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Anita B Goff

IN MEMORY OF

Guy Despard Goff

A
D I S C O U R S E
DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL OF
WILLIAM AND MARY COLLEGE, VIRGINIA;
ON THE
A N N I V E R S A R Y
OF THE
C O L L E G E F O U N D A T I O N :

By S. HENLEY,
PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

C A M B R I D G E,

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MDCCCLXXVI.

JEREMIAH, C. XIV. §. 3.

AND THEIR NOBLES HAVE SENT THEIR LITTLE ONES TO THE
WATERS; THEY CAME TO THE PITS AND FOUND NO WATER,
THEY RETURNED WITH THEIR VESSELS EMPTY.

IT hath not been more frequently than justly remarked, that the prophetic scriptures, if considered simply as human compositions, abound with such strokes of genuine eloquence and interesting description as have never been equalled by succeeding writers. Exclusive of that soothing melancholy, which diffuses a pleasing gloom over the heart, and is the invariable characteristic of our plaintive prophet, he frequently exhibits such pictures of woe as cannot fail to excite the tenderest sympathy. What painter could have imagined figures more affecting than the light sketches he hath introduced in his description of a drought? *Judah mourneth and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. Their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters, they came to the pits and found no water, they returned with their vessels empty: they were confounded and afflicted and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapt (for there was no rain in the earth) the plowmen were afflicted; they covered their heads: Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it because there was no grass. And the wild asses stood on the high rocks, they snuffed up the wind like dragons: their eyes failed them because there was no grass.*

It is observable that there is not in any language a metaphor more frequent than that which substitutes *water* for instruction. In the sacred writings it every where occurs; and the beauty of it is obvious on the slightest reflexion. In the passage I have quoted, it is considered as the source of life and health and joy to the whole creation. Of equal importance in the intellectual world is knowledge. Not less striking is the contrast between the aboriginal inhabitants of this continent and the English nation at present, than between the most parched and dreary desert, opposed to that delightful landscape, which the Psalmist describes, as *enriched by the river of God*. Nor, to continue the figure, doth desolation less certainly ensue to every valuable production of the human mind, where the means of knowledge are withdrawn, than a total destitution of all the blessings of life, where the *dews of heaven* are withheld, and the clouds no longer *drop fatness*. Among the first settlers of this Colony were many who had enjoyed every advantage of education that birth or fortune could procure; yet how soon did their descendants, through the want of such advantages, degenerate almost to a savage barbarity? From the records of those times, I am authorised to assert, that (had no publick provision been made for the support of learning) Science, in this quarter of the globe, with all her attendant blessings, must have perished. With what gratitude then should the inhabitants of America in general, and of Virginia in particular, regard the immortal NASSAU, who—when their ancestors were languishing for lack of knowledge—like another Moses in Horeb, *smote the rock*, and *caused waters to run down like rivers*. No longer could the *chief men* complain that when they sent their little ones to the waters, they came and found no water, for the meanest among them returned not with their vessels empty.

THAT establishments for the advancement of learning have been productive of salutary effects cannot be denied. It will also be allowed that their effects have been more or less salutary, in proportion to the excellence or defects of their constitution. Hence, the criterion by which we may estimate their perfection is the fit-

fitness of the means they prescribe to accomplish their end. Though we compared our own foundation to *water, gushing out of a rock*, yet we must not forget that the scene was a *desert*. This circumstance will account for peculiarities in the institution, which, though at that time proper, may cease to be productive of equal advantages, as the *desert* changes into a *fruitful place*. In England, and in almost every civilized state of Europe, it hath been found necessary to exclude from Colleges an attention to the first forms of letters and the rudiments of language. Nor might it perhaps be disadvantageous to the more liberal studies prosecuted here, if their example, in this, were followed, or even outgone. Low as literature was sunk in Italy, during the barbarous ages, a faint glow still trembled on the edge of the sky. The power and extent of the papal see, as its transactions were written in Latin (though corrupt) rendered some knowledge of that language requisite in every country connected with it: and when DANTE, PETRARCH and BOCCACE brought out of oblivion the purer reliicks of the classical ages, the same cause excited a general attention to them. In these writings, as in the fountains of knowledge, were contemplated the wisdom and the arts of Rome and Greece. These writings still remain the object of study, while the end, for which they deserved that attention they procured, having long since been obtained, it hath happened, as in other instances it too frequently does, that the means are now substituted as an end in its stead. Might not that time then, which to the generality is almost (excuse me if I say) uselessly employed, be devoted to more beneficial acquisitions? Will it be objected, that youth are inured to this discipline, not so much for the sake of acquiring the language itself, as, to fix in their minds an habit of attention? I answer, that studies less irksome will better subserve this purpose. Is there no danger of stifling the spirit of curiosity in its birth? While the mind continues undistracted by passion, may not the attention be more successfully directed to the pursuit of physiology, history, mathematicks, ethicks, or poetry, rather than be forced to run on the cold trail of words? A knowledge of the dead languages, it may be said, will be

acquired along with these. But, must a long series of years then be sacrificed for effecting what, by translations, might be, in a few months, obtained? The only advantage that can accrue is an acquaintance with those delicacies of style which may perhaps in a translation be lost, and which, when acquired, will, by no means, compensate for a want of skill in the beauties of their own language. Yet, after all, is there no room to suspect that even this boasted knowledge exists only in the ignorance, credulity, or temerity, of those who affect it? Could they evoke from their ashes the manes of Horace, of Virgil and of Tully, much more of Xenophon, Pindar, or Homer, to become their auditors, the most finished compositions of their whole lives would probably be treated as unintelligible jargon. But, granting the reverse, will the gain prove a compensation adequate to their labour? or, can it be considered as equivalent to the waste of ten whole years in the best part of life? If not, the grievance is a serious one, and requires a remedy.

It is the province of Education to discover and apply such principles as shall best conduce to IMPROVE THE CORPOREAL SYSTEM, TO ILLUMINATE THE INTELLECTUAL, and MELIORATE THE MORAL. Those institutions then are most perfect, which best provide for the attainment of these three principal ends.

I. It is to be lamented that the acquisition of liberal and genteel accomplishments, though not of the moral, or intellectual kind, should have been excluded from among the objects of education. In the splendid æra of chivalry, elegance of mien and address in the exercise of arms, were esteemed qualifications of the highest importance. A superficial acquaintance with painting or sculpture is sufficient to convince us, that to these, the human body is indebted for the development of its faculties, and the perfection of its form. To the athletic exercises was principally confined the discipline of the Grecian youth; and that superiority which Greece possessed over the rest of the world must be principally attributed to these. But,
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though the political advantages which flow from this source cannot be fully enjoyed, where the modes of education are not directed by the state, yet, in a seminary like ours, there might be something effected. The profits of the late lord chancellor Clarendon's history have been assigned to, and accepted by, the university of Oxford, in order to introduce accomplishments of this nature into that academy; the wisest and most affectionate of whose patrons have thought it no small improvement to their ancient plan of education [Blackst. Com. 4th. V. I. p. 27.]

II. As to intellectual attainments; though the general principles of science are taught in this college, yet, the elucidation of many of its objects lies beyond the sphere of the present professors. A knowledge of chemistry, anatomy, natural history and medicine cannot be procured without crossing the Atlantick: and what seems no less strange is this, that an institution so nobly endowed, should be deficient in the proper means of furnishing the candidates for the *bar* with a knowledge of their profession, or the magistrates on the *bench*, with those principles which should guide their decisions. Though the necessities of the *clerical* profession have been chiefly consulted, yet even its wants are but partially supplied. Provision indeed hath been made for reading the original languages in which the scriptures are written, and lecturing on scholastick divinity; but the evidences of our holy religion have been entirely overlooked, the history of its establishment in the world not regarded, and the peculiar constitutions of our national church passed by without the least notice.

III. THE last view of education hath indeed been considered as principal: and it is hoped that the assiduity of the professors in this department will be judged of from the improvement and conduct of their pupils.

My sole motive in hinting at the defects of our constitution is that they may be remedied, when circumstances will permit. In the mean time let me exhort you, who are sent hither to acquire the

the languages, to neglect no advantage you at present enjoy. In the prosecution of your studies the elegance and wisdom of Rome and Greece claim all your attention. Let it then at first be your object to understand the structure of their style : their history and customs will next merit your notice : the sublimity of their ideas, the beauty of their sentiments, and the perfection of their descriptions may afford you a rational and manly amusement : and—till this part of education shall have experienced a total revolution—they will demand and deserve your closest application. A knowledge of the Latin and Greek will facilitate the mastery of your vernacular tongue : and without the acquisition of these languages, you can, under present circumstances, attain to no eminence in the learned professions.

You, who are arrived at more important advances, let me earnestly intreat, to consider yourselves as candidates for the most valuable of prizes, and the publick, as spectators of your contest. If, in the Olympic games, all Greece applauded the victor, who excelled only in bodily strength or agility, of how much more praise shall ye be thought worthy, who, fired by a far nobler emulation, exert every nerve of the intellect, every energy of the soul ? The applauses of your fellow citizens will inspire your bosoms with a modest exultation, which will afford infinitely more delight than the loudest acclamations ; while a secret consciousness of innate worth, the inseparable attendant on merit, will prove a reward as much superior to the laurel as your contest is more than the corporeal. Picture to yourselves the heroes, sages, bards of ancient days, as every where surrounding your steps, as incessantly surveying your conduct, and applauding your efforts ; this will kindle up new vigour in your souls, and rouse in your breasts the laudable ambition of emulating their great examples. If *one other* motive may have any influence on your hearts, let me conjure you not to frustrate the sanguine, anxious, hopes of those, who have so fondly laboured for your sakes, endeavouring to furnish your understandings with knowledge, and to principle your souls with virtue.

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WILL it be presumption in me to exhort you also, who, with myself, are intrusted with forming the characters of the succeeding age? Nothing should seduce us from that watchfulness the important trust demands. It is of more value than the wealth of worlds. To educate a mind for the best purposes of this life, and an eternity of happiness in the next, is an object of the highest moment. While your hearts dilate with pleasure on the reflexion of your past success, may that animate you to persist in your future labours with unremitting ardour—

—AND O thou Father of lights and fountain of all wisdom, do thou enlighten our understandings, and direct our wills; that, in our several stations, we may so conduct ourselves, as to obtain thy favour, and an abundant admission into the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ.



