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THE EDINBURGH PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION.

ADDRESS BY THE EARL OF ELGIN.

The Winter Session of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution was opened on the 30th ult., by an introductory address delivered in the Music Hall by the Earl of Elgin.

Lord NEAVES, in introducing his Lordship, said - Ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate you on having the business of this session opened by Lord Elgin, who has kindly consented to deliver the introductory address. The countenance and assistance of so distinguished a nobleman must be peculiarly agreeable to us—[loud cheers]—and still more when we regard him as a countryman who has done such excellent service to his native land in foreign parts, and who now returns among us to continue, here or wherever else his duty may call him, that career of honourable service to the public which he has so nobly carried on hitherto. [Applause.]

SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE, IS IT AN EVIL OR A GOOD ?

The Earl of ELGIN, on rising, was received with long, continued applause. He proceeded to say :—Ladies and Gentlemen—Is there, in point of fact, anything which properly answers to the term, superficial-knowledge—mere smattering of knowledge? And if there be, is it an evil to be shunned or a good to be sought after? Or are these phrases, after all, a weak

invention of the enemy, a scarecrow set up to deter us from trespassing on the fields where the favoured few are gathering in their harvest, and from gleanings among the stubble such grains of sound learning and useful or agreeable information as we might contrive, poor triflers as we are, to carry away with us. This, as it appears to me, is about the only question affecting the principle and purpose of such institutions as this, on which a serious controversy can be raised at the present day.

* * * * *

I read with much interest and profit the speeches of the distinguished men who assisted at the festival given in honor of the completion of the tenth year of the existence of the Institution. The well merited tribute paid by the then Lord Provost to the ancient renown of Edinburgh as a seat of learning, and his stirring appeal to the citizens to aid in maintaining that high reputation, Mr. Macaulay's brilliant demonstration—[loud applause]—I see I cannot even mention that name without provoking applause—Mr. Macaulay's brilliant demonstration of the value of that national literature towards which his own genius has so largely contributed, the felicitous exposure by the Archbishop of Dublin of the fallacy that because knowledge may be abused it is the part of prudence to abandon its pursuit, and patiently to endure the more formidable perils of ignorance—a fallacy against which Dr. Arnold directs these significant words of warning—"Above all, be afraid of teaching nothing. It is vain now to say that questions of religion and politics are above the understanding of the poorer classes. So they may be; but they are not above their misunderstanding."

MR. MACAULAY'S REPLY TO THE QUERY.

To revert, however, to the inquiry which I propounded at the outset of these observations. Is the smattering against which we are warned a fact or a fiction—a real danger or a bugbear? Simple as the question may appear, the answer to it is by no means so obvious as might at first sight be supposed. Mr. Macaulay, in the speech to which I have already referred, meets it with a direct negative. He challenges the declaimers against superficial knowledge to furnish their standard of profundity. He ridicules the anti-temperance doctrine which they broach on the subject when they say, "Drink deep or taste not," raising a laugh at their expense by the addendum, "shallow draughts intoxicate; drink largely and that will sober you." [Laughter.]