

1835

# An Address on Education, as Connected with the Permanence of Our Republican Institutions

Lucian Minor

---

## Repository Citation

Minor, Lucian, "An Address on Education, as Connected with the Permanence of Our Republican Institutions" (1835). *Faculty Publications*. 1320.

<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1320>

Copyright c 1835 by the authors. This article is brought to you by the William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository.

<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs>

## AN ADDRESS ON EDUCATION,

AS CONNECTED WITH THE PERMANENCE OF OUR REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS.

Delivered before the Institute of Education of Hampden Sidney College, at its Anniversary Meeting, September the 24th, 1835, on the invitation of that body,—by Lucian Minor, Esq. of Louisa.

[Published by request of the Institute.]

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Institute :

I am to offer you, and this large assembly, some thoughts upon EDUCATION, as a means of preserving the Republican Institutions of our country.

The sentiment of the Roman Senate, who, upon their general's return with the shattered remains of a great army from an almost annihilating defeat, thanked and applauded him for *not despairing of the Republic*, has, in later times, been moulded into an apothegm of political morality; and few sayings, of equal dignity, are now more hackneyed, than that "A good citizen will never despair of the commonwealth."

I shall hope to escape the anathema, and the charge of disloyalty to our popular institutions, implied in the terms of this apothegm, if I doubt, somewhat, its unqualified truth; when you consider how frequently omens of ruin, overclouding the sky of our country, have constrained the most unquestionable republican patriot's heart to quiver with alarm, if not to sink in despair.

When a factious minority, too strong to be punished as traitors, treasonably refuse to rally under their country's flag, in defence of her rights and in obedience to her laws; when a factious majority, by partial legislation, pervert the government to the ends of self-aggrandizement or tyranny; when mobs dethrone justice, by assuming to be her ministers, and rush madly to the destruction of property or of life; when artful demagogues, playing upon the credulity or the bad passions of a confiding multitude, sway them to measures the most adverse to the public good; or when a popular chief (though he were a Washington) contrives so far to plant his will in the place of law and of policy, that the people approve or condemn both measures and men, mainly if not solely, by his judgment or caprice; and when all history shews these identical causes (the offspring of ignorance and vice) to have overthrown every proud republic of former times;—then, surely, a Marcus Brutus or an Algernon Sidney,—the man whose heart is the most irrevocably sworn to liberty, and whose life, if required, would be a willing sacrifice upon her altars—must find the most gloomy forebodings often haunting his thoughts, and darkening his hopes.

Indeed, at the best, it is no trivial task, to conduct the affairs of a great people. Even in the tiny republics of antiquity, some twenty of which were crowded into a space less than two-thirds of Virginia,—government was no such simple machine, as some fond enthusiasts would have us believe it might be. The only very simple form of government, is despotism. There, every question of policy, every complicated problem of state economy, every knotty dispute respecting the rights or interests of individuals or of provinces, is at once solved by the intelligible and irreversible *sic volo* of a Nicholas or a Mohammed. But in republics, there are passions to soothe; clashing interests to reconcile; jarring opinions to mould into one result, for the general weal. To effect this, requires extensive and accurate knowledge,

supported by all the powers of reasoning and persuasion, in discussing not only systems of measures, but their minutest details, year after year, before successive councils, in successive generations: and supposing the machinery of Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary to be so simple or so happily adjusted, that an idiot might propel it, and a school-lad with the first four rules of arithmetic—or even "a negro boy with his knife and tally stick"—might regulate its movements and record their results; still, those other objects demand all the comprehension and energies of no contracted or feeble mind. Nor are these qualities needful only to the actual administrators of the government. Its proprietors, the people, must look both vigilantly and intelligently to its administration: for so liable is power to continual abuse; so perpetually is it tending to steal from them to their steward or their agent; that if they either want the requisite sagacity to judge of his acts, or substitute a blind confidence in him for that wise distrust, which all experience proves indispensable to the preservation of power in the people,—it will soon be *their* power no longer. A tame surrender of it to him is inevitable, unless they comprehend the subjects of his action well enough to judge the character of his acts: unless they know something of that vast and diversified field of policy, of duty, and of right, in which they have set him to labor. Yes—in its least perplexed form, on its most diminutive scale, the task of self-government is a perilously difficult one; difficult, in proportion to its nobleness: calling for the highest attributes of the human character. What, then, must it be, in a system so complex as ours? Two sets of public functionaries, to appoint and superintend: two sets of machinery to watch, and keep in order: each of them not only complicated within itself, but constantly tending to clash with the other. Viewing the State government alone, how many fearful dissensions have arisen, as to the extent of its powers, and the propriety of its acts! Turning then to the Federal government, how much more awful and numerous controversies, respecting both the constitutionality and expediency of its measures, have, within half a century, convulsed the whole Union! No less than three conjunctures within that time, threatening us with disunion and civil war; not to mention the troubles of the elder Adams' administration, the conspiracy of Burr, the Missouri dispute, or the cloud (now, I trust, about to disperse) which has just been lowering in our northern sky. To the complexity of our two governments, separately considered, add the delicate problems daily springing from their relations with one another, and from the mutual relations of the twenty-four states—disputes concerning territory; claims urged by citizens of one, against another state; or wrongs done to some states, by citizens and residents of others—all these, and innumerable other questions, involving each innumerable ramifications, continually starting up to try the wisdom and temper, if not to mar the peace, of our country;—and say, if there are words forcible and emphatic enough to express the need, that the POPULAR WILL, which supremely controls this labyrinthine complication of difficulties, should be enlightened by knowledge, tempered by kindness, and ruled by justice?

\* Mr. Randolph's Speech in the Virginia Convention, November, 1829.

Gentlemen, when such dangers hedge our political edifice; when we recollect the storms which have already burst upon it, and that, although it has survived them, we have no guarantee for its withstanding even less furious ones hereafter—as a ship may ride out many a tempest safely, and yet be so racked in her joints as to go down at last under a capful of wind; above all, when we reflect that the same cankers which have destroyed all former commonwealths, are now at work within our own;—it would betoken, to my view, more of irrational credulity than of patriotism, to feel that sanguine, unconditional confidence in the durability of our institutions, which those profess, who are perpetually making it the test of good citizenship “never to despair of the republic.”

But is it ever to be thus? Were then the visions of liberty for centuries on centuries, which our fathers so fondly cherished, all deceitful? Were the toil, and treasure, and blood they lavished as that liberty's price, all lavished in vain? Is there no deliverance for man, from the doom of subjection which kings and their minions pronounce against him? No remedy for the diseases which, in freedom's apparently most healthful state, menace her with death?

If it is not ever to be thus; if the anticipations of our revolutionary patriots were not all delusive dreams, and their blood fell not in vain to the ground; if man's general doom is not subjection, and the examples of his freedom are not mere deceitful glimmerings up of happiness above the fixed darkness which enwraps him, designed but to amuse his fancy and to cheat his hopes; if there is a remedy for the diseases that poison the health of liberty;—the reason—that remedy—can be found only in one short precept—ENLIGHTEN THE PEOPLE!

Nothing—I scruple not to avow—it has been my thought for years—nothing but my reliance on the efficacy of this precept, prevents my being, at this instant, a monarchist. Did I not, with burning confidence, believe that the people can be enlightened, and that they may so escape the dangers which encompass them, I should be for consigning them at once to the calm of hereditary monarchy. But this confidence makes me no monarchist: makes me, I trust, a true *whig*; not in the party acceptance of the day, but in the sense, employed by Jefferson, of one who trusts and cherishes the people.\* Throughout his life, we find that great statesman insisting upon popular instruction as an inseparable requisite to his belief in the permanency of any popular government: “Ignorance and bigotry,” said he, “like other insanities, are incapable of self-government.” His authority might be fortified by those of Sidney, Montesquieu, and of all who have written extensively or luminously upon free government: but this is no time for elaborate quotations; and indeed why cite authorities, to prove what is palpable to the glance?

Immense is the chasm to be filled, immeasurable the space to be traversed, between the present condition of mental culture in Virginia, and that which can be safe-

\* “The parties of Whig and Tory are those of nature. They exist in all countries, whether called by these names, or by those of Aristocrats and Democrats—*Côté droite* and *côté gauche*—Ultras and Radicals—Serviles and Liberals. The sickly, weakly, timid man, fears the people, and is a tory by nature. The healthy, strong, and bold, cherishes them, and is a whig by nature.” Jefferson.

ly relied upon, to save her from the dangers that hem round a democracy, unsupported by popular knowledge and virtue. Cyrus the Great, when a boy, among his play fellows, avoided contests with his inferiors in strength and swiftness; always challenging to the race or the wrestling match, those fleet and stronger than himself: by which means, observes Xenophon, he soon excelled them. Imitating this wise magnanimity of Cyrus, let us, in looking around to find how we may attain an excellence, worthy of Virginia's early and long illustrious but now paling fame, compare ourselves not with States that have been as neglectful as we, of popular education, but with some which have outstript us in that march of true glory.\*

The Common-school system of New York, which has been in operation since the year 1816, is in substance this: The counties having been already laid off into tracts of five or six miles square, called *townships*,—each of these, upon raising one half the sum needed there for teachers' wages, is entitled to have the other half furnished from the state treasury: and each *neighborhood* in the township, before it can receive any part of this joint sum, must organize itself as a *school district*, build and furnish a school house, and cause a school to be taught there for at least three months, by a teacher who has been examined and found duly qualified, by a standing committee, appointed for that purpose. To the schools thus established, all children, rich and poor alike, are admitted without charge. Mark the fruits of this system. In 1832, there were in the state 508,878 children; of whom 494,959 were *regular pupils at the common-schools*: leaving fewer than 14,000 for private or other instruction, and reducing the number who are unschooled, to an inappreciable point. In Massachusetts, the townships are compelled by law to defray nearly the whole expense of their schools; and the organization is in other respects less perfect than in New York. In each, however, about ONE-FOURTH of the whole population is receiving instruction for a considerable part of the year; and in Massachusetts, in 1832, there were but TEN persons between the ages of 14 and 21, who could not read and write.

Connecticut, with a school fund yielding 180,000 dollars annually, and with common schools established by law in every township, finds their efficacy in a great degree marred by a single error in her plan. This error is, that the whole expense is defrayed by the state. In consequence of this, the people take little interest in the schools; and the children are sent so irregularly, as to derive a very insignificant amount of beneficial instruction: so clearly is it shewn, that a *gratuity*, or what seems to be one, is but lightly valued. The statesmen of Connecticut, convinced that the only method of rousing the people from their indifference, is to make them contribute something for the schools in their own immediate neighborhood, and so become solicitous to get the worth of their money, are meditating the adoption of a plan like that of New York.

Even in Europe, we may find admirable, nay wonderful examples, for our imitation.

\* Montesquieu, mentioning the adoption, by the Romans, of an improved *buckler* from a conquered nation, remarks, that the chief secret of Roman greatness was, their renouncing any usage of their own, the moment they found a better one. [“Ils ont toujours renoncé à leurs usages, sitôt qu'ils en ont trouvé de meilleurs.”] *Grandeur et Decadence des Romains*—Chap. 1.

Prussia has a system, strikingly analogous to that of New York; and in some respects, superior to it. As in New York, the superintendence of popular education is entrusted to a distinct branch of the government; to a gradation of salaried officers, whose whole time is employed in regulating the courses of study, compiling or selecting books, examining teachers, and inspecting the schools. At suitable intervals, are schools expressly for the instruction of teachers: of which, in 1831, there existed thirty-three—supplying a stock of instructors, accomplished in all the various knowledge taught in the Prussian schools. In no country on earth—little as we might imagine it—is there probably so well taught a population as in Prussia. Witness the fact, that in 1831, out of 2,043,000 children in the kingdom, 2,021,000 regularly attended the common schools: leaving but 22,000 to be taught at their homes or in private academies.\* France, in 1833, adopted the Prussian plan, with effects already visible in the habits and employments of her people; and similar systems have long existed in Germany, and even in Austria. The schools for training teachers (called, in France and Germany, *normal schools*) pervade all these countries.

In England, government has yet done little towards educating the common people: but Scotland has long enjoyed *parish schools* equalled only by those of Prussia, Germany, and some of our own states, in creating a virtuous and intelligent yeomanry. Throughout Great Britain, voluntary associations for the diffusion of useful knowledge, in which are enrolled some of the most illustrious minds not only of the British empire but of this age, have been for years in active and salutary operation; and, by publishing cheap and simple tracts upon useful and entertaining subjects, and by sending over the country competent persons to deliver plain and popular lectures, illustrated by suitable apparatus, they have, as the North American Review expresses it, “poured floods of intellectual light upon the lower ranks of society.”

From a comparison with no one of the eight American and European states that I have mentioned, can Virginia find, in what she has done towards enlightening her people, the slightest warrant for that pre-eminent self-esteem, which, in some other respects, she is so well entitled to indulge. Except England, she is far behind them all: and even England (if her Societies for diffusing knowledge have not already placed her before us) is now preparing, by wise and beneficent legislation, to lead away with the rest.

Let me not be deemed unfilial or irreverent, if I expose, somewhat freely, the deficiencies of our venerable commonwealth in this one particular. It is done in a dutiful spirit, with a view purely to their amendment: and may not children, in such a spirit and with such a view, commune frankly with one another?

A great and obvious difference between our primary school system, and the *common-school* systems of the northern states, is, that *they* take in ALL children: while

\* The enumeration in Prussia, is of children between 7 and 14 years of age; in New York, of those between 5 and 16. In Prussia, the sending of all children to school is ensured by legal penalties upon parents, guardians, and masters, who fail to send. New York approximates remarkably to the same result, by simply enlisting the *interest* of her people in their schools.

† Ever since 1646, except 36 years, embracing the tyrannical and worthless reigns of Charles II and James II.

we aim to instruct only the children of the poor; *literary paupers*. We thus at once create two causes of failure: first, *the slight value which men set upon what costs them nothing*, as was evinced in the case of Connecticut; second, *the mortification to pride* (an honest though mistaken pride,) in being singled out as an object of charity.\* As if these fatal errors had not sufficiently ensured the impotence of the scheme, the schools themselves are the least efficient that could be devised. Instead of teachers retained expressly for the purpose,—selected, after strict examination into their capacities, and vigilantly superintended afterwards, by competent judges—the poor children are entered by the neighboring commissioner (often himself entirely unqualified either to teach or to direct teaching,) in the private school which chance, or the teacher's unfitness for any other employment, combined always with cheapness of price, may have already established nearest at hand. There, the little *protégé* of the commonwealth is thrown amongst pupils, whose parents pay for them and give some heed to their progress; and having no friend to see that he is properly instructed—mortified by the humiliating name of *poor scholar*—neglected by the teacher—and not rigorously urged to school by any one—he learns nothing, slackens his attendance, and soon quits the temple of science in rooted disgust.

Observe now, I pray you, how precisely the results agree with what might have been foretold, of such a system. In 1833, nearly 33,000 *poor children* (literary paupers) were found in 100 counties of Virginia; of whom but 17,081 attended school at all: and these 17,081 attended on an average, but SIXTY-FIVE DAYS OF THE YEAR, EACH! The average of learning acquired by each, during those 65 days, would be a curious subject of contemplation: but I know of no arithmetical rule, by which it could be ascertained. That it bears a much less proportion to the *reasonable* attainments of a full scholastic year, than 65 bears to the number of days in that year, there can be no doubt.

Ranging, out of the schools, through the general walks of society, we find among our poorer classes, and not seldom in the middling, an ignorance equally deplorable and mortifying. Judging by the number met with in *business* transactions, who cannot write their names or read, and considering how many there are whose poverty or sex debars them from such transactions, and lessens their chances of scholarship; we should scarcely exceed the truth, in estimating the *white adults of Virginia who cannot read or write, at twenty or thirty thousand*.

\* “What you say here, is verified” (said a venerable friend to me, on reading these sheets as they were preparing for the press—a friend who at the age of 72, has taken upon him to teach 12 or 14 boys; more than half of them without compensation—) “what you say here, is verified in my school. Those who do not pay, attend hardly half their time; and one, who is anxious to learn, and would learn if he came regularly, is kept by his father to work at home, and has not been to school now for more than a fortnight. And it was just so,” continued he, “when I managed the W. trust fund for a charity school, 20 odd years ago. The parents could not be induced to send their children. Sometimes they were wanted at home: sometimes they were too ragged to go abroad: sometimes they had no victuals to carry to school. And when we offered to furnish them provisions if they would attend, the parents said ‘no, that was being too dependent.’ In short, the school produced not half the good it might have done. There was the most striking difference between the charity scholars, and those who paid.” Similar testimony as to such schools may be obtained of hundreds.

And of many who can read, how contracted the range of intellect! The mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, all unexplored, though presented hourly to the eye; the glorious heavens, their grandeur, their distances, and the laws of their motion, unthought of; man himself—his structure, so fearful and so wonderful—those traits in his bodily and mental frame, attention to which would the most essentially conduce to bodily and mental health—all unnoted; History, Geography, *tabule rase* to them! And for political knowledge, upon which we of Virginia mainly pride ourselves—choose, at random, a man from the throng in any court-house yard, and question him touching the division of power between our two governments, and its distribution among the departments of each: the probabilities are ten to one, that he will not solve one in ten of your questions—even of those which are to be answered from the mere faces of the two constitutions. Take him then into that wild, where *construction* has been wont to expatiate, and you will find him just able to declare *for* or *against* this or that controverted power or measure: not because his reason has discerned it to be constitutional or otherwise, but because it is approved or disapproved by a chief of his own party, or by the leader of a hostile one. And the aggregate of opinions thus caught by accident, is the basis of the *popular will*: and it is the voice prompted by this will, that is called “*The voice of God!*”

Do not misapprehend me. Never would I have the voice of the people other than “the voice of God”—other than all-powerful—within its appropriate sphere. I am as loyal to their sovereignty as the most devout of their flatterers can be: and it is from my desire to see it perpetuated, that I speak out these unpalatable truths. Some roughness of handling is often necessary to heal a wound. The people, like other sovereigns, are sometimes misled by flattery: they should imitate also the wisdom of those monarchs we occasionally meet with in history, who can bear unwelcome truths, and let the speaker live; nay, hearken kindly to his discourse, and let it weigh upon their future conduct. Do I overrate the portion of the people I now address, in classing them with such monarchs?

Sagacious men have not been wanting among us, to see the radical defects of our primary school system: and in 1829, the late Mr. Fitzhugh\* of Fairfax, stimulated the Legislature to a feeble effort towards correcting them, by *empowering* the school commissioners of any county to lay it off into districts of not less than three nor more than seven miles square; and to pay, out of the public fund, *two-fifths* of the sum requisite for building a school house, and half a teacher's salary, for any one of those districts, whenever its inhabitants, by *voluntary subscription*, should raise the residue necessary for these purposes: and the schools thus established were to be open, gratuitously, alike to rich and poor. But the *permissive* phraseology of this statute completely neutralized its effect. It might have been foreseen, and it *was* foreseen, that *empowering* the commissioners to act, and leaving the rest to *voluntary contributions*, would be unavailing, where the workings of the

\* William H. Fitzhugh—whose death cannot yet cease to be deplored as a public calamity; cutting short, as it did, a career, which his extraordinary means and his devoted will alike bade fair to make a career of distinguished usefulness.

school system had so long been regarded with apathy. The statute has been acted upon, so far as I have learned, in but *three* counties of the State; remaining, as to the other 107, a dead letter. I have the strongest warrant—that of *actual experiment*, in New York and in Massachusetts—for saying, that had the law *commanded* the commissioners to lay off districts in all counties where the census shewed a sufficiently dense white population; and had it then organized in the districts some local authorities, whose *duty* it should be to levy the needful amount upon their people;—I should have been saved the ungracious task of reproaching my country with her want of parental care; and Virginia would now be striding onward, speedily to recover the ground she has lost in the career of true greatness.

If a sense of interest, and of duty, do not prompt her people, and her legislature, immediately, to supply defects so obvious, to correct evils so glaring; surely, very shame at the contemplation of her inferiority to those, above whom she once vaunted herself so highly, will induce measures which cannot be much longer deferred without disgrace as well as danger.

In addition to *normal schools* (for training teachers,) an able writer in the Edinburgh Review (to which\* I owe the particulars of the Prussian, German, and French school systems) suggests, in my opinion very judiciously, the attaching of a Professorship to Colleges, for lecturing upon the *art of instruction*; to be called the professorship of *Didactics*. Such a chair, ably filled, would be invaluable for multiplying enlightened teachers, and for enhancing the dignity of that under-estimated pursuit. Conjointly with the normal schools, it would soon ensure an abundant supply of instructors for all the common schools.

*The kinds of knowledge* which should be studied in the schools, and diffused by books, tracts, and oral lectures, among the people, form an important topic of consideration. It is not for me, at least now and here, to obtrude an inventory of my favorite subjects, or favorite books: but the claims of a few subjects upon our regard are so overshadowing, as to make dissent scarcely possible, and their omission wholly unpardonable, in any extensive view of the connexion between *popular education*, and *popular government*.

Foremost of these, is the subject of Constitutional Law, and Political Right: something of which might be taught, even in childhood. If the children of Rome were obliged, at school, to lay up in memory the laws of the Twelve Tables, with all their ferocious absurdities; how much more should the children of our country learn those fundamental laws, which guarantee to them the noble inheritance of a rational and virtuous freedom! Even to very young minds, the structure and powers of our two governments may be rendered intelligible by familiar and impartial treatises, with clear oral explanations. The merit of impartiality in these political lessons, is illustrated by the odiousness of a departure from it, which startled me the other day, in reading the THIRTY-FIFTH EDITION of a popular and in other respects an excellent History of the United States,† de-

\* Nos. 116, 117—July and October, 1833—reviewing several works of M. Cousin, who went as commissioner from France, to explore and report upon the Prussian and German systems of public instruction.

† By Charles A. Goodrich. The abstract of the Constitution is

signed for schools; where that section\* of the Federal Constitution which declares the powers of Congress, is presented thus: "The Congress of the United States shall have power to make and enforce *all laws which are necessary to the general welfare*—AS to lay and collect taxes," &c.—going on to enumerate the specified powers, as *mere examples* of Congressional omnipotence! And the myriads of tender minds, which probably already owe all their knowledge of the Constitution to the abstract where this precious morsel of political doctrine occurs, can hardly fail to carry through life the impression, that the powers of Congress are virtually as unbounded as those of the British Parliament. Now, to make patriots, and not partisans—upholders of vital faith, not of sectarian doctrine—treatises for the political instruction of youth should quote the *letter* of every such controverted passage, with a brief and fair statement of the opinions and reasonings on both sides. The course of political study would be very incomplete, without the Declaration of Independence, and Washington's Farewell Address: and occasion might readily be found to correct or guard against some fallacies, afloat among mankind, and often mischievously used as axioms. "That the majority should govern," is an instance of them: a saying, which, by being taken unqualifiedly as at all times placing *the majority* above the Constitution and Laws, has repeatedly caused both to be outraged. Witness the "New Court Law" of Kentucky, in 1825; and a very similar act passed by Congress, in 1801. The prevalent opinions, that parties, and party spirit, are salutary in a republic; that every citizen is in duty bound to join one or the other party; and that he ought to go *with his party*, in all measures, whether they be intrinsically proper or otherwise; if not fallacies so monstrous as to make their currency wonderful, are at least propositions so questionable and so important, as to make them worthy of long and thorough investigation before they be adopted as truths.

Without expending a word upon that trite theme, the *utility of history* to all who have any concern in government, I may be allowed to remark, that works for historical instruction, instead of being filled with sieges and battles, should unfold, as much as possible, those occult and less imposing circumstances, which often so materially influence the destinies of nations: the well-timed flattery—the lap-dog saved—the favorite's intrigue—the priest's resentment or ambition—to which field marshals owe their rise, cabinets their dissolution, massacres their carnage, or empires their overthrow. Yet the reader need not be denied the glow he will experience at the story of Thermopylæ, Marathon, Leuctra, or Bunker Hill. All those incidents, too, whether grand or minute, which may serve as warnings or as encouragements to posterity, should be placed in bold relief, and their influence on the current of events, clearly displayed. Numberless opportunities will occur, for impressing upon the minds of young republicans, truths which deeply concern the responsibilities involved in that name: the artifices of demagogues—the danger, in a democracy, of *trusting* implicitly to the honesty and skill of public agents—the worthlessness of popularity, unless it be "the popularity which follows, not that

which is run after"—the importance of learning to resist the erring impulses of a misguided multitude, not less than the unrighteous mandates of a frowning tyrant!—the ease, so often exemplified, with which a people may be duped by the *forms of freedom*, long after the substance is gone—the incredible aptitude of *example* to become precedent, and of precedent to ripen into law, until usurpation is established upon the ruins of liberty—and the difference between *true* and *false* GREATNESS, so little appreciated by the mass of mankind. This last point could not be better illustrated, than by a fair comparison of Washington with Bonaparte: a task which Dr. Channing, of Boston, has executed, in an essay among the most elegant and powerful in the English or any other language.

To render *Political Economy* intelligible to a moderate capacity, dissertations sufficiently plain and full might easily be extracted from the writings of Smith and Say, and from the many luminous discussions, oral and written, which it has undergone in our own country. Miss Martineau has shewn how well its truths may be set forth in the captivating form of tales: and the writings of Mr. Condé Raguet teem with felicitous illustrations.

*Practical Morals*—I mean that department, which teaches, and habituates us, to behave justly and kindly to our fellow creatures—will ever be poorly taught by dry precepts and formal essays. No vehicle of moral instruction is comparable to the striking narrative. How is it possible for any school-boy to rob an orchard, after having read Miss Edgeworth's "Tarlton?"—or to practise unfairness in any bargain, when he has glowed at the integrity of Francisco, in purposely shewing the *bruised side* of his melon to a purchaser? or not to loathe the party spirit, when he has been early imbued with the rational sentiments contained in the "Barring Out?" In short, to be familiar with the mass of that lady's incomparable writings for youth, and not have the principles and feelings of economy, industry, courage, honor, filial and fraternal love, engrained into his very soul? Or how can he fail to find, in "Sandford and Merton," for the daily occasions of life, the happiest lessons of duty and humanity, and for those great conjunctures which never occur in many a life time, the most resistless incentives to a more than Roman heroism?

Other branches of knowledge are desirable for the republican citizen, less from any peculiar appositeness to his character as such, than from their tendency to enlarge his mind; and especially because, by affording exhaustless stores of refined and innocent pleasure, they win him away from the haunts of sensuality. "I should not think the most exalted faculties a gift worthy of heaven," says Junius, "nor any assistance in their improvement a subject of gratitude to man, if I were not satisfied, that to inform the understanding, corrects and enlarges the heart." Felix Ness, the Alpine pastor, whose ardent, untiring benevolence, ten years ago, wrought what the indolent would deem miracles, in diffusing knowledge, and a love of knowledge, amongst an untutored peasantry, found their indifference towards *foreign missions* immovable, until they had learned something of *geography*: but so soon as they had read the

taken, he says, from "Webster's Elements of General Knowledge."

\* Article 1 § 8.

\* Lord Mansfield.

† The "*ardor civium prava jubarum*," not less than the "*vultus instantis tyranni*."

description of distant countries, and seen them upon the map, they conceived an interest in the people who dwelt there; and entered warmly into the scheme of beneficence, which before had solicited their attention in vain. "Their new acquirements," observes Ness, "enlarged their spirit, and made new creatures of them; seeming to triple their very existence." Geometry, he remarked, also "produced a happy moral development:" doubtless by the beauty of its unerring march to truth. Arithmetic it is superfluous to recommend: but its adjunct, Algebra, deserves cultivation as an exercise to the analyzing faculties; as an implement, indispensable to the prosecution of several other studies; and as opening a unique and curious field of knowledge to the view.

The *physical sciences*, shewing the composition and defects of soils, and the modes of remedying those defects—the natures and properties of minerals and vegetables—the modes in which different bodies affect each other—the mechanical powers—the structure of man's own frame, and the causes which benefit or injure it—the utility of these cannot escape any mind.

For books, and tracts, and oral lectures for the people, there will be no want of materials or models, or even of the actual fabrics themselves. The publications of the British and American Societies for the Diffusion of Knowledge, are mines, in which selection, compilation, and imitation, may work with the richest results to this great cause. Many of these productions, and still more eminently, the scientific writings of Dr. Franklin, afford most happy specimens of the style, suited to treatises for popular use: no parade of learning; no long word, where a short will serve the turn; no Latin or Greek derivative, where an Anglo-Saxon is at hand; no technical term, where a popular one can be used. By presenting, in a form thus brief, simple, and attractive, subjects which in their accustomed guise of learned and costly quartos or octavos, frighten away the common gaze, as from a Gorgon upon which none might look, and live, you may insinuate them into every dwelling, and every mind: the school urchin may find them neither incomprehensible, nor wearisome; and the laboring man be detained from the tippling house, and even for an hour, after the day's toil is over, from his pillow, to snatch a few morsels from the banquet of instruction.

Many will cavil at the attempt to disseminate generally, so extended a round of knowledge: and if, to escape the charge of *impracticability*, we say, that our aim is to impart merely a slight and general acquaintance with the proposed subjects,—then, *sciolism*, and *smattering*, will be imputed to the plan; and Pope's clever lines, so often misapplied, about the *intoxicating effect of shallow draughts from the Pierian Spring*, will be quoted upon us. Come the objection in prose or in verse, it is entirely fallacious.

Learning, either superficial or profound, intoxicates with vanity, only when it is confined to a few. It is by seeing or fancying himself wiser than those around him, that the pedant is puffed up. But now, all the community, male and female, are proposed to be made partakers of knowledge; and cannot be vain, of what all equally possess. Besides—the sort of knowledge that naturally engenders conceit and leads to error, is the *partial* knowledge of *details*; not a comprehensive

acquaintance with *outlines*, and *general principles*. A quack can use the lancet, and knows it to have been successfully employed for severe contusions and excessive heat; but does not know the *general fact*, that under extreme exhaustion, indicated by a suspended pulse, stimulants, and not depletives, are proper. Seeing a man just fallen from a scaffold, or exhausted with heat and fatigue in the harvest field—his pulse gone—the quack bleeds him, and the patient dies. Again—a loungee at judicial trials, having picked up a few legal doctrines and phrases—perhaps being master of a "Hening's Justice"—conceives himself a profound jurispudent; and besides tiring the ears of all his acquaintance with technical pedantry, he persuades a credulous neighbor, or plunges himself, into a long, expensive, and ruinous law-suit. The worthy Mr. Saddletree, and Poor Peter Peebles,\* are masterly pictures of such a personage: pictures, of which few experienced lawyers have not seen originals. The storm so lately (and perhaps even yet) impending from the north, and several other conspicuous ebullitions of fanaticism, are clearly traceable to the perversion of a text† in our Declaration of Independence and Bills of Rights, detached from its natural connexion with kindred and qualifying truths, by minds uninstructed in the *general principles* of civil and political right. The mind which has been accustomed only to a microscopic observation of one subject, or one set of subjects, is necessarily contracted, fanatical, and intolerant: as the wrinkled crone, who, during a long life, has never passed the hills environing her cabin, or heard of any land besides her own province, believes her native hamlet the choicest abode of wisdom and goodness, and its humble church the grandest specimen of architectural magnificence, in the world; and hears with incredulity or horror, of distant countries, containing mountains, rivers, climates, and cities, such as her thoughts never conceived, and people with complexions, customs, language, and religion, different from all that she has ever known. But the intellect, that has surveyed the outlines and observed the relations of many various subjects (even though not thoroughly familiar with any,) resembles the man who by travelling, or even on a map, has traced the boundaries and marked the relative positions of different countries. Knowing that *they exist*, and *are peopled*, he readily forms distinct ideas of their surfaces, and their moral traits: their mountains, rivers, and cities, their arts, commerce, manners, institutions, and wars, rise before his imagination, or are grasped by his knowledge: and whatever he hears, he is prepared rationally to credit or reject, to approve or censure, as it comports well or ill with probability and with reason. Now, to counteract the one, and to promote the other, of these two conditions of mind, are precisely what is proposed by the advocates of popular instruction. They propose to teach *outlines*; and carefully to impress the fact, that *only outlines are taught*: so as to shew the learner, plainly, the precise extent of his knowledge, and (what is yet more important) of his *ignorance*. It is thus, that, being not "proud that he hath learned so much," but rather "humble that he knows no more," vanity and self-conceit will be most certainly prevented:

\* In "The Heart of Mid Lothian," and "Redgauntlet."

† "All men are created equal," &c. This principle is, in substance, asserted in the Bill of Rights or Constitution of almost every State in the Union.

that a wise doubt of his own infallibility will make him tolerant of dissent from his opinions: that he will be prepared at all times to extend his acquisitions easily and judiciously, and to connect them well with previous acquisitions—proving how truly Blackstone has said, in paraphrase of Cicero,\* “the sciences are *social*, and flourish best in the neighborhood of each other:” in short, that he will approach most nearly to that “healthful, well proportioned” expansion of intellect and liberality of character, which Locke† terms a *large, sound, roundabout sense*. In this point of view, it will be found that “a little learning is” not “a dangerous thing.”

I am deeply sensible, that I have left untouched many topics, even more important and more pertinent to the main theme of my remarks, than some which I have discussed. Indeed, so wide and so varied is that main theme, that I have found myself greatly embarrassed in selecting from the numerous particulars which solicited my regard on every hand. I have not presumed to offer any fully rounded plan, of that legislative action which is so imperiously demanded by the public weal, and soon will be, I trust, by the public voice. A few hints, are all that seemed to become me, or indeed that could well be crowded into my brief share of this day’s time. For a plan, both in outline and in detail, I point to our sister states and to the European countries, that have taken the lead of us: and to the virtues and wisdom, by which our statesmen will be able to supply the defects, avoid the errors, and even, I trust, surpass the excellences, of those states and countries. That the Legislature may be wrought up to act, individual influence, and the more powerful influence of associations for the purpose—of whom I deem you, gentlemen, the chief, because the first—must be exerted. You must draw the minds of the constituent body forcibly to the subject. It must be held up in every light; supported by every argument; until the people shall be persuaded but to *consider* it. Then, half the work will have been done. And in its further progress towards consummation—when the illuminating process shall have fairly begun—still it will be for you, gentlemen, and for those whom your example shall call into this field of usefulness with and after you, to exert, with no slumbering energy, the endowments wherewith you and they, are entrusted. You, and they, must become authors, and the prompters of authors. Books, for use in the schools, and cheap, simplifying tracts as well as books for circulation among the people, must be composed, compiled, and selected. Lectures, plain and cheap, and suitably illustrated, must be delivered through town and country. After the example of the good Watts, and of our own many illustrious contemporaries in Britain and America, learned men must oblige Science to lay aside the starched dignity and grand attire, by which hitherto she has awed away the vulgar; and to render herself universally amiable, by being humbly useful: as the wisest‡ of heathens is said to have “brought Philosophy down from the skies, placed her in human havnts, and

made her discourse on the daily concerns of human life.”

In this whole enterprise, its undertakers should resolve to be convinced by no sneers, daunted by no difficulties, arrested by no obstacles. Difficulties and obstacles enough, indeed, will present themselves to the timid or superficial glance; but they will vanish, before calm scrutiny and brave determination. Even where the means of solving or removing them may not occur before hand to the mind, what was lately said in a worse cause, will prove to be true: “Where there is a *WILL*, there is a *WAY*.” In such a cause as ours, and in reference to the epithets of “visionary,” “impracticable,” “chimerical,” “Quixotic,” and all the other imaginary lions which will be discovered in our path, well may we say, with the generous confidence of Lord Chatham, that we “*trample upon impossibilities*.”

Has not our success, indeed, been already demonstrated? Demonstrated, in the first place, by unnumbered instances of parallel, and more stupendous enterprises, accomplished under circumstances less favorable than those which attend our undertaking? Such enterprises as the Reformation of Luther—the settlement of America—her deliverance from a foreign yoke—the teaching of the blind and the dumb\* to read and to write? Demonstrated, again, by actual *experiment*, that sovereign test of practicability—experiment, seven times repeated, with extensive, if not complete success—in New York, in Connecticut, in Massachusetts, in Austria, in Germany, in Prussia, in Scotland? Yes—it is no untried path we are called to tread: scarcely a step of the way, but has been explored and smoothed before us. All that we have to do, is to look around—see what others have done—correct our own procedure by what we perceive defective in theirs—and forthwith open the floodgates of light, and bid the torrent pour.

Young gentlemen, foster-sons of the venerable institution near us! Some, if not all of you, are destined by your opportunities, and by bosoms glowing with honorable ambition, and beating high with the consciousness of talent, for a conspicuous part in the drama of life. Your eyes, doubtless, have already often glanced around, to see in what field you shall reap the harvest of wealth, respect, and fame, which hope represents as awaiting you. The buzz of notoriety, the palm of eloquence, the gorgeousness of office—those glittering bribes, which have lured onward their tens of thousands to mere splendid misery or to a shameful end after all—have, no doubt, displayed their attractions to you: but permit me to suggest, that if you will devote the powers with which nature and education have gifted you, to the patriot task of purifying and expanding the minds of your countrymen—besides enjoying in your latter days that sweetest of earthly thoughts, the thought of a life spent in usefulness—you may have gathered laurels of glory, compared with which, all the chaplets ever won in the tilt-yard of vulgar ambition are paltry weeds.

My wealthy fellow citizens! remember, that where

\* —“omnes artes, quae ad humanitatem pertinent, habent quoddam commune vinculum, et quasi cognatione quadam inter sese continentur.” *Orat. pro Arch. Poet.*

† Conduct of the Understanding.

‡ Socrates. “Primus ille Philosophiam devocavit e caelo, et in urbibus collocavit, et in domus introduxit; et coegit de vita et moribus, rebusque bonis et malis quaerere.” *Cic. Tuscul. 5.*

\* Dr. Johnson, after having witnessed the surprising performances of the pupils in a College for the deaf and dumb at Edinburgh in 1773, concluded that such a triumph over an infirmity apparently irremediable, left nothing hopeless to human resolution. “After having seen the deaf taught arithmetic,” says he, “who would be afraid to cultivate the Hebrides?” *Journey to the Western Islands.*

suffrage is nearly universal and the majority rules, if the great body of the people be ignorant or immoral, property is never secure from assaults, under the disguise of law: either agrarian schemes, or oppressive protecting systems, or advantages to certain classes, or some form of unequal taxation; all, the result of ill-informed minds, or of depraved dispositions. And if lawlessness assume not the garb of legislation, still it is always banded with ignorance in the firing of barns, the destruction of labor-saving machinery,\* conspiracies to raise wages, and all the terrific outrages that spring from the fury of mobs. Thus, by a wise Providence, are you, who are the most *able* to promote the education of the people, also by far the most *interested* in doing so. If there can be a case, in which a judicious liberality is the truest economy, that case is now yours: and never may the *ill husbandry of niggardliness* be more awfully exemplified, than by your grudging a small particle of your wealth, to place the remainder beyond the reach of this peril.

My fellow citizens (if any such are before me) who do not possess wealth, and who have scarcely tasted of the cup of knowledge! You surely need no exhortation to quaff freely of that cup, when it shall come within your grasp: but I do exhort you to employ your influence as men, and your constitutional power as voters, in persuading your fellow citizens, and in prompting your public agents, to adopt the requisite measures for dispelling, now and forever, the clouds and darkness in which republican freedom can never long live.

And if, at the remotest point of future time, to which we may look forward as witnessing the existence of human government any where, our democratic forms shall still retain, unimpaired, even their present purity, and present fertility of substantial freedom and happiness; much more, if they shall have waxed purer, and stronger, and more fruitful of good, with each revolving century,—defying the power or conciliating the love of foreign states—maintaining domestic harmony—oppressing none, protecting all—and so fully realizing the fondest hopes of the most sanguine statesman, that no “despair of the republic” can trouble the faintest heart:—all will be owing (under Providence,) to the hearkening of this generation and the succeeding ones, to that voice—not loud, but solemn and earnest—which, from the shrine of Reason and the tombs of buried commonwealths, reiterates and enforces the momentous precept—“ENLIGHTEN THE PEOPLE!”

---