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**Title:** "The Choice," by Franklin F. Bond

**Format:** Commencement Oration

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# The Choice

Phrenology is hardly a science; yet who would not have it so? An oracle to speak once. A voice with a distinct call. An exacting brain weigher whose lb is just 16oz. A faithful finger pointing the trembling, weak kneed, undecided one to the pearly words "This is your way walk ye in it." He would easily be counted chiefest sage who taking the lay of our intellectual region could mark off and separate the rich soil from the stony places. But all is silent as the sphinx, mute as marble. No voice, no sound, no sign from without.

The poet is born they tell us, and it must be so. "I lived in numbers and the numbers came." This is the explanation of one who knew more than the alphabet of poetry. Few are the poets and fewer the born poets. Bumpology then being in its infancy, and the quiet whisper of the still small voice the inspiration of the chosen few;

What will the many do?  
 All experience lay bare two facts;  
 one that no man can succeed  
 best at everything, the other that  
 choice is not a matter of  
 indifference.

A good mother is partial. She  
 thinks to choose for the cherub  
 in the crib. Deep religious convic-  
 -tions fix fast that choice. The  
 Presidency of the U.S. that long  
 lane which to so many has  
 never had a turn is least of all  
 her concerns. Among the stars she  
 sees but one, drawn to it let by  
 it she finds herself at Bethlehem.  
 To the Prince of Peace <sup>she</sup> pays her  
 vows and dedicates her dearest  
 treasure. The child then is a  
 preacher long enough before thought  
 awakes. The keenly sensitive ear  
 of the mother detects the ~~secret~~  
 -music of the sweetest eloquence  
 in his childish lipings. Dawn  
 gives place to morn. The child  
 grows apace. An ordinary boy to  
 be sure, but to the mother not  
 ordinary, in voice, in look, in

movement how like her ideal. Hope is high. In ten years young manhood decides, decides adversely. The long cherished dream of the fondest of mothers ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> broken. In thirty years market success comes to the now strong man at the bar or in the State. The venerable woman is proud enough of her son's attainments, but she is disappointed - He was born to her a bishop.

A father is ambitious. To be distanced by his son, his supreme wish. Long has he stood in the shoes of toil. Accumulation has been steady but slow. Straitening his now bent form, and looking at his toughest muscles and leathery hands he says "my boy shall never work as I have, brains shall bring him in a profession what brain has failed me at a trade. But somehow or other that boy has a persistent hankering for the shop, tinkers around at odd times, and despite all efforts to dissuade him takes from his father, adds to it and the

machinist becomes the draughts-  
 man. There are those who  
 drop down under lucky stars  
 and stay there. Birth, surrounding  
 a series of fortunate circum-  
 stances and their own good  
 parts round off the rough edges  
 of the rugged coast. But how  
 many strike out aimlessly at  
 first? They know not how, they  
 know not why! One of the  
 class says "everything is crowded,  
 us pick in these times. Chance  
 makes the choice, a newspaper  
 advertisement put ~~xxxx~~ <sup>the boy</sup> in a  
 law office. The study is hard  
 and stale. The time for pre-  
 paratory examination comes and  
 goes again and again, but he  
 does not present himself. It  
 looks like failure, it would  
 be failure. But he has long  
 fingers, he is a natural penman.  
 Taking leave of law, he stands  
 behind the desk of a counting  
 room. Finds peculiar fascination  
 in turning of the dry leaves of  
 the daybook and becomes enthu-  
 siastic in racing up and

down long columns of figures. In one year his salary is doubled, In five he is worth two ordinary men to the firm.

Aptitude is the principle<sup>al</sup> thing. There is something <sup>in</sup> the natural desire to go this way or that way, there is much in it. The chirpings and carolling of a bright eyed Spanish girl, were happily interpreted by knowing parents, and the waver today concedes to "Patti" the first place in song. But aptitude does not always mean facility at first. There is a hard shell to break through sometimes. The master workman and clumsy apprentice would appear to be no kin when frequently they are one and the same. Then aptitude most surprisingly will run out through one line into another. Who would think that the man who hammered unshapely iron into horse shoes could mould a Community's theology? yet the leader of New England orthodoxy at the beginning of this century

started life a blacksmith.  
 Now there is a forced adaptation,  
 a kind of stubborn makefit.  
 It goes by the splendid name  
 of push. Push is power, but  
 hermit is powerless. For what  
 are stout arms and legs with-  
 out eyes? Push in the right  
 line is a miracle worker, push  
 in the wrong direction is simply  
 butting against the cold, hard  
 stone. Right head energy is  
 wasted; for it is going around  
 from the start to the start  
 again instead of out and on.  
 A man stripped of conceit, severely  
 honest with himself, having the  
 critical eye continually turned  
 inwards and a clearly defined  
 purpose just ahead of him, rarely  
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 possibility of stumbling into  
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 close calculations. In his thought  
 he has driven down each stake  
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"Curran" was an awkward Irish man. At the debating club, his rising provoked laughter, but he took the floor in spite of it. He couldn't talk, but he would talk. "Curran" was no fool. He took in the full measure of his resources, his defects he knew best. They clung fast to him, but like a skin he shed them. To most persons his career was a marvel, but to him it was not. He ~~proved~~ <sup>showed</sup> that grace might be extorted from the gawk, he ~~showed~~ <sup>proved</sup> that the stammering tongue might have the very soul of eloquence at its root.

F. F. Bond  
83'



Commencement Oration of Franklin F. Bond, Class of 1883  
Transcribed by Meg MacAvoy, September 2008  
Edited by Krista Gray, September 2008

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