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MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

The following OPENING ADDRESS was delivered before the Mechanics' Institute, by JOSEPH HOWE, Esqr. at the commencement of the Winter Course, and is published in compliance with a vote passed by the body:

[Continued from p. 363.]

While to the young who hear me, then, I would say, make the most of the season of youth, and of the golden opportunities which many of your fathers were denied—to those who have arrived at manhood I would also say, fancy yourselves still at school—give what hours you can spare to this cheap seminary, which does not interfere with your other occupations—and fear not that reading, reflection, conversation, or even writing, on any subject within the wide range by which man's powers and enjoyments are bounded, is a profligate waste of leisure, or a presumptuous invasion of the rights of any other class. To the spirit of restlessness under the restraints which are imposed by a life of labour—to the mischievous ambition, which too often tempts persons who lack industry to succeed in the honest occupations to which they have been bred, to rush into other professions, or cast about for some lazy road to wealth and eminence, we should offer no food. We seek not to withdraw the Mechanic from his workshop, but to make him more intelligent while he is there, and to multiply his sources of rational enjoyment when he returns to the bosom of his family. The false pride which regards idleness as a privilege, and mechanical pursuits with contempt, it is not our wish to encourage; but the noble self-confidence, and manly independence, which the habit of providing for our own wants and those of our friends—exercising to the highest pitch of exertion the bodily and mental powers, and depending upon our own resources in every untried scene or unexpected difficulty—this is the kind of pride which it has been our object to foster, which it should still be our aim on all occasions to arouse.

And why should not Mechanics, as a class, feel pride in themselves, and in the noble pursuits to which Providence has devoted their lives? The profession of Arms has ever been, and still is, regarded with a degree of admiration, approaching to idolatry—and yet, the triumphs of the soldier, where are they? Except a limited number, and those often won by an undisciplined peasantry struggling for freedom, how few fields are worth remembering, how few battles have produced any permanent advantage to mankind! Of all the intrigues of statesmen, how little can now be traced, in the countries which their diplomacy puzzled or embroiled? But the triumphs of the Mechanic are every where—the noble Ship that circumnavigates the globe, from the solid keel that ploughs the waves to the pennant that flutters in the breeze, is the magnificent work of his hand; the Chain Bridge that unites two islands, and beneath which the proud ship sails, while an army is marching overhead, has been fashioned and reared and sustained by him; and that still more extraordinary bridge, by which oceans are spanned and continents united, the Steam Boat, is flung upon the mighty waves, to dare their violence and baffle their strength, by the swarthy artisan; the Railroad, that annihilates time and space—the Compass that guides the mariner across the waves—the strong Anchor that enables him to ride out the storm, and the Beacon which points to the destined haven—these are the daily and hourly contributions of the Mechanic to the common stock of the world's means of security and enjoyment. The Astronomer cannot gaze into the heavens, or the Geologist penetrate into the bowels of the earth, without his aid; he renews the fading sight of the aged by a simple instrument, and scatters from the Press the elements of all knowledge among the young.

Those who attempt to look down on the men who do these things, must be sadly deficient in understanding; and those who, belonging to this class, are not proud of its fellowships, its station in the general scale, its knowledge, capabilities and influence, notwithstanding the sneers of such simpletons, must fall far below the proper standard of moral courage and true dignity of soul. Among the Mechanics of this town, the Institute has done much to excite and keep alive those feelings of honest pride and self-reliance, without which the objects we seek to secure could never be obtained. The old prejudice which taught that Mechanics were an inferior order of beings, is fast fading away, and giving rise to more correct opinions, among ourselves and among our families. For my own part, I never could see any reason why a Mechanic should not be a Gentleman, in every thing—in mind and manners—in intelligence, and taste, and refinement—in a high sense of honour, and an enlarged activity of intellect,—lacking only what many regard as the necessary supports to the character, the privileges of

idleness, a costliness of attire, and a lavish expenditure upon the vanities and frivolities of life.

If this view be sustained, and I believe it will by the male members of this Institute, and through them, become impressed upon the minds of their fellow workmen, apprentices and friends, the time is not far distant when the Halifax Mechanics will take a much higher stand as a class, and when to be known as one, will be a recommendation to a man wherever he shall remove. That we shall have the aid of the female part of our population, most deeply interested in the matter—as we have always had, in every step of our progress, I confidently expect. A Mechanic's wife cannot fail to be keenly alive to the character, and reputation, and influence, of the order to which her husband belongs. Her range of duties are of the most important and sacred character—it is her's to assist and encourage the man to whom she has linked her destiny, during his hours of labour, or in the intervals of toil; to soothe him in times of sickness and anxiety, to calm his fluttered spirits, and fix his wavering thoughts, during those severe trials and privations, to which all men having a competence to earn, are necessarily subjected. It is her's also, and for her own sake this portion of her duties should not be neglected, to embellish and adorn his dwelling with the evidences and the results of a cultivated taste,—aye, even to adorn her person with the graceful neatness, which shall attract and delight his eye, without wasting his substance; but, above all, it should be her studious care to make his home attractive, to make him feel that it is a sanctuary from the cares, and perplexities, and foibles of life—a scene in which rational improvement and agreeable recreation are to repair the waste of the body and the exhaustion of the animal spirits; and from which the mind is to emerge, strengthened, refreshed and enlarged, to perform, with renewed vigour and added intelligence, the humble perhaps, but the manly and important duties of life. There may be those who believe, that a flower in a Mechanic's window, a garden in the rear of his dwelling—a poem or a tale read to him by his fireside—a book put into his hand at night—or an air sung or even played to him after his evening meal, must necessarily relax his muscles or unnerve his arm; but I entertain a different belief, and know that there are many here who have tried the experiment, and yet are of the same opinion.

If these little embellishments of laborious life were more regarded, the distance which seems to divide the Mechanic from some other classes of society would be materially diminished, and our children (a common practice in Nova Scotia) find less temptation to undervalue and desert the honourable occupations in which they have been reared. If Mechanics are regarded, and above all if they regard themselves, as beings whose energies, unaided and uncultivated by science, are to be wasted in merely manual labour and sensual enjoyment—if to toil with a vacant mind, and indulge the animal passions, in a home where no attempts are made to cultivate the mind, and few appeals are made to the better feelings, be their only aim, their sons will, if nature has given them better capacities, or accident has created better tastes, probably forsake the business which it has cost years to establish, and their daughters will hesitate at marrying into a class whose homes have so few attractions. This should not, it need not be. To combine with the greatest amount of labour, attention to business, and economy, the widest range of intellectual pursuits, and a refined enjoyment of the social pleasures, should be our aim; and let us never be deterred from doing this, by any sneer from those who fancy that all the labour of life should be left to us, and all the enjoyment of it to them. A Mechanic's children, if they think aright, need never be ashamed of their origin, or of their station: they belong to a class whose business it is to create, and not to destroy—to multiply the sources of human enjoyment, not of human misery,—and who have filled the world with marvels, in conception often outrunning the exaggerations of poetry, and rivalling the minute arrangement and wonderful accuracy of nature. A Mechanic's children, if properly taught, will, while they reject with scorn the idea, come from what quarter it may, that they are forbidden to break through the boundaries of caste, or to aspire to eminence in any department of science, or art, or letters, which they may choose—or to dare the highest flights of social or political ambition, if nature has given them the talents to ensure success, will nevertheless regard with the highest respect, and honour with the highest exertion, the useful occupations of their parents, and follow them in a spirit of cheerful industry, unconscious of disgrace. In doing so, they will ever meet encouragement here; and in this Institute, while they are taught the principles by which labour is to be saved, they will never be encouraged to indulge in frivolities for which it must be abandoned.

Among the means by which it has occurred to me that the objects we have in view might be still further carried out, are:

1st. Occasional Lectures from Mechanics, on the several branches to which they have been bred. These might embrace the general history of a particular trade, an exhibition of some of its first rude results, an exposure of the errors by which its advancement was retarded; and biographical notices of the individuals who have been its greatest improvers, ornaments or patrons. The scientific principles upon which it is founded, or the application of which, to some extent, is advisable, might also be explained. An historical sketch of its introduction and progress in this country, might then be given—showing the extent to which it furnishes an article of export, or of domestic consumption, and the bearing of colonial and imperial legislation upon its present condition, or its further growth and extension.

2d. Might not Medals be presented to the Institute, either by patriotic members of particular trades, or by a combination of those interested in their welfare, to be awarded as prizes to Apprentices, for the most perfect evidence of skill and dexterity in the several branches to which they are attached. These medals might be held in charge by the officers of the Institute—the award to be made by the best judges of the article—the prize to be publicly presented, and worn for one year only, unless won a second time by the same individual; but to be returned, to form the subject of a renewed contest, at the close of every year.

3d. By personal efforts to extend the number of our members, and to ensure a punctual attendance throughout the course. It may be said that every body knows that the Institute is in existence, and that they ought to join it without solicitation. This may be true enough, but some allowance should be made for the idleness, parsimony, carelessness, or indifference, to which we are all more or less prone. Some have not joined the Institute because they have not been asked—or because they have imbibed some absurd prejudice, or received an erroneous impression, as to its character and objects. We should not be too proud to leave the former without excuse, or to disabuse the latter; and if each member were but to make one convert, or add one friend, our lists would be enlarged, and our funds made applicable to the furtherance of many subsidiary objects which we cannot at present embrace. A constant attendance is also of some consequence; and although I feel that my own example of late has not entitled me to say much on this subject, yet I cannot but observe, that, as a full house has an enlivening and stimulating effect upon an actor, so is a lecturer cheered by the sight of a crowded audience; while others are tempted to come forward, or put forth their highest powers, by a consciousness of the numbers who are to listen and to judge. It might be as well, also, if notice were given in the newspapers, at the commencement of every course, that strangers from the country are freely admitted; and this might be posted up in the houses where country people most frequent. As the Legislature gives us an annual grant, it is but right that we should make some return to persons from the other counties; and the more that come, the more rapid will be the rise of similar institutions in all the smaller towns. Slick, when he got a clock into a house, was certain that the family would not let it out; and when we once get a man in here, we may be sure he will come again, or never rest satisfied till he has got an Institute of his own.

A fourth suggestion has for its object the enlargement rather of the Museum than of the Institute. It is growing fast, but the question occurs, may it not grow faster? Suppose that each member of the Institute were to consider it obligatory upon him, to present one article every year; and when no other curiosity came in his way, were to order a bird, at his own expense, from Mr. Downs, nobody would feel the cost of the contribution; and yet, in a year or two, we should have, besides a variety of other attractive objects, an ornithological collection quite equal, if not superior, to that formerly gathered, by the exertions of a single family, at Picton. It has occurred to me, also, that if the simple words, "Remember the Institute," were posted up in the cabin of every vessel sailing out of Halifax, they would be the means of largely increasing our stores. Captains and passengers and supercargoes have so much to do, and so many things to think of, when they arrive at foreign ports, that they seldom think how many curiosities they might put into a locker; but their eyes resting continually on "Remember the Institute"—recalling the scenes, and thoughts, and wants, of their native land, they would bring us many things which are now forgotten; and merchants and consignees visiting them on board their ships, and seeing the inscription, would often make them presents of which we should reap the advantage. (To be concluded in next number.)