

LECTURE VI.

THE STUDY OF MEN, CONCLUDED. — PRACTICE OF LEADING MINDS IN HISTORY.

15. THE theoretical consideration of the study of men as a means of rhetorical discipline invites us to observe further, in concluding the discussion, that the study of living men as a source of discipline is commended by the general practice of leading minds in history. The remarks I have to make on this point will not add much to your note-books. Yet they are necessary to illustrate the reality of the views I have presented, as proved by experience.

The truth is, that the majority of us have passed through our courses of collegiate training, under erroneous impressions, probably, of the proportion in which books have contributed to the making of controlling minds in real life. The cases have been exceptional in which power of control has been gained largely in any department of life without this practice of the study of men as distinct from the study of libraries.

(1) Much is signified to the purpose here by the ancient curriculum of education. The ancient systems of education included provision for extensive travel. The Greek and Roman schools of learning were never considered adequate to the complete training of men for public life. The training of the schools, it was

assumed, was to be followed by travel in other lands. No man would then have regarded his literary culture as finished, even in its foundations, without the appendix of travel to the scholastic discipline.

This was the ideal of a liberal education throughout the middle ages. It has always been the English ideal, to this day, of the most perfect educational training. The idea of deriving the whole of a young man's mental discipline from schools of learning is a modern, and specially an American idea. Here it has arisen from the extension of scholastic privileges to multitudes who have not the means of travel, and also from the fact that the early entrance of young men upon public life here in part takes the place of travel in pressing them into some knowledge of the world.

Plato was thirty years old when Socrates died. He spent eight or nine years under the instruction of Socrates, and then he spent ten years in Megara, Magna Grecia, and Sicily, before he returned, and entered upon his public life in Athens. In this country, six of the corresponding ten years in a young man's life are spent in the first experiments of professional duty. Practically those six years are a part of his professional discipline. We all find it such in fact. We depend on the first years of our public life for that part of our training which the early systems of education derived from travel. But, come from what source it may, it comes from some source in nearly all the cases in which a power of control is gained largely in any department of public life.

(2) Not to rest with general assertion on a point of so much interest as this, let me recall to you certain biographical facts in the history of literature, and of

government, and of the arts. These embrace specially, among others, some which relate to the habits of distinguished speakers.

But first let me recall the one man who illustrates almost every thing in literary history. The point in the history of the English drama which Shakspeare marks most vividly is that in which it ceased to be scholastic, and became popular. Shakspeare disowned the tyranny of literature, and defied the tyranny of criticism. He became what he was to the English drama simply by being what he was to the English people. Critics have tried hard to make out for him a large acquaintance with books; but that is the very thing of which the evidence is least in his history.

On the other hand, nothing else is so certain in the meager knowledge we have of his personal career, as that he acted his own plays, lived in the world which he sought to entertain, studied the tastes of his own companions, and wrote for the people of his own times. Never was man more intensely a man of the present. From the latest researches in Shakspearean literature, it appears that he seldom or never wrote a tragedy till some one else had first tried the public taste on the same subject. M. Guizot, who, though a Frenchman, has written the keenest criticism upon Shakspeare's works which I have met with, finds nothing else in them so characteristic, and so philosophically explanatory of their success, as the fact that they evince a most masterly knowledge of his own age and country, and that he wrote in a spirit of ardent loyalty to them both.

The next illustration is Raphael. Says one of the most intelligent critics of this prince of painters, "His

paintings seem as if he had gone about the streets, and, whenever he found an expressive face or attitude, had daguerreotyped it on his brain, and gone back to his studio to reproduce it." The point of interest in the criticism is the fact that such was precisely the fact in Raphael's professional habits. His most celebrated faces are almost all of them portraits. His personal friends, the celebrated women of his age, some of the courtesans of Rome and Florence, still live on his canvas. Such was the extent to which he carried this fidelity to real life, that some critics even question his originality of conception.

A third example is Edmund Burke. One of his critics, speaking of Burke's writing, says of the man, "He was a man who read every thing, and saw every thing." The key to his success as an author—an author, I say, for he was no speaker—is to be found in his own criticism of Homer and Shakspeare, of whom he said, "Their practical superiority over all other men arose from their practical knowledge of all other men." Burke respected the popular mind. In his appeals to it he laid out his whole strength. Some of his most profound reflections on political economy he embodied in his "Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol." And what was the "Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol"? Nothing but a political pamphlet written to carry on a political campaign in a single shire. His "Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful" was the product of a period of recreation. The hard work of his life was expended on the practical affairs of England. He was one of the most ardent and original of theorists; yet such was his subjection of theory to fact in his knowledge of mankind, that his was the first leading mind in Europe which

recovered from the intoxication of the French Revolution, and detected the drift of it towards anarchy.

A fourth illustration is Curran, the Irish orator. His mother used to say of him, "O Jackey, what a preacher was lost when you became a barrister!" The old lady was right if Curran would have carried into the ministry the same methods of self-discipline which he practiced for the bar. He laid the foundation of his success as a barrister in the coffee-houses of London.

The London coffee-houses of that day were what the "London Times" and other metropolitan newspapers are now. Curran used to spend two hours every night in them for the purpose of studying the politicians whom he found there, observing their ways, their speech, their opinions, even their dress. He would go from one to another, selecting those which he said "were most fertile in game for a character-hunter." In this respect he represented almost all the public men of his day who became eminent in the public life of England. Lord Macaulay says that the coffee-house was then a national institution, so general was the resort to it of men whose public efforts of speech and authorship ruled the realm.

Fox and Mirabeau I name as men of great power in speech without great learning. As students of books they were too indolent to accumulate the materials of their own speeches: each had his bag. But as observers of men they were indefatigable: therefore, in spite of their deficiencies in the knowledge of libraries, they became masters in parliamentary debate. These men represent a class of minds which spring up in every country of free speech.

Napoleon is a seventh example. He founded libra-

ries, but never entered them. But that was no boast when he said, "I know man." He used to visit in disguise the seaports of France to converse in person with the fishermen and sailors and smugglers. He illustrated the way in which a man of the world will often spring at a bound, in religious argument, to results which a scholastic mind would have reached, if at all, with slow and wary steps. Thus it was that the superhuman nature of Jesus Christ revealed itself to him. When he formed the celebrated "Code" which bears his name, he gathered around him the first jurists of the empire, including those of the old monarchy; and he astonished them all by the practical wisdom with which he fused the conflicting materials which they furnished him, into one consistent and feasible system of organic law. His method of studying any subject which the welfare of the empire required him to master was to summon a group of conflicting living authorities on that subject, and set them to arguing with each other in defense of their respective opinions.

Another instance to the point is Walter Scott. He lived with the multitude. His official duties kept him a large part of the time in a Scottish court of quarter sessions. Hence it has been so often said that his fictions read like histories, while the histories of other men read like fictions. In his school-days Scott was a dull boy and an inveterate truant. He would entice one or more of his companions to run away with him to Calton Hill or Arthur's Seat, and there he would practice upon them his art of story-telling. He was an unwearied conversationalist: nobody was too high, and nobody too low, for him to talk with. In the "Fortunes of Nigel" he represents one of the characters as

saying that a man of active mind can not talk with the boy who holds his horse at a watering-place, without obtaining some new thought. He used to go to the fish-market at Billingsgate to study the dialect of the fishwomen. He has been known to pause in the street to jot down on a scrap of paper, or on his thumb-nail, a word which he caught from a passer-by.

In his novels he draws so largely upon real life that they are not properly called romances. He deals with living characters, employs living dialects, records as fictions actual occurrences. His own henchman, Tom Purdie, is described in the "Red Gauntlet." The death of the Templar in "Ivanhoe" was an exact copy of a death-scene which occurred to a friend of Scott while pleading a cause in his presence in a court-room in Edinburgh. The localities of most of his stories he describes from his own sight of them. He visited the Continent to see for himself the localities of "Quentin Durward." The best guide-book to the lakes of Scotland is said to be Scott's "Lady of the Lake."

Aristocratic as he was in his aspirations, he still enjoyed the common people more heartily than the society of his equals. The professors of the University of Edinburgh complained that he chose the society of men of business rather than their own. He held to that choice deliberately. He said that he found the conversation of men of the world to be more original, and more fit to feed a literary spirit, than that of literary men themselves. In a moment of petulance he declared that the dullest talk he ever listened to was that of a group of literary men at a dinner-table. "I love the virtues of rough and round men," he says: "the others are apt to escape me in sal-volatile and a white pocket-handkerchief."

Again he writes: "I have read books enough, and conversed with enough of splendidly educated men in my time; but I assure you I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor uneducated men and women than I ever yet met with out of the pages of the Bible." On another occasion, when his daughter condemned something for being "vulgar," he replied, "You speak like a very young lady. Do you not know the meaning of the word 'vulgar'? It is only 'common.' Nothing that is common, except wickedness, can deserve to be spoken of in a tone of contempt. When you have lived to my years, you will agree with me in thanking God that nothing really worth having in this world is uncommon."

A ninth example is Patrick Henry. His bankruptcy in a country store in Virginia was a foregone conclusion because of the way in which he spent his time. His habit was to collect a company of villagers in his store, and give them a subject of conversation, and then fall back and listen to their talk. Popular modes of thought, popular ways of argument, popular styles of illustration, popular sophistries, popular appeals, he studied thus month after month. That was his university, his school of oratory, his library. The principles and methods he learned there he adopted and imitated in his subsequent political career. He was the orator of the rabble all through life. He talked like the rabble, lived like the rabble, ate and drank and dressed like the rabble. He did this designedly for the sake of swaying the rabble in his public speeches.

One witness testifies to this from Mr. Henry's lips: "Mr. Chairman, all the larnin' upon the yairth air not to be compared with naiteral parts." Yet to studies

and abuses of this kind he owed at last his power to send the House of Burgesses rushing from their seats at the close of his description of a thunder-storm, or rather his adroit *use* of one which occurred near the close of one of his addresses. He was a representative of the whole class of public speakers who are so delusively called "natural orators." There are no natural orators. They all study oratory in studying men.

Passing now to the pulpit, I name but one other illustration, George Whitefield. His name is often adduced as an example of untaught, spontaneous eloquence. He was no such thing. No man was ever further from it. For patient, laborious, painstaking, lifelong study of the art of oratory, give us George Whitefield as the prince of students. Long before his conversion, when he was a tapster in his mother's tavern, he studied the English dramatic writers till he knew large portions of them by heart. He personated some of their female characters amidst rounds of applause from the villagers. Though sometimes intoxicated, he composed sermons, and tried the effect of them on the crowd around the doorposts. He stole hours of the night for the study of the dramatic portions of the Bible. Thus was it that the great field-preacher was made.

One effect of these experimental studies on his own mind was to create such a sense of the difficulty of preaching well, that, after his conversion, he says he never prayed against any corruption in his life so much as he did against being tempted into the ministry too soon. "I have prayed a thousand times," he says, "till the sweat has dropped from my face like rain, that God would not let me enter the ministry till He thrust me forth to his work."

In this spirit of reverence for his work, he became through his whole ministry a student of his audiences. He was incessantly trying experiments upon his congregations. The same sermons he preached over and over, till they were crowded with variations and improvements. Garrick, who himself owed much to his study of Whitefield, said that Whitefield never finished a sermon till he had preached it forty times. He preached from thirty to forty thousand sermons, but only about seventy-five have found their way into print. This is some index to the extent to which he must have carried repetition of the same discourses.

The pulpit is crowded with illustrations, either of the neglect, or the use, or the abuse, of this study of men as a source of homiletic culture. They might be multiplied indefinitely, but it is needless.

(3) I proceed, therefore, to remark that the same view is confirmed by the opinions of a class of writers and speakers derogatory to the value of rhetorical culture.

Oratorical study has to contend with the expressed judgments of certain orators and writers who say that it is useless. They have succeeded, as they imagine, without it. They have refused to be hampered by it. They have trusted to the instinct of speech and the cravings of a full mind for utterance. They have but filled the mind with thought, and then let it express itself. They have followed the counsel they so often give to young preachers, "Find something to say, and then say it." They therefore dispute the value of all conscious effort for oratorical discipline. Cicero, after writing the "De Oratore," condemned books on rhetoric. Macaulay, though the author of criticism enough to make volumes of rhetorical suggestion, decries con-

scious study of rhetorical science. George William Curtis in this country has reproduced Macaulay's judgment with approval. He sums up the whole argument by saying that rhetoric makes critics, but never orators nor writers.

These men represent a class of writers and speakers, themselves successful, whom every flourishing age of literature has produced, and who have no faith in the scientific culture of oratory for any other purpose than that of mental gymnastics. Its direct practical value they doubt or deny.

Test, now, these opinions by the actual experience of such men, and what do they amount to? Simply this: they are comparative opinions, in which abstract rhetoric is weighed against the literary discipline of real life. Such critics have profited so much more from the study of men than from the study of rhetorical treatises that the latter sink into insignificance in the comparison. Is it conceivable that Cicero's orations grew out of innate, unstudied eloquence alone? His own confessions contradict this. Is it imaginable that Macaulay's style was the fruit of unconscious ebullition of power? A thousand years of criticism could never convince the literary world of that. Is it possible that Mr. Curtis's "Easy Chair" was never manufactured? If the styles of these writers are specimens of spontaneous generation, the world does not contain any thing which is not such. The immortal columns of Greek architecture are no more made, studied, elaborated things than are such styles as theirs. Those styles have been originated, compacted, adorned, polished, by laborious study of speech and authorship in real life. Their authors have studied rhetoric in embodied forms. They have prac-

ticed it, as literary journeymen, in the mental collisions and abrasions of public life. They lived it many years before they could command their facile pen.

All opinions, therefore, of successful writers, derogatory to the study of oratory, are to be taken as only practical testimonies to the value of the study of it as embodied in living men. Whatever may be the bearing of them upon the scholastic culture of rhetoric, they are the most emphatic witness possible to the value of its practical culture through an elaborate and lifelong study of mankind.

To recapitulate, then, the several aspects of the subject which we have considered: we have observed that every preacher may obtain much oratorical culture from the study of his own mind; that he has a similar source of culture in the study of other men; that this study is often undervalued, because of a factitious reverence for books; that this study should be stimulated by that which is well known to be the popular idea of a clergyman; that the need of it in some quarters is indicated by the idea of a clergyman which is most common in literary fiction; that the absence of it discloses itself, not only in the unfitness of the pulpit to its mission of reproof, but also in its unfitness to the mission of comfort; that we may learn something to the purpose from the study of eccentric preachers; that the study of men is specially needful to educated preachers, because the literature of the world is not constructed, in the main, for the masses of mankind; that the need of it is enforced by the fact that often great changes of popular opinion occur independently of the cultivated classes as such; that in such popular changes the clergy are the natural leaders of the peo-

ple; that a certain minority of the clergy are found to be insensible or hostile to such changes; that, when the pulpit becomes identified with the cultivated classes alone, it loses power of control over all classes; that, when the pulpit betrays a want of knowledge of men as they are, the result is the creation of anomalous relations between the church and the world; and that the study of men here recommended is supported by the practice of leading minds in history.

You will not understand me as decrying scholastic discipline in the comparison. On that subject I have, in the sequel, other things to say. But I have wished to establish at present this as one part of a preacher's necessary and perpetual discipline for his life's work: that he must be a student of men, himself a man of his own times, living in sympathy with his own times, versed in the literature of his own times, at home with the people of his own charge, observant of the movements of the popular heart, and aspiring in his expectations of controlling those movements by the ministrations of the pulpit.

That was a confession which no minister should oblige himself to make, as a late professor in one of our theological seminaries did in the last year of his life, that for half a century he had read more Latin than English. That was the mark of a mind whose roots were in an obsolete age, and whose culture was chiefly in a language, a literature, and a style of thinking, which never can again be dominant in the civilization of the world.

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