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The Importance of a Purified Literature.

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ADDRESS

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AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE

ASSOCIATED ALUMNI

OF

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,

AUGUST, 1833.

By **DANIEL DANA, D. D.**

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY PERKINS & MARVIN.

1834.

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STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS
V. THE COMMONWEALTH

ADDRESS.

THE aspects of the present time are peculiar. They have no parallel in the history of man. We know, indeed, that present objects, and scenes just passing; objects and scenes in which we have a personal interest; assume, frequently, a factitious magnitude and importance. But here, there is no room for deception. If, in viewing the characteristics of the age, our first impressions have a deep and startling interest, the interest and the apprehension are but deepened by the maturest reflection.

The whole civilized world seems pervaded by a most extraordinary impulse. In government, in the social system, in politics, in morals, in religion itself, nothing seems stable and fixed. Every thing is turbid and revolutionary. Elements are at work, from which must spring, either an unknown beauty and order, or "confusion worse confounded." The human mind itself is unhinged. Principles sanctioned by the wisdom of ages, disappear in a moment, at a flight of specious eloquence, or the dash of a reckless pen. At a period when, more than ever before, the lights of experience are indispensable, thousands are busied only with new *experiments*; or bewildered with untried, or exploded theories.

When we turn our eyes to Europe, we behold a world of minds in a state of agitation; the great question of absolute or liberal government, much unsettled; and the path to freedom and enjoyment, if these objects are to be ultimately reached, lying, perhaps, through a sea of blood and suffering. In our own country, as we fondly hope, the grand point is set at rest; the season of danger past; and we please ourselves with the prospect of uninterrupted tranquillity; of

interminable and unparalleled enjoyment. But who sees not that these day-dreams may prove as transient, as they are splendid? In the very luxuriance of our blessings and our hopes, are found the productive sources of danger. In our extended and flourishing republic, how many corruptions spring. How many conflicts of interest; and still severer conflicts of passion. How many stains deform the fair face of our country. How many maladies prey at her very heart. Who can tell that the mine is not already prepared, whose explosion will prove the wreck of our most valued enjoyments, and our dearest hopes?

In such a condition of things, to look for direction and safety, to any other wisdom and power than that which made, and which governs the world, would be something worse than folly. It would be atheism and madness. No nation on which the sun looks down, has equal reason with ours, to feel its dependence on the Sovereign of the universe; for none is so deeply indebted; and none has so much to lose.

But our protection, if we are to stand, will come, not by miracles, but by means. Among these means, **LITERATURE**—we use the word in its largest sense—literature, next to religion, occupies the first and principal place. With entire confidence it may be asserted, that if those precious institutions which are the guard and the glory of our country; which give her an envied pre-eminence among the nations; are to be maintained, and transmitted down to distant posterity; she will owe the blessing, under God, to a sound and healthful literature.

In pursuance of this general idea, we will attempt a brief illustration of the *immense and controlling influence* which literature is destined to exert on the great interests of our republic. This will prepare the way to consider some *leading characteristics* of that literature which may be expected to prove a real blessing.

We judge of the future by the past; and “reason but from what we know.” The great Creator governs his immense empire by certain immutable principles. All the astonishing beauty and order and harmony which meet us in the natural world, result from the operation of a few simple and unvarying laws. Throughout the brutal creation, the purposes of infinite wisdom and benevolence are accomplished by something which we call instinct. But in the intellectual and moral world, the sovereign sway is exercised

by mind. "*Mind*," says the ancient sage, "is supreme, in heaven and earth." In the constitution, however, of different minds, we perceive that immense and endless variety in which, throughout his works, the Creator seems to delight. Is there not reason to believe that among the human species, there arise, from age to age, individual minds of finer temperament than ordinary; of more acute perceptions; of more extensive range; and more easily accessible to the influences of science of almost every kind? Such are the minds to which is usually ascribed the praise of *genius*.

But genius, with all its boasted and brilliant attributes, is an equivocal blessing. Frequently have its seductions proved fatal to its possessor; while its glare, and its eccentricities, like those of the comet, have portended only evil to the world. At best, it has accomplished, without the aid of science, almost nothing which is truly valuable. It was the acknowledgment of the admired Newton, that if he had effected any important good to mankind, he owed it chiefly to patient thought, and laborious application. In every age, those whom Heaven has raised up as distinguished instruments of usefulness to mankind, have been men who to native vigor of mind, have added the culture of discipline, and the ample stores of science. Such are the men who have been lights of the world, and guides of their species; men who have stamped their own opinions and characters on thousands and millions of their fellow-men.

It would be easy to illustrate this thought by the induction of a variety of particulars.

To recur a moment to that volume which, infinitely more than all others, has formed the minds, and fixed the everlasting destinies of mankind. By whom was it written? Obviously by men of minds not only powerful by nature, but expanded and enriched by various knowledge. True, they were divinely inspired. But this inspiration, while it effectually shielded them from error of every kind, did not render either needless, or useless, their own faculties, or acquisitions. Of this we have proof in the fact, that they all have a style and turn of thought peculiar to themselves. Consider the illustrious leader and lawgiver of the Jews; the writer of a most important portion of the sacred volume. He was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." And Egypt, since so dark and degraded, was then the eye of the world; the chief depository of all the human science that existed.

As to Paul, the principal penman of the New Testament, we can scarcely turn a page of his writings, without perceiving a mind powerful, profound, discursive; fearlessly grasping the sublimest themes, and familiarly pouring out the richest treasures of divine knowledge. Nor can we accompany him to Areopagus, without acknowledging his consummate acquaintance with Grecian learning and philosophy. Such were the accomplished scholars whom Heaven in its wisdom selected as the depositaries of its own truth, and the instructors and guides of an erring race.

When the light of divine truth, which for centuries had blessed the world, was nearly extinguished; when darkness that might be felt, brooded over the nations,—who were the selected instruments of rekindling the hallowed flame? Were they men of feeble powers, and stinted acquisitions? No. The Reformers were great men; powerful in intellect; affluent in the stores of human, as well as divine knowledge; masterly in reasoning; and sublime, though simple, in eloquence. These were the men who shook the papal throne; shook Europe, and the civilized world; and struck a blow in the earth whose vibrations are felt at this distant moment.

That the Fathers of New England were *good* men, is generally admitted. In the judgment, however, of many of their descendants, their eyes were but half opened to the light. Nor were they free from a deep tincture, both of bigotry and enthusiasm. That they had the infirmities of men, with some of the errors peculiar to their age, we readily grant. But unshaken adherence to truth is not bigotry. Nor is a deep and pervading sense of its power, enthusiasm. And if our ancestors sometimes passed insensibly the hairbreadth line of *separation*, it becomes not us, whose deviations may be far greater, though in a different direction, to cast the first stone. They were eminent men; eminent not only in piety and goodness, but in mental sagacity and power; in learning, divine and human; in depth of plan, and prospective wisdom. “God sifted,” it has been truly said, “a whole nation, that he might send the choicest grain into this wilderness.” And where is the wilderness now? If it is transformed into a delightful garden; a garden luxuriant in beauty and fragrance; in flowers and fruits; we owe it to the process of cultivation commenced by our pilgrim fathers. Those distinguished men lived less for themselves than for

posterity. In the institutions, literary, civil and sacred, which they have left us, we read an exalted wisdom ; a profound and far-reaching intelligence. And when, since time began, was there a fairer, richer inheritance transmitted from parents to children ?

In estimating the influence of literature on man, and on society, it is impossible to overlook the sages of ancient Greece. That little spot was, for centuries, the most luminous on the globe. Not only so ; it was the radiating point whence the light of learning was diffused over the civilized nations of the earth. It is true, that in most departments of what is distinctively called *science*, the philosophers and literati of Greece made but small proficiency, compared with what is witnessed in modern times. But in polite literature, in poetry, in eloquence, in the power of refined thought, and exquisitely polished composition, they occupy an undisputed pre-eminence. They have been admired, and will continue to be admired, in proportion to the prevalence of a delicate and correct taste. As to the famous Stagirite, his claims, as *master of universal science* ; as the *secretary of nature herself, dipping his pen in intellect*, will scarcely be admitted now. But some portion of praise is surely due to him who, boldly invading the broad field of human science, has left on almost every part, the inprint of his footsteps ; to him who, on a vast variety of subjects, has uttered a vast variety of truths not uttered before. Nor can that have been a mind of small power, which, for a thousand years, not only made its influence felt in the republic of letters, but converted that republic into a *despotism* ; a despotism governed with uncontrolled and undisputed sway.

But the path to truth which the searching eye of Aristotle failed to discover, was reserved for the greatest of British writers, and the brightest luminary of modern times. It was Bacon who first made the world see, that what had for ages and centuries passed for knowledge was but a kind of *learned ignorance* ; that the very mode of investigating truth had been misapprehended ; that if mankind would not remain in perpetual and hopeless estrangement from it, they must commence the search anew. In a word, he taught that truth was to be approached and secured, not through the medium of bold theory, but of careful observation and experiment ; of cool and cautious induction. This was a grand and powerful conception, which, like lightning breaking on midnight,

revealed a world shrouded in darkness before. Or rather, it resembled the first gleam of morning light. It promised, and it gradually ushered in, a bright and glorious day.

Of this wonderful man, it has been justly remarked, that his great merit was, that he himself had no *philosophy*, (considering the word as implying a sect, or school,) but he taught mankind the right *method* of philosophizing. He closed the paths which lead astray from truth, and opened the safe and only road to real science. He demolished, as it were, at a stroke, a thousand existing theories; and thus did a far greater service to the world, than if he had constructed a thousand more.

It is not contended that no philosopher who preceded Bacon, investigated truth by observation and experiment; nor that all his successors who adopted the system, explicitly recognized him as their great master and model. But if he was the first in distinctly announcing the principle; in illustrating its value, its power, its essential necessity, its application; and in exposing the futility of other modes of seeking truth; then he claims a distinguished pre-eminence, not only as a benefactor of science, but as a philosopher, and man of genius. Nor ought his claim to be denied.

Since the time of Bacon, knowledge has advanced with a much accelerated step. Numbers have followed in the path which he so luminously traced out; and have become, in their turn, the guiding lights of their species. Newton, assuming the humble but sublime office of *interpreter of nature*, has penetrated her recesses, revealed her secrets, expounded her laws, and in a thousand instances, substituted demonstration in the place of uncertainty and conjecture. With corresponding ardor, if not with equal success, Locke has explored the world of *mind*; endeavoring to trace its faculties and operations, with the sources, means and limitations of its knowledge. This broad and boundless field, thus entered, has attracted, in subsequent times, a multitude of zealous and diligent cultivators. That all have labored with success, will scarcely be pretended; unless it can be shown that theories opposing each other at almost every point, can be equally true. Indeed, we have much to convince us that mental science is even now in a very imperfect state. Yet each of the theories to which we have alluded, has had its day; and probably its share of influence in moulding the opinions of men on many of the most interesting subjects of

human thought—on government, on laws, on morals, on religion. If, even in such a state of things, the science of mind has produced such important effects, what may not be anticipated, when the discordant elements shall be arranged, and light break in upon all the darkness?

In short, look where we will ; on the present, or the past ; on our own country, or abroad ; we shall perceive the mighty, pervading, controlling influence of knowledge. We shall perceive that intelligence is power. We shall perceive that men of vigorous and highly-cultivated minds have sent forth an influence which has been felt through whole communities ; an influence which has guided their sentiments, formed their taste, dictated their laws, moulded their institutions, and, under God, stamped their destinies.

But if, in other lands, and other ages, the power of *mind* has been thus manifest, and the effects of knowledge thus important ; what results from these sources may not be anticipated in our own country, and in the remarkable era on which we have entered ?

Consider the nature of our government ; based on the broadest principles of truth and right ; and involving every degree of liberty which can consist with energy and order. What conceivable state of things could be equally conducive to the most vigorous exercise of mind ; to its largest expansion ; to its loftiest elevation ; to the richest accumulation of the treasures of science ; or to their most extensive diffusion through the community ?

We have a press, active and prolific beyond example. With surprising facility, the product of one mind becomes the property of a million minds. The strong conceptions, the heart-thrilling sentiments which rise in the bosom of the gifted individual, need not die in their birth. He may assemble the nation around him. He may make himself heard and felt in the remotest extremes of the community. He may impart his ardor to future ages ; and he may enkindle lights which shall shine in other worlds.

We are a nation of readers. Books on almost all subjects find their way, not only to the splendid mansions of the rich, but to the cottages of the poor. Some of the most valuable productions of Great Britain are more extensively read among our people, than in the land that gave them birth.

The disposition to read being thus general, it follows of course, that *authors* have their share of encouragement. The

period has gone by, in which American writers might justly complain of neglect. Indeed, the complaints uttered on this topic have been for a century past extravagant, if not entirely unreasonable. In the article of standard literature, the demand has generally been greater than the supply. And now that, for thirty years, the supply has been somewhat rapidly increasing, it is still outrun by the demand. The reading public may be sometimes capricious; but generally speaking, American writers are patronized to the full measure of their just claims.

Another security for the progress and the success of our literature, is found in our primary schools. This institution we owe to the sagacity and provident care of our venerable fathers. Yes; those *narrow-minded* men, in the day of their penury, and distress, and peril, laid broader foundations for instruction even in *classical* literature, than we, in our boasted era of light, and refinement, and prosperity, have retained and built upon. Still, while these provisions for elementary instruction are preserved in any degree of purity and vigor, they will be our safety and glory. They will stand as pledges that our freedom, our government, our laws, our religion will be maintained and perpetuated.

Of the rapid and unexampled multiplication of our colleges, what shall we say? In mathematical phrase, it tends to increase the *superficies* of our literature, more perhaps, than its *solid content*. In this way learning may be diffused; but will it not probably be diluted too? If, however, these institutions shall strenuously maintain their dignity and claims; if they shall vigorously press to higher and higher attainments; they will ultimately become sources of much good; precious fountains, fertilizing by their numerous streams every region of our land.

From the brief view we have taken, we are warranted to conclude that literature is destined to exert a wide-spread and most important influence in our country. Let us pause, and consider some of the leading characteristics which are requisite to render it a real blessing.

Here we may safely remark, that that literature alone is worthy of our support, which is itself supported on the basis of *truth*. In this remark, we do not include an unqualified denial of the legitimacy of fiction. Nor is it needful to adopt the shrewd objection of the mathematician against the poems of Homer; that though they were very fine, they *proved*

nothing. Let the poet, if he pleases, expatiate in an ideal world of his own creation. And let the writer of romance, if pure in his aims, his sentiments, and his style, try the power of his favorite instrument in promoting the interests of virtue. But when romance assumes the name of history, let its arrogant claim be rejected with contempt. It is a well-known incident in the life of Voltaire, that when, in a literary circle, certain statements in his "Age of Louis Fourteenth," were demonstrated to him to be untruths, he replied, without either resentment or blush, 'that he was well aware of it; that he never supposed them truths; and that he wrote, not to be believed, but to be read.' If every author were thus scrutinized; if every history were thus divested of its fictions, how many bulky tomes which occupy our libraries, would shrink to very reasonable dimensions. And is it not worthy an inquiry, whether *professed* romances, assuming for their basis the characters and the facts of legitimate history, and giving them a new shape and aspect, new features and complexion, are wholly innocent in their effects? Is it not a serious evil, that they *vitiate the truth of history*, and fill the mind with a motley, inextricable tissue of fact and falsehood. Indeed, they give to falsehood a decided ascendancy over truth. For no one needs be told that those vivid descriptions which seize the fancy, gain a far surer lodgment in the memory than mere naked statements of fact.

But it is not in history solely, nor even principally, that we perceive the importance of truth. Many works on natural science, which have been long received, and are not yet banished, nor discredited, are so replete with mistakes, that to store the mind with them, is to fill it with darkness, rather than with light. How many grave and learned systems of metaphysics are mere resurrections of long-buried errors. How many others exhibit such mutual discrepancies, that among half a score, one only can be right; while the probability is, that all are wrong. It would be easy to name celebrated and long-current treatises of ethics which, amid many truths, incorporate a *πρωτον ψεύδος*, a first and fundamental error, which mars and vitiates the whole. What can we say of many of the metaphysical, moral and theological systems which pour upon us, in such floods, from Germany, but that they exhibit, with an absence of common sense, the absurdities of false learning, the rovings of unbridled imagination, and not unfrequently, the very madness of impiety.

Whatever is conceded to the right of free inquiry, (and no one can rationally wish to suppress or abridge it,) it cannot be denied that errors of every kind, however plausibly supported, or by whatever celebrated names recommended, are mere incumbrances on science. As little can it be doubted, that moral and religious errors are dangerous ; contaminating to the youthful mind ; polluting to the heart of the community. The nation whose literature is thoroughly imbued with errors of this description, is in a hazardous state. The flush of health may appear in its countenance ; but a secret and mortal poison corrodes its vitals.

Our second remark is, that the literature we need, is *solid*, not specious, superficial and trifling. It has been stated that we are a nation of readers. And it would be delightful to believe that the public intellect is enlightened and improved, in proportion to the prevalence of this reading disposition. But this would probably be a great mistake. Many of the productions which issue from our press, are such as make no pretensions to impart sound and improving knowledge. With the materials they furnish, the mind may be fed to repletion, and yet pine and starve. How many of our public literary journals give us the shreds and patches and remnants of literature, rather than literature itself. How much specious learning, and imposing scholarship has been manufactured from the mere perusal of *reviews*. Concerning this modern vehicle of literature, it is, indeed, not easy to pronounce a correct and definite opinion. A review, conducted with candor and impartiality, replete with good taste, and accurately applying the sober and long-established principles of criticism to works of the passing time, is undoubtedly a public blessing. But a review, devoid of learning and good sense ; the instrument of party, or of avarice ; pouring out praise and censure by wholesale ; made up of disgusting eulogy, and malignant, cold-blooded satire ; is emphatically a public nuisance. Indeed, these journals, so far as they acquire an ascendancy which forestalls and prescribes the public judgment ; and thus relieves the reader from the burden of thought and investigation, become obstacles, rather than aids, to good sense and sound learning. And perhaps their most serious inconvenience is, that they nourish indolence, and foster self-conceit, by furnishing to thousands of superficial readers, the shadow, or semblance of knowledge, without the solid reality.

Similar objections lie against no small portion of those *abridgments* and *epitomes* of science which, of recent time, have deluged the community, and gained possession of many of our literary seminaries. These modern improvements, if they have their use, are susceptible likewise of egregious abuse. They may, in certain cases, be pioneers in the region of science; but they never can subdue and appropriate it. The student who is content with them, will find that if he has grasped at learning, he has embraced a cloud. And yet, in virtue of these sage discoveries, some of our academies, it should seem, impart more science to their pupils in a year or two, than is gained in the course of a seven years' residence at a university.

But these delusions, like all other delusions, will pass away. And for a consummation so important, we look with confidence to our higher seminaries; and especially to those of them which, from their long experience and established character, can speak and act with authority and effect. Nor do we suspect a disappointment. Colleges of this description will not be deluded by these false lights. They will not degrade the dignity, nor abandon the claims of solid, real learning. They will not suffer their pupils to dabble at the streamlets of science, when its pure and ever-gushing fountains are at hand. They will not see them lingering on the margin of the immense ocean, but will plunge them in its profundities. They will prepare and send forth to the world, not sciolists, but scholars; scholars initiated in all the mysteries of ancient and modern learning; scholars disciplined in their faculties, expanded in their views, affluent in real knowledge, *saturated* with genuine science. These are the men whose character, whose influence, whose high attainments will medicine the public mind, and put to flight the maladies of the day. The light of genuine science shall be restored; and the pale and sickly meteors which have usurped its place shall retire and vanish.

A third characteristic of the literature demanded by our age and our country is, that it be *useful* and *practical*, rather than speculative, or merely ornamental. The time is gone by, when the scholar could creditably employ himself in constructing or illustrating systems of no real interest or utility; or consume a long life in *laboriously doing nothing*. A learned treatise on the shield of one of Homer's heroes, or the precise number of soldiers incarcerated in the Trojan

horse, though it might have been read with avidity two centuries since, would find little favor now. These fopperies of learning have long since given place to grave and solid realities. Even in the physical world, mere niceties are in little present demand. Philosophy, according to the wish of the Athenian sage, has come down from her heaven, and makes her abode with men. Learning, issuing forth from her cloisters, and bringing all her capabilities into full action, produces changes the most astonishing in the face of human affairs. Never was the control of mind over matter so completely established before. Never did science so generously open its stores to aid the progress of art. Never did the progress of art so completely remunerate the contributions of science. Nature is pursued into her remotest retreats. Her choicest secrets are disclosed; and all her elements, and all her powers, become tributary to the convenience and even the luxury of man.

This unparalleled state of things sends forth an impulse which is felt among all classes of society. The scholar feels it in his closet, and the philosopher in his seclusion. Each begins to recognize the demands of the age; to be convinced that he has a part to act. Indolence gives way to exertion; barren speculations and theories are exchanged for practice; and the luxuries of literature are supplanted by its solid, sober realities. Men of superior minds begin to feel that the treasures of knowledge are not only to be accumulated, but imparted; and that to accumulate without imparting, is to act but a selfish and inglorious part. They feel, too, that those branches of knowledge are most worthy of cultivation, which are most susceptible of a practical application and use. And the conviction, we hope, is gradually pervading the community, that the value of every species of science is to be estimated by its tendency and effect; that all learning is worthless, which does not go to promote the benefit of man; his real benefit, either in personal improvement and comfort, or in domestic and social enjoyment, or in his character and influence as a member of the state, or in his relations to God and to immortality.

Still, there are some strong contrary appearances, and those somewhat ominous. How shall it be explained, that in an age thus eminently practical; an age distinguished for the cultivation of natural science; an age, too, in which the comforts and luxuries of *real* life abound, no small portion of

the reading community continually dwell in an *ideal* world of their own? Works addressed to the imagination; works which stimulate it to its highest exercise, and thus impart ultimately an excessive and morbid sensibility—these are the works which the public appetite has craved, and with which it has been fed and feasted to satiety. Is such a condition of things desirable or safe? Does it indicate a healthful state of the public taste? Does it bode well for the present or the coming age? Grant that the imagination has its legitimate demands—demands which in the case, emphatically, of the young, ought to be gratified to a certain extent. Does not the youthful imagination itself need to be repressed, rather than stimulated? And what if the works to which we have alluded, directly tend, in their frequent and familiar perusal, to unhinge the mind; to disgust it with every-day scenes; to unfit it for ordinary duties; to disqualify it for sober enjoyments? What if they introduce it to characters and scenes and sentiments and passions which vitiate the moral taste; which corrupt the heart to its centre; and which, sweeping away the mounds of purity and virtue, open a thousand avenues to temptation? In a word, what if they so occupy the time, the imagination, and the feelings, that God and eternity are forgotten; and neither leisure nor inclination is left for the proper business of a transient and probationary life?

Fourthly. We need a literature which, while constantly improving, shall *not be extravagantly revolutionary*. That, during the last half century, the most prominent feature in the face of the old world, has been *revolution*, will not readily be questioned. Thrones have been erected and destroyed; dynasties have risen and disappeared; ancient landmarks have been removed; the most venerated institutions have vanished away; and the whole frame of society has been convulsed to its centre. Connected with these changes, perhaps resulting from them, changes not less astonishing have been exhibited in the world of science. New fields of knowledge have been explored and possessed; the whole circle of arts has been surprisingly improved; scientific principles and theories, long unquestioned, have been exploded; and other principles and theories have occupied their place. The minds of men, animated with an extraordinary impulse, and dissatisfied with all existing things, have soared into new regions, and busied themselves with new creations.

In our own country, the state and aspects of things are cor-

respondent. Indeed, our national existence is but of yesterday; and we were cradled in revolution. And now we have arrived at the period of youth, have we not, with the ardor, and the energy of that period, a full portion, too, of its waywardness and vacillation? Does not *revolution* appear, full often, written in legible characters, on our principles and theories, our learning and our taste? Does it not threaten to mould our government, our laws, our civil institutions, and our very religion?—In the opinion of not a few in our community, we have just emerged from a state of semi-barbarism. A flood of new light has just burst on our country, and the world. Nothing is yet settled—nothing in politics, nothing in the science of mind, nothing in ethics, nothing in religion itself. Every thing is *to be* settled, in all these departments; and *we* are fully competent to the great and arduous work. For us it is reserved, and by us it is to be accomplished.—But are these opinions wise, or sober, or safe? Has the world existed nearly six thousand years in vain? Is the fancied wisdom of all the sages and philosophers and divines who have gone before us, mere folly; and are we the chosen instruments to detect it? Has the word of life remained, till now, a sealed book; and is ours the sagacity which is destined to open it? In settling the most momentous questions which concern our present, and our immortal state, shall we proudly rely on our own sufficiency; and superciliously spurn the gathered wisdom of ages?

We wish to be understood. We complain not of those really great and philosophic minds which, from the pure and ardent love of truth, boldly pursue her through all her haunts, that they may bring her forth to the light of day. With the energy of such minds, we expect to find combined a modesty and caution which are the best security against error. But we complain of those *semi-philosophers* who know not what it is to doubt or to pause; who confidently

rush in where angels fear to tread;

who prefer novelty to truth, and their own crude and shapeless theories to the sound and sanctioned wisdom of ages. Unless this spirit, which is too much abroad, be arrested and checked, it will work unknown and interminable evil. Nothing will be safe from its unhallowed touch. Nothing will escape its undermining influence. Let it thoroughly

infect our literature, and our literature will become our danger and our bane; an *ignis fatuus*, seducing us from every secure path, and plunging us in inextricable and destructive errors.

Our fifth remark is, that we want a literature which *will not submit to an unnatural and degrading alliance with the excitements and collisions of the day.*—Whatever different views may prevail on many subjects, there is one point in which all will agree. Ours is an age of extraordinary and unparalleled excitability. The community is never calm; never at rest. The secret of *perpetual motion*, as it regards the *public*, at least, seems at length to have been discovered. Whatever topic is presented to the attention of the community, and however important, and however imperiously demanding a thorough investigation, it is not submitted to a candid, careful, patient scrutiny. Far from this—a tide of public *feeling* is summoned around it. And if, while it remains isolated, this object cannot be accomplished, care is taken to surround it with so many associations, either natural or forced, as shall effectually secure the point. Thus it happens that many subjects of the deepest interest find neither a calm investigation, nor a thoroughly impartial decision. For who does not know that while the passions are awake, the judgment sleeps?

To the reflecting mind, few dangers of the day will appear so great and alarming, as the danger, lest some of the gravest and most momentous questions regarding the interests of the community, be decided, rather by the excited feeling, than the cool, unimpassioned, unwarped judgment of the public. We might instance even in religion; and on this sacred subject, we will hazard a single remark. Those lengthened meetings for pious purposes, which the age has witnessed, and which there is reason to believe the Most High has eminently blessed, are admirably calculated to promote an unusual strength and elevation and ardor of Christian feeling. But they are obviously not so favorable to a calm and successful investigation of difficult and disputed truth. And if, in such a season of excitement, there should seem to dart into some good mind, whether clerical or laic, some religious truth before undiscovered, or some novel and felicitous method of settling a *vexed question* in theology, would it not be natural to *suspect* the *new light*? Would it not be safe, at least, to defer an ultimate decision; and to subject the

impression of a heated moment to the investigation and the judgment of a cool and unimpassioned hour?

Few subjects are so deeply interesting to our community, at the present time, as the subject of *slavery*. How shall the sin it involves be put away? How shall the calamities it threatens be escaped? These are questions which agitate the mind, and press with mountain weight on the heart of every Christian patriot throughout our country. And surely these questions are important enough to demand, not only all the piety and goodness, but all the wisdom and reflection which, from every quarter, can possibly be brought to their discussion. How undesirable, then, that on such a subject, the public mind should be put into a ferment, and a flame? How lamentable, that instead of its cool, collected wisdom, we should have its accumulated wrath and passion? If here, mind is to be arrayed in angry collision with mind, and heart with heart, and citizen with citizen, and State with State, who sees not that the contest, begun in folly and infatuation, will terminate in revolution and blood?

The public excitability of which we have spoken, connected as it is with the unexampled freedom of our government, and the collisions of interests, whether real or imaginary, arising among the different States, is a most portentous affair. It affords to artful and aspiring politicians the very materials and facilities they wish, for accomplishing their favorite designs. It calls into powerful exercise all their talents and eloquence. It often lends to the very semblance of talents and eloquence, a splendor and an efficiency, equally astonishing and pernicious. Thus our country, to its remotest extremes, is kept in a state of ceaseless agitation. Thus, not unfrequently, storms are excited, which threaten the wreck of our peace, our liberty, our invaluable institutions, and even our national existence.

We sometimes venture to cast a glance at the legislature of our Union. And here, in this august assembly, we would fondly hope to see the concentrated intellect and wisdom, the collected virtue and dignity, of the nation. We would hope to see a pure and ardent patriotism, consuming every meaner motive, and triumphing over every opposing interest. We would hope to see illustrious senators, looking steadfastly at their country's good, and with calm, enlightened, undiverted zeal, devising and applying the means of its promotion. But we are not always thus gratified. We have seen, too

often, the prevalence of *sectional* jealousies, of contracted and interested views, of party animosity, and excited passion. We have seen brilliant powers, and specious reasoning, and imposing eloquence, enlisted on the side of misrule and disorganization. We have even seen the interests of truth and justice and humanity, **THE PLEDGED AND SACRED FAITH OF OUR COUNTRY**, sacrificed in our proud and splendid capitol. These things we lament, and can never cease to lament. Still, we rejoice that the flame of patriotism has not yet forsaken our country's altars. We rejoice that we have senators whose integrity has stood the test of every trial; senators whose simple and sublime aim is to serve and save the nation; senators who, superior to party interests and contentions, reserve their great energies for great occasions, and devote the noblest powers to the purest cause. Such are the men who are their country's dearest hope; her resort in the "cloudy and dark day;" and, under God, her refuge from the storm.

We remark, in the last place, and with emphasis; we need a literature which *pays implicit homage to Christianity*. There was a period when learning arrayed itself, with a bold front, against sacred truth; and ungratefully raised an impious hand against religion, its heavenly patron and benefactor. But it was a learning rather affected, than real. At some times, to borrow the representation of Cowper, it has "bored the solid earth," that it might

Extract a register by which we learn
That He who made it, and revealed its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.

At other times, it has ransacked the histories of Egypt, of Hindoostan, and China, in the hope of establishing the same shrewd conclusion. But more recently, philosophers and historians of the first reputation have completely put to flight these wretched dreams. They have demonstrated, so far as the point is capable of demonstration, that neither the globe itself, nor authentic history, gives testimony against the Mosaic account of the creation; but that each, on the contrary, strengthens and confirms it. It cannot, however, be denied, that many admired writers, especially in the department of polite literature, have impugned the truth of revelation, and given strength to the cause of infidelity. Such men have been the opprobrium of learning, and the malefactors of their species. How much better had it been for

themselves ; how much better for the world ; and especially, how much better for the wretched victims of their prostituted genius, had they never been born. Where, in all this universe, can there be found a more fearful, unphilosophical compound, than a man of splendid talents, and of a cold, impure, atheistic heart ; a man polluting the very air which, by divine sufferance, he breathes ; and imparting poison and death wherever his influence is felt. It cannot be sufficiently regretted that many British writings much perused in our country, and not professedly of the infidel school, exhibit a spirit and turn of thought which is any thing rather than Christian. Perhaps it is by writings of this description that the contagion of infidelity is most successfully propagated. The malady, coming unannounced, is admitted without suspicion ; nor is even an alarm excited, till the work of death is done.

Faithfulness requires me to notice another form or modification of infidelity. I refer to that which professedly admits the *truth* of Scripture, while it denies its proper *inspiration*. To say nothing of the inconsistency of this view of things, (for the Bible, be it remembered, is either properly inspired, or it is the basest and the boldest of all forgeries,) we cannot but remark, that the Bible, on this construction, has lost its authority ; and by losing its authority, has lost its value. For on this principle, in what sentence of the whole volume, can we be absolutely sure that God himself addresses us ? In what sentence of the whole volume, can we be absolutely sure that we find the *truth* ? If the Bible is such a book—the production, not of God, but of fallible, erring man—who will believe its declarations ? Who will rely on its promises ? Who will be alarmed by its threatenings ? And who will obey its commands ? Who sees not that we are left to all the uncertainty of *deism*—to all its gloom—to all its wanderings—to all its agony—to all its *despair* ?

The literature, then, which the age demands, and which will truly bless our country, is a literature which bows, with unquestioning submission, to the Bible—which, perceiving on its front the stamp of **DIVINITY**, receives, with childlike confidence, all its announcements, as so many axioms of infallible truth. Let it not be, for a moment, imagined that this is degrading. Newton thought not so. “We account,” says this master mind, “the Scriptures of God, the most sublime phi-

losophy." In consonance with this declaration of the first of philosophers, we may fearlessly assert, that the most exalted exercise of the most exalted intellect is implicit submission to **ETERNAL WISDOM AND TRUTH**. And when this spirit shall prevail; when it shall pervade the mind of every favorite author, and thoroughly imbue his writings; when it shall become an essential passport to public favor; when the whole reading community shall be daily familiarized to the views and sentiments of **HEAVEN**, the effect will be most auspicious. Truth and virtue will stand forth in all their majesty, and in all their loveliness. Error and vice will shrink away abashed. The standard of public morals will be elevated. The public taste will be corrected and refined. And the whole tribe of immoral, infidel, atheistic writers, the opprobrium and bane of their species, will sink into merited contempt.

Nor is even this all. While the public *heart* is purified, the public *intellect* will be expanded and improved. The discoveries of **Revelation**, like the rays of the sun, irradiate and warm and quicken every thing on which they fall. They have a grandeur, an interest, a power, which rouses and strengthens all the faculties of the soul. Let the truths of the Bible be not merely conned, but illustrated and impressed, in our schools; and millions of young minds, torpid or trifling before, will spring into healthful and vigorous action. Let the beauties and sublimities of the sacred volume be familiarized in our colleges; and it will be seen and felt how tame, comparatively, is all the boasted eloquence and poetry of Greece and Rome. Let the Scriptures be the *Hippocrene* of our poets; and their pages will cease to be invitations to slumber. Let the great and soul-thrilling verities of inspiration be uttered in all their simplicity, and richness, and variety, from our pulpits; and it will be seen at once, that while they purify the heart, and prepare man for heaven, they awaken trains of thought, rouse the dormant faculties, and invigorate the mind to action—incomparably more than all the forms of logic, or the dull and heartless discipline of the schools.

In giving utterance to these thoughts on the importance of learning to our country and its destinies; and in glancing at some principal characteristics of that learning which is our *great desideratum*; our aim is practical. We would impress on our fellow-citizens at large; especially would we impress

on the members of the literary community, a sense of their high and solemn trusts.

Behold the rising glories of our country—the profusion of blessings which indulgent Providence has poured around her—the grand, decisive experiment she is making for liberty and self-government—the destinies of her unborn millions, and of mankind, staked on the issue—the eyes of Europe, of the world, of Heaven itself, intensely fastened on the crisis. If she is saved, a new era of unknown brightness and glory dawns on the world. If she sinks, the hopes of man perish with her; and the blackness of despair rests on the whole scene.

Her refuge—we repeat it, and with profound reverence, mingled with trembling hope—is in God. *If He, the Sovereign of the world, give quietness, who can make trouble? And if He hide his face, who then can behold him?*—UNDER GOD, our country's safety must arise from the intelligence and wisdom of her sons. Nor is it possible to calculate the amount of evil which may be averted, or of positive good which may be secured, if those whom Heaven has qualified and destined to mould and sway the public mind, shall rightly employ all their energies, and all their means.

Mere knowledge—never let it be forgotten—will not, cannot save us. No. The best things become, in their corruption and abuse, the worst, and most pernicious. An unsound, degenerate, prostituted learning, is one of the greatest curses which can afflict any country; and most emphatically, a republican community, like our own.

If, then, there is a spirit abroad in the land, which is corrupting our *literature*; which would exchange its solid strength for a feeble and meretricious splendor; which regards its *surface* more than its *depth*; which through the medium of poetry, of romance, of history itself, is conveying poison to the public mind; tainting the virgin purity of the female heart, and seducing our young men into the paths that lead to death—let us resist it.

If there is a spirit which is corrupting our *politics*; arraying itself in hostility against the first principles of social order, and civil government; of public justice, and national faith; and of the constitution itself; summoning to its aid the ignorance, the prejudices and the passions of the people, with their *sectional* jealousies, antipathies, emulations, and im-

aginary interests ; and aiming to merge our fair and harmonious republic in a chaos of divided and conflicting communities—let us resist it.

If there is a spirit which is corrupting *morality*, aiming to subvert its long established and well understood principles ; and to substitute in the place of a pure, dignified, unbending morality, a morality the mere creature of convenience, or convention, or caprice, or fashion, or false honor—let us resist it.

And if corruption directs its attacks against religion itself, let us resolutely stand in its defence. If numbers in the community would divest the sacred volume of its inspiration ; that is to say, of all that renders it truly sacred and precious ; let us indignantly frown on the attempt. If numbers, not professedly denying the divine authority of the Bible, discard, or explain away its most obvious and vital truths, let us bind these truths more closely than ever, to our hearts. If an arrogant and false philosophy would instamp its own features on the doctrines of Christianity, let us dare adhere to the simple and divine beauty, the sublime and unbending majesty, of scripture truth. If a mistaken zeal would promote and propagate religion by methods equally abhorrent to the Bible and common sense, and repulsive to sober and thinking minds, let us steadfastly discountenance the delusion.

In fine : let us, in the various stations which Providence has assigned us ; and in our respective spheres of duty, and of influence, approve ourselves the undeviating, active friends of sound religion, and sound literature. In an age of too much glitter and ostentation, let us aim at nothing better or higher, than solid knowledge, genuine wisdom, unostentatious goodness, and substantial usefulness. In an age of unexampled excitement, let us claim the modest privilege of remaining cool. In an age of ceaseless revolution, let us remember that to *innovate* is not always to reform ; and that *old truth* is somewhat preferable to *new error*. At a period when the cause of God and truth is both assailed and defended with a zeal and vigor almost unparalleled, let us consecrate to this high and holy cause, all our faculties and resources, all our energies and efforts.

But we forbear. We have made perhaps but too large a draught on the reader's time and patience. It has afforded us, however, something of relief, and something of gratifica-

tion, to present thus publicly a few views on subjects of profound, and almost distressing interest. Our free suggestions we cheerfully submit to Christians and patriots; to minds that can think, and to hearts that can feel. May that Almighty Being with whom are the destinies of our country and mankind, mercifully disappoint all our fears, and more than realize our best and brightest hopes.

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