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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY OF THE ALUMNI

OF

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

AT

THEIR FIRST ANNIVERSARY, AUGUST 23, 1842,

BEING THE CLOSE OF

THE SECOND CENTURY AFTER THE FIRST CLASS WAS GRADUATED.

By JOSEPH STORY, LL. D.

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DISCOURSE.

GENTLEMEN,

There are few occasions, on which we could have been assembled, which would awaken more varied feelings, or possess a more profound interest, than that, which now brings us together. We stand here at the distance of two hundred years, upon the very spot, where stood the first class, having completed their academical course, ready to receive the earliest honors of this our parent University. From the pious lips of the first President, whose remains lie in the neighbouring churchyard, they received their farewell benediction, — in the presence of the venerable founders of the colony, — amidst the deep shades of the surrounding forests, — and under the roof of the simple edifice, first reared to God and the Church in this stranger land. Few, indeed, were they in number, but not faint or faltering in the support of religion and learning. The little Band of Nine may well be presumed upon that occasion to have sought utterance of their own thoughts in the very language of the Governor of the Colony (a short time afterwards) in his appeal to the General Court for aid to the College. “If this work of the College be thought fit to be upheld and continued, as we hope, that considerations of the glory of God, the honorable interest of the country, the good of all posterity, and the experience of the benefits and blessings thereof, will constrain all men to say, it is, then something must effectually be done for help in the premises.” And that something (said these youths) must be done by us, that we may establish the foundations, and perpetuate the fame, of this Institution. — We are the first-born,

and will not dishonor our parentage. Wherever our lots in life may be cast, to this blessed spot will we turn with a holy reverence. For the prosperity of this college shall our daily prayers ascend. Here shall our last thoughts repose. And whatever of earthly honors shall belong to us, to this altar shall they be brought, as the first-fruits of grateful children to the best of mothers. Worthily, indeed, were these vows performed. They went forth into the world with undaunted zeal to the great work, and became eminent in the church and the state. Their mouldering relics have, indeed, long since shared the common fate, and returned to the dust. But their good deeds still survive in the memories of good men, and shed a mild and balmy light over the annals of the past, as well as over the honors of the present days.

And We too, are assembled here, — for the first time, — on an occasion equally worthy of commemoration, and full of responsible duties. We meet to celebrate the first anniversary of the society of all the Alumni of Harvard. We meet without any distinction of sect or party, or of rank or profession, in church or in state, in literature or in science. We meet, as a band of brothers, educated in the bosom of the same indulgent parent, and drinking from the same fountain, which has from the beginning poured forth its pure and sparkling streams of knowledge to give life and glory to our land. Our fellowship is designed to be, — as it should be, — of the most liberal and comprehensive character, conceived in the spirit of catholic benevolence, asking no creed but the love of letters, seeking no end, but the encouragement of learning, and imposing no conditions, which may lead to jealousy or ambitious strife. In short, we meet for peace and for union; to devote one day in the year to academical intercourse and the amenities of scholars. We would shake off from our feet the dust, gathered, not only in the by-ways and highways of life, but in the fervid race for public distinction. We would lay aside for the hour, the garlands and the palms, and the emblems of victory. *Viridesque Coronæ, et Palmæ pretium victoribus.*

We would enter this temple with hearts overflowing with grateful recollections of the past, and earnest hopes of the future. We would lay upon this family altar our tribute of affection, and celebrate with our whole hearts the birthday of our matriculation. *Salve, — magna Parens, — magna Virum.*

Under such circumstances I am but too conscious of my own inability to perform the duties assigned to me in a manner, suited to the dignity of the occasion. It would have been far more grateful to me, that the task should, according to your first choice, have been executed by your venerable President, whose ripe scholarship, and rare endowments, and intellectual energy, have so long attracted the public admiration. He seems, indeed, to form the connecting link between the present and the past, standing, as it were, upon the verge of that dim twilight of life, where the twinkling stars, in our catalogue, alternately appear, and vanish, as the shades of the evening shut down upon the passing generations. *Sic itur ad Astra.*

I am conscious, also, in whose presence I stand, and whose instructed judgments I am called upon to address. I see before me the veterans, who, having won the laurels of their day, seek now in retirement to enjoy the dignity and repose of learned leisure. I see before me those, who occupy the high ranks of professional life. The venerable ministers of the Gospel, whose critical spirit has illumined the dark passages of Scripture, and given new vigor to the sublime truths of religion. I see the professors of the medical art, whose genius has curiously studied the maladies of our race, and whose skill has administered succour to thousands, who were ready to perish. I see the jurists, who, in the judgment-seat, or at the bar, have applied their profound knowledge to the support of the civil institutions of society, to the protection of innocence, to the fearless vindication of right, and to the triumph of justice over popular clamor and political cabal. I see the statesmen, whose enlarged and comprehensive minds have maintained the glorious struggle for the support of the princi-

ples of the Constitution, which may, if any thing human can, perpetuate the blessings of liberty, and save us from becoming a byword and reproach among the nations of the earth. I see the elegant and quiet scholars, who have given their days and nights to illustrate the annals of the past, or imparted a warm and sunny glow to the literature of the present. I see the ambitious youth, who, having completed their preparatory studies, stand at the starting-post of the course, impatient of delays, and panting for the toils and the rewards of the victories of life. The Olympic dust has not as yet even soiled their sandals. Nor can they as yet feel the force of that solemn admonition. "Let not him, that girdeth on his harness, boast himself, as he that putteth it off."

It is, I repeat it, under such circumstances, that I feel with unaffected sensibility the difficulties of the task, which I have assumed. Amidst a crowd of topics, which rush upon the mind, I would fain select some one, not unworthy the interests and associations of the occasion. After some hesitation nothing has occurred to me more appropriate, than some suggestions on the dangers and difficulties and duties of scholars in our own age, and especially in our own country.

If I were called upon to say, in one word, what constitutes the predominant danger of our day, I should say, that it is the tendency to ultraism of all sorts, and in all directions. In all ages there have probably been found among men of letters three distinct classes in opposition to each other. But never until our day have the lines of separation between them been so broad, and so sharply defined. These classes are, — The lovers of the past, — the devoted admirers of the present, — the enthusiastic prophets of the future. It is of course, that the world of letters, like the natural world, should appear under very different aspects and relations to each of these classes. The antiquarian dwells with intense pleasure upon the olden times, as at once their historian and eulogist. He lives, as it were, among the dead, and esteems it his highest privilege to remember the forgotten, and to chisel deeper the inscriptions upon the tombs of the renowned. He gathers up

the dilapidated fragments with a holy reverence, and finds in each of them the ruins of a lofty mind, more precious, because it is rescued from the remorseless hand of modern improvement, and speaks, in its broken language, the voice of departed ages. On the other hand, the fond admirer of the passing literature of the day deems little else worthy of his notice, and contemplates former works, but as faded pictures, left to moulder on the walls, or at best, as serving to show the prejudices, or follies, or defects of taste of bygone times. And, again, the man of ardent temperament, regardless of the known and the tangible, casts his keen glances through the obscurities of the future, and prophesies the surpassing grandeur of the days to come, when new revelations of the human soul shall be unfolded, and new truths be proclaimed, which philosophy itself, in its boldest flights, has never yet dreamed of. He sees, that, after the lapse of nearly six thousand years, Man is but in the infancy of his being ;— that he has learned little, which might not as well be forgotten ;— that the lights, which have hitherto guided him, are not from heaven, but false and delusive phantoms, which have led him astray ;— that he has yet to learn how to live, as well as how to die ;—and that this instruction is to be sought, not in the meditations and writings of the great minds of other ages, but in the depths and communings of his own spirit.

Now, I say, that these three classes of opinions, which, to some extent, have probably prevailed in all the epochs of literature, have acquired an unnatural impulse and acceleration in our day, from the vast powers of a free press, and the concentrated influences of a wide-spread education. If this state of things is to continue ; if these three classes of opinions are to flow on in separate, yet neighbouring channels ; if they are to divide and distract the public mind and conduct ; it is plain, that there is no small danger to the cause of solid learning, sound religion, and social institutions. Divide and conquer, is the cunning maxim of tyrants, in order to accomplish their nefarious purposes. But in the republic of letters the same rule must nourish factions at war with its safety and its ad-

vancement. If, for example, the human mind, (as we are sometimes proudly informed,) has never yet grappled with the great truths belonging to its character and destiny; if neither history, nor experience, nor philosophy, have hitherto even reached the vestibule of those inquiries, which are to guide us in the business of life, — in the affairs of government, — in the principles of public policy, — in the developement of national interests and resources, — in the foundations of morals and religion, — or (passing from these to less grave topics) if genius has never yet affixed the true value or importance to any of its own achievements in art, or science, or learning; and the mastery of its powers, as well as its means of excellence, are yet to be searched out, as unknown quantities; — then, indeed, as it seems to me, man has lived in vain, and disquieted himself in vain. We can give no pledges of success in our present efforts, which former ages have not given. We can offer no securities, which may not hereafter crumble away, like the fabrics, which they reared only to perish, or left, as monumental ruins, to instruct us in the meanness of the end, compared with the magnitude of the labor.

Considerations not less discouraging must arise, if either of the other two extremes of opinion are to possess an enduring influence. The truth is, that the past is not every thing; nor the future every thing; nor the present every thing. The intellect of man is now neither in its infancy, nor in its decrepitude. Human knowledge, — whether it be for ornament or use, — for pleasure or instruction, — is the accumulation of the wisdom and genius of all ages, and is, like the ocean, composed of contributions from infinitely various sources, whose currents have mingled together from the beginning, and must continue so to do to the end of time. Sound the depths, as you may, they will be found not entirely the same, nor entirely different. The shoals and the quicksands may be removed from one side; but they have often only shifted to the other. The waters may have become more clear and transparent in some parts; but at the same time more turbid, and shallow in others. The general level has not materially changed in

height or the current in its breadth, although occasional tides may have ebbed and flowed with irregular and sometimes desolating power. In some places the alluvial deposits have buried the ancient landmarks ; while in others they have been worn away, or submerged. So, in some measure, has it been with the history of the human mind. What has been gained in one direction, has been almost simultaneously lost in another. The known of one age has become the obscure of the next, and the lost of the succeeding. The favorite pursuits and studies of one age have sunk into insignificance or neglect in another. The value, as well as the interest, of particular researches has fluctuated with the passions, and the theories and the fashions of the day. And while each successive generation has imagined itself to stand upon the shoulders of all, that preceded them, and flattered itself with the belief, that it surveyed all things with a more comprehensive power, and a less obstructed vision, it has forgotten, that on every side there is a natural boundary to the intellectual horizon, at which every object becomes obscure, or evanescent ; and that, just in proportion, as we advance in one direction, we may be receding from well-defined and fixed lines of light in the other.

I have said, that the tendency in our day is to ultraism of all sorts. I am aware, that this suggestion may appear to some minds of an easy good-nature, or indolent confidence, to be overwrought, or too highly colored. But unless we choose voluntarily to blind ourselves to what is passing before our eyes in the daily intercourse of life, it seems to me impossible not to feel, that there is much, which demands severe scrutiny, if not serious alarm. I meddle not here with the bold, and yet familiar speculations upon government, and polity, upon the fundamental changes and even abolition of constitutions, or upon the fluctuating innovations of ordinary legislation. These might, of themselves, furnish out exciting themes for public discussion, if this were a fit occasion to introduce them. I speak rather of the interests of letters, — of the common cause of learning, — of the deep and abiding principles of

philosophy. Is it not painfully true, that the spirit of the age has broken loose from the strong ties, which have hitherto bound society together by the mutual cohesions and attractions of habits, manners, institutions, morals, and literature? It seems to me, that what is old is no longer a matter of reverence or affection. What is established, is not on that account esteemed positively correct, or even salutary or useful. What have hitherto been deemed fundamental truths in the wide range of human experience and moral reasoning, are no longer admitted as axioms, or even as starting-points, but at most are propounded only as problems, worthy of solution. They are questioned, and scrutinized, and required to be submitted to jealous proofs. They have not even conceded to them the ordinary prerogative of being presumed to be true, until the contrary is clearly shown. In short, there seems to me, at least, to be abroad a general skepticism, — a restless spirit of innovation and change, — a fretful desire to provoke discussions of all sorts, under the pretext of free inquiry, or of comprehensive liberalism. And this movement is to be found not merely among illiterate and vain pretenders, but among minds of the highest order, which are capable of giving fearful impulses to public opinion. We seem to be borne on the tide of experiment with a rash and impetuous speed, confident, that there is no risk in our course, and heedless, that it may make shipwreck of our best hopes, and spread desolation and ruin on every side, as well on its ebb, as its flow. The main ground, therefore, for apprehension is not from undue reverence for antiquity, so much as it is from dreamy expectations of unbounded future intellectual progress; and, above all, from our gross over-valuation and inordinate exaggeration of the peculiar advantages and excellences of our own age over all others. This last is, so to say, our besetting sin; and we worship the idol, carved by the cunning of our own hands, with a fond and parental devotion. To this cause, I think, may be chiefly attributed that bold, not to say reckless spirit of speculation, which has of late years spread itself with such an uncompromising zeal over our whole country. It is not

indigenous to our soil ; nor does it belong to the sober sagacity and patient judgment of the Anglo-Saxon race. There are many even among the educated classes, and far more among the uneducated, who imagine, that we see now, as men never saw before, in extent, as well as in clearness of vision ; that we reason, as men never reasoned before ; that we have reached depths and made discoveries, not merely in abstract and physical science, but in the ascertainment of the moral and intellectual powers of man, and the true structure and interests of government and society, which throw into comparative insignificance the attainments of past ages. We seem to ourselves to be emerging (as it were) from the darkness of bygone centuries, — whose glow-worm lights “ show the matin to be near, and ’gin to pale their ineffectual fires,” before our advancing radiance. We are almost ready to persuade ourselves, that their experience is of little value to us ; that the change of circumstances is so great, that what was wisdom once, is no longer such ; that it served well enough for the day ; but that it ought not now to be an object of desire, or even of commendation.

Nay, the comparison is sometimes eagerly pressed of our achievements in literature with those of former ages. Our histories are said to be more philosophical, more searching, more exact, more elaborate than theirs. Our poetry is said to surpass theirs in brilliancy, imaginativeness, tenderness, elegance, and variety, and not to be behind theirs even in sublimity, or terrific grandeur. It is more thoughtful, more natural, more suggestive, more concentrated, and more thrilling than theirs. Our philosophy is not, like theirs, harsh, or crabbed, or irregular ; but wrought out in harmonious and well-defined proportions. Our metaphysical systems and mental speculations are, (as we flatter ourselves,) to endure for ever, not merely as monuments of our faith, but of truth, while the old systems must fall into ruins, or merely furnish materials to reconstruct the new, — as the temples of the gods of ancient Rome serve but to trick out or ornament the modern churches of the Eternal City. Ay, — and it may

be so. But, who will pause, and gaze on the latter, when his eyes can fasten on the gigantic forms of the Coliseum, or the Pantheon, or the Column of Trajan, or the Arch of Constantine? "It was among the ruins of the Capitol," (said the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,) "that I first conceived the idea of a work, which has amused and exercised near twenty years of my life, and which, however inadequate to my own wishes, I finally deliver to the curiosity and candor of the public." Among the ruins of the Capitol! He felt, indeed, that history was philosophy, teaching by example. He was willing to devote a whole life to the study of the dead, that he might learn, how to instruct posterity in their dangers and their duties.

May I not stop for a moment, and ask if there is not much delusion and error in this notion of our superiority over former ages; and if there be, whether it may not be fatal to our just progress in literature, as well as to the permanent interests of society? I would not ask those, who entertain such opinions, to accompany me back to the days of Aristotle and Cicero, whose works on the subject of government and politics alone have scarcely received any essential addition in principles or practical wisdom down to this very hour. Who, of all the great names of the past, have possessed so profound an influence and so wide an authority for so long a period? If time be the arbiter of poetical excellence, whose fame is so secure as that of Homer and Virgil? Whose histories may hope to outlive those of Thucydides and Tacitus? But I would limit myself to a far narrower space, to the period of the two centuries, which have elapsed since our ancestors emigrated to America. Survey the generations, which have since passed away, and let us ask ourselves, what have been their literary labors and scientific attainments? What the productions of their genius and learning? What the amount, which they have contributed, to ameliorate the condition of mankind, — to lay deep and broad the foundations of Theology and Jurisprudence and Medicine, — to establish and illustrate the principles of free governments and

international law, —and to instruct, as well as amuse, the leisure, and to refine the taste of social life? Unless I greatly mistake, a calm survey of this whole matter would convince every well-balanced mind, that, if we may claim something for ourselves, we must yield much to the scholars of those days. We shall find, that much of our own fruits have been grafted on the ancient stocks. That much of what we now admire is not destined for immortality. That much, which we deem new, is but an ill-disguised plunder from the old repositories. And, that much, which we vaunt to be true, consists of old fallacies, often refuted and forgotten, or of unripe theories, which must perish by the wayside, or be choked by other weeds of a kindred growth.

The truth is, that no single generation of men can accomplish much of itself or for itself, which does not essentially rest upon what has been done before. Whatever may be the extent or variety of its labors, and attainments, much of them will fail to reach posterity, and much, which reaches them, will be felt, not as a distinct formation, but only as component ingredients of the general mass of knowledge. Many of the immortals of one age cease to be such in the next, which succeeds it; and, at best, after a fitful season of renown, they quietly pass away, and sleep well in the common cemetery of the departed. What is present is apt to be dazzling and imposing, and to assume a vast importance over the distant and the obscure. The mind in its perspective becomes affected by the like laws as those of the natural vision. The shrub in the foreground overtops the oak, that has numbered its centuries. The hill under our eye looms higher than the snowy Alps, which skirt the edge of the horizon.

But let us subject this matter to a little closer scrutiny, and see, if the annals of the two last centuries alone do not sufficiently admonish us of the mutability of human fame, as well as of that of human pursuits. What a vast amount of intellectual power has been expended during that period, which is now dimly seen, or entirely forgotten. The very names of

many authors have perished, and the titles of their works are to be gathered only from the dusty pages of some obscure catalogue. What reason can we have to suppose, that much of our own labors will not share a kindred fate? — But, turning to another and brighter part of the picture, where the mellowing hand of time has touched with its finest tints the varying figures. Who are there to be seen, but Shakspeare, and Milton, and Bacon, and Locke, and Newton, and Cudworth and Taylor and Barrow, not to speak of a host of others, whose works ought to be profoundly studied, and should illustrate every library. I put it to ourselves to say, who are the men of this generation, to be brought into comparison with these, in the extent and variety of their labors, the powers of their genius, or the depth of their researches? Who of ourselves can hope to exercise an influence over the human mind as wide-spread as theirs? Who can hope to do more for science, for philosophy, for literature, for theology, than they? I put the argument to our modesty, whether we can dispense with the products of their genius, and wisdom and learning; or may cast aside their works, as mere play-things for idlers, or curiosities for collectors of the antique?

I have but glanced at this subject. It would occupy a large discourse to unfold it in its various bearings and consequences. But the strong tendency of our times to disregard the lessons and the authority of the past must have any thing but a salutary effect upon all the complicated interests of literary as well as social life. It not only loosens and dis-joints those institutions, which seem indispensable to our common happiness and security; but it puts afloat all those principles, which constitute, as it were, the very axioms of all sound philosophy and literature. In no country on earth is the danger of such a tendency so pregnant with fearful results as in our own; for it nurses a spirit of innovation and experiment and oscillation, which leaves no resting-place for sober meditation or permanent progress. It was the striking remark of an acute observer of the human mind, that “He, who sets out with doubting, will find life finish, before he

becomes master of the rudiments ;” and that “He, who begins by presuming on his own sense, has ended his studies, as soon as he has commenced them.” *

But another danger in our age, and especially in our country, of no small extent, although certainly of a subordinate character, is the vast predominance of the taste for light reading and amusing compositions over that for solid learning and severe and suggestive studies. This has been gradually upon the increase ever since the commencement of the present century, and has become not only the fashion, but I may say, the passion of the day. It has been fostered by, and in its turn it has administered to, our periodical literature, which, from small beginnings, has at length accumulated to such a mass, as threatens to overwhelm all the other departments of literature and bury them under its avalanches. Novels and romances, and other exciting fictions, increase upon us with a fearful rapidity, and, in conjunction with periodicals, constitute the staple of nearly all the reading of the reading public. They are circulated in prodigious numbers through the cheap weekly and penny press. They are found with all the studied attractions and ornaments of letter press and engraving upon the centre-tables of the refined and wealthy, piled up with a gay and varied profusion. They line the saloons of our hotels and boarding houses. They fly on our railroads, and swim in our steamboats, with a dazzling and almost dizzy activity. Not a passenger-ship crosses the Atlantic, which is not freighted with the wet sheets of the last weekly or monthly, or quarterly, or the last story of the Jameses and Blessingtons and Bulwers. And, thanks to our good stars, sometimes they bring also, for our refreshment and delight, the thrilling pathos, and touching humor, of that marvellous genius of all work, the author of the “Old Curiosity Shop.”

The consequence is, what might naturally be expected, that many of our best minds, and especially those, who pant for early distinction, devote all their thoughts and all their time to labors of this sort. They are seduced by the eager

* Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses, p. 15.

appetite of the public for novelty, and the ready returns both of money and reputation, to abandon more serious and less attractive studies. They turn with indifference or disgust from topics, which require profound investigation or severe criticism. They become impatient of the slow progress towards excellence, and of the long and cold researches, which satisfied the desires of the men of other days, who were content to bide their time, and await the award of posterity. They seek not to build the lofty poetry, which shall speak to the hearts of a thousand generations. They meditate not those high enterprises in philosophy, in history, in theology, or in jurisprudence, which, when once accomplished, will live on and instruct mankind, when the spot, which covers the ashes of their authors, shall be forgotten or obliterated from the records of time. They seek the ribands and the wreaths, and the shouts of applause of the passing crowd, and forget that they are not fame, — but, at best, mere glitter and show and sound. They come as shadows, and as such they will assuredly depart. The white foam of the combing billow dies away at the moment, when it breaks upon the shore. But the depths of the ocean remain undisturbed and noiseless; for they belong to the things of eternity.

Who, that looks around him does not perceive, what a vast amount of the intellectual power and energy of our own country is expended, not to say exhausted, upon temporary and fugitive topics, — upon occasional addresses, — upon light and fantastic compositions, — upon manuals of education, and hand-books of instruction, — upon annotations and excerpts, and upon the busy and evanescent discussions of politics, which fret their hour upon the stage, or infest the halls of legislation. Need we be told, that honors thus acquired, melt away at the very moment, when we grasp them; that some new wonder will soon usurp their place; and, in its turn, will be chased away or dissolved by the next bubble or flying meteor. I know, that it has sometimes been said, that “Nothing popular can be frivolous; and that what influences multitudes

must be of proportionate importance."* A more dangerous fallacy, lurking under the garb of philosophy, could scarcely be stated. There would be far more general truth in the statement of the very reverse proposition. We construct all sorts of machinery for the ready diffusion of science, and the circulation of philosophy. Our lecture rooms and lyceums are crowded, day after day, and night after night, with those, who seek instruction without labor, and demand improvement without effort. We have abundance of zeal and abundance of curiosity enlisted in the cause, with little aim at solid results or practical ends. It seems no longer necessary, in the view of many persons, for students to consume their midnight lamps in pale and patient researches, — or in communing with the master spirits of other days, — or in interrogating the history of the past, — or in working out, with a hesitating progress, the great problems of human life. An attendance upon a few courses of lectures upon science, or art, or literature, amidst brilliant gas lights, or brilliant experiments, or brilliant discourses of accomplished rhetoricians, are deemed satisfactory substitutes for hard personal study, in all the general pursuits of life. Nay, the capital stock thus acquired may be again retailed out to less refined audiences, and give ready fame and profit to the second-hand adventurer.

It is an old saying, that there is no royal road to learning ; and it is just as true now, as it was two thousand years ago. Knowledge, deep, thorough, accurate, must be sought, and can be found, only by strenuous labor, not for months, but for years ; not for years, but for a whole life. What lies on the surface is easily seen, and easily measured. What lies below is slowly reached, and must be cautiously examined. The best ore may often require to be sifted and purified. The diamond slowly receives its polish under the hands of the workman, and then only gives out its sparkling lights. The very marble, whose massy block is destined to immortalize some great name, reluctantly yields to the chisel ; and years

* See Sir J. Mackintosh's *Life*, Vol. I. p. 131.

must elapse before it becomes (as it were) instinct with life, and stands forth the breathing image of the original. To sketch the outlines of Hallam's noble Introduction to the History of Modern Literature, required studies so vast and various, that the libraries of all America would not at this very moment furnish the means of consulting, far less of mastering, the original authors. And yet we are apt to imagine, that few books need now be read in order to reach the depths of any art or science.

The consciousness of this very state of public opinion cannot but operate as a discouragement upon sensitive minds, and weaken their ambition for the attainment of high excellence. But, above all, that, which, as I think, hangs with the deadliest weight upon the literary enterprise of American authors, is (what has been already alluded to) the perpetual necessity of catering to the false taste and morbid appetite of the mass of readers for temporary excitement, or for indolent amusement. How few, comparatively speaking, are found among our scholars, who devote their lives to the study of some great subject, with a view to embody their thoughts and acquirements, so that they may belong to the literature of future ages. How few are there, who can see, without dismay, the accumulation of materials around them, upon the mastery of which they are to found their own fame. How few can, with a calm and quiet consciousness of their own merit, see volume after volume fall from the press almost without notice or patronage, and yet be content to wait, until the voice of praise reaches them from a distance, — from the closets of the learned, and the schools of the philosophers. Speaking of the first volume of his great History of England, Mr. Hume, with quiet modesty, remarked ; “ My bookseller told me, that in a twelve-month he sold only forty-five copies. I scarcely heard of one man in the three kingdoms, considerable for rank or letters, that could endure the book.” But with the pride of a great mind, some years afterwards, he added ; “ I see many symptoms of my literary reputation's breaking out at last with additional lustre.” What a cheering, what an impressive example !

I rejoice to say, that there are scholars in our country, who have avoided the beaten and dusty paths of every-day reputation, and have been willing to labor, — unseen and unheeded, — for a more enduring distinction. And they have gloriously won the prize. There are historians, and biographers, and mathematicians, and painters, and sculptors, and poets, and divines, who have been content for years to live on hopes, nourished in their own bosoms, or whispered only by the gentle spirit of private friendship, while they have been toiling for immortality. Meanwhile the press has rung its merry peals throughout the continent, for the favorites of the day. And where are these favorites now? They have perished, and their very names have died away, like the memory of an echo. There is a fine remark of Lord Bacon,* that “He, that seeketh to be eminent among able men, hath a great task; but that is ever good for the public. But he, that plots to be only the figure among cyphers, is the decay of a whole age.”

And then again another danger, following close in the train of that, which I have been considering, is the feverish ambition for an artificial structure of style in all classes of composition. We no longer relish the quiet, easy, and idiomatic tones of the olden literature. The flowing grace and simplicity of Addison, — the terse yet transparent style of Swift, — the natural yet elegant diction of Goldsmith, — the playful humor, and colloquial familiarity of Lamb, mixed up with deep reflections, and occasionally sprinkled with quaint phraseology, — these are no longer in the possession of the public favor. If they are not deemed dull, they are passed by with indifference. They are more often praised, than they are read. They hold, indeed, a certain conventional rank; but it is more as a matter of courtesy to escape debate, than of sincere love of what is true or beautiful. We require a more intense and exciting style, — strong and animated language, — sudden and vivid contrasts, — abrupt changes, and unexpected turns

* 2 Bacon's Works, p. 345.

of thought, — high coloring, and wild, and, (it may be,) startling figures of speech. And so that the story tells, and the narrative flies on, or the satire scorches, or the humor is broadcast in its lights, we are quite content, that the composition should be any sort of mosaic work, — interlaid with scraps of poetry, or prose, — the classical or the new, — the quaint or the legendary, — the cant phrases of France or the mystical combinations of Germany. Everywhere we miss the raciness and richness of the Anglo-Saxon idiom, and even the ponderous vigor of the Roman roots forced into the native soil. To borrow the language of an eminent critic; “The grand defect is the want of repose, — too much and too ingenious reflection, — too uniform an ardor of feeling. The understanding is fatigued; the heart ceases to feel.”*

And this again nourishes that dangerous facility of writing, which is one of the most alluring temptations, and at the same time the most insidious foe of genius. He, who can throw off in a few hours the brilliant passages of his own mind upon transitory or local topics, and become the artificer of the leading article of a review, or miscellany, or annual, that flowers, and flourishes, and fades within the year; — He who puts forth his hasty pamphlet, upon the engrossing interest or stirring politics of the day; — He earns his passing fame with an easy promptitude, and may circulate freely among the wits of the club, and the coteries of the drawing-room. He, who writes well enough to please, and pleases well enough to be paid, as well as to be read, is but too apt to forget, that nothing valuable is suddenly acquired; that what is enduring must be costly, in time, in labor, in design, in intellectual effort. The veriest tyro in colors can paint a picture with lights and shades and false brilliancies, which may attract and deceive the vulgar eye. The common sculptor may mould the human features with a light and facile hand, or carve them into the cold rigidity of stone. But the great artists of ancient and modern times wrought not out so their mighty labors.

* Mackintosh's Life, Vol. I. p. 407.

The Apollo, the Venus, the Gladiator, the Guliano, and Lorenzo de Medicis, grew not thus under the chisel of the artists. The Madonna, the Last Supper, the Day of Judgment, sprung not from the dashing touches of the moment. Time may truly be said, with these great minds, to have been the parent of immortality.

In close alliance with the foregoing will be found another and kindred danger to scholarship. If the public taste thus acts upon the studies and products of authors, and fashions their works for the market of the day,

“If those, who live to please, must please to live,”

It is not less true, that it reacts upon readers with a reciprocal malign influence. Their time is equally wasted in the indulgence of a varied and sometimes superficial round of reading, which vitiates, while it pampers the appetite. All is desultory and miscellaneous ; crowded, and yet fleeting. The viands are dressed up in new forms and fantasies ; but still they are neither wholesome, nor satisfying. They cloy the taste without nourishing the soul. According to the temperament of the reader, his love of letters melts away under the soft sentimentalism of fiction, or wearies itself in drowsy indolence, or exhausts itself in private meditations, or rises into mystical reveries, very unintelligible, but not on that account less inviting.

It cannot admit of the slightest doubt, (at least in my judgment,) that the habit of desultory and miscellaneous reading, thus created, has a necessary tendency to enervate the mind, and to destroy all masculine thinking. Works of a solid cast, which require close attention and exact knowledge to grapple with them, are thrown aside, as dull and monotonous. We apologise to ourselves for our neglect of them, that they are to be taken up at a more convenient season ; or we flatter ourselves, that we have sufficiently mastered their contents and merits from the last review, although in many cases it may admit of some doubt, whether the critic himself has ever read the work. Without stopping to inquire, how many of

the whole class of literary readers now study with thoughtful diligence, the standard writers in our own language, and are not content with abridgments, or manuals, or extracts; I would put it to those, who are engaged in the learned professions, and have the most stringent motives for deep, thorough, and exact knowledge, I would put it to them to say, how many of their whole number devote themselves to the study of the great masters of their own profession. How many of them can, in the sober language of truth, say; We are at home in the pages of our profoundest authors, — We not only possess them to enrich our libraries, but we devote ourselves to the daily consultation of them. They are beside us at our firesides, and they cheer our evening studies. We live and breathe in the midst of their laborious researches and systematical learning.

If the seductive influences of this habit of desultory and miscellaneous reading and indulgence in general literature, were confined to persons of unbroken leisure, or indolent temperament, or moderate ambition, the evil would be far less felt, and the example far less mischievous. But it is apt to draw within its grasp the proudest spirits of the age. Many of the latter have the same insatiable appetite, if I may so say, for universal reading, — the same love of change, — the same eager search after novelty, which belong to the gay and the frivolous in their light pursuits. They amass vast treasures of knowledge, but use them, far less for composition, than for conversation; far less as materials, out of which they are to create works, destined for future ages, than as means for brilliant sallies in colloquial discourse, or for sunny disquisitions upon moral philosophy, or for picturesque sketches, or for off-hand contributions to the forthcoming periodical. They have learned well the lesson of Lord Bacon, that “Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament is in discourse; and for ability is in the judgment and disposition of business.”* But they have forgotten the

* Bacon's Essays. Essay 50, Vol. II. of his Works, p. 373.

noble admonition of the same great mind, that "Wise men use their studies; and that there is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. That they read, not to contradict or confute, nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider."*

There is, indeed, and for a considerable length of time, has been, a strong temptation to scholars to establish reputation by bringing their resources into full play in conversation among the higher circles of social life; and in our own times it has acquired a powerful impulse and acceleration among the affluent in learning and the elevated in genius. Dr. Johnson seems almost for the first time to have given it an attractive character by his own example and gigantic powers, both in reading and thinking. The glorious circle of great minds, who clustered around him, Reynolds, and Burke and Goldsmith and Jones and Scott, and the gay wits of London, who listened with a just homage to his controversial dogmas, and untiring flow of thought, made it a fashionable object of ambition to become great in conversation. It may well be doubted, whether, even Doctor Johnson, owing to this seductive influence, ever accomplished any thing commensurate with the powers of his understanding, or the variety of his knowledge. With the exception of his Dictionary (a work of vast labor, if not of critical skill) his best writings belong almost to the very close of his life; and if Boswell had not recorded his conversations with a graphical fidelity and fulness, which makes them the very familiars of our household, the fame of that great man, after a life of seventy-five years, would mainly rest upon two poems, in imitation of Juvenal, and upon his Lives of the Poets, which, with the exception of some half dozen Lives, wrought out with marvellous felicity and vigor, were but common task-work for the booksellers. I might mention Doctor Parr as another singular example of vast erudition, superior in this respect even to Johnson, and in general acquirements quite his equal, who has rendered himself famous for

* Bacon's Essays. Essay 50, Vol. II. of his Works, p. 373.

having exhausted his long life mainly upon a Spital sermon, and an edition of Bellendenus, neither of which is now read ; and yet if he had loved reading and conversation less, and composition more, he might have stood in classical and other literature among the foremost of his age. He lives now, rather by the bright sayings, preserved by his biographers, and by his private letters, than by any literary achievement, worthy of remembrance.

But, for an example still more instructive, and far more interesting and affecting, let us turn to one of the most philosophical and polished scholars of our own day, I mean Sir James Mackintosh, whose genius has illuminated, whatever it has touched, and touched almost every department of literature. Whoever has read the memoirs of that excellent man, written with an unassuming elegance, and a just filial reverence, by an accomplished scholar, must have risen from the perusal with mixed emotions of profound respect and profound melancholy. What do we here see, but a mind of the brightest order and most varied attainments, perpetually struggling with its own infirmity of purpose, — amassing, nay, devouring, all sorts of learning, with an eager and discriminating attention, sketching the outlines of the plan of some great work, and resolving at some future time to execute it, — rebuking its own delays, and yet persisting in the same course, — and at last, departing from the world, in a good old age, without having achieved any one of the loftier purposes, at which it aimed. Everywhere about us are the mighty fragments of his genius, like the mutilated Torso, exhibiting, in its broken proportions, the exquisite skill of the artist. His Introductory Lecture on the Law of Nations, the most magnificent discourse in our own, or, perhaps, in any other language, is but a finished portico for the vestibule of a temple, destined never to be erected. And, again, his Historical Dissertation upon the Progress of Ethical Science, which it is impossible to read without kindling into enthusiasm, leaves us, with its bright but rapid lights, just on the threshold of the very inquiries, to which it points our way. And then, again, his contributions

to the History of England seem but interludes between the acts and epochs of that great drama, where the curtain drops, just when the principal actors are about to play their parts on that grand theatre of human life. What can be more melancholy, or more full of regrets, than the contemplation of such a mind, so comprehensive in learning, so elevated in virtues, which has thus passed away, leaving so many admirable enterprises unaccomplished, and so many plans for immortality unfulfilled.

It may be said, that all this is the result of peculiar temperament. I think far otherwise ; it is the natural result of the seductive influences, of which I have spoken, and of the profuse expenditure of intellectual power upon ends and aims, incompatible with enduring excellence, which is so much fostered by the spirit of our age. How difficult must it be to resist the temptations to universal reading, and the fascinations of colloquial discourse, when they win instant praise, and circulate freely to the very boundaries of the literary world. For one, who, with a stout heart, and determined perseverance, could resist them, and die, like Sir Walter Scott, with his pen in his hand, there are hundreds, who would surrender themselves the willing, or the reluctant, victims to their influence, and resolve and re-resolve, and yet close their lives in the midst of hopes deferred, and expectations blasted, and projects abandoned.

I have thus far spoken of some of the existing dangers to the permanent interests of learning and literature ; and in so doing I have anticipated much, which belongs to the consideration of the discouragements and difficulties of scholars in our day. Many other admonitory and interesting reflections might, however, be added upon the latter topic ; but I shall content myself with a few suggestions only, addressed partly to our own peculiar national position, and partly to general causes at work throughout the world. One, indeed, which must strike even the most careless observer is the vast accumulation, in every department of knowledge, of new materials, which are to be mastered, in comparison with the old stock.

The brief but pungent apothegm, that life is short, and art is long, could never come home to the bosoms and business of scholars with more significance than in the present age. Hitherto, the task of completing the round of studies for a well-disciplined mind in any one department, seemed to lie within a comparatively moderate compass. But the mass has now increased to an almost overwhelming size, (to use the language of Sir Henry Spelman,) *Molem non ingentem solum, sed perpetuis humeris sustinendam*. In some sciences whole branches have sprung into being within the last fifty years, while others have received such vast additions, that the old foundations have been buried under the substructions of the new. The learned professions have received a like augmentation of principles and materials. Five hundred volumes would, a half century ago, have been deemed sufficient for all the ordinary exigencies of study, where five thousand volumes would now scarcely meet the daily demands, for consultation or instruction. Medicine has changed, not merely its systems and theories, and its formularies, but, through the instrumentality of chemistry, it has created a new *materia medica*, and a new nomenclature. Anatomy, and surgery, and physiological research, have elevated into science, what seemed before but a humbler department of art. Theology, in its dogmatical, exegetical, and critical inquiries, has made our libraries groan under the weight and variety of its contributions. In former times the ablest divines might content themselves with a few solid bodies of divinity, the best sermons of the old school, and some helps to criticism and exposition, in the shape of common-place books or concordances, illustrated by the standard guides in Ecclesiastical History. How changed is all this now! Jurisprudence has unfolded its stores with an equal profusion; and it is scarcely too much to say, that it is now practically impossible to read all, that is published; and the task of selection alone has become at once perilous and indispensable. In the mean time, the inquisitive and skeptical spirit of the age makes the duty of instruction, as well as that of the exposition and vindica-

tion of doctrines, full of labor and difficulty. Especially is this true in theology and the higher branches of philosophy. Here, the scholar must give a life of patient diligence to the task; and will find, that if he is read by many, he will be praised by few. His very learning may make his labors repulsive; and the very depth of his researches may discourage his faltering followers. His deficiencies will be studiously proclaimed, while the profounder results of his analysis are unheeded. Here, he will offend the prejudices of the day by a bold and fearless criticism, and there, he will encounter a dogma, which staggers his faith, or brings into question his prudence, or his judgment. If he appeals to posterity, he may, indeed, reap a just, though distant reward, when the passions and parties of the day shall have passed away. But, then, it may happen, that the appeal may never reach that tribunal; or, if it should, the changes of fashions and feelings and opinions may make his claim a slender inheritance, even if it should be recognised and confirmed. Under such circumstances, well may he be inclined to shun the toil of the enterprise, and exclaim: *Ostendunt hæc tantùm fata,—neque ultra.*

Look for a moment upon the exhausting demands of the pulpit. Instead of listening to plain, calm, and practical expository discourses, as in former times, we have now become fastidious and exacting critics. We require, every Sunday, the exhibitions of varied talent, dressed up with all the polished elegance and refinement of an exquisite taste. We seek, I had almost said, we demand, one or more sermons to be produced every week, which would require the meditations of the most gifted mind for a whole month; and of such a quality of excellence, that probably no single mind, in the history of the profession, ever produced twelve of them in any one year. This is not all. The discourses must be wrought out with somewhat of dramatic power and effect. They must be eloquent, as well as instructive; pointed, as well as true; vivid, as well as thoughtful. They must win by their persuasive approaches, even more than they strike by their masculine reasoning. They may, indeed, reprove vice with a

bold and fearless confidence, if it shocks by its grossness or revolting character. They may unmask hypocrisy, and denounce error, in good round terms. But they must deal gently with frailties, which are broadcast, and "just hint a fault or hesitate dislike," if it be a favorite folly of the day, which fashion has consecrated, and public opinion tolerates. Now, I think, that I do not exaggerate the difficulties and discouragements of the profession in our day, when I say, that the demands upon the preacher for ready compositions, and parochial duties, make it almost impracticable for him to attain eminence in biblical criticism, and disable him from writing works, which will be enduring monuments of his learning and ability, when he shall be gathered to his fathers.

Look again upon the scholar, who seeks eminence in classical studies. What a vast apparatus is now required to enable him to grapple with the intricacies of Grecian and Roman literature, its criticism, and its historical illustrations, or even the niceties of the grammatical structure of the language. It is a startling fact, that many a ripe scholar, even in patient and inquisitive and laborious Germany, will tell you, that there is not time, in any one life, to learn well more than a single language; that if one devotes himself to Greek, Latin is out of the question; and, that the study of a whole life may well be dedicated to the mastery of a single classical author, and even then, that much will be left untouched, or unexplained. Nay, Roman jurisprudence, which, after the criticisms of three centuries, seemed to have arrived at a fixed point in its expositions and principles, has now become suddenly changed in its aspects, and some of its elements have been displaced by the learned labors of living jurists, aided by the discovery of the Institutes of Gaius. And, as if ancient history itself were not secure against the inroads of modern speculation and industry, we are now told, that the historians of Rome totally mistook many of the facts, which they undertook to narrate from earlier traditions; and that we, in the nineteenth century, can, by more profound researches, correct errors and explain transactions, which, for eighteen hundred years,

were unquestioned, or were deemed irretrievably lost. It was not many years ago, that some of us were almost startled out of our proprieties by the doubt, whether any such person as Homer ever existed; and Niebuhr has so shaken the public confidence in the ancient historians, that a widespread alarm has infected our belief in the credibility of their chronicles.

Nor is the task of the instructor, or of the disciple, in intellectual or moral philosophy less formidable. If he could unfold the various systems of metaphysics, or of ethics, where is he to begin, or rather, where is he to end, his researches? His descent into the depths, and his ascent from them, are not among the facile operations of the human mind in our day.

“ In the lowest deep a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour him, opens wide.”*

If he has read half of what has been already written on these subjects, he has achieved a most gigantic enterprise. But if he would subdue the whole to his own purposes, and take but a moderate survey of the stores of scholastic logic and philosophy, deposited on the slumbering shelves of the public libraries of both continents, human life would not be long enough to complete his task. Here, at least, we must be content, not only, as Lord Bacon says, to read by deputy, but to think by deputy.

These are difficulties, which beset all scholars in our times from the profusion, and, as it were, from the very inundations, of learning. There are others, again, which press upon American scholars with peculiar force. Two opposite bands of disciplined troops break in upon our academical pursuits, as well as our literary repose, and threaten a protracted, if not a successful, warfare. They are embodied on one side under the leaders of what is called the Utilitarian System of knowledge, and on the other, under the clamorous advocates for an American literature, indigenous, exclusive, and national. Upon the former topic I do not purpose to touch. Upon the latter

* See Milton's Paradise Lost, B. 4, l. 76.

I would say a few words, as it constitutes the staple of so many of our public addresses, and ambitious essays. What do we mean by a National Literature? Do we mean by it a literature fostered and cultivated by American authors, addressing themselves to themes common to the world of letters? Or, do we mean by it a literature, which deals altogether in local topics, and busies itself only with institutions, and manners, and feelings, and discussions, peculiar to ourselves? If the former, it would be an idle waste of time to discuss the subject. The cultivation of literature in any country must essentially depend upon general causes, which rarely admit of much acceleration or retardation in their progress. An enduring literature must almost necessarily be of slow growth. It cannot be raised in the hot-beds of patronage or of power alone. It must spring up spontaneously, and be congenial to the soil. It can acquire excellence only, when the process of ripening is in a healthy air and a robust climate. It presupposes the existence of a large class of educated men, beyond what the steady demands of civil, political, and professional life require, for the advancement of the general interests of the society. It presupposes, that the rewards of other employments are not more certain and more tempting; more inviting from their relative facility of being reached; or more sure of conducting the aspirants to the repose and dignity of independence. It presupposes general wealth enough in the community to afford leisure to a large class of scholars to devote themselves to the highest pursuits of ambition, and the attainment of an imperishable fame; so that they may be content to wait for distant results. It presupposes, that it will afford a competent livelihood, to repay the exhausting labors of authorship, — for painful days, and wakeful nights, which move heavily on in the midst of secret and solitary studies, and indifference, and ill-health, and poverty. Until these things exist, — nay, until they in a great measure coexist, and act and react simultaneously upon each other, it is in vain to call for national literature and national authors. There must be patronage, liberal, constant, and comprehen-

sive, as well as genius and talent, in the land. The public must be ready to reward authors, as well as to praise them; — to protect, as well as to read, their works; — to encourage the domestic manufacture by giving it a reciprocal market abroad. Until this period shall arrive, it will be in vain to ask, or even to hope for a solid advancement in national literature. There may be, and there will be, occasional bursts of literary talent; but they will be irregular and transitory. There may be, and there will be, here and there, an author of exquisite elegance, or profound research; but for the most part, the lights will be flickering and faint, and do little more than skirt our horizon.

But if we mean by a national literature the other alternative before alluded to, a literature devoted to local thoughts, objects, interests, habits, and feelings, which shall stand out, like our lakes and rivers and waterfalls, with a sort of territorial magnificence or sovereignty (as is but too often the suggestion of national pride); then it might be worth while to consider, whether it were desirable, if attainable; or if attained, whether it would not sink us down to the level of a provincial dependency, rather than elevate us to the rank of equals in the republic of letters. It is true, that the vanity of possessing the home market might lead us to address nothing to foreign minds, or to foreign sympathies; that we might clothe ourselves with the common fabrics and costumes, manufactured to the order and fashion of the day, without dreaming, that they might possess neither grace nor dignity, and would be rejected by the taste, as well as be unsuited to the good sense, of other ages. To the great author seeking for permanent fame, may be addressed the same language, which has been addressed to the great painter. “He must divest himself of all prejudices in favor of his age or country; he must disregard all local and temporary ornaments; and look only to those general habits, which are everywhere, and always the same. He addresses his works to the people of every country and every age; he calls upon

posterity to be his spectators; and says, with Zeuxis, '*In æternitatem pingo.*' " *

Nay, I will go farther, and venture to affirm, that no author of any nation has ever attained permanent celebrity, whose works have not in fact been addressed to sentiments, feelings, sympathies, and experiences, common to the human soul in all countries, and all ages. There may be found a few persons, whose works paint transactions, which are purely local, or transient, and who may thus enlist the curiosity of the diligent antiquarian; but it is rather as specimens, than as models. The mass of authors in ancient, as well as in modern times, who are familiarly read, or extensively known, — are read and known, because their thoughts belong to all generations, and have inflamed the genius, and warmed the hearts of the instructed, as well as of the rude. The orators, the poets, the philosophers, and the historians of Greece and Rome are admired, not merely for the exquisite language, in which their works are clothed, but for the lessons of wisdom, which they teach; for the truths, which they expound; for the beautiful and sublime imagery, which they exhibit; and for the large results of human passions and human actions, which they narrate or suggest. These are just as striking, and just as important and useful now, as they were thousands of years ago. The works of Aristotle and Cicero have probably furnished more materials for instruction upon all the topics, of which they treat, than those of any other authors, who have flourished before or since their times. There is not a single page of Sallust or Tacitus, even when professedly discussing motives, or recording events, which now seem almost evanescent points of history, which are not replete with sound philosophy, with profound reflection, with acute analysis, of character, manners, and government, and with principles of universal application, which deserve to be treasured up as among the most valuable benefactions to the human race. To no nation on earth are the truths there unfolded, and the

* Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses, p. 59.

commentaries there condensed, of more importance than to ourselves. We may there see, how factions are engendered and how republics are ruined. How men in free governments become base, and servile, and corrupt, as well as, how they must act, in order to maintain the strength, the glory, and the well-balanced liberty of the State. Who does not read the common fate of republics, when Sallust, with searching severity, says; “*Ubi labore atque justitia Respublica crevit, — sævire Fortuna, ac miscere omnia cœpit. Qui labores, pericula, dubias atque asperas res faciliè toleraverunt, iis otium, divitiæ, optandæ aliis, oneri miseræque fuere. Igitur primo pecuniæ, deinde Imperii Cupido, crevit; ea quasi materies omnium malorum fuere.*”* Who does not see in his brief, but startling sketch of Catiline, the profligate demagogue of every age and country, at once crafty, selfish, variable, bold, and ambitious. “*Animus audax, subdolan, varius, cujuslibet rei simulator ac dissimulator, alieni appetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus, satis eloquentiæ, sapientiæ parum.*” † Who does not see the fawning sycophants and base retainers, waiting upon power and patronage, who pursue its triumph and partake its gale, in a single passage of Tacitus, of terrific grandeur, alluding to a period, when even fallen Rome yet affected liberty. “*At Romæ ruere in servitium, Consules, Patres, Eques. Quanto quis inlustrior, tanto magis falsi ac festinantes, vultu composito, ne læti excessu Principis, neu tristiores primordio, lacrimas, gaudium, quæstus, adulatione miscebant.*” ‡

These great men wrote not to foster the pride, or the tastes, or the prejudices of their own country. They wrote not for Rome, but for the World; not for their own age, but for all posterity. Sallust avows this to be his own motive; conscious (as he says) that virtuous fame alone is immortal. “*Mihi rectius esse videtur, ingenii, quam virium opibus, gloriam quærere, et quoniam vita ipsa, quâ fruimur, brevis*

* Sallust. Bell. Catil. § 10.

† Ibid. § 6.

‡ Tacit. Annal. Lib. 1, cap. 7.

est, memoriam nostri, quam maxime longam efficere. Nam divitiarum et formæ gloria fluxa atque fragilis; virtus clara æternaque habetur." * I have reserved (said Tacitus) a more fertile and secure subject for my old age, when, owing to the rare felicity of the times, you are at liberty to think what you please, and to speak what you think. "*Uberiorem securioremque materiam senectuti seposui, rarâ temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet.*" † A fit lesson to be learned even in this favored land; for, here, no mean courage is sometimes required, to speak what we think, when it strikes at some prevalent delusion; or to abstain from flattering the prejudices of the people, when the truth might offend them.

But I need not refer to the ancients. All countries and all ages furnish the same illustrations. There is not (I repeat it) a great author, who has come down to us with literary celebrity, whose pages are not addressed to interests, affections, and principles, common to all mankind. Tell me the author, who, since the revival of letters, has attained and still holds a settled eminence, in Italy, or Germany, or France, or England, whose writings are not felt to be the inheritance of the world? His works may have a strong flavor of the soil, where they were produced; they may be tinctured with the colors of the age, in which they lived; they may even be soiled and stained by its vices, or its follies, or its affectations. But these blemishes and peculiarities are accidental and unfelt, and serve but to present in a broader light their intrinsic excellences, — as the blur in the diamond reveals its imperfections, without diminishing the vivid sparkles from its transparent surface. Who, for a moment, could imagine, that Dante, or Tasso, or Shakspeare, or Milton, or Locke, or Klopstock, or Goethe, or Schiller, or Racine, wrote solely for their own times and their own country; and did not possess the proud consciousness, that they would be read by future generations in every nation, where letters should be cherished, however refined and however remote. "My name and mem-

* Sallust. Bell. Catil. § 1.

† Tacit. Hist. Lib. 1. cap. 1.

ory," (was the affecting and melancholy language of Lord Bacon, in his last will), "My name and memory I leave to foreign nations, and to mine own countrymen, after some time be passed over."

There could not, indeed, be a more dangerous delusion, than the attempt on the part of American authors to build up an exclusive national literature in the sense, to which I have last alluded. Our just ambition should be to make our literature a component part of the literature of the world, for the use of all nations and all ages. Let it have the bold impress of American genius, and the masculine vigor, and the brave spirit of inquiry and expression, which fitly belong to a free government, and an unshackled press. But let it rise to the dignity and elevation of an appeal to the highest minds in their highest studies, wherever their nativity may be cast. Let it speak a universal language, and address passions, feelings, sympathies, and principles, which glow with equal fervor at the poles and at the equator. Let the thoughts be such, as may save the language itself from perishing. Let them live on, and bless, and improve mankind, and unfold to them their duty and their destiny, until the period shall arrive, when tyrants and barbarians shall consign all books to a common destruction, as an incumbrance upon anarchy or despotism.

And this leads me to say a few words, and but a few words, for

"On our quickest decrees
The inaudible and noiseless foot of time
Steals, ere we can effect them,"

upon the duties of scholars in our day, and especially of American scholars. Much of what has been already said points its moral to this end and object. We have seen some of our dangers and difficulties. They may not be disguised, or concealed; but they must be met and confronted with a firm confidence and steady perseverance. The time has come, when the study of the ancient classics, of the great writers of Greece and Rome, is required to be reasoned out

and vindicated anew. While it is advancing with a steady pace among a select class of minds, we cannot fail to see, that it is in a proportionate degree holding a less comprehensive influence with the community at large. The sympathies, as well as the attractions, of other pursuits, and the brilliant achievements of physical science, have cast it with the multitude into comparative obscurity. But a more sweeping and impetuous cause is the strong tendency of the day to popular education and popular schemes of instruction. Knowledge, it is now thought, may be acquired with far less labor and in a more brief space. Compendious systems have succeeded the tardy progress and rough discipline of former times. The youthful mind is now required to be crammed with all sorts of learning and science, at a period of life when it can scarcely digest any. We hurry on the work of education with an eager and crowded impatience, and seek to condense the labor of years into that of months. All things are to be taught at the same moment; *Dum fervet opus*. And the appointed course once run over, the preparations of active life are deemed complete; the prizes of life are already within reach; and superfluous study is dismissed, as equally without pleasure and without profit.

It is for American scholars to rouse themselves for the coming events, which cast their shadows before. They must press upon the public attention, with a fearless spirit of expostulation, the utter folly of all such expectations; they must proclaim the solemn fact, that facile methods of education are mere delusions, which cheat us out of our time, as well as impair the vigor of our understandings; that they will make us at once superficial and conceited, and enervate without filling the mind. It has been eloquently said, that "These noble studies preserve, and they alone can preserve, the unbroken chain of learning, which unites the most remote generations; the grand catholic communion of wisdom and wise men, throughout all ages and nations of the world."*

* Life of Mackintosh, Vol. I. p. 119.

But a duty still higher, and more imperative, and urgent, is to stand forth as champions of truth, of sound morals, sound principles, and sound learning. It has been often suggested, as a matter of reproach, by foreigners, that our scholars and statesmen do not speak out to the public their real opinions. That they do not say, what they think, nor think, what they say. That our public harangues, and set pamphlets, and newspaper essays, are abundantly overlaid with flattery of vulgar errors, or popular delusions. That the people have perpetually trumpeted in their ears, the praise of their wisdom and virtue and intelligence, when it is apparent, that there is the most sincere distrust of them all, and often the belief, that we are on the downward path of ruin. In short, that the whole body of our passing literature, and the spirit of our public discussions, are moulded and fashioned to suit the ever varying forms of the popular will, and thus bring discredit upon our judgments, as well as upon our sincerity.

Admitting, that there is much of false and exaggerated statement in these suggestions, still there is truth enough at the bottom to challenge inquiry and demand reform. Has our literature in general a bold, healthy, solid, reflective, masculine character? Does it possess a fearless spirit of expostulation, or reproof, and a lofty avowal of principles, suited to the exigencies of our times? Does it tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, without fear, favor, affection, or hope of reward? Does it combat error, and expose folly, and resist visionary but captivating theories, by stirring appeals to the sober sense of the community, and the enlightened judgments of the wise? When the fundamental principles of republics, nay, of all governments, are assailed with presumptuous rashness, and the rights of property, and the securities of constitutions are assailed and questioned, does our literature come out, and unmask the deceit, and vindicate the truth, or does it lie by, and with indolent ease sleep over the evils, or silently evade its duty by hoping for the best, or softly whisper regrets, lest it should rouse opposition, or encounter obloquy? To these interrogatories let every scholar an-

swer for himself. But let him remember, that these are not times to blink at questions, or to push aside inquiries. Not only is the schoolmaster abroad, but the skeptic is by his side, and the importunate reformer with his nostrums, and the enthusiast with his idealities and abstractions. Christianity itself is called upon, on one side, to buckle on its armour, not to maintain the mere creeds and dogmas of a peculiar church or sect, but to establish its facts and its miracles, nay, the reality of the character, if not the personal existence, of the Founder of its hopes and its consolations. On another side, Protestantism is again required, at the distance of three centuries after its noble triumphs, to show its title deeds and its rights. It is put upon its defence, and asked for reasons and authority,—for its faith and its observances,—for its priesthood and its ordinances. The assaults come not from Rome alone. The battlements of Oxford frown upon its heresies, and forbid the banners of its alliance with the church. The warders upon her towers rebuke its backslidings, and demand a surrender of its banners and a renunciation of its errors. The blood of the martyrs has been spilled in vain. The warnings of the prophets have been proclaimed in vain. The Taylors, the Cudworths, the Chillingworths, the Barrows, and the Clarkes, have been but blind leaders of the blind. The Puritans and the Covenanters, the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists, the Calvinists and the Lutherans, are to lay down their spiritual arms, and submit to the sentence of the Vatican, pronounced on the banks of the Isis. These, then, are not the days for scholars, and least of all, for American scholars, to relapse into indolent indifference, or to send forth doubtful responses from their oracles, inviting double interpretations. The contest is no longer one with ignorance, or folly, or illiterate skepticism. The voices come from the seats of learning, from the deep studies of the closet, and from the bold speculations of gifted minds, capable of dealing with human rights and human belief. Learning must now be met by learning, talent by talent, genius by genius. The demand is for logic and reasoning, and historical truth, and not for mere dogmas or authority. Vague decla-

mation will not suffice. There must be close, forcible, clear, convincing argumentation.

I might add, if time would allow me, that there are other duties, devolving upon our scholars and statesmen, which come home, at this very moment, to our business and bosoms. To master the great questions, which now agitate, not merely our public councils, but the minds of the whole nation, upon topics of political economy, — of national rights and duties, — of constitutional obligations, — and of social interests, there are required all the resources of our knowledge and experience, the powers of eloquence, the lights of history, the most thorough investigations of the principles of international law. Have there been, and are there now brought to the task, free from the admixture of all extraneous and impure ingredients, the profound and honest judgments of our best scholars and statesmen? Or have the passions and prejudices and interests of the day mingled in the strife, and disturbed all the just influences, which ought to govern the discussions? Has it been left to the great minds, and the enlarged experience, and the learned studies of our best men, to expound subjects, so full of delicate and difficult relations? Have not rash men leaped into the arena, where angels might almost fear to tread, and eagerly sought to forestall the public judgment, by appeals to popular or local interests, or by lofty denunciations of all, who dared to promote calm inquiry, or the severe analysis of principles? One should have thought, that the very gravity of such topics would have suppressed all arrogant assertion, and put to flight all dogmatism and theories; that we should have consulted the oracles of other times, and sought instruction from their wisdom; that we should have invoked the aid of Grotius, and Puffendorf, and Vattel, and Burke, and Adam Smith, and the Authors of the *Federalist*, to enlighten our judgments, and purify our souls from debasing generalities.

And, again, it is the duty of our scholars to elevate the standard of our national literature; to engage it in themes more worthy of our destiny and rank in the republic of letters; to lift it above the petty strifes, the wild fantasies, and the



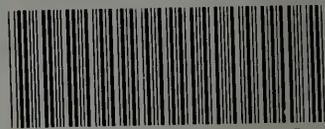
vague novelties of the day. If we may not aspire to the highest efforts of human genius, to the sublimer walks of poetry and philosophy, which dazzle by excess of light, we may yet seek a more elevated region, and breathe a purer air, than broods over the barren plains and misty valleys of common life.

“Largior hic campos Æther, et lumine vestit
Purpureo, — Solemque suam, sua sidera nôrant.”

Gentlemen, — I have done. As I close this discourse I cannot but turn my eyes to our venerable University, and ask, what she demands of us, her children, for the cause of religion, of letters, and of learning. She has stood forth for centuries, the glorious defender of truth, — unshaken, — unseduced, — unterrified. She has nourished in her bosom the wise, the eloquent, the renowned, the holy. In the days of her adversity, she has borne the brunt and burthen without fear or faltering. In the days of her prosperity, she has been content to cultivate learning, and promote the arts of peace. Shall not her children rise up, and call her blessed ! — At this very moment I seem to see the shades of her departed sons pass slowly before me, — the long procession of two hundred years. They point with deep thoughtfulness to the past, and with earnest solicitude to the future. Their silence, more expressive than any human speech, addresses to us, at once, the language of admonition, — of exhortation, — of encouragement, — of entreaty. Methinks, as their shadowy forms glide away, the silence is for a moment broken, and I hear their united voices, in unearthly tones, utter, from beyond the grave,

“O! Socii, — Antiquam exquirite Matrem.”

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