

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE DELIVERED BY THE REV. W.

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In all scientific studies, the true end, and the only end that makes them valuable, is the discovery of truth and the good of our fellow-creatures. The love of truth may be an end itself: a man may devote himself to the acquisition of knowledge, to the discovery of new truths, and the finding out of new inventions, for no other end than the pleasure which he receives from his course of study or investigation without incurring the reproach of being actuated by any vicious principle; but he only proposes to himself the true end of science, when together with the love of it, he seeks the good of his fellow-creatures, to enrich them with new means for the easier acquisition of the necessities of life, with new instruments for the production of additional comfort and happiness. This is a matter so obviously reasonable, that it might well be wondered at, that a different opinion and practice should have ever prevailed among men who gave themselves to the study of wisdom; but it is a truth that admits of few exceptions, that among those of the ancients who were, by profession and by public acknowledgement, philosophers, the proper object or design of their business, was overlooked for the most part. They were excellent at giving advices for the management of the passions, but had no rules to offer for the raising of supplies of food. They inquired into the nature of the gods, but they made few experiments upon the raw materials of the earth. They sought to raise the spirits of men above the ills of life, when they should have studied the best means of removing the ills of life. They endeavoured to make men better, but not to make room for more men, or to remove the temptations to evil which were incident to their condition. They cultivated well the garden of the soul, they sowed it with hopes of immortality and perfection, and inspired a generous ambition, a love of military and literary fame, a love of the fine arts, and an ardent patriotism, and all this they did wondrously well and have therefore been rewarded accordingly with their just meed of imperishable honour. But beyond all this, something besides was requisite. It was not enough that men should be entertained in the theatre with the sublimest productions of the tragic muse; they could not laugh forever at the comedies of Aristophanes or Terence, more especially in those states where the system of domestic slavery had either never been established or had afterwards been discontinued, or in those where a larger measure of civil freedom had forced the great mass of the people to be dependent upon their own resources—upon their ability to labour

and capacity to invent. The ancient philosophy, admirable as it was for the beauty of its foliage, but wonderfully penurious in substantial fruits, became during the middle ages, the mere plaything and game of the schools. The most refined and subtle spirits expended their strength and exhausted their ingenuity on questions, in the determination of which, mankind at large had little or no beneficial interest. The science of the ancients had a certain grace that rendered it attractive, and their disquisitions on laws and politics, on morals and the theory of education, on logic or the art of expressing one's reasoning, contain the soundest principles and far more truth than is to be found in most modern productions on these departments of philosophy; for a proof of which, it may be sufficient to mention that the logic of Aristotle has, within a few years past, received the most satisfactory vindication, and acquired a fresh authority in the English universities, while the study of it has been recommended by the highest names in the College of Edinburgh. But all this—the science that is recorded in the works of ancient philosophers, became vitiated and corrupted in the schools of the middle ages, inasmuch that in taking a survey of philosophy during that space, we cannot but confess the justice of the concluding remark of Meinecius:—"So numerous" says he, "is the family of philosophers, and so discordant are their opinions—since many persons, little better than fools and destitute of the love of truth, covered at the same time with various personal vices professed the study of wisdom, have shown themselves as examples of the uselessness of their discipline, is the opinion of a certain person, to be wondered at, who formerly said, that scarcely could a sick man be found to dream a thing so monstrous, but some philosopher may be shown to have advocated it?" Now, in modern times, among the great and majestic spirits who devoted themselves to the study of science, the first that authoritatively established and clearly pointed out the true end of philosophy, was Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England, in the reign of James the First. He turned the eyes of philosophers to the necessities and cares of human life. He desired to do for mankind, what a Mechanics' Institute is designed to do for its members, to put them in possession of instruments or means for the better acquisition of things needful and desirable. He desiderated for human life, substantial improvements, more than the dainty fare of subtle disquisitions. I remember when an old lady gave orders to her butler to bring cake and wine to her visitors, how that the significant words, "and beef and ham" were whispered into the ears of