

**DISCOURSE ON THE HISTORY, CHARACTER,
AND PROSPECTS OF THE WEST: DELIVERED
TO THE UNION LITERARY
SOCIETY OF MIAMI UNIVERSITY, OXFORD,
OHIO, AT THEIR NINTH ANNIVERSARY,
SEPTEMBER 23, 1834 PP. 3-55**

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DANIEL DRAKE

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FOREST WORSHIP.

BY F. H. SCHMIDT.

DISCOURSE

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HISTORY, CHARACTER, AND PROSPECTS

OF

THE WEST:

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UNION LITERARY SOCIETY

OF

MIAMI UNIVERSITY, OXFORD, OHIO,

AT THEIR NINTH ANNIVERSARY,

SEPTEMBER 23, 1834.

BY DANIEL DRAKE, M. D.

CINCINNATI:
TRUMAN AND SMITH,
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DEDICATION.

The following Discourse is affectionately inscribed to the native young men of the VALLEY OF THE MISSISSIPPI. In addressing it to them, the Author fondly hopes, not only to increase their interest in its history, character, and destiny, but to invite their attention to the scattered objects and events which claim examination. Many of these possess great intrinsic importance, and the whole must be thoroughly understood, before the natural and civil history of the Valley can be completed. The undertaking is one of magnitude and difficulty; but, as their pioneer fathers, by uniting into companies, were enabled to roll together and commit to the flames, the great trunks of the forest trees, among which they built their camps and cabins, and thus prepare the ground for the cultivation of corn; so the sons, by concert and a common effort, may rapidly bring together the materials for a picture of this favored region, as it was in the days of peril and privation; with a history of the bold and laborious enterprises, which planted in it the germs of civil society,

and watered them with blood. The tender scions, like the young orchard, could produce no mature and delicious fruits for those who naturalized them in the woods; but were designed for posterity, and should be cherished as a consecrated inheritance of parental love, to be transmitted from generation to generation.

THE AUTHOR.

THE WEST.

IN appearing among classical scholars, within the walls of a university, as your orator on this academical occasion, I find myself in the situation of a *Haw* tree of the woods, left standing in the cleared ground, and planted about with foreign fruit trees. Being improved by grafting and the various labors of art, their products are savory, and by persons of good taste, are, of course preferred; but still the *Haw* is not useless, for it serves as a term of comparison, and shows the necessity and value of early cultivation.

In consenting, at a late period, to supply the place of the able civilian on whom you at first relied,* I felt all the embarrassment that could arise from the consciousness of my incapacity to discuss a theme of pure literature; but I have, finally, chosen a topic which commends itself to my own feelings, and will not, I hope, be unacceptable to yours—it is the character, history, and prospects of the *WEST*.

The ancient and venerable maxim, *KNOW THYSELF*, has been generally addressed to individuals, but is equally applicable to communities; who should be familiar with the natural resources of their country, and the genius and tendency of their social, literary, religious, and political institutions; or they cannot cherish the good, and successfully cast out the evil. This self-knowledge of nations, is especially necessary for one of recent origin, where everything is still green, and must be fashioned according to the skill of those who regulate its growth.

Society in these *BACKWOODS*, even in the most thickly settled parts, is but in its forming state; and we are, therefore, invited

* *JUDGE LANE*, of the Supreme Court of Ohio.

to scrutinize, with care, the principles which control its development; for otherwise its maturity may offer less of perfection, than is found in communities which sprang up at an earlier period, instead of displaying, in its own strength and beauty, the beneficial fruits of their experience and wisdom.

It may be asked, however, whether it is consistent with the peace and perpetuity of the UNION, to inculcate a devotion to one of its parts? I shall not give a general answer to this question, but reply, that a devotion to the WEST, is manifestly compatible with both, and indeed the most efficient means of promoting both. This results from the geographical relations between the Valley of the Mississippi and the Atlantic states; relations, which being founded on nature, cannot be dissolved by the hand of art, but are daily acquiring new strength, as the ligaments of the body bind its different organs more closely together in each succeeding year of its natural growth.*

I do not propose, however, to go into the analysis of our young institutions; but in the spirit of the West, shall wander to and fro, expatiating on whatever may seem attractive, but still keeping within its ample bounds.

The first thing which strikes our attention, is the difference between the opportunities for intellectual and moral improvement, in old and new states of society, and their influence on the character of the people.

As the flavor of the grape depends greatly on the soil by which it is nourished, so the temperament of individuals is modified by the intellectual aliment on which their minds subsist in childhood and youth; and of course, in studying national character, it is of great service to know the different circumstances under which the people of different places have been educated.

Children who are born in old and compactly organized communities, are surrounded from infancy, with all the means of improvement which the inventive genius of civilization can create. Books adapted to every age and all varieties of taste—established institutions of learning, from the infant school to the ancient and venerable university—professional teachers of every grade of erudition—ingenious toys, which, in the very

* See Note A.

creaking of their wheels, speak instruction—full cabinets of the works of nature and art,—public lectures in lyceums—and laws of action, for the morning, noon and night of every day throughout the year, are but a part of the means of their education and discipline. They are thus made the objects of a sleepless superintendence; which not only supplies their minds with rich materials of thought, but lays down the rules by which their growth in intellect shall proceed. Educated under these advantages, they acquire a copious and varied learning, and exhibit, in manhood, a conformity more or less striking, to the standards of excellence which have been held up for their imitation.

Most of what gives them this excellence, is either imperfect or entirely wanting, in a new country; but are there no substitutes for these artificial advantages? I think there are several, and shall proceed to offer some of them to your consideration, leaving it with yourselves to assign the value of each.

Precious as may be the benefits which good establishments of learning afford, they are not the only means of intellectual improvement; for the pathless wilderness may be made a school-book, and nature is the institution, in which many of the ancients were chiefly educated, whose works of taste and genius, constitute an important part of your college course. It would be an error to say, that all children of the woods, are thus instructed; for all are not educated where the best institutions have been established; and many are incapable of being taught: but none, even for mere pastime, can roam over hill and dale, descend the precipice, and stray in the cavern that opens underneath, wade through the matted herbage, and part the tangled bushes, without acquiring knowledge at every step; as the bee which buzzes round him, loads its limbs with the *materiel* of its cells, while it flits from flower to flower to feast upon their honey. To derive substantial advantage from this intercourse with nature, the youth must give scope to his curiosity, and be fully aware that its gratification will bring a rich harvest of knowledge. He should, also, cultivate the faculty of observation; which, beyond every other, can be made to supply him with valuable information, in whatever situation he may be placed; and must be exercised early, or it will remain inactive and unproductive through life. An acute and vigilant observer