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ADDRESS

DELIVERED

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI,

BY THE

REQUEST OF THE TRUSTEES,

AND

OF THE SOCIETIES OF THE UNIVERSITY,

JULY TWELFTH, 1849.

BY ALBERT TAYLOR BLEDSOE,

Professor of Mathematics &c., and acting President of the University.

GENTLEMEN TRUSTEES—LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

THE University of Mississippi, as you are aware, has this day reached the close of its First Session; and in reaching this point of its progress, it has passed the most critical and trying period of its existence. During that period our minds have been frequently weighed down under a sense of the stupendous responsibilities resting upon us. Indeed, as the first faculty of an institution, upon whose destiny so many hopes and so many interests are suspended, we could not have failed to be deeply impressed with the magnitude of the trust confided to us.—Hence, the University has been the subject of our daily thoughts, of our nightly meditations, of our constant anxiety, of our profoundest solicitude. A multitude of reflections have thus arisen in our minds, which it would not be improper, perhaps, to lay before you on the present occasion; but, on the whole, we have deemed it advisable to confine our attention to a single subject, which has long appeared to us to be one of unspeakable importance. This subject relates to the origin of the difficulties with which every scheme of Education and Government is necessarily encumbered. But before proceeding to consider this subject, we beg leave to say a word in relation to certain difficulties, which have been peculiar to our labors during the past year. These difficulties have arisen in part from our own fault, and in part from circumstances and causes over which we have had no control. At the outset, we received a number of Students into the University, who were not prepared to reap the full benefit of its course of instruction. This error has been a source of vexation and trouble to us, rather than of good to those whom it was intended to favor. The successful operation of the University will require us, in future, to adhere more rigidly to the terms of admission prescribed in our laws and regulations. Indeed, it has been our intention, from the first, not to lower the standard of admission for another session; and if this has been done at all, it was because that standard had not been made known beforehand, and many had flocked to the University without the possibility of knowing on what they had to depend. We shall hereafter immoveably adhere to the prescribed terms of admission. This is indispensible, in our opinion, to secure a solid foundation on which to rear a goodly superstructure of sound learning, as well as to preserve the dignity and character of the University itself.

It has also been a great disadvantage, that as yet no Junior or Senior Class has been formed in the University. It is well known, that the elements of discord and mischief in Colleges are usually found in the Freshman and Sophomore Classes, while the elements of order exist in the two higher classes. The reason of this is plain. The higher classes are formed from the lower, by pruning and cultivating them; what is bad in them is cut off, and what is good, is developed and improved.—Hence, by the time they reach the Junior and Senior years, they are prepared to exert a salutary influence. We have been without this happy influence in the University of Mississippi; and that too, at the time it was most needed. If the machinery has not worked perfectly well, then, this should be ascribed in part at least to the fact, that one of its main regulators has been wanting.

In addition to this, when the University first opened, it was impossible to procure text books immediately, and consequently the time of the Students could not be fully occupied. Idleness, always so unfavorable to good conduct, was especially so in a large number of young men, many of whom had broken loose from the restraints of home for the first time, and collected together in one body. The disorders necessarily flowing from this source, were heightened and increased by the idea which some young men seemed to bring here with them, that College life is a sort of farce or comedy in which each actor is expected to display the brilliancy of his parts, and to signalize his genius in freaks of mischief and scenes of dissipation. This foolish notion was not sufficiently discouraged at first; because we sincerely wished to benefit all within our reach, and until all could have an opportunity to devote themselves to study, we could not determine who would remain incorrigible, and who might be saved to the University and to the State.

All things considered, we have no reason to be discouraged, but, on the contrary, we have abundant ground for hope, that the First Session of the University has succeeded so well as it has, and finally come to so auspicious a conclusion. Especially is this the case, as the good order of the Institution has been steadily progressive, and its prospects continually brightening. For several months past, indeed, the affairs of the University have flowed on smoothly and delightfully, with one exception; and that exception we are happy to know, soon terminated in as perfect order and quiet as ever reigned in any College.

We have endeavored to impress it upon the Students of the University—and we do most devoutly wish it could be impressed upon the people of the whole State—that if young men come here to improve their time, to cultivate their minds, then shall they be most affectionately welcomed and most kindly treated. No labor shall be spared on our part to help them forward in this noble design. We are willing, nay, infinitely more than willing, to join all such and become co-workers with them in this great and glorious work. But on the other hand, if they come here to waste the prime of life in idleness, and to squander their parents' money in dissipation; they must not expect us to permit them to fix a stain upon the character of this infant Institution. We care not, whether their parents be high or low, rich or poor, mighty or weak, we cannot permit them to enact their obscene comedies in this holy temple of learning, nor to set their cloven feet upon the tender blossom of Science, which has been so beneficently planted in this fair region of the South. If we can teach them no other lesson, we must at least teach them, that some other College, or some other place will answer their purposes far better than this. For if we understand it rightly, this Institution has not been so nobly endowed, that it may harbor the incorrigibly vicious and worthless, but that it may prepare men—real, living men—to become the ornaments of society and the faithful servants of the State.

This conducts us to the main subject of our discourse, namely, the origin of the difficulties with which every scheme of Education and Government is necessarily encumbered. These difficulties are frequently underrated; and hence inadequate means are relied upon to surmount them. One great reason of this error is, that the friends of education and good order frequently form too high an estimate of human nature. No greater mistake, we humbly conceive, can be made in any kind of government or discipline, whether it be parental, collegiate, civil, or ecclesiastical, than to proceed on the supposition of the inherent rectitude and purity of the human mind.

It is evident, that the moral world, as it came fresh from the hand of God, was not disfigured by the least appearance of evil. It was the perception of this truth, dimly seen through the mists of tradition, or more clearly revealed by the light of nature within us, that inspired the Heathen Poets with their beautiful visions of a golden age. And well might it do so; for in all the magnificence and glory of God's world, as it sprang bright from the word of His power, there was not the least impress or overshadowing of evil. Peace reigned within, and Paradise bloomed without. But that happy age has passed. Though once a reality, it now exists only among the bright dreams of the poet. Nowhere can we look on this majestic fabric of the world, without beholding the frightful ravages of evil, and the frowning signals of the divine displeasure. The King of terrors now reigns over all. The pride, the pomp, the glory of the world, wither at His approach, and sink into the dust. All ages and nations have sickened beneath the touch of His power. The fair world itself has thus become one great hospital, and the beautiful earth, one vast burying place. Whence is all this? Whence this infinite legion of miseries to which man is a prey? Whence this awful spectacle of a world lying in ruins, and hastening to decay?—This question cannot be better answered, than by the sublime language of the poet:—

> Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat;
> Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat,
> Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe,
> That all was lost.

Think not, we entreat you, that we are about to deliver a homily on "the fall of man and its consequences." Such a subject is so little adapted to flatter the pride, or to gratify the taste, or to delight the imagination, that it is prudently shunned by all literary men who have a due regard for their precious reputation. We trust we have not committed an unpardonable sin against the spirit of the "elegant literature" of the day, and brought ourselves into utter disgrace with all "polite scholars," by a mere passing allusion to it. We shall certainly not dwell on so repulsive a theme.—For why may not we, as well as others, think with the Church, and speak with the world? Why may not we, too, sail between Scylla and Charybdis by holding the doctrine of man's depravity as fact and treating it as fiction? Shall we not in this way satisfy the creed and at the same time gratify the taste of the very refined orthodoxy of the present day, and thereby escape the horrors of literary martyrdom? It is true, we have ventured, most unfashionably we admit, to allude to the depravity of human nature; but how careful have we been not to speak one plain word on the subject? We have merely hinted that human nature is not as pure as it might be; and even this hint, we have set forth in the high-sounding phrase and under the magnificent imagery of the poet, in order to conceal its offensiveness. If we had only seen an army with banners before us, or a wilderness of bristling bayonets, we might, perhaps, have summoned up courage to make a bold and open confession of this despised portion of the creed of the Christian world. But who can encounter, even in imagination, a whole Christian audience of learned men and fair women, with noses all upturned as if they smelt a sermon in every word? We confess, that we are prepared for no such conflict, and we intend to be guilty of no such heroic folly.

But, with permission of the audience, we will make bold to say, that neither education nor government is one of the fine arts, and hence, their principles are to be determined, not by the taste nor the imagination, but by the real nature and condition of man. If human nature be really fallen, this fact is fraught with the most tremendous practical consequences, and it cannot be overlooked with impunity. And we will also venture to affirm, that if Philanthropists and Statesmen had not kept this odious fact so much in the back-ground, their speculations would have been far more solid, and the world would have been delivered from a countless multitude of wild and visionary schemes for the improvement of mankind. It is high time, we think, that the fall of man, by which his whole destiny has been so fearfully controlled, and his whole history so deeply colored, should be taken into account in determining the great practical affairs of life. For if this be a great fundamental fact of man's history, it is evident that it cannot, with impunity, be treated as if it were one of the fables of the Heathen Mythology. Hence, the most enlightened friends of education who have overlooked this great fact, have adopted and relied upon the most inadequate means for the elevation and advancement of the human race.

It is an old and common remark, for instance, that men will always do right, provided they are furnished with the requisite light and knowledge. As this doctrine supposes ignorance to be the only source of evil; so the only remedy it proposes is the universal diffusion of knowledge.

This scheme for the training and elevation of human nature, has been handed down to us from antiquity. In one of his dialogues, Socrates is made to say: "The man, Euthydemus, that knows the laws that are to regulate his conduct in serving the Gods, will serve them according to those laws?" "No doubt," replies Euthydemus. "And he who serveth them according to those laws, will serve them as he ought." "He will," says Euthydemus. "But is he who serveth them as he ought, pious?" "Assuredly," answers Euthydemus. "Then he who knoweth how he ought to serve the gods," concludes Socrates, "may rightly be defined a pious person." Thus, according to Socrates, knowledge alone is the grand panacea for all superstition and vice, for all idolatry and crime.

In strict conformity with the above reasoning, the great moralist in question comes to the conclusion, that "we furnish ourselves with an inexhaustible fund of virtue, when we treasure up the writings of great men." If this be so, why we ask, was not a Bacon the purest, as well as "the greatest and brightest" of mankind? But Socrates himself shall pronounce the condemnation of his own logic. In the very same dialogue he says: "Doth not intemperance rob us of our reason, that chief excellence of man, and drive us on to commit the very greatest disorders? Can he who is immersed in pleasure, find time to turn his thoughts on things that are useful? But if he could, his judgment is so far overborne by his appetites, that, seeing the right path, he deliberately rejects it." Here the Philosopher, losing sight of theory and speaking from observation, has spoken in accordance with the experience of mankind in all ages. For who has not had occasion to utter the complaint of the poet; that he perceived and approved the right, but yet pursued the wrong:—

> "*Video meliora proboque*
> *Deteriora sequor?*"

Nowhere can we find a more striking illustration of this sad truth, than that which the great bard of Scotland has left upon record in the memorable lines which he prepared as a fit epitaph for himself:—

> Is there a man, whose judgment clear,
> Can others teach the course to steer,
> Yet runs, himself, life's mad career,
> Wild as the wave?
> Here pause—and, through the starting tear
> Survey his grave.
> The poor inhabitant below
> Was quick to feel, and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow
> And softer flame;
> But countless follies laid him low,
> And stained his name.

Ah, how bitterly must he have felt, in the very midst of all his light, the galling and debasing tyranny of vice! Though quick to feel and wise to know, this superiority of knowledge and moral sensibility, only caused a sense of folly to sting like an adder, and conscience to gnaw like a burning worm. Something more potent than mere knowledge, we repeat, is necessary to subdue the will of man. Indeed, in the whole range and wild chaos of human folly, we know not a more fatal delusion than that in which so many parents fondly indulge, that when their children "grow up and learn better," as they express it, it will be easy to induce them to throw off the bad habits, which, in early life, they have been most unwisely permitted to contract.

To train the mind, and form it to habits of virtue, is a far more difficult task than is supposed by many of the most enlightened friends of education. We might easily select a hundred striking illustrations of the justness of this remark. But we shall confine our attention to a single example, which is taken from an author of great eminence. In his celebrated work on "The Active and Moral Powers of Man," Dugald Stewart has said: "Good habits are incomparably more easy in the acquisition than bad. That such habits as are reasonable and agreeable to nature are more easily acquired than others of a contrary description, is an old and common remark. It is well expressed and very happily illustrated in the following language of Quinctillian: "The discipline of a virtuous life is short and easy, nature having formed us for whatever is excellent, and having so facilitated to a willing mind every acquisition which tends to its improvement, as to render it wonderful that vice should be so prevalent in the world. For as to fishes, water is the appropriate element; to terrestial animals, the dry land; and to birds, the surrounding atmosphere; so to man it is certainly more easy to follow the suggestions of *Nature* than to pursue a plan contrary to her obvious intentions and arrangements."

Now, this reasoning, plausible as it may seem, owes all its apparent conclusiveness to the ambiguity of a single word, on which it has but too securely stood from the time of Quinctilian down to the present day. We intend to lay bare this ambiguity, and expose the portentous sophism it has so long been made to support. For if this sophism be received as truth, it cannot fail to give form and substance and direction to our views respecting the means necessary to elevate and purify the nature of man: it must inevitably conceal from our minds the great difficulties of such a task, and consequently lead us to adopt inadequate and visionary schemes for its accomplishment.

In the first place, the reasoning in question is contradicted by facts. Since "the discipline of a virtuous life is so short and easy," say they, "it is wonderful that vice should be so prevalent in the world." Is it not strange that this wonderful discrepancy between their theory and fact, did not inspire these Philosophers with a doubt as to the correctness of their speculations?

But, secondly, the theory in question is not only contradicted by the phenomena of the moral world, it is also founded on false reasoning. The fallacy arises from the ambiguity of the proposition, that "virtue consists in following nature." To follow nature may mean, either to follow the *highest*, or the *strongest* principle of our nature. In the first sense, we do not deny that virtue consists in following nature. This doctrine, which was maintained by the most distinguished of the ancient Philosophers, is clearly unfolded in the most profound analysis of our moral powers ever given to the world. According to Bishop Butler, the author of that analysis, virtue consists in following the evident intention of nature; but it is the evident intention of nature, that conscience should be the supreme governing principle of our actions. "Had it might, as it has right," says he, "had it power, as it has manifest authority; it would absolutely govern the world." But to follow nature in this sense, that is, to follow the dictates of conscience, is no easy matter. On the contrary, to bring all our appetites and passions and desires into perfect harmony with the higher powers of our nature, is the most arduous and difficult of all labors.

But we may be said to follow nature, when we yield to the impulse of the strongest principle of our nature. In this sense, nothing is more easy than to follow nature, it is true; but to follow it in this sense, is not to practice virtue. Conscience is no longer what it was designed to be, the sun and centre of the moral system of man; directing all his movements by its light, and controlling them by its influence. Conscience has been dethroned. The passions have usurped the seat of power and authority. Hence, the discipline of a virtuous life is not so short and easy as it would have been, but for this frightful disruption in the moral harmony of our nature. If we would lead a virtuous life, we must do something more than simply glide down on the gentle current of pure affections; we must stem the mighty torrent of human passion. We must struggle against the wind, tide and current of the most influential powers of nature. This seems to be the true view of human nature, as it now exists, and it is in perfect accordance with the astounding facts of the world's overwhelming wickedness.

Statesmen, as well as the friends of education, have frequently overlooked the real internal source of the difficulties, with which they have had to contend. Hence, they too, have indulged in romantic hopes, and relied upon visionary schemes. Especially have they expected too much from the mere external arrangements of society. The people of Rome did right, no doubt, in hurling the Tarquins from the throne. They did right, no doubt, in refusing to submit to the oppressors wrong. But yet were they most sadly deceived in regard to the blessings they expected to flow from the establishment of a grand republic. They had expelled the Tarquins from the throne, but they had not expelled the spirit of the Tarquins from the human breast.—Hence, how soon is the fair morning of the republic overcast with clouds and darkness! How soon is the bright hope of the patriot blasted, and the land once more given to the tyrant's scourge! In vain has he burnt with indignation at the tyrant's wrong, and, in divinest rage, trampled the tyrant's throne to atoms. In vain has he poured down the floods of a holy wrath upon the vile head of the crowned actor in the awful tragedy of Lucretia. For scarcely has the monarchy passed away, before on the darkened theatre of the republic, is the equally appalling tragedy of Virginia enacted!

The first French revolution was, perhaps, the most magnificent illusion by which the world has ever been deceived. It was hailded by the friends of human freedom in every part of the civilized world, with acclamations of joy and delight. They beheld a great nation rising in its might, with a resistless determination to shake off the wrongs and abuses under which it had groaned for ages; and to establish in their stead, the grand principles of human right. The glory of the cause cast a deceptive lustre over the spirit by which it was espoused. For, in reality, the French people had only learned to hate the oppressor's wrong, and not to love liberty. They had sworn eternal hostility to tyrants, but not eternal fidelity to man. Hence their hatred of oppression was a fierce, wild, dark, maddened spirit of resentment; neither enlightened by wisdom, nor controlled by goodness. It was, therefore, as impotent to construct, as it was mighty to destroy. It knew no bounds of moderation; it absolutely rejoiced in the work of destruction, until all its infidel dreams about the inherent purity and the indefinite perfectibility of man, were swallowed up and lost in real visions of blood.

[*To be concluded next week.*]

CURIOUS FACTS—A writer in the Boston *Medical Journal*, states the following facts, which he says has been collected from authentic statistics:

1. That the longevity of the pure African is greater than that of the inhabitants of any other portion of the globe.

2. That Mulattoes, i. e., those born of parents one being African and the other Caucassian or white, are decidedly the shortest lived of any class of the human race.

3. That Mulattoes are more liable to die under the age of 25, than the whites or blacks between those ages—from 40 to 46, 50 to 1—and from 55 to 70, 100 to 1.

4. That the mortality of free people of color in the United States is more than 100 per cent greater than that of the slaves.

5. That those of unmixed African extraction in the "free States" are not more liable to sickness of premature death than the whites of their rank and condition in society; but that the striking mortality so manifest among the free people of color, is in every community and section of country invariably confined to mulattoes.

Major General D. E. Twiggs, United States army, has been ordered to assume command of the U. S. troops in Florida.