3

THE IMPORTANCE

OF

LIBERAL TASTES AND GOOD INTELLECTUAL HABITS

AS A PROVISION FOR

PURE AND PERMANENT ENJOYMENT:

BEING AN

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

DELIVERED ON THE 5th DECEMBER, 1837,

BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION OF TROY.

BY THE REV. HORATIO POTTER.

"Begin to educate the old man betimes."
Sir Matthew Hale.

TROY, N. Y.:

TUTTLE, BELCHER & BURTON, PRINTERS AND BINDERS.

1837.

ROOMS OF THE TROY YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION,
December 8, 1837.

DEAR SIR:

AT a meeting of the Executive Committee last evening, it was unanimously

"*Resolved*, That the Committee on Lectures tender the thanks of the Association to the Rev. HORATIO POTTER, for the able Introductory Lecture delivered by him before the Association, on the evening of Tuesday, the 5th inst., and request a copy for publication."

The undersigned, believing that the Address which was listened to with so much gratification, may prove interesting and instructive in perusal, would feel greatly obliged by your compliance with this request.

Your obedient servants,

I. J. MERRITT,
A. S. PERRY,
C. H. READ,
I. R. CATLIN,
H. BROWER,
C. H. ANTHONY,
W. H. VAN SCHOONHOVEN,

Committee on Lectures.

To Rev. HORATIO POTTER, Albany.

ALBANY, *December* 13, 1837.

GENTLEMEN:

Your note containing a resolution of the Executive Committee of your Association, and requesting a copy of my Introductory Lecture for publication, is just received. Being always deeply interested in the efforts of young men for intellectual improvement, and having on this occasion passed by more brilliant topics in order to present views which I deemed to be of great practical importance, I am particularly gratified at the favor with which these views have been received. With the hope that the Lecture, in a permanent form, may sometimes remind you of an absent friend, and be the means of recalling salutary truths to your recollection, I cheerfully comply with your request to furnish a copy for the press, and

Remain very truly yours.

HORATIO POTTER.

Messrs. I. J. MERRITT and others, Committee, &c.

LECTURE.

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Association:

In turning to contemplate the occasion which has now brought us together, my imagination has presented me with the image of a Young Man, laying aside his ordinary business on this evening, and preparing to attend the first annual meeting of the Young Men's Association for Intellectual Improvement. This being an Institution designed especially for his benefit, and being fitted therefore to remind him of his interesting position, as a young man just entering into the world, methought I saw him falling into a revery on the chances of life and picturing to himself the elevated station which he might hope to occupy, perhaps at the age of fifty. As he passed along the streets, as he entered this hall and took his seat among his ardent associates, the contracted brow, the compressed lip, the fixed but thoughtful eye seemed to me to reveal the workings of the mind within, which with a magic power, changing time and place, had bid twenty-five or thirty years pass away, and was busy in creating the wealth, the influence, the imposing establishments, the domestic and social arrangements, which were to adorn the prime of a prosperous manhood. Perhaps with a nobler view of true dignity and happiness he went on to furnish that splendid mansion which the imagination had created for his future abode, with a well chosen library, thinking of the stores of information he would amass as a more valuable acquisition than either wealth or power.

May I not consider such a young man as a fair representative of the youthful part of the assembly before me, and suppose that on this as on many similar occasions, most of you ask yourselves the question, "What will be my fortune in the struggle of life; when I arrive at the age of fifty, in what condition shall I see myself, as to

wealth, influence, external appliances for comfort and splendor, and as to extent of information?" If so, allow me to remind you, that there is another question more important than either of these. At the period of fifty, what will be your *intellectual tastes and habits?* These you are now forming. At the age just mentioned, probably before, they will be fixed, fixed with equal certainty, though not with equal wisdom, whether you attend to them or not; and on them will depend your happiness, your dignity and power as thinking beings, much more than on your wealth or civic influence—more even than on the extent of your information. All these things, even your stores of information, are external to the mind, something different from the spiritual essence, mere *instruments* which must be valueless for all rational purposes, unless there be such mental tastes and habits as will enable you to use them aright.

Young Gentlemen,—Permit me to remind you that as Americans you come forward into life under a very peculiar influence—an influence totally different from what you would encounter in the older countries of Europe. In many of those countries, in England, for example, the young man, as soon as he can observe and reflect, finds himself encompassed with memorials of departed taste, genius and learning. His first little excursion carries him by the birth-place or the former residence of a Shakspeare, a Milton, or a Locke. The first eminence he ascends brings into view a venerable tower, whose history sought for with childish curiosity, carries him back to other days, teaching him not only that the past is full of interest to excite and reward inquiry, but also that it is mind, cultivated mind, which constitutes the glory of man and makes his name imperishable. Ramble whithersoever he may, he discovers that he is treading in the footsteps of illustrious predecessors. Every village boasts its Cowper, its Newton, or its Pitt; every gothic temple, every ancient villa, every hill and dale has its story of former worthies, distinguished for their talents, their virtues, or their exploits.

He finds himself, too, dwelling in the midst of a nation of living scholars. He sees all around him—he encounters every where an almost countless number, honored of all for their genius, their learning or their exquisite taste; and when we add, that the productions of the fine arts, paintings, statuary, crowded libraries are

thickly scattered through the land, you may imagine, how deeply he must be made to feel by all that he sees and hears, that there is something better worth living for than sensual enjoyments, or mere wealth and the glitter of external show. He is presented every where with a high standard of mental cultivation. It is constantly forced upon his attention and made to incite him to a noble, generous emulation.

On the other hand, there is comparatively little in such a country to stimulate the sordid passions to *excessive growth* or to *overpowering activity*. Successful money-making is not so prominent as to absorb attention or obscure the view of other things. The business of the country has long since assumed a settled, uniform state. All departments are crowded—wealth is accumulated by slow and regular gradations—new fields of adventure, new channels of enterprise are rarely opened; so that novel and exciting appeals to cupidity are in a good degree wanting. There is little to disturb the uniform tenor of life, little to create a passion for those hazardous adventures, which are so absorbing, so incompatible with a just developement of all the social, moral and intellectual elements, and especially so fatal to the formation of liberal tastes and good intellectual habits. Thus while there is much, very much to elevate the views, to liberalize the tastes of the young man as he comes into life; there is, on the other hand, no overwhelming influence having a tendency to make him a mere sordid, grasping, restless man of business.

In what strong contrast to all this is the state of things in this country, I need scarcely remind you. Those productions of the fine arts, those memorials of other times which speak so eloquently to the youth of other countries, are unknown to us. Our mountains and vales, our rivers and lakes, have not yet been consecrated by genius. Our soil is still covered with forests—our people are still contending with physical obstructions. The few vestiges of the past worthy of preservation are swept away by the tide of improvement; and scarcely any thing remains to us, scarcely any thing could be expected to remain to us, but a land fertile in physical resources, and a people shrewd, enterprising, grasping, restless, busy with the external world and bent on making the most of external circumstances. Almost all minds are occupied

with plans to promote private or public wealth. Every year new fields of enterprise are thrown open, new excitements presented; rapid transformations call out the thoughts from the private sphere; while the tidings of a splendid opulence, achieved as if by magic, are constantly coming to excite cupidity and entice men away from calm, contemplative industry.

What, then, is the influence under which the young American first begins to think and to act? Why learning and taste are so rare, they have erected so few monuments, they have left so few traces in the field before him, that he is scarcely reminded of their existence, while every where he beholds an eager, exclusive devotion to business—a business prosecuted with reference solely to the acquisition of wealth. Conversation in the domestic circle and in the public resorts dwells on the new devices for amassing property, points to suddenly accumulated fortunes, magnifies the power of money; and in short, the glittering bauble dances before the eye of the *young man* till his spirit is eager for the prize, and he is made to feel, that business is the only enjoyment, wealth the only object of life. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I am far, very far from being disposed to undervalue the active employments of life—or to complain that in this country, they are generally embraced. The evil, if there be one, lies not in the employment, but in the *spirit with which it is pursued*. Owing to the tone of mind prevailing among us, young men are too often made to feel, on coming into life, that *external success* in their business or profession, i. e. wealth or eminence, is the grand and almost only object of life. Even knowledge itself, seems, for the most part, to be pursued for the sake of the external advantages, reputation and influence which it is supposed to confer.

Now all these views, whether they relate to wealth, to professional eminence or to knowledge, seem to me to be pervaded by a common error—that of expecting happiness, real well being from something which is *external to the mind*, something which does not make a part of the mind itself. The error is common, because external advantages are palpable, obvious, eagerly desired by all; while examples of true intellectual dignity and enjoyment are not only exceedingly rare, but even when met with, the secret of the

individual's power and happiness as a thinking being is of such a nature as to elude observation.

In regard to *wealth* the error is obvious on a moment's reflection. It is undoubtedly good in the hands of taste and piety. It will serve as an instrument of happiness if the mind be able to wield it aright—if it can be properly spiritualized, and thus invested with an intellectual and moral character. It can then be made to gratify the taste and the highest moral sentiments. But how poor and worthless in the coffers of the miser! How utterly incapable of imparting satisfaction to his sordid spirit! How often do we see men, whose wealth only serves to render their ignorance and vulgarity of mind the more pitiable and ridiculous, because the more prominent! Men whose natures have been hopelessly ruined by the manner in which through life they have pursued their object, having been constantly contracting tastes and dispositions that make them dissatisfied and miserable in spite of all their professions. Their desires have grown faster than their possessions, and are now less capable of being satisfied than ever before. With all their treasures they are really poorer than when they commenced their career. Sordid and narrow, they can find no satisfaction in using their hoardes. Accustomed to bustle and excitement, they cannot enjoy rest—they cannot improve leisure. The habits of mind they have contracted make them strangers to elevated tastes; and after all their anxious struggles to secure the means of happiness they are doomed to spend the miserable remains of life in a round of low gratifications, vexed by petty irritations, disquieted by impotent cares.

The same remarks apply to *professional eminence and official station*. Surely it is not in the opinions of other men, much less in mere eminence to make us either wise or happy! Have we not seen a Haman advanced above the Princes and servants of the King, banqueting at the royal table, and yet confessing that all his honors availed him nothing, so long as he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate and refusing to do him reverence. One vindictive passion—one inordinate, ungratified desire renders him incapable of enjoying any external advantage. Who has not observed, too, that there may be much activity and smartness—much dexterity in securing external success—much vigor of mind

even, and yet little true wisdom—few tastes or mental qualities of any kind that conduce to true enjoyment or real dignity. Sir Robert Walpole, the celebrated statesman, once lamented to Mr. Fox in his library at Houghton, his want of literary taste. "I wish," said he, "I took as much delight in reading as you do; it would be the means of alleviating many tedious hours in my retirement: but to my misfortune I derive no pleasure from such pursuits."

So, too, it is quite obvious that vast stores of knowledge may be acquired as *mere information*, with little power to use it for wise purposes. The acquisition may be attended with little improvement of the taste or of the judgment, with little genuine relish for intellectual enjoyment. Unused to that reflection by which knowledge is incorporated into the substance of the mind, and made at once to enrich, invigorate and adorn it, destitute of that love of truth which would render study delightful even though the student were alone on the earth, with none to communicate his knowledge to, void I say of these qualities, the possessor of mere information, instead of having resources within himself, may still be dependent on the admiration or the support of his fellow men. With restless passions, and an eager eye fixed on external objects, he may be using his stores only as a means of gratifying a petty ambition, while he is a stranger to that *internal complacency*, that delight of mind which is the peculiar happiness of the true lover of letters. Knowledge may be to him no better or nobler thing than is wealth to the man who lives only for a vulgar display. It may render him neither happy, wise, nor truly respectable.

Success, then, in the pursuit of wealth, professional eminence or mere information, ought not to be esteemed, as it too often is, the grand object of life. It may be achieved, and still leave a man miserable, if not contemptible. A plan of life to be truly successful, must make provision for *pure and permanent enjoyment*.

Now I maintain that such provision cannot be made without *liberal tastes and good intellectual habits*.

By liberal tastes I mean not a mere fondness for reading, irrespective of the character of the book. Such a fondness may expend itself on the monstrous and impure creations of fiction. These pervert the taste, by habituating the mind to the admiration of a world,

whose sentiments, passions and incidents are in violent contrast to the simplicity of nature. They debauch the feelings and principles by familiarizing the imagination to scenes, where the characters and actions are not only unnatural, but corrupt, utterly at variance with pure morality and religion, and rendered the more infectious because recommended by certain glittering and imposing qualities. Abounding in extravagant incident, they create a disrelish for the tame realities of our prosaic life; presenting bold, exciting narratives which amuse without taxing the mind, they incapacitate it for protracted efforts of attention, for the severe exercise of thought. The mind is thus formed to indolent passive habits, accustomed to be acted on rather than to act, to be agitated or amused, by a marvellous tale rather than to trace the reasoning of an author, to weigh his sentiments, principles and statements with a judgment watchful to approve or to condemn as the truth may require. Thus the mind is unfitted for all high efforts; while to complete the injury, the benevolent affections, accustomed to the same indolent, passive indulgence, no longer prompt as they were originally designed to do, to active effort for the relief of misery. The natural connection between pity and charity is dissolved, (pity having been so often excited where there was no room for charity,) and the readers of extravagant fiction can

> "Sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched,
> Nursing in some delicious solitude
> Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies."

Again, fondness for reading may expend itself on desultory and miscellaneous works, newspapers, reviews, ephemeral, superficial productions that happen to fall in our way. Such reading may impart much scattered imperfect information, but can never convey genuine instruction, can never make us thoroughly acquainted with any subject, and of course, therefore, can never create an ardent taste for any branch of knowledge; consequently can never lay the foundation of true wisdom or of real intellectual enjoyment. It serves but to dissipate thought, to create a wandering, aimless curiosity, which seeks momentary gratification and the reputation of having read, rather than that which is beautiful, true or useful.

By liberal tastes, I mean a lively relish for the beautiful in art and in nature; and also a warm attachment, a generous devotion to certain branches of knowledge.

There is, for example, a taste for Poetry and Eloquence, which not only enjoys their beauties, but perceives clearly in what those beauties, whether of thought or language, consist. There is a delightful *sensibility* to whatever is felicitous in diction, brilliant in conception or exalted in sentiment, which is a source of exquisite gratification; which differs from a mere ambition to be thought well read, as much as the feelings of a mercenary soldier differ from the disinterested love of the patriot; a sensibility which indulgence refines and sublimates, but never exhausts, which is ever alluring its possessor away from the haunts of listless idleness to the contemplation of the beautiful, and which often cheats him into forgetfulness of weariness, pain, depression, and the other ills that flesh is heir to. Let such a man enter his study or turn to his private haunt, exhausted, agitated, oppressed with care; let him take up one of his favorite masters without interest, almost with an effort, and perhaps in another moment a glowing passage, a striking thought will arrest his attention, will give a new direction to his feelings, and you will see him starting from his seat and pacing his room in a state of high intellectual enjoyment, as he dwells on the imagery or the electrifying thought of his author.

Again, there is a relish for the beautiful in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and in nature, which is an unfailing source of pleasure and improvement. These tastes impart an intellectual character even to hours of recreation, to the journey, the solitary walk, the social circle. Affording a gentle and innocent exercise for the judgment and the imagination, leading to elevated contemplation of human genius, they take off the attention from low images, they prevent the thoughts from brooding over petty evils and fruitless cares; and while they exhilarate the mind contribute greatly to improve it. Let a man of taste, whose mind the poets and historians have stored with imagery and with incident, have his attention directed to a powerful painting, a splendid edifice, or a sublime scene in nature, and how varied, how refined, how exhilarating the feelings it will excite. First there is admiration of the skill of the artist—of the manifold beauties of his work, or of the

natural grandeur and magnificence of the scene before him. Then the imagination is called into exercise—there is something to awaken a train of interesting associations—images of the past gather around him, the productions of genius, splendid passages of poetry and eloquence recur to his thoughts, and there is a glow, a pleasurable excitement of mind inconceivable by those who have not experienced it, never to be forgotten by those who have. But all this will depend, not only on the sensibility, but also on the fullness of the mind—on the variety and richness of the stores of imagery, which it has gathered from reading and from thought. The feelings with which Scott first trod the pavement of Westminster Abbey, how different must they have been from those of a common man in the same situation! The emotions with which he contemplated the ruins of Melrose or the vale of Ettrick, how unlike those of his friend, Tom Purdy.

But perhaps of all these, a taste for the simple beauties of *nature* is one of the most desirable. It makes our whole life a continued entertainment. Wherever we go the eye is presented with scenes of loveliness or of majesty—the spirits are calmed and refreshed, and the imagination is sweetly exercised—night and day, summer and winter, sunshine and storm, river and forest, ocean and sky come in their turn with ever varying charms, with ever increasing beauty. Other resources, Young Gentlemen, may fail us; but

> "Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy; for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings."—*Wordsworth.*

I cannot but express my regret that there is among us so little love for the country—so little taste for the simple tranquil beauties

of nature. Favored as we are with one of the most beautiful countries in the world, it seems to me that there is scarcely any land, where green fields, luxuriant forests and the pure air of heaven have so few devoted admirers as with us. Though I have seen the Rhine and the Rhone, though I have sailed on the Forth and on the Clyde, and rowed my boat on the Thames from Richmond to Twickenham, yet during the last summer as I passed up and down our noble river it appeared to me that I had seen nothing more beautiful. Now on a holiday in Europe you will see crowds of all ages and classes pouring forth from the cities to enjoy the country. Whole families, from the parents to the nurse and dog, have I often seen rambling out to the most secluded spots with their basket of cold provisions, that they might enjoy their repast amid the refreshing beauties of nature, and have at least one day of peaceful, social, healthful enjoyment. What an influence must such a day have in calming the passions, refreshing the spirits, restoring the mind to a just equipoise, promoting social and domestic virtues as well as in refining the taste! Such habits when extensively prevalent, what an effect must they have on the national character! How much would they do to counteract the excitability, the tendency to gross sensual enjoyment which seem to characterize our people!

But to the young man especially, who desires to make provision for pure and permanent enjoyment, this relish for the charms of nature is of the first importance. This together with a taste for the pleasures of the imagination, which seeks gratification in Poetry, Eloquence and History, (and indeed in the other productions of the Fine Arts, for they all appeal to and exercise the imagination,) in local association, in venerable remains, and even in nature herself, these will never fail to embellish the mind, while they furnish it with inexhaustible means of rational enjoyment.

And if there be in our country a want of those stimuli which excite the imagination, which are fitted to develope it so as to render it a prominent faculty; if we are destitute of those monuments and temples; if our mountains and lakes have not yet been consecrated by poets; if our villages and hamlets are not associated with the names of immortal men; if it is not our privilege to tread a soil which incloses the ashes of Miltons and Bacons and Shakspeares; if almost all these incitements to the imagination are wanting with us,

there is the greater need of special care, of systematic culture to prevent it from being lost, to train it up to the requisite strength and activity. *Let it not be supposed that the culture of the imagination is of no importance.* Without this faculty the human mind loses half its glory, and some of the very best, purest sources of enjoyment. And in such an age and country as ours, favored with access to every work of genius, familiar through these works with every inch of classic ground in Europe, surrounded by noble scenery, by spectred forests, once the abode of the red warrior, it cannot be difficult to find the means of cultivating the imagination, or of gratifying it after it has been developed.

Among liberal tastes I mentioned, in the last place, a warm attachment, a generous devotion to certain branches of knowledge—one or more. This is in the highest degree conducive, not only to mental improvement but to pure and permanent enjoyment. To the man who has become deeply interested in any branch of literature or science, all studies connected with it, are a mere *labor of love.* He returns to them with ever increasing delight, from business and from society—while the very energy and concentration of mind, with which he pursues them, insure a thorough and rapid progress. They constitute what is most essential to a happy life, viz., an interesting object, of which he can never become weary; an object which is always becoming more attractive, which diverts him, when he would otherwise be listless, and soothes and animates him when he would be melancholy. But, before there can be this strong attachment to particular studies, there must be some familiarity with the subject—there must be some degree of accuracy in our attainments. A friendship such as this springs not from casual, superficial intercourse. Such a taste comes not from mere desultory, aimless reading—it comes from intimacy of acquaintance—from the mind's having been directed particularly to a single study and having made a distinct, definite progress in it. Knowledge, clear and intimate, produces love; and love in its turn conduces to a happy advancement.

This leads me to observe that a provision for pure and permanent enjoyment, requires not only liberal tastes but *good intellectual habits.*

Young Gentlemen,—All our employments, all our efforts, literary as well as others, are attended with *two results*—one of which relates to the attainment of the object, the other to the influence of the effort on the character—in forming habits, tastes and dispositions. Every movement we make not only changes our position, in relation to the object on which our eye is fixed, but also effects a change in our intellectual and moral charcter. For example, we covet knowledge, information—our efforts to acquire it will be attended, first, with a certain degree of success; we shall acquire a certain amount of information; and, second, with the formation of certain habits of mind. Is it not to be feared, that we think too much of the mere information, perhaps I ought to say, of the mere temporary gratification, and too little of the mental habits we are forming in the mean time? Is it not to be feared, that, of all other things, our habits are often the least attended to, being left to the influence of circumstances, and allowed to *grow upon us without our notice?* We study every other art, but the art of regulating and controlling our thoughts, of wielding the energies of the mind, so as to make them most effective for the purposes of wisdom, usefulness and happiness! Thus while we are beating the air and grasping at shadows, life passes away, little progress is made, and habits are formed, which exclude the hope of future improvement. What, then, are good intellectual habits?

1. I mention in the first place, the habit of *controlling the thoughts.* How much of life is spent in vacant, useless thought; in thought which wanders without aim, without logical connection, without reference to truth, or utility, or duty, at the mere suggestion of an idle fancy! How much of life is consumed by those vain imaginations, those glittering or impure creations of the mind, which corrupt the heart, which enervate the mental faculties and indispose them to vigorous, consistent effort! How much is lost in brooding over anxious cares or imaginary griefs, where thought can produce no useful result and leads to nothing but misery! How much is trifled away in idle converse, in useless, aimless reading, in meddling with what concerns us not, and in mere devices to kill time! And after all, life is vapid, insipid, spent without interest and without improvement!

Now there is a way of escaping this misery; there is a method of rescuing these precious intervals, often so sadly wasted, and of turning them to a noble account. We may have a book ready, to which we can turn, without being, for an instant, at a loss, as to what we shall do; and from which, in a few moments, we may discover a beautiful expression, a striking thought, or an important truth. Now when a short interval of leisure occurs, which is the nobler way of spending it, to indulge in an idle revery, in a trifling conversation, in listlessly observing the passengers in the streets, or to walk into a neighboring parlour to listen to the conversation of the immortal Bacon? If the sage were still living, who would not esteem this privilege as the most precious he could enjoy! Bacon is indeed gone, but in five minutes you can peruse one of his essays, containing the richest fruits of his vast and comprehensive mind, more valuable even than his extemporaneous talk, worth an age of common place gossip. In five minutes you may read a speech in Shakspeare, or a passage in Milton—you may master a truth in moral or intellectual science, to be yours forever—you may learn what it is that causes the ascent of water in the pump, or that produces the twilight—or, if a book be not within your reach, you may be provided with an important subject on which you wish to reflect; you may review the facts and arguments connected with it, with which you are already acquainted, drawing new inferences, and noting down all your reflections. You may recur to the last truth in philosophy or in history, to which you have attended, to the last brilliant passages you have read, discovering new beauties and extracting new lessons of wisdom. Thus, while you are making important acquisitions, you may be cultivating the habit of directing your thoughts to a useful subject, and keeping them there—you may cultivate a habit of fixed concentrated attention, without which nothing great ever was nor ever will be achieved. You may acquire the power of regulating the succession of your thoughts, preventing them from wandering at random, maintaining a logical order among them, so that they will not be prone like a talkative man, to connect things which have no connection. Without this power the judgment can never be sound and discriminating. Now each one of these intervals may appear brief; yet when summed up they constitute a large portion of our lives, and if duly improved,

are amply sufficient for all the purposes of intellectual cultivation. The effort of controlling the thoughts, may seem difficult and painful at first; but practice will render it not only easy and agreeable, but in the highest degree conducive to happiness, which always flows from active, healthful, mental exercise. Dr. JOHNSON tells us, that when suffering from depression of spirits, he always compelled himself to take a book; and that the effort, as he continued to repeat it, was always becoming less painful. Who can tell, from how much misery he thus escaped, or how deeply the world is indebted to a habit, which must have augmented greatly his intellectual power and resources!

2. In the second place, I mention a habit of contemplating facts and incidents, not with a mere vacant wonder and curiosity, but *with reference to some principle* with which they must be connected. Here, gentlemen, is one of the greatest secrets of intellectual success—a habit of referring facts to principles, of ascending to the causes from which they proceed—of tracing the inferences to be deduced from them. It is in this way that discoveries are made in science, that comprehensive views of great subjects are formed. Millions of people before Newton had observed the fall of an apple; but it was reserved for him to ascend from that event to the great law which governs the Solar System. Hundreds of congregations had noticed the vibrations of a chandelier in a church before the time of Galileo; but it was reserved for his reflecting genius to perceive that these vibrations were isochronous, equal in duration, and to hit upon the thought that an instrument like the pendulum might be employed as a measure of time. Every man and woman has observed the steam issuing from the spout of a heated vessel of water; but it was for Savary to be stimulated by the incident to reflection and experiment, till he discovered that steam might be employed to produce a vacuum, a fact which prepared the way for the invention of the steam engine and all its subsequent improvements. It is, then, by reflecting profoundly on the *meaning of facts*, on the causes to which they may be ascribed, the principles with which they are connected, the inferences that may be deduced from them; it is in this way, that the mind is able to convert little things into lessons of wisdom, and make even incidental gratifications subservient to the interests of knowledge.

3. Again, permit me to recommend the habit of *studying subjects.* Too much time is apt to be spent in the reading of entire books, in which we often pass rapidly from one topic to another, collecting perhaps some scattered information or reflections, but obtaining no clear, comprehensive, thorough knowledge of any one subject. Thus a whole life may be and often is spent in promiscuous hasty reading, without making the individual well acquainted with a single branch of knowledge. To avoid this lamentable waste of time and attention, let one or more subjects be selected for inquiry at a time. Let the different questions connected with the subject be thoroughly investigated. Let facts be collected, their authenticity and weight be fairly determined, and the inferences to be deduced from them, be noted distinctly and briefly in our own language. Let us carry these subjects with us into society, converse respecting them with those who would be likely to give us valuable hints. Let us revert to them in our vacant moments, constantly recording our thoughts as well as the results of our reading, and never losing sight of the subject, till we have arrived at some satisfactory conclusion; or at all events, pushed our inquiries to the utmost extent of our ability.

In this way we shall be training our minds to habits of rigid logical inquiry, we shall be provided with employment for leisure moments—with the means of deriving improvement from society and conversation; and above all, we shall be making some *real thorough advances in knowledge.* There will be some subjects, which, in this way, we shall at length succeed in mastering. If full of difficulty they may be on our hands for years! So much the better! We shall have learned to hold our judgments in suspense! We shall have been inured to patient, thorough inquiry. We shall have been taught a lesson of modesty, which will prevent us from assuming hasty ill-considered opinions with confidence. We shall have at least one thing well settled in our minds! And this, Gentlemen, let me assure you, is a great advantage. *One subject thoroughly mastered throws light upon a hundred others.* It assists our inquiries in studies, which to a superficial view might appear to be very remote, while on the contrary, a hundred subjects, loosely considered, imperfectly understood, add little or nothing to the wealth of the mind, contribute no aid to new investigations. How often is

a whole winter spent in desultory reading without making any complete attainment, without mastering any subject, while the evenings of one month properly employed, on a single topic, would not only improve our minds, our mental habits, but give us a familiar acquaintance with some branch of knowledge, which would aid and gratify and adorn us to the end of life. In the evenings of one month, for example, perhaps I ought to say, of one week, a young man might acquire a competent knowledge of the steam engine, of its structure and history—such a knowledge as would enable him to speak and to think intelligently on the subject for the rest of his life, besides enlarging his views of many other topics. I might say the same of the subject of electricity, or of the atmosphere, of the imagination in intellectual philosophy, or of the revolution effected by Lord Bacon in the methods of philosophising, and a hundred others. Surely it is better to employ a month's leisure in mastering one thing thoroughly, than in wandering over a multitude of subjects, collecting a smattering of information on many, but acquiring a competent knowledge of none. It is in this way only that we can prepare ourselves to speak confidently or to think clearly—it is in this way only that we can become deeply interested in any branch of knowledge, or acquire that relish for it, which promotes enjoyment and facilitates acquisition.

We cannot, therefore, appreciate too highly the importance of studying subjects—of always having on hand some standing topics for thought and inquiry; which having been once selected shall never be laid aside or forgotten, till our inquiries have been pushed to a definite result—to a conclusion, if there be data sufficient to furnish one—or to a point, where we have a clear view of the difficulties of the subject—and of the facts and reasonings on both sides of the question. Thus for instance, if you undertake to examine the policy of the *restrictive system* in commerce, as opposed to the system of free trade, keep the question by you, while you proceed to collect facts and arguments, as opportunity shall serve, from books, from documents, from conversation, and from your own reflections, noting down constantly the results of your inquiries, and persevering till your mind is satisfied as to where the truth lies; or till, having a comprehensive view of the whole subject, you become convinced of your present incompetency to decide. Preserve your memoranda

for future review and correction; and above all, keep your mind open to conviction, should any thing occur to convince you of error.

4. And this leads me to speak of another habit of mind, of the utmost importance, both to wisdom and to happiness, viz.: the habit of preserving *calmness*, *modesty* and *candor* in all our inquiries. Gentlemen, a man may possess a great deal of talent and intelligence—he may be endowed with an active and vigorous mind, and yet he may be a most unsafe guide in all matters of reasoning. He is by nature a *partisan*, as well in literature and science, as in politics. The moment a question is presented, he rushes impetuously to his position, and from it no force of fact or argument can ever drive him. The moment he takes his position he begins, not to consider candidly whether it be tenable, but to fortify it! He searches for facts and arguments, not to resolve his doubts, not with an unbiased love of truth, but because he wishes to confirm and advocate opinions already embraced. Every thing is seen through a colored medium. Considerations on one side of the question, are undervalued—are so slightly noticed, that they make little impression on his mind, while those on the other are exaggerated by passion, by pride of opinion, are steadily contemplated, till by repeated impressions, they seem to be multiplied, and one feeble argument acquires the force of many powerful ones.

There are indeed two very different kinds of ability—there is what may be termed *forensic* ability, and there is *philosophical* ability. There are two very different habits of mind—forensic habits—habits of advocating opinions already embraced—and philosophical habits—habits of inquiring simply, without prejudice, without bias, without reference to our own previous impressions or those of others, what is truth? In the one case the thoughts are wholly occupied in sustaining, in advocating a received opinion—in the other case the mind is kept open to conviction, facts and arguments on all sides are allowed their just weight and importance, and an opinion, if formed, is abandoned as soon as it is found to be erroneous. In the one case judgment generally precedes and prejudices inquiry—in the other case, the judgment is held in suspense, till inquiry, calm and impartial, has furnished data for a rational decision. In the one case doubt is painful, is esteemed all but disreputable—in the other case doubt is preferred to error, and

the lover of truth would rather remain without an opinion, than embrace a false one. Where the forensic habit has long prevailed, the mind becomes incapable of calm, philosophical inquiry, incapable of reviewing and correcting its opinions. The forensic habit is the more common, but the philosophical is the more safe, more useful to the interests of truth and more conducive to happiness. The advocate, the man who takes his position hastily, confidently, who maintains it warmly with pride of opinion, is apt to have his spirits hurried, his passions agitated by controversy; especially as he will often be in the wrong and will find himself hard pressed with the weapons of reason. The philosophical inquirer, the simple lover of truth, on the contrary, finds his mind soothed and tranquilized by all his studies; and even when his opinions are opposed and fairly refuted, such is his devotion to truth, that he welcomes defeat, or rather he experiences no defeat, but feels that he has been a gainer by discussion.

Young Gentlemen,—Let me exhort you, as you value truth and happiness, to guard against the rash, partial, self-willed temper of the advocate—of the man who lives and talks only to repeat and maintain his own opinions—guard against over-weening confidence in your own judgment—guard against the habit of investigating a subject merely as an advocate to see how much you can make out of your cause—guard against the poor ambition of having an opinion before you have fairly considered a subject. *Be not afraid to doubt, if conscious that you are willing to believe.* Your intelligence, and especially your wisdom is to be measured not by the number of opinions you have embraced, but by the amount of thought and information you have amassed on the several subjects presented to your notice—by your real approximation to the truth. Be not driven about in your judgments by every wind of popular feeling. Go for your opinions, not to the multitude, but go to your closet—calm your spirits, divest yourselves as much as possible of prejudice—revert to first principles—seek large and comprehensive views—dig down to the foundations of your subject—scrutinize facts and arguments—turn to the sentiments of the wisest and best men, and bring every suggestion to the bar of a calm, candid judgment. In this way you will be training your reasoning powers to the best habits,

and at the same time furthering the interests of truth. You will be wise for yourselves and wise for the world.

5. Finally, let me recommend the habit of reserving your time and your thoughts *for the very best authors*. We are overrun with a multitude of trashy, ephemeral productions, which threaten to consume our precious time, to bedwarf our minds, if not to corrupt our principles, while the master spirits of the world are neglected and kept out of view. These shallow, flippant trifles are every where pushed out into prominence and urged upon our attention. Brush them all aside, young gentlemen, and make your way directly to those noble minds, which are worthy to be the teachers of their race. Have the courage, or rather have the pride to be ignorant of the last novel and the last flimsy piece of biography, while you devote yourselves to those great authors, who will give you the English language in its purity and strength; who will familiarize your minds with vast, comprehensive views, with great fundamental principles, with sublime and splendid imagery, who will give you not merely sound, but thought—thoughts that breathe in words that burn; who will give you judgment instead of conceit. Live much in the society of such writers. You will insensibly catch their spirit, their mode of reasoning, and their tone of thought. The world of truth into which they will introduce you, will be a great world.

It was said of a certain memorable character, that he was not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in other men. And so it may be said of a great writer, a man of large and full mind, that he not only thinks himself, but makes his reader think—not only gives him something to think about, but by pregnant hints arouses his mind to activity, and sends it forth in a train of original thought. Let a man, for example, take up Bacon's Advancement of Learning, and he will not advance far, before such a magnificent view will be opened—such an impulse will be given to his mind, as will compel him to close the book that he may indulge his own thoughts—such thoughts too as are worthy to be indulged.

Indeed no two things can be more dissimilar than are the different paths by which a small mind and a great one conduct us to the same conclusion. In the one case the language is flat, the illustration low, the reasoning even though convincing, all on a diminutive scale.

The traveler is carried through a barren, uninteresting country—enjoys little and learns little by the way. The main proposition, at the most, is feebly made out, and that is all. In the other case, the language is rich, glowing, instinct with life—the illustrations are drawn from the noblest sources, from all ages and all countries; the reasoning is masculine, interwoven with great principles, and scatters all around the most pregnant truths on other subjects, as it moves toward the main point. The traveler is conducted through magnificent scenery, now treading the vale of Tempe, now gazing from Alpine heights, his mental eye regaled with many a goodly prospect, new discoveries delight him at every step, and at last he ends his excursion, not with a cold, narrow, diminutive view of the principal object, but with a view large as life itself—a view which embraces all relations, and which is glowing with light from every quarter of the heavens! Go back, Gentlemen, to the best days of English literature—to the age of Elizabeth, and those immediately succeeding. Converse with Shakspeare, and Bacon, and Milton, and Hooker and Taylor, and South, and the other giants that lived in those days. Select you well-tried authors—keep them by you—peruse and reperuse them—meditate upon them, till their very spirit is transfused into your minds. In doing this, you cannot fail to liberalize your tastes—you cannot fail to invigorate your reason and your imagination.

Let us pause, then, for a moment, and contemplate the man, who, to diligent attention to business unites liberal tastes and good intellectual habits. Not content with comforts and luxuries for the body, he has provided society for the mind. He has assembled a few at least, perhaps many, of the master spirits of ancient and modern times, and domesticated them in his apartments. For their sakes he is content to retire from the circle of idlers, to pass by the lounge in the coffee room, to leave unopened the last novel and the last review. He loves their society; and without neglecting any duty, any call of business, he always returns to them with pleasure, and finds that while conversing with them his spirits are calmed, his weariness subsides and his cares cease to annoy him.* Alway occupied with

* Heinsius, the keeper of the library at Leyden, used to say, "I no sooner come into the library but I bolt the door after me, excluding lust, ambition, avarice, and all scuh vices, whose nurse is idleness, the mother of ignorance and

some interesting subject, or some great work, he is never for a moment at a loss how to spend a vacant hour. Not satisfied with one perusal of an author, or one examination of a subject, he reviews, compares different authors and conflicting statements, searches for objections, keeps his judgment in suspense, and is anxious only to know the truth. Passing as he does from grave to gay, from lively to severe, from dulce to utile, he is never weary, his mind is always fresh and always buoyant. After a few moment's reading in the morning, more or less as he has time, he carries out into the world a striking thought, an interesting subject, or perhaps a volume, which may occupy his mind in vacant intervals during the day. Having a relish for the productions of the fine arts, and especially for the beauties of nature, his journeys gratify his taste; while his table attracts the intelligent, gives him the society of thinking men, and his substance, instead of being employed to surround him with a vulgar splendor, decorates his abode in accordance with a simple but elegant taste, or contributes to the well-being of others. *He needs no high excitements.* Petty irritations and little passions pass by him as the idle wind. Every day improves his taste, his judgment, his imagination. His reasoning powers are invigorated, while his mind is filled with great principles, with sound maxims, with beautiful images. Every evening he is soothed and sweetly encouraged by the consciousness of having made some acquisition during the day, of having enjoyed a refined pleasure, and contemplated for the first time a noble and important truth.

What a contrast to such a character is the mere man of business, who possesses no taste for reading, or who, reading only at random, masters no subject, acquires no accurate information, no vigorous logical habits, no liberal tastes; who is compelled to spend the intervals of business in dull vacuity, in frivolous conversation, or in gross sensual indulgence; who lavishes his substance to invest himself with a vulgar splendor; and seeks that excitement, which is so necessary to men void of intellectual tastes, in politics or in mad speculations!

Many of the advantages attending the possession of liberal tastes and good intellectual habits, must have been apparent in the course

melancholy herself; and in the very lap of eternity, amidst so many divine souls, I take my seat with so lofty a spirit and such sweet content, that I pity all the rich and great who know not this happiness."

of these remarks; but if you are not already too much fatigued, it may be well to employ a moment in reviewing them.

1. And, first, in regard to the disposition of leisure time. Gentlemen, we cannot always buy and sell—we cannot always toil or transact business. There will be intervals of leisure, or if there were not, there would be periods when mental or physical relief would be indispensable. Now this relief consists not in idleness, not in vacuity of thought or frivolous enjoyment. *It consists in change of occupation.* It is best obtained by having an *end* in view, one which will be always interesting in the contemplation, as well as agreeable in the means. If then we confine our view to the events of a single day, who appears the more dignified and happy; he, who, in a moment of leisure, can turn with a relish to the master spirits of the world, to the consideration of an important subject—who seizes a moment in the morning to converse with a lofty mind, whose thoughts will accompany him with their ennobling influences during the day, and who spends half an hour at least every evening in the same way; or the man, who, in a moment of leisure, knows not which way to turn for amusement, who loses these precious moments in a restless search for enjoyment, in idle revery, in frivolous conversation, or in dissipation? And if we extend our view through a whole life, we see a still greater disparity; the one constantly improving, the other retrograding—the one always furnished with a pleasant ennobling recreation, in the gratification of taste and intellect, the other always teasing himself for a device to kill time—the one conscious that he is improving, having always a rational object in view, the other living at random, unconscious of improvement, pursuing external things, which often cheat him, and never yield any solid satisfaction.

2. Again, in regard to society and conversation. In Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott we have an interesting account of an evening spent in conversation by the poet and Sir Humphrey Davy. I suppose it will be admitted that this conversation must have been a source of more interest, enjoyment and profit to them, than an evening's conversation could be to two uninformed men. *Every degree of improvement in knowledge and intellectual power gives increased interest and utility to conversation.* Now in this country the man of taste and information will always be drawn into circles, in which he is qualified to move, with which he can assimilate, no matter what

may be his external circumstances. The state of his own mind, therefore, will determine whether he is to find society, both at home and abroad, in circles bright with thought and intelligence, or in such as are feebly excited by dull common place trifles. Whoever desires to enjoy the pleasures of intellectual society must go prepared to contribute his due proportion of thought and information.

3. In the third place, in respect to business. We should certainly prosecute it with more *zest* if we drew more refreshment from the pure wells of literature. From such intervals of leisure or from such society, as I have described, we should return with new spirit and animation to the field of active duty, instead of being vexed and wearied by excitement, by exhausting dissipation, or by a mere vapid existence. Having our minds enlarged, balanced and tranquilized by study, we should conduct it with more wisdom and success. Not needing the excitement of speculation, being free from grasping avaricious passions, we should escape many perturbations, many catastrophes, arising from commercial gambling—we should conduct our business in a manner, not to ruin our character, I mean the habit and temper of our minds, while we provided for all rational wants.

4. Again, observe the advantages of liberal tastes and good intellectual habits in seasons of protracted solitude and inaction. Nothing can be more painful to an active man, accustomed to bustle, with no taste for reading or reflection, than to be removed from his usual haunts and confined by sickness, or than to be reduced to inactivity by pecuniary reverse. Who has not seen such a man, fretting on his bed, retarding his recovery by his impatience, and annoying all about him by his irritability! Now a taste for reading and above all a taste for *contemplation*, would render disease tolerable, and seclusion pleasant. So too in times of pecuniary reverse; instead of being miserable for want of an object, ready to exclaim, "ye have taken away my gods," a burden to himself and his family, his leisure would be cheered by the usual gratifications, of which nothing could deprive him, while from his calm, elevated temper, and his noble sentiments, he would bear up well—he would make the most of the means of enjoyment and of recovery that were left to him.

During the late pecuniary disasters, a friend of mine in the city of New-York, called in the evening to see a neighbor whose fortunes had perished in the general wreck. He found him pacing his parlor in a state of extreme disorder, complaining that he was miserable for the want of the usual occupations and excitements. He had been an active man all his life, thinking of business and thinking of nothing else. He lamented that he had not, like his wife, a taste for reading, from which he might derive amusement. He had relied for happiness on something external to his own mind, *something separable from himself*, something perishable—it had been removed, and he was wretched! How different was the spirit of Milton! When reproached by his enemies with his blindness, he replied, "to be blind is not miserable, but not to be able to bear blindness that is miserable indeed." Should not this merchant have been able to say, "to be poor is not miserable, but not to be able to bear poverty that is miserable indeed." Look, too, at Bacon in disappointment and adversity, stript of his employments, degraded and banished from court! How calmly he pursues his studies in retirement, composing his great works, prosecuting his experiments, and at last dying a martyr to his zeal for knowledge!*

Young Gentlemen,—Intellectual tastes and habits are not at the mercy of political and commercial gales; they are as imperishable as the spirit to which they belong.

5. Finally, contemplate man in advanced life. How difficult is it for him, without other tastes to retire from business with safety or with comfort; and where can we find a more melancholy spectacle than that of an old man sighing for employments and frivolities for which he is no longer fitted! He, too, like the unfortunate merchant, is miserable for the want of an object—for the want of employment. His faculties speedily begin to fail for lack of exercise, and then, alas! when his intellectual powers decay, his physical

* One day Lord Bacon was dictating to Dr. Rawley some of the experiments in his Sylva. Being called out to receive a friend from court, who came to inform him that a grant made to him by King James would not be confirmed, he dismissed him very cheerfully, and coming straightway to Dr. Rawley, said to him, "well, sir, yon business won't go on, let us go on with this for this is in our power." And then he dictated to him afresh for some hours, without the least hesitancy of speech or discernible interruption of thought.

energies almost always sink with them. Hence it is that mere business men often die so soon after going into retirement. Students, on the contrary, persons who have cultivated a taste for intellectual pleasures, enjoy a serene, delightful old age. The mind is furnished with a gentle, healthful exercise—the interest in knowledge is rather increased than diminished; and, in short, to them belongs, what the mere business man, without liberal tastes, never knows in his old age, the otium cum dignitate—a graceful and dignified leisure.*

6. To conclude, Gentlemen, let us remember, that externals, wealth, rank, influence, fame, pass away, while mind, immortal mind, *with all that has been wrought into it*, lasts through eternity. Knowing as we do that the holiness which is to make us happy hereafter, begins to make us happy here—may we not believe that the intellectual tastes and habits, which contribute so much to our enjoyment in this world, will contribute not a little to our enjoyment in the world to come? May we not anticipate that they will qualify us for a higher ministry, for loftier contemplation of the works and ways of God, and give a wider range, a more exquisite relish to the pleasures which we may hope to derive from converse with glorified spirits! Ours then be the prayer of the poet—

> "Father of light and life! thou good Supreme,
> O teach me what is good! teach me thyself;
> Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,
> From every low pursuit! and feed my soul
> With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure,
> Sacred, substantial, never fading bliss!"

* "Nam cetera," says Cicero, "neque temporum sunt neque ætatum omnium, neque locorum: *hæc studia* adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur."—*Oratio pro Archia Poeta.*