

THE CAREERS OF SCHOLARLY MEN IN AMERICA

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If we take year by year a body of young men who represent the best scholarship of the college graduates of that year, we shall have a body of men who represent with reasonable accuracy the most scholarly young men of that year in college and out. If we find what changes have taken place in the careers they choose, as we pass down from 1850 to the present day, we shall know whether any given profession is gaining or losing in attractiveness to that type of men. The amount of its gain or loss we may measure by the increase or decrease in the number of such men choosing it. For this class of scholarly young men I have taken those graduates of representative colleges who have been elected to Phi Beta Kappa. I have traced the later careers of 5283 such men from the class of 1840 to the class of 1900.

By a scholarly man is meant a man who has the ability to acquire and think about knowledge, and who puts that ability in action. It is a narrower term than "an intellectual man," and much narrower than "a man of mental ability." Of scholarship as just defined, the college graduates who each year are elected into Phi Beta Kappa are, with few exceptions, the possessors. The Phi Beta Kappa badge is a recognized mark of scholarship; it is an emblem that a majority of college professors, for instance, are glad to wear. If any one doubts the appropriateness of Phi Beta Kappa membership as a test of scholarship, let him compare the scholarly attainments in after life of the Phi Beta Kappa men in any ten college classes with those of the other members, and he will soon be converted.

No one, save an omniscient observer or

a student who gave years to the task and had access to exact information concerning the lives of the college graduates of the last fifty years, could hope to present absolutely accurate statements on our subject. My data, taken from the catalogue of 1900, are subject to the factors of error and ignorance influencing it. For the most part these are such as to counteract one another, and the figures I shall present may be taken as reliable within, say, ten per cent. of their amount. The general tendencies shown are reliable beyond question.

We may best begin by studying the changes in the attitude of Phi Beta Kappa men toward various careers from 1850 to 1895, and then attempt to determine what the careers of Phi Beta Kappa men are to-day, and what they are likely to be in the near future.

There is a remarkable uniformity in the percentage of Phi Beta Kappa men entering the four leading professions. The percentages by five-year periods, from 1840 to 1900, vary only from 64 to 68. Whatever growth has taken place in the percentage of college graduates, in general, who enter business and industrial careers has influenced the interests and motives of the most scholarly section only to the very slight extent that in the twenty-five years from 1870 through 1894 1.5 per cent. fewer enter the professions than did from 1840 to 1865. This difference is so slight as to be as likely to be due to chance variation as to any real tendency. There seem to be certain innate propensities in the scholarly make-up which direct its activities in spite of notable changes in outside circumstances.

If the attitude of Phi Beta Kappa men

toward professional life in general has hardly changed in fifty years, it is not because the attractiveness of each particular profession has remained constant. Far from it. The share of them falling to each has changed notably and consistently during the period. The percentage of Phi Beta Kappa men who, in the years from 1840 to 1860, chose the law had in 1890 to 1894 nearly doubled. The growth here was not steady, for the attractiveness of the law grew markedly until 1880, and then fell off during ten years, only to increase again in our own time. To be exact, of those graduating in 1840-44, 14 per cent. made the law their career; in 1845-49, 10 per cent.; in 1850-54, 9.3 per cent.; in 1855-59, 10.5 per cent.; in 1860-64, 15.2 per cent.; in 1865-69, 19.7 per cent.; in 1870-74, 19.8 per cent.; in 1875-79, 22.5 per cent.; in 1880-84, 16.4 per cent.; in 1885-89, 14.4 per cent.; in 1890-94, 19 per cent.

Medicine has not been a popular profession with scholarly graduates. The percentages range from 6 to 4 from 1840 to 1885, and are 7.5 and 7 for 1885-89 and 1890-94.

The cause of the gain made by medicine from 1885 to 1895 is, one is tempted to think, the advance of medicine to the dignity of a science and the introduction into college courses of electives in science. The former makes the career more attractive to the thinker, and the latter gives scientific capacities and interests a chance to become aware of themselves.

Teaching has been changing from the casual work of young men forced somehow to earn money for professional studies, or the destiny of clergymen who found that their learning was worth more to the world than their piety or sermons, to a distinct profession with secure remuneration, great social advantages, and a chance to cultivate one's intellectual interests. This familiar change appears emphatically in my records. During 1885-95 25.5 per cent. of Phi Beta Kappa men became teachers, as against 9.4 per cent. from 1840 to 1844. The figures by five-year periods show a rapid increase in the popularity of the teaching profession with our class of men from 1840 to 1865, a decline during the next five years, and an increase from 1870 on. There is some evidence that the tendency has spent itself by now,

for since 1885 the percentage has been stationary.

By far the most striking change in the careers of scholarly men in this country has been the decrease in the number of them in the ministry. A Phi Beta Kappa man was three times as likely to become a clergyman in the middle of the nineteenth century as he is to-day. The percentages in different years are: 1840-49, 38.7 per cent.; 1850-54, 36.5 per cent.; 1855-59, 34.5 per cent.; 1860-64, 27.5 per cent.; 1865-69, 28.5 per cent.; 1870-74, 22.5 per cent.; 1875-79, 22 per cent.; 1880-1884, 19.5 per cent.; 1885-89, 16 per cent.; 1890-94, 14 per cent.

As has been said, these percentages represent the men who have made the ministry their life-work. The decrease would be even more marked if we took all those who entered the ministry, for, as is well known, there were, fifty years ago, many men who entered the ministry, but engaged eventually in the more profitable, congenial, or more needed work of education. One out of every seven Phi Beta Kappa men graduating from 1840 to 1850 who entered the ministry became, in the end, a teacher, while up to the present time only one out of seventeen of those graduating from 1880 to 1890 has done so.

The steadiness of the ministry's loss in attractiveness shows that its cause has not been due to any great and sudden crisis of crises, but to some factor which has worked throughout the period. This factor, whatever it is, has extended its influence widely. For in every one of the colleges taken, sectarian and non-sectarian, Eastern and Western, large and small, the same general change has occurred. If we pick out from the colleges those which have been most prominent in sending out future clergymen, we find that they apparently did not feel the influence which began elsewhere about 1850 until ten or fifteen years later. But from then on the influence worked even more powerfully on them than on the rest. I also find that the change in the attitude of scholarly men is not simply a part of an identical change in college graduates in general. College graduates have entered the ministry less and less in the last fifty years, but the change has not been so marked or followed the same course as it has with the scholarly section.

If we turn from history to present description and prophecy, we cannot, of course, make more than probable statements. The only way to tell the future is by the past, but the past is rarely a complete guide. And what I have to say about the careers of scholarly men to-day and during the next twenty-five years will be at best only a fairly likely inference.

If we had no records beyond 1894, we should say: Nothing save a revolution will prevent the ministry from losing all its hold upon the class represented by Phi Beta Kappa. The medical profession seems not likely to change very rapidly in attractiveness either way. Teaching has reached at least something near a maximum. The law is regaining what it lost from 1880 to 1890, and may continue to gain. The future will probably witness a steady gain in medicine, a slight gain in teaching, a rapid but unstable gain in the law, and a continued decline in the ministry.

Now we may ask what light the records of the men graduating from 1895 to 1900 cast upon these suppositions. The percentages computed from the catalogue are: law, 15; medicine, 2; teaching, 24; ministry, 5; but the statements of the catalogue concerning recent graduates are not at all accurate accounts of what their life-careers will be. Financial necessities or post-graduate study may delay a man's entrance upon his final career. My own estimate, based upon facts which cannot fitly be presented here, would be 25 per cent. in the law, 8 per cent. in medicine, 26.5 per cent. in teaching, and 10.5 per cent. in the ministry.

Law and teaching thus get a lion's share of the scholarship of the country to-day. Medicine seems from our figures, as indeed it must seem to wise observers of individual cases, to get a smaller proportion of scholarly men than its needs demand or its opportunities invite. That the chance for specialization, research, and consultation work will sometime raise this percentage seems sure. It is certainly to be hoped that medical practice will pass more and more out of the hands of ambitious drug-clerks and undisciplined youth into the hands of careful and broad-minded thinkers.

If scholarly men more and more reject the church as the means by which they will influence opinion and conduct, and replace it by educational, editorial, and administrative agencies, the next century may be altogether guided in its intellectual decisions and in those of its actions which depend on intellectual judgments by forces outside the church. Our grandfathers looked to the minister for advice not only upon religious beliefs and moral practice, but also upon most matters outside their own direct acquaintance. The minister prescribed for the education of sons, solved social problems, and acted as the source and judge of truth in matters of general knowledge. Our sons seem likely to regard the ministry as a body of men fitted to deal with men's religious welfare, but less fitted to be general mentors than others. The direction of the people in other than purely religious activities may pass wholly out of the hands of the church.¹

¹ See paper by the Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden on "The Calling of a Christian Minister," in *THE CENTURY* for July, 1885.



TOPICS OF THE TIME

OUR INHERITANCE IN EMERSON

ONE hundred years ago Ralph Waldo Emerson was born—on the 25th of May, 1803. He died on the 27th of April, 1882. The reaction which seems to be a necessary incident in the progress and establishment of an author's fame may be said to have reached its culmination in the case of Emerson some years ago. John Morley's estimate of him and that put forth by Matthew Arnold in his American lecture were read, at the time of their publication, by those whose intellectual lives were partly fashioned by the literature of the man of Concord, with both protest and sinking of the heart. Those estimates were kindly and regretful dethronements of the god; their very kindliness, and the fact that they were written by sympathizers and admirers, by writers who owed much to Emerson, and who desired to deal as gently with the somewhat outworn divinity as possible,—the evident conviction and unimpeachable honesty of the verdicts,—these things made the Emerson enthusiast all the more anxious, in the midst of his rebellion.

The unflinching admirer, at the time, was so grieved at the destructive parts of these criticisms that he, perhaps, failed to appreciate the constructive praises. He was so pained to witness the removal of his divinity from his exalted pedestal that he was little comforted by the fact that the new shrine, while somewhat different, was scarcely less highly placed than the old. And yet this is the language in which Morley concluded his study: "When all these deductions have been made and amply allowed for, Emerson remains among the most persuasive and inspiring of those who by word and example rebuke our despondency, purify our sight, awaken us from the deadening slumbers of convention and conformity, exorcise the pestering imps of vanity, and lift men up from

low thoughts and sullen moods of helplessness and impiety."

And Arnold, after his negations, it will be remembered, spoke thus: "We have not in Emerson a great poet, a great writer, a great philosophy-maker. His relation to us is not that of one of those personages; yet it is a relation of, I think, even superior importance. His relation to us is more like that of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius is not a great writer, a great philosophy-maker; he is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. Emerson is the same. He is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. All the points in thinking which are necessary for this purpose he takes; but he does not combine them into a system, or present them as a regular philosophy. Combined in a system by a man with the requisite talent for this kind of thing, they would be less useful than as Emerson gives them to us; and the man with the talent so to systematize them would be less impressive than Emerson. . . . As Wordsworth's poetry is, in my judgment, the most important work done in verse, in our language, during the present century, so Emerson's 'Essays' are, I think, the most important work done in prose." And Arnold closed his lecture with this memorable passage: "You cannot prize him too much, nor heed him too diligently. He has lessons for both branches of our race. I figure him to my mind as visible upon earth still, as still standing here by Boston Bay, or at his own Concord, in his habit as he lived, but of heightened stature and shining feature, with one hand stretched out toward the East, to our laden and laboring England; the other toward the ever-growing West, to his own dearly loved America,—'great, intelligent, sensual, avaricious America.' To us he shows for guidance his lucid freedom, his cheerfulness and hope; to you his dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation."