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ANDREW CARNEGIE, PATRON OF LEARNING[1]

By Dr. JAMES B. CONANT

PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WITH this evening's dinner we end a celebration which I am sure you will all agree has been most impressive. We bring to a conclusion this century's formal salutation to the memory of a most remarkable man. Now I am not qualified even to attempt to evaluate the part Andrew Carnegie played in the industrial development of this country; nor am I sufficiently informed as to the history of philanthropic enterprises to try to estimate the magnitude of the results accomplished by his immense donations. But it is clear even to the most casual observer that on this occasion we pay tribute to a unique personality, a single individual who had original ideas and the ability and character to put them into practice. When in Carnegie's own words "he resolved to stop accumulating and to begin the infinitely more serious and difficult task of wise distribution," he made for his day a novel decision. He turned a corner, as it were, and the Anglo-Saxon world following him looked at an old problem from a new angle.

Andrew Carnegie departed from the beaten track both in accumulating his wealth and, what is vastly more important, in disposing of it. I like to think that among the other objects he had in mind in the distribution of his money was the idea that for generations to come his own unorthodox actions might enable other men in entirely different walks of life to be equally original. As Mr. Keppel has said, Carnegie in the conduct of his business believed in the importance of finding the right man and then betting on him heavily. The same principle, to my mind, may be applied throughout the whole range of human activities. Unfortunately nowadays this is too often overlooked in our research institutes and our universities. The scientific director of a large and successful company once said to me, "We could burn all the specifications for making our products, we could sink all our plants to the bottom of the Atlantic, but if we kept

[1] Delivered at the Andrew Carnegie centenary dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria, New York, November 27, 1935.