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A Successful Life.

Alumni Oration

Delivered at the 40th Annual Commencement of the University of Notre Dame,

By Professor William Hoynes, A.M., '69.

The desire to make life a success appears to be common to men of all climes and natural to mankind in all ages. From the dawn of recorded time to the present it has been exhibited in the progress of events. The notable achievements that mark the lives of men and the history of nations bear witness to its scope in time. The remarkable labors wrought on land and sea in the progress of industrial development testify to the world-wide range of its exhibition. Such facts supply ample evidence that it is the vital principle of persevering labor and the great stimulus to hard work. In view of its almost unlimited application and exhibition the question "How shall it be put into practice and directed?" intimately concerns the welfare, progress and stability of society.

What is success?

The wish to make life a success is salutary and commendable. That is a proposition to which all agree. But all do not agree as to what constitutes success. And that is the real question to be solved. It is therefore pertinent to ask, "What is success? Does it consist in the accumulation of wealth? Is it to be measured by skill in money-getting?" Men may not, in a theoretical sense, regard the possession of riches as constituting true success; but, in a practical light, the majority, it is to be feared, think otherwise and look upon amassed wealth as furnishing the most conclusive evidence of a successful life. Viewed from a theoretical standpoint, it is generally admitted that this is a lamentable perversion of the idea of true success. And now let me endeavor to prove that it should be so viewed even from a practical standpoint. To be genuine, success must include as an essential element a warm, strong and constant purpose to be manful in act, charitable in thought, and generous in deed. Success of this kind enhances the common good, keeps dormant the fierce and malignant spirit of popular envy and distrust, and serves to promote the security and welfare of society. The purpose to be useful is the element in the struggle for success that keeps a man in friendly and sympathetic relations with his fellow-men. When a person forfeits claim to their confidence he is generally condemned or treated with open contumely. His reverses excite no regret. Nobody pities him. If his selfishness made him refuse in his prosperity to be useful to others, in his misfortunes others are not inclined to be useful to him.

Power and abuses of wealth.

The rule stated holds good not only as to abuses in the practical exercise of the desire to achieve success, but also in respect to the use of power of every kind. The higher a selfish and unscrupulous man raises himself above his fellow-men, whether by the debasing influence of mammon or the tricks of political legerdemain, the more he is shunned and despised by them. There is a growing feeling among men that no person has a right to acquire dangerous power under the laws of a popular government. And many of them believe that vast accumulations of capital give such power. Mammon is always king in the realm of venality. Sophocles makes Creon say:

"There is nothing in use by man which for power of harm can equal money."

And the statement is as true now as it was 2300 years ago, when originally written. Money is sometimes used, not in this country particularly, but in all countries, to corrupt the very sources of legislation. It is at times employed to swerve electors from an honest discharge of their political duties, to cripple the independence and direct the work of legislative bodies, to usurp the functions of the judge, and to tamper with and corrupt jurors in the very temple of justice. All this is manifestly antagonistic to the common welfare and subservive of good government. Wealth is wholly indebted to the law for protection, and to the law it owes the duty of absolute subjection and obedience. By invading the domain and usurping the functions of the law, it removes the only sure restraint upon popular license, and challenges an injured and enraged people to do their worst. Thus it invites the conflicts and calamities that from time to time disturb communities and render insecure all kinds of property. The avarice and selfishness which inspire interference with the
law almost necessarily provoke distrust, indignation, opposition. Besides, a tendency to overreach frequently defeats itself. Methods of indirectness may recoil with violence upon the schemes they are intended to promote. When the source of the law is corrupted or its operation suspended, the populace becomes aroused, a fierce and implacable power springs up, the demon mob rages, and capital flees in terror from the dreaded violence. Misdirected wealth may thus conjure up a power that it cannot control. It may meet destruction in its own sorceries. And these are but few of the effects of the desire to be successful without at the same time being useful to the community and the State. In attempting to grasp too much, all may be lost. How much more prudent to make success subordinate to utility! Noah Webster, the renowned lexicographer, held firmly to this view, and was enabled at the close of his long and eminently successful life to say:

"My life has been one of uniform enjoyment because filled up at every stage with active labors for some useful end."

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF DIFFERENT AGES.**

Every distinctively marked age has characteristics of its own. Its customs, habits of living, tendencies of thought, preferences in industrial pursuits, and inclination to the arts of peace or the turbulence of war, are all indicated by evidence sufficiently definite to admit readily of identification in time by the observing student of history. Our own age is marked by achievements that distinguish it as the most active, aggressive and practical that the world has ever seen. Within the past 100 years things have undergone vast changes. The most casual observer can readily see that our century has but very little that corresponds to what was notable in industry and human affairs in the preceding ages.

In feudal times the grade of power of a king, prince, duke, or other leader, was determined by the number of followers subject to him. His influence was measured by the number of soldiers he could lead into battle. Money was comparatively scarce, and everywhere it was secondary to the power and influence of rank. From the $1,500,000,000 in circulation in the time of the Roman Empire the volume of currency had become contracted to about $200,000,000. A warlike spirit prevailed. The customs were peculiar to the time and in harmony with the conditions then existing. But the invention of gunpowder gradually wrought a change in the methods of conducting warfare. The small man became as serviceable in the field as the large one. In course of time, the armored knight, with his sword or lance, ceased to be a match for the plebeian foot-soldier and his rude fire-arms. He fell back into the shadows of obscurity, and with him disappeared forever the joust, and the tournament, and the old-time system of warfare.

In the succeeding transition from feudal life to a more modern state of things, the dwellers of the towns acquired as much power as they could seize. In doing so they were greatly favored by the attendant chaos and disorganization in social and political conditions. When peace returned and matters became adjusted to the new order of things it was found that labor and commerce were rapidly adding to the volume of currency, and that the banker, the money-lender and the man of business had acquired a power that entitled them to the recognition of rank, if it did not actually compel such recognition. The bill of exchange and the promissory note largely increased the volume of currency, and in business became a substitute for money, while money became "the sinews of war!" The king, prince, duke, and the like, found themselves unable to command the services of soldiers if without money to pay them. In a large measure their power had passed to bankers and money-lenders, and in practical affairs capitalists rose to a rank hardly second to that of rulers. And there they now stand. Money is more abundant than ever it was, and the strife to secure it seems to have correspondingly increased. All see that it gives an influence which even rank does not confer, and no one can fail to notice that it is sought even more eagerly than rank. In fact, with it rank can easily be secured. If the desire to acquire wealth were not so eager, persistent and insatiable, it would evidently not possess such power for harm. It would not be capable of exercising so sinister an influence upon affairs that intimately concern the welfare of society. It would not enable vulgar pretenders to reach the highest stations of honor and power. It would not be so potent an agent in countenancing the shoddy glitter, gaudy tinsel and artificial manners that have grown so common since began the social reign of bonanza kings, stock-jobbers, Wall-street autocrats, and the like.

**DESPICABLE FEATURES OF AVARICE.**

This last reference suggests another view of the subject under consideration, and it is that the accumulation of vast means gives but very scant return for the unremitting labor, close attention and stingy parsimony, not to say unscrupulous practices, frequently deemed necessary to acquire it. To the calm observer the passion to accumulate millions upon millions, never resting, but ever pushing on through strife and hazard, seems to point to the misdirected zeal of the despised miser and to suggest this as a twin passion. Both have more than they need to enable them to live in independence and comfort; but yet, actuated in common by the insatiable spirit of avarice, they learn to cultivate a disposition most odious in its grovelling and mercenary tendencies, and the finer feelings of their nature become blunted. By cultivating a selfishness which withers the generous impulses of the heart they deliberately choose to trudge along in the gloom and solitude of a life destitute of utility to the public. They choose to stand apart from the sympathetic and reciprocally helpful relations that conduct to the welfare of society and signalize the popular conception of public duty.

It is unquestionably proper and commendable for a man to acquire...
A SUFFICIENT COMPETENCE

to maintain himself and family in independence and comfort. It is, in fact, a duty to provide against future want. It is laudable to guard against the encroachments of poverty. It does a man honor to overcome and rise above it. In the language of Dr. Johnson:

"Let it be your first care not to be in any man's debt. Resolve not to be poor. Whatever you have, spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness. It certainly destroys independence, and it makes some virtues impracticable and others extremely difficult."

Let a man have ample means for all reasonable uses. Let him acquire a competence, but, according to Burns' philosophy,

"Not for to hide in a hedge,
Nor wait on train attendant,
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent."

Let him be able thoroughly to educate his children. Let him give them all the advantages the best institutions of learning offer, for nothing tends with greater certainty to make life useful and successful. He runs no risk of incurring disappointment by excessive zeal in this direction. Children properly trained and well-instructed do him more credit than unbounded riches. An intelligent, upright, industrious and promising son more truly fills the hearts and lives of his parents with satisfaction and happiness than could the actual possession of all the opulence that avarice might covet. And no wealth can compensate for the shame and misery parents feel when their children grow up in indolence, ignorance and vice—triple furies that mercilessly haunt idle, degraded and useless lives. The parent who becomes a virtual slave in toiling to acquire riches in order that his children may live in affluence and idleness makes a lamentable mistake. A proper sense of responsibility and need of work is essential to the development of our best powers and the establishment of a firm character. Work is the great exorciser of impure thoughts, degrading preferences and criminal inclinations. From it they all flee. Foul and unwholesome as the water of a stagnant pool, the indolent life readily generates the fell brood of customary vices; but pure as the gushing spring of the mountain, beautiful as the rippling brook of the meadow, true and constant as the channel of a mighty river, a life of lofty aims and noble virtues, an honor to all identified with it. What father would not rather have his son lead such a life, though comparatively poor in worldly possessions, than behold him rich as Croesus, though indolent, illiterate, selfish, degraded?

"For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich;
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honor peereth in the meanest habit."

UNCERTAINTIES IN THE WAY OF SUCCESS.

Besides, what uncertainty attaches to wealth! Croesus himself affords a pertinent example. But it is unnecessary to go to the remote past for examples. We have multitudes of them in our own day. Fourteen years ago there was no man in Germany more prominent in business circles than Stronsberg, the railroad king. He owned railroads, factories, foundries, palaces, mines, blocks of buildings, vast landed estates, etc. His wealth was safely estimated at 60,000,000 marks. He was the companion of princes, nobles and ministers of finance. All eagerly sought his advice in monetary matters, and he was viewed as hardly less than a magician or sorcerer in affairs of business. But depression in trade set in after the Franco-German war. Conditions underwent a change. King Strousberg could not understand the new order of things, or accommodate himself and his methods to it. His great fortune ebbed away and totally disappeared. He became a beggar. The other day he died in Berlin. No friends were present. No expressions of sympathy were heard. He died a pauper, and soon afterward his remains were taken away and buried in a pauper's grave. But such instances are so numerous that it will not do to particularize. And it is unnecessary in this connection to refer to the recent disasters in Wall street. It would be superfluous to name the men whose millions upon millions were swept away in a few hours. Obdient to the promptings of an insatiable avarice, they could not be contented with the ample fortunes they had. With a selfish disregard for the rights of others, they sought to acquire additional millions. And their avarice overreached itself. In trying to grasp too much, they lost all.

The wrecks of financial disaster are to be found in every city and town. Month by month they increase in number. There are but very few enterprises or business houses in any part of the country that were thought of or had a definite prospect of existence 100 years ago. The houses then prominent and the names then great in the marts of trade have altogether disappeared. They have been swept into destruction by the recurring storms of financial disaster and have sunk into oblivion. All things seem ordained to grow up, flourish for a time, and then decay. And the great commercial enterprises of the world appear to be no exception to the rule. Most of those now notable have sprung up within the past fifty years. Who may foretell their fate for fifty years to come? And who may describe the feelings of a person prominent in business and wealth when he begins to miss his hold, to slip backward, to lose his riches? Who can understand the grief and misery of a person who stumbles and falls to the foot of the precipice—back to the humblest plane of life? It was far better for him, and far more conducive to his happiness, if he had never risen above the humble plane of obscurity and daily toil. Poverty, hardship, neglect and daily fellowship with the poor and the wretched, are never more difficult to endure than when they succeed comparative affluence. Then the contrast is greatest and fills life with the pain of disappointment and the inexorable miseries of multiplied privations. Poor victim! He sees the force of truth in the lines—
To be reduced to want; to see the whole current of his life changed; to behold his family sharing his reverses; to feel that he has no alternative but to engage in some menial work for which he is not qualified; to bear the harsh grating of formal expressions of condolence on the part of former friends; to know that every act of his and every indication of the increased frugality of his family is made a subject of comment among his neighbors; to think that his life is a failure, and that all his acquaintances so view it, and that he has fallen to an inferior plane of manhood in the estimation even of his own household, are all subjects of keen disappointment, bitter mortification and intense misery. Far happier is he who has never fallen from affluence to indigence, but who is progressing steadily and steadfastly, even though slowly, from indigence to comfort and independence. As Holmes says:

"I find the great thing in this world is not so much where one stands, but in what direction he is moving."

Every step forward puts him farther ahead than ever he was before. He takes no risks. He is content to proceed slowly and by legitimate means. He maintains an equable temper, is always the same, seeking to avoid giving pain to anyone, lives a life of usefulness, and makes his acts square with the requirements of duty. In short, he conducts himself as a man of honor and steadfast character, and he is viewed as such by all that know him, no matter how poor he may be. The life of a man who so lives is full of contentment and happiness. To it comfort and independence cannot be denied. It is sure to be crowned with success. In fact, from the very beginning it is a success. Well does he who aims so to live know that

"What men most covet,—wealth, distinction, power, are baubles nothing worth; they only serve to raise us up, as children at the school, and rouse us up to exertion; our reward is in the race we run, not in the prize. Those few to whom is given what they ne'er earned, having by favor or inheritance, know not, nor ever can, the generous pride that glows in him who on himself relies, entering the lists of life. He speeds beyond them all, and foremost in the race succeeds. His joy is not that he has got his crown, but that the power to win the crown is his."

Men could far better endure the privations incident to unpropitious fortune were it not for the contrasts between wealth and indigence so obtrusively presented. And the person who by avarice, indirectness and unscrupulous ways amasses vast means and delights in improving opportunities to show how much richer he is than others, cannot reasonably expect to be sincerely honored or respected. The accumulation in his hands of what would, if equally distributed, make thousands comfortable, suggests even of itself contrasts that irritate many. And the spirit of our laws and political institutions is opposed to marked distinctions between citizens, whether in respect to their standing before courts of justice or in their social relations to ward one another. In the Federal constitution itself the fathers of the Republic were careful to embody a provision prohibitory of the use or acceptance of titles of rank and heraldic distinctions of all kinds. And who will argue that the spirit of that provision is not inferentially prohibitory of the contrasts which superabundant accumulations of wealth are so likely to create? The laws are by no means friendly to the acquisition of dangerous powers by any man or class of men, and the intermeddling in public affairs of those who control vast accumulations of capital is viewed with extreme jealousy by all who bestow particular attention upon the old-time landmarks of the Government. While human nature is weak there will be a tendency to obliterare or cover up the visible contrasts or distinctions between wealth and poverty, for the poor who share feelings of common pride dislike to have evidences of their unfortunate condition emphasized by their dress, social rank or general style of living. Hence they are peculiarly pained by inability to exhibit indications of sufficient means in possession to overcome such contrasts. And this very weakness leads to an extravagance which they are poorly prepared to indulge—an extravagance which often becomes a cause of vice and crime. It will hardly be denied that in these particulars the contrasts which excessive wealth is likely to produce are detrimental both to society and the State. But it is not pleasant to treat this subject, and with those few words it is dismissed. It may be stated, as a rule, that in every walk of life

**persevering labor is essential to success. The most brilliant genius is practically useless without hard work. Buffon says, "Genius is only a protracted patience." And Dr. Dewey declares that "Genius will study; it is that in the mind which does study; that is the very nature of it." Sydney Smith adds his voice to this testimony and says: "There is but one method of attaining to excellence, and that is by hard labor... There are many modes of being frivolous and not a few of being useful; there is but one mode of being intellectually great."

There can be no doubt that well-directed efforts strengthen both mind and body. The more a person does, the more he becomes able to do. If he has a duty to discharge or a special task to perform he can easily do twice as much as when he works without an object. Voluntary and unnecessary labors are never so fertile in results as those directed under a sense of obligation to a specific aim. Everybody may for himself notice how much more he can accomplish when his work proceeds under the consciousness of a duty to be performed than when it is due to the caprice of the hour or a mere voluntary impulse. Coleridge truthfully says:

"Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, and hope without an object cannot live."
THE LESSONS OF ADVERSITY.

They are practical and salutary. They will develop and bring out whatever latent genius or talents you may have. They have been long and painfully studied by many whose names rank among the greatest in history. The word "adversity" is inscribed in lustrous characters upon the noblest records of human action.

"The gods in bounty work up storms about us. That give mankind occasion to exert their hidden strength, and throw out into practice virtues that shun the day, and lie concealed in the smooth seasons and calms of life."

Confining attention to the great names of our own country; very few can be mentioned that were not either directly or indirectly associated at one time or another with the practical experiences and severe lessons of adversity. The lives of such men and the whole history of the country prove it. I might instance Franklin, Fulton, Morse, Marshall, Jackson, Clay, Greeley, Lincoln, Wilson, Weed, Bishop Hughes, Brownson, Carpenter, Johnson, Garfield, and innumerable others, as affording conclusive evidence of the accuracy of this statement. But it would take too long to refer to them in detail. Before dismissing the subject, however, let me give you an extract from an address delivered to the people of Great Falls, N. H., by the late Henry Wilson, who long and ably served his country in the United States Senate and as Vice-President of the Nation.

"I was born here in your county. I was born in poverty. Want sat by my cradle. I know what it is to ask a mother for bread when she had none to give. I left my home at ten years of age and served an apprenticeship of eleven years, receiving a month's schooling each year, and at the end of eleven years' hard work I received as compensation a yoke of oxen and six sheep, which brought me $8. A dollar would cover every penny I spent from the time I was born until the age of eleven. I know what it is to travel weary miles and ask my fellow-men to give me leave to toil. I remember that in September, 1833, I walked into your village from my native town, and went through your mills seeking employment. If anybody had offered me $8 or $9 a month, I should have accepted gladly. I went down to Salem Falls, I went to Dover, I went to Newmarket, and tried to get work, without success; and I returned home weary, but not discouraged, and put my back on my back and walked to the town where I now live, and learned a mechanic's trade. The first month I worked after I was 21 years of age, I went into the woods, drove team, cut mill-logs, and chopped wood; and though I rose in the morning before daylight, and worked hard until after dark at night, I received the magnificent sum of $2. And when I got the money, those two dollars looked to me as large as the moon looks to-night."

And in describing his own experiences in early life Thurlow Weed says:

"I remember how happy I was in being able to borrow the book of a Mr. Keys, after a two-mile tramp through the snow, shoeless, my feet swaddled in the remains of a rag-carpet."

Young men, in entering upon the discharge of the stern duties of life borrow courage from such examples. No matter against how many privations you must contend. With courage and fortitude go forward. Endeavor to be successful in the better sense of the word. As Bacon says,

"Seek not proud riches, but such as you may get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly."

Remember that unless a man is upright, humane and charitable toward his fellow-men, and useful, industrious and devoted to duty in his relations to society, an impartial world will not be inclined to pronounce his life successful.

Do not be influenced by the popular fallacy that you may waste your earlier years in the pursuit of foolish pleasures, or in "seeing all sides of life," as some express it. Do not seek to shelter yourselves from reproof or for extravagance, and profligacy, and mis-spent years, behind the subterfuge of "follies of youth." Polly is not necessarily referable to any age, and it requires a strong effort of the imagination to suppose that one who habitually exhibits it in youth will grow out of it when older. In this connection let me call your attention to one of the noblest passages in Ruskin's writings:

"In general, I have no patience with people who talk about 'the thoughtlessness of youth' indulgently; I would infinitely rather hear of thoughtless old age and the indulgence due to that. . . . A youth thoughtless, when the happiness of his home forever depends on the chances or the passions of an hour! A youth thoughtless, when the career of all his days depends on the oppor-
tunity of a moment! A youth thoughtless, when his every action is a foundation-stone of future conduct, and every imagination a fountain of life or death!"

"The follies of youth" too often become the foundation of a whole lifetime of folly. Do not offer so flimsy an excuse in justification of profligacy and wrong-doing. Habit has justly been called "second nature." It grows and becomes stronger with each repeated act of indulgence. If you find the effort to overcome it difficult at first, be sure that subsequent efforts in the same direction will be attended with increased difficulty. Be sure, therefore, that if you shelter bad habits behind the poor subterfuge styled "follies of youth," they may grow upon you, work ruin to your best prospects, and hopelessly wreck your lives.

Choose your vocation or profession with great care. Having made a selection, stick to it. Be true to your judgment in the matter. Do not turn capriciously from one occupation to another in case you feel inclined to be dissatisfied with your choice. Do not become dissatisfied with it. Go forward with an invincible purpose to succeed. Propose to yourself an object. Have a definite aim. And push on to attain it with all the vigor, judgment and ability you possess. No matter what your business, devote your best energies to it. Be sure that in the general and active competition now prevailing every line of business has its full complement of energetic, experienced and intelligent representatives. And be sure also that you would make a mistake and court failure by entering into competition with them in any calling with which you are unacquainted. Attend to the calling you understand, devote your undivided attention to it, and be certain that in it your chances of success are much better than in a vocation involving obligations and duties with which you are comparatively unfamiliar. Furthermore, do not endeavor to become suddenly rich. Be assured that slow and steady progress will afford you truer satisfaction, and involve far less hazard to the business in which you are engaged. To give an inflated or magnified importance to one's wealth or business standing is always injudicious. It is a mere bubble, and the first chill of adversity breaks it. Besides, it renders necessary, "in order to maintain appearances," acts of display and extravagance that too severely tax small profits and limited means, and consequently invite failure. Be honorable, straightforward, temperate, careful as to whom you choose for companions, averse to all kinds of games of chance, and convinced that nothing truly serviceable to you can be acquired without honest work.

Try to go through life with a heart large enough to feel sympathy with the distressed of all quarters of the globe, a sense of philanthropy broad enough to include all mankind, a steadfast purpose not to be betrayed into wrong-doing under any circumstances, a love of work and industry that makes indolence impossible, a hand open to every worthy object that appeals to our common humanity, an honest interest in the welfare of the State and the good of society, and an earnest desire to promote true religion as a means of surrounding the sacredness of your homes and family ties with strongest safeguards, and ultimately insuring the crowning glory of a successful life in the realization of that complete tranquility and perfect felicity promised to those who faithfully observe God's holy laws and commandments.

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**Farewell.**

As blend the days into a year,
As blend the years into an age,
So ages fade and leave no mark,—
No record on the blotted page
Presented to the eyes of men,
Called History—which reaches o'er
The past as might a man stretch out
His arm and reach the furthest shore
Of widest sea! And ages past
Are oft forgot. The days glide on
And in oblivion soon are lost:—
Gone as the flakes of snow are gone
That fall upon the ocean's breast
And add their little to the sea,
Unnoticed there to blend themselves
With measureless immensity.

Another year has softly fled
And mingled with the dreamy past:
Another year of pleasant toil
Is ended; and we meet at last
To say farewell. When looking back
Upon each swiftly-passing year,
It seems as but a calm, sweet day
Since leaving scenes our hearts hold dear—
Our parents and our childhood's friends;—
It seems as but a short, dim day
Since, leaving idle sports behind,
Our childish joys, our thoughtless play,
We entered on the busy months
Of study:—and those months have fled
Unnoticed;—only marked by fruits
They may have born us. If instead
Of satisfaction pain be ours,
The remedy is lost:—We know,
When sowing, by our choice of seed,
The plant that must by nature grow.
This prolonged day of happiness
Is all now left us of the year;
To-day are Sundered pleasant ties
Of friendship: yet howe'er so dear
The bonds association weaves,
They vanish by comparison
With love that's tried from cradle-days.
And now our parting-day is come,
Our happiness but shows our hearts
The place of dearest ties above
Less dear. We leave these friendships' haunts
To dwell among the haunts of love.

W. H. JOHNSTON.

**One of the heaviest things in this world is the "test of truth." There is so much that won't bear it.**