LECTURES ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH LITERATURE AND LIFE, PP. 1-217

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649628919

Lectures on Subjects Connected with Literature and Life, pp. 1-217 by Edwin P. Whipple

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

EDWIN P. WHIPPLE

LECTURES ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH LITERATURE AND LIFE, PP. 1-217

Trieste

LECTURES

ON

SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH

LITERATURE AND LIFE.

BY

EDWIN P. WHIPPLE,
AUTHOR OF "ESSAYS AND REVIEWS."

FIFTH EDITION.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
M DCCC LIX.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE I.*

AUTHORS IN THEIR RELATIONS TO LIFE.

THERE has existed in all ages a class of men, called at different periods by different names, but generally comprehended under the name of authors. They hold the same relation to the mind of man that the agriculturist and manufacturer bear to his body; and by virtue of their sway over the realms of thought and emotion, they have exercised a vast influence upon human affairs, which has too often been overlooked or denied by earth's industrial and political sovereigns. Operating as they do on unseen substances, and working silent and mysterious changes in the inward man, without altering his external aspect, they have strangely puzzled the whole horde of bigots and tyrants, and have written their Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin on the walls of earth's proudest palaces. On the occasion of a literary anniversary like yours, I am aware of no more appropriate

* Delivered before the Literary Societies of Brown University, Sept. 1, 1846.

subject, — none which is more likely to bear, remotely or immediately, on your own future pursuits and professions, — than this of Authors; and in tracing out some of their relations to life, I think I can inflict less tediousness upon you than if I had selected some topic with a more resounding name, and admitting of more ambitious disquisition. My object will be to set forth their moral and intellectual influence, the physical necessities which have modified the direction of their powers, and the discrepancies observable between their internal and external existence. This will involve a consideration of their relations to their age, to booksellers, and to domestic and social life. You must pardon the remediless superficiality of my view, as each division might well exhaust a volume.

And first, let us refer to the influence of authors, and the position they have occupied in the world.

Without taking into view the lives and thoughts of authors, history becomes an enigma, or a many-volumed lie. We read of wars, crusades, persecutions, ameliorations, of mighty and convulsive changes in opinions and manners, without obtaining any clue to the real causes of events, any insight into the laws of God's providence. Without inweaving literary into civil history, we gain no knowledge of the annals of human nature. We have the body of history without the soul, — events without

ideas, — effects without causes, — the very atheism of narrative. The abridgments we study at schools are commonly made up of incidents jumbled together like beads, and unconnected by any thread of reason and reality. It is hardly possible for a boy, studying these works, to grasp any other idea of man than the idea of a being with legs, arms, and appetites.

Now it is a fact that Thought, true or false, beneficial or pernicious, has borne the sceptre of influence in this world's affairs. Impulse, whim and chance, have not been the blind guides of the generations of men. Above all the fret and tumult of active existence, above the decrees of earth's nominal sovereigns, above all the violence and evil which render what is called history so black a record of folly and crime — above all these, there have ever been certain luminous ideas, pillars of fire in the night of time, which have guided and guarded the great army of humanity, in its slow and hesitating, but still onward, progress in knowledge and freedom. It is not the ruler that makes the most noise in the world, that most shapes the world's fortunes. Ten rockets, sent violently into the air, by their blaze and impotent fury, attract all eyes, and seem much finer and grander than the eternal stars; but after their short and rushing life has burnt out, and they have noised themselves into nothingness, the stars still shine serenely on, and seem