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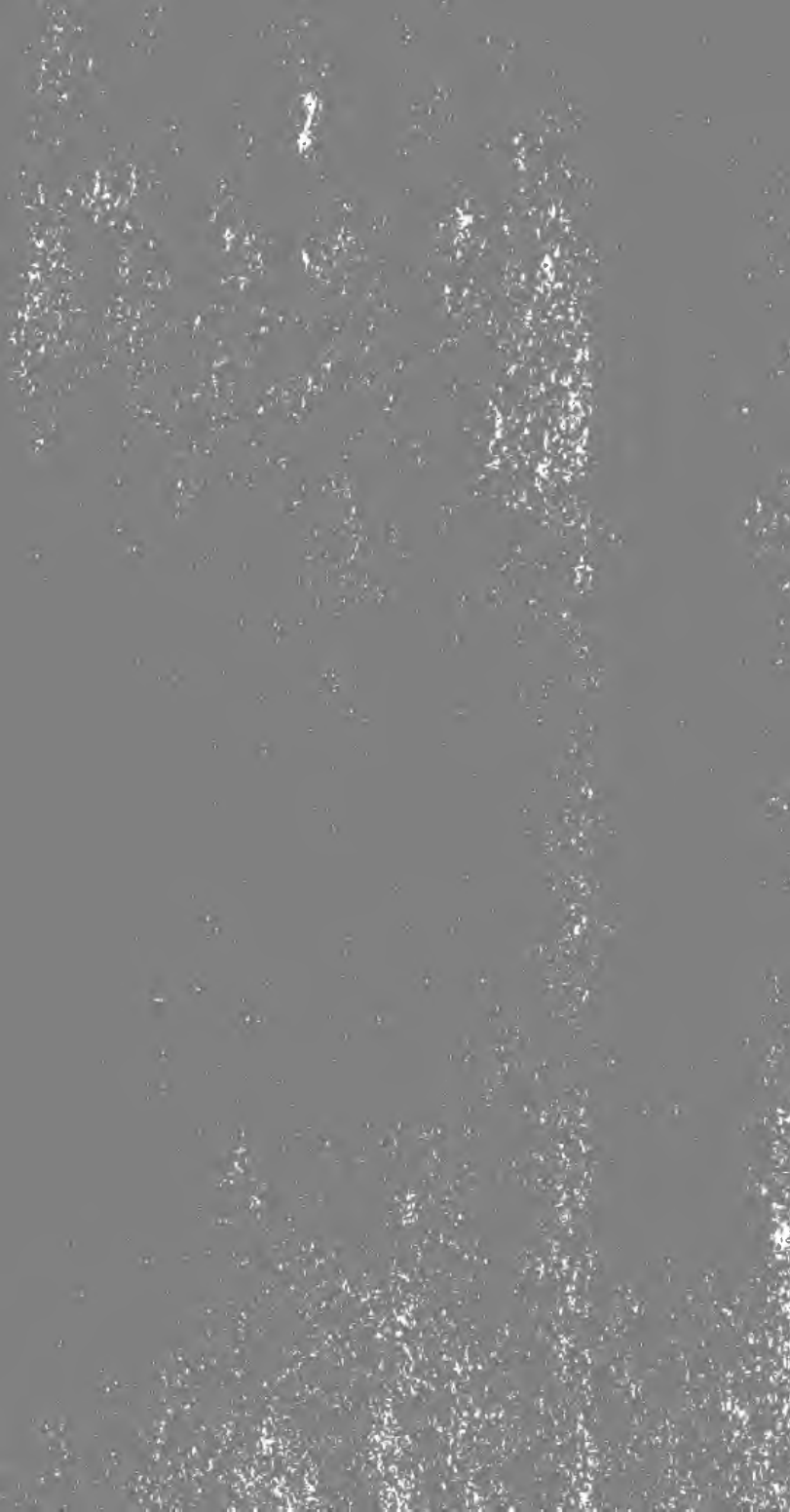


An Oration, on Education

By
T. H. Seymour

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES





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AN ORATION,

ON EDUCATION;

DELIVERED AT NORWICH, VT. SEPT. 6, 1831,

On the Eleventh Anniversary of the

American Literary, Scientific & Military Academy.

BY T. H. SEYMOUR, ESQ.

OF HARTFORD. CONN.

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When we reflect on the innumerable benefits knowledge, with a profuse and liberal hand dispenses, a desire is felt to examine the subject, and trace the benign operations of a cause, involving the happiness of Nations and individuals. Something there is, highly consoling to man, when he looks over the vast field of learning and fixes his eyes on those immutable truths, which are there established, as land marks, to guide and direct him on his course.

Of the many subjects that invite our attention, whether rendered formidable by riches, or the combined influence of the great, none have such deserving claims upon mankind, as the great subject of education. This controlling topic is exalted above all others, holding out, as it does, the powerful incentive to exertion, imperishable rewards. When rightly directed, it scatters the vices that owe their parentage to ignorance, and binds the brow of virtue, with wreathes of eternal fame. The age in which it is our happiness to live, is one truly important, exhibiting the triumphs of knowledge, over those errors, which for centuries lay in the way of man's advancement, and fully proving that no bounds are set to the progress of intellect, and thus inviting us onward to other achievements no less great and ennobling. Knowledge in our day, is by no means, as of old, confined to a particular sect,

or nation, and therefore, being more generally diffused, it is reasonable to anticipate changes greater than any that have yet taken place. As we shall be led to speak more particularly of our own country, in the course of our observations on this subject, an allusion to what knowledge always has done for nations, will naturally suggest a few remarks respecting what may yet be done.

The influence of knowledge upon nations, we know to be great and salutary. Its sublime effects on different portions of mankind, leave no doubt on our minds, but this is the perennial source of happiness; the fountain from whence flows all that can add to the glory, and greatness of a nation. Wealth may purchase temporary power, by laying hold on the interests, and taking advantage of the countless weaknesses of men, but the state, whose only resource is a fluctuating perishable commodity, must be said to rest on a very dangerous and unstable foundation. This alone, will allure enemies, but knowledge attracts none but friends. "Bear witness Greece, thy living page." Her philosophers, historians and poets, drew within the country the good and great, animated with an ardent desire to pay a tribute to the exalted talents of her illuminati, and learn of them the paths which lead to immortality. There, where Homer sung, and Socrates instructed, even the enemies of Greece yielded up their prejudices, and joined with friends, in extolling the worth of her sons; whose only aim was, to please and to instruct mankind. It will be found that nations most distinguished in the annals of the world, arose to greatness in proportion as they advanced in knowledge. The Romans, early impressed with the importance of education encouraged every effort of the human mind, and honored every aspiration of the soul, whether uttered in the language of philosophy, or the melting strains of poetry. They welcomed every child of genius to their arms; the wanderers from the Isles of Greece, and those bearing the ensigns of a more barbarous clime. Her sons thirsted after wisdom, and knelt with pure devotion, in the Temple dedicated to the service of

the immortal mind. In this way, from a state of ignorance and barbarity, they rose to greatness, and although their morality was not of the same sublime nature with ours, education was the means of reforming a thousand abuses, and opened a door for the reception of numerous virtues. What though the philosophers of Greece and Rome mingled in the same crucible truth and error, the former almost, if not quite, precipitated the latter. It was Cicero, who laid it down as a fixed principle; that we ought to do nothing that is avaricious, nothing that is dishonest, nothing that is lascivious; even though we could escape, the observation of Gods and men. That in a nation where the religion of the Redeemer, had not shed abroad its mild lustre, such sentiments should fall from the lips of any one, is evidence of the influence of learning on the human heart. The light that flashed up from her seven hills, illumined other nations, and the then known world, seemed destined to become an example to all mankind. Thus the foundation of an Empire was laid, which men in their admiration called eternal. It may be remarked that education leads to two great results; the spread of christianity, and the love of freedom, without which, a nation can be neither truly great, or happy. In order to prepare the way for the reception of christianity, some light must be let in upon the mind, or error and superstition, will overwhelm the most palpable truths, and men perhaps become the victims of bigotry and fanaticism. It is only as we advance in knowledge that the shadowing clouds of superstition roll away, and the brilliant sun of truth bursts upon our delighted vision. Mankind, while they continue in a state of ignorance, are indeed but children; and not until education has done something for the heart, by tempering the springs of passion, will it yield to the mild touch of true religion. Truth, tho' sometimes spontaneous, needs the gentle rain of science, and the refreshing dew of knowledge, or it will wither.

Through the influence of learning, the affections are refined, and the mind of man when once moved by impressions of beauty and sublimity, every where to be seen in the material world,

has found a clue to immortality. We would not exalt too highly, that knowledge which is of the earth, earthy, but inasmuch as it encourages virtue and morality, it thereby aids and supports religion in its high calling. It is thus education contributes to promote christianity, and where the former is wanting, ignorance assuredly will spurn the offers of salvation, and shut out the light in the world. The fall of the Roman Empire was followed by a long dreary night of moral darkness, and during several centuries, ignorance was almost universal, and Religion made little progress. All Rome had done, towards advancing the high interests of mankind, and giving impulse to every great object of the day, when her glorious lights hung out in beautiful relief, suddenly received a check, and was lost amid the general gloom. But a new era was to take place, and knowledge was to assist in evangelizing the world. The revival of letters under the patronage of Leo, was auspicious to the great cause, and what ignorance had consigned to the darkness of the grave, knowledge bid come forth, and the earth and the sea gave up their dead. Invention was manifest in all the mind undertook, and zeal for discovery, opened a new field to the mental eye. Man seemed imbued with a spirit of enterprize, which adverse circumstances could not extinguish, and while thousands were moving on, refreshed by the breath of a new morn, Religion took them by the hand, and sweetly pointed to a world beyond the skies, where learning convoked her followers, and a light from on high illumined the scene. From all we know of the effect of knowledge, it is reasonable to infer, that science and philosophy, while they enlighten and expand the mind, also confirm and strengthen its hopes. Along the paths of science, wonderful and sublime, by the fascinating walks of literature, and the flowery groves of poetry, mankind are led to "Look through nature up to nature's God."

No less remarkable has education been in marshalling the way to freedom. "The history of England," said a champion of the second bill of rights, not long since, on the floor of Parliament, "is the history of a succession of reforms, a proof

if indeed any is wanting, that knowledge will never be satisfied, while aught remains to be accomplished. He that reflects on the course of liberty in that country, will be led to inquire by what means aristocracy has been made to yield so often. The institutions of Alfred, (not perfect indeed, though far in advance of the age,) hardly survived him; but the encouragement he gave to learning, was felt by posterity, and from generation to generation, the elements of christianity and freedom were transmitted. A contest for the latter, first obtained *magna charta*, and the blood of Charles I. extinguished in a measure, that blind veneration for Kings, to which the people were fatally prone. On the tomb of her patriot, freedom declared "resistance to tyrant's, obedience to God;" and the last prayer of Sidney was, "Lord defend thy cause, and defend those who defend it." The settlement of the pilgrims here, and subsequent glorious events, are the consequence of struggles in that country, between tyranny on the one hand, and liberty on the other, learning ever the friend of man, presided the guardian genius of the latter, and even in our day, the glorious work is progressing. By regular gradations in the scale of freedom, that nation has at length reached a point, which if achieved, will lighten the hearts of its subjects, and raise the hopes of all, of whatever clime, who hail thee liberty, "thrice sweet and gracious Goddess." But not to one nation are these benefits confined. Over all the world, the light of knowledge is spreading, and even the heart of the barbarian begins to feel its genial warmth. By degrees, bigotry, superstition, and tyranny; are yielding to the spell of its enchantment. While men rejoice in contemplation of the glorious prospect, time, pressing the ashes of dead Empires, and pointing to "art, glory, freedom blotted out;" in some degree justifies the maxim of political writers, that nations like individuals, after a few years of perfection, are doomed to decay. Liberty we know, has sometimes sprung up without much exertion, and nations have started into existence, as if at the touch of a wizard's wand. But to preserve and perpetuate freedom, to keep

pure the fountains of literature, and the dust from the volume of truth, can only be accomplished through the united energies of a people, continually directed to these great objects. The premature decay of these nations, once crowned with great glory, may be attributed in part, to want of information among all classes, whereby the bonds of union are strengthened. Wherever knowledge is dispensed, a sort of unity and strength prevails, and when it ends, certain distinctions begin, baneful to harmony, and the spirit of equality. This being the case in Rome, the patrician and plebian distinctions, so fatal to the peace and tranquility of the republic, were perpetuated. Knowledge will have attained its greatest glory, when mankind stand on the same common level. This indeed is the benevolent design of knowledge, to break down every wall of partition, between man and man, and thus bring them to know and love each other. Not many centuries since, knowledge was confined exclusively to the few, and hence a *learned* aristocracy sprung up, almost as dangerous as a *monied* aristocracy. With regard to this country, which in a peculiar manner has become the "light of nations," there is yet a lingering of that dogmatical spirit, so prevalent in a less enlightened age, and it is probably owing in a measure, to the course of instruction so general here, it being of too theoretical a character. Institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, though they may yearly send forth genius to hold sweet fellowship with the world, and smooth the paths of learning, are not adapted to the soil of a republic. They to a great extent, foster the vices, and preserve the growth of "Princes and Lords." Education, instead of cherishing feelings of pride and self conceit, as is too often the case should be directed against these very principles. The people of this country require a system of education peculiar to their republican character, suited to their habits, plain, practical, opposed to speculative, that shall nurture the stern virtues, a system calculated to unfold the physical, as well as mental faculties, and prepare the young for the service of their country, in peace or war. If it was applied, in a manner

calculated to prepare the majority of youth for practical duties, more than it is with us, the sentiments to which allusion has been made, would hardly gain ground. During the apprenticeship of youth, when the heart is laid open by the master spell of learning, the season should be spent in treasuring up information on the most useful, practical subjects, since with many it is the only favorable opportunity for acquiring knowledge. But genreally speaking, it is not the case in our country. Students are required to pursue a regular course of lessons, and naturally imbibing the same ideas, they are very apt to look forward to the same objects, and imagine themselves destined to the same glorious ends. To this cause may be attributed the fact, that so many, after receiving the honors of a College, pursue fame through the paths of Law, and Medicine, of whom the great proportion fall below mediocrity. Thus the professions are crowded by individuals, who contribute little to the happiness of community, but who tend to bring disgrace upon the cause of justice and humanity. How many of the number, now weaving the "cob-web thread of sophistry" around some delightful truth, might be usefully employed in the mechanic arts. Yes honorably employed! Franklin was not ashamed of his calling, but delighted to recur to that portion of his life, when he was engaged as a Printer, usefully and profitably. It is evident but few can follow with any prospect of success the learned professions, as they are called, but many may pursue other objects with credit to themselves, and happily, by less intricate paths, contribute to their own, and their country's glory. The great proportion of young men, must of necessity, turn their attention to the more humble, but not less worthy occupations for subsistence, and therefore, it is highly important that they draw knowledge from those sources, containing all useful practical information. Because education is not enough adapted to the various pursuits of life, many out of the hundreds who graduate yearly, are thrown upon the world, from whom the country reaps no benefit. Of what use, it may be asked, is knowledge to us, unless we, the recipi-

ents, can turn it to some good advantage. This is the price at which it was bestowed by the great dispenser of blessings, that man should not hide his talent in the earth, but continue to add to its worth. It is, however, impossible that all can be employed in the same way. Since they cannot then, let it be the object of every Seminary of learning, to direct attention, more particularly to employments of a practical, scientific character, the various mechanic arts, civil engineering, surveying, and not least, agriculture; a department the scholar need not be ashamed to enter, which however neglected, contains the elements of national and individual wealth. The other professions, will take care of themselves, but these, equally useful, demand a portion of that knowledge, now thrown away in useless competition for fame, which like the wild fire we sometimes behold playing above the dark and vaporous earth, forever eludes the grasp of the wondering children of men. Let those who stand in the high places of knowledge adopt a course of instruction practical throughout, and intelligence will find its way into the counting-room and workshop, it will place the mechanic on a level with the sage, and direct the plough in the field, thus rendering these professions more respectable than the superficial are willing to admit. Education conducted on this plan, would be strictly republican. Instead of learning being confined to the few, it would be widely disseminated, and more immediately conveyed to the laboring class of community, who need information as a shield against the devices of those, who, not content with teaching, would also lead, and govern mankind. Under the system so general in this country, but one direction is given to the mind, and every thing taught, seems only preparatory to display at the Bar, or in the Senate, while in reality, a part are unfitted for the active duties of life, by being lifted from their sphere. A different course of instruction would furnish fewer theorists, and more practical men, and at the same time, enable *all* to follow some useful profession. In order to prepare the young more effectually to discharge practical duties, such as must fall

on most of them, attention to bodily exercise is indispensable, and the subject of physical education deserves to be considered and carried into operation, as well as aught that concerns the mind. Effeminacy and its train of vices, are the direct consequence of a sort of luxurious ease, contracted during youth, and mostly while within the walls of the academy. Now, independent of the benefits which must accrue to individuals, under a regular course of physical discipline, the Republic would receive at the hands of her magi, men of stout hearts, and vigorous minds.

When we reflect that many have sown the seeds of death with the first rudiments of knowledge, and others have grown up with weak and feeble constitutions, for want of early and repeated exercise of the faculties by which we move and enter on the performance of the various duties of life, an increasing interest is attached to the subject. With respect to the mind there is a curious analogy between it and the body. Severe labor, long continued, will paralyze the constitution and waste its strength. So too, the mind, subjected to close painful application seldom endures the trial without being affected as well as the entire system. It cannot any more than the body, support burthens, and preserve unimpaired its curious and wonderful faculties during a lengthy period of excitement. Memory, hovering over the past and hoarding up the treasures of a by gone age, or writing on the tablet of the heart the result of close reading and calculating demonstration, truths so necessary for men to know, will, if not occasionally suspended in its operations, too severely try its great and important powers.

The mind requires relaxation in the same degree as does the body; and when the powers of the latter are gently moved by exercise, the mind, though partially at rest, will be recovering strength, and preparing for a more daring flight. Unaided by the physical faculties, the soul, dependant in one sense on the clay which encloses it, will lose its nervous intellectual grasp. Exercise besides being a pleasant restora-

tive to the mind, forms man for activity, and clothes him with majesty and strength. Thus he is fitted to endure the wear and tear of existence, under which another would sink. The ancients were fully sensible of the importance of this subject, and their course of exercise combined amusement with utility. Their schools, where dwelt philosophy and the muses, where enchantments "flung a sunlight over the heart," provided for the stern discipline of the physical powers, and from those nurseries of all that is great in man, there went forth the inflexible, unwavering citizen, and the intrepid patriotic soldier. The youth of Sparta were accustomed to undergo fatigue from their earliest years, and as they grew up, each exhibited in his own character a fine illustration of the superiority of the system, under which he was educated. And we may add, while the wisdom of the Grecian Laws, especially those regulating the training of youth, were respected, and strictly enforced, luxury looked into the state, but dare not enter, and war rolled by, without polluting her free soil. With us it must be made a duty, as with them, and the good effects will fall on a large number of the sons of the republic. They will grow to manhood, exempt from many infirmities, sound in body, and if the nature of their studies direct to practical employments, possess all the qualifications necessary to success. The great object however, will not be answered unless this important part of education is made a duty, as well as other branches. It will never do to leave it to the whim and caprice of those, for whose benefit such a course is intended. As to the sort of exercise, there is one, possessing merits we hesitate not to declare, above any that can be named, inasmuch as it leads to a correct knowledge of military tactics. This science is important to us, and the practical part a most healthy instructive exercise. Having alluded to the subject, we would urge one consideration more, and although the "small voice" here lifted up, will hardly be heard beyond these walls, the time, the place, seem to demand further deliberation. The necessity of "scattering the seeds of military knowledge" throughout the Re-

public is entitled to serious notice. That nation may justly be considered strong, whose sons understand the use of those means of defence, on which she must rely in the hour of her utmost need. The glory of a nation is common property, and if parted with, it must be at the risk of national infamy. Yet this glory, this character, written on her institutions, and blazing in the eyes of the world, is ever liable to be tarnished by the breath of envious nations, and the sacred rights of the true cause of glory, brought down by intrigue, or the strong arm of power, to a level with lowly things. Considering the situation of Empires, and their relative position towards each other, it is chimerical to suppose they can ever unite long in fellowship. Never will the interests of nations be one, and undivided. They must ever differ in some essential particulars, and in the course of human events, there is a possibility of serious collision. This being an undeniable truth, it is the imperative duty of that nation, whose laws are worth preserving, to prepare for whatever evils past experience points out as likely to happen, and of which the mutations that are constantly taking place in the world, leave no doubt. The late glorious change in the French dynasty, that one event which will forever shed renown on the gallant people whose blood has consecrated it, and sealed the instrument of their deliverance, placed the nations of Europe in a most critical situation. The unholy war now raging against Poland, land of heroes; Sobieski and Kosciasko, has enlisted the sympathies of every one, who can estimate the value of equal justice, and in all probability, Russia, insensible to the blessings of freedom, will soon have more to contend with than she at first anticipated. In view of this prospect, what naturally forces itself on our minds, but the solemn conviction, that we too, in progress of time, may be drawn into conflict with the haters of the liberties of man? If there is one truth more important than another to us, it is this; that though freedom *may be gained, it seldom can be recovered*. Once lost, all is lost! But it is gained, triumphant truth! We walk in its light, and sit down

under the shadow of the tree whose leaves are emblems of the freshness and glory of our political system. And yet is there no danger that we may be driven forth from this second paradise? There is danger, if we are not constantly prepared to meet and repel war should it reach these peaceful shores, or to go forth, and humble the "untamed spirit," that dares to hold cheap our liberty and our laws. The safety of this republic, her honor and glory, can only be entrusted to the free born people, and they must be instructed in the holy art of defence. It is admitted that we cannot tolerate standing armies, for the reason that they have ever been more devoted to the interests of a throne, than those of the people. If then, we are too wise to rely on mercenaries, shall we lose our credit for sagacity, and not provide for future security? No! the voice of reason, the dictates of humanity, the solemn warning of that great patriot and statesman, "first in war, first in peace," the bloody past, and the fearful present, point out in characters not to be mistaken, the duty of Americans. All the morality a nation can oppose to the whirlwind of war, will prove too feeble to stay its progress, when it rolls up, and comes darkly on. But there is a physical power, guided and supported by moral courage, refined and sublimated by the *amor patria*, which is, and ever has been, irresistible. Blood may flow, and the altar and the hearth be made desolate, but peace will finally extend her olive branch, and the defender assume in a more lofty character, his station in the world. If it is plain that resort must be had to the people, should unforeseen events place us in the character of belligerents, this much, is surely important, to have men, who, when called on to peril their all in the cause of their country, possess a knowledge of that science, indispensable to good discipline, and success in the field. Undoubtedly much might be done towards effecting this great object, if military tactics were made a part of elementary education. A little time devoted to this subject in our Seminaries of learning, might be profitably spent, and this knowledge, so important to us, instead of being confined to a few privileged individuals

would soon be generally understood and correctly practised. We may reasonably calculate the most beneficial consequences from this simple plan. Imperceptibly the happy result would follow without an effort on the part of those, who, regarding the militia as the palladium of our liberties, desire to see them well disciplined. Teach the young throughout our country, in this way, and they will bear the knowledge home a gift of value, to bestow on their fellow citizens. Thus, every man would, in time, become a soldier, without derogating from his station in life, or nurturing dishonorable ambition. For it is idle to suppose the people will ever thirst to mingle in the battles of ambition, however skilful in tactics, or animated with the spirit of the followers of Cæsar, burn to be led against the men of every nation. They are bound by a thousand holy ties to the soil, their interests, their happiness is inseparably woven with our free institutions, and these must be defended at the risk of life and fortune. That a course of education such as we have endeavored to point out would benefit the country, by providing for every capacity, and thus placing it in the power of all to begin the world well, enemies to luxury, possessing not only the spirit, but the strength to roll back the tide of war, and save the land from pollution, there is little room to doubt. Let it not be supposed that the man of mere practical information, sufficient to give an impulse to whatever he undertakes, has not the same power to do good with the professional character. Each in his own sphere may do good or evil, but because one is deeper read in metaphysics and philosophy than another, does it necessarily follow that he will confer greater benefits on mankind? Learning cannot confer perfection, tho' it may lead to it. The advantages of science and philosophy are great, and it so happens, they have been levelled to human reason. Let the mind be enlightened by a few ideas on subjects of this nature, and it will easily contemplate worlds, and systems of worlds. It does not require a long life of research to make a philosopher. The Athenians were called a nation of philosophers, and the knowledge acquired in their schools,

reduced to a few plain truths, was sufficient to put them in a thinking way. They were mostly useful, practical men, quick to understand their rights, and bold in defending them. The plain practical man, converts whatever he touches into fine gold, while the mere speculator, "wrapped in dismal thinkings" is often led through a train of absurdities, from which very little good results. *Practical* men the country calls for. To the inventive practical genius of Fulton, we are indebted for a new and curious craft, which may be seen stemming the impetuous current of the Mississippi, and the rapids of yon pure stream, thus uniting the interests, and confirming the friendship of the inhabitants of different states. Education has done much for us, but a vast deal remains to be accomplished. Here the temple of science and philosophy are crowded by willing auditors, and a glory like that which fell on the Roman eagle, is rendering more visible each star in the banner of our freedom. Education has exploded old errors, shamed bigotry, broken the cords of persecution and left human opinions free. Blessed gift of God to man, grant it may be spared alike by all, and so impartially distributed that no one shall feel himself exalted above another. Here let the work be accomplished. Inspired by that innate principle, love of country, we are inclined to invoke first a blessing on this "land of the mountain and the flood," but our sympathies are not bounded by the green lovely home, hallowed in our hearts. They fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, and hang with trembling anxiety round the houseless heads of the oppressed and persecuted of whatever name or nation. Dear thrilling reflection! Man shall not forever be degraded; he shall not creep in the dust like the serpent, nor hang his head like the willow, in the courts of kings, but raised and honored by knowledge, he shall enjoy the blissful sweets of uninterrupted civil and Religious liberty.



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