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Baccalaureate Address

Sidney H. Marsh

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Transcribers: Gabriella Scippa and Ashley Spahn November 30, 2009

Baccalaureate
May 3, 1868

Hebrews 11. 27.

For he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

This language is employed with reference to Moses. The great lawgiver. A man greater than any in the history of our race for comprehensive wisdom and practical sagacity. To wisely rule man as it is the most difficult, so it has always been esteemed the ablest action of man.

No Solon or Confucius or Lycurgus or Caesar or Charlemagne or Alfred or Washington has ever equaled Moses, by whom came the Law—in the worthiest action. No man ever so thoroughly apprehended the wants of man in the securities for his happiness.

He was not a weak & amiable man who might be drawn to the observances of religion because of his weakness. He was the strong-willed commanding man who led the Israelites through unparalleled difficulties from Slavery to the Promised Land.

He is an excellent example for the man whom Providence calls to public life & to be a leader of the people and what [illegible text] characterized his life whatever ideas guided him or principle actuated him exceeding interest and value. [illegible text] the views of such a man as Washington—[illegible text] acknowledge a kind of authority in the opinion of the great & good. [illegible text] might in therefore study whatever throws light on the character of this great lawgiver & leader. But we do not need the might of example to enforce the teaching of our texts. If however our impression is unfavorable to that teaching. If it seems weak or puerile let us remember that it was accepted and practiced by the great lawgiver and leader the foremost man of the ages.

But what was that teaching?

That a purpose of life the highest & noblest may be certainly [illegible text] if it is not necessarily approved to the processes of this world & that faith in the presence & power of the invisible God is the secret strength of such a man.

In order to make this more apparent Let us consider [illegible text] proportions.

That the ideal is the form of this highest & best purpose.

That the realization of this necessitates the use of power & from the nature of the purpose & the circumstances this power must be the super human personal power of God.

The ideal in the form of the highest and best purpose we do not mean by this any ideal.

The selfish greedy voluptuary words in ideals. His imagination if as foul as “Vulcan’s smithy” with ideals lost but not the ideals of the true, the beautiful & the good. He is stired in effort by [illegible text] they stimulate a transient purpose.

Whether he is the man who gross imaginations to gross enjoyments or the man whose culture leads to an enjoyment of the imagery & who delights in those sensuous descriptions that minister stimulants to passions – as to much of our light literature does without distinctly disclosing its aim or [stiring?] to special sin. There are a great many idealists of this style, idle

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dreamers – not workers for any thing certain by as far as possible from being [illegible text] workers for a purpose.

There is another class of idealists. That we do not mean viz. the theorizers “Who dream their dream of the ideal” who construct. Their arcadias & the “Islands of the [illegible text]” giving the form & structure of imaginary states & shape into a definite system Their theories of government & society. We cannot speak slightingly of Plato or Moore or Harrington. Men of large hearts & strong minds whose ideals of the perfect have entered into the working plans of more active men.

There is no form of government in Christendom that is not other than it would have been & better too for The Theorizing of these men & still they were not men of the highest purpose. For do we mean such idealists as turning Germany sends forth. A swarm like those that overrun Europe in the early [illegible text] self assisting strong & full of vigor. A material that in the Providence of God may be designed to mix with & correct degeneracies of other kinds.

This idealism and ever evolving and never trusting search after a system of thought or philosophy that shall satisfy the cravings of the mere Intellect.

While each movement seems only to furnish some new material & so increase the difficulty of accomplishing the hoped result. Like the blistering winds & rains of March—These Thinkers pass over The fields of Thought. They seem to [illegible text] the soil & start this [illegible text] to growth – but they are neither the sand nor the influence that informs the harvest.

These are not only not the idealism that we have in view but they are not really idealism at all. The Four idealism is of a different character. It produces ideals of good things for men. It aims not at systems but facts or rather [illegible text] things to be done. It does not rest satisfied with the representation & lie back with self-congratulations to contemplate the work as something accomplished & say “Lo, all this I have accomplished” behold! What a beautiful theory & what a symmetrical structure I have [illegible text]” rather “This is what must be accomplished. “This will I do or strive to do & others shall see that it must be done & help me.” It is an ideal of something to be effected in the character & institutions of men.

It is not a conception of a perfect state of society with its definite organizations its constitution & social order fixed. To which our present world is to be conformed by straitjacket [illegible text] and enthusiastic stretchings of strainings of poor humanity to be, like the frog in the fable, bigger than it is.

It does not aim at a higher & better as an absolute form of society. It says “we do not know what we shall be.” It may describe as the evangelist did. The New Jerusalem but it is characterization not definition-- It is an ideal of good to man as well as men. But in each case it is an ideal of specific conduct as conducive to the highest well being of the individual & the community. It says the individual “Be like it & the community” Let us strive to realize the glorious vision of the Prophets -- “The holy man who spake as they were moved by the Spirit.” But it does not conceive a definite person that each individual is to become nor a certain social organization for the common wealth. It even concerns not the ultimate perfection, but of the next thing to be done to secure it. Its form takes on the form of the [illegible text] the things that must

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be done -- It is practical. It is not vaguer. It is exceedingly definite. It insists that such & such things are to be done. It is logical. There is reason & method in the relations of its special ideals to the welfare of man & men. It is an idealism that sees very clearly the good that it seeks to realize & moreover is [illegible text] of the steps by which this is realized so far as these steps are determined by the ideal.

It is an ideal for man & men. It is inspired by love. Unlike all others it has not its ends and & aim in itself -- The voluptuary imagines for self gratification. The Theorist for The sake of The Theory -- The man of ideas imagines for the sake of his fellow man.

Sympathy pervade-s it as its vital-blood - sympathy for all men & as This charity characterizes his purpose it overcomes all minor differences & proves the True fraternal bond for all who possess it. When [illegible text] to heart over all barriers of doctrine or of form. We are no longer Congregationalist Baptists & Methodists but [illegible text] of mankind.

We have Thus spoken of The ideal as characteristic of the action practical & progressive purpose to do good to man -- The man who exercises such noble purpose [illegible text] & acts in view of [illegible text] things. Above all [illegible text] & absolute & practical he seeks by definite measures to establish our invisible in the world. He is a man of ideas. His ideas are visions of practical methods to realize an unseen & undetermined kingdom on Earth --

How can This be? This leads to a further consideration of the nature of This purpose --

This kingdom is God's Kingdom. The man who exercises The purpose referred to is in direct sympathy & intercourse with God -- from God he consciously receives a spirit of enlightenment as to this spiritual wants of man of just of man of just what in order That This Kingdom -- This highest Good may prevail on earth.

Having a knowledge of what men need his ideals of The [illegible text] of supplying them may be accurate -- this purpose is not merely a purpose That The man approves. But it is a purpose consciously & prayerfully held to cooperate with God. -- It is not passive & blind following of sovereign authority - but a sympathetic response to Divine love -- It is not a self reliant & self assured plan for peace and good will to men but a "Glory to God in The highest" & to peace & good will --

[illegible text] -- That it is a product of a Divine inspiration -- the inspiration that shone The nature of the kingdom of heaven without defining it & That awakens The sympathy with human want & spiritual want while leaving to man the ideas & purposes by which the result is to be reached.

This purpose to realize an idea as we have described it surely was in its nature the noblest that could actuate man. It was also one with God's purpose not as comprehensive as Gods purpose for that Took in all The world while man's was instrumental only to that result but The human purpose was in harmony with the Divine. This conscious harmony with God is characteristic of the man of ideas of whose purpose we speak This as well as this common love to man makes him one class of men distinct from all others.

There are Those [illegible text] for Talent & of wide influence where silent Thought has become public & manly difference beyond [illegible text] the knowledge of Their names -- who

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Think that the bond & Tie of fellowship among man is in the mere fact That They have purposes without reference to God.

John Stuart Mill one of the foremost intellects of the age says “[illegible text] to Think That a religion may exist without a belief in a God! Men as men are religious. The belief in God is an opinion, not essential to any purpose— a harmless opinion which some chose to hold but it is not essential-- But This is a deadly error. For what is The nature of The purpose referred to?

It is aggression determined to vindicate & establish certain ideas of human well being in the earth.

This implies The overthrow of existing forms. Think what these are. The power of evil in The individual soul. The established & strengthened power of Institutions – practices – assented to, approved confirmed & maintained by The strength of a people & The power vested in anointed kings.

[illegible text] a Pharaoh determined to enslave & Tyrannize over a people –

Without a Divine in inspiration of justice & a vision of the authority & power & holiness of Jehovah, would a man, no matter what his natural sagacity & strength of will. Conceived the purpose of removing these fetters & leading them forth, especially when he saw that they did not wish him to be their deliverer? No! The man who would attempt this must be a man of ideas such as only the clear knowledge of God as merciful as well as just could generate.

The more courage which Moses manifested in facing Pharaoh has equals perhaps in history but the moral dignity & grandeur of his position, his calm commanding tone his miraculous power were the product of ideas of the good of Israel with which God inspired him. He stood in the presence of Pharaoh surrounded with the awe-inspiring evidences of Egyptian power. Majestic, the king sat upon his throne.

The brilliancy of dyes that then thousand years had not diminished. The glitter of gems & of Ophir gave splendors that dazzled the beholders. The priesthood feared and honored the [illegible text] in earthly form -- stood submissive around him. The form & authority of nations & a dynasty were there. But with a glory surpassing the splendors of all earthly pomp, August & sovereign was the [majesty of the King immortal and invisible, apparent to the clear faith of Moses. He knew the will of God. He had the clear idea of their good and deliverance & he had the strong purpose to accomplish it. -- God strengthened him it is true with special direction & aid. But Moses had [illegible text] his individual character his own ideas.

There are no ideas of good to man that are not inconsistent with the passions of man & the interests of the principalities and [illegible text] that rule in the Children of [illegible text] may safely say not only a purpose for good may [illegible text] but that it must run counter to the purpose of evil. Cherish any ideas you place of this kind study the circumstances adjust yourself to them more never so cautiously. In them try to realize your ideas and you will surely find yourself antagonizing with some prejudice or opinion of men around you. That like a [illegible text] to protect the stronghold.

Are you mastered by the ideas of the temperance movement for example? & the Spirit of God is doubtless in it. Do you go forth to call more to the participate in the blessings of temperance. Over what opposition do you [illegible text] note merely obstacles but opposition.

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Do you propose any reform which you know would be for the happiness & welfare of man? You must ridicule [illegible text] the malignant and spiteful men. Rest assured if you are actuated by a moral purpose, if your ideas are worthy to be called ideas at all, then will you have to stand before Pharaoh & nothing can sustain you except the conviction that you are right because God is with you. In all ages there is the same test to all truly heroic purpose.

It must stand before the thrones of power. It must feel that this worlds power is against it. Too strong for it, except as it has the hidden security of Gods purpose & as the invisible God sustains it.

The student ~~you are going out into the world~~ perhaps you think that your talents & education are to advance you along the ways of life with greater ease & with [illegible text] the good of [illegible text] & honor & earthly happiness [illegible text] you may so use them that they shall make crooked ways straight & rough places smooth. You will other things being excel by reason of your education. You can be more cunning [illegible text] more systematic & more successful than those with equal but undisciplined talents -- But do not I beg of you go forth to join the hungry greedy rushing crowd of seekers of place and office. Be men of ideas. You see that I do not mean by this wayward erratic impracticable men. Be more imbued with the convictions that God has a glorious work in this world.

Be ministers of his word & work. There is nothing else noble or worthy to become [illegible text] with this. Have that work at heart. If you have you will see ways in which in accordance with The Divine Plan you can help on God's work of many in the world. Can you be in sympathy with mans wants & not see some way in which Through Gods grace you can help & benefit him?

If your minds are cultivated if you know how to defend a cause & overthrow opposition to it. If your knowledge of language has given you power to form clear conceptions & detect the untruths in ambiguous terms. If your scientific training has sharpened your perceptions and strengthened your powers of argument. If philosophy has shed the light upon the intricate ways of immortal & spiritual progress or wandering --

If logic as [illegible text] & ways of error & shown how [illegible text] then are you specially qualified to do something for Christ in This world. Oh! That man is no Christian man who is not a man of ideas. Who goes into life with no noble heroic Christian purpose or who is not [illegible text] till he finds it. Shame of the Christian whose main business is for himself who is not chiefly interested in carrying out himself or in helping others carry out some work or other. Then how [illegible text] Times in the history of the church whom the friends of God seemed shut up. They could do little. They could only stand & wait. But this is not so now. The battle is in array. The Hosts of Sin, the forms of darkness with [illegible text] out & [illegible text] by might men are assaulting the strongholds of truth. They are [illegible text] diminished boldly [illegible text]. Boldly now they do not attack some force or picket guard. They attack the central points where all Christians alike are interested. As whom Charles the Hammer fought on the Sunny plains of France for all [Christendom?]. The battle that stopped the proud invading men of [illegible text]. So Christendom is to day face to face with the prince of darkness.

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We want men in whom the love of God has [illegible text] ideas of what may & must be done. Who are the enemy not only but see ways & means to rout and overthrow him.

Gentlemen of the graduating class. I don't know as I can express our educational purpose in a single phrase better than by saying that it is to make our students men of ideas.

It is a good thing to possess knowledge -- there is value in refinement in a skill in elegant arts -- but those are but the kid gloves and the fluttering plums of parade day compared with the clear purpose. The strong heart & the sagacious head needed in this battle with Satan in which every Christian is called enter. You want to know what is be done and how to do it -- your culture should have helped in the solution of these questions. But still more you need the Spirit of the Lord. That you may have a heart for his work. This we cannot give you By we pray the Lord for you that he may endow you richly with his Spirit. You go not [illegible text] You go out to assured success as the world measures it, but to help a cause that should surely triumph. Like the Christian hero in [illegible text] in that Triumph from afar & labor for its speedy coming. You will have the experience of those who have gone before you in this world. May God help your labor lighten your trials if for your good & bring you at last a [illegible wording] that shall share the Triumphs of Immanuel.

The past years are within. The future is dark and uncertain.

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