

**AN ADDRESS TO THE LITERARY
SOCIETIES OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,
ON THE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE
OF GERMAN LITERATURE. HANOVER,
N.H., JULY 24, 1839**

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An Address to the Literary Societies of Dartmouth College, on the Character and Influence of German Literature. Hanover, N.H., July 24, 1839 by A. H. Everett

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A. H. EVERETT

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ADDRESS
TO THE
LITERARY SOCIETIES
OF
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,
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THE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE
OF
GERMAN LITERATURE.

DELIVERED AT
HANOVER, N. H., JULY 24, 1839.

BY A. H. EVERETT.

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1839.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, JULY 24, 1839.

TO HON. A. H. EVERETT.

Dear Sir:—At the Anniversary meeting of the two Literary Societies, United Fraternity and Social Friends, held on this day, it was—

RESOLVED:—That the thanks of the Societies be presented to the Hon. A. H. Everett for his *very excellent and eloquent* Oration, and that a copy be requested for publication.

We cannot but express our individual, earnest wishes that this resolution may receive your favorable notice.

Very Respectfully,

Your Obedient Servants,

J. BOWEN CLARK, S. DANA, A. FRANKLIN EDWARDS, E. H. BARSTOW, R. J. CARPENTER, A. STEPHENS,	} Committee of the Societies.
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HANOVER, N. H. JULY 24, 1839.

Gentlemen:—I have received your letter of this day, communicating a Resolve adopted by the Literary Societies at their late Anniversary Meeting.

Permit me through you to offer to the Societies my sincere acknowledgments for the very friendly terms in which they have been pleased to mention the Address. Agreeably to their desire I have the honor to place a copy at your disposal and am with great regard, Gentlemen,

Very Truly and Respectfully, Your Friend,

And Obedient Servant,

A. H. EVERETT.

MESSERS. J. BOWEN CLARK, S. DANA, A. FRANKLIN EDWARDS, E. H. BARSTOW, R. J. CARPENTER, A. STEPHENS,	} Committee of the Societies.
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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETIES :—In selecting a topic for the present Address I have thought it superfluous to invite your attention to a statement of the arguments in favor of education and improvement. They are familiar to you all, and have become by frequent repetition on public occasions almost common-place. The general aspect of the country, and especially the section we inhabit; the schools that abound in our towns and villages; the academies that are found in almost every county; the universities and colleges of which several more or less flourishing adorn nearly every one of our confederated states; the new efforts that are making in all quarters in the cause of education; finally, Gentlemen, the very purpose for which we are assembled; this brilliant concourse of spectators, in a region remote from the great centres of population, brought together

by no other purpose than that of gratifying their taste for the highest and purest intellectual and moral pursuits, or their personal interest in those who are engaged in them ; all these circumstances seem to show that the public mind is already deeply impressed with the importance of education. I have therefore thought that the hour which we are to pass together might perhaps be more profitably employed in the consideration of some particular topic, connected with the literary and scientific objects, to which alone on this occasion we should for a moment feel a wish to direct our attention. For on these auspicious anniversaries set apart for purposes in which all the people take an equal interest, I need not say that the most remote allusion to the ordinary topics of party strife and contention should be carefully excluded. We meet to day not as members of sects and parties, but as friends and fellow laborers in a common cause ; as fellow citizens of the great Republic of Letters ; as brothers of the family of man.

In pursuance of these ideas I propose, Gentlemen, on the present occasion, to offer you some remarks upon the *Character and Influence of the Literature of Germany* ; a subject which of late years has justly excited and continues to excite a great and constantly increasing interest. Germany, though separated from us by a broad intervening ocean, is closely connected with us in all the points which belong to moral and intellectual character. Our forefathers who came to this country from the British isles drew their own

origin from the banks of the Rhine and the depths of the Hercynian forest. It is to these scenes so famous in classical history that we are finally carried back when we seek out the real *incunabula gentis*, the original head quarters of that remarkable race which from these central points has spread itself over the whole north of Europe and is fast spreading itself over the whole of North America. Germany is the head spring of our language, laws, and polity. The British Constitution, the basis of our own, and for a long time the great exemplar of regulated liberty, was found, says the illustrious Montesquieu, in the woods of Germany. Our form of Christianity which we prize so highly and consider so important, has been transmitted to us in later times from the same quarter:—and what I deem far more essential than any mere form of religion or government, we refer to our Anglo-Saxon origin the high moral qualities,—the enterprize, the industry,—the courage, active and passive,—the temperance, prudence, and patience,—the generosity and frankness,—above all, the earnestness and sincerity, which distinguish the German race under all its various names, and have given it,—wherever they have come into contact,—an easy ascendancy over the graceful and brilliant but far less manly, bold and vigorous genius of the South. Finally, Gentlemen, we have seen in this later age,—within the last half century,—this same antique soil, blooming with the rich products of a new universal philosophy and a new school of polite literature; products which have fixed to an almost

unexampled extent the attention of the world and continue to exercise a powerful influence upon the development and progress of the mind throughout Christendom.

I mention these facts, Gentlemen, in evidence of the extent to which the influence of Germany has modified, in the most various ways, our whole intellectual and moral existence. Of the numerous interesting points to which I have cursorily alluded, I must confine myself strictly on the present occasion, to the last in the order of time, the new school of polite Literature. Even of this any thing like a thorough and full examination is of course precluded by the limits of the occasion. If by presenting a few of the salient points with as much relief and distinctness as my humble ability may render practicable, I can excite such an interest in the subject as will lead you to follow up my imperfect hints by independent researches of your own, my hopes will be more than satisfied. I select the literary in preference to the philosophical department of the subject, not because I consider it more important, but because from its greater popularity it seems better fitted to the purpose of a public address.

The earliest literature of Germany, though rich, original and vigorous, never assumed a classical shape, and has come down to us in the form of materials rather than finished works. The patriotic enthusiasm of our own time has attempted to elevate the Lay of the Nibelungen into a grand national Epic ; but although the subject and char-

acter are well adapted for this purpose, the execution is too imperfect. The scene is laid in part at the court or rather head quarters of Attila the Hun, but so dim and shadowy are the delineations of the characters, and so imperfect is our knowledge of the history of the period, that no one has yet undertaken to fix with certainty or even probability the local position and national character of the Nibelungen warriors who form the heroes of the story. With the disappearance of these shadowy personages from the scene of action, literature sinks into a long slumber from which she has only revived since the Reformation. Luther himself combined with his power of thought and iron will, literary talents of the highest order, which, had it not been his vocation to be the first of Reformers, would have rendered him one of the greatest of Philosophers and Poets. His translation of the Scriptures,—a Herculean labor for a single man,—while it proves the extent of his industry and perseverance, is thought to have done more than any other work to fix the standard of the German language. His writings, in prose and verse, are instinct with a life and spirit which with a higher finish of style would have made them master pieces of art. But although the mighty Reformer possessed himself very superior literary capacities and accomplishments, the results of his labors were far from being immediately favorable to the development of learning. The great movement of the Reformation, which for the two following centuries covered Germany with