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Josiah Royce: The Significance of His Work in Philosophy

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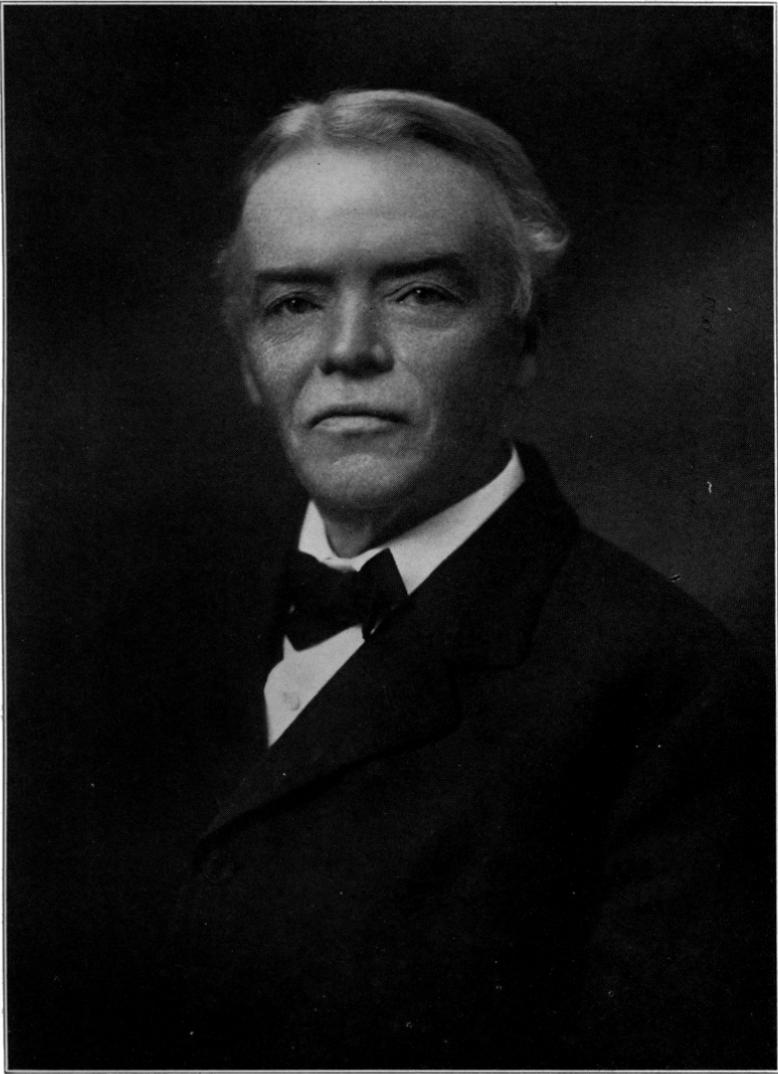
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JOSIAH ROYCE

1914

(Aet. 58)

## JOSIAH ROYCE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS WORK IN PHILOSOPHY.

IT is with sincere satisfaction, Mr. President and Members of the Association, that I accept the invitation, conveyed through the chairman of your Committee of Arrangements, to take part in the proceedings at this meeting in honor of Professor Josiah Royce. I am glad of this opportunity on my own personal account as well as on that of the University of California, his original alma mater, which is justly proud of him and of the notable record he has made. In the admiration felt by his native university, I of course strongly share. Parted by the breadth of the continent though we have been for these long years since 1884, we have nevertheless had many students in common. In fact, several of your prominent members, holding the chief positions in their subject at leading institutions of the country—at Yale, at Johns Hopkins, here at California, at Stanford, at Missouri, and, till recently, at Texas—had their initial training here at California and here received the stimulus that fixed them in a devotion to philosophy. In the pursuit of this they became, by my advice, as members of the Harvard graduate school, the diligent hearers of Professor Royce and his colleagues. Of his own original students, on the other hand, prominent ones, whose ability and whose profit from him their present positions before the country—at Harvard, at Columbia, at Michigan—now prove, in a degree that must give him well-founded gratification, came into the department of philosophy at California as my younger colleagues; there, by taking a constant part in the graduate seminar of advanced logic and metaphysics continuously conducted here, they became my students as well as my colleagues, and returned later to the east with an acknowledged attachment to this University which has been of profound satisfaction to its authorities and of great benefit to myself.

This important interchange in a common calling has given me an especial interest in Professor Royce's labors, and has caused

me to follow his work and his very numerous publications with an attention that I hope has corresponded to the worth of his performance.

On this extraordinary occasion of his honoring recognition by his colleagues from all parts of the country, I therefore join cordially in congratulating him on his notable career. It has indeed been of very marked achievement. Beginning in a small country village among the foothills of the Sierra, on the remote shores of our western frontier, amid surroundings none too friendly of the rugged pioneer life in a mining region, it has grown to international proportions; his words have been heard and his thoughts upon many of the most difficult human questions have been considered beyond both the great oceans. Such an extended hearing has doubtless been aided by the great spread of the English language, following on the extension of British empire and American colonization; but his native equipment and his active industry have enabled him to take advantage of this, so that still in middle life, having barely passed his sixtieth year, he has gained for the thinking of another American a serious general attention. It is a fact of which, as his countrymen, we may all well be glad; a case of the unexpected that is solid experimental reality; a thing for which we can sincerely give him recognition without flattery, and without any suspicion of compromising our self-respect.

Yet as members of a profession so serious in import as ours, in which he has proved himself such a valiant example, we should fall short, I am sure, of his own wishes if we spent this occasion in mere personal laudation. Rather, we should gather from his career and his work the real lessons which they convey for our proper business—the stimulation and leadership of thought as the guide of life. This is not a time, certainly, for rigid criticism or disputative objections; but we may well take the trouble, indeed we must not fail to take it, to ascertain what important questions he has put before us for settlement; above all, what positive contributions he has left us, upon which we must proceed in the further work which as thinkers we must do if we would go forward in the genuine spirit of his example.

What, then, has been the indisputably permanent thing in his work? What doctrine, or doctrines, has he put forward, from which we cannot wisely depart, but on the contrary must adhere to, must develop and improve, if we are to succeed in our real business? And what, on the other hand, must we be on our guard against, if against anything, lest we run into views injurious to our human calling, and mislead others into error?

For an illumining answer to these questions, I must ask you to listen to certain biographical items, not generally known, or, if known, not taken enough public account of. Without in the least detracting from his own powers and credit, it is no doubt a fact, of which Professor Royce himself has made the most loyal and public acknowledgment, particularly in his Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard, though repeatedly and in many other places, that he owes a considerable part of his singular success to his early recognition and hearty appreciation by his friend William James. James, in his published answer to the question, *What is the good of going to college?* has said with penetration that it is the power this gives you to know a good specimen of a man on sight; and this, his prompt discovery of our now noted colleague has pointedly illustrated. It was from James, my own greatly valued friend as well as his, that I first heard of Royce; not directly, for he did not himself speak to me on the matter, but by a message sent through one of my students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, inquiring whether I had met "Mr. Royce of California," and, in case I had not, advising me not to miss seeing him. This must have been quite soon after Royce's graduation at California, perhaps while he was on his way to his studies at Johns Hopkins—somewhere about the fall of 1876. Nothing came of this, however: I was too busy to hunt the young man up (he was then in his twentieth or twenty-first year), and I heard nothing more of him until after he had taken his doctorate at Johns Hopkins, where he had heard James (and perhaps Stanley Hall) in psychology, Peirce in logic, and George Morris, the able and accomplished translator of Ueberweg, on the history of philosophy and on Hegel, had gone to Germany and heard I know not whom, and had returned to California

to take an instructorship at his alma mater, in the department of English, where the poet Sill became his chief. Here I later heard he was not happy with some of his learned colleagues. With a genuine insight into the needed foundations for the writing of English, or indeed of any language, he discerned it was necessary to lay an underpinning of logic. For this purpose, he wrote and printed in San Francisco, in 1881, and used with his classes, his remarkable *Primer of Logical Analysis*, a work of great originality and suggestiveness, in fact one of his best productions. But many of his colleagues and some of the Regents thought this a transgression of the departmental boundaries and voted that the instructor must stick to the department lines, must teach English composition and not logic; and so on, and so on. This led Royce to be glad to give up the California position, and to come, I think in 1882, to Harvard as a substitute for James, who was to be away in Europe on his sabbatical. With a true thinker's confidence, however, he offered in addition to his regulation duties a public course of lectures on the philosophy of religion. It proved a great "take," and made his Harvard fortune; he afterwards printed the substance of the lectures in his first published work, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*. In his first years at Harvard I still got no opportunity to meet him, being absent in Europe and, later, at Michigan, and far too busy with my own work. But I heard of him one day in a way that challenged attention. The late Edward Everett Hale asked me if I had seen or heard "this striking young man from California"; when I said no, Dr. Hale went on: "Well, he seems noticeable, surely. What do you think I heard him doing in a lecture the other afternoon? Why, nothing less than showing that our human ignorance is the positive proof that there is a God—a supreme Omniscient Being!" This certainly caused me, as the slang saying is, to "sit up and listen," but I still had no opportunity to meet the young lecturer until I saw him, a singular figure, at the annual dinner of the Examiner Club, in May, 1884. Even then we got no chance to speak together, but I was so struck by his unusual appearance, that of a middle-aged British head and countenance set on a smallish youthful body,

that I could not avoid asking a neighbor at the table who he was, and was told it was Royce. It was not until the autumn of 1884, when I came to California to take up the duties of the new Mills professorship of philosophy, that at length I met our guest, who was spending his vacation there in work upon his history of California. I saw him frequently then, and found him the good character and the vivid thinker that we have all since known him to be. Yet in all our talks, I never gathered what, if anything definite, his *Weltanschauung* might be, as our German brethren call it. I kept remembering what George Morris had said to me about him, that "he could never himself learn what the young man thought on any of the questions or systems upon which he (Morris) lectured." It was not until 1885, in the fall or winter, that Royce sent me a copy of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, from which I learned his substantial membership at that time in the school of Hegel and was in consequence greatly pleased, as I was then myself still a good Hegelian, as yet unsuspecting the profound inconsistency, which I came ere long to discover, in the doctrine of the Hegelian "center," that the real universe is an all-inclusive Spirit, a God who is a "Person of persons," in whom all particular and individual selves "live and move and have their being": a stern and uncompromising system of universal Determinism.

In 1895, a few years after our California foundation of the Philosophical Union, we began a series of Annual Addresses by the authors of the books used by the society as bases for its studies in the successive years. At our first public meeting for this purpose, Professor Royce, then ten years beyond the publication of his *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, and well established in the public notice, was naturally the chief speaker. The assemblage was so large as not only to fill the auditorium to its capacity, but to make it impossible for hundreds to find entrance; the people from San Francisco, Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley, were greatly curious to see and hear the first graduate of their State University who had attained to a full professorship at Harvard. Professor Royce read with his well known animation and skill a paper, two hours in length, to this audience who never

took its attention off him, though the great majority of them must have been quite innocent of understanding what he said. The proceedings, including his address and notable papers on it, by his honored teacher Joseph LeConte and Dr. Sidney Mezes, their common student earlier, who had long been also mine,<sup>1</sup> were two years afterwards published in the volume entitled *The Conception of God*; the three papers, when thus printed in 1897, were accompanied by a series of my own comments, which I felt I must not refrain from making. I am burdening you with these long digressive details, because I wish to bring unmistakably to your attention this important but little read volume, chiefly by Professor Royce, containing besides his address his much fuller discussion of his theory of Idealistic Monism as the true account, as he then thought, of the nature of the absolutely real world; containing also his replies to his three critics. It is undoubtedly one of his most significant writings, indispensable for a clear understanding of the metaphysical theory which he then held, and continued to hold for years afterwards, and contains his clearest as well as most condensed statement of the noted argument by which he believed he was demonstrating the monistic conception of the nature and actual existence of God, and by which he certainly and conclusively refuted agnosticism. For this last reason, this book, like his other and still less known work that I have mentioned, the *Primer of Logical Analysis*, constitutes part of his enduring contributions to our field. It may well be made a landmark, and a base for our further advance in settled decisions in our subject.

The allied theory, that the defense of our capacity for absolute certainty must rest upon an idealistic metaphysics, is, as I think, Professor Royce's other contribution to philosophy to which we must adhere; I speak of it as his contribution, because, though the doctrine is not his save by hearty acceptance, I am thinking now of the subtle and unexpected argumentation by which he has supported this oldest and best expression of our historic human insight, dating from Socrates and Plato in Europe,

<sup>1</sup> At that time in charge of the philosophical department at the University of Texas, later its president, and now president of the College of the City of New York.

but having its earlier beginnings in the philosophies of the Orient. It is this native gift for original argumentative research that makes the genius of our colleague. His two volumes of Gifford Lectures, *The World and the Individual*, are full of this original reasoning; from this work I commend to your special attention the chapters in the first volume that establish a conclusive damnatory critique of what its advocates have chosen to call Realism. The great virtue of this critique is its vindication of Systematic Truth as the only valid director of feeling and conduct, and its implied definition of idealism as the consistent application to the control of desire and action of the universal logic that Truth as a system involves: nothing stands alone and isolated in the universe present to genuine thinking; each truth rests on other and on all. Let us keep a secure hold upon this view of what defensible idealism is, in contrast to the pseudo-idealism that means the pursuit of sentimental dreams about the so-called 'ideal,' and the utterly vague aims that go with this. Sound idealism is simply the rule of evidenced judgment, directed by the primordial Ideas, over the rest of life. How correct it is as a theory of knowledge, the act by which the individual, as thinker, displays its universality of view; and how easy the *non sequitur* by which, for instance, Hegel and his school suddenly convert this doctrine of logic, correct so far as it goes or can go, into their theory of Monism; a theory of Realism, in fact, though disguised in the misleading name of Absolute Idealism.

It is interesting to notice, in the continued writings of our colleague, that as the years have gone forward his views have apparently been changing; in the theory of knowledge, possibly more than truth will warrant. At any rate, in recent publications he has now served warning on us that he need no longer be counted as belonging to the school of Hegel; that, indeed, he never did cardinally belong there, and that, as some early reviewer has said, his doctrines are more akin to the views of Schopenhauer than to those of Hegel. We may venture to wonder at this last announcement. There has never been a trace of pessimism nor of asceticism in Royce's thinking, nor any agreement with Schopenhauer other than the prominence which, in common

with James, and in fact with nearly every other thinker in the long list of Harvard philosophizing, he gives to what he calls Will, though in a sense different in kind from Schopenhauer's and also from James's. This nominal Voluntarism I am confident we may safely discount, as inconsistent with our thinker's idealistic view, so far as this is true. It of course savors of the general Elective Theory on which the present Harvard university system is founded, and, however really it may violate the motto *Veritas* borne on Harvard's preferred seal, indicates the subtle influence that James's voluntaristic theory of the psychological world of 'perception,' as an assemblage of particulars rendered 'real' by our selective picking out from the undifferentiated mass of 'sensation,' exercised upon his friend's thinking when this came upon the difficult question of the metaphysical reality of the world of particular selves, and the preservation of the individual person notwithstanding the all-determining fact of God as the Oversoul. It is not for us to be surprised that James himself always remained dubious over this translation of his psychological into a metaphysical doctrine, wavering to the end between a puzzled though admiring sympathy and a general pragmatic scepticism toward every view tinged, however faintly, with the color of the Absolute. To James, of course, 'absolute' whether as a comparatively humble acolyte, adjective or adverbial merely, or as elevated to the lordly substantive office and made, as the Absolute, with a capital *A*, to play the part of a Substitute God, was a conception under suspicion; indeed, almost under ban. The deep-seated agnosticism that lay concealed in Pragmatism prohibited the doctrine of Truth itself, in the historic meaning of an absolute certainty, and required a new meaning for the very words 'truth' and 'true,' if such a thing were in any way possible. To James the true and the real, or rather, the true as an attempted depiction of the real, became a strictly partisan matter; as he used often to say, "A question of taste, you know." Such a voluntaristic philosophy, consistent enough with 'radical empiricism' and its really inevitable corollaries of scepticism and agnosticism, is in fact contradictory to that strong and profoundly argued idealism of *The World and*

*The Individual*, which has logically annulled Realism by reducing it to the unavoidable and ruinous shuttling from materialism to agnosticism, from agnosticism to materialism, ever back and forth, and forced the thinking holder of it out of its lines and into the wide-open field of Mysticism, to be driven thence, again, into the clutches of Critical Rationalism. From this one must gain rescue by the discovery of the dialectical nature of partial or partisan knowing, and by insight into the rational harmonic that carries disputative differences up into the larger embrace of interpretative conciliatory thought.

It is on this strongly reasoned basis of a logic idealistic in the sense that it replaces, by implication, the abstract scheme of the mere coherence of concepts by a conference of thought in a society of intelligences, guided, in its very initial sources, by the conciliatory Ideas (the True, the Beautiful, the Good) that provide a wider and higher region of interpretation wherein the disputes of partial thinking may seek and find reconciliation, that the sober and genuine idealistic philosophy must henceforth build. Voluntarism is consistent enough with Pragmatism, but it cannot protect itself, nor us, against sceptical Indifferentism, and cannot, in the last resort, fortify intelligence against materialism and atheism. When 'truth' gets translated into mere preference of feeling, or even into sturdy resolve, and yet remains, after all, but an uncertain conjecture, subject to revision, and sure to come to this in the lapse of time, a revision that with the lapse must recur and recur and recur *in perpetuum*, it cannot but cease at length to be worth the trouble of the guess and the testing by trial. The defect of Pragmatism is that its sole achievement is negative, is rejection. It is a factor, of course, in the dialectic of experience, the history of changing judgments in and concerning the transient world of the senses; it belongs to that logic that demands the correction of mistakes, whether private or communal. But it is not upon the level of the affirmative reason.

Very interesting and encouraging is it, that in the changes of view, whatever else they may be, that he has now publicly announced, we can notice that in the numerous volumes he has published since his lectures at Aberdeen on the Gifford Foundation,

Professor Royce has continually dwelt more and more upon the notions of Loyalty and the Community. In these indications of a concrete and social idealism, we who earlier than he have accepted the view of a primordially harmonic pluralism (if indeed he has changed in that direction), may naturally take satisfaction and hope. We desire the aid of so strong a man, who, in addition to his native gifts, has had the good fortune to come to such a fame and to so great a consequent influence. It is not true, as the old saying boasts, that 'truth is mighty and will prevail.' It will prevail if men are on the search for it and on guard for its security; but not otherwise. The burden is upon *us*, as thinkers, to find the truth that is true on the largest and most assured scale for our human nature, to seek it by that weighty and mutually interpretative intercourse of thought which the aid of the civilized community affords each of us, in return for the fealty, the duty, we owe to it and pay to it, and to our fellow-members that with us compose it.

An aspect of these changes of view, indicated rather than clearly explained, Professor Royce has recently referred to his later studies of the logician Charles Peirce, a thinker to whom James always declared himself greatly indebted, and to whom it would almost seem that Royce has now turned, after the loss of his great friend, as if to render justice to a mind not sufficiently appreciated before; or, possibly, in a reverent penitence for not having during his friend's lifetime given heed enough to James's repeated praises of Peirce.

These studies in Peirce, we are told, with a frank sincerity wholly to be praised, have resulted in a change of view, on our colleague's part, in the theory of knowledge. He now presents himself as an adherent and developer of Peirce's doctrine in this important field of philosophy. He tells us, with right caution, that he is by no means sure that in the construing and interpretation he has put on Peirce's views he would have had their author's own approval; but the new theory of knowledge, which Royce holds to be true, and of high importance, is set forth at its full in the second volume of his recent work, *The Problem of Christianity*. I may take it for granted, of course, that you are

all familiar with this new theory, and its triple logic of perception, conception, and "interpretation," as our author calls it. In this last term he appears to use the word in the sense of the clarification of issues between disputing parties, alluding to the pacificatory function of heralds between warring armies speaking different tongues, and needing to have their contesting purposes made intelligible and susceptible of mutual understanding and compromise; compromise, however, only on condition of larger advantages accruing from peace than from struggle.

It is to be hoped that the empiricism of Peirce, fully as 'radical' as that of James, may not have invaded the high and soundly supported idealism of Royce's earlier philosophical activity. At any rate, we need not permit it to weaken our own; for this 'radical empiricism' is a glaring case of incomplete and one-sided thinking, capable of refutation, and in fact refuted by Royce himself in *The World and the Individual*, and the other writings belonging to his idealistic period, if that has passed. But perhaps in this reference he has not changed.

In his Phi Beta Kappa oration our colleague has given us a list of the three names that he reckons foremost in the history of American philosophy,—Jonathan Edwards, Emerson, and James. These alone, he thinks, have commanded alike a world-wide, especially a European, attention. For my own part, I am not satisfied with a ranking based on public acceptance and fame alone. Again a current proverb proves, in the deepest sense, to be deceptive: *Securus judicat orbis terrarum* is far from true, even as an historical fact; much less, on the scale of rational worth and merit. Emerson and James were both great men of letters, great writers; yes, great thinkers, if you will; but they do not belong in the strict list of philosophers, the one a moral sage and poet, the other a richly endowed and greatly generous human character, with a style that for unaffected manly vigor has hardly been surpassed, perhaps not even equalled, and a diction so brilliant and pungent, often, as to seem to pierce and fuse the very substance and being of the objects it describes; I yield to nobody in my admiration of him as a man or as a powerful writer. Nor in a lofty estimate of Emerson, the very

foremost of our American poets, the leading writer of serious prose in his century, the most awaited, most stimulating moral influence in the world of his day, in this regard surpassing even his friend Carlyle. But both look out of place in a series with such a master of logic and technical philosophy as Edwards; that mastery in logic is a cardinal test of the true philosopher, and neither Emerson nor James possessed it. Both, on the contrary, did their best to discredit it, Emerson by taking refuge in mysticism, James by an attempt through psychology to set feeling and will into the deciding and directive place in conscious being.

It is frightful, when one stops to think what it must mean to the reality of a moral life for men, for their *duty*, for a true 'reign of God' in the soul, to hear Emerson glorifying the Oversoul: "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence," he says, "which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams." (*Self-Reliance*, p. 56, quoted, too, by James in his *Human Immortality*.) There were no doubt two Emersons, as James has rightly pointed out, the plotinizing Emerson of the Oversoul and Emerson the instinctive New Englander, supremely sensitive to individual responsibility, of the *Voluntaries* and the *New England Reformers*. But neither the one nor the other had any logic wherewith to defend himself; both were satisfied with mystic insight, incommunicable, and the method of mere declaration: Say what you see, and say it adequately, and there will be no need of argument. And for James, all argument, the whole laborious round of logic, ended in insoluble dispute, in utter moveless loggerhead, the death of decision. The only way out of this was to listen to your felt wishes, choose the side you care for, put your will into its service, and strike for your cause; whether it win or lose, *you* will have won, in the sense that you will not have fallen as a malingeringer or a coward. Of which we must in sober judgment say, it is certainly courage of a sort, but a courage to no purpose: *c'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*.

We ought to think of both Emerson and James, not that they

were not at least as great as Jonathan Edwards, but that more likely they were both much greater, and that their world is right in undoubtedly supposing them so. Only, they are out of the true perspective when set in a row with Edwards; or, better perhaps, Edwards is in the wrong perspective when placed in the line with them. James, it seems to me, belongs quite justly in a list following Emerson; in a list of four English prose writers of the nineteenth century who deservedly won the greatest notice and the widest influence,—Carlyle, Emerson, Mathew Arnold, James: the last at some distance below his predecessor, just as Arnold fell discernibly below Emerson and Carlyle. The four were powerful thinking writers rather than philosophers; something probably greater than philosophers. Are not sages and poets men of larger compass than philosophers as such? Unless indeed, like Plato, philosophers should be all three at once, and so, again like Plato, become incomparable and live in all ages.

If the list of strictly philosophic thinkers in our country, rightly headed by Jonathan Edwards, who partly settled the question as to the seat of human freedom by showing incontestably where it is *not*, that it is not in the will, is now to be continued, it is little to be questioned that the place our colleague, in such quiet and natural, though indeed unavoidable, self-forgetfulness, assigned to his gifted friend James, really belongs to himself. I would insert other names in the list, on the ground of merit rather than public note—President Samuel Johnson (disciple of Berkeley and stimulator of Edwards), James Marsh, Rowland Hazard, Joseph LeConte, John Fiske, Thomas Davidson, George Morris, Carroll Everett, Elisha Mulford, and, above all, William Torrey Harris, so long our unequalled Commissioner of Education, our master scholar in Hegel, of the largest international recognition; the series has not been brief, though I confine it, of course, to those who have passed from the living. But let our colleague accept the honor that events, seconding his native powers, have conferred upon him. Let him rejoice, in common with us all, at his great good fortune. Seldom is it that genius of his especial sort meets with such general public acknowledgment: the taste nowadays is for intelligence in other

fields, more in the public sight, more accessible to the multitude; more directly advantageous, also. As Professor Royce, I may properly repeat, is still far from being old, still not past middle life, we have the hope, yes, the expectation, that he will continue to contribute, as he has hitherto done, to the stores that enrich our calling. I heartily congratulate him again upon the merited honor of the present occasion, and wish him health, continued life and powers, and yet added successes.

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