, abandon the Nicaragua concern and set out to finish that same impracticable and preposterous Panama scheme ourselves.

Thus wave after wave of half-considered opinion sweeps over the country; we flash into flames of sudden excitement which, fortunately, for the most part, die out like heat-lightning; feel equally fit to flout all the world's experience, solve at sight all its problems, or fight all creation at the drop of a hat; and are always in danger of going off at half-cock into a new party or out of it, into some untried policy or out of it, into some monstrous injustice or out of it, into war or out of it.

A graver change, amounting to a distinct degeneration in the average American character, may be a further consequence, and is at any rate a further accompaniment, of the tendency to loss of faith and loss of purpose. It is the extravagant notion, never held in the days of the Fathers, that this is a land of equality, and that one man is as good as another. It has never been a land of equality, and one man never has been as good as another, and never will be, in this country or any other, in this life or any other — till the just God turns unjust, and the creature that does ill becomes in his eyes as the creature that does well.

What is true, and it is the shining glory of the Fathers to have established it, is that this is a land where all men are on a par just once in their lives, for they have an equal start. Each man is guaranteed certain fundamental essentials at the starting-post — his life, his liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in his own way, so long as he respects the corresponding rights of others. Beyond that it is a fair field and no favor; and from the very moment of the equal start some draw ahead and others lag behind. The equality has disappeared like the morning mist — the inequality that lasts to the end, and is greater here than anywhere else in the world, is the inspiring fruitage of those blessed Republican institutions under which no man can be too low to rise to the top if he is fit for it.

But the delusion of equality remains and poisons. The laggard

One Man
not as
Good as
Another

declares he is just as good as the man that has outstripped him, and that he is the victim of a monstrous injustice in being left behind. The spendthrift finds it iniquitous, since one man is as good as another, that he should be poor and needy while the frugal and careful neighbor that started on an equal level with him is free from want. The idler swaggers up to his employer with the declaration that, since one man is as good as another, it is an imposition to pay him any less than the industrious workman at his side, and that he has a trades-union at hand to prove and maintain it by a logic you can't resist. One man is as good as another, and therefore, it is such an outrage to deprive a man of his vote, merely because he has been a thief or a murderer, that the Governor must pardon him before the expiration of his term in the penitentiary, in order that the cloud on his free and independent American citizenship may be removed, and he may resume his rightful share in the business of governing the country.

This temper soon carries the false doctrine of equality one step further. It comes next that since one man is just as good as another, if the other does n't think so, he must be made to. In fact, if he does not agree with the devotees of the doctrine at a time when they have started out to enforce it on their employer or on their associates or on the community, he will do well to seek liberty to earn his living in some land of despotism — the home of the free is no place for him and is full of danger. The walking delegate is just about as obliging as the traditional foreman of the fire-engine who said, "You may paint de machine any color you please, s' long 's you paint it red." You may do as you like in this land of liberty, so long as you do what our Union tells you.

But let us be fair to the laboring man, and even to his misrepresentative, the walking delegate. This American intolerance of dissent is not confined to the Trades-Union. The powerful Trust may be just as exacting and intolerant till its demands have once been successfully challenged; and it has not at times been bashful about making these demands on legislatures, on the courts, even on the highest departments of the Government and on national candidates. It is not bashful at this moment in Wall Street about making them upon the inevitable candidates of the party in power. The party boss has been accused of the same intolerance of dissent; the party machine has gone nigh to be suspected; doctors and lawyers and bankers have small room for the inconsiderate man who dares differ on what they think essentials from the temporary or local majority; the intolerance of dissent has even been said to have reached into the Church.

An acute observer has traced the turbulence of French history

since the days of Mirabeau to a lopsided belief in their Trinity, Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. The controlling masses, he said, cared very little for Liberté, and hardly more for Fraternité, but had a consuming, vitriolic appetite for Égalité. And so it came about that equality under the Emperor, First or Third, was better than liberty under the Citizen-King or under the Republic. Our doctrine that one man is just as good as another is carried farther still by its devotees: he is more than as good — he is better; or, as the emancipated negroes loved to declaim in those deplorable reconstruction days, “De bottom rail’s on top, bress de Lawd.” So now it sometimes appears that if any man has the admitted power to rule, it is the ignorant man, the idle man, the vicious man. To him nearly every worldly-wise person seems to think it prudent to kowtow; while the other kind must obey or else be clubbed or dynamited into submission.

In such circumstances as we have been describing, mere noise, clamor, tumult, vociferous demand, becomes a social and political force of the first magnitude. Under its impulse the soberest and best elements of the community are not infrequently swept into hasty conclusions which are afterwards repented at leisure. Such, to take one single example out of many, was the sudden conversion of nearly everybody to the notion that Arbitration is the most certain road to justice. Far be it from me to question or depreciate the admirable workings of this beneficent device, when both sides fairly enter into it, in fields to which it is adapted. But the sudden conversion I speak of is to the notion that it is in every sudden need always better than the courts and a cure-all for every ill. In consequence of the general, unhesitating acceptance of this notion, if one side to a dispute is ready and eager for arbitration, the other is vehemently censured if it in turn hesitates for an instant at swallowing the nostrum. The old machinery of justice must be set aside; the time-honored tribunals for the protection of individual rights and the adjustment of conflicting interests between man and man, gradually evolved through long centuries of Anglo-Saxon development, are pronounced too slow and too costly and too uncertain; the safe and sure thing is to compel—for nothing short of compulsion will satisfy these sudden converts—to compel both sides to appear before a new tribunal which can decide offhand, unhampered by rules of procedure or technicalities of law, according to intuition and sense and feeling. And so the man that balks at arbitration has lost his case already before the bar of that Public Opinion which rules the country.

Carrying
Good Things
to Excess

Who does not see, then, the special advantage this up-to-date patent medicine for producing quick justice may often give the less deserving side? When the Walking Delegate, that new and powerful Peer of the Realm, has n't been doing much for a week to convince his Society that he is earning its pay, he has only to invent some new demand for shorter hours or more frequent shifts or fewer bricks in the hod, and when it is denied, promptly call for an arbitration. Now the essence of an arbitration, the only object of an arbitration, is to settle the thing, settle it quick and make people contented again. But how can they be contented unless they get at least some part of what they claim? In ordinary disputes between individuals or classes, an arbitration that did n't give something to both sides would be rare indeed; an arbitration that does n't more or less "split the difference" would be unusual. So the natural end of it is that the Walking Delegate gains the approval of his people and strengthens his position by showing that he has earned his salary; his society gains something out of his new demand, where, till he invented it, nothing had been expected or wanted or thought of; and the employer gains — well, he gains a settlement for the time being, anyway, till the Walking Delegate thinks of something else.

Exactly the same results may be expected when an employer, being in the wrong in a dispute with his workmen, induces them to consent to an arbitration, excepting that then you have another influence coming in to modify the outcome: the sympathy all right-minded men instinctively feel for the weaker side in a controversy. Very nearly the same results may be expected when among contending capitalists the one who is getting and deserves the worst of it calls for an arbitration. Very nearly the same may be expected when a nation that sets up and adheres long enough to a preposterous boundary claim, calls for an arbitration — unless, indeed, as in a recent case, the nation in the right is wise enough to get exactly half the arbitrators! Otherwise the unreasonable claimant can never be worse off than before, and the chances are in favor of his gaining at least something! No wonder arbitration, with all its recognized merits and its beneficent successes, has come to be held at a premium by the side that is in the wrong. Starting with nothing, that side must generally come out with something, anyway, to the good! For the side that is in the wrong, therefore, the game is always worth trying.

The Other
Side; and
the Cure

Here I must bring to a close these too prolix illustrations of the changing temper and practice of our people, as we have been drifting out of sight of those old American safeguards of Faith

and Purpose. But let no hearer for one moment forget that there is another side to the picture. Admitting all faults and inconsistencies and hysterical alternations of heat and cold, our people are still the freest, most generous, most capable, most active and daring, our country is still, in our eyes, the best the sun shines on. But we should be less its admirers, less loyal and less useful as its citizens, if we did not face the known facts with open eyes. Remember, too, that what we see is but in the dawn of our new century, and before our national existence has as yet anywhere near reached the span the Psalmist assigned for two human lives. When we get a little nearer national maturity, and when the gigantic forces of the Twentieth Century are really under full headway, where is all that incessant, restless fever of change to lead? When the physical and moral whirl in which our national character is taking shape becomes still greater; when the marvels of the past half-century have become the commonplaces or even the rejected crudities of the next; when the forces of steam are obsolete and electricity is the slowest power we deal with; and when our population, instead of merely eighty millions, approaches two hundred millions, as it surely must long before the end of the century; as the scientific advances which even such an age will count miraculous, burst upon us, what is the poor human American to do, in his present fever and with his present nerves, but with fivefold greater powers placed in his hands, and fivefold greater attention and capacity demanded for their control? If, sixty years ago, the free forces and rushing advance of the Republic urgently needed the regulation of a powerful and learned conservative body, who can overestimate the necessity for such service now?

When you ask how it is to be rendered, one cannot be mistaken in turning first to those priceless qualities in any sound national life, whose tendency to decay we noted at the outset. Give back to us our Faith. Give back to us a serious and worthy Purpose. Restore sane views of life, of our own relations to it, and of our relations to those who share it with us. Moderation in our conceit of our own almightiness will surely follow, moderation in the intolerant assertion of our own rights, moderation in meddling with the rights of others, some tendency to thought before action, some continuity of conduct personal and public, and some reference of policy to enduring principle.

Outside the immediate and inestimable effect on the family, the conservative power of educated women will naturally show its first, and perhaps its chief, influence in the next greatest

Where Edu-
cated Women
can first Help

among the forces that guide the world,—that of social life. They will surely help to check its degradation. They may make it regain its soothing relaxation, and its benign stimulus for the best in every one. They may even give back to Society the inspiration it once had for the leaders of the world's work. They will certainly correct the prevalent vicious conception of its real scope. They will reject the notion that it is a sort of trade to which a few devote themselves, as most others do to the other pursuits of life; that thus there are, in the vulgar phrase of the day, society women, just as there are shopwomen or cleaning women, and that each class must stick to its trade;—that, in fact, what is called our best Society is a strictly limited sort of trades-union, unfriendly to the admission of apprentices not coming from its own ranks, and that it is an imperative necessity for outsiders with social aspirations to force their way into it by push and notoriety, trick and device, if they would avoid social extinction! From this degrading conception comes the constant craze for newspaper publicity, and every other form of publicity; from this the paltry scheming, the vulgar push, the endless flattery and insincerity and loss of self-respect by foolish aspirants, who seem all the time to ignore or to be unconscious of the blighting influence in the glare and heat and dust of such an arena, upon all the finer qualities that make woman adorable and human life attractive.

If the conduct of the so-called inner circles of Society has sometimes seemed to justify this brazen uproar at their gates, so much greater the demand for the conservative influence and the real refinement that come from the high training of superior women. When other ideals are cherished, when Faith and Purpose in life reassert their sway, Society will look for its leaders even less than it really does to-day to the embellished matrons still friskily playing tomboy, and noisily marshaling, for fresh extravagances of social demeanor and amusement, their collections of dashing young centaurs from the race-track and the hunting-field, and of handsome young cigarette-smoking experts from the bridge-table.

When these higher ideals do return, the powerful influence of educated women will surely array as never before the best of their sex in compact, resistless phalanx against a social evil, alarming, degrading, and demoralizing, which has suddenly become almost too common to provoke surprise;—the transformation of marriage from a sacrament of God into a thoughtless and headlong business or social arrangement to be dissolved almost at pleasure. Six hundred and fifty-four thousand persons di-

vanced in this country in twenty years, and those not the last—such is the deplorable record on which Catholic and Protestant clergy are already appealing for a union of all moral agencies to retard this downward rush of the multitude.*

The same influence should help resist the yet more common weakening of family ties and destruction of family life. It should correct, at the origin of the evil, the extraordinary development of nervous excitability that accounts for so much of our fickleness of view and instability of belief; for the frequent outbursts of general turbulence and lawlessness through whole zones of population; for the varied and incredible character of the crimes, for the amazing publicity which attends them, and the ready imitation which the wide knowledge of every new crime often stimulates.

Perhaps the same influence may even penetrate citadels far better entrenched,—those of evils that come from the ill-judged excesses of the best of people. It may possibly infuse moderation into our new and admirable devotion to athletics, and rescue us from those vagaries of Sport run mad that have made the football teacher more important in our universities than the Professor of Chemistry or of Philosophy, and the record of the cinder-track the essential thing rather than the baccalaureate degree.

Harder task yet, it may restore sanity to our Charity run mad; may teach us the infinite harm that lurks in our lazy way of riding ourselves of each casual beggar with a careless quarter instead of a careful inquiry; and may even, after a time, stop the premium we put upon crime and crankiness when we build palaces for our lunatics and our criminals, and sustain them in these establishments in a comfort and even luxury far beyond the average of what many taxpayers who meet the bills can afford for themselves. Under your guidance the moderate conclusion may, in fact, be reached that even for sweet Charity's sake the upright, industrious New York farmer or mechanic or shopkeeper is not

* The corresponding secretary of the National League for the Protection of the Family, the Rev. Samuel W. Dike, of Auburndale, Mass., published a letter on June 16 referring to newspaper reports of this remark. He said:

"This reference to the increase and extent of divorce in this country has attracted much attention. But some of the newspapers have erred in the statistics given. For it was not 'in the last twenty years' that there were 323,716 divorces granted in the United States, but in the twenty years 1867-1886. These are from 'The Report on Marriage and Divorce in the United States and Europe,' p. 1074, made by the Department of Labor in 1889. This report was secured chiefly through the efforts of the National League for the Protection of the Family. The league has been trying of late to have a further investigation ordered by Congress, to bring the report of 1889 down to date. That report passed through three or four editions, and is now out of print.

"For the last twenty years, judging from the figures of the few States which supply them annually, the number of divorces must be much larger than for the period of 1867-1886. For example, Ohio granted 1809 in 1886, and 3217 in 1889. Michigan had 1339 in 1886 and 2418 in 1900. Indiana granted 1655 in 1886, and no less than 4699 in 1900, more than three times as many as there were in 1882, or in any earlier year."

bound to house and feed the crank and the criminal better than he can the children of his loins and the wife of his bosom.

Are the burdens thus laid out for the conservative and moderating influence of the educated women of the land too weighty to be borne? I do not believe it. I am full of good hope for the future—more hopeful to-night than before I saw the late work of Vassar, more hopeful at every addition to the splendid array of its followers, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Radcliffe, and the rest, with which our country now leads the world in the advanced education of women.

But that you may not fall short of the full measure of your high capacities and still higher calling, let me ask your attention to a fact, and put to you a question about it. It is a fact, almost a commonplace,—at any rate, it is a fact which I venture to affirm, and believe to be beyond intelligent contradiction,—that the young ladies here at eighteen average higher than any corresponding body of boys at the same age in any corresponding institution. My question is, How will it be at twenty-eight? On your answer to that question depends our hope that the educated women of the country may furnish the conservative force for our land which the English philosopher led us to expect and the Frenchman to see that we needed.

Is it not the frequent experience that from the moment of entering society the girl almost stands still,—is, at least, surely and generally passed by the boy,—and that in maturity and middle life the relative positions are apt to be reversed? The question is not raised with any thought of suggesting competition. Among all the disagreeable things brought forward by the new school, the most hateful is this thought of rivalry between the sexes, or of any necessary or natural antagonism of interests. My closing suggestion, then, with reference to the opportunities before you, and the country's need of you, is, not the duty of rivalry, but the duty of growth. For, never forget, it was merely of the body, not of the intellectual or spiritual man, the declaration was made that you cannot by taking thought add one cubit to your stature. When a tree ceases to grow, your science teaches you that it should be harvested. When the sun ceases to rise, its shadows fall mournfully eastward and the day is surely drawing to its close. When you cease to grow, you have already begun to decay. Grow, then, while you live,—grow to the full height of the duties we have seen. The land never needed you as it does to-day; you will never see a day in which it will not need you more and more.

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