

happiness of man is even more uncertain than the destiny of states.”*

We have assembled, gentlemen, to inaugurate the re-entrance into life of the “Sheridan Literary Society,” which formerly flourished and rejoiced in its strength, but like learning in Europe during the middle ages, it had its decline—became enveloped in darkness, and subsequently languished and died—only, as we confidently hope, to emerge from that gloom, arrayed in more than its former brightness, and endued with a stronger and more enduring vitality. The object which we, in common with other Societies of this kind, have in view in meeting here together at certain stated periods is twofold. Firstly, to encourage literary research, and literary discussion, and thereby to increase that stock of knowledge which we may already have acquired; and secondly, to accustom ourselves to convey to others with that clearness which ever accompanies true eloquence, the results of our research, and thus to become adepts in the art of public speaking. Surely if we can even partially attain to either of these ends, our time will not have been misspent—our labour will not have been in vain. Bacon has taught us that “knowledge is power”—experience has proved to us that knowledge is pleasure. Would you ask me what it is that equalizes the social condition of man, and levels all the distinctions of birth, or of wealth? I answer, knowledge. Would you know what it is that gives to all of us, no matter what may be our political position, no matter what may be our worldly rank, no matter what our religious creed, the most universal and wide-spread enjoyment? I will tell you it is knowledge. Would you enquire what it is that elevates man’s mind above the grovelling pursuits of mere animal pleasure, that tends to save man from the horrible degradation of sinking into the “mud-puddles” of sensual indulgence? (as Carlyle has it.†)—What is it that sobers him in prosperity, and consoles him in adversity, that arms him for the battle of life, and enables him to hew out for himself a road which

* Guizot’s “Memoires pour servir à l’histoire de mon temps.”

† Carlyle’s “Frederick the Great.”