THE PROTECTIVE POLICY IN LITERATURE: A DISCOURSE ON THE SOCIAL AND MORAL ADVANTAGES OF THE CULTIVATION OF LOCAL LITERATURE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649233076

The Protective Policy in Literature: A Discourse on the Social and Moral Advantages of the Cultivation of Local Literature by William T. Coggeshall

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WILLIAM T. COGGESHALL

THE PROTECTIVE POLICY IN LITERATURE: A DISCOURSE ON THE SOCIAL AND MORAL ADVANTAGES OF THE CULTIVATION OF LOCAL LITERATURE

Trieste

The Protective Policy in Literature.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

SOCIAL AND MORAL ADVANTAGES

OF THE

CULTIVATION OF LOCAL LITERATURE.

BY

WILLIAM T. COGGESHALL,

OHIO STATE LIBRARIAN.

Delivered before the Beta Theta Pi Society of Ohio University at the 54th Commencement, June 22d, 1858.

COLUMBUS, OHIO:

FOLLETT, FOSTER AND COMPANY.

1859.

THE WEST AND ITS LITERATURE.

WHEN I was invited to stand in this place to-night, distrusting my fitness for such a position, I could not accept the responsibility it would impose, until I had determined the purpose of a Discourse.

It was with great diffidence and deep embarrassment, I seriously took up that question. I could not be mistaken in the character of the audience to which I would speak. I was invited by a Literary Society composed of young men, who are soon, with cultivated minds and willing hands, to go forth into the world to forge out careers for themselves. I knew that my voice would be heard within the walls of the first general Institution of Learning provided for, by the liberal foresight of Congress, in the Great West. Bearing in mind that this Institution seeks to develop character becoming the vigor and independence of prosperous intelligence, I was led to reflect whether it would not be peculiarly appropriate to plead before the Students and Teachers, the thinkers and workers, here assembled, the advantages of cultivating a Literature in the West, which will represent its history and its capacities — its people, their opportunities and their purposes.

When I had decided upon that theme, I did not fear an imputation of "sectionalism." Literature which lives represents the spirit of a people. In that sense it must be "sectional," or local; in a word, native.

From the earliest Hebrew, Chaldaic, or Egyptian records, through Grecian, Roman, German, Spanish, French or English, "sectionalism" has been a vitalizing power—sectionalism, not as a subservient spirit devoted to selfish purposes for narrow ends, but truthfulness to the animating characteristics of thought and action among an individual people.

Plato and Demosthenes, Cæsar and Cicero, Luther and Calvin, Shakspeare and Gœthe, Voltaire and Calderon, Milton and Moliere, were "sectionalists." So are Bryant and Longfellow, Bancroft and Irving, Willis and Cooper. American literature was unrecognized, in the world's highest courts of criticism, half a century ago, because it was not pervaded with the special characteristics of the forming nation. Western literature, though in a lively degree representing Pioneer men and Pioneer times, has been disregarded, as a distinct power, in the general interest for welcome to whatever, springing out of seaboard cities, has been creditable to the national character.

Let us inquire why.

It is a law of mental and physical philosophy, that the character of a people depends greatly upon the advantages, or disadvantages, of the country it inhabits.

The most favorable natural condition for the healthful development of a people, is in a climate and upon a soil which require, but which generously reward, judicious industry.

That is the character, preëminently, of the soil and climate which have attracted emigrants from all quarters of the globe to

"The land of the West, green forest land,"

fitly apostrophized by William D. Gallagher as the

"Clime of the fair and the immense,
Favorite of Nature's liberal hand,
And child of her munificence."

Its mountains and valleys and plains—its great rivers and inland seas, bless a people, whose ancestry had peculiar incentives to

industry—who, with mental cultivation, braving peril and deprivation, vigorously started a new life. Having no use for the conventionalities to which they had been accustomed, they could afford manners and customs becoming their new relations, and, consequently, it is said with truth, that western men are frank, generous, prompt; perhaps rude; it may be rough, according to the rules of polite society.

Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton, Davy Crockett and George Rogers Clark, Rufus Putnam and William Henry Harrison, were types of the character which fought the Indians, hunted the bear and the deer and the buffalo, conquered the wilderness, and organized States.

The antithesis of characteristics which distinguished their public lives, were not more deeply marked than the contrasts to have been met, in camps and circles, never known out of the forest or the settlement. Heroism, in the sense of self-sacrificing devotion to a definite purpose, was a necessity of pioneer life; and self-reliance shone as an eminent characteristic of Western Society, when general observation was first attracted to it as an element in national councils.

The social history of the early West exposes need of culture, but it evinces virtue, and its political history evinces wisdom. Consequently its amazingly augmenting power can be explained as clearly as a mathematical problem. Self-reliant industry upon a generous soil, shaded by hills and forests, brightened by navigable rivers—social virtue and political wisdom—these won the epithet *great* for the West, and upon these does security for the worthiness of that epithet depend, in whatever respect it may be used, not implying extent of domain.

It is said that a frontier merchant is at once recognized in New York, by his self-reliance, his independence; it may be, his rude generosity. The half-horse, half-alligator caricatures of Western peculiarities which have prevailed, had a natural significance in the stamp pioneer life gave its inheritors.

When a thorough-bred Yankee, a regular down-Easter, comes "out west," with his cautious care of sixpences, he is as surely known as a fresh Hollander, or an Irishman with brogans; and, not until he is so transformed that he can speak as if he were not afraid of wasting his voice, does he cease to be an object of scrutiny.

It is well worthy of remark, that while Western Society is required to harmonize countless conflicting peculiarities, which accompany emigrants from all quarters of the globe, it so far preserves its original force of character, that it is competent to liberalize the shrewd New Englander, who, after forty years' wear and tear on a sterile farm, or in a narrow counting-house, comes West, with a long face, deploring the necessity of relinquishing good society for the companionship of wide corn-fields, fat oxen, big pigs and land warrants, or town lots and railway scrip.

But the modification of character which overcomes the immigrant in the West, is owing in a great degree to an influence which always underlies progress. It exists in distrust for the past and hope for the future, inspiring a willingness to adopt and encourage whatever promises prosperity.

This influence led the earliest pioneer, and it leads the latest immigrant, if he comes hither for good purpose. In the language of a writer who has studied the history of the West, and who appreciates her opportunities: *

"What, till within a few years past, the onward-coming multitudes have found on arriving here, has been, chiefly, physical sufficiency, great intellectual expertness, a degree of moral independence wholly new to them, and capacity for almost indefinite extension, either morally, intellectually or physically. Coming in upon us by hundreds and thousands, as they now are and for years have been, their gentler and fiercer passions, like meadow

* William D. Gallagher—Historical Address, 18—.

rivulets and mountain torrents, mixing in with and modifying our own, and their art, science and literature, their hard-handedness and willing-heartedness, and their experiences of life generally giving to and receiving from ours new impulses and new directions, the whole soon to flow together in one common stream of Humanity, which will be found irresistible by any barriers that may oppose its course, must inevitably give new and peculiar aspects to the region and the era wherein it holds its way. * * * *

"Out of the crude materials, collected and collecting in the North-West—materials that are just now taking forms of symmetry, and exhibiting a homogeneousness that has not heretofore belonged to them—are to come arts and institutions and educations better fitted for the uses and enjoyments of man, and more promotive of those high developments that are within the capacities of his nature, than anything which the world has yet seen. * * *

"Here, on this magnificent domain—this undulating plain—that extends from the beautiful bases of the Allegheny Mountains to the broad, fertile shores of the Mississippi River, and stretches its arms from near the 36th quite to the 42d degree of north latitude—are in time to be witnessed the freest forms of social development, and the highest order of human civilization."

Enthusiasm animated the pen of the writer whose words I have quoted, but it was enthusiasm tempered by judgment; it grew out of a liberal estimate of natural opportunity.

The conditions of the superior human advancement, possible, in the lapse of time, through that opportunity, depend on well-directed industry, humanitary ingenuity and political wisdom; but all of these depend upon social characteristics, for upon social characteristics—upon domestic life—in the widest degree, rest the morals of a people; and the morals of a people are purified or corrupted by their literature—the literature they produce.

The world's history is marked by periods to which literature

gave character, and these periods are among the brightest on the scroll of Time. Songs and Poems, Orations and Histories, with their encouragements and warnings, are valued in all influential society, with higher and deeper reverence than whatever else the proudest nations produced. They are not only inspiring for themselves, but they preserve whatever was inspiring among the people from whom they proceeded.

The record of the world's action, as it appears in monuments or mausoleums, in pagodas or palaces, in pyramids or temples, does not teach that honor and usefulness are what men should have ambition for. These noble lessons lie in the literature, spoken from the pulpit, on the rostrum or in the forum, upon the highway or in the cloister, which, through its agents, that now search every cabin, the Printing Press, reproduces and renews.

Books are the most enduring of human possessions. Literature is alone, of human instrumentalities, a pervading spirit which Time cannot destroy—a spirit which animated tradition when time, with man, was young, and took form and comeliness in poetry and history—a spirit for which ingenuity has toiled through all the centuries of the past, and to which the highest forms of human aspiration now do reverence.

Nature's affinities are not monopolized in the natural sciences. The mental as well as the material world has its attractions and its repulsions. Literature, in the broadest sense, is the medium of their transmission from one man—from one age or from one nation to another.

Music has tones which act responsive to peculiar human emotions, and so has Literature; but there are melodies which inspire all humanity, and there are literary utterances which find echo wherever there is a human heart. These utterances are among the surest evidences of the cultivation of the right spirit of literature by a people, but often they burst forth in signal rebuke of indifference to that spirit.

Greece and Rome, England and France, Germany and Spain,