

## SELF CULTURE.

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Read before N. W. Brown's Arbor Day entertainment, May 24, 1886, at Forest City, N. B.

\* \* \* I have chosen for my theme to-day, "Self Culture."

Remember little is gained by coming to this place at this time, or from day to day, as pupils, and having the mind wrought upon by any teacher, unless we are roused to act upon ourselves, and make what we hear part and parcel of ourselves.

"I asept and dreamed that life was beauty,  
And woke and found that life was duty."

Self culture is no dream, but something possible. You *must* believe this, else all the teachers may talk, the public speakers may declaim, and you will listen with but small profit.

Two powers each one of you possess that makes it possible to educate yourselves—self-searching and self-forming power. By self-searching, or looking within, we find out what the mind is capable of bearing, whether it be suffering or joy—that is, we can, by this power of ours, not only know what we are, but what we may become, and this is the power that mainly distinguishes us from the brute.

Yet a still higher power is in the grasp of each of us—the power of acting upon and forming ourselves—and we, because of this power, become responsible beings, and because of it (it doesn't matter what or where we are now), with this power we can conquer a better lot, and if we have advanced but little be even the happier because of starting from so low a round in the ladder.

It is an easy task, then, to unfold the idea of self culture to boys and girls, men and women, having the intelligence of those before me. To cultivate anything, be it plant, animal or mind, is to make it grow, and nothing can be cultured except it have life, be, then, who does what he can to unfold his powers, and especially the nobler ones, practises self culture.

In unfolding my subject I shall deal with it, first, in its moral aspect. When we study ourselves, or look within, we find two principles, orders of action,—appetite and passion on the one hand, tending to selfishness, and on the other a principle, having regard to the rights of others, and this voice or principle must be obeyed, cost what it may. Is this statement too strong? Dare one of you deny that there springs up within you this voice, this idea of justice, in opposition to selfishness, whenever placed in circumstances to call it forth? There are but few, if any, here too young to know the meaning of this idea. You may not call it by the same name; one may call it reason, another conscience, and a third the moral sense, never mind the name, bear in mind it is a real faculty in each one of us, and my young friends, and my older friends, do not fail to cultivate it beyond, make it grow, for on the growth of this depends all others.

Think you passion is stronger than the moral sense? Truly it may speak louder, but its voice is widely different from the tone of authority used by reason, and even when the bad triumphs, as it oftentimes does, still are you rebuked by this moral principle, and I would have you see clearly these two great faculties, the selfish and unselfish. Depress selfishness, keep it down, stunt its growth, but expand and culture in every way, even to the enthronement of this idea, of a sense of duty within us. And don't forget that most of our studies are limited—end at some stated point—to this there is no limit.

We will next pass to the consideration of the intellectual faculty. None of you are in danger of forgetting this, for 'tis by the mind that we gain much of the success in life. And we hear you speak of a man's improving himself; the thought uppermost in your mind is,—he is studying to gain knowledge; that we look upon it as solely training the mind; so we build school-houses and colleges for this purpose, often drowning out moral principle by its exclusion.

No one venerates more than I the intellect. But it should never be lifted above moral principle. And I think you will agree with me when I say that reading and study are not enough to make perfect our power of thought. Why is it not enough? do you ask. Because in order to the full development of my nature, and the making my nature perfect, is the primo reason for my existence: I *must* follow truth, let it lead me where it will, no matter how it bears on myself. It is for lack of this that some men of great minds hold to great errors, and teach them, and seek even to throw down the principles of virtue and hope. And with this disinterested faculty, men of moderate powers have come up to greatness of thought; and many of you, no doubt, have noticed that some of our most successful teachers owe that success not so much to natural greatness as to their adherence to truth, their readiness to live and die for truth. Education, then, may, and in many cases does, become a power without moral principle to guide it. Perhaps I can best have you understand this truth by illustration: I have watched with much interest the building of our new steamboat, taken notice of the work on hull, the boiler, the engine, the new method of propulsion. And I find the old well-known power in steam, when confined in the boiler, yet this is simply force without a guiding hand, the pipes carrying this force to the engine, there to perform its important work. Thus is it with education without moral principle, a blind force, as likely to do injury as good. Most of us are apt to think that education consists in getting information, in adding one piece of knowledge to another, and the sum of it all is education. Now, important as this is, it is far from being all. What we wish is not so much an accumulation of facts, as a power to turn these upon the actual life of man. In other words, the force to live beneath effects two causes. Each of you must have noticed in men around you, and even here among your school-mates, two classes of minds, one busy with the details, looking at and after all the little things and affairs, and being satisfied with this; another using these facts as stepping stones to broader and higher truths. All men for ages had seen wood, stone and metals fall to the ground. Newton, standing on these facts, gave us a law, controlling all outward creation. You frequently hear one talking of particular acts of a neighbor, another will look beyond the act to the principle prompting the act, and thus gets a larger view of humanity.

I might go on and speak of this self-culture as regards the religious faculty, which is really an in-born quality in humanity, of which every one must acknowledge the truth. To sound the depth and breadth and height of this would require more time than is allowed me here, and a more fitting opportunity than this, which may one day be my privilege. I might dwell on the sense of beauty, and strive to awake you to its wonders. I might call your attention to the cultivation of the faculty of utterance, and ask you to cultivate this as being one of the essentials to a perfecting of yourself; and I will say, that the neglect of cultivating this power of utterance oftentimes makes men and women of deep and weighty thought appear as ciphers, for lack of the power to tell it in fitting language, for all will acknowledge that we can understand ourselves better and thought will grow clearer, because of trying to make others understand it, and we find in all schools the study of grammar and language pursued.

You see from all I have said that I do not look on man as a machine to be kept going by outside influence, do a certain amount of labor, and go through a certain round of motions then fall to pieces at death, but as an immortal being; and hence all true culture is immortal. Mayhap some of my hearers think that it is no use to educate beyond the amount required for the work you propose to do in life. Now I think, and would have you think the same, that you should be educated because you are men and women—boys and girls,—and not because you are going to make leather from hides, sell goods, or drive a team; and this very culture that I am advocating would enable you to tan intelligently, sell goods honestly, and drive a team carefully.

I have now shown you as clearly as I may in so short a time what I mean by culture. Now you would like to know the means by which to attain it. The first I would name is a firm, unmistakable belief in its possibility. Second, experience and observation. Good books read and digested, newspapers, magazines, and other publications sagaciously selected, these latter being helps to observation and experience. Controlling appetite, and especially let me urge in this connection the abstinence from use of spirituous liquors. Intercourse with superior minds, both in the community in which you live and wise selection of books. Other means for culture I might name, but I trust that these will suggest to your mind many others. Let me in conclusion say, you are not made what you are, simply to toll, eat, drink, and sleep. You have many deficiencies to remedy, and your usefulness lies in the faithful education of yourselves, and thus make yourselves worthy the free institutions and Province in which you live.

## HOW AND WHAT TO READ.

"The art of right reading," says Mr. Frederick Harrison, "is as long and difficult as the art of right living. It needs a strong character and a resolute system of reading to keep the head cool in the storm of literature around us."

Much has been written of late concerning the best books to read. "The deluge of advice in this matter," says the *Westminster Review* for July, "began in November last by Lord Iddlesleigh's desultory course delivered at the Edinburgh University."

But Sir John Lubbock's list of "The Best Hundred Books," published in the *Contemporary Review* for December, has attracted the most attention, and called forth the greatest amount of criticism.

The editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, desirous of obtaining other opinions on the subject, submitted Sir John Lubbock's list to different men whose ideas he considered valuable. The result is very interesting, and the "great difference of opinion as to the best books was surprising, even to Sir John himself." Some of the best authorities exclude many books contained in Sir John's list; and of the nine other lists sent to the *Pall Mall Gazette* there is not one which occurs on every list. This difference of opinion among educated people, would leave us to agree with the conclusion of Professor J. S. Blackie as quoted by the *Westminster*: "No man, it appears to me," says Professor Blackie, "can tell another what he ought to read. A man's reading to be of any value must depend on his power of assimilation, and that again depends on his tendencies, his capacities, his surroundings and his opportunities."

Mr. Ruskin, who hurls anathemas against several of the generally accepted authors, yet makes the wise remark that he is consternated at "the idea that any well conducted mortal life could find leisure enough to read one hundred books."

It is well, no doubt, to have the best thinkers of the world point out for the new generation what are really the best books of all literature, but the great divergence of opinion goes to prove that the vast field of literature contains what is valuable for each individual and that each will choose what his natural tastes and the quality of his education fit him to assimilate. And individualism should be encouraged in this as in all other departments of life. The aim of education should be to put the growing mind in full possession of what powers it may possess with as wide liberty of choice in all things as possible. The question with us all should be rather how to read than what to read. Almost any book of merit read in an attentive and studious manner will stimulate thought in the reader, which is the best result of all reading. And once the habit of thinking for one's self, even when reading the thoughts of another, is really formed, it almost naturally follows that the quality of the reading will improve and the reader will inevitably find that he has unconsciously acquired a taste and inclination for the best books without the stimulus of lists supplied by others.