

# Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

## Documents Online

**Title:** "Oration Collegiate Education," by C. W. Prettyman

**Format:** Commencement Oration

**Date:** June 18, 1891

**Location:** Orations-1891-P942c

### Contact:

Archives & Special Collections  
Waidner-Spahr Library  
Dickinson College  
P.O. Box 1773  
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

[archives@dickinson.edu](mailto:archives@dickinson.edu)

11  
Oration

Collegiate Education

C. W. Prettyman

Of the advantages of Collegiate training for men purposing a professional life there is among intelligent men no debate, even those, who are wont to sneer at the learning of the schools are silent here. It is rather as to its value to men intending to pursue a non professional or business career that question arises.

This being the case it is the purpose of this address to set forth briefly the real aim of a Collegiate course and to see if it is not one, which

would warrant any person pursuing such a course no matter what sphere of life he intends to enter.

Before doing this however permit us to point out what appears to be a manifest unfairness in the method of comparison usually adopted by those, who have been pleased to array themselves in opposition to the advocates of Collegiate education.

When a person wishes to cite an illustration of a man, who, without Collegiate training, has nevertheless achieved command

ing success his mind naturally turns to the greatest man of this class he happens to know and holding this man up he triumphantly demands of his opponent to match him if he can, which challenge the advocate of Collegiate education may or may not be able to meet. Others in their comparisons are always sure to place over against the best non-Collegian some poor fool, who happens to have been to College and from these illustrations proceed to draw conclusions unfavorable to Collegiate education.

From illustrations such as these it is evident nothing can ever be gained. If a fair comparison is to be made between the two classes they must be compared as a whole and not as individuals and even if it should be proven that all the great men in the world had never seen inside of a college this would not militate against our argument for had they had the advantages of a collegiate course they might have acquired even greater success. Not infrequently indeed we hear some man, who has

attained great prominence say that his one regret is that he did not secure a more liberal education, thus expressing his belief in the advantages accruing to it.

It is useless however to advance arguments for or refute arguments against a College education before such an audience as this; your very presence here on this occasion clearly indicating the opinion you have upon the subject. Recognizing this let us now examine a few of the advantages to be derived from the pursuit of such a course.

To begin, the phrase "College Education" conveys to the minds of most persons an idea vague or perhaps I had better say very definite. To one it is the synonym of social depravity. To another it means a four years course of unremitting study of text books. Both views are totally incorrect. The person, who regards the College simply as a polite means of destroying youth has little faith in the integrity of those, whose duty it is to manage such institutions. And he, who anticipates spending four years in College

over text books with nothing to distract his attention, will soon awake to find himself under almost as great a delusion as the unsuspecting youth, who goes there proposing to lui within the limits of the one hundred and seventy five or two hundred dollars, which we sometime see stated as the amount, which an ordinary person will spend per year. Doubtless there are instances which might be cited in support of both of these views but those of the latter are coming to be few and far between.

and let us hope that those of the former will never again cast a stain upon the fame of any institution of learning.

Were I asked to give a definition of Collegiate education or to state briefly the end sought in the pursuit of a College course, I could not better express <sup>it</sup> than in the words, - the making of men. Not a superior species of animal, that has succeeded in passing twenty or more years of life and then fallen heir to an inheritance, which he is no more worthy to enjoy than his brute companions

but a man, that most divine  
of creations and one well  
fitted to perform his part  
in the glorious consummation  
of the destiny of the race.

What more noble purpose  
could be sought for by an in-  
stitution and what greater  
boon craved by youth than  
the enjoyment of the advan-  
tages to be derived from the  
pursuit of such a course?

The American college has un-  
dergone a great transition in  
this respect. From a place,  
where it was once thought  
amply sufficient to have but

one course, which all must pursue  
it has become an institution,  
whose chief function is as  
Geo. Wm. Curtis has well ex-  
pressed it "not to impart  
knowledge but to inspire  
intellectual and moral growth  
and had he added phys-  
ical also he would then  
have enumerated the <sup>three</sup> requi-  
sites for the fulfillment of  
its function as implied in  
the definition, which we have  
already given.

It is our purpose to try to  
show that the College is prepared  
to develop this threefold nature

of man and if we can do this we will, as we think, have shown sufficient reason why every person should avail themselves of the privileges of a Collegiate course.

A sane mind in a sound body is a perfectly safe proposition upon which to base an argument for College Athletics. But if any you have ever engaged in such an argument with parental authority you know that in some instances exception is taken to the statement that foot ball for instance is one of the best means to at-

tain this end, they maintaining that it is far more likely to subvert rather than accomplish the purpose for which it is intended. Foot ball is played however and there are many arguments, which might be advanced in its defense but I mention it here simply as one of the means, by which a man may develop his physical nature. If he does not care to play foot ball he may play base ball, tennis or may take exercise in the gymnasium. There is no scarcity of means for him to develop his muscles and

not only have all the best colleges provided these means but they have taken measures in many cases compelling the students to use them.

Now I can hear my friend, who does not favor college athletics saying that he sends his son to college to study and does not care to have him graduate a J. L. Sullivan or like some fellows, whom he knows, who have trained their muscles and become perfect athletes but nothing more.

We are not asking him to send his son in order that he may become an athlete only nor an

ur extolling such as he has described. They have not realized the real purpose of a Collegiate course and have secured but a part of the development, which might have been theirs.

That the College is preeminently fitted to develop the intellectual faculties has never been disputed. For many years this was its sole aim and in connection with the development of the other two phases of life will continue to make it the factor for good in the future, which it has been in the past. To those of means College life offers sufficient attractions

to induce them to pursue a course there. Indeed this has become quite the popular thing and there is some danger that like most popular things the character of collegiate education may become degraded. To those of few brains but much money this appears a very easy means of securing ~~the~~ an appearance of intellectuality without performing any of the work necessary for the actual attainment of knowledge. If they can succeed in securing a diploma they feel that they have about mastered everything to be known and need but faith

but to rely on their experience.  
Nothing can be farther from the truth  
than this. A man, who graduates  
thinking that he knows much  
more than the fact that he  
really knows very little has ac-  
quired during his course that  
one thing, which above all others  
he should have avoided, - conceit.  
He is not supposed to know  
everything when he graduates on  
any one subject completely. The  
object of the course is rather  
to train a man in habits of  
thought and to give him an  
intelligent idea of as many  
subjects as can be consistently

done. He is simply fairly introduced to a subject and, if he happens to like it, is left gazing with longing eyes at the vast fields of knowledge, which as yet he has never entered. If however, with this feeling of ignorance comes a sense of his ability to enter these fields and investigate for himself, the College has accomplished its mission and has done it well.

A man however may leave College having developed his physical and intellectual faculties to the highest degree, yet if with all this development his moral nature has been neglected

he falls far short of the stature of a perfect man.

There is no denying the fact that there is immorality in College but where is there not! There is also morality and a sufficiency of it to induce anyone to lead a moral life, who may desire. The majority of students have high ideas concerning correct living and if a man becomes immoral after entering College it is either on account of tendencies, which he possessed before entrance or because he voluntarily chooses for his associates those whose companionship is degrading. There

is not more immorality in College than in the world in general and if a man comes here, having had proper training at home and blessed with sufficient backbone to know his own mind on subjects pertaining to himself he will bear the test rather than hurt by the experiences to which he has been subjected.

Wherever a man may be his morality depends entirely upon himself and I believe that at College there are as many inducements for him to choose the moral as there are in any other sphere of life.

If now our law succeeded in showing that the College is prepared to develop the physical, intellectual and moral nature of man it may be asked "why then do so many leave with these ends but partially realized"? The only answer is that they have been content to develop some of their powers to the neglect of others and have thus failed to secure a complete education.

While many of the men graduated from our Colleges do reflect shame rather than credit upon the institutions from which they have gone forth yet the

vast majority leave College with  
higher aspirations and loftier  
ideals prepared by their course  
both to perform successfully their  
work in life and "to do good  
in their day and generation".

Commencement Oration of C.W. Prettyman, Class of 1891  
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002  
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

## Oration Collegiate Education

C.W. Prettyman 1891

Of the advantages of collegiate training for men purposing a professional life there is among intelligent men no debate, even those, who are wont to sneer at the learning of the schools are silent here. It is rather as to its value to men intending to pursue a non professional or business career that question arises.

This being the case it is the purpose of this address to set forth briefly the real aim of a Collegiate course and to see if it is not one, which

would warrant any person pursuing such a course no matter what sphere of life he intends to enter.

Before doing this however permit us to point out what appears to be a manifest unfairness in the method of comparison usually adopted by those, who have been pleased to array themselves in opposition to the advocates of Collegiate education.

When a person wishes to cite an illustration of a man who, without Collegiate training, has nevertheless achieved command-

ing success his mind naturally turns to the greatest man of this class he happens to know and holding this man up he triumphantly demands of his opponent to match him if he can, which challenge the advocate of Collegiate education may or may not be able to meet. Others in their comparisons are always sure to place over against the best non-Collegiate some poor fool, who happens to have been to College and from these illustrations proceed to draw conclusions unfavorable to Collegiate education.

From illustrations such as these it is evident nothing can ever be gained. If a pair comparison is to be made between the two classes they must be compared as a whole and not as individuals and even if it should be proven that all the great men in the world had never seen inside of a College this would not militate against our argument for had they had the advantages of a Collegiate course they might have acquired even greater success. Not infrequently indeed we hear some men, who has

attained great prominence say that his one regret is that he did not secure a more liberal education, thus expressing his belief in the advantages accruing to it.

It is useless however to advance arguments for or refute arguments against a College education before such an audience as this, - your very presence here on this occasion clearly indicating the opinion you have upon the subject. Recognizing this let us now examine a few of the advantages to be derived from the pursuit of such a course.

To begin, the phrase "College Education" conveys to the minds of most persons an idea vague or perhaps I had better say very definite. To one it is the synonym of social depravity. To another it means a four years course of unremitting study of text books. Both views are totally incorrect. The person, who regards the College simply as a polite means of destroying youth has little faith in the integrity of those whose duty it is to manage such institutions. And he, who anticipates spending four years in College

over text books with nothing to distract his attention, will soon awake to find himself under almost as great a delusion as the unsuspecting youth, who goes there proposing to live within the limits of the one hundred and seventy five or two hundred dollars, which we sometime see stated as the amount, which an ordinary person will spend per year. Doubtless there are instances which might be cited in support of both of these views but those of the latter are coming to be few and far between

and let us hope that those of the former will never again cast a stain upon the fame of any institution of learning.

Were I asked to give a definition of Collegiate education or state briefly the end sought in the pursuit of a College course, I could not better express it than in the words, - the making of men. Not a superior species of animal, that has succeeded in passing twenty one years of life and thus fallen heir to an inheritance, which he is no more worthy to enjoy than his brute companions

but a man, that most divine of creations and one well fitted to perform his part in the glorious consummation of the destiny of the race.

What more noble purpose could be sought for by an institution and what greater boon craved by youth than the enjoyment of the advantages to be deprived from the pursuit of such a course?

The American college has undergone a great transition in this respect. From a place, where it was once thought amply sufficient to have but

one course, which all must pursue it has become an institution whose chief function is as Geo. Wm. Curtis has well expressed it "not to impart knowledge but to inspire intellectual and moral growth" and had he added physical also he would then have enumerated the three requisites for the fulfillment of its function as implied in the definition, which we have already given.

It is our purpose to try to show that the College is prepared to develop this threefold nature

of man and if we can do this we will, as we think, have shown sufficient reason why every person should avail themselves of the privileges of a Collegiate course.

“A sane mind in a sound body” is a perfectly safe proposition upon which to base an argument for College Athletics. But if any you have ever engaged in such an argument with parental authority you know that some instances exception is taken to the statement that foot ball for instance is one of the best means to at-

tain this end, they maintaining that it is far more likely to subvert rather than accomplish the purpose for which it is intended. Foot ball is played however and there are many arguments, which might be advanced in it's defense but I mention it here simply as one of the means, by which a man may develop his physical nature. If he does not care to play foot ball he may play base ball, tennis or may take exercise in the gymnasium. There is no scarcity of means for him to develop his muscles and

not only have all the best colleges provided these means but they have taken measures in many cases compelling the students to use them.

Now I can hear my friend, who does not favor College Athletics saying that he sends his son to College to study and does not care to have him graduate a J. L. Sullivan or like some fellows, whom he knows, who have trained their muscles and become perfect athletes but nothing more.

We are not asking him to send his son in order that he may become an athlete only nor are

we extolling such as he has described. They have not realized the real purpose of a Collegiate course and have secured but a part of the development, which might have been theirs.

That the College is preeminently fitted to develop the intellectual faculties has never been disputed. For many years this was its sole aim and in connection with the development of the other two phases of life will continue to make it the factor for good in the future, which it has been in the past. To those of means College life offers sufficient attractions

to induce them to pursue a course there. Indeed this has become quite the popular thing and there is some danger that like most popular things the character of Collegiate education may become degraded. To those of few brains but much money this appears a very easy means of securing ~~the~~ an appearance of intellectuality without performing any of the work necessary for the actual attainment of knowledge. If they can succeed in securing a diploma they feel they have mastered everything to be known and need henceforth

but to rely on their experience. Nothing can be farther from the truth than this. A man, who graduates thinking that he knows much more than the fact that he really knows very little has acquired during his course that one thing, which above all others he should have avoided, -

conceit. He is not supposed to know everything when he graduates or any one subject completely. The object of the course is rather to train a man in habits of thought and to give him an intelligent idea of as many subjects as can be consistently

done. He is simply fairly introduced to a subject and, if he happen to like it, is left gazing with longing eyes at the vast fields of knowledge, which as yet he has never entered. If however, with this feeling of ignorance comes a sense of his ability to enter these fields and investigate for himself, the College has accomplished it's mission and has done it well.

A man however may leave College having developed his physical and intellectual faculties to the highest degree, yet if with all this development his moral nature has been neglected

he falls far short of the stature of a perfect man.

There is no denying the fact that there is immortality in College but where is there not? There is also mortality and a sufficiency of it to induce anyone to lead a moral life, who may desire. The majority of students have high ideas concerning correct living and if a man becomes immoral after entering College it is either on account of tendencies, which he possessed before entrance or because he voluntarily chooses for his associates those whose companionship is degrading. There

is not more immortality in College than in the world in general and if a man comes here, having had proper training at home and blessed with sufficient backbone to know his own mind on subjects pertaining to himself he will leave helped rather than hurt by the experiences to which he has been subjected.

Whenever a man may be his morality depends entirely upon himself and I believe that at College there are as many inducements for him to choose the moral as there are in any other sphere of life.

If now we have succeeded in showing that that College is prepared to develop the physical, intellectual and moral nature of man it may be asked "why then do so many have with these ends but partially realized"? The only answer is that they have been content to develop some of their powers to the neglect of others and have thus failed to secure a complete education.

While many of the men graduated from our Colleges do reflect shame rather than credit upon the institutions from which they have gone forth yet the

vast majority leave College with higher aspirations and loftier ideals prepared by their course both to perform successfully their work in life and "to do good in their day and generation."