



## Smithsonian Institution

*Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archives*

### John and Charles Wise Ballooning Collection - Scrapbook 3

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## POPULAR LECTURES

### AMBITION:

An Address Delivered by John Wise, Esq., before Inland City and Conestoga Councils, O. U. A. M., January 9th, 1854.

Reported for the Saturday Evening Express.

Brother Councillor and fellow members. When the motion was made and carried, that I should deliver an address before Conestoga and Inland City Councils, I considered it more in the light of a compliment towards me, than the expression of desire the part of our Councils to listen to a discourse, from which they might receive amusement and instruction. Viewing it in this light, I made no preparation in methodizing my thoughts, taking it for granted that I would be favored with a thin audience, and that a thing discourse would meet all the requirements at my hands. But now it is otherwise—having reckoned without my host, I find myself surrounded by a larger audience, and with nothing on hands but the spontaneous resources of the moment. Although I determined from the beginning to make the subject Ambition, I confess, that to do justice to the subject, justice to my audience, justice to myself, it would require far more ability and study than my embarrassed mind at the present moment can supply.

Ambition is a singular passion, if I may be allowed the term. It is too often mistaken in other notions. Some people count actions as the work of Ambition, that are disgraceful to the term. They would fain make us believe that some of the most sordid passions as evinced in the various pursuits of life were the legitimate fruits of Ambition. They say it is the ambition of some to grow rich. There is nothing more false than that an honorable ambition can be solely engrossed in getting rich for riches' sake. Ambition is made of better stuff than that; and he who believes that he is impelled by Ambition, when his whole soul is buried in the sordid desire for the almighty dollar, belies himself, and has never felt the ennobling sentiment which moves true ambition. To get rich is a desire. To be ambitious is to seek excellence! I do not mean to say that to get rich, and to be ambitious at the same time is compatible. Nay! upon the other hand i would be understood to say, that true ambition is generally followed by pecuniary advantages, which may be reaped by the proper owner of them if he desires it. This is sometimes the case; but it often happens, that the truly ambitious man aims to secure the excellence of the [[?]], by doing that which [[?]] secure him the admiration of his fellow men, than which there is no greater reward for an honorable man.

It was the ambition of Washington to free our country from the oppressions of Great Britain; and right nobly did he carry it out. It was the ambition of General Jackson this day thirty-nine years ago to save New Orleans from the threatened 'Booty and Beauty' of England's picked soldiers; and in spite of the edict of a timid and overawed civil tribunal, he made Pakenham and Gibbs bite the dust, with 2400 more of their Booty-seeking brothers in arms. Well and truly do our hearts worship at the shrine of true ambition in commemorating the event. It was ambition that moved Franklin to set a snare for heaven's fiercest artillery, when he flew his kite on bush hill; and the bolts of Jupiter had to 'ground arms' to the noble ambition of a true philosopher. He sought to excel in science and art, and the world has responded to his ambition.



Fulton, our own son—the boy whose sketches were yet visible upon the walls of a building not a square off, some years ago—was moved by ambition to excel—first at silver-smithing—then at painting, and afterwards in the destiny for which nature had shaped him. When he got to England, whither his friends had sent him to take lessons from the renowned West, he beheld the unappropriated powers of steam, and his ambition inspired him to make it subserve the world as a great means of transition! What did he accomplish? Did the Claremont unfold a tale of ambition when she walked (slowly to be sure) steadily up the Hudson from New York to Albany! Does the great Ocean steamer breathe aught but notes in the fullness of ambition when it plows its furrow through the ocean, and lashes the billows to a foam! Does the thundering locomotive speak aught but ambition—ambition brewed and put into action by the quickening leaven bestowed upon the world by the Genius of Little Britain (now Fulton township)—as it hurls its long train with meteor speed over the land!

Such, brothers, is the sort of ambition I would have you emulate. It is good for us to be here, if we can bring our hearts and our minds to a true sense of ambition. Every man has the inherent qualities susceptible of being roused to a proper sense of ambition, but every man does not take the trouble to excite that quality. It lies inert in him, like the electricity in a glass tube. It wants rubbing to bring it out, but when once brought out, like the fire of the electric spark, it illumines the way in which he should move onward.

Man possesses the faculty of exciting his ambition, and every man has a sphere of action in the which he may become distinguished if he will but pursue the object of his ambition steadily and with a fixed determination of 'I will do it,' because he can do it, but it wants a rubbing up of the dormant powers!

I once heard a negro preacher say that 'a man without religion is like a beef-steak without gravy.' And I would say to you that a man without ambition, is like a beef steak without pepper and salt! He is insipid, like the constant sweet without a sour—like an unseasoned pudding—the very dogs turn up their noses at it.

A famed writer says: 'There is a destiny shapes our course, rough hew it as you will,' and he said true. The courses must be run, do ye it slovenly or energetically—without ambition, or with it, the course must be made, though you lay by the wayside like dolts—like spiritless beings. The ambitious man goes at it with a will—a right good will, and be his destiny what it may, though but a mechanic like our honored Fulton, his fellow men will honor him for his excellence. Brothers, every one of you has a destiny to perform, but the spirit of performing it is matter for your own ambition. God has given you—each of you, a title in fee simple to this prerogative, and if you fail to exercise its use, that is your own neglect; and when you grow old and decrepid without its honors, or perchance have passed your day of reckoning in debauchery or indolence, do not for the soul of you upbraid a beneficent providence for that which your own gross inclinations have defrauded you out of. Remember, that as a humble citizen, living in a country, wherein honorable ambition is as free to roam as the air of heaven; where light and knowledge, and rights and privileges, and learning, and honors, and reputation, and fame, and every thing which can redound to the glory of a man, is not the monopoly of a privileged few; you must necessarily be the architects of your own renown, whether in yourselves, or by perpetuation in your own offspring.

God is bounteous in this our land, especially in our own state, and if the true spirit of ambition has passed over any of you until your years have brought you down to the more earnest solicitude for the welfare of your offspring, it is still not too late; the gray hairs of spent manhood may still be made happy in the works of your offspring by inheriting on them the means which give to ambition its brightest jewels—I mean education.

But remember that education is not now, what it was when our fathers were young men. Then, to read and write, was considered a tolerable good education; but that day has passed by, and a new order of things has come up before us. Now it requires more, to be accounted a good education and thank God the means are at hand for the use of all, and sorrowful must be the heart of him who will hereafter go down to the grave with a neglect of the education of his offspring upon his guilty head—guilt more reproachful than infidelity itself. Formerly it was accounted education to have learned the names of things now, it requires to learn the philosophy of things, and particularly that most intricate philosophy—the science of human nature. brothers, an honorable ambition must incite you to educate your offspring adequately to the times and in this you have no excuse, not even that of indigence, inasmuch as the doors of learning are open unto you, from the lowest to the highest branches of education. But my heart has bled at the supinuity of some of our citizens, in marching out of the secondary schools some of the brightest gems of the human mind, to place them into a factory, or on a brickyard. better had you deprive yourselves of the dispensable commodities of subsistence; yea, even rather live for a while upon the most frugal, because it is the most healthy fare, than cripple the intellect, if you do not degrade it, by an untimely application of the tender fibre to hard labor. 'Labor for labor's sake, is unnatural,' and he whose ambition leads him to abridge 'hard work' by the invention of labor saving machinery, is a benefactor to the human race. This surprises you. A strange doctrine, think you, brothers, this robbing you of your toil; but as God is just, so it is the truth, and in this our own beloved country he has given you all a common inheritance, upon which you may build your claim to all the honors and enjoyments that respite from labor, and application to refinement, can afford. He that cannot appreciate this has never yet taken the pains to raise himself above the animal nature attached to him for no other purpose than to strengthen the understanding. The man whose honorable ambition leads him to believe that God has provided for all men and for all things, without respect to person, never fails to come out right in the end, no matter how bumble his sphere of action may be, and though he has but contributed a sewing-machine, or a cotton-gin, to the advancement and[[?]] of his race. The humblest artisan may enjoy the pleasure of true ambition as much as the greatest sage or general, since it is a matter not so much of extent as it is of degree. While the mechanic's ambition incites him to attain the par excellence of his profession, his soul will rejoice in the same degree when he attains his point of excellence, as does that of the sage when he has solved a wonder of nature, or the general when he returns from the field of victory. I wish I had not made the last comparison, because I think that true ambition is opposed to the shedding of blood by driving hot lead and cold steel through men's vitals, and should not be accounted as an action moved by ambition, were it not that amor patriæ. in some cases may inevitably lead to such inhuman work. Refined ambition is indeed working now to abridge this antagonism to a noble principle, and it finds it advocacy an efficient aid in one of our humblest citizens, Elihu Burritt, the Worcester Blacksmith, Take him, if you please, brothers, as a model of ambition. Watch him at his anvil fetching the [[?]] hammer upon the plastic metal, while his mind is reveling upon the plans to be effected for the regeneration of human nature, and now finding a well appointed laboratory in the blacksmith's head! Where do you see him next? In Europe convened with a congress of nations, endeavoring to establish a 'Peace Congress,' wherein nations shall hereafter submit their quarrels to the arbitrament of human intellect, instead of to brute force. Refined ambition is urging us on to this mode, and already we see it manifested in the minds of great generals, who truly feel themselves more honored, and very justly too, when as diplomatists they gain a more exalted

victory than a bloodstained field of battle ever has. Our noble Scott himself fought his way ambitious 'to conquer a peace,' when he marched his force under double quick time into the city of Mexico. And now, brothers, as to the ambition of societies. Heretofore we have considered individual ambition, let us for a moment examine collective ambition. there is a national ambition; and there is state ambition; I mean by this. that collective, or rather aggregated ambition, longing for the promotion and excellence of the part, or purport of the district it represents. It pertains to societies, and that should be the main principle by which every society that sets claim to honor ought to be moved. Such was embraced in the obligation I took when I joined this society, and you have all done the same [[destroyed]] some may think the beneficial fea[[destroyed]] be most valued. To such I would [[destroyed]] if any were here, you have not yet [[destroyed]] what constitutes a full man, and th [[destroyed]] whose whole desires are absorbed [[destroyed]] four dollars per week allowed to a sick brother, I would say you are therein degraded. You are less than a man - to be treated like a beast of burden, only to be fed, so that you can be used. Don't wince at this brothers, because your destiny casts before you a better lot. Though you be but a laborer, a mechanic, a true ambition on your part never fails to exact from your employer that respect which is at all times due between man and man. Human obligations are mutual, and so it is written by the hand of God, and he that attempts to disregard it is a blasphemer, and will be a tyrant whenever and wherever opportunity affords him an exercise of his brutal propensities. There are Hanau's of high and low degree-in the kingly chair and in the soul-crippling factory, but a spirit of true ambition, such as may be cultivated in a society, is ever sufficient to frown it down. In order to command respect and influence we must be active. We possess political privileges, which, [[?]] few exercised in a body, as a unit, in an honorable [[?]], but judicious manner, cannot [[destroyed]] produce the most salutary effects upon a class of people, of which we form a reasonable portion. In referring to the beneficial principle [[?]] of our order, I do not wish to be unders[[destroyed]] deprecating it; on the other hand [[destroyed]] upon it as a good feature, a prop to our ambition, but when it comes to the cons [[destroyed]] tion of our destiny, we have a higher nobler aim, and one that must wo[[destroyed]] for us that respect, which moral [[destroyed]]ness imbued with a proper degree [[destroyed]]pendence and true love of country [[destroyed]] always exact. In conclusion, brothers, le me ex[[destroyed]] to a full sense of our object; let [[destroyed]] to our country that we understand that which destiny has confided to out [[destroyed]] watchful then, that we may never [[destroyed]] the forlorn condition of Europe's [[destroyed]] that we may always be enshielded [[destroyed]] the panoply of a God-inspired am[[destroyed]]

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