

Educational.

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Characteristics of the present Age, and the duties of the Educated Classes as suggested by them:

AN ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE THE ASSOCIATED ALUMNI OF ACADIA COLLEGE, JUNE 5, 1865, BY THE REV. A. H. MUNRO, OF HALIFAX.

Concluded.

Pleasant indeed would a review of society be, and most hopeful its condition if these were the only characteristics of our age. But alas they are only the bright lights of the picture; there are dark shadows in the back ground, telling of evils which it is not only unwise but criminal to ignore. There are many social facts that are a disgrace to our civilisation and wear a sad and portentous aspect.

Amid all our advance in science and its application to improved domestic life and social habits, DISEASE holds its fatal sway. We know and practise a great many things conducive to health. Society now eats and drinks less of what it should not, and more of what it should; has learned to use freely soap and water, and prize pure air; is every way cleaner and more temperate in its habits; ventilates its buildings, cleans its streets, drains its cities, opens its parks, buries its dead in cemeteries; and yet, because of ignorance, vice, poverty, and overwork, disease, which, but for these, could find neither its materials nor its victims, is ravaging with fatal effect on every hand. Maladies that should disappear are perpetuated; others, whose very existence is a shame to us, are on the rapid increase.

PAUPERISM, VICE, AND CRIME, in spite of all our improvements and reforms, benevolent enterprises and philanthropic schemes still maintain proportions which if not what they once were are still of fearful magnitude. We need quote no statistics, urge no proofs it is all too self-evident and too well known to require either. There is an eastern story that runs something like this. In a large city there was once a deep dark well into which no one dared to look for it was full of unmentionable horrors and was called the devil's well. And a wise man had told the people that if ever the beams of the sun should penetrate this well fearful calamity would follow. So the well was always kept covered. But one night the cover was removed and not replaced, and in the morning when the sun shone, the waters of the well rose till they overflowed and filled yard and street, and square and garden, overwhelmed them all, and in a mighty torrent swept on till it reached the sea, leaving not a vestige of the city nor ought to tell where once it stood. Is there not, it has been asked, a devil's well in every city of the civilised world? In London, in Paris, in New York? Yes, and even in little Halifax? A something full of horrors into which we dare not look, but which may not always be kept down? Vast hordes of social pariahs, too wretched to fear any worse fate, too vicious to feel any compunctions, are hidden away in the garrets and cellars of the alleys and slums of all our cities. The wonder of wonders is that they remain there and do not come forth, an army of desperadoes to rob, murder, and destroy. To what does society owe its safety? To its police and standing armies? In some small degree no doubt; but chiefly to the fact that the vicious are too vicious to unite readily and try their strength with the orderly and well-to-do. If it were not for this, the one half of society would have to arm itself to the teeth against the other. At what a price is such protection as we enjoy purchased! Mr. Hill, Recorder of Birmingham, estimated the criminals of England, the country whose statistics prove it to be the lowest in crime of any in the world, to be 100,000 in number, costing at the smallest calculation 10 millions per annum and probably twice that amount.

One of the most unfavorable characteristics marking the opposite extreme of society and of course from it downwards as far as the imitation is possible, is OSTENTATION, in its lowest form, the lavish display of wealth. The desire to be rich and to be thought rich is the vulgar ambition cursing modern society. Mammon is its God, money its chief good, and the human being who writes, speaks, works, or does any possible thing for aught but pay, its solitary miracle. Hence the frauds, forgeries, defalcations and embezzlements perpetuated by men of education and refinement, which have become so disgracefully frequent during the last few years.

Strange it is, but true, that amid all the light and knowledge we enjoy, the charge of SUPERSTITION may be brought with justice against all classes both in England and America. We laugh at the winking Madonnas of Italy, the miracle of Salette, and the devils of Morzine. But Mormonism, the wretched invention of a village swindler and horse-thief, has seduced scores of thousands of our well-to-do working people from their homes and sent them to the Salt Lake. Spirit rappings have their well attended circles and well paid mediums in almost every city. Wealthy fools pay a guinea each to attend the seances of those shallow imposters, the Davenport brothers. Dr. Newman publishes to the world his faith in the liquification of the blood of St. Januarius, and Dr. Cummings makes a fortune out of interpretations of prophecy based on an erudition that identifies Armageddon with Sebastopol.

These are not all the favorable or unfavorable features of our age. There are many others I might mention, and some of which you may be surprised at my omitting. But these appear to me to be most important and suggestive of the duties the educated classes owe to society.

And before proceeding to discuss what these duties are, permit me to answer the question why I refer specially to the Educated Classes in connection with their performance? First, because I am addressing an Association composed of educated men; and, secondly, because society must either be governed by the cultivated and refined, or by the ignorant and vulgar, so long as those two classes exist,

which is likely to be for some time to come. Conjointly it cannot be done. If the educated lead, the uneducated must withdraw and submit. This, as DeTocqueville long ago predicted, has already taken place in the United States, with what result we all know. Throwing aside as unworthy of a moment's consideration theories of abstract rights, because they are all abandoned in the social compact, I assert that the law of society is that which is for its best interest as a whole; and the duty it imposes second only to that which we owe to God; and further that its first claim upon its educated classes is that they shall take upon and secure to themselves the direction of its political power and social influence. I know of no country on earth in which this has been done perfectly. Perhaps more nearly in Great Britain than anywhere else, but even there only approximately. Yet it is the duty of all educated men to labor for its realisation. To do this they must be active, earnest members of society, unselfishly doing much only because the social welfare demands its being done. Not wise merely for themselves; which kind of wisdom Lord Bacon says is not that of an angel or a man, but the wisdom of the rat, which runs from the falling house. The smallest thing on earth is the man whose education having enabled him to take an expanded view of God's universe ends by centering his vision upon himself.

To those of a different spirit I address myself and proceed to indicate a few of the duties which I think the special characteristics of the age impose upon them.

1. TO BE EARNEST STUDENTS OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.

The science of the 19th century is not Geology nor Chemistry, but Social Philosophy. This is the subject of all others that has enlisted the widest and deepest interest, in connection with which there has been the most discovery and improvement, and which is most rapidly growing in magnitude. It is a trite but nevertheless important remark that the subjects of public discussion in the present day are mostly new, peculiar to our age. In legislative halls, popular assemblies, lecture rooms, Reviews, Magazines and Newspapers, many topics are now most earnestly discussed which are of recent origin. They are the wise or foolish, practicable or impracticable projects and experiments of Social Science. In the category we must include Socialism, Communism, St. Simonism, Chartism, Education and Temperance, Women's Rights Conventions and Early Closing movements, Factory Labor bills and Emigration, Poor Laws and Criminal Statutes, Reformatories and Ragged Schools, Public Libraries and Working Men's Clubs, Baths and Wash houses, Model Lodging houses and Savings Banks, Parks, Museums, Galleries of Art and Schools of Design, City Missions, Industrial Exhibitions, and hundreds of other matters. Social Science is continually adding to its list of topics and the number of its ardent votaries. These already include every order of mind, every grade of society, from the statesman in the Cabinet to the artisan at his loom, from the queen in her palace to the shirt-maker in her garret. It is absorbing, and consecrating to its best use all other science and much of art. It has given a new and holier tone to politics, fresh and fruitful fields to religious effort, a new and loftier dignity to the age. It is alleged that it has changed the character of our literature. Society now, it is said, has no taste for the tender sentimentalism of Richardson, the coarse passions of Fielding, or the superb romances of Scott. It does not withdraw its former verdict concerning the genius of these writers, but it has lost interest in their productions, and prefers fictions that have a meaning and purpose in connection with social life and its evils. Cowley is forgotten, Gray remembered for a single elegy, Young for a dozen lines or so, and the Lake Poets are vanishing out of sight, because they have no words that can speak to the heart of modern society. A writer in a British Review says: "The wild conceptions, the splendid imagery and exquisite melody, with which Lord Byron poured forth the turbid and passionate sensibilities of his soul, no longer affect us, for we, in our generation, are stirred in deeper depths, tried by sterner griefs, moved by more genuine emotions than his." Hood is cherished in our memories not for his exhaustless wit, humorous poems or clever fictions, but because, as is inscribed upon his tomb-stone,—"He sang 'The song of the ship';" throwing the light of his genius upon one of our social wrongs. Tennyson was acknowledged as a true poet, "born, not made" long since; but it was not till society saw his meaning in the Idyls of the King and at what he was pointing in Enoch Arden, that it took him to its heart. Every thing bears witness to the same change. The welfare of society as a whole, the claims and wants of its sections, reforms, preventions, remedies, bear away the palm from every other topic. Society has awoke from the slumbers of the past, and has commenced to grapple in earnest with its gigantic, complicated and appalling social evils and iniquities, too long neglected. It feels that these are the problems which this age must solve, if it would live and prosper, which it can no longer pass by nor leave to the future. Unless our whole theory of civilization is unsound, practical christianity a fiction, and human progress a fancy, society is wise and right in manifesting this spirit, and every educated man who does not imbibe and actively display it is demonstrating his own narrowness and littleness, is neglecting a great duty, leaving a large debt unpaid, and doing his best to prove how much men may may know with little advantage.

2. TO CAREFULLY AND ACCURATELY INFORM THEMSELVES AS TO WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL FACTS AND FEATURES OF THEIR OWN LAND.

Most of the illustrations I have used to-night have been taken from the social life of other countries, particularly England and the United States. My reasons for so doing have been that those countries are the most advanced in real civilization, that any statements I made could be more easily tested if referring to them, and also because they are the countries whom socially we most resemble, and by whom we are most influenced. But perhaps my doing this

has caused some who have listened to feel that these illustrations and illusions were wanting in local fitness. Possibly this is not the case to the extent they imagine. Let us not live in a fool's paradise and suppose a state of things to obtain here which has no reality, no place but in our own fancy. It would be well for us to enquire, Are we enjoying all the benefits of civilization we might reap? Are we not enduring social evils of which we might rid ourselves entirely, or which we might at least greatly diminish? Is it not disgraceful that, with all the advantages of a new country, the worst evils of older states should not only be reproduced among us, but in some cases even exaggerated? How true this is, many will be startled to know.

Pauperism is one of the blots of English civilisation, but the number of paupers is very large in Halifax compared with English towns of the same population. Crime is one of the darkest features of social life in England, but the murder rate is higher here than there. Ignorance among the masses prevails there to a sad extent, but our last census declares there are 80,000 persons in this Province who ought to be able to write but can not. If we reflect upon these things and the amount and character of the popular reading, the nature of our social amusements, the tone of public discussions, the prevalence of a narrow, bitter, party spirit, the condition of many of the laboring, and all the colored population, and the practice of intemperance, and commission of infanticide in this land, there is surely enough in its social aspects to demand earnest effort and to answer every educated person disposed to ask "Who is my neighbour?"

3. TO SEEK TO GIVE A RIGHT DIRECTION TO BENEVOLENT ENTERPRISES.

Good men are not always wise, and laudable zeal is not always judiciously directed. A social reformer may be a fanatic with a pet project, fanciful and impossible; or a philanthropist, wisely seeking to accomplish a really good and practicable work. Attempts at doing good have not unfrequently been sad mistakes fraught with evil. Educated men can do much to prevent their repetition by ascertaining what has been done in other lands and how it may with advantage be imitated in their own.

4. TO SET BEFORE THEMSELVES THAT THE GREAT SOCIAL PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE IS THE ELEVATION OF THE LOWER ORDERS.

I do not say the only problem, but the great problem which society must solve. The best thinkers of the age admit that till it is solved not much more can be accomplished in the way of social progress. The existence in every community in both continents, of large masses, ignorant and miserable, degraded and vicious, is an incubus which society may sustain, but with which it cannot advance. Must it remain, wasting the resources, absorbing the energies and discouraging the hopes of society? Too much has already been done to doubt that infinitely more is possible. Results almost miraculous have arisen from well directed efforts in some quarters where the worst materials had to be dealt with. France has proved that squalid destitution may be prevented. The convict system of Ireland has solved the problem of dealing with the criminal classes. In the United States the artisan enjoys a social position that is nearly everything that could be wished. Cannot all these be united without the despotism of France, the democracy of America or the abnormal peculiarities of Ireland? Were this accomplished the most gigantic of our social evils would assume proportions that need excite no alarm, and would wear an aspect that would encourage the hope of their speedy and entire removal. Surely such an object is worthy of the deepest consideration and most earnest efforts of every educated man.

5. Last, but not least, TO PROMOTE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF THE HIGHEST CHARACTER TO THE WIDEST POSSIBLE EXTENT.

There may be education highly intellectual, but not Christian. There may be education that is Christian, as far as it goes, but which does not involve mental culture of a very high order. What society most needs is, the presence and preponderating influence of a large class of men and women, whose mental training habituates them to a wide and elevated range of thought, and who combine with it the true spirit of Christian philanthropy. While thankfully acknowledging that we have some such, let us labor that we may have more. What we have are the salt of the earth;—what we hope to have shall be as the dew of heaven to our moral deserts, the lights of the world to guide it on its path of progress. If our institutions of learning are not adapted to produce such characters, then let us not abandon them, but give ourselves no rest till they are rendered competent to the work. But if this is the kind of education they impart, then they are worthy of our most enthusiastic support, for they are conferring not only upon us and the whole community, but upon generations unborn, the most valuable of social blessings.

And now, in conclusion, let me say my purpose to-night has been to appeal to those patriotic feelings which should animate every intelligent Christian man. Patriotism is a Christian virtue taught by our Saviour, when he wept over Jerusalem, and by the Great Apostle when he so pathetically lamented his cast-off race. It is to me, a matter of equal doubt whether one can be a true Christian and not be a patriot, or a true patriot and not be a Christian. The love of country is as real a duty as the love of father or mother, wife or child. But what is our country? "Not," says Coleridge, "the land in which we were born, or in which we may live, but that to which we are united and belong, by the affinities and sympathies of race, language, literature, faith, interest and rule." If so, then Britain is our country and all her glory is ours. But what is that glory? Not her victories, conquests, vast dominion, immense power and prestige; but her healthy, intellectual, social and religious life; that she is the mother of many nations, reflecting her civilization, perhaps destined to surpass it, and that after eighteen centuries of history she never before