

ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

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On the Study of Literature by John Morley

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JOHN MORLEY

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The Annual Address

TO THE STUDENTS OF
THE LONDON SOCIETY FOR THE EXTENSION OF
UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Delivered at the Mansion House, February 26, 1887

BY JOHN MORLEY

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MY LORD MAYOR, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,

When my friend Mr. Goschen invited me to discharge the duty which has fallen to me this afternoon I confess that I complied with very great misgivings. He desired me to say something, if I could, on the literary side of education. Now, it is almost impossible—and I think those who know most of literature will be readiest to agree with me—to say anything new in recommendation of literature in a scheme of education. But, as taxpayers know, when

more unlike in aim, in ideals, in method, and in matter, than are literature and politics. I have, however, determined to do the best that I can ; and I feel how great an honour it is to be invited to partake in a movement which I do not scruple to call one of the most important of all those now taking place in English society.

What is the object of the movement ? What do the promoters aim at ? I take it that what they aim at is to bring the very best teaching that the country can afford, through the hands of the most thoroughly competent men, within the reach of every class of the community. Their object is to give to the many that sound, systematic, and methodical knowledge, which has hitherto been the privilege of the few who can afford the time and money to go to Oxford and Cambridge ; to diffuse the fertilising waters of intellectual knowledge

from their great and copious fountain heads at the Universities by a thousand irrigating channels over the whole length and breadth of our busy, indomitable land. Gentlemen, this is a most important point. Goethe said that nothing is more frightful than a teacher who only knows what his scholars are intended to know. We may depend upon it that the man who knows his own subject most thoroughly, is most likely to excite interest about it in the minds of other people. We hear, perhaps more often than we like, that we live in a democratic age. It is true enough, and I can conceive nothing more democratic than such a movement as this, nothing which is more calculated to remedy defects that are incident to democracy, more thoroughly calculated to raise democracy to heights which other forms of government and older orderings of society have never yet at-

tained. No movement can be more wisely democratic than one which seeks to give to the northern miner or the London artisan knowledge as good and as accurate, though he may not have so much of it, as if he were a student at Oxford or Cambridge. Something of the same kind may be said of the new frequency with which scholars of great eminence and consummate accomplishments, like Jowett, Lang, Myers, Leaf, and others, bring all their scholarship to bear, in order to provide for those who are not able, or do not care, to read old classics in the originals, brilliant and faithful renderings of them in our own tongue. Nothing but good, I am persuaded, can come of all these attempts to connect learning with the living forces of society, and to make industrial England a sharer in the classic tradition of the lettered world.

I am well aware that there is an appre-

