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Love and Scholarship

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"An honest confession is good for the soul."

I never liked mathematics; and have at times been disposed to look upon Euclid as a minor Egyptian plague; certainly, as having brought about a greater curse to the children of men than ever did our primitive parents. But whilst I have always had such an antipathy to this Archimedean pastime, I have, on the other hand, been ever captivated by the study of the languages; and have never been able to speak of Homer, Horace, and Virgil, except as the apostles of intellectual peace and goodwill toward men. The Latin Treatise of Bishop Berkeley on Mathematics hath been from time immemorial my beau idéal of incongruity; the idea of a man’s arrogating the Latin tongue, wherewith to put forth a treatise on this scientific abomination, appears to me more of a prostitution of “the livery of heaven to serve the devil in,” than aught else that hath ever come under my observation; I could have known from this, without a perusal of his subsequent productions, that he was not altogether human, in other words, that there was somewhat of immaterialism about him. I allude to this predilection for the classics, simply because of its intimate connection with the mournful incident in my history which I am about to relate.

I was sitting in my room one night, imbibing the original, i.e. outlandish phrases of Æschylus, when I was interrupted by a very unceremonious visit from my friend Noddlestupe, of the Freshman class, if it is allowable for a senior to acknowledge a friend in the aforesaid class.

“Hallo, Jack,” he cried, “you must go down with me to see the ga’-h’als, so you must”—at the same time arranging his standing collar in the looking-glass with infinite nonchalance. He continued: “I s’pose if I am a Freshman, and you are a Senior, we can agree in going to see the girls, can’t we?”

The fellow who thus addressed me was quite handsome, and a most essential fop in habit and appearance, in consequence whereof he was a universal favorite amongst the girls. But, however tempting his company might be on such an occasion, I had no inclination or intention to accept the abrupt invitation, and forthwith commenced an excuse.

“My respected friend,” I replied, “you have certainly found me in no frame of mind to engage in anything of this nature—”

“Faugh!” interrupted he, “when will you get in such a frame of—”

“But then I’ve ten propositions in Calculus at six, and five pages in Æschylus—”

“Now that’s a precious way for a man of your sense to talk. Why, you can get them both in ten minutes—and come, let me tell you,” at the same time placing his hands and mouth to my ear. He whispered something,
whereupon I immediately arose, and dressing myself, blew out the spirit lamp, and proceeded to follow my friend Noddlestupe!

As readers have a legitimate right to demand any information which it may be in the power of the writer to impart, and as the Freshman didn't whisper loud enough to be heard, I doubt not but that the curious reader will ask what he said. Why, la! me, 'twas nothing in the world but this: "Come ahead; we'll go down to see Miss Sus—I mean the Misses Benston!" And if he (the reader) or she should wish to know why my reluctance was so much overcome thereby, that I arose and accompanied friend Noddlestupe, why, in that case, I suppose, I must candidly confess that I—I esteemed Miss Susan Benston very highly. But mind, reader, I tell you this in confidence; and—but I hav'n't time to add what I was about to, for we are now standing at the door of the Misses Benston, awaiting an answer to the door-bell. And now good-bye, reader, for we are invited into the parlor, and, unless you will step in with us, we'll have to leave you for the present.

We had to wait some time before the young ladies entered; first came Miss Mary; in about ten minutes afterward Miss Jane, and, in five minutes after her, Miss Susan! as when the twilight of morning increases into day, and thus awaits the rising of the sun himself. I believe the fashion of dropping in one by one, so prevalent amongst ladies, arises from the fear of dazzling their visitors with too much beauty at once—I don't know though. It was very strange, but I never felt such complete inability to engage in conversation in my life, as I did this night. And oh! how I envied the senseless Noddlestupe beside me, who was carrying on quite a spirited conversation with two of the young ladies, whilst I could scarcely grumble forth my meaning in monosyllabic demi-sentences to one. Indeed, this envy occupied such a place in my mind, that I turned my attention more to what the Freshman said than to what Miss Susan said to me; and, in listening, I heard him pronounce the following amazing sentence:—

"That, Miss Jane, is, as Ovid says, a rari ave."

"Rari ave, Noddlestupe?" I cried, interrupting him with an emphasis that astonished the trio infinitely.

"Yes, to be sure, rari ave; what then?"

"Why, you must know that it's bad Latin; and, besides, it isn't Ovid that says it, but Juvenal."

"You're entirely mistaken; and if you'll think a moment, you'll doubtless perceive your error. Perfectly proper;" then, turning to the ladies, he continued—"you see, ladies, it's where Deucalion and Pyrrha are the only two who are not overwhelmed by the flood; and, as the dove comes back to him, he is beautifully represented as breaking out, 'Rari ave! hail, hail! sweet bird,' and so forth."

The sang froid with which he laid this string of nonsense before three intelligent ladies, and the simple idea of a Freshman having the ineffable
impudence to quote foul Latin in my presence, and then try to browbeat me, a Senior, into the acknowledgment of its correctness, perfectly unmanned me; I couldn’t speak, and he, interpreting my silence to his own advantage, continued—

“Oh, never mind, Jack! it was only a lapsus linguæ of yours. The ladies don’t think anything of it, I’m sure!”

The latter part of the sentence was spoken in a whisper, sufficiently audible, however, to call forth the consolation of the three Graces as followeth:

Mary.—"Certainly we don’t!"

Jane.—“Why, to be sure not!”

Susan(!)—“Never dreamed of such a thing!”

It has been months since, but I have never been able to look a lady in the face from that time to this. My classics have lost their attraction, and I have turned my attention to Philosophy!

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J. BAYARD TAYLOR.

We know no poet of the present day whose career we have observed with more interest or more ardent hope, than that of Bayard Taylor—short, indeed, as yet, but thus far brilliant and successful. Our eyes have been constantly fixed upon him, from his first appearance before the world as a poet, until now. We read with much pleasure, when first given to the public several years ago, his “Ximena and other Poems,” a modest little volume, produced amid the laborious and obscure duties of a printer’s apprentice, and published by the author to procure means for gratifying his insatiate thirst for foreign travel. We then distinctly recognized, in those creations of his youthful genius, bright germs of thought that have even yet scarce had time for full development,—buds that have hardly yet burst into full bloom. We have followed him, too, with lively interest, in his “Views Afoot,” through the most enchanting scenes of the Old World; and have ever been forced to laud his indomitable energy and never-failing self-reliance, whilst we admired his unassuming character and modest disposition. His subsequent rise to fame has been remarkably rapid; difficulties which have crushed others, have seemed to vanish as he advanced. His steady progress, from the humble position of a printer-boy, through successive grades of journalism, to the editorship of one of the first literary periodicals in our country, declares him as well the favorite of fortune as the child of genius. Bayard Taylor has not yet reached his zenith; he is still calmly winning his way upward amid the crowd and din of the busy world around him. He is destined yet to acquire a stronger hold upon the affections of mankind—