

Peter Cooper's Address, November 2, 1859

Originally published in Cooper Union Tracts, No. 2, 1860

The original address may be found at the Cooper Union Library and Archives.

After the Introductory Lecture to the course of Scientific Instruction by Dr. John W. Draper, Mr. Peter Cooper being called upon by the audience, made the following remarks:

It is my friends at all times difficult to speak with strict propriety of matters pertaining to one's self.

The occasion that has brought us together, is one on which my mind has dwelt with long and anxious hope.

It is now my privilege and joy, to welcome the youth of this city and country to all the benefits and privileges of this Institution.

It will be, my friends, entirely out of my power to give you any clear idea of the labor and efforts that have been required, to obtain the means necessary for the erection of this building. A building now entirely devoted, with all its rents and revenues of every name and nature, to the advancement of Science and Art.

This building has scarcely been absent from my thoughts a single day, for nearly thirty years. I have laboured for it by night and by day with an intensity of desire that can never be explained.

It is now my fervent hope that the youth of my native city and country will constantly throng these halls, with eager efforts to gain that kind of useful knowledge which is needed to make them wise, good, and useful to themselves and to their country.

I trust that all the youth of our city and country, through all coming time, will realise that this Institution has been organised for their special use and improvement; and I trust that they will rally around and protect it, and make it like a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid.

You, my young friends, are now more deeply interested to care for, and to use this Building wisely and well, than I by possibility can be.

My time, in the course of nature, is rapidly drawing to a close; while you may have many long years to enjoy the benefits of this Institution, or to suffer the consequences of a neglect to improve the opportunities here offered, as this Building has been erected solely for your advancement in Science and Art.

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I trust that the time will come when the knowledge and application of science and art will elevate the hearts of men above the tinsel toys and groveling pursuits, that now so completely engross their thoughts.

Science, my friends, is a means to develop the laws and purposes of Deity.

It is the means, placed within our reach, that God has given to unveil and bring to light a great and glorious purpose; to show an adaptation of means

to ends, running through and connecting the movements of every particle of matter throughout all the vast fabric of creation.

Such a purpose in the mind of infinite goodness could not do less than to organize, individualize, and immortalize minds, with power to receive and communicate happiness to all eternity.

Science has given to man a telescopic power, that enables him to penetrate the depths of space and to measure the distance, diameter, and density of all those Planets, that float with such majestic splendor around the heavens. With the microscopic power, man is enabled to penetrate the minutæ of Creation, bringing into view wonders and beauties that language cannot describe.

By the use of Mechanical powers we are permitted to transport our self around the world as on the wings of the wind.

With the help of Electrical and Chemical Powers man is enabled to dissolve all known substances and as it were to take the world to pieces, selecting those parts best suited for his uses.

With the aid of Science, he guides the running brook, and causes it to flow in living streams at his command into every room within his dwelling.

With the aid of Science man penetrates the bowels of the earth, and drags from its silent depths those mineral products, that beautify and bless the world. He rends the solid rock and shapes it into forms of use and beauty.

He dissolves the mineral coal into a gaseous vapor, that floats beneath our streets to every dwelling, ever ready to burst forth in beauteous light at our command.

For the purpose of exhibiting the power of Science to control the electric fire, I will ask you not to be alarmed if a momentary darkness be allowed to come over us, in order to show not only the beauty of returning light, but the power to control the elements entrusted by the Almighty to our use.

(At this instant the gas was turned off, and the 168 burners were extinguished; they were immediately lighted again by the Electric sparks from a Ruhmkorff Induction Apparatus.)

With these powers it is possible for us to send our messages around the world with the speed of lightning.

It is in the power of Science to draw from nature's garden all that is good for food, pleasant to the eye, and calculated to make us wise.

It should never be forgotten that the universe itself exists by reason of obedience to laws so wise and good as never to require to be either altered, amended, or revoked.

It is this very power to perceive, understand and apply these laws, that elevates man above the level of the brute.

It is the proper business of all true science and philosophy to work in harmony with these laws.

These laws, my friends, have forever connected health with temperance,

and peace with virtue.

For one I indulge the hope that science will finally unfold the great mystery of our being, and show the law of our progress written upon all the varied leaves of Creation; demonstrating the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of that God, who has given immortality to man.