

Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

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

Documents Online

Title: "Intellectual Achievement," by John H. Grabill

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: July 12, 1860

Location: Orations-1860-G728i

Contact:

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

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Intellectual Achievement

Commencement Oration

by
J. M. Grubill
1895

Intellectual Achievement

In the actions of man there may be recognized a secret power whose influence, though for the most part unseen, shapes the destiny and forms the character. Dependent, in part, upon the individual and drawing its vitality from nature, its tendency is either to elevate the mind or sink man below the position assigned by an intelligent Creator. Presenting itself to the choice of the individual, weak and insignificant at first, it is nourished by association until at length acquiring its full sway resistance proves ineffectual and stamping its image upon the character of the man, his words become the proof of its existence and his actions the exponent of its power.

But whether it be pure and noble or impure and selfish its nature is seldom entirely concealed. In it may be recognized the birth of intellectual achievement. The secret motives unknown to all but the individual himself, become the foundation of every effort to advance the true theory of knowledge and to make known those few and important principles upon which depend the existence of man and the harmony of the universe itself. But amid all prompting motives there are none possessing so great inherent strength, none wielding an influence so weighty as the love of truth. Implanted

within the bosom of man by divinity itself and nurtured by all the natural ties and associations which are held most dear, there is a power, there is a sanctity in love too pure for language too desirable, too vast for imagination too conceivible. And when man is once subdued by this strong passion, time, talent, energy, and even life itself are cast as a willing sacrifice upon the shrine of truth. What nobler impulse what more exalted emotion can thrill the breast or fondle with affections than the love of truth? Under its influence the wearied mind deriving sustenance, as it were, from every passing breeze, recognizes in the starry firmament the beauties as well as the utilities of nature's laws, and finds the impress of a Creator upon the rocks concealed for centuries from the view of man.

But, while an immense impetus is given by the secret motives the influence of patient persevering effort contributes no little aid to intellectual achievement. So that the two grand features of mental development are passivity of motion and energetic action. Before the combined efforts of the two impediments which have stood with defiance for centuries, have yielded, as the threatening iceberg which defies the howling blasts and roaring tempests of winter modestly

yields to the gentle embraces of the vernal breeze. Genius
with its heavenly epithets, though for the moment it
may appear clad in all its native beauty, and awaken
within the bosom emotions of the purest delight, as the fiery
meteor, must sink to be forgotten so soon as its resplend-
ent scintillations are lost amid the surrounding dark-
ness. Genius, it is true, may wander through the realms
of imagination gilding the beauties of nature with the touch
of her own plastic hand, and combining the scattered
and apparently incompatible facts into one harmon-
ious whole but never can the monuments erected at
her shrine equal those built up by the untiring industry
of intellectual effort. See with what self-sacrificing
zeal those who appear most eminent among the
ancient sages applied themselves to the one great ob-
ject of enquiry, disregarding public opinion not
in that base ignoble sense in which the hardened
wretch finds a palliation for his ~~own~~ guilt in his
own bosom, but with that noble Godlike independence
in which a man recognizes his own responsibility as
disconnected with the opinions and associations of others.
In such efforts have the natural sciences found

a permanent foundation. Astronomy, the most difficult and yet now the most perfect of all, was dependant upon fluctuating and ill-founded supposition until by the efforts of him whose name is familiar to all, ^{almost indissolubly connected with} after forty years of immense study and meditation actuated by no other motive than that of unfolding truth and applying the unwearied faculties of a well disciplined mind to this one great object; the new and almost perfect theory was presented to a world not yet capable of appreciating the truth and beauty of the discovery.

Geology has found a similar advocate in the person of Hugh Miller whose wonderful achievements have done much in reconciling the truths delineated to man through revelation and those indelibly enstamped upon man's works, and the cloud of gloom occasioned by whose death has scarcely disappeared from the countenances of an admiring world.

But we cannot, here, enumerate the grand and successive intellectual achievements which have shed their genial rays upon man's rugged pathway, at each elevating him to a position higher than the one previously occupied. We can but take a hasty glance at his position when dependent upon physical power alone, and that at the

present day after a thousand "Triumphs of mind
over matter" have reduced the elements themselves
to his power and placed him in a position
nearer his God. And if the past furnishes
any criterion by which we may judge the
future, the progress of intellectual achiev-
ment is destined to be onward till the
difficulties which now hang over us with
threatening aspect shall have vanished and
the honors of victory be lost amid the
glories of a brighter existence.

Intellectual Achievement

In the actions of man there may be recognized a secret power whose influence, though for the most part unseen, shapes the destiny and forms the character. Dependent, in part, upon the individual and drawing its vitality from nature, its tendency is either to elevate the mind or sink man below the position assigned by an intelligent Creator. Presenting itself to the choice of the individual, weak and insignificant at first, it is nourished by association until at length acquiring its full sway resistance proves ineffectual and stamping its image upon the character of the man, his words become the proof of its existence and his actions the exponent of its power

But whether it be pure and noble or impure and selfish its nature is seldom entirely concealed. In it may be recognized the birth of intellectual achievement. The secret motives unknown to all but the individual himself, become the foundation of every effort to advance the true theory of knowledge and to make known those few and important principles upon which depend the existence of man and the harmony of the universe itself. But amid all prompting motives there are none possessing so great an inherent strength, none wielding an influence so weighty as the love of truth. Implanted

within the bosom of man by Divinity itself and maintained by all the natural ties and associations which we hold most dear, there is a power, there is a sanctity in love too pure for language too describe, too vast for imagination to conceive. And when man is once subdued by this strong passion, time, talent, energy and even life itself are cast as a willing sacrifice upon the shrine of truth. What noble impulse what more exalted emotion can thrill the breast or fondle with affections than the love of truth? Under its influence the wearied mind drawing sustenance, as it were, from every passing breeze, recognizes in the starry firmament the beauties as well as the utilities of nature's laws, and finds the impress of a Creator upon rocks concealed for centuries from the view of man.

But, while an immense impetus is given by the secret motives the influence of patient persevering effort contributes no little aid to intellectual achievement so that the two grand features of mental development are purity of motive and imagination. Before the combined efforts of the two impediments which have stood with defiance for centuries, have yielded, as the threatening iceberg which defies the howling blasts and roaring tempests of winter modestly

yields to the gentle embraces of the vernal breeze. Genius with its heavenly epithets, though for the moment it may appear clad in all its native beauty, and awaken within the bosom emotions of the purest delight, as the fiery meteor, must sink to be forgotten so soon as its [resplendent?] scintillations are lost amid the surrounding darkness. Genius, it is true, may wander through the realms of imagination gilding the beauties of nature with the touch of her own plastic hand, and combining the scattered and apparently incompatible facts into one harmonious whole, but never can the monuments erected at her shrine equal those built up by the continuing industry of

intellectual effort. For with what self-sacrificing zeal those who appear most eminent among the ancient sages applied themselves to the one great object of inquiry, disregarding public opinion not in that base ignoble sense in which the [illegible] finds a [illegible] for his guilt in his [illegible] [guilt?] in his own bosom, but with that noble Godlike independence in which a man recognizes his own responsibility as disconnected with the opinions and association of others. In such efforts have the natural sciences found

a permanent foundation. Astronomy, the most difficult and yet now the most perfect of all, was dependent upon fluctuating and ill-founded suppositions until by the efforts of him whose name is almost indissolubly connected with ~~familiar to all~~, after forty years of immense study and meditation [illegible] by no other motive than that of unfolding truth and applying the unwavering faculties of a well disciplined mind to this one great object; the new and almost perfect theory was presented to a world not yet capable of appreciating the truth and beauty of the discovery. Geology has found a similar advocate in the person of Hugh Miller whose wonderful achievements have done much in reconciling the truths delivered to man through revelation and those indelibly enstamped upon nature's works, and the cloud of gloom [illegible] by whose death has surely disappeared from the countenance of an admiring world.

But we cannot, [illegible], enumerate the grand and successive achievements which have shed their genial rays upon man's rugged pathway, each elevating him to a position higher than the one previously occupied. We can but take a hasty glance at his position which dependent upon physical power alone, and that at the

present day after a thousand "triumphs of mind over matter" have reduced the elements themselves to his power and placed him in a position nearer his God. And if the past furnishes any criterion by which we may judge the future, the progress of intellectual achievement is destined to be onward till the difficulties which now hang over us with threatening aspect shall have vanished and the honors of victory be lost amid the glories of a brighter existence.