

nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust—some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see that if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience—patience; with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace, the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work, the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world not to be an unit; not to be reckoned one character; not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our

opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends; please God ours shall not be so! We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul, which also inspires all men.

LITERARY ETHICS

AN ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE THE LITERARY SOCIETIES OF
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, JULY, 24, 1838

GENTLEMEN—The invitation to address you this day, with which you have honored me, was a call so welcome that I made haste to obey it. A summons to celebrate with scholars a literary festival is so alluring to me as to overcome the doubts I might well entertain of my ability to bring you any thought worthy of your attention. I have reached the middle age of man; yet I believe I am not less glad or sanguine at the meeting of scholars than when a boy I first saw the graduates of my own college assembled at their anniversary. Neither years nor books have yet availed to extirpate a prejudice then rooted in me, that a scholar is the favorite of heaven and earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men. His duties lead him directly into the holy ground where other men's aspirations only point. His successes are occasions of the purest joy to all men. Eyes is he to the blind; feet is he to the lame. His failures, if he is worthy, are inlets to higher

advantages. And because the scholar, by every thought he thinks, extends his dominion into the general mind of men, he is not one, but many. The few scholars in each country, whose genius I know, seem to me not individuals, but societies; and, when events occur of great import, I count over these representatives of opinion, whom they will affect, as if I were counting nations. And, even if his results were incommunicable; if they abode in his own spirit; the intellect hath somewhat so sacred in its possessions, that the fact of his existence and pursuits would be a happy omen.

Meantime I know that a very different estimate of the scholar's profession prevails in this country, and the impurity, with which society presses its claim upon young men, tends to pervert the views of the youth in respect to the culture of the intellect. Hence the historical failure, on which Europe and America have so freely commented. This country has not fulfilled what seemed the reasonable expectation of mankind. Men looked, when all feudal straps and bandages were snapped asunder, that nature, too long the mother of dwarfs, should reimburse itself by a brood of Titans, who should laugh and leap in the continent, and run up the mountains of the west with the errand of genius and of love. But the mark of American merit in painting, in sculpture, in poetry, in fiction, in eloquence, seems to be a certain grace without grandeur, and itself not new but derivative; a vase of fair outline, but empty,—which whoso sees, may fill with what wit and character is in him, but which does not, like the charged cloud, overflow with terrible beauty and emit lightnings on all beholders.

I will not lose myself in the desultory questions, what are the limitations, and what the causes of the fact. It suffices

me to say in general that the diffidence of mankind in the soul has crept over the American mind; that men here as elsewhere are indisposed to innovation and prefer any antiquity, any usage, any livery productive of ease or profit, to the unproductive service of thought.

Yet, in every sane hour, the service of thought appears reasonable, the despotism of the senses insane. The scholar may lose himself in schools, in words, and become a pedant; but when he comprehends his duties, he above all men is a realist and converses with things. For the scholar is the student of the world, and of what worth the world is, and with what emphasis it accosts the soul of man, such is the worth, such the call of the scholar.

The want of the times, and the propriety of this anniversary, concur to draw attention to the doctrine of literary ethics. What I have to say on that doctrine distributes itself under the topics of the resources, the subject, and the discipline of the scholar.

I. The resources of the scholar are proportioned to his confidence in the attributes of the intellect. The resources of the scholar are co-extensive with nature and truth, yet can never be his unless claimed by him with an equal greatness of mind. He cannot know them until he has beheld with awe the infinitude and impersonality of the intellectual power. When he has seen that it is not his nor any man's, but that it is the soul which made the world, and that it is all accessible to him, he will know that he, as its minister, may rightfully hold all things subordinate and answerable to it. A divine pilgrim in nature, all things attend his steps. Over him stream the flying constellations; over him streams time, as they scarcely divided into months and years. He inhales the year as a vapor: its fragrant midsummer breath, its spark-

ling January heaven. And so pass into his mind, in bright transfiguration, the grand events of history, to take a new order and scale from him. He is the world; and the epochs and heroes of chronology are pictorial images in which his thoughts are told. There is no event but sprung somewhere from the soul of man; and therefore there is none but the soul of man can interpret. Every presentiment of the mind is executed somewhere in a gigantic fact. What else is Greece, Rome, England, France, St. Helena? What else are churches, literatures, and empires? The new man must feel that he is new and has not come into the world mortgaged to the opinions and usages of Europe, and Asia, and Egypt. The sense of spiritual independence is like the lovely varnish of the dew, whereby the old, hard, peaked earth and its old self-same productions are made new every morning, and shining with the last touch of the artist's hand. A false humility, a complaisance to reigning schools, or to the wisdom of antiquity, must not defraud me of supreme possession of this hour. If any person have less love of liberty and less jealousy to guard his integrity, shall he therefore dictate to you and me? Say to such doctors, We are thankful to you, as we are to history, to the pyramids, and the authors; but now our day is come; we have been born out of the eternal silence; and now will we live,—live for ourselves,—and not as the pall-bearers of a funeral, but as the upholders and creators of our age; and neither Greece nor Rome, nor the three Unities of Aristotle, nor the three kings of Cologne, nor the College of the Sorbonne, nor "The Edinburgh Review," is to command any longer. Now that we are here, we will put our own interpretation on things, and our own things for interpretation. Please himself with complaisance who will,—for me, things must take my scale, not I theirs. I will say

with the warlike king, "God gave me this crown and the whole world shall not take it away."

The whole value of history, of biography, is to increase my self-trust, by demonstrating what man can be and do. This is the moral of the Plutarchs, the Cudworths, the Tennemanns, who give us the story of men or of opinions. Any history of philosophy fortifies my faith by showing me that what high dogmas I had supposed were the rare and late fruit of a cumulative culture, and only now possible to some recent Kant or Fichte,—were the prompt improvisations of the earliest inquirers; of Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Xenophanes. In view of these students, the soul seems to whisper, "There is a better way than this indolent learning of another. Leave me alone; do not teach me out of Leibnitz or Schelling and I shall find it all out myself."

Still more do we owe to biography the fortification of our hope. If you would know the power of character, see how much you would impoverish the world, if you could take clean out of history the lives of Milton, Shakespeare, and Plato,—these three, and cause them not to be. See you not, how much less the power of man would be? I console myself in the poverty of my thoughts; in the paucity of great men, in the malignity and dulness of the nations, by falling back on these sublime recollections, and seeing what the prolific soul could beget on actual nature; seeing that Plato was, and Shakespeare, and Milton,—three irrefragable facts. Then I dare; I also will essay to be. The humblest, the most hopeless, in view of these radiant facts, may now theorize and hope. In spite of all the rueful abortions that squeak and gibber in the street, in spite of slumber and guilt, in spite of the army, the bar-room, and the jail, have been these glorious manifestations of the mind; and I will thank my great

brothers so truly for the admonition of their being, as to endeavor also to be just and brave, to aspire and to speak. Plotinus too, and Spinoza, and the immortal bards of philosophy, that which they have written out with patient courage makes me bold. No more will I dismiss with haste the visions which flash and sparkle across my sky; but observe them, approach them, domesticate them, brood on them, and draw out of the past genuine life for the present hour.

To feel the full value of these lives, as occasions of hope and provocation, you must come to know that each admirable genius is but a successful diver in that sea whose floor of pearls is all your own. The impoverishing philosophy of ages has laid stress on the distinctions of the individual and not on the universal attributes of man. The youth, intoxicated with his admiration of a hero, fails to see that it is only a projection of his own soul which he admires. In solitude, in a remote village, the ardent youth loiters and mourns. With inflamed eye in this sleeping wilderness he has read the story of the Emperor Charles V until his fancy has brought home to the surrounding woods the faint roar of cannonades in the Milanese and marches in Germany. He is curious concerning that man's day. What filled it? the crowded orders, the stern decisions, the foreign despatches, the Castilian etiquette? The soul answers—Behold his day here! In the sighing of these woods, in the quiet of these gray fields, in the cool breeze that sings out of these northern mountains; in the workmen, the boys, the maidens, you meet,—in the hopes of the morning, the ennui of noon, and sauntering of the afternoon; in the disquieting comparisons; in the regrets at want of vigor; in the great idea, and the puny execution;—behold Charles V's day; another, yet the same; behold Chatham's, Hampden's, Bayard's,

Alfred's, Scipio's, Pericles's day,—day of all that are born of women. The difference of circumstance is merely costume. I am tasting the self-same life,—its sweetness, its greatness, its pain, which I so admire in other men. Do not foolishly ask of the inscrutable, obliterated past, what it cannot tell,—the details of that nature, of that day, called Byron, or Burke—but ask it of the enveloping now; the more quaintly you inspect its evanescent beauties, its wonderful details, its spiritual causes, its astounding whole,—so much the more you master the biography of this hero and that and every hero. Be lord of a day, through wisdom and justice, and you can put up your history books.

An intimation of these broad rights is familiar in the sense of injury which men feel in the assumption of any man to limit their possible progress. We resent all criticism which denies us anything that lies in our line of advance. Say to the man of letters, that he cannot paint a transfiguration, or build a steamboat, or be a grand-marshal,—and he will not seem to himself depreciated. But deny to him any quality of literary or metaphysical power and he is piqued. Concede to him genius, which is a sort of stoical *plenum* annulling the comparative, and he is content; but concede him talents never so rare, denying him genius, and he is aggrieved. What does this mean? Why, simply that the soul has assurance, by instincts and presentiments, of all power in the direction of its ray, as well as of the special skills it has already acquired.

In order to a knowledge of the resources of the scholar, we must not rest in the use of slender accomplishments,—of facilities to do this and that other feat with words; but we must pay our vows to the highest power and pass, if it be possible, by assiduous love and watching, into the visions

of absolute truth. The growth of the intellect is strictly analogous in all individuals. It is larger reception. Able men in general have good dispositions and a respect for justice; because an able man is nothing else than a good, free, vascular organization, whereinto the universal spirit freely flows; so that his fund of justice is not only vast, but infinite. All men, in the abstract, are just and good; what hinders them in the particular is the momentary predominance of the finite and individual over the general truth. The condition of our incarnation in a private self seems to be a perpetual tendency to prefer the private law, to obey the private impulse, to the exclusion of the law of universal being. The hero is great by means of the predominance of the universal nature; he has only to open his mouth and it speaks; he has only to be forced to act and it acts. All men catch the word or embrace the deed with the heart, for it is verily theirs as much as his; but in them this disease of an excess of organization cheats them of equal issues. Nothing is more simple than greatness; indeed, to be simple is to be great. The vision of genius comes by renouncing the too officious activity of the understanding and giving leave and amplest privilege to the spontaneous sentiment. Out of this must all that is alive and genial in thought go. Men grind and grind in the mill of a truism and nothing comes out but what was put in. But the moment they desert the tradition for a spontaneous thought, then poetry, wit, hope, virtue, learning, anecdote, all flock to their aid. Observe the phenomenon of extempore debate. A man of cultivated mind, but reserved habits, sitting silent, admires the miracle of free, impassioned, picturesque speech in the man addressing an assembly—a state of being and power, how unlike his own! Presently his own emotion rises to his lips, and over-

flows in speech. He must also rise and say somewhat. Once embarked, once having overcome the novelty of the situation, he finds it just as easy and natural to speak,—to speak with thoughts, with pictures, with rhythmical balance of sentences,—as it was to sit silent; for, it needs not to do, but to suffer; he only adjusts himself to the free spirit which gladly utters itself through him, and motion is as easy as rest.

II. I pass now to consider the task offered to the intellect of this country. The view I have taken of the resources of the scholar presupposes a subject as broad. We do not seem to have imagined its riches. We have not heeded the invitation it holds out. To be as good a scholar as Englishmen are; to have as much learning as our contemporaries; to have written a book that is read; satisfies us. We assume that all thought is already long ago adequately set down in books,—all imaginations in poems; and what we say, we only throw in as confirmatory of this supposed complete body of literature. A very shallow assumption. Say rather, all literature is yet to be written. Poetry has scarce chanted its first song. The perpetual admonition of nature to us, is, "The world is new, untried. Do not believe the past. I give you the universe a virgin to-day."

By Latin and English poetry, we were born and bred in an oratorio of praises of nature,—flowers, birds, mountains, sun, and moon; yet the naturalist of this hour finds that he knows nothing, by all their poems, of any of these fine things; that he has conversed with the mere surface and show of them all; and of their essence or of their history knows nothing. Further inquiry will discover that nobody,—that not these chanting poets themselves, knew anything sincere of these handsome natures they so commended; that they contented themselves with the passing chirp of a bird, that

they saw one or two mornings, and listlessly looked at sunsets, and repeated idly these few glimpses in their song. But go into the forest, you shall find all new and undescribed. The screaming of the wild geese flying by night; the thin note of the companionable titmouse in the winter day; the fall of swarms of flies in autumn, from combats high in the air, pattering down on the leaves like rain; the angry hiss of the woodbirds; the pine throwing out its pollen for the benefit of the next century; the turpentine exuding from the tree; and indeed any vegetation; any animation; any and all, are alike unattempted. The man who stands on the seashore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange. Whilst I read the poets I think that nothing new can be said about morning and evening. But when I see the daybreak I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearian, or Miltonic, or Chaucerian pictures. No; but I feel perhaps the pain of an alien world; a world not yet subdued by the thought; or, I am cheered by the moist, warm, glittering, budding, melodious hour, that takes down the narrow walls of my soul and extends its life and pulsation to the very horizon. That is morning, to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body, and to become as large as nature.

The noonday darkness of the American forest, the deep, echoing, aboriginal woods, where the living columns of the oak and fir tower up from the ruins of the trees of the last millennium; where from year to year the eagle and the crow see no intruder; the pines, bearded with savage moss, yet touched with grace by the violets at their feet; the broad, cold lowland, which forms its coat of vapor with the stillness of subterranean crystallization; and where the traveller,

amid the repulsive plants that are native in the swamp, thinks with pleasing terror of the distant town; this beauty,—haggard and desert beauty, which the sun and the moon, the snow and the rain, repaint and vary, has never been recorded by art, yet is not indifferent to any passenger. All men are poets at heart. They serve nature for bread, but her loveliness overcomes them sometimes. What mean these journeys to Niagara; these pilgrims to the White Hills? Men believe in the adaptations of utility, always: in the mountains they may believe in the adaptations of the eye. Undoubtedly the changes of geology have a relation to the prosperous sprouting of the corn and peas in my kitchen garden; but not less is there a relation of beauty between my soul and the dim crags of Agiocochook up there in the clouds. Every man, when this is told, hearkens with joy, and yet his own conversation with nature is still unsung.

Is it otherwise with civil history? Is it not the lesson of our experience that every man, were life long enough, would write history for himself? What else do these volumes of extracts and manuscript commentaries that every scholar writes indicate? Greek history is one thing to me; another to you. Since the birth of Niebuhr and Wolf, Roman and Greek history have been written anew. Since Carlyle wrote French history we see that no history that we have is safe, but a new classifier shall give it new and more philosophical arrangement. Thucydides, Livy, have only provided materials. The moment a man of genius pronounces the name of the Pelasgi, of Athens, of the Etrurian, of the Roman people, we see their state under a new aspect. As in poetry and history, so in the other departments. There are few masters or none. Religion is yet to be settled on its fast foundations in the breast of man; and politics, and philoso-