

III

A LEAGUE OF LEARNING

YOUR climate has got me by the throat, and I can only croak; but I think you won't mind that if I speak the truth. A "League of Learning"—a phrase which I think is your invention, Mr. President—describes in a very accurate way the purposes of the mission of which I am one of the members. I rather think that some of its purposes have been described already, and I shall refer to them only very briefly. The idea that underlies it is that an interchange and exchange of university students and university teachers between this country and Great Britain will not only be helpful to those teachers and students, but also tend to bring the two nations into fuller understanding, and, therefore, into closer and deeper intimacy and fuller mutual helpfulness.

We think it is good for us to know you better, and we think it will be good for you to know us better. But we believe also that a still wider good might ensue, a good in which all mankind might share and never lose any more. Whether it comes from national self-conceit or not I cannot say, but, at any rate, we do assume that these two peoples—unless, indeed, I may really call them one—have it in them to secure that there shall be no great war any more, nor shall the fear of it darken the life of nations in times of peace. And we believe this because we think that these two peoples have a stronger sense of justice than has evinced itself in other nations. Britain, with all its defects, I think

will be acknowledged—even by Germany and even now—to have more political genius than any other European nation. That political genius which you have, too, turns back and has its very simple roots in a keen sense of “fair play,” as we call it. It manifests itself in the Englishman’s games, and even in a street fight. “Give the little chap his chance,” you may hear the Cockney cry, and you like him for it. It is a consequence of this spirit that in our political dealings with native populations we have persistently, and on the whole consistently, been faithful to the notion that the best thing we can do, even for ourselves, is to govern for their sakes. Government *for* the people is worth having even when it cannot be, as yet, government *by* the people. Had the commercial dealings of our “business men” been as clean as the political dealings of our civil servants, I could be endlessly proud of my country’s history. But the stain of the sharp business man’s intercourse with crude natives is deep and nauseous. We are trying as a political people to educate India and all our other dependencies into self-government. We want them to walk freely on their way to their highest good as soon as they can do so. We are likewise free from all selfish ambitions in regard to the war. We went into the war as clean in spirit as yourselves; and I do not know that it is possible to say more. We want also, as you do yourselves, to come out of it with clean hands. If we have to be still in future responsible for a wide empire, as no doubt we shall be, and if we have to guide and guard lower forms of civilization than our own, we will try in the future, as in the past, to govern for the sake of the governed. Whatever promise of growth their ruder civilization offers, we want to make the most of it. We desire to make the best use of all the good that lies in their simple customs, their quaint traditions, and their religion, rather than supplant

them with those of our own which must remain alien to them. In one word, we would in our dealings with them show that we respect their national personality. Respect for personality is the essence of both private and international morality. As a good teacher respects the personality of the boy and seeks to make the most of it, so would we respect and make the most of our Indian and African provinces. Indeed, I know no simpler practical maxim, for every man in every station of life and at every occupation, than that of treating others "always as ends and never as means." Good government alone is wise government, and wise government follows the example of the mother whose aim always is the good of her child, or of the gardener who labours for the growth of the plants according to their own kind, and finds therein his own reward.

That respect for personality, for the right of the independent growth of far-away peoples in our broad-extended empire, has been the binding force of the empire. Liberty is the best imperial and democratic cement that was ever invented. It has bound the British Empire in such a way that not one of its remotest parts has broken off in the days of distress. Even Ireland was loyal in parts, and both its sections were more friendly to England than to one another.

I had not intended to go into these matters. But they are the more significant in that you have shown the same spirit in the Philippines; and hence we think that if Britain and America stand shoulder to shoulder in times of peace, as they have done in this war, and seek the same preëminence in their respect for the rights of other nations, great or small, we have the best security that the inexpressible horrors of war will never more be known. There is no other kind of security known to us that has so much promise as that of the united purpose of these two great nations.

And we have come here to ask you to do your part in the Rice Institute so to guide the youth in your charge that, so far as lies in them, they shall help to bring and keep together these two peoples as partners in the enterprise of freedom and fair play the world over.

Now I will sketch our plan briefly. There are five kinds of interchange we think possible, and it is of first-rate importance to regard them as *complementary* and *not competitive*. They are not even alternatives, for they may be all carried out together. The first interchange is of undergraduates. We think, for instance, that students here in Houston, having spent two years here and having two years more to go in order to complete the B.A. or first degree, might spend the second two years in one of the universities of Great Britain, and come back to you with certificates from those universities indicating the kind of work done by them. You would accept those certificates on their return, if the work was satisfactory, as equivalent to your own; and having examined the students and found the examination to be satisfactory, you would give them your degree. Two years here and two years in Britain would count as equivalent to four years spent in either of the two countries. That is quite clear, is it not? We think it may be good for our young men and for our young women, as many of them as could avail themselves of the opportunity, to spend a portion of their undergraduate course amongst your students and in your care.

Secondly, there is the academic period between what you call your B.A. and what you call your M.A. Now, the equivalent to that (for there is a difference in terms) would be the period between a B.A. in a British university (or an M.A. on the "ordinary" level) and an M.A. *with honours*, which with us is a far higher degree. Your more brilliant

students, and these only, in the main, having taken your B.A., might come over to us for that period and might come back to you and be examined for their M.A. or be tested by ourselves on the honours standard. And similarly on the other side: our young men and women might come over to you for their advanced work, and come back to us either certified by you or to be tested by ourselves for their M.A. with honours.

Thirdly, there is the Ph.D. So far you have been getting your Ph.D. in Germany, and it was like other things Germany made. I will be quite explicit as to this matter, namely, that while the universities in Britain are all eager to welcome your aspirants to this degree and will gladly devote themselves to help them to gain the Ph.D., you will not get in any one of them anything like the cheap degree that, as we have been informed in America, was obtainable in Germany. Nobody need come over with the idea of getting an easy doctorate; and I don't think I am wrong in saying that you here do not desire it. But the way to the degree is, I repeat, perfectly open to the men and women who are willing to toil and capable of writing theses that are genuine contributions to any kind of knowledge. Your university would send them over, with adequate credentials, for two years to one of our universities, say Manchester, or Dublin, or St. Andrews, or Oxford. And they would have to spend two years in preparation for their degree. But not necessarily at the same university. Candidates coming to Glasgow or Manchester might spend part, if not even the whole, of their second year in England, or on the European continent, in other universities. Of course, I am speaking about a candidate for the Ph.D. who is a Master of Arts. At the end of his two years he presents his thesis. His thesis is examined by competent men. In Glasgow we have as examiners one

of our own professors and a distinguished professor of one of the other universities who is an authority on the subject discussed in the thesis. These two together examine the thesis, and report upon its merits and defects to a committee, which in turn reports to the Senate. The Senate then confers or refuses the degree. If the value of the thesis is doubtful, the candidate is subjected to an oral or written, or both an oral and written, examination. The examiners report upon it, and their view is adopted.

The other two methods of interchange concern college and university *teachers*. We lay great stress upon the value of the interchange of *young* teachers. The advantages are obvious, but I shall not dwell upon them, for Dr. Walker will speak on this aspect of the matter.

Now I should like to say a word about the institution of scholarships. Without the assistance of scholarships I should fear that the interchange may not be possible to many young men and women who would themselves profit by residence at a foreign university and carry back home with them a contagious spirit of sympathetic understanding with the country they have visited. This is a matter which, so far as concerns your students, I believe could be most efficiently carried out by the sororities and fraternities of the colleges and universities in America. Were your sororities and fraternities to send over to the universities and colleges of England, or Scotland, or Wales, or Ireland one or more of their brilliant young men and women every year, they would be deepening their own interest in the older institutions, and opening a way for fuller intercourse. Moreover, the scholarships might well be a memorial connected with the war we have waged and won, side by side. But Professor Joly will, I trust, make you share his convictions on this matter. I shall only add that I can think of no purpose

either more useful or more sacred than that of a scholarship in memory of fallen heroes in the war, established in order that our youths may know one another better and by the lasting influence of their college experiences in the two countries bring the two branches of the great English-speaking people into closer community of beneficent purpose.

The flow of students from the other side to this will, I believe, be slow at first. We do not catch up new ideas as quickly as you do. Moreover, you have already formed a fairly general custom of sending your students and your teachers East. For reasons, some of them obvious and some subtle, some springing from your circumstances and some from your national disposition, you will cross the Atlantic about as readily as you cross the street, while we think twice before doing so, and, in the end, must have some very cogent reasons. It is for us something of an adventure. And, lastly, money, so far as the spending of it is concerned, seems to have a lower value with you than with us in Scotland—you part with it with less searching of heart, even though you may not be one whit more generous for great objects. But one thing I can say emphatically—the colleges and universities of the British Isles recognize too clearly the public good that would flow from the mingling of your influence with their own, not to enter heartily with you into a lasting “League of Learning.”

Now, a League of Learning, compared with more material bonds and formal covenants, looks impotent, fragile, and impractical. How can a “League of Learning” help to unite two great nations? It is an “academic” affair, as we say when we wish to imply ineptness and innocent helplessness. The academic mind, like your “high-brow” man and his “high-brow” affairs, is a thing that the “practical man” speaks of with kindly and humorous tolerance. He will say

that "knowledge is power," but he does not really believe it. It requires some range of vision to agree with the great thinker who said that knowledge is never useless. Nor is this true, if taken too literally. As you, Mr. President, have hinted more than once, it is not mere knowledge, but the enlightened *mind* which is the reservoir of power. A great thinker, according to Emerson, is like a fire in a great city: you do not know where it will stop. A great idea is the winged measure of a great mind: it begins in one head, as Carlyle said, but, given time, it will conquer the whole world. Great conceptions in the world of human relations, ideals let loose upon a community, are like the physical forces which are operative in the natural world. They are binding laws, always at work. They are capable of being disobeyed, but never of being suspended; and if they are disobeyed, they bring their inevitable, punitive consequences.

There was once, we are told, amongst a small people in ancient times, a people obscure in every sense but one, a very great and very humble Teacher of men. At the close of His life, only about a dozen men believed in Him, and they were men in every social sense of no account. These followed their Teacher about from their love of Him, but even they entirely misunderstood His doctrine. Nevertheless, when He was facing death and His whole mission appeared to be a total failure, He said to them, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be ye of good cheer. I have overcome the world." There never was so great a teacher with so humble a ring of disciples as Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, so sublime was His faith, so sure was He of the conquering power of the truth which He taught by word and deed, that He spoke of its victory over the whole world as already won.

Knowledge in every domain, whether natural or spiritual, is power: Knowledge conquers.

No league can be more powerful than a league of thinkers, of men whose one desire is to discover and teach the truth. What is not less important, there is a sense in which thinkers, real lovers of truth, cannot help being in league. For every truth is universal. It is held in common by all who comprehend it. Truth is not in its nature an exclusive possession. It were an impossible world if different men possessed different truths about the same thing: so that $2 \times 2 = 16$ to one, 21 to another, and 11 to a third. Every discovery of truth by its very nature is a potential revelation to all men, and they concur in it. Error begets disagreement and separates men; truth brings harmony and unites them, and especially the truths that appertain to man as man, to man as a rational being, or, as I like the word, to man as spirit. All truths of the spirit are not only universal, but they have a directly uniting force within them. Indeed, that is the characteristic of all spiritual as contrasted with material things. The things of the spirit are mutually inclusive. They contain one another, which is impossible for all things that are material and occupy space and time. What *I* have, if it is a material possession, *you* have not; and what you have got, I have not. This piece of land is mine; that piece of land is yours. I cannot get yours without making you poorer, nor can you have mine. But whenever we begin to deal with spiritual things, "mine and thine" are found to include one another. There is mutual possession. The Scottish wife, speaking of her husband, calls him "*My* man." The husband, speaking of her, calls her "*My* wife." Now which of them is the owner? Well, you had better not try to decide. "*My* country," "*My* people," "*My* father," "*My* child"—these are cases of mutual inclusion, every one. The truth that I may have and impart to you leaves me none the poorer for being given away. On the contrary, by com-

municating it I may possess it all the more clear and full. The influence that a good character sheds—that beauty which is radiated outwards constantly from the conduct and character of a gentleman—is not lost in being imparted. It does not exhaust us to give away any of our spiritual possessions. On the contrary, at every stage, and with every step we take in the spiritual world, to give is to get; to die is to live. To give ourselves to a great cause is to make that great cause beat like a pulse in our veins—the life of our life.

The application of all this to the universities is obvious. Entering into this spiritual league, you throw open your treasures to us in America, and we throw open our treasures of learning to you in Britain, and we enrich ourselves to the measure of our generosity. All virtues and all truths, all spiritual phenomena, have this character. They enrich and they unite men at the same time. And the more we know and dwell on these truths, the more fully we shall work together. I entertain a strong faith in the value and power of learning, especially of learning in this domain of the humanities. And I believe the world would gain if the devotees of learning more consciously leagued themselves together, and more deliberately exercised their influence on the practical affairs of the nation. For one thing, the universities should take upon themselves frankly the responsibility for the better education of the nation. The medical profession in Great Britain, united in one body, holds itself responsible for public health, thinks out the problems, insists on getting means to solve these problems, and dictates to the community. Its authority in sanitary matters is not opposed or questioned. But education has to go on its knees to local councils for means of mental health. “Will you please add a penny to the rates, so that we may save your children’s minds from the distortion and maladies of ignorance?”

Again, the great medical practitioner, coming down to a little village and finding there a humble physician, recognizes him as a member of his own profession, and in that respect as an equal. The university professor and the village schoolmaster should be on the same terms, for they are, and ought to be, members of a League of Learning devoted to the world's greatest good. It is not right that the education of the people should be to so great an extent in the power of persons to whom education is a secondary matter as compared with political or economic issues, while those who live by it and for it have so little say. I do not find business men commit the charge of their own monetary concerns to the town council or the county council. National education will prosper only in the hands of a League of Learning. University men must be trusted with the responsibility of education, and university men will not be doing their duty until they take that responsibility upon themselves. Those whose dedicated lives prove that they believe that a generous education is one of the best things that a people can have, should possess the authority and the power to make good their views in the life of the nation; and it is the duty of such men to claim the authority and welcome the responsibility.

The analogy of the medical profession is instructive in other ways. It is a league of health which would secure the physical well-being of *every* man, woman, and child. Its methods are becoming more and more preventive. It would forestall illness and turn it aside. In a similar way, a League of Learning should have as its aim that *every one* shall be educated. Ignorance, like ill health, is always dead loss. The care for the mind of the nation should be as constant and universal as the care for its physical well-being. What would you think of a nation which resolved by law

to look after the physical well-being of the children until they are fourteen years old, but not any longer? Would you consider that Great Britain had done anything notable in resolving to look after the bodily health of the boys and girls until they are sixteen, and in beginning to think of extending their care till they are eighteen? On the contrary, you would think us foolish if we fixed any limit of age. Physical health must be a national care always, even to the last moment of life.

Can you assign any valid justification for the very different attitude which both nations, yours and mine, take to mental health? Is a stunted mind of so much less importance than a stunted body? When will we see that it is morally and socially imperative that, all our lives long, there shall be some interest of some kind in some science, in some branch of learning or of art, that shall occupy the leisure hours and widen the outlook and enrich the soul of the man of business and of the working man alike? There is more and more leisure and there is more and more pay coming to the working man, I believe; and I am delighted with the fact. But I want the working man to be led and guided to a better use of his leisure, and a better use of his higher pay. And I know of no better way than that he should be educated to such a stage that he shall continue all his life long to delight in history or in literature, in physical experiment or in some other of the thousand and one ways in which the world imparts its meaning and beauty to man—the world which, day and night, by its constant laws and its never ceasing changes, is tempting the mind of man to come and understand and enjoy it. Nature is one grand treasury of truths of every kind, waiting to be possessed by man; and the majority of us walk blindly through these treasures without ever seeing their worth.

There is, verily, a need and a call for a League of Learning whose purposes are as generous as the spiritual wants of man are deep, and as the wealth of the world, natural and spiritual, in which he moves so blindly, is inexhaustible.

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