ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

EROSOPHIC SOCIETY,

AT THE
NON-CIRCULATING
ROOM USE ONLY
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA,

AUGUST 9, 1834.

BY PROFESSOR TUTWILER.

TUSCALOOSA:
ROBINSON & DAVENPORT, Printers.
1834.
Hall of the Erosopic Society, August 9, 1834.

Prof. H. Tutwiler: Dear sir—Permit us, as a committee from the Erosopic Society, to tender you the sincere thanks of that association for the honor done them by the very excellent and appropriate Address, which you to-day delivered, on their third anniversary, and also respectfully to solicit that you favor the Society with a copy of the same for publication.

With sentiments of the most cordial and sincere regard,

We subscribe ourselves,

Your very humble and obedient servants,

THOMAS M. PETERS,  
WM. S. PARHAM, \[ Committee.  
REUBEN MUNDY, \]

Prof. H. Tutwiler.

University of Alabama, August 11, 1834.

Gentlemen: In compliance with your request, as a committee from the Erosopic Society, I herewith submit to your disposal a copy of my Address delivered before them on their third anniversary.

Accept my warmest thanks, gentlemen, for the very kind and flattering manner in which you were pleased to communicate the wishes of the Society—and believe me

With sentiments of
Esteem and friendship,

Yours truly,

H. TUTWILER.

To Messrs. THOMAS M. PETERS,  
WM. S. PARHAM, \[ Committee.  
REUBEN MUNDY, \]
ADDRESS.

Man is called the noblest of the Creator's works: and so he is—but in what does his superiority consist? Is it not chiefly in his capability of intellectual and moral improvement? We see the lower animals in the short space of a few months attaining their utmost perfection, and after the lapse of centuries we cannot perceive that their species have advanced a single step: the beaver builds its dam and the bird its nest as they have done from time immemorial. Man only has the faculty of progressive improvement: he has within him an intellect and a soul endowed with expansive forces that know no limits. By the aid of this principle he becomes from the weakest and most helpless of all created beings the undisputed lord of the creation. He can treasure up the results of his own experience and observation; he can avail himself of the experience and observation of those around him, and appropriate to his own use the collected wisdom of those who have gone before. Thus is he constantly tending towards perfection, and here might be rest his title to superiority in spite of those philosophers who would elevate the brutes to the rank of man, or degrade man to the level of the brutes. But if, on the contrary, man is guided by instinct instead of reason, if he suffer himself to become the slave of his appetites, the victim of his prejudices and his passions, where, let me ask, is his boasted superiority? Truly, "man that is in honor and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish."

The benevolent Author of Nature has implanted within man the desire of knowledge, or principle of curiosity as the moving force which is to carry him onward in his intellectual career. This is one of the most important principles of our nature; it commences with our very existence, and terminates—we know not where. Observe the infant philosopher prying into the construction of his playthings; see him breaking open his rattle to ascertain the cause of its noise; hear him constantly asking questions of those about him, and often such questions as the human mind cannot answer: unless indeed (which is too often the case) he is told by his injudicious parent or teacher that children must not "ask questions." And here permit me to remark, what a heavy responsibility rests upon those to whom is entrusted the early management of this important principle; it may be blunted if not entirely destroyed, in infancy, or it may be directed to useless and unworthy objects.

The gratification of this desire is always accompanied with pleasure. Man is not merely endowed with a disposition to seek after knowledge, but the knowledge when obtained is an inexhaustible source of enjoyment springing up in the mind without the consideration of any direct personal advantage whatever—this is no necessary connection—but it is a part of that golden chain let down from the throne of the Eternal, which indissolubly binds together the interest and the happiness of man. The gratification of our senses is also accompanied with pleasure, but how vast the difference between the pleasures of sense and those of intellect! the former are necessarily limited in number, the latter admit of unlimited increase; in the cup of sensual enjoyment so soon as we go beyond a certain depth, (and that no very great one) we come to the dregs where all is bitterness; but the intellectual pleasures may be continually repeated without satiety or distaste. They form a "well of living water in which there are no dregs—the deeper we go the purer it becomes; they are pleasures too of which we cannot be deprived, and which may be enjoyed in every situation in which man can be placed. While the enjoyments of sense are dependent on external circumstances and events over which we have no control, the pleasures of intellect rise from the mind itself 'unsolicited, unborrowed and unbought.' "The labor of intellectual search," says a late celebrated writer, "resembles and exceeds the tumultuous labors of the chase, and the consciousness of overcoming a formidable obstacle, or of lighting on some happy discovery, gives all the enjoyment of a conquest without any of these corroding reflections by which the latter must be impaired. Can we doubt that Archimedes who was so absorbed in his contemplations, as not to be diverted by the sacking of his native city, and was killed in the very act of meditating a mathematical theorem, did not, when he exclaimed, 'I have found it! I have found it! feel a transport as genuine as was ever experienced after the most brilliant victory.'" When Sir J. Newton was engaged

* Robert Hall.
in those mathematical calculations, which were to confirm his bold hypothesis of the system of the Universe, his excitement became so great, as he found each figure bringing him nearer and nearer the anticipated result, that he was unable to proceed with the calculation, and had to entrust its completion to a friend. When Dr. Franklin ascertained by a most dangerous experiment, the sameness of lightning with electricity, an emotion of joy so powerful overcame him that he felt he could at that moment have willingly died. Such instances might be multiplied, but these are enough to shew that there is a lofty, a disinterested pleasure attending the pursuit of knowledge.

The advantages of knowledge, apart from its pleasures, are too manifest to require illustration. They will be seen in the strongest light if we compare a civilized nation with a barbarous one. What but knowledge made the Athenian superior to the Seythian, the Roman to the Gaul? It has been often said and admitted that knowledge is power—that it is wealth; but we see that it is more than these, it is happiness—happiness in the acquisition, and happiness in the possession. We might even go further, and say that knowledge tended to the promotion of virtue; and this it does, not only by multiplying the mental resources, and thus elevating the mind above low and grovelling pursuits, but by leading to the formation of habits of order and industry, without which it cannot be acquired. It is not a sufficient answer to this position to say, that some learned men have been bad men; we might ask, would they not have been much worse without their learning? We do not pretend to say that the cultivation of the intellect alone is enough to make a man altogether virtuous or happy; but we do contend, that in a majority of cases knowledge will be found acting the part of a handmaid not only to natural morality, but to religion. Hence, says the wise man, “that the heart be without knowledge, it is not good.”

Great are the pleasures and advantages arising from knowledge, that some philosophers have attempted to resolve the desire of it into self-love; but it seems evident, that this desire must have existed prior to any experience of the pleasures arising from its gratification. Cicero takes a true view of the subject when he calls knowledge the food of the mind, and Mr. Stewart has correctly remarked that the object of curiosity is not happiness, but knowledge. It appears, therefore, to be an ultimate principle of our nature, given to us for the wisest purposes, and it is our duty to cultivate and improve it. Indeed, it may be doubted whether all the advantages and pleasures of knowledge would have been sufficient, without the aid of the principle of curiosity, to urge men forward in its pursuit, and it has been well remarked that “the only enduring incentive to vigorous exertion and the investigation of truth, is the love of knowledge and the feeling of pleasure arising from its pursuit.” When this has been in a measure deadened by early education, other principles, such as the love of praise and the stimulus of personal distinction may be resorted to, but they will be found comparatively weak and ineffectual.

There is scarcely any other principle of our nature so powerful in intensity and duration as the love of knowledge when once truly awakened. The chill hand of poverty has in vain attempted to freeze its current. In vain have disease and affliction combined to stop its progress. Persecution has threatened and punished in vain. Like the mountain stream, it gathers strength as it advances, until the mightiest obstacles give way before it. It was the ardent passion for knowledge that carried onward a Newton to “scan the wide world and number every star” it was this that sustained a Roger Bacon, a Copernicus, a Galileo, under all the persecutions of ignorance and bigotry; and it was this that moved the arm of our Franklin “to grasp the lightning’s fiery wing” and like the infant god of the fable, play with the thunderbolts of Jupiter.

We are too apt to imagine that the difficulties arising from external circumstances, form the greatest impediments in the pursuit of knowledge; but this is far from being the case. The truth is, there is no one who has greater difficulties to struggle with in its pursuit, than he who has been brought up in the lap of ease and luxury. In such a one the love of knowledge meets with its most dangerous enemy, the love of ease; an enemy, the more dangerous, because it is unperceived; it makes its advances gradually and imperceptibly, until what was at first regarded as an innocent fault, if not a kind of negative virtue, obtains the ascendancy, and not merely suspends the functions of our other virtues, but totally destroys them. “Laziness,” says Rochebruneau, “is as it is, often gets the mastery of us, overrules all the designs and actions of life, and insensibly consumes both
passions and virtues;" and the same author adds that we have a mora of laziness in the mind than in the body. Here, then, may be one cause why so many who possess all the advantages of wealth (and they are great) are outstripped in the race of those who have to struggle with poverty and its thousand ills, and who possess, perhaps no more natural talents. It is a matter of every day observation, that many of the most eminent men of every country have had to force their way to eminence through the most powerful external obstacles, and this fact led, no doubt, to the remark of a celebrated French writer, that no man could be great without encountering and overcoming difficulties; but we repeat, ‘the temptations of wealth’ are as difficult to be overcome as ‘the obstructions of indigence.’ To the wealthy student, therefore, who feels not the stimulus of necessity, we would say, guard with vigilance against the very first approaches of this insidious foe; listen not to her siren song; however light her claims may seem at first, depend upon it, when they become so heavy as to be felt, they will be too strong to be broken. Would you, for inglorious ease, resign your birthright to all the lofty pleasures of knowledge? You have advantages which but few can possess, and you know who has said, ‘where much is given, much will be required.’ But to the indigent student who is sometimes almost ready, to shrink back at the obstacles which seem to block up his path, we feel authorized to speak in the language of encouragement, and to say, that ‘no difficulties arising from external circumstances can eventually resist a steady determination to excel.’ These obstacles, which look so formidable at a distance, will vanish when you approach them. Read the ‘Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties,’ and see how many have triumphed in the same, or a harder struggle. Let this consideration smooth the rough ascent and cheer you onward to the temple of fame. When we look around us and behold the inexhaustible fountain at which we are permitted to gratify our thirst for knowledge, we cannot fail to be filled with gratitude to the giver of every good and perfect gift. The man of contemplative mind may find:

And when from external objects he turns his view within, a

new world of wonder opens to his enraptured vision. Should our globe continue to exist for thousands of years, the vast ocean of Knowledge will still be, in a great measure, unexplored, although each generation may set out from the point which the preceding one had reached. In the physical world, in the course of a few centuries, or less, it is fair to presume that there will be sciences, of the very names of which we are ignorant, while those now taught will be carried to a higher degree of perfection; and in the moral world, there seems no less reason for believing that a vast amount of truth remains yet to be discovered. This reflection should teach us the absurdity of ever remitting our efforts and imagining that our education is complete; it should teach us, too, the useful lesson of humility, and a sober estimate of the powers of the human mind—and it is worthy of remark, that nothing is so well calculated to save us from self conceit as a constant progress in knowledge. The wise man has ever been the most humble. When the oracle pronounced Socrates the wisest of men, he said it was because he felt that he knew comparatively nothing, while others thought that they knew much; and herein consists the danger of a little knowledge; it is not to be mistaken for a great deal. Sir Isaac Newton used to say to his friends when they expressed their admiration of his great discoveries, that, to himself he seemed to have been but a child gathering pebbles on the sea-shore, while the immense ocean of truth lay unexplored before him. Knowledge has been well compared to an expence ever widening before us and around us. Its horizon seems not only always as distant as ever, but always becoming more distant, the more we strive to approach it, for every one discovery is merely the opening of a road to other discoveries and the lifting of us at the same time to a new eminence from which we see a broader domain than before, both of the known and the unknown.” The consideration of the progressive increase of knowledge is likewise well calculated to fill the mind with the most pleasing emotions. “When the warm glow of youthful feeling has passed away,” says an anonymous writer, “I know of nothing so worthy to replace it, nothing so well calculated to relieve the insipidity of middle life, as the prospect of continual advances in knowledge, inspiring hopes which are perpetually gratified and perpetually renewed. An adequate view, a deep impression of the progressive character of science is utterly inconsistent with that
overcoming vanity which causes a man to place his own opinions as the limit of improvement."* Such considerations will keep the mind open to conviction, and every day will contribute to the correction of our errors, the solution of our difficulties and the increase of our knowledge. And here it may be proper to warn you against that fatal delusion of supposing for a moment that your education will be completed when you leave this place, or indeed at any period of your lives. You cannot be too often reminded, that the few years spent in college are barely sufficient to begin your education—not so much to acquire knowledge as to learn how to learn: you are here engaged in sharpening and preparing the instruments with which you are to work hereafter. If, when you leave these halls, you pack up your little stock of knowledge, and label it complete, you will not only cease to advance, but will lose your relative position in the world of intellect. You will, in effect, be carried backwards. It is not uncommon to hear young persons ask, what use will it be to me to study this or that branch? I never expect to apply it, to any practical purpose. But, independently of the mental gratification which accompanies the pursuit of every branch of learning, these studies may be useful as a discipline to the mind, or as a key to the attainment of other knowledge. It should never be lost sight of, that the objects of intellectual education are twofold: the development and exercise of the mental faculties, and the acquisition of knowledge. If the Author of nature had formed us with minds at once matured and capable of grasping any subject whatever, there might then be some plausibility in the question. But this, we know, is not the case: the mental faculties, as well as the bodily, must be developed and strengthened by exercise.

Knowledge, then, being so desirable, as well for its own sake, as for the benefits it confers, the question naturally arises, are all capable of enjoying this happiness? We answer, they are, though not perhaps in the same degree. Some philosophers, indeed, have even gone so far as to assert that there are no natural differences between one man and another in point of intellectual character, but that all are born with an equal capacity of improvement. Admitting, however, the contrary to be true, and we see no reason why there should not be mental as well as bodily differences.

* Essay on the Progress of Knowledge.

among men. Still, it is certain, that we have each of us received our talents, whether five, or two, or one; and it is as much the privilege and duty of him who has received one talent to cultivate and improve it, as of him who has received five. Should he hide it in the earth, or lay it up in a napkin, he will most assuredly be punished as a wicked and slothful servant. Of how much sorrier punishment will he be thought worthy, should he waste or misapply it!

How these talents may be best improved is a problem which has not yet been fully solved, but to the solution of which we are gradually approaching. We shall briefly hint at a few general principles. And, in the first place, let me observe, that personal effort is indispensable. Nothing great or good has ever been or ever will be accomplished without labor; but this very labor becomes a pleasure—labor ipse voluptas. What others can do for you is but as the small dust of the balance compared with what you can do for yourselves. This is the first step of the ladder; without which the others cannot be reached. But this labor must be accompanied with attention, else it will be exerted in vain; indeed, attention is absolutely "necessary for the due exercise of every other mental process." Sir Isaac Newton was wont to say, that if there was any mental habit or endowment in which he excelled the generality of men, it was that of being able to fix his attention exclusively on the subject before him; and this power of concentrating the attention will, if I mistake not, be found to be a predominant trait in the character of all truly great minds. For the formation of this habit, (and it is nothing more,) there is no rule more important than the simple one of "doing one thing at a time." But something more than bare attention is necessary, and that is reflection. We must think for ourselves, and not be the mere passive receptacles of the thoughts of others. Knowledge is not like a plant that "can be transplanted in full maturity from one mind to another;" it is more like a seed which "must be sown, strike root, and go through the whole process of vegetation, before it can have a living connection with the new soil, and flourish in complete vigor and development." Books have now become one of the most important sources of information; but they may be, and no doubt often are, productive of evil instead of good—as children are disposed to believe every thing which they hear, so unreflecting persons (who are only children of a larger growth) are
disposed to believe every thing which they read, when it does not conflict with a previously formed opinion. Now to read any book and adopt what is in it as mere matter of authority, will not only lead to confirmed ignorance, but is positively hurtful to the mind. "Nothing in truth," says that practical philosopher, D. Stewart, "has such a tendency to weaken not only the powers of invention, but the intellectual powers in general, as a habit of extensive and various reading without reflection. The activity and force of the mind are gradually impaired in consequence of disuse: and not unfrequently all our principles and opinions come to be lost in the infinite multiplicity and discordancy of our acquired ideas." For the sake of such readers (and they are many) Bishop Butler says he has often wished it had been the custom to lay before people nothing, in matters of argument, but premises and leave them to draw conclusions themselves. It is this habit of reading without reflection which has brought book-knowledge, as it is called, into contempt. Why is it that we are often astonished at the simple and clear view of what we imagined an intricate subject, presented by those who have not had what is called an education? Is it not because they have been accustomed to think for themselves? Not having the time or the means which others have, they have been thrown upon their own resources, and have thus acquired habits of reflection. And what, but the disposition to receive at second hand the opinions of others without examination, shed such disastrous twilight, for so many centuries, over the human intellect—when it was a sufficient reason for theories the most absurd and repugnant to common sense to say the master hath said it? 'when Aristotle was every thing and reason nothing.' But when the human mind was freed from the trammels of authority it sprang forward with an elasticity which has not yet ceased to act. The ardent inquirer after knowledge will never give his assent but upon reflection; neither will he seek for arguments merely to support preconceived opinions: 'his most anxious inquiry will be what is truth?'; and he will 'woo her with the unwearied ardor of a lover.' As accuracy is only another name for truth, let me urge upon you the importance of aiming at it in all your acquisitions; at least, learn one thing thoroughly, with which, as a standard, you may be able to compare your other knowledge.

If care be necessary in the manner of reading, it is not less so in the matter. It is with the mind precisely as with the body; its vigor does not depend so much upon the quantity of food taken, as upon the quality, and the manner in which it is digested. A taste for reading is not always indicative of a love of knowledge. It may originate in a restless desire of excitement and be compatible with the greatest indolence of thought. In youth the imagination predominates over the other faculties, and it is well that it should; but the exercise (or rather the indulgence) of this faculty is so easy and so agreeable, that there is great danger of its being too much stimulated, while the other faculties of the mind remain dormant, perhaps undeveloped. This is one of the evils likely to be produced in the minds of youth, by that class of fictitious works called novels. They give the reins to the imagination at a time when it ought rather to be checked, and the disproportionate influence which this faculty thus acquires, accompanies us in spite of ourselves, just as "the image, which the eye acquires from looking "at any dazzling object, still appears before it wherever it turns." It is true, that these books may, and often do, contain much instruction, but is it not equally true that these parts are generally hurried over by the confirmed novel reader as the dullest portion of the work? And how few are there who will not find it a task to toil through the pages of a novel, after being made acquainted with the final catastrophe? But do they not exert a good influence over the affections and expand the heart with beneficent energy? We have yet to learn that the readers of novels are more susceptible of the passions of love and gratitude, of compassion and benevolence, than others. On the contrary, such artificial excitements tend rather to harden the heart. They nourish a cold sentimentalitiy which feels no sympathy for the 'flesh and blood' around them, but reserves it all for the creatures of its own imagining. The worst effect, however, of many of these books is, that they lead us to place our hopes of success in any pursuit, upon some lucky turn of fortune, instead of, where it ought to be placed, upon our own exertions; and it has been somewhere remarked that a propensity to look more to chance than to probability invariably debilitates the reasoning faculties and vitiates the moral sentiments. If there be any period of life at which these books may be read with safety, it is when the judgement has attained the ascendancy, and then they may furnish a pleasant relaxation from severer studies.
There is one important means of intellectual improvement to which I must be permitted to call your attention, and which, it is to be feared, is too much neglected. I allude to the practice of frequent writing in connection with your studies. It has been objected that this plan is unfavorable to the memory, by superseding, to a certain degree, the necessity of its exertion; but it lays the foundation for perpetual progression, by enabling us to advance from elementary truths to those which are more complex, just as the algebraic notation enables the mathematician to carry his calculations much farther than he could have done without it. A mistaken and injurious notion prevails that the practice of writing is unfavorable to the public speaker, but Lord Brougham (whom all will admit to be a competent judge) says on this subject:—

"I should lay it down as a rule admitting of no exceptions, that a man will speak well in proportion as he has written much, and that with equal talents he will be the finest extempore speaker, when no time for preparation is allowed, who has prepared himself the most sedulously, when he had an opportunity of delivering a premeditated speech—all the exceptions I have ever heard cited to this principle are apparent ones only.

Hitherto we have regarded man chiefly as an intellectual being; but it must not be forgotten that he has also a moral nature, capable of improvement, and upon the proper improvement of which depends his situation, in a great degree, in the life that now is, but chiefly in that which is to come. However great may be a man's intellectual attainments, if he lack moral worth, he will be but a painted sepulchre. The very vilest of mankind acknowledge the importance of moral character by pretending to virtues which they do not possess: and hence it has been said, with truth, that "hypocrisy itself is a homage which vice pays to virtue." But nothing short of the actual possession will ensure a permanent reputation. The false pretender may succeed in deceiving during his own life time, but posterity will tear away the veil which he has thrown over his actions, and exhibit them in all their naked deformity.

The time has been when mankind seemed disposed to bestow more liberal applause upon their destroyers than upon their benefactors, but this feeling is rapidly passing away: the glare of military glory has lost much of its dazzling lustre, and the conquerors of the earth are fast descending to their proper level. The period is approaching when a man's fame will be proportionate only to his usefulness as a member of society; and may we not indulge the hope that our country will be the first to act upon this important truth? Why does the American mother teach her infant offspring to look with reverence and affection the name of Washington? Is it for his military prowess? Then might Arnold, the traitor, lay claim to the same homage? No, it is for his nobler, his purer virtues; those virtues whose only aim was his country's, his God's and truth's. All the blood stained laurels of Bonaparte would be well exchanged for a single leaf from the wreath of our own Washington.

The pleasures arising from the cultivation of our moral nature surpass the pleasures of intellect as much as the latter are superior to the pleasures of sense; they are, in fact, the only perfect pleasures. But the whole history of the world shows that man, when left to himself, is utterly inadequate to the attainment of perfect moral purity—some higher aid is requisite, and Christianity descends from Heaven to supply it. All, even its enemies, admit that the Christian religion exhibits the only perfect code of morality that has ever existed. No other system unites the essentials of completeness and consistency. The law of the Lord is perfect. But it is not only as furnishing an infallible rule of life that Christianity lays claim to our attention. She comes, a more welcome messenger. She brings us good tidings of great joy. It is the only system that has ever attempted to heal the awful breach between God and man. Even admitting that unaided reason could enable us to 'find out the Almighty,' and demonstrate the perfection of his natural and moral attributes, still, the mighty question would remain unanswered. We should but see more clearly the breadth and depth of that 'great gulf' which separates guilty man from a Being of infinite purity and boundless perfections. The light of Nature, as it is called, is a dim and flickering light, serving only to render the darkness more visible. It shows the man the danger of his situation without pointing him to the means of escape. Nothing but the sun of righteousness can illuminate the narrow way, and the strait gate, which leadeth unto life. Here is a subject, compared with which, all others sink into insignificance. The knowledge of which we have been speaking is confined to this earth: its pleasures and advantages, for aught we know, terminate here. We dare not pro-
mise you that it will be of any avail in that endless state of existence to which we are all hastening, and of which this is but the beginning. But this is a knowledge which stretches into futurity and lays hold on life eternal. If Religion be important, it is all-important. Let me entreat you, then, to give to this subject that attention which its importance demands. All we ask of you is to examine it for yourselves. Go not to the ridicule or the misrepresentations of its open or secret enemies. Go not to the creed or practices of its professed friends; but go to the Bible—there you will find Christianity in all her native purity and simplicity. She shuns no investigation; she asks for no concealment or disguise; her language to all who inquire is, come and see. But she will not force herself upon our attention; her voice comes not in 'peals of thunder,' which all must hearken to, but as a whisper in the ears of those who will listen, and like the still voice of conscience it may be disregarded. Neglect it not at your peril. Inquiry is a duty of which you cannot divest yourselves. Do not expect to take shelter under the fallacious maxim that you are not responsible for your belief. Belief rests upon evidence: evidence demands investigation; and this investigation must be full and fair. Come to the subject, then, with a mind free from prejudice and a sincere desire of ascertaining the truth; and when you are convinced of the heavenly origin of Christianity, submit yourselves to her authority. Let her precepts regulate all your conduct. Let them be a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your path; then will you grow in favor and good understanding both with God and man. Reason, as well as Revelation, declares that 'whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.' This is the seed-time with you: that you may so improve, as to reap a full harvest of length of days and honors here, and a happy immortality hereafter; is, and ever will be, the prayer of him, who now thanks you for the honor you have conferred upon him.