

**A DISCOURSE ON THE LIFE AND
CHARACTER OF THE HON.
NATHANIEL BOWDITCH, LL. D., F. R.
S., DELIVERED IN THE CHURCH ON
CHURCH GREEN, MARCH 25, 1838**

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A Discourse on the Life and Character of the Hon. Nathaniel Bowditch, LL. D., F. R. S.,
Delivered in the Church on Church Green, March 25, 1838 by Alexander Young

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ALEXANDER YOUNG

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THE VARIETIES OF HUMAN GREATNESS.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

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OF THE

HON. NATHANIEL BOWDITCH, LL. D., F. R. S.,

DELIVERED IN

THE CHURCH ON CHURCH GREEN,

MARCH 25, 1838.

BY ALEXANDER YOUNG.

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1838.

✓ 20-
700.

44 His, mihi dilectum nomen maneatque verendum,
His saltem accumulem donis, et fungar amico
Munere!—Non totus, raptus licet, optime praese,
Eriperis. Redit os placidum, morosque benigni,
Et venit ante oculos, et pectore vivit imago."

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TO
THE CHILDREN
OF
MY DEPARTED PARISHIONER AND FRIEND,
THIS DISCOURSE
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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If any apology should be deemed necessary for the freedom and frequency with which I have introduced into this discourse quotations from the old writers, (most of the longer ones having been omitted in the delivery), I would plead in my defence the following judgment of Coleridge.

“Why are not more gems from our early prose writers scattered over the country by the periodicals? Great old books by the great old authors are not in every body's reach; and though it is better to know them thoroughly than to know them only here and there, yet it is a good work to give a little to those who have neither time nor means to get more. Let every book-worm, when in any fragrant, scarce old tome, he discovers a sentence, an illustration, that does his heart good, hasten to give it.”

DISCOURSE.

1 CHRONICLES, XXIX. 12.

IN THINE HAND O LORD, IS POWER AND MIGHT; AND IN THINE HAND IT IS
TO MAKE GREAT, AND TO GIVE STRENGTH UNTO ALL.

In nothing, as it seems to me, is the sovereignty of God more strikingly displayed, than in the diversities of personal endowment, and the consequent varieties of human greatness. Man, with his limited and short-sighted wisdom, aims, in all his plans and operations, and especially in his modes of intellectual and moral culture, at uniformity. If he could have his own way, and there were no conflicting and counteracting influences in nature, he would, in his systems of education, run us all in the same moulds, shape us in the same unvarying and inflexible forms, and send us out into the world exact counterparts and copies of one another. But Divine Providence, in the plenitude and profusion of its power, seems, throughout the whole extent of creation, to pursue an entirely opposite course, and to delight in variety. The naturalist tells us that in the vegetable kingdom no single leaf is exactly like its fellow, and we know on whose testimony it is that we believe that

“one star differeth from another star in glory.” There are, too, the same varieties of human power and greatness, as there are inequalities on the earth’s surface, gradations in the scale of animal life, and diversities in the instincts and capacities of the several races of the brute creation.

It is the doctrine of my text, that “it is in the Lord’s hand to make great.” All power and might are his, and all human greatness, of every sort and degree, physical strength, intellectual vigor, genius, talent, wisdom, are all alike his gifts. He is the author of all the powers and faculties of man, from the highest to the lowest; which, accordingly, in their several places and appropriate degrees, are all to be honored and cultivated. It is a narrow and unworthy feeling to disparage any of these divine endowments, or to despise any of the various indications of human power and greatness. The mind must not say to the body, “I have no need of thee;” nor yet the senses to the spirit, “We have no need of you.” For man is not one power or faculty, but many. It behooves every one, then, to stir up and cultivate the peculiar gift of God which is in him, and thereby cause a various tribute of glory to ascend from earth to heaven. For God is truly glorified by the full developement and right exercise of our several faculties, and by their consecration to the increase and diffusion of knowledge, virtue and happiness on the earth. Not in vain is this prodigal variety of human gifts, if God be honored and man blessed by it.

Let us, my hearers, take a survey of some of the prominent varieties of human greatness. Let us see how they have been viewed and estimated. Let us look at them as so many manifestations of divine energy in man.

In the first place, and at the lowest point of the scale, stands physical greatness, strength of body, power of limb, capacity of labor and endurance, material energy and force. At some periods in the world's history, and at certain stages of man's growth, before the mental and moral faculties are unfolded, and the higher principles of our nature have gained the ascendancy, and civilization spread her restraining and refining influences, this species of greatness has been the most in honor and demand. When the earth was one vast forest, and the wild beast prowled on the frontiers of the infant settlements, and waged a desperate and hardly unequal warfare with man, then physical strength was, of course, alone cultivated and prized. The great ones of that period were the men of giant frames, and tough muscles, and arms of iron—the Samson and the Hercules of their tribe. The primitive, or as we choose to call it, the fabulous history of our race, is full of the marvellous exploits of these renowned heroes, who protected the rising hamlets, with their flocks and herds, from the depredations of the wild boar and the wolf. In the early annals of almost every nation, ancient and modern, we meet with a great man of this sort, who, by mere physical strength, cleared the land of some ferocious animal,