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ADDRESS

ON THE

ENCOURAGEMENT OF EMULATION IN THE
EDUCATION OF YOUTH,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

EDUCATION CONVENTION OF INDIANA.

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 27, 1837.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE SENATE.

INDIANAPOLIS:

DOUGLASS & NOEL, PRINTERS.

1837.

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE CONVENTION,
AND FELLOW-CITIZENS:

THE topic allotted to me for remark this evening, is, *the propriety or impropriety of encouraging emulation in the education of youth.* By some very recent and sensible writers on the subject of education, the practical question involved in our theme, would seem to be disposed of without much difficulty. They consider the term emulation as synonymous with ambition and designating one of the modifications of selfishness. Now the desire of acquisition, which is founded altogether in the love of having the pre-eminence, is doubtless inseparable from an envious spirit or from vanity, and ought to be rigidly discountenanced. It is a misanthropic desire and ungenerous, fraught with incalculable evils to the community.

But this application of the term, emulation, has not obtained universally, if it has in general, with the most accurate and discriminating writers. I have the impression, that it prevails less extensively on the other side of the Atlantic than with us; it certainly is not so generally adopted at the south and west, as in some other sections of our country.

No one we presume, who shall read in Marshall's narrative of the capture of Lord Cornwallis, that "reciprocal esteem and a spirit of *emulation*" were cultivated by Washington between the French and Americans; or, in the very language of Washington himself, "that the bravery exhibited by the attacking troops," composed of the two nations, "was *emulous* and praiseworthy," will understand the word to be used in a bad sense. It was neither the spirit of *ambition* nor of *envy*, which he endeavored to diffuse in the allied French and American army; for it comprised mutual esteem, and, consequently, with the desire to excel, the love of ministering to each other's fame.

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Not less obvious and appropriate to our argument, is the meaning of emulation in the following remark of Dr. Johnson:—"Of the ancients, enough remains to excite our *emulation* and direct our endeavors." The great English moralist here refers to *emulation*, as an active desire among modern nations, to surpass the ancients in works of art and genius, and evidently presents this desire in the character of an effective and useful principle.

In perfect accordance with such views, Buck, in his Theological Dictionary, denominates emulation, "a generous ardor, kindled by the praiseworthy examples of others, which impels us to imitate, to rival, and, if possible, to excel them; a passion which involves in it, esteem of the person whose attainments or conduct we emulate, of the qualities and actions in which we emulate him, and a desire of resemblance, together with a joy springing from a hope of success."

The Biblical Dictionary of Dr. Alexander, defines emulation, with special reference to its meaning in the Sacred Writings, "a striving to do more than others, in what is holy, just and good."

That emulation is used in a good sense, in the inspired scriptures, may be easily shown. In what other sense, we ask, could the holy apostle endeavor, by magnifying his office of teacher to the Gentiles, 'to provoke to emulation his kindred?' Such he is at pains to show, is the *natural* effect on their minds of preaching the gospel to other nations; and he evidently rejoices in it as a desirable result. It might be shown, that the apostle actually availed himself of this principle, especially in his plea for the indigent and suffering disciples at Jerusalem. It is beyond a question, most happily illustrated in his own zeal, which nobly aspires to surpass even the other inspired teachers, in toils and sacrifices for the christian cause; while he manifests unmingled satisfaction in their success. This emulation was not the feeling of selfish jealousy nor the desire of tame imitation, but a generous and holy ardor to excel.

These few remarks may suffice to justify our application of this term, to an active and useful propensity in men, and whose existence is testified by numerous and competent witnesses. "No one can doubt," says Upham in his Mental Philosophy, "that this principle aids very essentially in keeping the powers of men in suitable activity. How often do we see individuals of distinguished talents, who hold the same place in public estimation, contending with all the

owers of their minds for the mastery over each other, and yet maintaining a mutual respect and sincere friendship. The whole ardor of their souls springs forward to the attainment of some new excellence of reason, or speech, or action; and while they rejoice in their own ascendancy, they feel the purest complacency in the honorable achievements of their rivals."

This account of emulation supplies a sufficient answer to most of the objections, which have been urged against even its toleration in the education of the young. We shall not affect ignorance of the frequent existence of envy and hurtful strife, among the youthful aspirants in some and perhaps most of our literary institutions. Nor will it befit any christian now to become their apologist. These evils have indeed been attributed to emulation as their natural parent; but she disclaims the relationship, and hands them over to a more unprincipled and assuming dame, called Ambition. And they would actually seem to be as little connected with emulation, as with most other natural and active principles of the human mind.

Admitting then that emulation is an innocent propensity, and its influences on human activity of great moment to the world; it becomes a serious inquiry, what are its just pretensions to our practical regard, in the intellectual and moral training of the young. It must be obvious, we should think to all, that such a principle in men, should neither be attempted to be suppressed; nor can be safely overlooked. On the contrary, it claims from every instructor of youth, a very practical attention.

It is first of all important, that the young should be carefully taught to discriminate between emulation and those modifications of the selfish principle, with which it is in most danger of being confounded. Several authors have named envy, as being nearly allied to emulation and the most commonly taken for it, principally on the ground, that both imply a desire to excel. I cannot however agree with this statement; and am rather surprised at the want of discrimination, not to say of common-sense observation, which it manifests. There is a wide and obvious difference between the desire to excel, founded in a benevolent regard for the persons attempted to be surpassed, and the unfriendly feelings comprised in envy of their success. Few indeed, we think, are the instances in which the one is mistaken for the other. There is another active principle in man, which puts in a far

more specious claim to this alliance and even identity with emulation. Who has not heard of "a *laudable* and *necessary* ambition?" This is the principle, which recent writers have actually confounded with emulation; and through which it has been formally assailed, as though it were accountable for envy and hatred and mortal strife. Ambition is however the thing, which, in the similitude and very garb of a generous propensity, does really overlook all right, and laugh at the claims of charity. It aims indeed at excelling, but for an inferior and selfish object, and often from the worst of motives. The young should be made to understand the difference; and that true emulation really terminates, where envy, hatred of rivals or vanity in success, begins. He who habitually yields to these latter emotions, has upon him the brand of a narrow and selfish spirit. Emulation is kind and charitable, and magnanimous; and finds only *regret* in the mistakes, the deficiencies and disappointments of others; while she sincerely rejoices in their highest attainments and most splendid success. He that is truly emulous of others, would not, were it in his power, turn them back, nor for one moment retard their progress, in the race of improvement. He only strives to excel them, and will admire and love them the more for the superiority, which may render that impossible.

All this, the child, and much more the youth, can easily be taught. He should also be exhorted to bring his desires of excellence to the correct moral standard, and often to try himself by it. Neglect here, whether it arise, on the part of the teacher, from lack of virtuous principle, or want of discrimination, or from an honest zeal to reform mankind, by giving up to indiscriminate proscription, whatever natural propensities are suspected of evil, is most seriously to be deprecated.

Emulation demands less of stimulus in its development, than of care to preserve it from deteriorating into inferior principles of action. It appears to sustain a relation to ambition, analogous to that of self-love to selfishness, or of self-esteem to vanity. Men ought certainly to love themselves. They ought to be possessed of a just self-respect. Deficiency in either, might be followed by strange and destructive effects. The truth is, deficiency is here less commonly the fault than excess. The judicious teacher will not therefore labor so anxiously to increase the influence of these principles, as he will to preserve them from degenerating into selfishness and vanity. For what, I ask,

is selfishness but self-love urged on to criminal excess? And what is vanity but self-estimation, inflated beyond all reasonable bounds, and cherished in base forgetfulness of our dependence and obligations?

It is equally possible that emulation should be excessively encouraged, should be urged up to that point, where the love of excelling holds a dangerous and wicked pre-eminence. The person emulated would, in this case, be regarded as a despised or a dreaded rival; his acquirements would be contemplated with envy instead of admiration; and the contest become one for mere superiority. In other words, emulation may thus degenerate in ambition, and the employment of too much stimulus, should be expected to realize this deterioration.

On the other hand, this propensity bears a striking resemblance to self-love, in the natural provisions which Providence ever supplies for its developement. Its existence and growth are early discoverable in children. The infant pupil, immediately on commencing his education, is placed along side of his equals in age and literary advantages. No sooner does he occupy this position, than he feels and exhibits the desire to excel. He learns to measure his success by that of his little companions, to weigh the commendations of his teacher and read his speaking eye. Who that listens to the statements of children respecting their proficiency in any useful attainment, has not remarked the comparisons which they involved? Who does not know both from observation and experience, how easily the young, in every class of literary institutions, are excited to a contest for superiority; and how almost unconsciously, both parents and teachers avail themselves of this fact, at least so far as to keep their charge advised of their comparative progress and capacity for improvement?

Active life affords the man of enterprise, in every useful calling, a sufficient stimulous to virtuous emulation. Indeed, the majority of educated minds suffer rather from excess, and the consequent exclusion of other influences and motives, not less appropriate to great and useful undertakings.

The desire to excel, it must be acknowledged, admits of a wide and efficient influence; but it neither comprises nor implies a large portion of all the persuasives, which should move a virtuous mind to action. No considerate parent would be satisfied with having his children obey him and consult his happiness, from motives which do

not involve genuine filial regard. He could not be averse to witness some measure of emulation in their dutiful attentions, and a conscientious respect for justice in every arrangement; but he would still feel that filial love is the natural and most certain incentive to filial duties. He would have them deal justly and lovingly with him from tender affection. So of all the benevolent actions and useful enterprises in which men are employed. Each has an appropriate motive or principle of action to which it corresponds, and from which it ought to spring. Men should act the part of friends from true friendship, of patriots from love to their country, of reformers from regard to public virtue, and of philanthropists from an expansive spirit of benevolence. On the same principle, the dissuasives from a criminal or useless life, should be appropriate to the individual to be influenced and the misconduct from which we would recall him. To every vice and folly, there may be a barrier raised in the mind of the tempted individual. Need we explain here the value of an enlightened conscience? Of early and permanent impressions of our obligations to Providence for unnumbered benefits? and of the interesting and solemn claims of the community around us, if not of future generations, upon our best endeavors? Who has not learned, that the social relations, the innocent attachments, the hopes and apprehensions of men, supply inexhaustible sources of natural and moral incentives to great and virtuous actions?

It must be recollected, that education is answerable, not merely for the training of the young to right and useful undertakings, but also for the motives by which their minds are allowed to be swayed. If it is desirable, that the child should early refrain from vice and idleness, and acquire strictly moral and amiable habits and a spirit of useful enterprise, on those just and appropriate principles, whose efficacy is felt wherever virtue reigns, then should no single incentive, (the love of God and man excepted,) impart the entire character to his actions. He may rightly cherish the desire to excel in whatever calling Providence has allotted him. But his conscience must be kept awake to the calls of duty, and his heart to the claims of gratitude and the pleadings of human sympathy. Even self-love, and a proper self-respect, and the power of natural affection, and patriotism, and whatever is lovely and of good report, must each in its place, constrain him to act nobly his part. These various and powerful princi-

ples of action, I contend, are needful for erring men, in this state of temptation to evil : he needs all these dissuasives from vice, all these incentives to virtue. Were it otherwise, these are still the principles of action, which most become his moral and immortal nature. They are best suited to his individual and social responsibilities, and may be denominated the only adequate and lasting incentives to a virtuous life.

More need not be said to illustrate the necessity of restricting the culture of emulation as a principle of well doing. The time we hope is near, when it will not be considered, so commonly as now, that the main object of the teacher is to carry forward his pupils in a brilliant course of literary acquisitions, without much regard to the moral considerations, by means of which their powers are so industriously tasked. He will be held responsible to parents and to society, as he ever must be to Providence, for the active principles he supplies and cultivates. Then may we hope to see every class of our literary institutions adapt their culture of mind to the moral nature and responsibilities of the young, in view of the different parts they have to act in the world. By such appropriate training will our children be rendered worthy citizens of the great and happy land in which they live, and be qualified for the noble enterprises of philanthropy to which we trust it is destined.

Our train of remark has then brought us to these conclusions :

1. Emulation is an innocent and desirable propensity, and useful, as one of the active principles of our nature.
2. The objections commonly made to its encouragement in the education of youth, are to a great extent, founded in mistake. Ambition and other modifications of the selfish principle, are really chargeable with the evils which have been objected to emulation.
3. Notwithstanding the value of emulation as a principle of action, it claims less of aid in its developement, than of discrimination and care to preserve it from degenerating into ambition and other selfish principles.
4. There are other active propensities of our nature, to other persuasives to improvement and useful enterprise, which from their number and power and moral character, have superior claims upon the practical friends of education. It is believed that these claims have not been sufficiently appreciated. Many teachers seem more intent

upon exciting their pupils to exemplary *diligence* in study, than anxious to effect it only by the influence of right and appropriate motives. And yet upon the motives of the pupil, has depended the moral character, and it may be, the lasting benefit of his acquisitions. How serious the fact! how wide and destructive the delinquency!

It may naturally be expected, that we should express an opinion of those public distinctions in not a few of our literary institutions, which have for their object to foster a spirit of emulation, by exhibiting to the public the comparative acquirements of their pupils. The plans by which this is effected are various. In some institutions, a strict account is kept of the conduct and progress of all the students, with reference to their classification. Every student has his name placed in one of the three or four lists, which, in the judgment of his teachers, designates the class of students, with which he ranks, in natural capacity and scholarship. Such records of comparative standing are communicated to parents and guardians, are exhibited to public examiners, and in other ways extensively promulged. They also form the evidence of merit, by which the honors of the college or academy are distributed to the pupils.

Other institutions, without formally classifying their under graduates, are not less mindful of their comparative improvement, and always designate individuals to public exercises and privileges of different descriptions, in conformity with it. This fact is perfectly understood by all concerned; and does not fail to exert a considerable influence on the feelings and literary habits of the student. Whether this influence is on the whole desirable, has been of late the subject of much discussion.

The advocates for these discriminations contend, that they excite permanently a useful and necessary emulation, without occasioning of course any evil. The student, it is said, and said truly, has no first cause of complaint; nor is he compelled to act from improper motives. If he becomes ambitious and gives way to envy of his superiors and even to unfriendly animosities, he alone is ~~to~~ be blamed.

This representation is not without force, and should doubtless be well considered by those, who contemplate a change in the system. We owe this respect to the *oldest*, and, in many respects, the *best* institutions in our country. But while we avoid innovating rashly, it

must not be forgotten, that we are bound to weigh the wisdom of others, and, where the means are afforded, to put it to a practical test.

In the present case, it may be properly a subject of inquiry, whether these public distinctions, intended to encourage a useful emulation, are wisely adopted to their object. The desire to excel for the sake of excellence, and from admiration of the individuals emulated does not live on publicity and commendation; and has, in truth, little need of public honors to excite it. On the contrary, such distinctions would seem to be suited rather to the selfish propensities of our nature. They appeal directly to ambition. If they do not and are not commonly productive of the corresponding fruits, then have we indeed mistaken some of the most obvious and uniform operations of the human mind.

The practical question is, can these powerful excitements of ambition and its kindred emotions, be dispensed with, except at the hazard of incurring other and more serious evils? They doubtless can, if other and better incentives to action, are practically within our reach. And who shall pronounce that they are not, until we have made the trial. Several Eastern Colleges and high schools have begun the experiment of doing without them; and they report, I believe without exception, that it works well. A recent communication from the President of one of these colleges, assures me, that the effect of abolishing honorary distinctions among their students, has been in every particular, most happy. Instead of extinguishing their desire for high attainments in scholarship, it has evidently augmented that desire; while it has greatly added to the peacefulness and cheerful industry of the college.

In this young state, we enjoy, at least in the infancy of our institutions, the best opportunities for testing the power of moral considerations and true emulation, on the minds of youth. The trial will cost us nothing, on the score of change; nor need it expose to hazard any valuable interest. While therefore not a few of the more experienced teachers and friends of education at the East, are known either to abandon, or seriously distrust the systems of public honors, which have generally been connected with the education of youth on both sides of the Atlantic, we are sufficiently warranted in making the experiment of what can be effected by more unexceptionable persuasives. We say then, let this experiment be fairly made.

It is desirable, no doubt, that every student should be informed of the measure of both his acquisitions and capacity for improvement. We should then be taught to estimate them justly. But neither the District School, the Academy or the College, need this estimate be founded in public comparisons with others, rather than with the different stages of his own advancement. It were indeed easy for instructors to adopt some device, by which the pupil would be led to compare himself more with himself, and draw from his own progress, a powerful incentive to diligence. Now can it be difficult to place before him the fond expectations of relatives and friends, and the reasonable claims of society. Innumerable motives may be presented to his conscience, and his self love; while his companions are summoned before his mind, not in the character of rivals, but of worthy examples, which he is bound to admire, and if possible to imitate.

We repeat it, let the experiment be made, of conducting every department of our literary institutions on those principles, which shall make as little as possible to the selfish propensities of the young. For this, competent instructors of good moral character, who have the talent of arresting the attention of the young, and throwing a glow over whatever they attempt to teach, must be employed.

Instructors also as well as pupils, must imbibe the desire to succeed without giving place to vanity or the spirit of ambition. The sentiment must be widely inculcated and obtain with the citizens, that the teacher is as truly responsible for the motives by which he endeavours to secure the industry of his pupils, as he is for the subjects on which he employs them. In short, the people must be persuaded of the practical truth, that no greater work of philanthropy or of merit is involved upon them, than that of rightly educating the young for the duties of men, of citizens and of Christians. Let this solemn duty be once duly appreciated, and we need not despair of future generations that shall truly honor, while they bless the ancestors who faithfully consulted their noblest and lasting interests.