

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

THE RIGHT HON. B. DISRAELI, M.P.

DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1873,
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS INSTALLATION

AS

Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow



GLASGOW

JAMES MACLEHOSE, 61 ST. VINCENT STREET

Bookseller and Publisher to the University

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MR. PRINCIPAL, PROFESSORS, AND STUDENTS,

My first duty, and my deepest gratification, is to thank you for the honour which you conferred on me two years ago. It is a high one. No one can be insensible to sympathy from the unknown; but the pleasure is necessarily heightened when it is offered by the educated and refined; when that body is representative, and, above all, when it represents the youth of a famous country.

My next duty, and one of which the fulfilment is scarcely less gratifying, is to avail myself of the privilege attendant on the office to which you have raised me, and to offer you some observations, either on the course of your studies or the conduct of your lives, which, if made by me, will be made without pretence or presumption, quite satisfied if, when we are separated, any chance remark of mine may recur to your memory, and lead you to not altogether unprofitable meditation.

Were I to follow my own bent, I would dwell on those delightful studies which occupy a considerable portion of your time within your academic halls ; studies which, while they form your taste and strengthen your intelligence, will prove to you in future years both a guide and a consolation ; but when I recollect the illustrious roll of those who have preceded me in this office, and remember how fully and how recently many of them have devoted their genius and their learning to such an enterprise, I am inclined to think that the field, though in my opinion inexhaustible, has been for the present sufficiently cultivated, and that, as you are about to enter life at a period which promises, or rather which threatens, to be momentous, it would not be inappropriate were I to make some observations which may tend to assist you in your awaiting trials.

He who would succeed in life, and obtain that position to which his character and capacity entitle him, has need of two kinds of knowledge. It would seem, at the first blush, that Self-Knowledge were not very difficult of attainment. If there be any subject on which a person can arrive at accurate conclusions, it should be his own disposition and his own talents. But it is not so. The period of youth, in this respect, is one of great doubt and

difficulty. It is a period alike of false confidence and unreasonable distrust, of perplexity, of despondency, and sometimes of despair. It has been said by an eminent physician, that there are few persons of either sex who have attained their eighteenth year, who have not contemplated withdrawing from the world; withdrawing from that world which, in fact, they have never entered. Doubtless this morbid feeling is occasioned, in a great degree, by a dread of the unknown, but it is also much to be attributed to, and it certainly is heightened by, an ignorance of themselves.

How, then, is this self-knowledge to be acquired, and where are we to obtain assistance in this quest? From the family circle? Its incompetency in this respect is a proverb. Perception of character is always a rare gift; but around the domestic hearth it is almost unknown. Every one is acquainted with the erroneous estimates of their offspring which have been made even by illustrious parents. The silent, but perhaps pensive, boy is looked upon as a dullard, while the flippancy of youth, in a commonplace character, is interpreted into a dangerous vivacity, which may, in time, astonish, perhaps even alarm the world. A better criterion should be found in the judgment of contemporaries who are our equals. But the generous ardour of youth is

not favourable to critical discrimination. Its sympathy is quick ; it admires and applauds ; but it lavishes its applause and admiration on qualities which are often not intrinsically important, and it always exaggerates. And thus it is that the hero of school and of college often disappoints expectation in after life, but the truth is he has shown no deficiency in the qualities which obtained him his early repute, but he has been wanting in the capacity adapted to subsequent opportunities.

Some are of opinion that the surest judge of youthful character must be the tutor—and there is a passage in Isocrates on this head not without interest. He was an accomplished instructor, and he tells us he always studied to discover the bent of those who attended his lectures. So, after due observation, he would say to one—You are intended for action, and the camp is the life which will become you ; to another, you should cultivate poetry ; a third was adapted to the passionate exertions of the Pnyx ; while a fourth was clearly destined for the groves and porticos of philosophy. The early Jesuits, who were masters of education, were accustomed to keep secret registers of their observations on their pupils, and generations afterwards, when these records were examined, it is said, the happy prescience of their remarks was strikingly

proved by the subsequent success of many who had attained fame in arts and arms. But the Jesuits, gentlemen, whatever they may be now, were then very clever men ; and I must confess that I am doubtful whether the judgment of tutors in general would be as infallible as that of Isocrates.

In the first place, a just perception of character is always a rare gift. When possessed in a high degree it is the quality which specially indicates the leader of men. It is that which enables a general or a minister to select the fit instrument for the public purpose,—without which all the preparations for a campaign, however costly and complete, may be fruitless, and all the deliberations of Councils and all the discussions of Parliaments, prove mere dust and wind. Scholars and philosophers are in general too much absorbed by their own peculiar studies or pursuits to be skilled in the discrimination of character, and if the aptitude of a pupil is recognised by them it is generally when he has evinced a disposition to excel in some branch of acquirement which has established their own celebrity.

No, gentlemen, I believe, after all, it will be found that it is best and inevitable, in the pursuit of self-knowledge, that we should depend on self-communion. Unquestionably, where there is a

strong predisposition, it will assert itself in spite of all obstacles, but even here only after an initiation of many errors and much self-deception. One of the fruitful sources of that self-deception is to be found in the susceptibility of the youthful mind. The sympathy is so quick that we are apt to transfer to our own persons the qualities which we admire in others. If it be the age of a great poet, his numbers are for ever resounding in our own ear, and we sigh for his laurels; if a military age, nothing will content us but to be at the head of armies; if an age of oratory and politics, our spirit requires that we should be leaders of parties and Ministers of State. In some instances the predisposition may be true, but it is in the nature of things that the instances must be rare. In 99 cases out of 100 the feeling is not idiosyncratic but mimetic, and we have mistaken a quick sensibility for creative power. Then comes to a young man the period of disappointment and despondency. To publish poems which no one will read; to make speeches to which no one will listen; after reveries of leading armies and directing councils, to find yourself, on your entrance into the business of life, incapable of influencing the conduct of an ordinary individual—all this is bitter; but all depends upon how the lesson is received. A weak spirit will not survive this catastrophe of his self-

love. He will sink into chronic despondency, and, without attempting to rally, he will pass through life as a phantom, and be remembered as an old man only by the golden promise of his deceptive youth. But a man of sense will accept these consequences, however apparently mortifying, with courage and candour. He will dive into his own intelligence, he will analyse the circumstances of his failure, he will discriminate how much was occasioned by indigenous deficiencies, and how much may be attributed to external and fortuitous circumstances. And in this severe introspection he may obtain that self-knowledge he requires; his failures may be the foundation of his ultimate success, and in this moral and intellectual struggle he may discover the true range of his powers and the right bent of his character and capacity.

So much, gentlemen, for Self-Knowledge, a subject that for ages has furnished philosophers with treatises. I do not pretend to be a philosopher, and I have not offered you a treatise, but I have made some remarks which are, at least, the result of my own observation.

But assuming that you have at length attained this indispensable self-knowledge, and that you have an opportunity in the pursuits of life of following

the bent of your disposition, we come now to the second and not less important condition of success in life—Have you that other kind of knowledge which is required? Do you comprehend the Spirit of the Age in which your faculties are to be exercised? Hitherto you have been as explorers in a mountain district. You have surveyed and examined valleys; you have penetrated gorges; you have crossed many a ridge and range, till at length, having overcome all obstacles, you have reached the crest of the commanding height, and, like the soldiers of Xenophon, you behold the sea. But the sea that you behold is the Ocean of Life! In what vessels are you going to embark? With what instruments are you furnished? What is the port of your destination?

It is singular that though there is no lack of those who will explain the past, and certainly no want of those who will predict the future, when the present is concerned—the present that we see and feel—our opinions about it are in general bewildered and mistaken. And yet, without this acquaintance with the spirit of the age in which we live, whatever our culture and whatever our opportunities, it is probable that our lives may prove a blunder. When the young King of Macedon decided that the time had arrived when Europe should invade Asia,

he recognised the spirit of his age. The revelations of the weakness of the great King which had been made during the immortal expedition of the Ten Thousand, and still more during the campaigns of Agesilaus, had gradually formed a public opinion which Alexander dared to represent. When Caius Julius perceived that the colossal Empire formed by the Senate and populace of Rome could not be sustained on the limited foundation of the municipal institutions of a single city, however illustrious, he understood the spirit of his age. Constantine understood the spirit of his age when he recognised the sign under which he was resolved to conquer. I think that Luther recognised the spirit of the age when he nailed his theses against indulgences to the gates of a Thuringian Church. The great Princes of the House of Tudor, and the greater statesmen they employed, were all persons who understood the spirit of their age.

But, it may be said, these are heroic instances. A perception of the spirit of their age may be necessary to the success of princes and statesmen, but it is not needful or equally needful for those of lesser degree. I think there would be fallacy in this criticism, and that the necessity of this knowledge pervades the whole business of life. Take, for example, the choice of a profession. A know-

ledge of the spirit of the age may save a young man from embracing a profession which the spirit of the age dooms to become obsolete. It is the same with the pursuits of commerce. This knowledge may guard a man from embarking his capital in a decaying trade, and from forming connections and even establishments in countries from which the spirit of the age is gradually diverting all commercial transactions. I would say, a knowledge of the spirit of the age is necessary for every public man, and in a country like ours,—where the subject is called upon hourly to exercise rights or to fulfil duties which, in however small a degree, go to the aggregate of that general sentiment which ultimately governs States,—every one is a public man, although he may not be a public character.

But it does not follow, because the spirit of the age is perceived and recognised, it should be embraced and followed, or even that success in life depends upon adopting it. What I wished to impress upon you was that success in life depended on comprehending it. The spirit of the age may be an unsound and injurious spirit; it may be the moral duty of a man, not only not to defer to, but to resist it; and if it be unsound and injurious, in so doing he will not only fulfil his duty, but he may accomplish his success in life. The spirit of the age, for instance,

was in favour of the Crusades. They occasioned a horrible havoc of human life ; they devastated Asia and exhausted Europe ; and, in all probability, in acting in this instance according to the spirit of the age, a man would have forfeited his life, and certainly wasted his estate, with no further satisfaction than having massacred some Jews and slain some Saracens.

What then, gentlemen, is the spirit of the age in which we ourselves live ; of that world which, in a few years more or less, you will all have entered—where you are to establish yourselves in life—where you have to encounter in that object every conceivable difficulty, perplexities of judgment, material obstacles, tests of all your qualities, and searching trials of your character,—and all those circumstances more or less affected by the spirit of the age, an acquaintance with which will assist you in forming your decisions and in guiding your course.

It appears to me that I should not greatly err were I to describe the spirit of this age as the spirit of Equality. But equality is a word of wide import, under which various schools of thought may assemble, and arrive at different and even contradictory conclusions. I hold that Civil Equality—that is, equality of all subjects before the law, and that a law which recognises the personal rights of all subjects—

is the only foundation of a perfect commonwealth, one which secures to all liberty, order, and justice. The principle of civil equality has long prevailed in this kingdom ; it has been applied during the last century, more finely and more completely to the constantly and largely varying circumstances of the country ; but it had prevailed more or less in Britain for centuries ; and I attribute the patriotism of our population mainly to this circumstance ; and I believe that it has had more to do with the security of the soil than those geographical attributes usually enlarged upon.

Another land, long our foe, but now only our rival in the arts of peace, thought fit, at the end of the last century, to reconstruct its social system, and to rebuild it on the principle of social equality. To effect this object it was prepared to make, and it made, great sacrifices. It subverted all the institutions of the country : a Monarchy of 800 years, whose traditionary and systematic policy had created the Kingdom ; a National Church, for, though Romanist, it had secured its liberties ; a tenure of land which maintained a valiant nobility that never can be restored ; it confiscated all endowments and abolished all corporations ; erased from the map of the soil all the ancient divisions, and changed the landmarks and very names of the country. Indeed, it

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entirely effected its purpose, which was to destroy the whole of the existing social elements, and level the past to the dust. This experiment has had fair play, and you can judge of its results by the experience of eighty years. It is not in Scotland that the name of France will ever be mentioned without affection ; and I will not yield to any Scotchman in my appreciation of the brilliant qualities and the resplendent achievements of its gifted people. We are not blind to their errors ; but their calamities are greater than their errors, and their merits are greater than their calamities. When I heard that their bright city was beleaguered, and that the breach was in the wall, I confess I felt that pang which I remember, as a child, I always experienced when I read of Lysander entering the city of the Violet Crown.

But, gentlemen, I may on this occasion be permitted to say that, of all the many services which France has rendered to Europe—Europe, that land of ancient creeds and ancient governments, and manners and customs older than both—not the least precious is the proof she has afforded to us that the principle of Social Equality is not one to which a nation can safely trust in the hour of trial and in the day of danger. Then it is found that there is no one to lead and nothing to rally round. There

is not a man in the country who can assemble fifty people. And rightly ; since for an individual to direct is a usurpation of the sovereignty of the many. Those who ought to lead feel isolated, and those who wish to obey know not to whom to offer their devotion. All personal influences are dead. All depends on the Central Government—a sufficient power in fair weather, but in stormy times generally that part of the machinery of government that first breaks.

Civil Equality prevails in Britain, and Social Equality prevails in France. The essence of Civil Equality is to abolish Privilege. The essence of Social Equality is to destroy Classes. If the principle of equality at the present day assumed only these two forms, I do not think there would be much to perplex you in your choice, or in your judgment, as to their respective results. But that is not so. The equality which is now sought by vast multitudes of men in many countries, which is enforced by writers not deficient in logic, in eloquence, and even in learning, scarcely deigns to recognise civil equality, and treats social equality only as an obsolete truth. No moral or metaphysical elements will satisfy them. They demand Physical and Material Equality. This is the disturbing spirit which is now rising like a moaning wind in Europe, and

which, when you enter the world may possibly be a raging storm. It may, therefore, be as well that your attention should be called to its nature, and that you may be led to consider its consequences.

The leading principle of this new school is that there is no happiness which is not material, and that every living being has a right to share in that physical welfare. The first obstacles which they find to the establishment of their views are naturally the rights of private property. Therefore the rights of property must be abolished. But the social system must be established on some principle, and therefore for the rights of property they would substitute the rights of labour. Now, the rights of labour cannot be fully enjoyed if there be any limit to employment. The great limit to employment, to the rights of labour, and to the physical and material equality of man, is found in the division of the world into States and Nations. Thus, as civil equality would abolish privilege, as social equality would destroy classes, so material and physical equality strikes at the principle of patriotism, and is prepared to abrogate countries.

Now, I am addressing a race of men who are proud, and justly proud, of their country. I know not that the sentiment of patriotism beats in any breast more strongly than in that of a Scotchman.

Neither time nor distance, I believe, enfeebles that passion. It is as vehement on the banks of the Ganges as on the banks of the Clyde, and in the speculative turmoil of Melbourne as in the bustling energy of Glasgow. Why is a Scotchman proud of his country? Because the remembrance of it awakens a tradition of heroic exploits and inspiring emotions; of sacrifices for its sake in the field and on the scaffold; of high examples of military skill and civil prudence; of literary and scientific fame; of commanding eloquence and profound philosophy, and of fascinating poesy and romance—all of which a Scotchman feels ennoble his existence; and all of which, he is conscious, have inevitably sprung from the circumstances of his native land. So that the very configuration of the soil and the temper of the clime have influenced his private virtues and his public life, as they unquestionably have given a form and colour to those works of creative genius which have gained the sympathy and admiration of the world.

No, gentlemen, it is not true that the only real happiness is physical happiness; it is not true that physical happiness is the highest happiness; it is not true that physical happiness is a principle on which you can build up a flourishing and enduring commonwealth. A civilised community must rest

on a large realised capital of thought and sentiment; there must be a reserved fund of public morality to draw upon in the exigencies of national life; society has a soul as well as a body; the traditions of a nation are part of its existence. Its valour and its discipline, its religious faith, its venerable laws, its science and erudition, its poetry, its art, its eloquence, and its scholarship, are as much portions of its existence as its agriculture, its commerce, and its engineering skill. Nay, I would go farther, I would say that without these qualities material excellence cannot be attained.

But, gentlemen, the new philosophy strikes farther than at the existence of patriotism. It strikes at the Home, it strikes at the individuality of man. It would reduce civilized society to human flocks and herds. That it may produce in your time much disturbance, possibly much destruction, I pretend not to deny; but I must express my conviction that it will not ultimately triumph. I hold that the main obstacles to its establishment are to be found in human nature itself. They are both physical and moral. If it be true, as I believe, that any aristocracy, distinguished merely by wealth, must perish from satiety, so I hold it is equally true that a people which recognises no higher aim than physical enjoyment must become selfish and enervate.

Under such circumstances, the supremacy of race, which is the key of history, will assert itself. Some human progeny, distinguished by their bodily vigour or their masculine intelligence, or by both qualities, will assert their superiority and conquer a world which deserves to be enslaved. It will then be found that our boasted progress has only been an advancement in a circle; and that our new philosophy has brought us back to that old serfdom which it has taken ages to extirpate.

But the still more powerful, I think the insurmountable, obstacle to the establishment of the new opinions, will be furnished by the essential elements of the human mind. Our idiosyncrasy is not bounded by the planet which we inhabit. We can investigate space and we can comprehend eternity. No considerations limited to this sphere have hitherto furnished the excitement which man requires, or the sanctions for his conduct which his nature imperatively demands. The spiritual nature of man is stronger than codes or constitutions. No government can endure which does not recognise that for its foundation, and no legislation last which does not flow from this fountain. The principle may develop itself in manifold forms, shape of many creeds and many churches, but the principle is divine. As time is divided into day and night,

so religion rests upon the providence of God and the responsibility of man. One is manifest, the other mysterious; but both are facts. Nor is there, as some would teach you, anything in these convictions that tends to contract our intelligence or our sympathies. On the contrary, religion invigorates the intellect and expands the heart. He who has a due sense of his relations to God is best qualified to fulfil his duties to man. A fine writer of antiquity, perhaps the finest, has recorded in a passage his belief in Divine Providence, and in the necessity of universal toleration.

Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν καὶ τὰτα καὶ τὰ πάντ' ἀεὶ
 φάσκοιμι' ἂν ἀνθρώποισι μηχανᾶν θεοῦ·
 ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ τὰδ' ἐστὶν ἐν γνώμῃ φίλα,
 κείνους τ' ἐκείνα στεργέτω καὶ γὰρ τὰδε.

These lines were written, more than two thousand years ago, by the most Attic of Athenian poets. In the perplexities of life I have sometimes found in them a solace and a satisfaction; and I now deliver them to you, to guide your consciences, and to guard your lives.

GLASGOW:

Printed at the University Press,

153 WEST NILE STREET.

