

**THE PLEASURES, THE  
DANGERS AND THE USES  
OF DESULTORY READING**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649308590

The Pleasures, the Dangers and the Uses of Desultory Reading by Stafford H. Northcote

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE**

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BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL OF IDDESLEIGH

*Northcote, Stafford H.*



LONDON  
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH AND CO

1885

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"The Times" of November 4, 1885.*

*Revised by Lord Iddesleigh, and with a few  
additions.*

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THIS Discourse was read by the Earl of Iddesleigh, Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh, in the United Presbyterian Synod-hall; the first of a series of Addresses to the Students, on November 3, 1885.





*Introduction.*

GENTLEMEN,

**W**HEN I had the honour of addressing you on the occasion of my inauguration, I expressed a hope that it might be in my power to visit you again in the course of my term of office, so that the intercourse between your Rector and the great body of students might not be limited to the single address which custom prescribed, and which has, I think, usually furnished the only opportunity for our being brought together. I expressed this hope knowing that under any circumstances I should feel the advantage of occasionally renewing my acquaintance with the University. But since the time to which I refer much has happened



to increase—if I may use the phrase, to intensify—the feelings of regard and of kindly goodwill which were engendered at our first meeting. We have rejoiced together, and we have sorrowed together. We rejoiced in the interesting proceedings which attended the celebration of the tercentenary. We sorrowed at the common loss which we sustained in the death of our esteemed and distinguished friend, the late Principal. I should be wanting in all right feeling if I did not take this opportunity of again bearing my testimony to the high qualities and the eminent services of Sir Alexander Grant.

I have referred to the links in the chain of affection which I hope binds us together, but there is still another matter upon which I am anxious to say a few words, and which brings us more directly to the business of this evening. Within the last two years the students of this University have done much to quicken and to develop what I may call the University life. You have felt that, in

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order to gain the full advantages which these seats of learning are able to offer, it is necessary for you to adopt some method of common action, to set on foot an organization capable of promoting you in the means of expressing your wants, and of taking steps to supply them. To this movement, as I understand, we are to attribute your coming together to-night; and I trust I am a good augur when I foretell that this meeting will be followed by many more, at which you will have the benefit of valuable lectures by eminent men upon the various subjects of interest upon which they will be able to address you. It is a wise idea, and I trust it will not only deserve, but command success.

Gentlemen, you have done me the honour to ask me to open the ball, and to deliver something in the nature of a lecture. If I had had more command of my time, and could have given to any subject which I might have selected the study which a man ought to give before he presumes to appear



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in public as a lecturer, I would gladly have made the attempt; but it is not so, and I feel that I must ask your indulgence if I shrink from the inspiring call which would bid me soar with the Dircean swan, and content myself with a humbler imitation of the Matinian bee. Alike in the subject which I shall choose, and in the mode of handling it which I shall adopt, I shall endeavour to avoid the charge of presumption, and I therefore trust that I may disarm criticism and escape the mortification of ill-success. I shall not attempt to tread the high paths of science, or to enter far into the domain of philosophy. Neither shall I adventure upon the more elevated regions of literature or seek to explore the temples of the Muses. My theme will be the pleasures, the dangers, and the uses of what is commonly called desultory reading, and I hope to be allowed to decline for my address the more pretentious title of a lecture, and to describe it rather as a desultory discourse. Not that I regard

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