VARIOUS

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Содержание

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KNOWLEDGE

It was for a long time the custom to recommend knowledge to the attention of the people by depicting the material advantages and pleasures incident to its pursuit. Glowing and attractive pictures were exhibited of the career and progress of meritorious and successful persons, who had been elevated by their intelligence to positions of consideration and distinction. Universal history and biography were ransacked to furnish instances of a persevering and well-rewarded prosecution of knowledge 'under difficulties;' and the general mind was invited to contemplate and reflect on these, as worthy exemplars for its imitation. The inference, moreover, that was almost uniformly intended to be drawn, was such a one as was naturally acceptable to the crude and undisciplined understanding – the obvious purpose of all such representations being to stimulate the energies and enterprise of the ambitious, by

the offer or indication of material rewards, and to make intelligence respected and desirable for the sake of its sensible compensations.

There might perhaps be reasons adducible to justify the employment of such incitements, as there may doubtless be circumstances under which the cultivation of knowledge might, for a time, be more effectually advanced by means of interested considerations, than by an appeal to motives more strictly rational, and accordant with a disinterested reverence for its spiritual worth and dignity. There are evidently stages of human progress when a regard for their personal interests has a more powerful efficacy in urging men into improvement, than any of the finer influences of which they are susceptible, or which an advanced culture would probably awaken. Thus, as an exoteric or introductory intimation of the value and desirableness of knowledge, it may not be amiss to attract a people, otherwise indisposed to its acquirement, by an exhibition of the conventional advantages and distinctions which it may contribute, more or less successfully, to realise. And though it cannot be allowed that the culture of the intellect is to be subordinated to the acquisition of any of the temporal benefits of life, yet inasmuch as an increase of intelligence and sagacity may be reasonably applied to the promotion of such comforts and conveniencies as tend to enhance the rational satisfactions of existence, it is not to be questioned that the latter may be innocently, and even serviceably, urged upon the attention, as

reasons and motives for stimulating the slothful or indifferent mind to an appropriate activity, whensoever higher and worthier considerations may have been found to be ineffectual, or are in any likelihood of being imperfectly apprehended. The sole condition needful to be observed by those who thus endeavour to promote the education and enlightenment of the people, is a clear and firm persuasion in themselves that such a method of interesting men in the pursuits of literature or science, can only be considered as initiatory, and preparatory to something higher, and that at last knowledge must stand recommended to the mind by its own intrinsic charms, and by its grand and native tendency to further a man's spiritual advancement.

It is scarcely to be doubted that the oversight of this has greatly contributed to occasion the failure of many of those popular schemes and institutions which have had for their object the intellectual improvement of the people. Starting with the flattering assumption that literary and scientific information possessed the power of raising men to social consequence, it was presently perceived that the result was not answerable to the expectations which had been excited, and that the more generally intelligence was spread, the greater was the competition for the advantages in view, and the less the chance of attaining them. By being taught to regard their education as a means or process whereby they might be more readily and securely inducted into positions of emolument and honour, not only were the people misdirected with respect to the real and authentic

signification of manly culture, but even the inducements held out as the encouragements of their efforts were found to end mainly in disappointment. The generality were not, and could not be enriched, nor very sensibly elevated in the estimation of the world; they did not usually attain to what they had been taught to aim after, which was, in most cases, antecedence of their fellow-men, distinction and exalted notice in the eyes of accredited respectability. The conditions of society to which they were subjected limited most of them to their old employments and pursuits, and it only occasionally happened that a man's personal fortunes were very materially promoted by the intelligence he had gained through studious exertion. If, by some favourable concurrence of circumstances, one might chance to attain eminence, or realise any considerable share of the substantial possessions of life, for every individual thus fortunate, there has probably been a thousand whose efforts were utterly unproductive of any such success. Upon the whole, it is evident that the more universally the benefits of instruction are extended among a people, the casual prizes which were formerly accessible to rare examples of ability and intelligence become less and less easy of attainment, and have an eventual tendency to become distributed altogether without reference to that intellectual superiority which, when education was less general, more invariably commanded them. The peculiar distinctions which knowledge is competent to confer must be looked for in other directions than those which are supposed to lead to the

acquisition of wealth or mere conventional reputability – must be sought, indeed, among the inner laws and necessities of the human mind. The power which we ascribe to intelligence must be exercised for ends and objects which have hitherto been too commonly overlooked, and the purposes and aims of education will need to be more intimately adjusted to the essential demands of character.

A notorious consequence of the popular instruction most prevalent within the last twenty years, has been the elicitation of a certain superficial cleverness, valuable principally for marketable or ostentatious purposes, and no more indicative of intellectual elevation than the frivolous accomplishment of rope-dancing. It is for the most part an affair of memory, a mere mechanical agility, expertness in acts of routine; and in its superior developments takes most commonly the shape of a keen vulpine perspicacity, which may very readily be cultivated independently of any coincident development of the reflective reason or the moral attributes. The practical understanding, being trained into separate activity, and exercised apart from its constitutional connection, may obviously be used like an implement, in subordination to the propensities or the will, and for the accomplishment of purely selfish, or even discreditable ends. Thus, while it is perfectly true that a liberal and complete education – using the word in its largest and strictly philosophical significance – is the sole and certain means of human elevation, it is not to be denied that very considerable acquisitions of

information, and much intellectual ability and shrewdness, may subsist together with a manifest unscrupulousness or depravity of disposition. And hence it is evident that the power of knowledge is good or evil according as it is used; and so long as its cultivation is enjoined out of motives involving a primary regard to worldly advantages and promotions, there will never be wanting persons to pursue it out of mercenary, and in other respects questionable considerations. The entire grounds of the common advocacy of education must be abandoned; we must ascend from the low places of expediency and selfish benefit to the nobler platform of that universal and inborn necessity in man, which demands a circular and simultaneous culture of his whole nature – that essential and inward law of being whose perfect and successful development shall be answerable to the destination contemplated in the origin and intention of the human constitution.

The true reason for individual cultivation is undoubtedly to be sought for in the native requirements of the soul. The essential worth of knowledge lies not so much in its adaptations to our temporal conveniencies or ambition, as in the service it performs in promoting spiritual enlargement. What we more especially understand by education is a progressive process whereby the intellectual and moral powers are expanded and developed to the extent of their capabilities, and directed towards objects of action and speculation which have a tendency to advance the effectual wellbeing of the individual – a wellbeing whose character is not to be determined arbitrarily by opinion, or considered

as consisting in conditions accordant with mere conventional preconceptions of mortal happiness, but one which pre-exists as an ideal prefigurement in human nature. That only is a right and sufficient education which aims at the perfect culture of the man – which, as far as is possible with objective limitations, educes and invigorates his latent aptitudes and gifts, to the end that he may employ them in a manner which is consistent with the pure idea of his own being. The consideration to be kept continually in view is, what is a man by natural capacity destined to become? – what heights of intellectual and moral worth is he capable of attaining to? – and, on the whole, what courses of discipline and personal exertion are most suitable, as the means of raising him to that condition wherein he will most admirably fulfil the design of his creation? To instruct and educate him with respect to this design is the highest and ultimate purpose of all knowledge. It has thus a grander aim than the mere promotion of the conveniencies of our material life. Prosecuted with reference to this loftier end, it is exalted into the appropriate guide of a man's endeavours – acquainting him with the laws and relations of his existence, and shaping for him the authentic course of his sublunary conduct.

It is accordingly obvious, that in order to obtain its lasting and most prizable advantages, the pursuit of knowledge must be entered on and followed as a *duty*. A man must esteem his personal culture as the noblest end of his existence, and accept his responsibility in regard to it as the most paramount of obligations. To this one pre-eminent aim all other aims and

aspirings must be held as inconsiderable and subordinate. Let him know, and lay earnestly to heart, that all his efforts at cultivation are to be everlasting in their results – fruitful for ever in blessed consequences to himself and to the world, or otherwise miserably and perpetually abortive, according to the character and spirit of his activity. All learning and experience have an intimate and natural respect to the progressive perfection of the human soul. The original idea of a man – what he individually ought to *be* and *do*– that is the basis whereon he is to found and build up his entire being. He must therefore prosecute knowledge with a reverent and religious earnestness, strive diligently to comprehend the relations in which he stands to God and his fellow-men, and sedulously endeavour to fulfil his true and peculiar destination, which is, to make his temporal existence correspondent with the inner laws of his own soul, and to leave behind it in the spiritual world an imperishable and eternal consequence.

This view of the intrinsic worth and significance of knowledge must be admitted to be far more exalting and salutary to the mind than any which has reference exclusively or principally to its agency in simply secular affairs. It leads a man inevitably to respect the integrity and rightful exercise of his capacities, by discountenancing all employment of them which might tend in anyway to invalidate or impair the natural supremacy of the moral sentiment. Considered as the power whereby he may cultivate and enlarge his being, knowledge is invested with a lofty

and perennial momentousness, which cannot, and may not, be disregarded without derogation to our highest interests as human and spiritual intelligences. It is indeed a revelation, in all its manifold departments, of that vital and sustaining element of things which is designated Truth, and whereon every effort that can reasonably be expected to be lastingly successful is most intimately dependent. As man liveth not by bread alone, but by every gracious word that proceedeth from the mouth of God, by every just and everlasting law which He has established for the guidance and edification of mankind, so assuredly is it of primary concern to men to be qualified to interpret those sublime utterances, and to apprehend their import and significancy, in relation to the aims and hopes of life. This is the great and inestimable excellency of knowledge, that it acquaints us with something of the reality and nature of the mysterious frame of things wherein we live, and are necessitated constantly to work, and unfolds for us the laws and reasons of that obedience which we are constrained to yield to the established economy wherewith our existence and essential welfare are connected. The highest and most binding obligation for us to know anything at all, is our natural need of intellectual enlightenment – the soul's unquestionable necessity for an intimacy with Truth, and the joy and satisfaction which it finds in its contemplation. And thus it is that all knowledge is eminently sacred, as being the stream through which a human mind draws insight from the central source of all intelligence; as being that which informs us

of self-subsistent Law and Power, and consciously connects us with their reality and operations. That baneful divorce between intelligence and holiness which a sceptical and frivolous age has so disastrously effected, will need to be set aside as altogether founded on a serious mistake; and indeed men are already beginning to apprehend that no pure faith can be sustained, no sound or abiding virtue inculcated and established, which is not deeply grounded in that mental certainty and assurance which clear, indisputable knowledge alone can furnish.

Let knowledge, then, be recognised as a primary indispensability for the mind, the natural and appropriate inheritance of every human soul; and let us esteem it as a sufficient and authentic plea for its universal dissemination, that it is ever needful for the soul's health and welfare; and condescend not to demand it on any inferior pretext. If there is one right of man more essentially sacred than another, it is his right to as complete and perfect an education as his own capacity, and the attainments and adaptations of the age he lives in, are adequate to supply him with; and again, if there is one human duty more paramount and obligatory than the rest, it is that which enjoins upon a man the use of his best energies and efforts to advance himself in intellectual and moral vigour, and to turn every talent and capability most honestly to account; since upon the depth and extent of his own inward force will depend the essential worth of his subsequent performances. The rational enlargement of the individual is indeed the one great end of life.

Nothing has so high a claim on us as the cultivation of ourselves. 'It is most true,' as a vigorous and thoughtful modern writer has remarked – 'it is most true, and most fitting to be said to many in our day, that a man has no business to cut himself off from communion with so rich and manifold a world as ours, or arbitrarily to harden and narrow his life on any of the sides on which it is open and sensitive. But it is also no less necessary, and perhaps in this time more required to urge, that a man's first vocation is to be a man – a practical, personal being, with a reasonable and moral existence, which must be kept strong, and in working order, at all expense of pleasure, talent, brilliancy, and success. It is easy to lose one's self, or, as the Scripture has it, one's own soul, in the midst of the many and glittering forms of good which the world offers, and which our life apprehends: but to know any of these as realities, it is necessary to begin by being real in our own human ground of will, conscience, personal energy. Then will the world also begin to be real for us; and we may go on through eternity mining deeper and deeper, and in endless diversities of direction, in a region of inexhaustible realities.'[1]

[1] Sterling's Sayings and Essayings.

WORLDLY WISDOM

A TALE

Mr and Mrs Davenant especially prided themselves on their worldly wisdom and on their strong good sense – excellent qualities undoubtedly, but susceptible of being carried to an injurious excess. If it be true that in our faults lie the germ of virtues, no less true is it that almost every virtue is capable of being exaggerated into vice. Thus was it with the Davenants: in their code everything was made subservient to *worldly wisdom*: all their own and their friends' actions were measured by that standard; consequently every generous aspiration was checked, every noble, self-denying action decried, if it could not be reconciled to their ideas of wisdom. In course of time Mr and Mrs Davenant grew cold-hearted, calculating, and selfish; and as their fortunes flourished, more and more did they exult in their own wisdom, and condemn as foolish and Quixotic everything charitable and disinterested. To the best of their power they brought up their children in the same principles, and they succeeded to admiration with their eldest daughter, who was as shrewd and prudent as they could wish. Mrs Davenant would often express her maternal delight in her Selina: there never

was a girl possessing such strong good sense – such wisdom. Some people might have thought that in Miss Selina's wisdom the line was somewhat faint that divided it from mere cunning; but mothers are rarely very quick-sighted with regard to their children's faults, and Mrs Davenant never saw the difference.

With their other daughter they were not so successful. When Lucy Davenant was but five years old, a relation of her mother's, a maiden lady residing in Wales, had, at her own earnest request, adopted the younger daughter. Miss Moore was very rich, and her fortune was entirely at her own disposal, so Mr and Mrs Davenant at once acceded to her request, never doubting that she would make Lucy her heiress. Lucy remained with Miss Moore till that lady died; but although she left her nothing in her will but a few comparatively valueless mementos, she owed more to her care and teaching than thousands could repay. Under the influence of her precepts, and the admirable example she afforded, Lucy became generous, unselfish, open-hearted, and truthful as the day. But her parents, unhappily, were blind to these virtues, or rather they deemed that, in possessing them, their child was rather unfortunate than otherwise. Lucy was utterly astonished when she came home from Wales after her kind friend's death, at the strange manner and stranger conversation of her parents and her sister. Her father had accompanied her from Pembrokeshire, and he had scarcely spoken a word to her during the whole of the journey; but, in the innocence of her heart, she attributed this to his grief at the

loss of his relation. But when she arrived at her father's house in the city of B – , where he was the principal banker, she could not avoid perceiving the cause. Her mother embraced her, but did not pause to gaze on her five-years-absent child; and as she turned to her sister Selina, she heard her father say, 'Lucy hasn't a farthing in the will.'

'You don't mean it?' cried Mrs Davenant. 'Why, how in the world, child, have you managed?' turning to Lucy. 'Did you offend Miss Moore in anyway before she died?'

'Oh no, mamma,' murmured Lucy, weeping at the thought of her aunt's illness and death thus rudely conjured up.

'Then what is the reason?' began her mother again; but Mr Davenant raised a warning finger, and checked her eager inquiries. He saw that Lucy had no spirit at present to reply to their questions, so he suffered the grieved girl to retire to rest, accompanied by her sister; but with Selina, Lucy was more bewildered than ever.

'My dear Lu,' said that young lady, as she brushed her hair, 'what is the meaning of this mysterious will? We all thought you would be Miss Moore's heiress.'

'So I should have been,' sobbed Lucy; 'but' —

'But what? Don't cry so, Lucy: what's past can never be recalled,' said Selina oracularly; 'and as you're not an heiress' —

'Oh, don't think I am vexed about *that*,' said Lucy, indignant at the idea, and drying her eyes with a determination to weep no more. 'I have no wish to be an heiress: I am very glad, indeed, I

am not; and I would rather, much rather, not be enriched by the death of any one I love.'

'Very romantic sentiments, my dear Lu, but strangely wanting in common sense. All those high-flown ideas were vastly interesting and becoming, I daresay, among your wild Welsh mountains; but when you come into the busy world again, it is necessary to cast aside all sentiment and romance, as you would your old garden-bonnet. But, seriously, tell me about this will: how did you miss your good-fortune?'

'Miss Moore had a nephew, a barrister, who is striving very hard to fight his way at the bar: he has a mother and two sisters entirely depending on him, and they are all very poor. All my aunt's property is left to him.'

'Well, but why at least not shared with you?'

'I did not want it, you know, Selina, so much as they do. I have a home, and papa is rich, and so' —

'And so, I suppose, you very generously besought Miss Moore not to leave her fortune to you, but to her nephew?' said Selina with a scornful laugh.

'No, no; I should not have presumed to speak on the subject to my kind, good aunt. But one day before she had this last attack of illness she spoke to me about my prospects, and asked me if papa was getting on very well, and if he would be able to provide for me when I grew up' —

'And I've no doubt in the world,' interrupted Selina, staring with excessive wonderment in her sister's face, 'that you

innocently replied that he would?'

'Of course, sister,' replied Lucy calmly; 'I could say nothing else, you know; for when I came to see you five years ago, papa told me that he meant to give us both fortunes when we married.'

'And you told Miss Moore this?'

'Certainly. She kissed me when I told her,' continued Lucy, beginning to weep again as all these reminiscences were summoned to her mind, 'and said that I had eased her mind very much, her nephew was very poor, and her money would do him and his family great service; and it is never a good thing for a young girl to have much money independent of her parents, my aunt said; and I think she was quite right.'

'Well,' said Selina, drawing a long breath, 'for a girl of nineteen years and three months of age I certainly do think you are the very greatest simpleton I ever saw.'

'Why so?' inquired Lucy in some surprise.

'Why, for telling your aunt about the fortune you would have: you might have known that she would not make you her heiress if you were rich already.'

'But she asked me the question, Selina.'

'That was no reason why you should have answered as you did.'

'How could I have answered otherwise after what papa had told me?'

Lucy was imperturbable in her simplicity and guilelessness. Selina turned from her impatiently, despairing of ever making her comprehend how foolishly she had behaved.

The next morning Mr and Mrs Davenant were informed by their eldest daughter of Lucy's communications to her respecting Miss Moore's property. Selina was surprised to find that they exhibited no signs of great anger or disappointment, but contented themselves with inveighing against Lucy's absurd simplicity, and her fatal deficiency in worldly wisdom.

'Not that it matters so *very* much this time,' said Mrs Davenant philosophically; 'for it appears that the amount of Miss Moore's fortune was very much exaggerated. Still, Lucy might as well have had her three thousand pounds as Arthur Meredith; and it grieves me – the entire affair – because it shows how very silly Lucy is in these matters. She sadly wants common sense I fear.'

Similar verdicts were pronounced with regard to poor Lucy almost every hour in the day, until she would plaintively and earnestly inquire, 'What *could* mamma mean by worldly wisdom?' Certainly it was a branch of knowledge which poor Miss Moore, with most unpardonable negligence, had utterly neglected to instil into her young relative's mind. But though it was greatly to be feared that Lucy would *never* possess wisdom, according to her mother's definition of the word, she could not avoid, as in course of time she became better acquainted with the principles and practices of her family, perceiving *what* it was that her parents dignified by so high-sounding a name. It made her very miserable to perceive the system of manœuvring that daily went on with regard to the most trivial as well as the more important affairs of life. She could not help seeing that truth was

often sacrificed for the mere convenience of an hour, and was never respected when it formed an obstacle to the execution of any plan or arrangement.

She felt keenly how wrong all this was, but she dared not interfere. On two or three occasions, when she had ventured, timidly and respectfully, to remonstrate on the subject, she had been chidden with undue violence, and sent sad and tearful to her own room. With Selina she was equally unsuccessful; only, instead of scolding, her lively, thoughtless sister contented herself with laughing loudly, and contemptuously affecting to pity her 'primitive simplicity and ignorance.'

'It's a thousand pities, Lu, that your lot was not cast in the Arcadian ages. You are evidently formed by nature to sit on a green bank in shepherdess costume, twining flowers round your crook, and singing songs to your lambs. Excuse me, my dear, but positively that's all you are fit for. I wonder where I should be if I possessed your very, *very* scrupulous conscience, and your infinitesimally nice notions of right and wrong? I daresay you'd be highly indignant – excessively shocked – if you knew the little *ruse* I was forced to resort to in order to induce cross old Mrs Aylmer to take me to London with her last year. Don't look alarmed; I'm not going to tell you the whole story; only remember there *was* a ruse.'

'Surely, Selina, you don't exult in it?' said Lucy, vexed at her sister's air of triumph.

'Wait a minute. See the consequences of my visit to London,

which, had I been over-scrupulous, would never have taken place. Had I been *too* particular, I should not have gone with Mrs Aylmer – should not have been introduced to her wealthy and fashionable friends – should not have met Mr Alfred Forde – *ergo*, should not have been engaged to be married to him, as I have at present the happiness of being.'

'My dear Selina,' said Lucy timidly, but affectionately, laying her hand upon her arm, and looking up into her face, 'are you sure that it is a happiness? Are you quite sure that you *love* Mr Forde?'

Selina frowned – perhaps in order to hide the blush that she could not repress – and then peevishly shook off her sister's gentle touch.

'No lectures, if you please,' she said, turning away. 'Whatever my feelings may be with regard to my future husband, they concern no one but him and myself. Be assured I shall do my duty as a wife far better than half the silly girls who indulge in hourly rhapsodies about their love, devotion, and so forth.'

Lucy sighed, but dared not say more on the subject. She was aware that Selina classed her with the 'silly girls' she spoke of. Some time before, when her heart was bursting with its own weight of joy and love, Lucy had been fain to yield to the natural yearning she felt for some one to whom she could impart her feelings, and had told her sister of her own love – love which she had just discovered was returned. What an icy sensation she experienced when, in reply to her timid and blushing confession,

Selina sneered undisguisedly at her artless ingenuousness, and 'begged to know the happy individual's name!' And when she murmured the name of 'Arthur Meredith,' with all the sweet, blushing bashfulness of a young girl half afraid of the new happiness that has arisen in her heart – and almost fearing to whisper the beloved name even to her own ears – how crushing, how cruel was the light laugh of the other (a girl, too, yet how ungirlish!), as she exclaimed half in scorn, half in triumph, 'I thought so! No wonder Miss Moore's legacy was so easily resigned. I did not give you credit, Lu, for so much skill in manœuvring.' Lucy earnestly and indignantly disclaimed the insinuation; but Selina only bade her be proud of her talents, and not feel ashamed of them; and she could only console herself by the conviction that, in her inmost heart, Selina did not 'give her credit' for the paltriness she affected to impute to her.

A short time afterwards, Arthur Meredith presented himself at B – , and formally asked Mr Davenant's consent to his union with Lucy. The consent was granted conditionally. Arthur was to pursue his profession for two years, at the end of which time, if he was in a position to support Lucy in the comfort and affluence she had hitherto enjoyed, no further obstacle should be placed in the way of their marriage. Arthur and Lucy were too reasonable not to perceive the justice of this decision, and the young barrister left B – inspirited by the consciousness that on himself now depended his own and her happiness.

The time passed peacefully and happily with Lucy even after

he was gone. She heard from him frequently; and his letters were always hopeful, sometimes exulting, with regard to the prospect which was opening before him. Selina used to laugh at her when she received one of those precious letters, and ran away to read it undisturbed in her own room. Little cared she for the laugh – she was too happy; and if she thought at all about her sister's sneers or sarcasms, it was to pity her, sincerely and unfeignedly, that she could not comprehend the holiness of the feeling she mocked and derided. Selina's destined husband meanwhile was absent on the continent. He had an estate in Normandy, and was compelled to be present during the progress of some improvements. On his return they would be married, and Selina waited till then with considerably less patience and philosophy than Lucy evinced. Fifty times a day did she peevishly lament the delay; but not, alas! from any excess of affection to the man she was about to marry: it was always *apropos* of some small inconvenience or privation that she murmured. If she had to walk into the town, she would sigh for the time 'when, as Mrs Forde, she would have a carriage at her own exclusive command;' or if she coveted some costly bauble, the name of Alfred was breathed impatiently, and a reference to 'pin-money' was sure to follow. The marriage might have taken place by proxy with singular advantage: if Mr Forde had sent a cheque on his banker for half the amount of his income, Miss Selina would have married it with all the complacency in the world!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.