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MONDAY EVENING, MAY 16, 1853.

NO. 20.

LECTURE.

Miramichi Mechanics' Institute.

At the Annual Meeting of the above Institution, held on the 26th April last, the following Resolution was unanimously passed.

RESOLVED, That the President call on JAMES CAIE, Esq., and request him to publish in the Gleaner, the Lecture delivered by him on closing the Institute the past season.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When your Committee, whose duty it was to provide LECTURERS, went round last Fall, I promised to supply one Lecture.— Since that time, however, I have been prevailed on to appear before you no less than three times.

Our President—Ladies and Gentlemen—is a very worthy, excellent Gentleman; but he has one great fault; he sets us a bad precedent; although well qualified he will not lecture himself. Ask him why? he will exclaim—Lecture! why I deliver a little Lecture or two, every Thursday evening, and all these little Lectures put together, make one long lecture, just as so many pieces or patches put together, make one large Quilt or Coverlet.

But although our esteemed President will not lecture himself, he stands unrivalled in the art of inducing others to lecture. On my return from Richibucto about six weeks ago, Mr President informed me that there was no Lecturer for that evening. Well, I said, it can't be helped.— But it can be helped, said he; you are one of the Committee to provide Lecturers, and if you cannot find another, you must lecture yourself. What, said I, Lecture at an hour's notice. Give us an old one, said he, and so I did. I do hope that Mr President will be one of the Committee to provide Lecturers for next winter, because in that case I will take care that there be no lack of Lecturers.

You will give us the closing Address, won't you? said Mr President, the other day. I cannot, I really have not time to prepare it, said I. Pshaw! nonsense! It's an easy subject; you're never at a loss; make it short. I saw that escape was hopeless; I'll try said I.

In this way, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been prevailed on to address you for a short time this evening, before closing the doors of the Institute for the season; but I assure you there is not a person in this community who has less time at his disposal, for preparing Lectures, than I have. Most of the present Address has been written after office hours, and when most of you were soundly locked in the sweet embrace of Somnus. (This fact may account for its being, what you will find it to be, a very sleepy affair.)

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The progress of knowledge in all its various Departments, distinguishes the present century, from every other period in the history of mankind, and whether that knowledge be considered in reference to the great achievements performed by the human mind, or its influence upon the wants of society, it cannot fail to excite your surprise. When we compare the condition of the inhabitants of Great Britain, or civilized Europe and America, with those of the Islands of the Pacific Ocean, and such as are still bound by the chains of an untamed barbarity; we perceive what a wide distance, beings of the same race, are separated, in their moral, civil, and intellectual conditions. Just in proportion as our enjoyments exceed those of the ferocious Arab, prowling over the burning desert, or the Indian, who seek repose on a bed of snow; so are we indebted to the acquirement of knowledge, for the comforts and luxuries we enjoy.

Man, in an uncivilized state, is a savage; governed by the sudden impulse of a moment; he rushes into acts of horrid brutality; and is more to be feared than the lion of the forest, or the venomous adder. He may behold and admire the beauties of external objects, and pay his adoration to a God, made by his own hands, but he perceives not the proper use of any thing in creation, and is a stranger to all intellectual enjoy-

ment. On the other hand, the man of an enlightened mind, is constantly engaged in applying every thing to some definite purpose. To lessen his own, and the miseries of others, and to increase the comforts and enjoyments of life, are his aim; and so long as those objects are pursued, under the direction of religion, they are most deserving of his labour. He thus arrives at some knowledge of himself, and the material world; and if truly wise, prepares for an unchangeable and better state of existence.

Like the radiant light of day, the gems of knowledge, are now being diffused over the darkest retreats of ignorance, and all the civilized nations on earth, are vying with each other, in efforts to withdraw the veil, that has so long shrouded the minds of the many.

It would be interesting and instructive, could we stop here, to trace man's progress in intellectual pursuits. We should find it one of ups and downs; of alternate clouds, eclipses, and sunshine. The lamps of Literature and Science, at one time, burning brightly, at another flickering in the socket, and ready to expire. But as your time will not warrant even a running comment on so lengthy a subject, I shall confine myself more particularly to the period which elapsed since the origin of Mechanics' Institutes.

We are indebted to the genius and philanthropy of Professor John Anderson, the founder of the famous Institution in Glasgow, known as the Andersonian College, and to his friend and fellow Professor, the talented and eloquent Dr Berwick, for the formation of the first Mechanics' Institute.

These Institutes had their origin in Glasgow, about the beginning of the present century; and it is astonishing what a variety of objections were at first urged against them. Some objected to them on the ground, that they excluded religious instruction; others, because of the danger of religious discussion being allowed to creep in, and thus engender infidel principles; While a third party boldly proclaimed their aversion to them, on the ground that the information furnished by them was of a shallow, superficial kind; and upon the trite axiom of Pope, that a "little learning is a dangerous thing" they predicted that Mechanics' Institutes would prove dangerous things. Thus arguing just as I should do, were I to try to convince you that darkness was preferable to the light of these lamps, because that light is not so brilliant as the light of the sun, or that total darkness was preferable to moon-light, because that light was less luminous than that of the day. The triumphant success, however, which has everywhere crowned the working of Mechanics' Institutes, has long since silenced all objections raised against them, and they are now allowed to be one of the most efficient agents of the day, for the dissemination of correct knowledge.

During no period in the history of our race, have the Arts and Sciences made such progress, as during the present century. Great Britain—supreme in almost every thing that tends to exalt humanity—has given gratifying proof of her title to supremacy; not only by the number and nature of her recent discoveries, but by the application of these to the ordinary purposes of life. During that period, she has converted her territories, upon which the sun never sets, into displays of her genius, and covered the Globe with the triumphs of her skill and ingenuity.

Nor is the progress of the Arts and Sciences confined to Great Britain. The ingenuity of man is fast acquiring a mastery over the elements of nature everywhere. Space is rapidly being annihilated. Two words in our language—till lately understood, and full of meaning—have now become obsolete, and might as well be blotted out of the dictionary. The one is *distance*, the other is *miles*. Suppose, Mr President, that you have a friend whom you wish to visit, at 50 miles distance, and that I have a friend whom I wish to visit, at 500 miles distance; and suppose that between me and my friend, there intervene a *line of Railway*, the fact is, I could visit my friend in *as little time*, as you could visit your friend, and with much greater comfort and safety. What is the use, then, of

talking of miles or distance? The question is, how long time will it occupy to visit our respective friends, and the answer will be the same in both cases. Suppose again, Mr President, that you have a friend with whom you wish to correspond, at 10 miles distance, and that I have a friend with whom I wish to correspond at 10,000 miles distance, and suppose that between me and my friend, there intervenes a line of Electric Telegraph; but between you and your friend no such line intervenes; the fact is I could correspond with my friend, though 10,000 miles away, as speedily as you could correspond with your friend, though only 10 miles away. What is the use then of talking of miles or of distance in such cases? These words have really no meaning now a days.

Even here, in this out-of-the-world, snowy land of trees, we have shared in the triumphs of Science. 20 years ago four, and often six months were necessary to convey a message to and from America and England. Since the era at which the Cunard line of Steamers began to ply, it would seem as if the Sister Isles had broke loose from their ancient moorings, and had drifted nearer our shores, for one month now amply suffices for this purpose, and when that gigantic rainbow-line of Electric Telegraph shall have been completed, which is to connect the Old and New Continents, completed it will be, just as sure as we occupy this Hall then may we enjoy a confab with friends in England, Erin-go-Braugh, or Auld Scotia dear, any day or hour we choose.

I am no prophet, Sir, nor the son of a prophet, but I fearlessly venture to predict that before ten years shall have elapsed (unless war, or some such course occur to prevent it) it will occupy less time to communicate with a friend at the Antipodes; or in other words, it will occupy less time to convey a message a distance equal to the circumference of our Globe, than it required in Professor Anderson's day, to send a message to a neighbouring town. Now, a very interesting enquiry here forces itself upon us. It is this. To what is this mighty march of intellect, this rapid progress in Arts and Sciences attributable. Is it to a more general diffusion of the Roman and Grecian ethics, or a greater or growing intimacy with the Greek and Roman classics? This idea is very prevalent indeed, a proposition purporting to sustain a doctrine something like this, has been gravely propounded from this platform, more than once. But I think it would not be very difficult to prove to you, that instead of the study of Greek and Latin having accelerated, it has greatly retarded the progress of knowledge, during the period under consideration.

I must not be understood as having any controversy with those who conscientiously differ from me in opinion, respecting the advantages to be derived from a knowledge of Greek and Latin. Such persons have a perfect right to express their honest convictions on the subject. So have I. And although I differ from them on this point, I respect their opinions—because conscientious—and trust they will respect mine. It is in this way, or by hearing both sides of any proposition, that we are enabled to discover upon which side the truth lies.

Nor must I be understood as being averse to a complete classical Education. Our language being a compound language, or a language derived from other languages such as the Hebrew—Greek—Latin—French—and many others—the greater intimacy we can have with all these languages the more correctly will we comprehend our own. But in unless in cases where parents have it in their power, to give each of their sons a thorough classical education, and except in cases where these sons are to fill professional stations, or stations in life where they will have leisure to prosecute or put in practice such learning, it will be found that the loss of the many years of their existence spent at college, will be but poorly repaid by the value of the knowledge attained.

But to proceed,—it will be granted that not more than one tenth part of the parents of these provinces, or indeed, of parents anywhere, are in circumstances to send their sons to school for a longer period than from six to eight years. Now, these six

to eight years, the first half at least is occupied in learning to read, write, and cipher; but reading, writing, and ciphering are not knowledge, they are only the means by which we are enabled to acquire knowledge. Neither is the bare learning to translate Latin and Greek, knowledge of itself. It is merely one of the means by which we are enabled to acquire a knowledge of the style and sentiments of Grecian and Roman authors. I shall not stop to expose the absurdity of a boy, barely capable of reading or understanding the English language, a boy still, as it were, in the baby clothes of learning, attempting to master the Greek and Roman classics, in three years. I only assert, that although I went to school six years previously, and although I fought with these classics, for three times three years, instead of mastering them, they fairly mastered me.

But let us pass on to ascertain what is the most desirable knowledge. Now, to be answered correctly, this question must be answered according to the circumstances of the person answering it. Well, I will be that person. I can only afford to give my sons what I suppose, six or eight years schooling. I say, sons, because I happen to be one of those who view it as unfair, unjust, to make one of my sons a Scholar at the expense of his brothers; one a gentleman while the others are left to dig their way through life, as hewers of wood, and drawers of water, and all this that I may boast of having in my family a gentleman. My sons having already spent the first three or four years of their school-going days in learning to read, write, and cipher; the question which I am now called upon to answer, is this, (and a very important question it is), what kind of knowledge will be most profitable to my sons, when they come to act their parts in the great arena of life. Because to the attainment of this knowledge my sons should apply themselves, during the remaining years they are to be at school.

Now, do you believe that a smattering of Greek and Latin, such as they could acquire in three or four years, or such as would enable them, with the aid of a Lexicon and Latin Dictionary, to translate at a sitting, a page or so of Cornelius Nepus, Horace, Virgil, or Homer, would be such knowledge or do you not rather think that the study of Physiology, that is, the study of themselves, their physical, moral and intellectual constitution; the history of their own and other countries, Natural Philosophy in its fullest meaning, and the study of the Sciences would be more likely to prove advantageous to them.

I do not wish to hide the truth, that if the question under consideration, had been asked half a century ago, it would have been answered by a large majority in favor of Greek and Latin. Indeed in many nooks and corners of my native land, the antiquated idea still prevails, that unless a young man have devoted the best years of his life, to the study of Greek and Latin, he should not be esteemed what was called a good scholar, or qualified to fill any office of great trust or emolument; but if stuffed with those, as cooks stuff geese with seasoning, no matter though as ignorant as Patlas the Indian, of himself, and the nature and properties of every object in creation, such a youth must needs be looked up to as a prodigy of learning. Now, the reason of this is easily explained: The Greeks and Romans, you know, were the earliest nations that attained to a high degree of civilization.

During the long period that elapsed between 600 years before the Christian era, and 400 years after it (say 1,000 years), there lived in the States of Rome and Greece, many distinguished reasoners on the nature and destiny of man; many orators, poets, sculptors, and historians, with others remarkable for the elevation and refinement of their sentiments; but it was so ordered by Providence, that during the 4th and 5th centuries the Roman Empire was invaded and overrun by hordes of barbarians from the north of Europe. A long night of intellectual darkness succeeded this period, during which the manuscripts and literature of Greece and Rome were lost to the world. At length, however, civilization again dawned, when it had set in Italy. The manuscripts of Greece and