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CULTIVATION OF THE TASTE, AN EDUCATIONAL DESIDERATUM.

In the *extent* of the means of education possessed by our people there is little more to be asked, at least where a free school system exists. The duty of government to educate the masses as a means of self preservation, a duty first proclaimed in Massachusetts and by our own forefathers, is now acknowledged and acted upon so generously that our public schools are superior to our private, and the children of the wealthiest from choice share in the instruction provided for the necessities of the poor. Resulting from this free school system are many other aids also to general intelligence. Our largest libraries are open to the humblest; high dignitaries and the hard-handed mechanic sit side by side in the lecture-room, and address public meetings on common topics; and the same newspaper is read by the occupant of the most richly furnished parlor and in the lowly cottage of the day laborer.

Yet there is a defect in our education to which attention cannot be too strongly turned. With all its superiority, the American character is wanting in æsthetical culture,—in that love of nature and of the beautiful which God planted in us and designed we should exercise. We are very prosaic, very matter-of-fact and practical in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Foreigners note this as one of their first impressions of us, and its correctness must be admitted. We are early

trained to *calculate*, early imbued with the prudent money-getting sayings of "Poor Richard," early taught to ask in regard to everything, *cui bono*.

How indifferant are our people generally to the sensations fitly awakened by nature's manifestations seen on every side, and to the lessons they were intended to inculcate! They watch the sky with no emotion stirred by its ever-changing aspect, but simply to see if the weather will be fair or foul on the morrow. The splendor of a beautiful aurora only tells them it is time to get up and go to work; and the gorgeous hues of the most glorious sunset, so suggestive of pure and holy thoughts, and of "that better land" of which this is so faint an image, and of that Being who never ceases to be good, only remind them they must cease from labor and prepare to go to bed. The beauty of a flower may plead for admiration—they tread upon it as a useless weed. A tree grows before their dwelling, raises its graceful form to heaven, and would delight the eye and afford a grateful shade by its foliage—yet it is cut down because the mould gathers under its branches, and the shingles rot. The swelling buds of spring simply tell them they must throw off their flannel; and the golden tints of the autumnal leaves, too rich for the art of the painter, excite no feeling but that wood must be housed for the approaching winter. They gaze on the earth and think only of corn and potatoes; on the illimitable forest, and estimate its cords of wood; on the mountain towering in grandeur to heaven, and sigh over a waste that the plow can never penetrate; on the ocean in its dark and awful heavings, and think of cargoes of cotton and grain endangered and insurance to be paid; on Niagara, and the factories it could be made to carry, if they would pay dividends. This is no exaggerated picture of the great body of our people, high and low, ignorant and educated. Those who from position and superior means of culture might be supposed to possess minds open to beauty wherever seen, often seem most destitute of any such power. The minister in his walks heeds not the sermon God preaches to him so effectively, and that he might preach to his congregation; the lawyer thinks of his suits—the physician of his drugs—the schoolmaster of his bad boys.

In many countries of Europe, far below us in general intelligence and mental culture, there is a much purer and better developed national taste. In England, of the same stock, a love of flowers is universal. The poorest man will have, if he has room for nothing more, a honeysuckle to clamber over his door and gladden his heart by its fragrance and beauty. A