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AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEWBURGH LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

ON ITS

FIRST ANNIVERSARY.

December 29, 1836.

BY REV. JAMES R. WILSON, D. D.

NEWBURGH.

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NEWBURGH, *December 3, 1836.*

SIR—We have the honour of informing you that we have been appointed a committee by the members of the "Newburgh Library Association" to express to you their thanks for the very eloquent and excellent Address delivered by you before them on Thursday evening last. Believing that the promulgation of the sound views and able reasoning contained in that address would be attended with happy effects, the members have also instructed us to request of you a copy for publication.

We have further been requested by the Trustees to tender for your acceptance a certificate of Life-membership in the Association—and to convey to you their lively gratitude for your kind exertions in behalf of its objects.

Believe us, Sir, with respect,
Your obedient Servants,

A. M. SMITH,
A. J. DOWNING.

REV. JAS. R. WILSON, D. D.

COLDENHAM, *December 13, 1836.*

GENTLEMEN—For the favorable opinion, which, though you, the members of the Newburgh Library Association, express in relation to the address lately delivered before them, you will please to tender them my grateful acknowledgements. As they are pleased to think its publication may be attended with profitable results, the manuscript is cordially committed to their disposal for that purpose. Were it much better than it is, the writer would be more gratified, in giving it to the public. For yourselves, you will accept of the sincere respects of

Yours, truly,
JAMES R. WILSON.

A. M. SMITH, *Esq.*
A. J. DOWNING, *Esq.*

ADDRESS.

PTOLEMY SOTER, about three hundred years before the commencement of the Christian era, founded the Alexandrian library. It was greatly enlarged by his successors in the throne of Egypt, especially by his son **PTOLEMY PHILADELPHUS**, the munificent patron of literature and learned men. Though it suffered greatly in the course of the long and fierce wars among the successors of Alexander the Great, between Egypt and the Romans,* yet when entirely destroyed by **AMRUS EBNOL** a Turkish general, in six hundred and forty-two, it contained seven hundred thousand volumes. It embraced in its collection maps, topographical delineations, and geographical descriptions, with whatever was curious in the literature of former ages. There are now in Germany one thousand authors, who produce a volume every year, and yet it would require at that rate, seventeen hundred years, to furnish as many books as were placed in that stupendous depository. **PTOLEMY** designed his library to be subservient to a Lyceum, or society of literati, which he had formed, on a plan similar to the French National Institute, the Royal Society of London, and the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. The Alexandrian Library and Lyceum, drew together into Egypt the learned and the curious of all countries, and rendered that kingdom for many ages the most illustrious in literature, among the nations. In the early ages of Christianity, the school of Divinity in Alexandria, was the most celebrated of all the Christian seats of learning. It sent forth a great host of learned Divines.

* Julius Cesar in his invasion of Egypt burned four hundred thousand volumes.

The city of Alexandria, situated on the Mediterranean sea, at the most westerly of the seven mouths of the Nile, had been founded by Alexander the Great, about thirty years before the institution of its library by PTOLEMY; but in that time, it had attained to a considerable magnitude, as the Capital of an opulent and commercial kingdom. When PTOLEMY PHILADELPHUS perceived that it had become the literary capital of the nations, he determined to make it the commercial metropolis of the world, and he succeeded. For many ages the trade of the east had passed through the gulf of Armus and the Persian gulf to the mouth of the Euphrates, up that river to Babylon, and thence was conveyed by caravans to the Lycian shores of the Mediterranean, and distributed to the nations of the west. In the reign of Solomon, a part of this current began to be drawn westward, through the Straits of Babelmandel, up the Red Sea, to the port of Ebath, near to where the town of Suez now stands, and thence by land across the Isthmus, to Rhinacurura, near the Mediterranean, and from that place to Tyre. After the decline and fall of Babylon, the full stream was diverted into this channel. Ptolemy, no doubt at the suggestion of the learned men who resorted to Alexandria, projected and executed the plan of diverting its course still farther westward. He built a large navy to protect his merchant ships in trading with India, Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia, from which countries they brought into the Red Sea, the spicery and rich wares of the east, and landed them at Hozmus, a port on the east of Egypt. They were thence transported by land to Coptus on the Nile, and down that river to Alexandria. A small canal was opened through the desert between the Red Sea and the Nile, in order to supply the caravans and public houses, with fresh water. By these wise measures, the whole commerce of the east centered in the capital of Egypt; Alexandria became the mart of nations, and enjoyed that pre-eminence for more than seventeen hundred years. It was through the discovery of a passage by the Portuguese, round the Cape

of Good Hope, about three hundred and fifty years ago, that the course of the eastern trade, was diverted still farther to the west. Though the library of Alexandria was destroyed in about one thousand years after its institution, yet the pre-eminent commercial advantages to which it contributed, if it did not originate them, lasted seven hundred years longer.

The course of trade both in ancient and modern times, has been guided and quickened by that learning and knowledge which are both collected and distributed in literary institutions. It was learning and learned men that concentrated the commerce of ancient kingdoms, in Babylon. It was also the wisdom of Solomon that brought it westward, for besides the inspired works which have come down to us, "He spake," by books, "of trees from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowls, of creeping things, and of fishes." It was learning that made Alexandria the great depot of the eastern hemisphere. It was the learning of Portugal that opened a high way for it through southern seas, round the Cape of Good Hope, and by the west of Africa. It is learning that has made British merchantmen the carriers of the world, and London the greatest and most opulent city on earth. It is learning that now guides the current of commercial wealth to our own continent, and that will ere long bring it through the Isthmus of Darien, to the city of New York.

Why should it not be so? It is mind and not brute matter that governs the enterprizes of men. It is chiefly by reading that mind is cultivated, strengthened and adorned. Few, perhaps, have reflected much on the many and great advantages resulting from an attentive perusal of good books, in which we hold communion, in their best thoughts, with the greatest minds both of the living and the dead.

It furnishes a source of refined and delightful enjoyment. The pleasures of reading are various. It gratifies taste—a faculty in some degree possessed by all who participate in our common nature. The delight of which we are susceptible,

In the contemplation of a beautiful object is referable to an ultimate law of our intellectual constitution. It is one of our benevolent endowments by the Creator, for the purpose of multiplying human happiness. A finely written book, if free from any thing positively offensive, imparts pleasure from the beauty of the composition, and the polished elegance of the style even where these are its only recommendations. It is chiefly in this way that poetry and fictitious narratives, fascinate with their charms so many readers of all ages, ranks and sexes. Even the most grave, who profess to despise them, if once caught in their toils, are held fast by their enchantments. And though it is greatly to be deplored that very many works of these descriptions, lend their powers to the corruption of public morals, and exceedingly pervert the sensibilities of youth, yet the pleasures of taste, enjoyed in reading, are not to be charged with the evil. Where is there any thing excellent or desirable, that has not been flagitiously perverted to the most mischievous ends? To taste, merely, an appeal is made by that class of books called annuals, which have become so popular in modern literature. It seems to have been adopted as a first principle, by those who issue them, that they shall contain as little thought as possible. The author, the printer, the painter, the engraver, the paper-maker and the book-binder, contribute the rarest specimens of their respective arts, to array them in the most gorgeous drapery. They intend to minister to the gratification of taste, make these specimens of the fine arts popular, and give them currency in the market. Their success equals their efforts. After all, this is the most humble grade of enjoyment in the pleasures of taste derived from books. When important truths, in philosophy, politics, morals and religion, enlightened arguments on grave and interesting topics, and historical narratives of the rise, growth, decay, and ruin of empires, are embellished with the beauties of style, the gratifications of taste, are furnished in their excellency and fullness. They are relished even by an illiterate reader, though he is utterly incapable of analyzing the sentiment, or of accounting for the agreeable emotions.

The pleasure of taste is but one of the elements that enter into the enjoyments of reading. They exist, often in a high degree, when it is not even one of the ingredients. We are endowed with an instinctive principle of curiosity, impelling us onward in the career of knowledge. As the eye is never filled with seeing, so the mind is never filled with knowing. The more abundantly this principle is nurtured, the more insatiable are its cravings after greater acquisitions, and the more are the enjoyments of discovery enhanced. The regions of knowledge to be explored are literally boundless; the means of gratifying the principle of curiosity exhaustless. It is but very little that we can see with our own eyes, or hear with our own ears. By conversation with others much may be learned, but even this source of acquiring knowledge is very limited compared with our wants and our desires; but "of making many books there is no end." The stores of truth that have been in process of accumulation for ages, are so ample that the longest life and greatest diligence can appropriate but a very small portion of them. The most voracious *hellus librorum*, or devourer of books, to the last day of the longest life, finds the means of gratifying his appetite for something new.

The editors of our daily and weekly newspapers are almost wholly dependant on this principle, for the support of their journals. Facts, warm from life, are served up in haste, to furnish food for its cravings. In these times of peace, many of their articles of news, are murders, robberies, casualties, and the claims, success or failures of political aspirants—matters of no permanent interest, or great importance—but they are new, and gratify the desire for novelty. Many are really instructive and important, but in their composition destitute of all that is relished by a cultivated taste. The paper is coarse, the typography inaccurate and crude, the style in which their articles are written unpolished, and much of it even grammatically incorrect, and the matter without arrangement or connection. With all these imperfections, they are sought

after and read with insatiable avidity, altogether unexampled in the past history of reading, in any other department of literature, and chiefly for this reason, that they supply aliment for the principle of curiosity. In these remarks it is not intended to cast blame on either the editors, or the printers of these journals. Were they to use paper of a fine quality, aim at typographical elegance, and employ ripe, and polished belles lettres scholars to write for their columns, the enhancement of price would so curtail their subscription lists that they must soon wind up their business. The haste too, with which both the literary and the mechanical parts must be driven through, in order that the contents of the paper may embrace the latest news possible, puts it out of their power, to bestow the time requisite for polish, or even for accuracy. Besides their complexion is such that few of their articles are ever read more than once. Why should pains be taken to enrich and adorn what is so transitory? Between the splendid annuals, and the unadorned newspaper—the butterflies and the carrier pigeons of literature—we have the substantial treasures of learning, rich in every excellence and garnished with every beauty, where both taste and curiosity find the fullness of their gratifications. All this is provided in large and well selected libraries.

Another ingredient in the pleasures of good reading, is the communion of the reader with the excellent and the great of ancient ages and of our own times. Who would not think it a very high degree of intellectual entertainment, could he enjoy but for one day, the society of John and Isaac Newton, of Milton and Cowper, of Turretten and Rutherford! But we have it in their works, where, they being dead, yet speak, for our improvement, and delight. The best of men are very imperfect, and their imperfections are an alloy to the pleasures derived from social intercourse with them. Comparatively few of these defects appear in their writings, in which their noblest thoughts best digested trains of argument, loftiest

flights of imagination, and the most charitable sympathies of their hearts are uttered in their choicest style of elocution.

Farther, the acquisitions of reading are not for ourselves alone; what we learn, we rejoice to hope we shall be able to communicate to others for the increase of their felicity and worth. From the social impulses of our nature all may partake in this benevolent sentiment; but parents, instructors, professional men and authors, enjoy it with peculiar vivacity and relish. When any one reads merely for the purpose of making a display of superior attainments, and gratifying his vanity, it is a wretched perversion of a noble feeling, into an unhallowed emotion. To read that we may enlarge the sphere of our usefulness, and increase our power to glorify God and do good to men is both delightful and praiseworthy.

Again, while we have great delight in acquiring a knowledge of the divine attributes, by the investigation of his works and contemplation of his glory and beauty, exhibited, in the works of his hand around us; we are much more delighted, when we avail ourselves of the light, which is shed by books so copiously on our understandings, revealing the excellent Majesty of the Creator of all things and of the Redeemer of Sinners. The historical works of those who know him not—such as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Russell's *Ancient and Modern Europe*—may impart enjoyment, under this aspect, as they unfold the wonderful doings of God, in administering the great kingdom of Providence. It must be confessed, however, that it requires an enlightened judgment, fortified by christian piety, to guard the reader of such books, against the subtle and uncandid insinuations of minds possessed of great talents, but perverted as theirs were, by the unholy dogmas of a sceptical philosophy. Every truly good man will be pained in perusing such works, in the reflection, that intellects such as theirs were, should be shrouded in utter darkness, in relation to the most

important of all topics. The pleasure derived from reading, under this view, and without the alloy we experience in the study of such works as Shuckford's and Prideaux Connections, Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Buchanan's and Aikman's Scotland, and Robertson's Scotland and Charles V. But it is not from historical books chiefly, that good men derive enjoyment, in improving their knowledge of the Author of all good and the fountain of all excellence. The authors of all books of sound philosophy, whether, physical, intellectual, or moral, reveal in their investigations, the glory of the Creator. Withal, many writers on these vast and interesting topics, do not intend to illustrate the divine attributes, while they unfold the mysterious laws and wondrous operations of the divine wisdom and power, in the natural, mental and moral departments of the universe. But whatever they intend, if guided by truth and talent, in their researches, they do accomplish the object, to which we refer, for the gratification of minds, more pure and elevated than their own. However, it is cause of gratulation to all devout men, that the ablest philosophical writers have been the friends of truth. Sir Robert Boyle, Sir Isaac Newton, Mr. Locke, and Heineccius were not less distinguished for the homage which they rendered to the Creator and Redeemer of men, than for their powers of philosophical investigation. But after all, it is in works professedly theological, deriving their doctrines from the Holy Scriptures, the pure fountain of divine truth, that the righteous man will derive the most exalted and permanent delight. Witseus, Sauren and Edwards, are authors of the class to which we here refer. Upon the whole, every reading man, whatever may be the class or the complexion of the works which he prefers, knows and will testify from his own experience, that deprived of his books, he would be cut off from the sources of his most precious enjoyments. If any man would multiply his own means of happiness let him read,

read, read. Would any one in the true spirit of enlightened philanthropy, promote the felicity of his friends, neighbours and fellow citizens, let him furnish them with access to good books, and encourage them to read.

But in reading, we should be moved by much higher aims, than present gratifications, however exquisite, and elevated. We must read for the cultivation of intellect. No extent of academical or collegiate education, no association with men, however extensive and select, no oral instruction in the private circle, in the lecture room, at the forum, in the legislative hall, or in the pulpit, will make a really intelligent, learned or great man, without reading—without *ample* reading. What evidence have we that there ever was in the Ante-Mosaic ages, except the Saints who were taught by the Word and Spirit of God, any really great man? Before the age of Moses, there were no books, except those in hieroglyphics; for alphabetical writing was revealed to him, in the giving of the two tables of the law on Mount Sinai. How far these hieroglyphics might answer as a substitute for books cannot now be known. But we are certain that as a vehicle of mind, they must have been operose and cumbrous. And we are sure that nearly all the knowledge of these ancient ages has perished, except what Moses recorded by the pen of inspiration. The annals of China respecting those remote times, the history of ancient Egypt, before the Exodus, and all the traditions collected by Manetho, Sanconiathon, and even by Herodotus, with all the tales in Homer's Illiad, and Odyssey, and the Works and Days of Hesiod, are little better than mere fable. An antedeluvion living to the age of nine hundred years could not acquire without books, more knowledge than is now attainable in the short period of our brief lives. And whatever may have been their acquisitions, we know that he who in our times does not read much, is not, and cannot be, more than a mere smatterer. By books, and by books only,

can the mind now be replenished with the precious treasures of useful knowledge. In order to this, however, the books read must be well selected, read, re-read, and digested by sober thought and reflection. Much reading without meditation may render the mind a crowded lumber-room, but it cannot make the memory a well assorted store-house of scientific attainments.

For the kind of mental culture which reading, in the right way, produces, a long course of preparatory discipline in the schools is not indispensable. Neither Franklin, nor Washington, had such a course. But they both read much and thought more, by which their minds became not only vigorous, but highly cultivated in those departments of thought and actions in which their intellectual energies were exerted. Sir Isaac Newton remarked with respect to himself, when some one complimented him on his wonderful discoveries, that he believed there was none, if any difference, between his and other minds, except that he had the faculty of fixing his thoughts steadily on any topic of investigation, until he obtained the result which he sought. But had he not by reading learned all that philosophers before had discovered, these concentrated energies of thought would have been fruitlessly expended. Whenever these two are united they never fail to make a respectable man, and more commonly a great one. Who ever read and digested Sydenham, Hunter, Rush, and a few other such medical writers without becoming a learned and intelligent physician? Who ever thoroughly comprehended the historical works, to which we have referred, that was not a historian? Who ever read and studied Heineccius' Law of Nature and Nations, Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, Thorburne's *Vindicia Magistratus*, Blackstone's Commentaries, Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, and Vattel on the Law of Nations, without being an able Lawyer and politician? Who ever read and comprehended Calvin's *Institutions*, Nethews' *Economy*,

and Turriffin's System of Theology, and was not a respectable divine? Who—but we must shorten sail lest we be carried too far from shore, on this ocean of mind. Those who have made the greatest figure in literature have been the most careful and attentive readers. Demosthenes, incomparably the most eloquent of all ancient Pagan orators, copied out eight times with his own hand, the history of Thucydides. The eloquent Whitfield, read on his knees, with devotional attention, the whole of Henry's excellent Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. Such a reader of well written books on important subjects, never fails of his reward. He cultivates a field, from which no wise and diligent cultivator ever failed to reap an abundant harvest.

The careful reading and extensive study of such books as ought to be selected, would prevent the vain pretensions set forth by so many to important discoveries. We have contracted, in this age, a vehement propensity to find out new truths, in all departments of knowledge, and originate inventions in all the arts. New theories are started, and novel schemes exhibited, creating transient excitements, for a few days; exciting wonder, and speedily passing into oblivion. They meet with this fate either because their authors discovered what is no where to be found, or what had been well known to others hundreds of years before. The truth is, important and useful discoveries and inventions are *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*—few and far between. There have been about seven in four centuries—the discovery of the circulation of the blood, of the planet Herschell, of the American Continent, and of the principle of gravitation governing the motions of the planets, the identity of lightning and electricity, and the application of steam for propelling machinery, and to steam-boat navigation, and rail-road travelling. All these amount to scarcely one in two generations of men. They are indeed real triumphs of genius; for they are not the result of acci-

dent, like the discovery of the arts of making glass, and gunpowder. Though the ordinary, every day profits of reading and study are incomparably more important than rare and splendid discoveries, yet as these have resulted from the wise and diligent use of books, it may be profitable to recollect that all these great achievements of mind have been the offspring of the most cultivated intellects, and much investigation. Of Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood, not much is known, except that he was a learned physiologist, who had read all the valuable works of physicians on the animal organization, and economy. Herschell, who discovered the most remote known planet in our system, was a profound astronomer, who had devoted his life to the cultivation of his favorite science. In the library of the Royal Society of London, he had access to all that had been published by astronomers on the magnitude, motions, and appearances of the planetary bodies, and on the dimensions and laws of the solar system. He was a master in the science of optics, and proficient in all the departments of Natural Philosophy. The numerous books which guided his way to the high and far distant regions of the mundane system, were so many, various, and expensive, that no one of common means could have procured them. Furnished with all requisite helps in the princely collection, to which we have referred, he was enabled to explore the vast and distant regions of space, bring to light a mighty planet that for ages had been revolving, unseen by mortal eyes, and to affix his name to a world eighteen million miles from the sun, and more than thirty-five million in diameter.

Columbus, before he entered on his great voyage of discovery, made himself familiar with all the terrestrial, meteoric, and oceanic phenomena, which had been observed and recorded by the geographers who preceded him, to such an

extent that even his errors were made to subserve his great object of research. Newton's discovery of the extension of the law of gravitation, to all the planetary bodies of our system, and consequently to all others in the material universe, was suggested by the fall of an apple from the tree. But it was only to a mind like his, replenished with all the treasures of science that had been accumulated by Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, Halley, and others, that a philosophical truth of such magnitude, could have been suggested by so small an incident.

The successful application of steam power, by Watt and Bolton of England, for the purpose of propelling machinery, is not to be ascribed merely or chiefly to mechanical ingenuity. That, they did possess in an eminent degree, but their success, was chiefly owing to the knowledge of their friend, Dr. Black, at that time the most learned Chymist, in England. He guided them in the path of experiment, enlightened by such luminaries as Lavoisier, Chaptal, and their predecessors. Indeed, it was necessary that all the science acquired for thousands of years, and transmitted by books from one generation to another, should precede the wonderful success of these two learned mechanics in the new application of a power which changes the whole aspect of society. The appropriation of this power to navigation by Fulton, could not have succeeded, in any other hands but his, or such as his, conducted in the path of discovery by the lights which his predecessors had kindled. Guided by these he travelled in the way opened by those who went before him, and by moving on in the same direction, he advanced still farther into unexplored regions.

Franklin, bringing down lightning from the clouds, and demonstrating its identity with the electrical fluid, furnishes another illustrious example to our purpose. He read, reasoned and digested, all preceding experiments and theories, then drew his own sagacious conclusions, and boldly adventured to solicit the lightning of heaven by his kite and key.

All these gigantic efforts of mind, which excite our admiration, awaken generous emulation, and bless mankind, forcibly illustrate the doctrine that reading is the appropriate means of cultivating and invigorating our mental faculties. These distinguished men did not, as sciotists and smatterers advise, reject all systems of science, throw aside all books, and launch out on the ocean of discovery without chart or compass. Had they so done, they would have perished deservedly in unknown seas. The proud and arrogant rejection of the labours of our fathers, though much in the taste of many in this age, merits unqualified reprobation. It is an attempt to demolish with unholy hands the magnificent temple of science, and make it even more desolate than the ruins of Palmyra, or Tadmor in the wilderness, where there are still stately columns, though torn from their bases, to bear witness to its ancient grandeur. These innovators would make the temples of knowledge desolate as ancient Babylon, that shall never be inhabited from generation to generation. It would be in their spirit to applaud the order of the Turkish Sultan, consigning to the flames the Alexandrian Library.

Books and reading are friendly to rational liberty. They are dreaded, and justly, by despots and tyrants, who enslave, oppress, and degrade the nations. Hence, censorships of the press, expurgatorial indexes, and the disabilities imposed on elementary nurseries of instruction. Set wide open the portals of knowledge, and make it accessible to all, and the reign of despotism will soon be brought to a termination. It is not, indeed, to be denied, that able pens have been often bought by the gold of oppressors, that learned and eloquent writers have been seduced into the advocacy of tyranny and become the panders of power. The restoration of the Mantuan farms and the elegant country seat of Tivoli, made Virgil and Horace the fulsome adulators of the Cesars, who overthrew in the battle of Pharsalia and Actium, the liberty of Rome and enslaved the Commonwealth. Hume is the advocate of high

prerogative, and the enemy of British liberty. But even they are forced, by the verity of historical fact, to record events which are at war with the claims of despots—events, eloquent in the cause of liberty. The element in which oppression lives, breathes, and has its being, is ignorance. It cannot bear the light. Liberty, in the most exalted sense of the word, is the first-born of knowledge. “They shall know the truth and the truth shall make them free.” The invention of the art of printing in the fifteenth century, the revival of letters in the sixteenth, and the circulation of books, made civil and priestly thrones totter on their foundations, and tyrants feel for their crowns. It was the learning of the Swiss Cantons, and the books of the Seven United Provinces, that made the hardy mountaineers of the former, and the boors of the latter, noble freemen. English literature has infused into the British constitution, those elements of liberty, that elevate the jurisprudence of Britain above the old feudal despotisms of the continent. It was the press more emphatically than the sword that freed the American Colonies from the yoke of foreign bondage. Burn all our libraries, close our printing offices, arrest the progress of free discussion, and soon our fourteen millions of freemen would be degraded into bondmen. Instead of the song of liberty that now floats along our vales, and re-echoes from our hills, the groans of slavery would sigh in every breeze. A reading and intelligent population cannot be made slaves; the illiterate and ignorant alone are the prey of tyrants. Next to the institutions of religion faithfully administered, the schoolmaster who teaches us to read, the author and the printer who make good books, the librarian who furnishes them to the reader, are the most efficient guardians of the rights of man. Where men become mere eating and drinking animals, and the nurture of the mind is postponed to the gratification of bodily appetites, they are incapable of enjoying liberty, fit to be slaves, and slaves if they are not now, they will soon become.

Closely allied to the influence of books in securing human rights, are the benign effects which they produce in the preservation of moral order. The morality of any community, and its growth, and its prosperity, in all that is desirable, are inseparably connected. It is true that no man's practice equals his knowledge of duty. All may say in some degree, with *Media*, in the tragedy "I know and approve the better, I practice the worse." There have been, in all enlightened communities, men of great minds, and cultivated understandings, and yet as malignant and immoral as they were great. The people of Alexandria had of all ancient cities, the greatest facilities of acquiring knowledge, and her citizens were learned beyond all her rivals, but they were immoral. Alexander the great was the most learned prince of his age, and perhaps the worst king of any age or nation. Cesar and Napoleon among crowned heads, and Machiavel, and Voltaire, among learned authors, may be enrolled in the list of vicious great men. We might refer to instances of the kind without travelling to remote lands, or recurring to distant ages. But why multiply examples, when it is admitted that Greece, when it attained to its greatest elevation of learning, and Rome in its most polished ages, were so corrupt as to be tottering to their fall. All these, and were there far more similar examples, would not prove that knowledge is naturally allied to vice, or that "ignorance is the mother of devotion." They do, indeed, demonstrate what many intelligent men do not appear to know, that the mere diffusion of intelligence is not alone a sufficient guard against the encroachments of vice. But they prove no more. And, after all, those nations or sections of society, that are the most enlightened, are, as a general rule, the most orderly and moral. It was not the books and the reading of the Grecian States and Roman commonwealth, that corrupted their manners, destroyed their liberties, and reduced them to ruin. Other causes—the luxury of the opulent, the effeminacy of the noblesse, with the usurpations, gross tyranny and shameless profligacy, of military chieftains, such

as Pericles, among the Greeks, and Cesar, Anthony, Pompey, and Crassus, among the Romans, and the ignorance of the body of the people, that corrupted those great masses of society to the core, and desolated their fields and cities. These were causes too powerful to be resisted by the influence of mere learning, in despite of which the population of those nations became more and more debased. Their learning too was perverted in ministering to mere present gratification, rather than of solid improvement, and in making it the vehicle of depraved sentiment. This fact, all would do well to remember, as the tendency, in our own country is to the same evil.

That the proper use and happy improvement of the means of instruction, have done more for the advancement of moral order, than their perversion has harmed public morality, is undeniable. Were it not so, darkness should be preferred to light, and men should hasten back as fast as possible to the state of barbarism, cast off all civilization, and become savages. It was by the gradual progress of knowledge that society emerged from the Gothic barbarity of the dark ages. Let any one read Hallam's history of the Middle ages, when it was necessary to pass a law that every clergyman should learn to read, and then doubt, if he can, whether the diffusion of knowledge by books produces a salutary effect on the moral order of the world. Immoral as the great mass of the people now are in christendom, all would shudder at the return of such gigantic immorality, as that of Europe, from the eighth to the fourteenth century. The revival of letters by the family of the Medici, in Italy, in the latter part of the fifteenth century and in the beginning of the sixteenth, prepared the way, and furnished the means, for effecting that great amelioration of the morals of society, of which we are all reaping the pleasant fruits. Owing to powerfully counteracting causes, the most excellent and learned works published in the tenth and seventeenth centuries, did not produce their full effects.

The crowned heads and priestly tyrants of Europe saw with alarm, a great revolution in public sentiment among their subjects, and in connection with lordly feudal barons, exerted all their unholy energies, to arrest its progress. Their efforts were not altogether vain. Large portions of the continent have hardly enjoyed one ray of that great light which sprung up in the sixteenth century. Italy, Spain, Portugal, the north of France, Austria, the circles of Germany on the head waters of the Rhine, and the south of Ireland, abound more with revolting immoralities, than any other parts of Europe, because the portals of knowledge have been shut against them, by their oppressors. Why are the people of the Swiss Cantons, the Hollanders, the Saxons, and the Prussians, less vicious than those countries to which we have referred? It is because they are more enlightened. What learning has done, in the north of Ireland, for the amelioration of Irish morals, may be estimated by comparing their present state with the condition of the people on the south of that Island. Why are the English and Scotch more moral than the French and Spaniards? It is because there is more knowledge diffused through the British community. Why are the people of the Low Lands of Scotland more orderly than their English neighbours on the same island? It is because more of the common people are taught elementary learning, have more and better books, and read more. Why is Connecticut the most orderly and moral community on this side of the Atlantic? It is because they all can and do read. Why are the people of the South American Republics more immoral than those of the United States? It is because fewer of them have access to books or are able to read them. Why are our own Northern States more moral—but I forbear. The induction is sufficiently ample to justify the general maxim that the multiplication of books and readers, with all their present imperfections, is friendly to moral order.

Perhaps some good people may be ready to conclude, that in the preceding remarks too much has been ascribed to books, and that these beneficent results ought to be ascribed to a higher agency—the power of religion. It is admitted that separate from the institutions of religion, the happy influence of books on the good order of society, would be greatly diminished, if not quite destroyed. But we mean to advance even still higher claims on behalf of books and reading. They promote the cause of true religion. In strictness of language, morality and religion are the same thing, or rather morality is an essential part of true religion, and there is no moral virtue such as Heaven approves, or with which a pious man will be satisfied, except as it proceeds from charity out of a heart purified by religion. Yet we have used the term moral in a popular acceptation, as referring to that orderly course of outward deportment, by which the interests of society are promoted. The profitable results of reading, are far more than the promotion of such morality, and than all that we have enumerated in the discussion. Bad books, adverse to all religion, and very many of them have been written, have been read and have done great harm. It is still true that there are more good books on this all important theme, than on any other topic; and without the diligent and proper use of them, true religion must languish. If it is true “that intelligence is the life of liberty;” it is more emphatically true, that sanctified intelligence is the life of religion. The wisdom of the greatest and best men of all ages, derived from the pure fountain of all religious truth, is treasured up in the writings of those whose works praise them in the gate. The choicest learning of the most cultivated and purest intellects, has been devoted to the investigation of the most important, most profitable, and most delightful of all subjects—“pure religion and undefiled.” The proceeds of these labours are contained in the books which, as the best of legacies, they have bequeathed to

all succeeding ages. But they must be read to be appreciated.

If the time of man's existence were limited by the present life, there might be some reason in not extending our researches beyond terrestrial objects. But destined as we are to an endless duration, that course of reading which meets the wants and satisfies the cravings of an immortal mind, must embrace the great and all absorbing topics of the christian religion. All should cultivate this field, that they may reap the rich and immortal fruits which it yields. I have long thought, that did I not believe the Holy Scriptures to be revelations from Heaven, I would read them, with some works of able and approved divines, that I might know, what that system is, which has been embraced by so many millions of men, many of them the brightest ornaments of our nature. But those who believe that the system of gospel truth, revealed in the Bible, is the voice of God speaking to men for instruction and salvation, are inexcusable, if they do not avail themselves of that wisdom which it imparts, that they "may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It is the Christian religion that has laid open the treasures of knowledge to all ranks of society. Among the ancient oriental nations, the philosophers never proposed to instruct the common people in the mysteries of religion, or the principles of philosophy. They seem to have thought such a diffusion of knowledge not desirable, and even impossible. At all events, the attempt was not made. The only approximation ever made towards it, was by Socrates, and perhaps this may have been the true reason, that he was condemned and executed under the false accusation that he contemned their gods. The common object of the priests, philosophers, and rulers of Pagan nations, was to hold the common people in bondage, as an ignorant and profane rabble, created to be enslaved. Our maxim, that knowledge on every useful subject shall if possible be com-

municated to all of every rank, is the offspring, neither of mere learning, nor of Pagan philosophy. It flows from a higher source—the divine and benevolent spirit of christianity. Among the ancient Egyptians, Arabians, Persians, Phenicians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, books were not made for the vulgar, nor are they now in Hindoostan, the Birman Empire, and China. In all these heathen nations, they are designed for the muftis, priests, philosophers, and kings only, and to them only are they accessible. The art of reading and the use of books have never been extended to the great body of the people, except in christian nations. It is on this account, that truly republican forms of government, can exist only among christian people. The states of Greece and ancient Rome were rather oligarchies, than republics. As the spirit of revealed religion, has unlocked the store-houses of knowledge, and opened them wide to all, as the gospel has brought life and immortality to light, and is the great means of promoting the best interests of man on earth, and the only means of preparing him for a blessed hereafter, the reading of those books by which it is illustrated, assumes an aspect of the highest interest. But as some may think this topic rather theological than literary, I forbear to press it farther.

The pleasures, the intellectual the moral and the religious improvement, derived from reading, are topics of argument that may be urged in any age, place, or nation, for the accumulation of books, and their diligent use by all who have access to their precious treasures. But there are many local considerations derived from the history, present state and future prospects of this village, that add importance to the subject of this address. The basis of the population of Newburgh, was laid in a plain, economical, and industrious people, about fifty years ago, who were drawn together at this place, by the advantages of trade. No impulse was given to it by the en-

terprise or wealth of one or more individuals forcing it into notice. This circumstance, has imparted some peculiarities to its growth and character. The same industry and economy in which it commenced, continues in a good degree to the present time. Its location possessed advantages on a more extensive scale than could be perceived by any one at its commencement. On the west side of the Hudson between it and the city of New York, there is no site where it is possible, at least for many years, to create a flourishing village. On the east side, there is but one range of counties belonging to the state of New York, between the North River, and the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and the range of mountain, bounding those counties, on the east, direct the current of trade from the country beyond them, to Long Island Sound. All the villages on the east side of the river, from Albany to New York, are limited in their resources, in this respect, by their geographical position. Less than half the efforts that have been made by enterprising men to advance Poughkeepsie and Hudson, would have made Newburgh a flourishing city.

This location connects itself, naturally and necessarily, with the tier of counties on the southern line of the state, two or three counties in the northeast of Pennsylvania, and Essex and Sussex in New-Jersey. By no other route, can produce, from these extensive and fertile regions, reach New-York, without crossing the high range of mountains to the south of us. It was as certain, then, as any locality could render it, that the products of the soil from those quarters, in finding its way to New-York, would pass this way. It is a law of commerce, almost as invariable as the law of gravitation, that produce will travel to the sea board, and to navigable rivers, by the nearest, and cheapest known practicable routes. Attempts to thwart it in this matter, are nearly as fruitless, as would be an effort to change the course of the monsoons or

trade winds. It is on this principle, that trade has forced itself to the Hudson, at this point, and made it a mart so flourishing. Should the benignity of Heaven still continue to bless the vast and opulent country, to the west of us, and this village, as it has done for the last fifty years, it cannot be long until Newburgh will be a large commercial city. It was thought by many that the opening of the Hudson and Delaware canal, would arrest the growth of Newburgh, by diverting the whole trade from the west, to Kingston—that the county of Orange, would be the only source of trade for this village. We all now see how erroneous was this anticipation. Since the completion of that important work, Newburgh has grown more rapidly, than at any former period. Not that it had any influence here; in truth, it was not felt. Except through Albany, and on the line of the grand canal, there is no place in this state, north of New-York, which so many travellers pass, in the course of a year, as through this village. The river from New-York to this place, is open in ordinary seasons, nine months and a half of the year, or about two hundred and eighty days. The average arrivals and departures daily, estimated together, cannot fall much short of three hundred, or eighty-four thousand, in one season. The sections of country in the interior, occupied by those travellers, are generally connected with this village, by some commercial ligament. Great numbers of them transact much business here. From some late estimates of the amount of daily exports, from Newburgh, it would seem that in one season, they cannot fall much below four and a half millions of dollars. In all these facts, we discover the causes that have with- in a few years, especially, given such an acceleration to the growth of the village. To all these facilities, it is obvious to remark, that the rail-road, now in a course of construction will make very large additions.

For what then, has the beneficence of Heaven poured into

the lap of this people, so great a profusion of earthly blessings? Surely it has not been, that they may be expended in the mere gratification of our animal natures, much less to foster the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. Our bodies have been created to subserve our better part, and all worldly possessions for the cultivation and adornment of our intellectual faculties. But in commercial cities, (I say cities, for Newburgh will soon be a city,) the amassing of riches is the means of increasing many evils, if the application of the proper correctives is neglected.

1. The extravagant embellishments of private dwellings, unnecessary profusion in equipage, and wasteful expenditures in dress. Neatness, and even richness, in all these respects, is allowable and proper, when the household revenues are very abundant, and where the mind receives proportional improvement. But it often accurs, and will accur here, unless guarded against, that all this gorgeous display is made, while the mind remains in a disgusting state of ignorance, rusticity, and rudeness. A gentleman, in one of our opulent cities, had charge of a literary institution, in which an opulent father entered his son, as a pupil. The teacher was invited to spend an evening in the family. He was ushered, by a richly dressed servant, into a most splendidly furnished drawing-room, where he was introduced to the mother of the boy. Her dress was costly in the extreme, and no doubt in the newest mode imported from some European emporium of fashion. But the mind, in the most wretched poverty, was clothed in beggarly rags, and the manners every way vulgar. This rudeness too, was incomparably the more disgusting, as there was an awkward attempt to imitate the elegance and air of the intelligent and refined, and as it was contrasted with the taste of the milliner and upholsterer. The father and the children of the family were soon assembled. The minds of all, were utterly destitute of knowledge and refinement. Could any thing be more preposterous than all this? Probably in that rich and splendid mansion, there was not

one book, at least not one worth reading. To prevent evils like this, diffuse among the citizens of this village a taste for profitable reading.

2. Where there is, as often happens, a tact for the acquisition of wealth, without any relish for general knowledge, a love of money for its own sake—the root of all evil, is cherished, and grows into the ruling passion of the soul. It requires no process of reasoning to prove that this is a gross perversion of the bounties of Heaven. Our capacities for physical gratification are very limited. The most opulent man can enjoy no more of it, than he who possesses a bare competency; the resources of mental enjoyment are boundless. To such often a great accumulation of property purely for its own sake, and not as the means of enlarging the sphere of our knowledge or of doing good, if not the most mischievous, is one of the most sordid passions. To prevent its growth here, diffuse among the people a taste for profitable reading.

3. The increase of wealth, without a correspondent growth of intellectual vigor and purity of soul, fosters every vice, until society is corrupted in its morals to the very core. Where the means are abundantly furnished, if nothing better offers, an attempt will generally be made to pamper the appetites, and find out the means of debasing, sensual indulgence. Than that such should be the deplorable result of commercial prosperity, it were incomparably better that our citizens should never to the end of the world become more opulent than they now are. As one means of preventing such an abuse of riches, diffuse among the people a taste for profitable reading.

4. One of the most deplorable perversions of prosperity, where salutary checks are not provided, is the corruption of the youth, especially of young men. This topic addresses itself with emphasis to parents, whom the commerce of this village either has enriched or is enriching. As a general rule, the sons of opulent parents, will not pursue, with the assiduity of their fathers, the labour necessary for the accumulation of

property. Idleness leads to profligacy, and consequent ruin, both in this world and hereafter. A gentleman of great respectability in a prosperous commercial city, tells us that when he commenced business as a merchant, about twenty-five years ago, he was personally acquainted with twenty young men, the sons of rich men, and that all but himself have gone to utter ruin. They spent their leisure hours in the bar room, at the card table, the theatre, &c. until their morals were debased, their health destroyed, and their patrimony wasted. Now they are all either gone down to a premature grave, or are reduced to poverty and degradation. It would wring, in the bitterness of agony, the heart of any father to anticipate for a darling son, such a destiny. But many parents bring these evils on their children, by treasuring up for them, great stores of property, while the treasures of mind and the more durable riches of the kingdom of Heaven are neglected. It would be heresy to maintain that mere learning and books would certainly secure your sons from the path of sensual gratification, and make them great and good; for there are instances where these means have proved ineffectual. But surely it may be affirmed, that as the pleasures of reading are incomparably greater, purer and more noble, than those criminal indulgences that seduce young men into the road to ruin, were they well taught when young how to appreciate those higher sources of enjoyment, it would be a wiser means to promote their welfare, than the efforts which are made by many for bequeathing to them no more than ample inheritances in property. To furnish them with the full means of enjoyment by books, social libraries or library institutions must be founded and supported—supported munificently. A diligent reader will soon exhaust the contents of most private collections, even those of professional men. If you would then provide a guard for your sons, against the temptations, which wealth brings with it, encourage the **NEWBURGH LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**. The one thousand volumes which it has collected, in a short time, will do good, while it is a happy

indication that some at least of the citizens do appreciate the doctrines enforced in this address.

Of such importance are these institutions that, as we may safely assert, they ought to be patronized by the state. Vast sums are lavished from the state treasury for advancing internal improvement. Canals and rail-roads furnish facilities for commerce, and the increase of wealth. The internal improvement of mind and morals, is incomparably more important. The expenditures out of the state treasury, on our primary Schools, Academies and Colleges, are for the promotion of a much more elevated kind of internal improvement, than the opening of channels along which commerce may pour its fullest streams of wealth. The acquisition of the art of reading is the most important good, resulting from the appropriations made by the state for the education of youth. It is not only the basis of the whole superstructure of learning, but is in itself the most valuable of all literary attainments, as furnishing more means of enjoyment, and as leading immediately to more important results, than any other literary attainment. But our citizens do not, and perhaps cannot avail themselves of its advantages. Hundreds of thousands who have been taught to read, are almost destitute of books. All the books in most family collections, might be read in less than one winter season. The cultivation of the minds of the young, after they have learned to read, is much more important, than all their culture in the schools. It may be replied to all this—let them buy books for themselves. This objection is as available against state aid for schools, as for libraries. It is demonstrated by experience, that the people are as tardy in buying books, as in supporting schools. To teach them the art of reading, without supplying them with books, is little less absurd, than to furnish every family with a plough, and no land to cultivate. But you can and will make your library association great and flourishing even without aid from the state.