

**AN ESSAY ON THE MEANS AND
IMPORTANCE OF INTRODUCING THE
NATURAL SCIENCES INTO THE
FAMILY LIBRARY, AND DIFFUSING THE
ELEMENTS OF GEOMETRY INTO THE
PLAN OF THE POPULAR EDUCATION**

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An essay on the means and importance of introducing the natural sciences into the family library, and diffusing the elements of geometry into the plan of the popular education by D. McCurdy

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D. MCCURDY

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TO

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AN ESSAY

ON

THE MEANS AND IMPORTANCE

OF

INTRODUCING THE NATURAL SCIENCES

INTO

THE FAMILY LIBRARY,

AND

DIFFUSING THE ELEMENTS OF GEOMETRY

INTO

THE PLAN OF THE POPULAR EDUCATION:

BY D. McCURDY,

LATE A CLERK IN THE U. S. PENSION OFFICE.

SECOND EDITION, IMPROVED.

WASHINGTON:

BLAIR AND RIVES, PRINTERS.

1842.

CAJORI

Entered, according to act of Congress, in the Clerk's office of the District of
Columbia, by DENNIS McCARDY.

NOTE.—An error in the orthography of this author's name was unintentionally admitted into the former edition of this Essay. The remarks made in connection with that error were intended for another occasion.

LB 1645
M26
1842

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The writer of the following discursive remarks served the republic during twenty-two years, *die et nocte*, as a teacher, in word and sign; commissioned and caressed by the people long before the strength of the young man had gone forth from the halls of the muses to disseminate literature and science in the land. Then, in 1834, after a suspension of two years or more, occasioned by disease, the effect of his application, he was employed as a clerk in the service of the government; and, in 1840, notified, with others, that from the 28th of February, 1841, his service should not be required. The last ten years have presented to his view, unsought, shades of human character deeper than those which he had been accustomed to contemplate; therefore, with incredible pleasure, he returns to the pursuits of Science, because he feels within himself the more cordial palpability of the benign radiance beaming from the beauty of her truths.

From many flattering testimonials furnished to him by citizens of this District, in order to favor his application for a school in the city of Baltimore, he thinks it proper to select for publication here the letter received from the office: where he had the honor to serve; *for the public service is honorable in itself; but the manner of obtaining a place may be antihetical, and the fervid ambition, incapacity, and catastrophes of Phacton are recorded for our instruction.*

"WASHINGTON, July 30, 1841.

"We hereby certify that Mr. DENNIS McCURRY has been a clerk in the Pension Office for several years, and is now dropped in consequence of the decrease of the business. During his continuance in office, we have necessarily acquired a knowledge of his attainments; and do most earnestly and unhesitatingly recommend him to the Commissioners of the Public Schools in Baltimore, as possessing high and eminent qualifications as an instructor.

- "GEO. W. CRUMP, *Chief Clerk.*
 - "JOHN D. WILSON, *Clerk.*
 - "HENRY H. SYLVESTER, *Clerk.*
 - "WM. S. ALLISON, *Clerk.*
 - "FRENCH S. EVANS, *Clerk.*
 - "DANIEL BROWN, *Clerk.*
 - "JAMES L. EDWARDS,
- "*Commissioner of Pensions.*"

The appointment in Baltimore was made in favor of a worthy gentleman, who had the greatest minority of votes at a preceding election for teacher. And, on application to be reinstated as a clerk, the President of the United States made the following endorsement of the papers submitted to him on our behalf:

"All that I can say or do is to refer this to the Secretary, with the declaration that, from all the information which I have received, Mr. McCurdy is a good clerk and a worthy man.

"J. TYLER.

"October 26, 1841."

UNION LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY,
Medical College, Washington, September 30, 1841.

Sir: On the evening of the 23d instant the following resolution was moved and adopted in this Society:

"Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to examine an Essay proposed to be published by DENNIS McCURDY, Esq., late a member of this society, and report a resolution sanctioning its publication, or otherwise."

Committee—Messrs. Cunningham, Lang, and Nalley.

On this evening, (30th,) Mr. Cunningham, from the said committee, presented the following

REPORT:

"The committee appointed under a resolution of this society to examine an Essay prepared by D. McCurdy, Esq., have attended to that duty, and find the same to contain an outline of a Magazine, proposed to be published in the city of Washington, to be entitled 'The Washington Magazine and Junior Citizens' Guide to Science.'

"The committee highly approve of the plan as laid down by Mr. McCurdy, and believe it would, if published in conformity to the design communicated, be conducive to the advancement of education and science, and a valuable companion to the master and student, as well as to the junior members of families. Your committee, therefore, recommend the following resolution for the adoption of this society:

"Resolved, That the Union Literary and Debating Society, having full confidence in the mathematical and scientific attainments of Mr. Dennis McCurdy, take great satisfaction in recommending his proposed Magazine to the patronage of a liberal public.

"A. F. CUNNINGHAM, }
 "JNO. H. LANG, } Committee."
 "R. B. NALLEY, }

"And, on motion, the said report was received, and the resolution unanimously adopted."

The above is a true extract from the minutes of the proceedings of the Union Literary and Debating Society.

Very respectfully, &c.

JNO. H. LANG, *Secretary.*

To DENNIS McCURDY, Esquire.

INTRODUCTION.

There are in the general system of things a just proportion and due equilibrium, dependent on the exercise of its proper function by each of the constituent parts ; which exercise preserves the system in a healthy condition. The same is true with regard to the particular systems composing the various departments of human affairs and human knowledge ; namely—government, law, religion, physic, the arts and sciences, and such like. Each system may be compared to a machine, the compartments of which are so well adjusted that they move together in harmonious action ; the pretensions of one being no encroachment on the rights of another. Theorists are often accused of disturbing this order of things, by proposing changes, introducing new springs and principles of action, and attaching great importance to some parts which the community had comparatively neglected. The estimate of the theorist differs from that of other people ; and if his scheme should be inexpedient or impracticable, his zeal will only expose him to derision and contempt.

It does not follow, however, that communities are never to be agitated with untried questions, because their condition is not already perfect, nor every individual enjoying all the possible means of happiness, and the full measure of his capacity for knowledge. Communities lose many advantages by supineness, and more by misapplied activity. They sleep when they should be vigilant, and wake to exhaust their energies in unprofitable toil. Columbus employed seven anxious years in awakening the world to an interest in his plan of discovery, during which time he was treated as a chimerical projector. It required the physical co-operation of others to effect his design ; and from this necessity he en-

dured their scorn, until by pertinacity he drew the current of public opinion into his ship's path over the previously unexplored deep. Upon men without fortune has always devolved the labor of instructing the world.

Such is the example which we propose to ourselves in urging the improvement of common school education, by the infusion of the elements of geometry. For this purpose, a plan of a Manual and Chart is proposed: a description of which may be seen in a subsequent part of this Essay. But, in order to place the means of acquiring the knowledge of science in the way of adults of both sexes, we here present a prospectus of a Magazine, which may be imitated by men of science in all practicable places. A periodical publication, commencing with the elements of geometry and arithmetic, and containing a well-arranged and complete course of mathematics, would be read, in many instances, by persons who could never be persuaded to undertake the subject by means of the books used in schools; especially if the illustrations should be so simplified as to supply the want of living teachers. Such reading, exclusive of the practical use of the sciences, would contribute to neutralize the deleterious effects of works of fiction, ultra politics, and all that exuberance of fanciful matter by which the morals of the age are relaxed, and the line traversed in every direction, which distinguishes right from wrong. The reports of the many violations of law and order would not be read for amusement, which is a certain patronage of the wrong-doer; the brightest parts would not be employed in depicting the vices and follies of men with a playful coloring of their enormity, from which the fascinated reader glides, among the puppets of the author, into those errors which he finds so elegantly described. The rule of right, upon which the eye of the freeman should ever be fixed, is not laid down in such productions. The false impression is not effaced from the reader's mind, that he is not accountable to God or his country until after he has entered his or her service by special agreement, and signed a pledge, or made profession to that effect. If the author is friendly to religion, he must disguise that. To acknowledge the claim of the Redeemer to the love of our race, is an insuperable barrier to that friendship. His regard for good morals also wants the rule—"To love one's neighbor as himself." Hence such writings do not, in any instance, reprove the reader for faults, nor afford any light for the correction of errors; which, after all, are mere negative utilities. And thus failing in the first part of the rule of improvement—

"Cease to do evil," they can have no pretensions whatever to the second part—"Learn to do well." Having, therefore, neither positive nor negative goodness, the alternative is evil; and, under these views, we cannot be of the number of those who would regret the loss of reputation, as such, to writers of this class, by a voyage from Europe; because, in our humble opinion, that loss would rather be the recovery of sound discretion to a portion of the people, who had been, to some extent, deluded by the misapplication of great talents—a reduction of over-rated worth to its par value.

There is also another object to be achieved by the diffusion of the exact sciences, (if our people *will be gratified* while the Genius of our institutions weeps, and Modesty shrinks from the scene,) namely: to make the amateurs of indecent exhibitions intimate with the properties of the spiral curve; that they may, at least, be able to criticise, with fastidious accuracy, the circumgyrations of all young dancers, patented at the courts of dukes and princes, as one of the means of governing their disfranchised *cognaille*, whose return to sound discretion these magnates might have some cause to dread; but who are entirely useless to our people in the administration of their affairs, either private or public. Useless, indeed, and inefficient for any purpose of good, but greatly prolific as the seed of evil; because the artist, corrupt at heart, and ready to sell his country for sordid gain, exhibits for sale multiplied copies of such indelicate exposures; and, in the interior of his impure shop, finishes the work of shame undisguised, to which he will invite the ripening debauchees, disgracing humanity, and breaking down the last impediment which obstructs the decline of virtue. Where, do you inquire, are the seats of such abominations? Tamper with the crime in your theatres, and you will find the copies every where in the streets of your cities. Their favorite haunts will be near the legislative halls, dishonoring the precincts of the sacred fanes of human liberty, without the remedy of law, or a vindicator of the public sanctity. For how will your courts be able to convict or punish in the copy that which you have sanctioned and applauded in the original? Citizens! will you make the fine arts the medium of corrupting your morals? Will you abdicate your rational forms of government, and be led by low sensations unbecoming the supreme dignity of the inheritance of your philosophic and Christian fathers? Will you borrow your taste, as a people, from the kennels of paganism, perpetuated as it is in the unamended condition of a large majority of the populace of the old world?