

LECTURE ¹

COMMENDATION OF THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY.

It is now fashionable with many advocates of physical science, to denounce this study as useless. The subject to-night will be the inquiry, Is this so? Or is it still true, that "the proper study of mankind is man?" But we must define what we discuss. There is a tradition that the old Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, when asked, *Σοφιστής εἶ;* replied *Ὁν μὲν, σοφίας δὲ φιλόσ.* "Wisdom" here meant, knowledge of the mental principles which regulate all other knowledge. It was, I believe, H. Crabb. Robinson, who asked *Goethe* if he was reading any philosophy; when he said: "No; I do not propose at this time, to do any thinking about thinking." This is a very good definition of philosophic thought. *Thinking how the mind rightly thinks.* It is usually regarded as including, 1. Psychology, or the "natural history" of the human mind. 2. Logic. 3. Ethics, or the principles of *duty* 4. Ontology, or the science of real existences. 5. Nat. Theology: The inquiry after the First Causes.

The grounds on which philosophy is usually disparaged are these: First. That there can be no true science, except it be founded throughout on a basis of *facts*. How do we ascertain facts? By actual *observation*. The instruments of observation are our *senses*. But mind and its processes are not observable by our senses. Hence, second. There can be no true science, save of *phenomena* (changes in objects cognizable by our senses) and *their laws*. Third. The history of philosophy confirms this: they say, it has never had any certainty. It settles nothing, but keeps its doctrines in endless debate. Every new age presents a new philosophy, which is built up only to be demolished by the next age; whereas physical science is settled; it is "positive," it establishes its permanent laws, which thence-

forward abide to bless and help mankind with their applications. A striking instance of this charge is presented by Mr. G. H. Lewes, who writes a "History of Philosophy" with the purpose, as he says, of proving that there is no philosophy. This strikes me very much as though a man should trouble himself to write a biography of Wm. Tell, for the purpose of proving there had never been any Tell! Mr. Lewes thinks philosophy a humbug. The man who writes a whole history of a humbug is in great danger of making his book a humbug!

Men are arguing here, under this illusion, that it is the bodily senses alone which give *palpable, solid facts*; beguiled by that feature of obtrusiveness and familiarity, which marks our bodily sensations. Hence their baseless notion, that all doctrines about *Mind*, that intangible and invisible thing, are but vague speculations of which there is no stable way to convince other men. But the science of mind *is* a science of observation, and is based on facts, the most solid kind of *bottom-facts: The facts of consciousness*. "Ah," they reply; "of consciousness! Another shadowy, abstraction among faculties! Give us facts of eyesight!" Very well. Let us take the most familiar and homely case. Your eyes, nose and palate, you think authorize you solidly to say: "I see my breakfast." But in saying that, you have said, I, Ego, Self! And the *ego*, the self, has been the subject of your proposition, the nominative to your verb "*see*." So that to know your breakfast, you must first have known yourself, as a Mind capable of consciousness and thought, believing in its own existence and identity, and furnishing from its own inner powers the conception of *space*, position, and the other relations in which the breakfast is seen to exist. You must have a knowledge of this *Self* in order to have a knowledge of your breakfast. You can only believe in your breakfast by means of believing in this self, this mind, and its laws, which shows you the outer object. If your belief in your mind is not solid, still less can the belief in your breakfast be. this hangs on that. What a delusion then, to say that your breakfast is a fact of observation, and yet, 1 its laws and powers, 2 your 3 mind, are not! While shut up in this room, you could fast is a fact of observation, and yet, (1) its laws and powers, (2) your, (3) mind, are not! While shut up in this room, you

could only see one of those trees, *by looking through a window*. And the window is nearer to you than the tree. So that you cannot know the tree as a fact of observation, *without having first known the window as a fact of observation*. So, you can never reason, without having, beforehand, and in order to your reasoning, some *principle or axiom, which you reason by*. Try it. You reason, for instance: "Men must be real free agents, *because* a just God holds them responsible." Right. But your mind saw this inference to be right, only because you were guided by this prior, self-evident principle that free agency is necessary to my just responsibility. If your inference is solid, the principle it hangs on must be more solid. But that is an abstract principle in philosophy! And when you argue with your fellow man, you know that you can only convince him of your inference, by means of that same first principle regulating his mind and thought, just as it does yours. If you did not think so, you would deem it just as sensible to argue with your horse, as your neighbor. And so, all around, we find that our "facts" of sensation are only certain to our knowledge on condition we believe in these inner "*facts*" of mind, the general and, if you will, abstract *principles of thought*, which regulate the action of all faculties, from the olfactory, up to conscience. You have had to philosophize, in spite of yourself, in order to use your nose, your fingers, and your eyes and ears. You may be in the condition of astonishment of Moliere's *gentilhomme bourgeois*, M. Jourdain, who, when his literary teacher showed him the distinction of prose and verse, was very much surprised to find that he had been speaking prose all his life! You have been obliged to proceed, in all your knowledge, on this much abused philosophy, all along!

It may be well just here to illustrate farther the fact that every man philosophizes, "will he, nill he," if he thinks. Here is a plain carpenter, who on Monday takes up the hatchet he had sharpened and used Saturday. It proved itself of good steel, temper and edge, then. Will it cut well this morning? Assuredly it will, says the honest man. But may it not have changed its nature since Saturday, although not meddled with in any way? Is it obliged to be steel now, because it was steel then; may it not now be of soft iron? or lead? "No!" he exclaims. "That's absurd!" But why absurd, Mr. Carpenter?

Perhaps he had not thought it out in full form; but now that you press him to do so, he tells you: no change could have been made in the metal without *some cause*; and that "he knows by looking at it," i. e., by its sensible properties, that it is still steel. That is all very plain and simple; but this carpenter has now posited three of the most profound general truths of abstract philosophy: The necessary law of causation; the continuity and permanency of substantive being; and the inseparable union of attributes to their substance. He has been dealing in the depths of ontology! He has even decided the philosophic axiom on which the theological argument for and against the sacrament of the mass turns! Quite a philosopher he!

A pump-maker brings you a new pump. He knows that the piston, valves and air-tight joints are precisely like those of other pumps in actual use. You ask, "Has this pump ever been tried?" "No, sir." "Then how do you know it will draw any water?" "Oh, sir, it will be sure to draw. My other pumps made like it, do." Here he posits another prime maxim of philosophy: "Like causes are sure to produce like effects."

Messrs. Huxley, Comte, Tindal & Co. abuse philosophy, and applaud science. I ask them, can a *science* be built up by hypotheses alone? Oh, no! But why not? Why is inductive demonstration necessary? The answer is philosophy: logic. Does the frequent observation of a "*post hoc*" prove a "*propter hoc*?" Oh, no: that is not valid induction. Why not? The answer, again, is philosophy: logic.

Now, one may exclaim in surprise: How is it that we have all been philosophers unconsciously, and have spoken ill of the philosophy we all nevertheless employ? The answer is, that the fundamental laws of thought are *self-executive*. The kind Creator has, fortunately for us, ordained them so that they usually put themselves in operation and work aright, without our adverting to them, or choosing how they are to work. Then, you may ask: Is not the study of them as unnecessary as their action is unavoidable? I reply: the case is much like that of the muscles and tendons in a healthy boy's limbs. He does not know their names, number, or position; but none the less kind nature makes them obey his will; and he makes as good a run at football, as the best anatomist. The study of anatomy is

then useless? No: suppose the time comes when that boy has to amputate your limb! Anatomy will be very desirable for him then. And it will be a very good thing for him now; to teach him prudence in using that neat pair of legs of his, that he may not strain them the wrong way—or put a force on them they were not made for.

To the objection that philosophy is ever changing and unsettled, and has established no fixed principles of science, I reply by a denial. Philosophy has established a good many principles,—such as those named above. The most discordant schools teach them: the only difference between them has been as to the methods of establishing them. There have been many differing schools, rational, empeiical, ideal, pantheistic, spiritualistic, materialistic: from the Academy of Plato down to the “Concord school”: from Pythagoras to Hegel. But there have always been parts of philosophy, which have remained fixed. Since Aristotle wrote his *Analytics*, no philosopher has successfully disputed the main doctrine of the syllogism. With the great mass of philosophers the natural theology of Zenophon’s *Mem.* has continued to this day, the true, natural theology. Even in the most litigated branch of philosophic psychology, the orthodox school have always taught a doctrine substantially orthodox, *and the same doctrine*: Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm in the middle ages. If Locke, after Hobbes, taught a scheme conceding too much to sensation, Shaftesbury and Stillingfleet in England, and Leibnitz in Germany, refuted him, and taught the correct scheme. Over against Cordillac, the sensationalist, stood Roger Collard. Against Hume stood Dr. Thomas Reid: against the Mills, James and J. S. stood Hamilton.

Were we inclined to retort, we might ask, whether all the parts of professed physical science are stable and undisputed? Are there no mutations and debates there? Even the science of optics, newly created by Newton almost two centuries ago, is still uncertain whether her undulatory theory is true or not. Geology, though a science of the rocks, still fluctuates in many places like an unsteady sea. Its British Corypheus, Sir Charles Lyell, is said to have edited eleven editions of his own masterpiece, his “*Principles of Geology*”; and in every edition to have amended and contradicted something in the previous one. Men

differ by hundreds of thousands of years about their glacial age. Its stratigraphy is in some parts conjectural. The science of medicine, in many of its parts, is so uncertain and variable, as to provoke the gibe, that the doctors change as much in their fashions as the ladies do about their bonnets. In philology, two theories of the origin of language still contend for the mastery. Astronomers are not yet certain whether the nebular hypothesis is the true account of the origin of worlds, or whether the new star in Andromeda has not exploded it into a fiction even thinner than nebular "star-dust." Chemistry still has its doubts and its revolutions. Has it found out all the simple substances? Or has it counted too many of them? Has Kerpule convinced all the chemists yet of his theory of insomorph compounds? These questions remind us, that uncertainty and change are the traits of other sciences besides the philosophic.

It is often asked, tauntingly, what practical results has philosophy yielded for man? Look what physical science has done to ameliorate man's existence, to improve his means of subsistence, to palliate his diseases! It has taught mankind to subjugate nature, to utilize the lightning, to bridge mighty floods, to navigate the trackless oceans. Since the days of Lord Bacon, and under his guidance, physical science has almost made mankind a new race, in a new and better world. But what *practical results* does philosophy show? We will tell you anon, how she rendered an essential aid in all these material exploits. But we wish, as we pass along, to expose another large hallucination just here. First, education has two results: one, the communication of knowledge of facts; the other, the cultivation of the faculties and moral character. Of these, the latter is far the more valuable. Even on the lowest utilitarian view, it is better to have that culture, which enables the mind rapidly to gather the facts it may find useful, than to have, by borrowing, a set of facts without the ability to get more. It is better to have a well built mill, which can grind endless quantities of flour as needed, than to have numerous barrels of flour, with no machinery to grind more when needed. But farther: knowledge is valuable as a means; the man himself is the end. Hence, the culture which ennobles and makes the student more a man, bears most directly on the true

end. But the study of philosophy, even if it left no knowledge of useful facts, would still be the most valuable; because it conduces so powerfully to cultivate the soul, to sharpen the discrimination, and train the reason.

The Germans very happily call the "practical" branches, "the bread and butter sciences." They win the material means of living and luxury. This commercial age exalts them for that reason; but under an illusion. No one will dispute this truth, that these material luxuries are *means, not ends*. They are not valued in themselves, as we value the friend we love, but because their consumption ministers to us some pleasure. The epicure values his luxurious dish of fresh oysters, not as oysters—as such they ferment and decay—but as representing so many pulses of pleasure in his own consciousness, to be derived from their consumption. All these things are only *means* of happiness. Where is happiness: in the oysters, or *in the soul?* And what is happiness? The beast would have a simple answer: In eating and lying down to chew the cud. But he who would not degrade himself to a brute-level, must give the higher answer of philosophy: "Happiness is virtuous energy." Happiness is the right, harmonious and successful exercise of man's powers. And the higher the powers exercised, the higher the happiness. The nobler mental activities, then, are as much more valuable than material good, as the end is more valuable than the means. Those activities, those studies *are happiness*: the material goods are but means to happiness, uncertain, partial means; and the sciences called practical, if valued only for their "bread and butter" results, only means to those means.

As was mentioned, those who laud the physical sciences as the only studies worthy of pursuit, date their splendid career from Bacon. It began, they say, by his teaching us how to investigate material nature. But I ask, *was it a physical science* which taught that? By no means. It was philosophy! *Ba-* which taught that? By no means. It was philosophy. Bacon's *Novum Organum* is solely and purely a discussion of a metaphysical subject: What is inductive proof? the highest and most abstruse branch of logic. There is not a physical problem discussed or settled in the whole book, except one: "What is the nature of caloric?" And that is introduced solely to

illustrate the application of the metaphysical principle to physical inquiry. This, then, is an illustrious instance of the truth that, while the physical sciences are the handmaids of man's material welfare, they have to look to philosophy to show them how to proceed for this end. Take this parable. Let us suppose that building houses was truly "the chief end of man," instead of a mere means for his comfort. Then the carpenter would be the true hero. And his tools would be his noble weapons. But without the *dull whetstone*: these tools would cease to cut and shape the lumber! It is then as essential as any tool. Thus, philosophy may at least say, in the words of Horace: *Ergo fungar vice cotis, acutum Reddere quae femine valet exsors ipsa secandi.*

Nothing can more strongly illustrate the dependence of all other spheres of thought on philosophy for guidance than this question touching the conditions of scientific belief. Will you believe what you cannot understand? Should any amount of evidence make you do so? Sound physical science, like sound philosophy, answers: Yes. Mystery, even when incomprehensible, is no sufficient evidence a statement may not be true. There is no department of truths, not even the most familiar, that does not include, or at least imply, incomprehensible propositions. Will you believe what contradicts a necessary judgment of the mind, and fundamental law of thought? No. There is no amount of evidence sufficient to make you do that. For, you would argue, in doing that, you would so infringe the very conditions of rational belief as to leave the mind incompetent for any act of judgment. I cannot surrender these necessary laws of thought, in order to believe the statement which contradicts them, for if I did I should thereby become incapable of valid thought, and so, of rational belief. My assent to truth would be as valueless as that of the pig grunting his assent to a mathematical theorem. The derationalized being cannot believe.

But now, your assent to these two questions has made it most imperative for you to be prepared with an answer to another question: *Which are* the fundamental laws of thought? If the very condition of credibility of the statements offered you, the very possibility of believing them, is conditioned on their not contradicting those vital rules, you must be able to

say which those rules are. But this question takes you into the very heart of philosophy. To settle what are the truly fundamental and necessary laws of thought. To distinguish them by sure traits from other judgments, which habit, imitation or prejudice may have made us regard, though unwarrantably, as very essential truths; this requires the most thorough exploration of consciousness, and the most careful speculation. Is *this* a necessary and fundamental judgment: That the same finite thing cannot be at the same time in two places? Or this: That a material substance cannot change while all its sensible properties continue the same? Or the logical laws of identity, contradiction and excluded middle? Or, the law of causation: that no new effect can arise without adequate cause, and that like causes must always produce like effects? If these are necessary principles of thought, you may reject any amount of professed evidence for a contrary statement, assuring yourselves that "there must be some mistake." If you confound some dictate of habit or prejudice with these, you may be fighting against the truth. And, in fact, the history of opinion is full of just such confusions. And nothing but a very deep philosophy can unravel them!

Once more: Sir Wm. Hamilton very justly asserts, that philosophy is necessary—at least to all who do not believe the Bible, to know whether there is a God. Certainly He is not audible, visible, or tangible; so that the question cannot be settled by observation with our senses. We see very clearly that most of the things in this world are temporal and dependent beings; as the plants, the trees, the animals, the humans. Go back in time far enough and we reach the date when they were not. We cannot think they created themselves. Is it then a necessary law of thought, that we must reason back from the dependent, to some independent Being; from the temporal to the eternal? And if yes: Is this eternal Being self-existent? Is he living; or as Mr. H. Spencer says: is it not a He, but an It, an eternal, blind, physical *force*? Is He or It intelligent? Is He a free agent? Has He a moral character, and is that character bad or good? All these are questions of philosophy! But they are the most practical questions in the universe. Can there be any prayer, or not? Is there any providence? Is there any hereafter? Is my dead child annihilated? And will I be re-

sponsible in that hereafter for my conduct here? Can I enjoy any religious hope, or must I be an atheist, "without God, and without hope in the world?"

The disparagers of philosophy are fond of saying, that the exact sciences give them solid footing on the earth; but philosophy is a changing and fickle "cloudland." Let us accept the similitude for a moment. We are then reminded that it is from this cloud-land the most beneficent, and the most destructive agencies descend, which bless or devastate the habitations of men. From those shifting clouds falls the gentle rain, which waters the earth and makes it bring forth "bread for the eater and seed for the sower." Thence also descends the tornado, which wrecks the costliest works of man, and crushes him a mangled worm under their fragments. Thence leaps down the thunderbolt, which shivers his towers and scorches him with instant death.

Philosophy is the cloud-land? So be it. This metaphor then reminds us of the great practical truth: That it is *opinion*, which really rules the world, for weal or woe. And these governing opinions, which when popularized, become the most practical guides of action, and the most tangible and concrete blessings or curses of mankind, have their *source* in the abstract regions of philosophy. The thinker finds them there, rightfully or wrongfully, and impelled by their logic becomes their apostle, and in turn impels the reasons of the multitude to deeds of heavenly beneficence or of relentless cruelty. You have all heard of the religious persecutions of the middle ages. Let me raise before you the picture of one scene, typical of a thousand others as ghastly. It is about A. D. 1210. His holiness, Innocent III., Pope of Rome, has proclaimed a crusade against the peaceful Albigenses in the South of France, and promised valuable "indulgences" to all who will assist to destroy them. The city of *Bezieses* in Languedoc is crowded with these hapless people, who have at last stood at bay for their lives, with their wives and children, intermingled with a multitude of devout Roman Catholics. Seventy thousand souls throng the beleaguered town; when breaches are made and the fierce soldiery, inflamed almost to phrensy by the desperate resistance, are ordered to enter and put every soul to the sword. The Bishop *Arnauld Amaieu*, is there as representative of the

Pope, to guide and bless their efforts in the name of the "Prince of Peace." Even the executioners asked, by what sign they should distinguish heretic from good Catholic, so as to spare the latter. "Kill them all," cried his holiness. "The Lord will know his own!" And all: helpless babes, pious Catholics, as well as dissenting Albigenses, perished in one remorseless slaughter.

But these butchers supposed that they were only acting out their philosophy consistently. Is man responsible for his beliefs on moral subjects, or not? This is a question of moral philosophy. If he is, then ought this wrong believer (*mescreant*) to be punished for his error? Why not? It is wrong. It is a responsible wrong. It is a most mischievous wrong. The heretic may do more hurt to human welfare, especially when the eternal consequences of soul-destroying error are included, than all the horse thieves, burglars, and free-booters in the world. Why, then, should society hang the horse thieves, and allow to the heretics immunity? Is it not unequal, unfair, unjust? And since Rome teaches that her Popes are the God-appointed depositories of doctrinal infallibility, and guardians of Gospel truth, why should not the Pope direct the sword of justice? And why should we not deem the stern severity of the execution to be righteousness and not cruelty, as we do when the sheriff executes the grim sentence of the law on the felon, with almost infinite pity concealed in his heart, and yet under the impulse of an awful *duty*, which leaves him no option? Plant those propositions sincerely in the conviction of these persecutors' minds; and their bloody acts are the consistent result. Now, we Americans are blindly and passionately attached to liberty of thought and denounce the wickedness of persecution for opinion's sake. I propose to you to take that chain of propositions which I stated, and show the flaw in their connection. You find them apparently an iron chain. Where will you break it? at which link? Only philosophy can show you how to break it. If you reject her aid, you stand in an attitude more amiable, indeed, than the persecutor; but in which your amiability is a logical inconsistency.

Again: we have all heard the famous maxim: "All men are by nature *equal*." There are two species of equality. There is the equality of British freedom, whose watchword is: "Ev-

ery Englishman is equal before the law." It does not mean that the peasant is equal to the peer in the list of his particular franchises—these are very different. But the peasant has the same right to his narrower franchises as the peer has to his wider. The same law protects both, on the same fundamental principles of justice. The maxim, in this sense, does not assert that nature has made men literally equal in strength, in sex, in capacity of mind, in virtue, in fortitude, in health. Hence it holds that a true and equitable equality must distribute different grades of franchise to these different beings, according to their capacities to use them. It does not hold that the child justly wields the same set of privileges as the father. It does not believe that the woman has, for instance, the same "inalienable" right to sing bass and wear a beard with her husband. But this maxim, after leaving Providence to distribute to different classes of mankind the several allotments of privilege they have capacity to improve aright, claims for the protection of all the common sanction of justice and the golden rule.

Then, there is the equality of the Jacobin: a very different thing, which teaches that mechanical sameness of function, franchise and privilege, in each detail, is a right, "inalienable," "natural" and "self-evident." That whatever particular franchise is enjoyed by the highest citizen, must also be attainable by the lowest; or these sacred intuitions are outraged. The question between these is a *question in philosophy*: not a very easy one, if we may judge by the frequency with which thinking men confuse the two together. Let us see what practical fruits this confusion of two abstract theories has borne.

One crop of those fruits might have been seen in Paris a century ago. "The Reign of Terror" was established. The guillotine stood before the Thuilleries "*en permanence*." The gutters ran daily with blood. The prisons, filled by vile delators with thousands of the noblest and best, were emptied by the "Septembrigans," through wholesale massacre. To have *belonged to a privileged class* was the sufficient crime. To assert the privilege of any class, in church or state, was treason. This was the logical result of the philosophy.

We pass over to America in 1865, and we see the second harvest of death from this same philosophy. If the Jacobin

equality is that which intuition teaches to be "inalienable," then it was inconsistent that the Africans, though pagans, aliens, lately savage, and utterly unfit to wield the higher franchise of civic life without ruining society and themselves, should be "held to service or labor" under other citizens. It was iniquity that they should be denied any franchise attainable by any other citizen. As this was "self-evident," and the equality "inalienable," no constitutions, laws, or covenants could legitimate the difference between African and American. But they all became null and void in attempting to do so. Yea, God himself was quite roundly notified, that he had better not legitimate it, or he would be repudiated also! And when some eight millions were unable to see this Jacobin logic so, a quarter of a million of them were killed, their homes desolated, and half a continent clad in ruin! *Thus practical* is this science of philosophy!

Are these portentous forces of the philosophic cloud-land, then, reducible to no laws? If so, we must cower and tremble before them, as our savage forefathers, twenty centuries ago, did before the lightning and tempest. The conviction that their causes are beyond our control, or even knowledge, must combine with our experience of their mischiefs. Is this abject state the best that physical science can promise to society? No. As Matthew Maury reduced the laws of meteorology to a science, hitherto only a riddle and a terror to mankind, so a modest philosophy, pursuing the same humble, diligent method for "the investigation of nature," teaches to discriminate, to foretell, and even to control the lightnings descending from the spiritual world.