

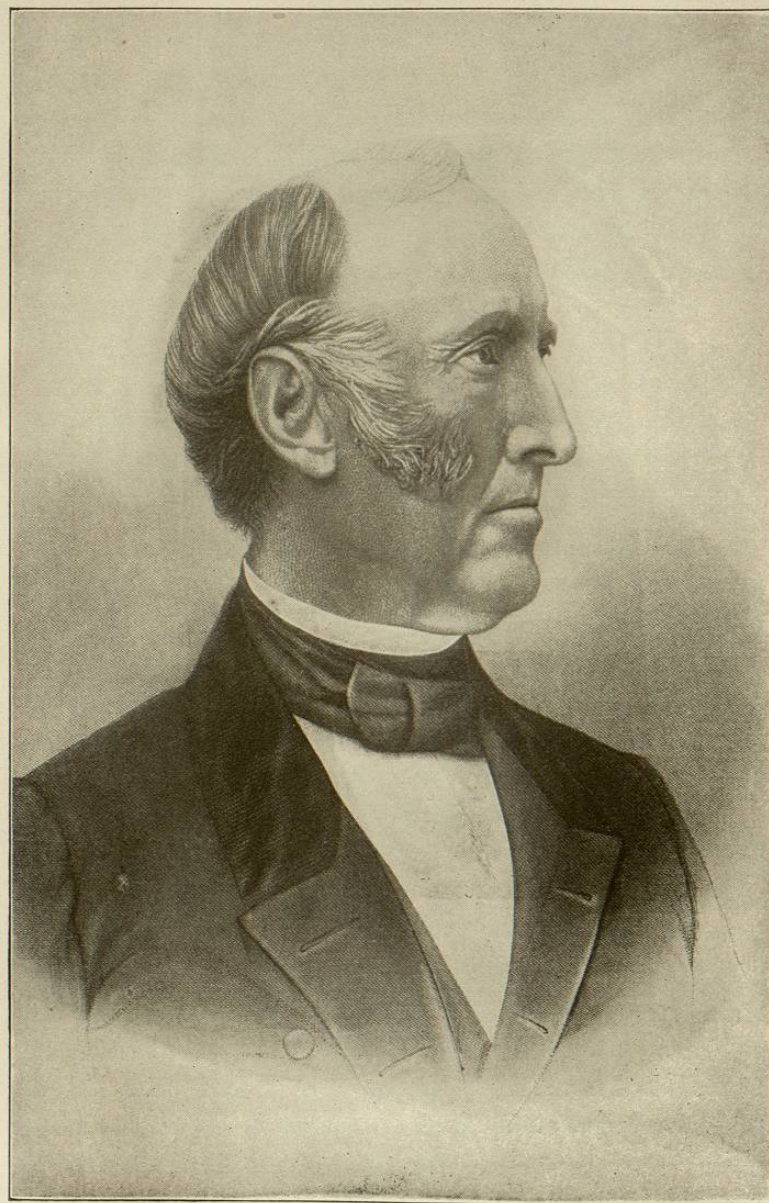
## WENDELL PHILLIPS

**W**ENDELL PHILLIPS, distinguished American Abolitionist, was born at Boston, Mass., Nov. 29, 1811, and died at Boston, Feb. 2, 1884. The descendant of a distinguished family, and heir to a fortune, he was educated at Harvard University. After graduating from the law school of that institution, he began to practice at the Bar in 1834, but was soon diverted to politics by his antipathy to slavery. For the quarter of a century preceding the outbreak of the Civil War his remarkable speeches on the platform in behalf of the abolition movement rendered compromise impracticable and armed collision inevitable. After the close of the war, he advocated woman suffrage, prohibition, and labor reforms. In 1870, the Labor party and the Prohibitionists nominated him for Governor of Massachusetts, but he failed to be elected. Phillips had great powers of sarcasm and invective, as well as consuming passion and fire. Two of his later lectures on popular themes are one on "Toussaint l'Overture," the other, here given, on "The Lost Arts."

### THE LOST ARTS<sup>1</sup>

**W**E SEEM to imagine, that whether knowledge will die with us, or not, it certainly began with us. We have a pitying estimate, a tender pity, for the narrowness, ignorance, and darkness of the bygone ages. We seem to ourselves not only to monopolize, but to have begun, the era of light. In other words, we are all running over with a fourth-day-of-July spirit of self-content. I am often reminded of the German whom the English poet Coleridge met at Frankfort. He always took off his hat with profound respect when he ventured to speak of himself. It seems to me, the American people

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(200)



WENDELL PHILLIPS



might be painted in the chronic attitude of taking off its hat to itself; and therefore it can be no waste of time, with an audience in such a mood, to take their eyes for a moment from the present civilization, and guide them back to that earliest possible era that history describes for us, if it were only for the purpose of asking whether we boast on the right line. I might despair of curing us of the habit of boasting, but I might direct it better!

Well, I have been somewhat criticised, year after year, for this endeavor to open up the claims of old times. I have been charged with repeating useless fables with no foundation. To-day I take the mere subject of glass. This material, Pliny says, was discovered by accident. Some sailors, landing on the eastern coast of Spain, took their cooking utensils, and supported them on the sand by the stones that they found in the neighborhood: they kindled their fire, cooked the fish, finished the meal, and removed the apparatus; and glass was found to have resulted from the nitre and sea-sand, vitrified by the heat. Well, I have been a dozen times criticised by a number of wise men, in newspapers, who have said that this was a very idle tale, that there never was sufficient heat in a few bundles of sticks to produce vitrification,—glass-making. I happened, two years ago, to meet, on the prairies of Missouri, Professor Shepherd, who started from Yale College, and, like a genuine Yankee, brings up anywhere where there is anything to do. I happened to mention this criticism to him. "Well," says he, "a little practical life would have freed men from that doubt." Said he, "We stopped last year in Mexico, to cook some venison. We got down from our saddles, and put the cooking apparatus on stones we found there; made our fire with the wood we got there, resembling ebony; and when we removed the apparatus



there was pure silver gotten out of the embers by the intense heat of that almost iron wood. Now," said he, "that heat was greater than any necessary to vitrify the materials of glass." Why not suppose that Pliny's sailors had lighted on some exceedingly hard wood? May it not be as possible as in this case?

So, ladies and gentlemen, with a growing habit of distrust of a large share of this modern and exceedingly scientific criticism of ancient records, I think we have been betraying our own ignorance, and that frequently, when the statement does not look, on the face of it, to be exactly accurate, a little investigation below the surface will show that it rests on a real truth. Take, for instance, the English proverb, which was often quoted in my college days. We used to think how little logic the common people had; and when we wanted to illustrate this in the schoolroom,—it was what was called a *non sequitur*: the effect did not come from the cause named,—we always quoted the English proverb, "Tenterden steeple is the cause of Goodwin Sands." We said, "How ignorant a population!" But, when we went deeper into the history, we found that the proverb was not meant for logic, but was meant for sarcasm. One of the bishops had fifty thousand pounds given to him to build a breakwater to save the Goodwin Sands from the advancing sea; but the good bishop,—being one of the kind of bishops which Mr. Froude describes in his lecture, that the world would be better if Providence would remove them from it,—instead of building the breakwater to keep out the sea, simply built a steeple; and this proverb was sarcastic, and not logical, that "Tenterden steeple was the cause of the Goodwin Sands." When you contemplate the motive there was the closest and best-welded logic in the proverb. So I think

a large share of our criticism of old legends and old statements will be found in the end to be the ignorance that overleaps its own saddle, and falls on the other side.

Well, my first illustration ought to be this material, glass: but, before I proceed to talk of these lost arts, I ought in fairness to make an exception; and it is the conception and conceit which lies here. Over a very large section of literature, there is a singular contradiction to this swelling conceit. There are certain lines in which the moderns are all satisfied with themselves, and contented to acknowledge that they ought fairly to sit down at the feet of their predecessors. Take poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, the drama, and almost everything in works of any form that relates to beauty,—with regard to that whole sweep, the modern world gilds it with its admiration of the beautiful. Take the very phrases that we use. The artist says he wishes to go to Rome. "For what?"—"To study the masters." Well, all the masters have been in their graves several hundred years. We are all pupils. You tell the poet, "Sir, that line of yours would remind one of Homer," and he is crazy. Stand in front of a painting, in the hearing of the artist, and compare its coloring to that of Titian or Raphael, and he remembers you forever. I remember once standing in front of a bit of marble carved by Powers, a Vermonter, who had a matchless, instinctive love of art, and perception of beauty. I said to an Italian standing with me, "Well, now, that seems to me to be perfection." The answer was, "To be perfection,"—shrugging his shoulders,—"why, sir, that reminds you of Phidias!" as if to remind you of that Greek was a greater compliment than to be perfection.

Well, now the very choice of phrases betrays a confession of inferiority, and you see it again creeps out in the amount



we borrow. Take the whole range of imaginative literature, and we are all wholesale borrowers. In every matter that relates to invention, to use, or beauty, or form, we are borrowers.

You may glance around the furniture of the palaces in Europe, and you may gather all these utensils of art or use; and, when you have fixed the shape and forms in your mind, I will take you into the museum of Naples, which gathers all remains of the domestic life of the Romans, and you shall not find a single one of these modern forms of art or beauty or use, that was not anticipated there. We have hardly added one single line or sweep of beauty to the antique.

Take the stories of Shakespeare, who has, perhaps, written his forty-odd plays. Some are historical. The rest, two thirds of them, he did not stop to invent, but he found them. These he clutched, ready made to his hand, from the Italian novelists, who had taken them before from the East. Cinderella and her slipper is older than all history, like half a dozen other baby legends. The annals of the world do not go back far enough to tell us from where they first came.

All the boys' plays, like everything that amuses the child in the open air, are Asiatic. Rawlinson will show you that they came somewhere from the banks of the Ganges or the suburbs of Damascus. Bulwer borrowed the incidents of his Roman stories from legends of a thousand years before. Indeed, Dunlop, who has grouped the history of the novels of all Europe into one essay, says that in the nations of modern Europe there have been two hundred and fifty or three hundred distinct stories. He says at least two hundred of these may be traced, before Christianity, to the other side of the Black Sea. If this were my topic, which it is not, I might tell you that even our newspaper jokes are enjoying a

very respectable old age. Take Maria Edgeworth's essay on Irish bulls and the laughable mistakes of the Irish. Even the tale which either Maria Edgeworth or her father thought the best is that famous story of a man writing a letter as follows: "My dear friend, I would write you in detail, more minutely, if there was not an impudent fellow looking over my shoulder, reading every word." ("No, you lie: I've not read a word you have written!") This is an Irish bull, still it is a very old one. It is only two hundred and fifty years older than the New Testament. Horace Walpole dissented from Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and thought the other Irish bull was the best,—of the man who said, "I would have been a very handsome man, but they changed me in the cradle." That comes from Don Quixote, and is Spanish; but Cervantes borrowed it from the Greek in the fourth century, and the Greek stole it from the Egyptian hundreds of years back.

There is one story which it is said Washington has related, of a man who went into an inn, and asked for a glass of drink from the landlord, who pushed forward a wineglass about half the usual size; the tea-cups also in that day were not more than half the present size. The landlord said, "That glass out of which you are drinking is forty years old."—"Well," said the thirsty traveller, contemplating its diminutive proportions, "I think it is the smallest thing of its age I ever saw." That story as told is given as a story of Athens three hundred and seventy-five years before Christ was born. Why! all these Irish bulls are Greek,—every one of them. Take the Irishman who carried around a brick as a specimen of the house he had to sell; take the Irishman who shut his eyes, and looked into the glass to see how he would look when he was dead; take the Irishman that bought a crow, alleging that crows were reported to live two hundred



years, and he meant to set out and try it; take the Irishman who met a friend who said to him, "Why, sir, I heard you were dead."—"Well," says the man, "I suppose you see I'm not."—"Oh, no!" says he, "I would believe the man who told me a good deal quicker than I would you." Well, those are all Greek. A score or more of them, of the parallel character, come from Athens.

Our old Boston patriots felt that tarring and feathering a Tory was a genuine patent Yankee fire-brand,—Yankeeism. They little imagined that when Richard Cœur de Lion set out on one of his crusades, among the orders he issued to his camp of soldiers was, that any one who robbed a hen-roost should be tarred and feathered. Many a man who lived in Connecticut has repeated the story of taking children to the limits of the town, and giving them a sound thrashing to enforce their memory of the spot. But the Burgundians in France, in a law now eleven hundred years old, attributed valor to the East of France because it had a law that the children should be taken to the limits of the district, and there soundly whipped, in order that they might forever remember where the limits came.

So we have very few new things in that line. But I said I would take the subject, for instance, of this very material—very substance—glass. It is the very best expression of man's self-conceit.

I had heard that nothing had been observed in ancient times which could be called by the name of glass,—that there had been merely attempts to imitate it. I thought they had proved the proposition: they certainly had elaborated it. In Pompeii, a dozen miles south of Naples, which was covered with ashes by Vesuvius eighteen hundred years ago, they broke into a room full of glass: there was ground-glass,

window-glass, cut-glass, and colored glass of every variety. It was undoubtedly a glass-maker's factory. So the lie and the refutation came face to face. It was like a pamphlet printed in London, in 1836, by Dr. Lardner, which proved that a steamboat could not cross the ocean; and the book came to this country in the first steamboat that came across the Atlantic.

The chemistry of the most ancient period had reached a point which we have never even approached, and which we in vain struggle to reach to-day. Indeed, the whole management of the effect of light on glass is still a matter of profound study. The first two stories which I have to offer you are simply stories from history.

The first is from the letters of the Catholic priests who broke into China, which were published in France some two hundred years ago. They were shown a glass, transparent and colorless, which was filled with a liquor made by the Chinese, that was shown to the observers, and appeared to be colorless like water. This liquor was poured into the glass, and then, looking through it, it seemed to be filled with fishes. They turned this out, and repeated the experiment, and again it was filled with fish. The Chinese confessed that they did not make them; that they were the plunder of some foreign conquest. This is not a singular thing in Chinese history; for in some of their scientific discoveries we have found evidence that they did not make them, but stole them.

The second story, of half a dozen, certainly five, relates to the age of Tiberius, the time of St. Paul; and tells of a Roman who had been banished, and who returned to Rome, bringing a wonderful cup. This cup he dashed upon the marble pavement, and it was crushed, not broken, by the fall. It was dented some, and with a hammer he easily brought it



into shape again. It was brilliant, transparent, but not brittle. I had a wineglass when I made this talk in New Haven; and among the audience was the owner, Professor Silliman. He was kind enough to come to the platform when I had ended, and say that he was familiar with most of my facts, but, speaking of malleable glass, he had this to say,—that it was nearly a natural impossibility, and that no amount of evidence which could be brought would make him credit it. Well, the Romans got their chemistry from the Arabians; they brought it into Spain eight centuries ago, and in their books of that age they claim that they got from the Arabians malleable glass. There is a kind of glass spoken of there, that, if supported by one end, by its own weight in twenty hours would dwindle down to a fine line, and that you could curve it around your wrist. Von Beust, the Chancellor of Austria, has ordered secrecy in Hungary in regard to a recently discovered process by which glass can be used exactly like wool, and manufactured into cloth.

These are a few records. When you go to Rome, they will show you a bit of glass like the solid rim of this tumbler,—a transparent glass, a solid thing, which they lift up so as to show you that there is nothing concealed; but in the centre of the glass is a drop of colored glass, perhaps as large as a pea, mottled like a duck, finely mottled with the shifting colored hues of the neck, and which even a miniature pencil could not do more perfectly. It is manifest that this drop of liquid glass must have been poured, because there is no joint. This must have been done by a greater heat than the annealing process, because that process shows breaks.

The imitation of gems has deceived not only the lay people, but the connoisseurs. Some of these imitations in later years have been discovered. The celebrated vase of the

Genoa Cathedral was considered a solid emerald. The Roman Catholic legend of it was, that it was one of the treasures that the Queen of Sheba gave to Solomon, and that it was the identical cup out of which the Saviour drank at the Last Supper. Columbus must have admired it. It was venerable in his day; it was death for anybody to touch it but a Catholic priest. And when Napoleon besieged Genoa,—I mean the great Napoleon, not the present little fellow,—it was offered by the Jews to loan the Senate three million dollars on that single article as security. Napoleon took it, and carried it to France, and gave it to the Institute. Somewhat reluctantly the scholars said, "It is not a stone: we hardly know what it is."

Cicero said that he had seen the entire "Iliad," which is a poem as large as the New Testament, written on a skin so that it could be rolled up in the compass of a nut-shell. Now, this is imperceptible to the ordinary eye. You have seen the Declaration of Independence in the compass of a quarter of a dollar, written with glasses. I have to-day a paper at home, as long as half my hand, on which was photographed the whole contents of a London newspaper. It was put under a dove's wing, and sent into Paris, where they enlarged it, and read the news. This copy of the "Iliad" must have been made by some such process.

In the Roman theatre,—the Coliseum, which could seat a hundred thousand people,—the emperor's box, raised to the highest tier, bore about the same proportion to the space as this stand does to this hall; and to look down to the centre of a six-acre lot, was to look a considerable distance. ("Considerable," by the way, is not a Yankee word. Lord Chesterfield uses it in his letters to his son, so it has a good English origin.) Pliny says that Nero the tyrant had a ring with a