

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK AND ITS FRENCH INSPIRATION

By Charles Beatty Alexander, LL.D., Litt.D., a Regent
of the University of the State of New York. An
address delivered at the Luncheon Given in Honor of
Monsieur André Tardieu, French High Commissioner
to the United States, by the French Institute in the
United States on the 6th of April, 1918, at the
Ritz-Carlton Hotel, New York



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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Mr Chairman, Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am instructed to present to you the following resolution adopted on the 28th of March last by the Regents of the University of the State of New York, and I am much honored in conveying this message to you:

"It having come to the knowledge of the Board of Regents that the French Institute in the United States, lately chartered by the University, is giving a luncheon on the 6th of April in the City of New York in honor of Monsieur André Tardieu, French High Commissioner to the United States, and that an invitation has been kindly extended to the Regents to be present, it was voted that the Regents desire to express their gratification that Monsieur Tardieu is to be received and entertained by one of the institutions of the University, and that they authorize Regent Alexander, who has announced that he intends to be present, and who has been asked to speak on that occasion by the Institute, to convey to Monsieur Tardieu a welcome on behalf of the University, and an expression to the Institute of the satisfaction of the Regents."

The University desires also to welcome Sir Henry Babbington Smith, K.C.B., C.S.I., Minister Plenipotentiary, Assistant Commissioner for Great Britain, representing Lord Reading, who comes to us from a nation bound to us by an ancestral language, reverence for the common law, and love of liberty.

The University rejoices to see the representatives of Italy present. America has looked upon all of the magnificent fighting, which seems to have been done by supermen, on the heights of the Alps for the last three years.

As you all know, the Regents are the governing body of the University of the State of New York. This university, unique in its organization and methods of work, is not an educational superstructure; it is not a teaching institution. It is the embodiment of the educational agencies of the commonwealth, the incorporated intelligence and the assimilating bond of its elements, and a state department of education, with certain large legislative powers and legal functions in regard to state educational policies and laws. Its

province is the entire range of public education. It embraces the membership and the work of the public schools, academies, colleges, professional and technical schools, universities, libraries and museums. It provides opportunity for cooperation and understanding among its members while diminishing or adjudicating occasions of friction and conflict; adapts educational policy to varying needs; and indicates and provides a continuity of knowledge. It accumulates books, and manuscripts, supervises the public archives, collects valuable natural objects, and may prosecute scientific work directly on behalf of the State; grants all educational charters in the State, confers honorary degrees, establishes examinations, and bestows certificates, diplomas and degrees; admits to certain professions and occupations, and regulates the certification of public accountants and nurses. It apportions state educational funds. It fosters all forms of cultural work; recognizes local associations of an educational character, distributes printed matter, encourages civic improvement work—in fact, does everything it can to stimulate the intellectual life of the people. Its annual convocation for the consideration of important educational matters enjoys a notable reputation. This occasion convenes not only the Regents and officers of its institutions, but also many eminent educators from outside the State who are cordially welcomed and share fully in all discussions. Its proceedings, issued annually, are of much value to educational libraries.

The State does not exercise a complete monopoly of education. Private institutions exist, subject to no public authority, which do good work. But it is the policy of the State to bring all chartered educational institutions into the University and, while allowing them virtually complete self-government in internal administration, to hold them accountable for the proper performance of their duties. These chartered institutions are subject to the inspection of the Regents, who may require annual reports of them.

The power of granting educational charters has always been conservatively exercised, the Regents insisting that the body to be incorporated shall be composed of people of the highest character, that the object shall be a highly educational one, as distinguished from commercial, and that the institution shall be of a kind which will guarantee a wise management and a stable existence. The conditions they believe to be amply fulfilled in the case of the French Institute.

It is a matter of interest to the Regents to learn among other things that the president of this institute is the great-grandson of

John Lawrance, who was one of the early Regents of the University. Incidentally, as judge advocate of the continental army, he officiated in the court that tried Major André. While thus referring to the president, let me say that while I know that there are many reasons for his deep and persistent interest in France, yet I can not, as a vice president of the Society of the Cincinnati, refrain from hoping and believing that he has been greatly inspired in his interest in French art and letters in this country by his membership in that society, with its magnificent record of the mutual service performed by its original members and that gallant body of French officers who came to the rescue of this country in the War of the Revolution.

It is also a matter of great interest, when we are united with our traditional ally in a war for the freedom of the world, that the French Institute should be one of those chartered by the Regents, thus forming a part of the University; for the parent institution, the University of the State of New York, apparently derived much of its inspiration from French sources and from early lovers of France.

The historic University of the State of New York was founded immediately after the achievement of American independence. In January 1784, two months after the British left New York, Governor George Clinton embodied in his message to the Legislature an earnest recommendation for the encouragement of education. The matter was taken up by the Legislature and James Duane brought in a bill entitled, "An act for establishing a university within this State." Nothing definite is known of the origin of this idea of a university nor of the provisions of the bill. The friends and governors of King's College, within and without the Legislature, immediately made a determined and successful effort to revive that institution and make it the head of a university system. Thus there was created by act, May 1, 1784, a corporation designated as "The Regents of the University of the State of New York" in which were vested all the former rights, privileges and immunities of the government of King's College—thereafter Columbia College and now Columbia University—together with the power to found and endow schools and colleges throughout the State. While it was in a certain sense a state department of education, it also included all the chartered, teaching institutions of academic and collegiate rank; it was in form a private corporation.

Aristocratic ideas of education had prevailed in the establishment of King's College and the leaders of 1784 were too much in

sympathy with the spirit of conservatism to have much faith in the radical innovations such as were proposed by educational reformers in the France of their time. Yet the law of May 1, 1784, was a compromise, for there was a strong democratic element in favor of a state system not centered around the old college, but identified with state life and controlled by the people. These opponents, who represented the popular party of the American Revolution and who later had French sympathies, adopted the new philosophy of freedom and self-government in church and state, and favored positive and practical education—the kind which would best fit men for service in the state.

In November 1784 the control of Columbia was strengthened by an amendment to the law. Able men worked for Columbia, such as James Duane, the first mayor of the city of New York, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. They preferred centralization in the established corporation rather than a new and problematical university controlled by the communities of the State. The laudable ambition of Columbia men seemed to them to accord with expediency.

The Regents, during the first three years of their being, confined their activities to those of trustees of Columbia College. The general educational interests of the State suffered and there was dissatisfaction. The popular opposition found a leader in the Legislature in Ezra L'Hommedieu of Suffolk county, who was also a member of the Board of Regents. In 1786 he fathered a copyright law which had a rider permitting the establishment of an academy. This, the first academy incorporated by the Regents, marked the successful beginning of a wide movement for such institutions, and a growing menace to the then predominance of Columbia.

The split came in the Legislature of 1787, over the granting of a charter to an academy which had applied to the Legislature rather than to the University. L'Hommedieu seized the opportunity to prepare a bill to reorganize the University upon a broader basis. He became the champion of the interests of the State as a whole—of a widely spread education that should serve local needs while unified in a state system. The Regents saw the need of reform. In February 1787 Hamilton proposed a bill which had as its principal object the improvement of the condition of Columbia. Hamilton's committee appears to have ignored the academies and schools until L'Hommedieu's activity began. Hamilton favored a more effectual working of the existing acts, L'Hommedieu, a new and broader foundation. It seemed that neither side could prevail and both appeared willing to compromise. An arbitration committee

was appointed by the Regents, opportune concessions were made by Columbia, the two parties united, and a law, satisfactory on the whole, was framed, and was passed by the Legislature. The Regents were reorganized. Their general powers were continued, but the property and the direct management of the affairs of Columbia College were restored to a local board of trustees. The essential features of this system remained the same for more than a hundred years. In 1895, the Regents became a constitutional body under the name of "The University of the State of New York."

The founders of the University may have supposed that the Regents would have the oversight of all the school interests of the State, but the Regents did not press any claims for their own control of the common schools so that for a time two state educational systems, one in control of academic and higher education and the other in control of common schools, resulted. The Regents' control would have produced early a symmetrical and coordinated system of education, from the lowest to the highest grades, with unified administration and supervision, but it was only after nearly a century of contention that the two systems were united under the Board of Regents in 1904.

Thus it was that in New York City this University had its origin; and thus also that early dissension displaced Columbia as the head of the system and resulted in the establishment of a University which became the mother, not of students, but of corporations — of universities, colleges, academies, schools, libraries, museums, scientific associations, and other educational agencies.

The following is a statement of the work of the University:

SCHOOLS	ATTENDANCE	NET PROPERTY
Common elementary schools.....	1 454 514	\$202 922 359
Special elementary schools.....	940	3 734 106
Common high schools.....	171 263	41 817 557
Special high schools.....	4 152	2 578 652
Academies.	53 461	32 559 445
Normal schools.	8 125	3 261 681
Teachers training classes and schools.....	4 422	
Universities, colleges, professional schools and other higher institutions.....	56 116	173 041 375
Private schools of all grades, exclusive of academies as enumerated above, as shown by reports and best available information (estimated)	275 000	
Indian schools.	842	33 500
Evening schools	173 878	
Evening vocational schools.....	27 688	
Trades and vocational schools.	17 861	2 750 168
	<hr/> 2 248 262	<hr/> \$462 698 843

The total number of University scholarship holders in the State is 3000.

The total number of Cornell scholarship holders in the State is 600.

Three hundred and fifty-six (356) holders of University scholarships are also holders of the state scholarship in Cornell University.

In three of the colleges of the State—The College of the City of New York, Hunter College, and the State College for Teachers—the tuition is free. To this extent all the students in these colleges may be said to be enjoying scholarships.

Nearly 600 libraries and museums are registered with the University, enjoying the benefits of educational extension work and the resources and services of the great State Library and the magnificent State Museum at Albany. The University embraces also many institutions and associations devoted to science, literature, art, history and other subjects.

The University has often been called imperial in character, an analogy being drawn between its system and that of Great Britain and her colonies. There is a persistent tradition that it was conceived and founded by Alexander Hamilton, and the great reputation of that statesman for plans of a profound and imperial nature has led many to lend a willing ear to the tradition. Hamilton's share in the definitive reorganization, so far as university and college education is concerned, was undoubtedly large; but the provisions for academies and colleges throughout the State—the care of local educational interests—are chiefly due to Ezra L'Homme-dieu. Neither appears to have been active in the passage of the original law of 1784. Hamilton was not then a member of the Legislature. In the reorganized system of 1787, both were active and were advocates of rival bills. A compromise resulted and it can not be truthfully said that either, or even both together were the sole authors of the educational system, which had assumed many of its permanent features in the earlier legislation. The University has a manifold authorship.

It is to France that we owe the conception and the best features of our educational system. It was idealistic France, the France of the encyclopedists and the Revolution, that furnished the inspiration of the new educational ideas. France was awakening to new life during the latter half of the eighteenth century and was casting off the shackles of medievalism which fettered the world. Educational revolution was but a part of the same awakening which found expression in the growth of science and in political upheaval. The educational revolution in France quite significantly preceded the

political. This liberal movement in France, based on naturalism, harked back to the ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. Greek ideals of the physical, mental and political virtues were revived and the idea of the imperial organization of old Rome. Rousseau and his followers opposed arbitrary authority and favored the secularization of schools. In education, freedom of thought, state control and a centralized form of administration were advocated. The reaction against clericalism enthroned the state. In the secularization of learning and the revival of state education, France achieved a great triumph. The medieval University of Paris was the parent and model of the chief universities of Great Britain and Germany. Its early tendency toward centralization grew. Though educational matters in France were in a state of ferment and revolution for some fifty years — until Napoleon established his university in 1808 — the new current of thought flowed from France to the world, and prevented ecclesiastical and aristocratic dominance in the establishment of the University of the State of New York.

The political leaders of the American Revolution were close students of the new French philosophy. The New York constitution of 1777 shows the influence of French thought in its conception of the state. The similarity of the French plans for national education and those of the new American states leaves no doubt that the French schemes had been carefully studied. Nor is there lacking evidence of particular and concrete influences. The two great Americans most conspicuously in sympathy with French philosophy, Jefferson and Franklin, both planned systems of education according to the French ideas. Franklin wrote from France to friends in New York about educational matters. John Jay returned from Paris to New York in 1784, expressing French educational ideas. French sympathy and alliance in the American Revolution brought more than material support. After Yorktown, Rochambeau and his army waited in this country the final decision of peace. Among the many addresses which he then received from legislatures, institutions of learning, etc., was one from the ancient College of William and Mary, at Williamsburg, Virginia, where he had established his headquarters: "Among the many substantial advantages which this country has already derived and which must ever continue to flow from its connection with France, we are persuaded that the improvement of useful knowledge will not be the least. A number of distinguished characters in your army afford us the happiest presage that science as well as liberty will acquire vigor from the fostering hand of your nation."

Following the Revolutionary War, and growing out of our French alliance, a remarkable attempt was made to establish in the United States a grand system of higher education. The projector was a veteran of the war, the Chevalier Quesnay de Beaurepaire, grandson of the famous French philosopher and economist, Doctor Quesnay, who was court physician to Louis XV. He planned to found in Richmond, the new capital of Virginia, an academy of the arts and sciences. This institution was to be national and international, with branch academies in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York, and affiliations with the royal societies of London, Paris and Brussels, and other learned bodies of Europe. The best talent of the Old and New World was to be enlisted in its service. The academy was to teach the youth of America, to form scientific commissions, to investigate our natural resources and products, to communicate to Europe a knowledge of America, etc.; it was to issue its proceedings yearly, from its own press in Paris, and to distribute such publications to the learned societies of Europe. Quesnay conducted a diligent propaganda in Virginia and other states and secured the approval and support of many distinguished men. The foundation of the academy was laid in Richmond, June 24, 1786. Having organized his academy, Quesnay returned to Paris and set to work actively in the interest of his grand project for the intellectual union of France and America. He gained the favor of men of the most cultured taste and of the highest rank in France. His list of "foreign associates" comprises the most distinguished French names in art, science, literature and politics: Beaumarchais, secretary to the king; Malesherbes, minister of state; the Comte de La Luzerne, minister and secretary of state; the Marquis de La Luzerne, royal ambassador to Great Britain; the Marquis de La Fayette, then a marshal of the armies of the king; the Abbé de Bevi, historiographer of France; Condorcet, secretary of the Royal Academy of Science; Dacier, secretary of the Royal Academy of Art; Houdon, the sculptor; the Marquis de Montalembert; the Duc de La Rochefoucauld; Vernet; and many others. Supported largely by French capital, strengthened by French prestige, by literary, scientific and artistic associations with Paris, the intellectual capital of the world, the Academy of the United States of America at Richmond might have become a center of a higher education. But circumstances were against it. France, on the eve of revolution, was in no condition to foster an educational system in the United States. Jefferson, the first conspicuous advocate in this country of

centralization in university education, was living in France from 1784 to 1789 and knew and favored Quesnay's project. His ideas, stimulated by such suggestions, found later expression in the establishment of the University of Virginia, which is his immortal monument.

The comprehensive plan of Quesnay may have had a decided influence upon the system adopted by New York. He visited here about the time of the establishment of 1784 and secured for his project the approval and support of many distinguished and influential men, among them being Governor Clinton, Mayor Duane, and the Livingstons — the very men who were then considering and debating the problem of a general system of education for New York.

It has been seen that, upon the reorganization of the University in 1787, the man who was the most conspicuous advocate of the broader, and now dominant, educational ideas, was not Hamilton, but L'Hommedieu. The latter was the descendant of Benjamin L'Hommedieu, a Huguenot, who came to New York from Rochelle, France, after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and settled in Southold, Long Island. Ezra L'Hommedieu was graduated from Yale in 1754 and completed his education by travel and study in France. A portrait of him, in the possession of the Regents, shows a fine classic head and vivacious and intelligent expression. It can readily be seen how the French blood and training of L'Hommedieu may have influenced the organization of the University.

I am, however, much tempted to feel that the real father of the University was William Livingston, the scholar, the vigorous writer, the cultured and able lawyer, and the brilliant and versatile New Yorker, who afterwards became governor of New Jersey. He was an early exponent of revolutionary ideas in New York and a determined opponent of the founding of King's College under the domination of the Church influence. He wrote with the fervor of the French reformers of that period about the divinity of "reason" and the bane of ecclesiasticism. His arguments contain the germ of the whole modern educational reform. He was an ardent student of Montesquieu, and his words, like those of the French philosopher, revive the Hellenistic spirit as the source of new educational inspiration — an education free from all traditional bondage, organized upon state foundations, and which seeks a knowledge positive and practical rather than scholastic. His plan for the proposed college contained several provisions which, ignored in its establishment,

were triumphant later in the organization of the University. The chief practical features of his plan, some of which strongly resemble French schemes, won a triumph in the final establishment of the University. There can be little doubt that the founders of the University were familiar with his plans. His distinguished family connections assured an added influence. Henry Brockholst Livingston, one of the first Regents, was his son; John Jay married his eldest daughter; Chancellor Robert R. Livingston was a cousin.

Further evidence of the comprehensive and imperial character of French ideas of education and of the influence which such ideas must have exerted in the United States is found in the plans of Dupont de Nemours, the distinguished French economist and philosopher, and the ancestor of our eminent family of that name. A friend of Turgot, he was of that group of French economists who tried, by economic measures, to avert the French Revolution. A member of the *Assemblée des Notables* and an influential writer upon social and philosophical subjects, he was one of the best examples of educated men under the old régime. Before the French Revolution he had made the acquaintance of Jefferson in Paris. He came to this country, visited Jefferson in Philadelphia, and interested himself in education in the United States. At the behest of Jefferson, he wrote a treatise on "National Education in the United States" which set forth a plan for a general system of popular education for the whole country. His university idea included not only the higher but also secondary and primary education; in fact his plan embraced the whole educational field and was described as the University of North America. Intentionally he broke away from the historic constitution of universities; but he considered that America and European countries required a national system of education, beginning with the common schools and culminating in special, professional and technical institutions. He proposed that the city of Washington should be made the educational as well as the political capital. Here his brilliant imagination pictured and planned a magnificent palace of education, dedicated to the enduring progress and enlightenment of the American people. It is interesting to note that one of his family is today one of those much interested in this French Institute. I allude to General T. Coleman du Pont.

The idea developed by Dupont de Nemours was not peculiar to him. It originated in the schools of Paris, the oldest university in Europe. The thought of state education was abroad in the land.

George Washington's scheme for a national university, to be established at the capital, was generally known. He had announced it to Congress and had provided for it in his will. But such schemes were too grand for the new republic with its feeble national life.

It may be that the magnificent palace dedicated to education which has been erected by the State of New York in Albany is a realization of the dreams and visions of Quesnay and Dupont de Nemours, but I venture to suggest that those dreams and visions will be more completely fulfilled when the magnificent new building of the French Institute to house its collections and as a place for the association of its members has been completed in the City of New York.

In 1808, the Emperor Napoleon founded a University of France, comprising a system of secondary schools, and university centers, each with its local government, in the chief towns. This university absorbed and controlled the entire educational system of France. It was substantially the New York plan, carried out by a ruler with supreme power and resources and under different national circumstances. That there were many opportunities for an interchange of ideas and the exercise of mutual influences is indicated in many ways. Quesnay's plan provided a "committee of correspondence," formed at Paris and charged with the international work of the Academy. A councillor of this committee, Fourcroy, was the adviser of Napoleon in the establishment of his university. And Condorcet, whose plan for a national system of education contains most of the modern reforms, was one of the "foreign associates," as were La Fayette and Jefferson — then minister at Paris. Thus there were men who had an early and intimate knowledge of educational affairs in America. It is sometimes suggested that Napoleon obtained and made good use of the charter of the University of the State of New York. Unfortunately proof is lacking. What a source of gratification it would be if some day one of our students delving in the archives of France were to discover the material which would prove the truth of that which is now only a supposition. Certain it is, however, that if France gave New York the ideal of a symmetrical state system of secular education, New York in turn, in its comprehensive university corporation, was the precursor of France in giving practical form to such a system.

During a century and more of national growth France has modified her university by according greater liberty to institutions; and by providing educational facilities not found in the original system, such as elementary, technical and normal schools, and schools for

girls. This plan approximates the New York idea of a university as including all education. Meanwhile, the Empire State has constantly tended to centralization and has unified her dual system. The intervention of the State, exercised through the Regents and their special agent, the President of the University of the State of New York, who is also Commissioner of Education, has its counterpart in France in the ministry of public instruction. In both the state regulates the general rules of discipline and the general order of work; yet liberty is respected — freedom of thought and methods. These two great educational systems developed by democratic influence are today the most complete, the most logical and the most closely related in the world.

France and America have a glorious inheritance of common memories and historic associations. France assured our independence and embodied the ideal in the Statue of Liberty in the great gateway of the western world; she ceded us Louisiana that we might be great; she was the first nation of the world to accord recognition to our national emblem; she gave us the plan of our national capital. Though very different in many ways, France and America have the same ideals of freedom and justice; the same striving for better conditions and a greater share of happiness for the many. And this presage of a closer union is being fulfilled. There has been a constant exchange of thoughts and views; and, in late years, of books and men. And the French Institute is consummating this normal, peaceful and enduring alliance by its great work of instructing the people of this State and of the United States in the treasures of learning and art which France has placed at the disposal of civilization.

This meeting today at the exalted behest of the French Institute enables us to recall especially the debt of gratitude which we owe to France for the imperial organization which now dominates education in this State, and which has done so much to advance its interests; and it is only a very small return for what the State owes France that it should grant great and important powers to the French Institute to carry on its grand work. The Regents believe that a great future awaits this relatively new institution and they desire to express their profound gratitude that an eminent citizen of France should have left his engrossing and patriotic duties and come into the portals of the University, for his presence within this great spiritual and practical structure expresses to those laboring in this noble cause his appreciation of the work which is being done.

We like to let our minds run back and to think how gratifying it would have been to Livingston and Hamilton and L'Hommedieu and Duane to see that the institution which they with such deep consideration and solicitude created has chartered, in this late day and at a time when the very foundations of justice and humanity are being shaken, a body destined to unite still more closely the two great nations of France and America; and to increase, if it were possible to do so, the enthusiasm with which America has entered into the vast struggle. Mr Hawkes and his associates built better than they knew when they founded the French Institute, for they did not anticipate that it should be a power and a rendezvous in these days of turmoil and stress for the lovers of the glorious France that has saved the soul of the world.