PUBLIC ADDRESSES, COLLEGIATE AND POPULAR; PP.1-172

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D. D. WHEDON

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PUBLIC ADDRESSES,

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COLLEGIATE AND POPULAR.

BY D. D. WHEDON.

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1852.

DEDICATION.

TO THE

CIRCLE OF PUPILS AND FRIENDS

BY WHOSE INVITATION MOST OF THESE PIECES WERE

DELIVERED,

AT WHOSE REQUEST SOME OF THEM WERE SINGLY

PUBLISHED,

THIS COLLECTION IS RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED.

THE CLASSICS.

AN

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

AS

PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE,

IN THE WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY,

AUGUST, 18[illegible].

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

Between the enunciated word upon the human lips and its correspondent idea in the human mind there is no natural and no necessary connection. Language, when viewed in the light of an invention, must be considered as the application of sound to the purposes of the conveyance of thought; and so viewed, appears the mightiest of all the achievements of combining intellect.

Considered, however, as a divine endowment, most strikingly simple, indeed, is the providential arrangement. The intellect might be stored with treasures of inestimable knowledge; the imagination may be all gorgeous with vivid imagery; the bosom may throb with heaving emotions; yet, without this magic key to unlock their sources, they must be suffocated in agonized silence. Man would be a virtual idiot, though endowed with the loftiest capacity, and a real hermit, though surrounded with the densest society. Yet, mark how simple the apparatus which Providence has adjusted to the most exalted purposes. The whole process is performed, the whole object is gained, by sound — vox et preterea nihil. Within some prolific intellect awakes to new existence the eloquent thought, seizes the buoyant sound, and flits, a living messenger, a winged fancy, through liquid air, and descending upon the congenial organ, and melting into other minds, becomes a thrilling impulse to surrounding thousands. By an analogous process, the word becomes associated with the written character, and the mighty conception of one master spirit speeds a more than lightning

flight, through space and time, to far distant continents and far coming centuries.

Amidst the remains of antiquity there are two preëminent languages, that stand in unrivalled solitude, the magnificent depositories of departed genius. Other nations have indeed existed, and they rise upon the imagination like shadows, vast and magnificent, indeed, yet shadows still. But our own ancestral traditions are scarce more familiar to our youthful ears, than the glorious recollection of Grecian arts and Roman arms. Who has not been often and eloquently told that they reared in noblest grace the architectural column, they drew the most thrilling melody from the silent shell, they gave the most speaking life to the sculptured marble? Their arts have been the amateur's raptured admiration, their eloquence the scholar's model, their heroism the patriot's inspiration. Philosophy first lectured in their lyceums, liberty thundered her undying echoes in their forums, and poetry peopled their sceneries with forms of living ideal beauty, until every forest, dale, and hill, became classic and consecrated, and "not a mountain reared its head unsung."

Objections are often, indeed, expressed against the study of the productions of ancient genius. We frequently hear it complained that they have a too little practical character, and too feebly avail the young champion upon the arena, and amid the bustle of life's arduous contest. Be it so. But might I suggest that excitement is too much the characteristic of the age — that the youthful pulse beats but too early, and too intensely for the maddening contest; that the vortex of the political whirl is but too absorbing, and fascinates too frequently the ardent eye of young ambition? May I ask, should there not exist at least a class, less practical, if you please, retired from the intoxication of the active aspirants, of gentler nerve and milder tone, who love the classic grove and the academic hall, and who there, in their sphere of quieter usefulness, might form an allaying element amid the ferment and the whirl; who might temper the *dis*tempered pulsations of the young aspirant, rushing to the contest, and before he engages, form him to gentler tastes, and open to him, in his own mind, elements and traits which he would

never discover amid the rush of the multitude; who might dispense precepts of integrity, stigmatized, indeed, as impracticable, by the hackneyed adept, yet so effective as to guard his steps in many a trying moment, and elevate his views in many a depressing hour; who might store his imagination with generous and lofty conceptions, pronounced, indeed, romantic, by the common-place, yet so ennobling in effect as to exalt his nature, to render him the inspirer of lofty conceptions, illustrious purposes, and animated action in other minds; who might, in fine, create within his soul an entire department of intellectual resources, denounced as worthless, indeed, by the utilitarian, and totally beyond the reach of the arithmetician's figures and the economist's scales, which, though they may add not one farthing to his estate, nor one inch to his successful career of ambition, may constitute, in his own breast, a treasure which the Indies could not buy, a moral elevation to which the presidential chair could not exalt?

There are places and times in which it is emphatically the rage for people to be practical;—and practical they are with a vengeance. This feeling is sometimes extended into an affectation of barbarism. There is abroad a spirit of literary fanaticism, that under the pretence of ultra-utilitarianism, would, we might think, with one flourish of the torch of Omar, send the whole world of classic literature to join the ashes of the Alexandrian library. Making the five senses supreme umpire, it estimates the value of any object by its transmutability into consumable material. I, too, would claim to be an advocate of utility; but not of such a utility as they would propose. True utility would prompt us ever to store the youthful character with generous sentiments, refined taste, and varied acquisitions. In so doing, we should communicate many a fact, and many a principle, which the scholar might subsequently have, in fact, no actual occasion to use; which some would, therefore, pronounce useless; but of which any liberally educated gentleman would blush to be ignorant. A lawyer, or a minister, may never, in the course of his professional life, have occasion to mention the fact that Jupiter was the supreme deity of Grecian mythology; and yet who would not smile in contempt, if such a man, on such a sub-

ject, should expose his ignorance? A countless multitude of facts, whole departments of knowledge, may exist in the mind, which the possessor is never called to apply in practice, but the acquirement of which has communicated a discipline to the powers, and the possession of which presents a richness and a range of thought that constitute alone the completely accomplished character. True utility would dictate that to such a model should be formed the educated gentleman of our land, — a character where every nerve of the mind has received its full training, every department of the intellect has been so stored, and every weight of the character so equipoised, as to present that object, on earth most supremely beautiful to the mental eye, the finished model of complete intellectual symmetry.

It has been sometimes complained that the youthful mind should so long be employed upon mere language—simply words—words—words. But how much are mankind governed by these same words! The philosopher, who said that words were things, pronounced an apothegm of far more wisdom than pretence. Things they are, and powerful things too. To obtain the mastery of the energies of language, to acquire the art by which the marshalled array of sentences outrivals in gigantic effect the marshalled array of bayonets, to possess the magic mystery of binding in the fascination of uttered syllables, and ruling with more than imperial sway the wilderness of free minds —these are objects for which ambition believes that years of toil are a cheap requisition. But what method better than classic study for the acquirement of such a mastery of language? Not only does the student, by a knowledge of etymology, acquire new perceptions of the force of a large part of his own language, but from the comparison with a far different structure than any which any modern language affords, he acquires new ideas of the mechanism of language, and new powers of collocation and arrangement. He is obliged to pass from the circle of his own little vocabulary, and range and ransack through the whole extent of lexicography, to equip the idea which his author obliges him to clothe in words. Hence every language lesson is, in effect, an effort at composition, in which a given idea is propounded, for which the scholar is to supply the phraseology. The whole mass of English lies funded in his