

# The Advancement of Learning commended to the care of Kings

*To the King.*

(1) It might seem to have more convenience, though it come often otherwise to pass (excellent King), that those which are fruitful in their generations, and have in themselves the foresight of immortality in their descendants, should likewise be more careful of the good estate of future times, unto which they know they must transmit and commend over their dearest pledges. Queen Elizabeth was a sojourner in the world in respect of her unmarried life, and was a blessing to her own times; and yet so as the impression of her good government, besides her happy memory, is not without some effect which doth survive her. But to your Majesty, whom God hath already blessed with so much royal issue, worthy to continue and represent you for ever, and whose youthful and fruitful bed doth yet promise many the like renovations, it is proper and agreeable to be conversant not only in the transitory parts of good government, but in those acts also which are in their nature permanent and perpetual. Amongst the which (if affection do not transport me) there is not any more worthy than the further endowment of the world with sound and fruitful knowledge. For why should a few received authors stand up like Hercules' columns, beyond which there should be no sailing or discovering, since we have so bright and benign a star as your Majesty to conduct and prosper us? To return therefore where we left, it remaineth to consider of what kind those acts are which have been undertaken and performed by kings and others for the increase and advancement of learning, wherein I purpose to speak actively, without digressing or dilating.

(2) Let this ground therefore be laid, that all works are over common by amplitude of reward, by soundness of direction, and by the conjunction of labours. The first multiplieth endeavour, the second preventeth error, and the third supplieth the frailty of man. But the principal of these is direction, for *claudus in via antevertit cursorem extra viam*; and Solomon excellently setteth it down, "If the iron be not sharp, it requireth more strength, but wisdom is that which prevaieth," signifying that the invention or election of the mean is more effectual than any enforcement or accumulation of endeavours. This I am induced to speak, for that (not derogating from the noble intention of any that have been deservers towards the state of learning), I do observe nevertheless that their works and acts are rather matters of magnificence and memory than of progression and proficience, and tend rather to augment the mass of learning in the multitude of learned men than to rectify or raise the sciences themselves.

(3) The works or acts of merit towards learning are conversant about three objects—the places of learning, the books of learning, and the persons of the learned. For as water, whether it be the dew of heaven or the springs of the earth, doth scatter and leese itself in the ground, except it be collected into some receptacle where it may by union comfort and sustain itself; and for that cause the industry of man hath made and framed springheads, conduits, cisterns, and pools, which men have accustomed likewise to beautify and adorn with accomplishments of magnificence and state, as well as of use and necessity; so this excellent liquor of knowledge, whether it descend from divine inspiration, or spring from human sense, would soon perish and vanish to oblivion, if it were not preserved in books, traditions, conferences, and places appointed, as universities, colleges, and schools, for the receipt and comforting of the same.

(4) The works which concern the seats and places of learning are four—foundations and buildings, endowments with revenues, endowments with franchises and privileges, institutions and ordinances for government—all tending to quietness and privateness of life, and discharge of cares and troubles; much like the stations which Virgil prescribeth for the hiving of bees:

“Principio sedes apibus statioque petenda,  
Quo neque sit ventis aditus, &c.”

(5) The works touching books are two—first, libraries, which are as the shrines where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed; secondly, new editions of authors, with more correct impressions, more faithful translations, more profitable glosses, more diligent annotations, and the like.

(6) The works pertaining to the persons of learned men (besides the advancement and countenancing of them in general) are two—the reward and designation of readers in sciences already extant and invented; and the reward and designation of writers and inquirers concerning any parts of learning not sufficiently laboured and prosecuted.

(7) These are summarily the works and acts wherein the merits of many excellent princes and other worthy personages, have been conversant. As for any particular commemorations, I call to mind what Cicero said when he gave general thanks, *Difficile non aliquem, ingratum quenquam præterire*. Let us rather, according to the Scriptures, look unto that part of the race which is before us, than look back to that which is already attained.

(8) First, therefore, amongst so many great foundations of colleges in Europe, I find strange that they are all dedicated to professions, and none left free to arts and sciences at large. For if men judge that learning should be referred to action, they judge well; but in this they fall into the error described in the ancient fable, in which the other parts of the body did suppose the stomach had been idle, because it neither performed the office of motion, as the limbs do, nor of sense, as the head doth; but yet notwithstanding it is the stomach that digesteth and distributeth to all the rest. So if any man think philosophy and universality to be idle studies, he doth not consider that all professions are from thence served and supplied. And this I take to be a great cause that hath hindered the progression of learning, because these fundamental knowledges have been studied but in passage. For if you will have a tree bear more fruit than it hath used to do, it is not anything you can do to the boughs, but it is the stirring of the earth and putting new mould about thee roots that must work it. Neither is it to be forgotten, that this dedicating of foundations and dotations to professory learning hath not only had a malign aspect and influence upon the growth of sciences, but hath also been prejudicial to states, and governments. For hence it proceedeth that princes find a solitude in regard of able men to serve them in causes of estate, because there is no education collegiate which is free, where such as were so disposed might give themselves in histories, modern languages, books of policy and civil discourse, and other the like enablements unto service of estate.

(9) And because founders of colleges do plant, and founders of lectures do water, it followeth well in order to speak of the defect which is in public lectures; namely, in the smallness, and meanness of the salary or reward which in most places is assigned unto them, whether they be lectures of arts, or of

professions. For it is necessary to the progression of sciences that readers be of the most able and sufficient men; as those which are ordained for generating and propagating of sciences, and not for transitory use. This cannot be, except their condition and endowment be such as may content the ablest man to appropriate his whole labour and continue his whole age in that function and attendance; and therefore must have a proportion answerable to that mediocrity or competency of advancement, which may be expected from a profession or the practice of a profession. So as, if you will have sciences flourish, you must observe David's military law, which was, "That those which stayed with the carriage should have equal part with those which were in the action;" else will the carriages be ill attended. So readers in sciences are indeed the guardians of the stores and provisions of sciences, whence men in active courses are furnished, and therefore ought to have equal entertainment with them; otherwise if the fathers in sciences be of the weakest sort or be ill maintained,

“Et patrum invalidi referent jejunia nati.”

(10) Another defect I note, wherein I shall need some alchemist to help me, who call upon men to sell their books, and to build furnaces; quitting and forsaking Minerva and the Muses as barren virgins, and relying upon Vulcan. But certain it is, that unto the deep, fruitful, and operative study of many sciences, specialty natural philosophy and physic, books be not only the instrumentals; wherein also the beneficence of men hath not been altogether wanting. For we see spheres, globes, astrolabes, maps, and the like, have been provided as appurtenances to astronomy and cosmography, as well as books. We see likewise that some places instituted for physic have annexed the commodity of gardens for simples of all sorts, and do likewise command the use of dead bodies for anatomies. But these do respect but a few things. In general, there will hardly be any main proficience in the disclosing of nature, except there be some allowance for expenses about experiments; whether they be experiments appertaining to Vulcanus or Dædalus, furnace or engine, or any other kind. And therefore as secretaries and spials of princes and states bring in bills for intelligence, so you must allow the spials and intelligencers of nature to bring in their bills; or else you shall be ill advertised.

(11) And if Alexander made such a liberal assignation to Aristotle of treasure for the allowance of hunters, fowlers, fishers, and the like, that he might compile a history of nature, much better do they deserve it that travail in arts of nature.

(12) Another defect which I note is an intermission or neglect in those which are governors in universities, of consultation, and in princes or superior persons, of visitation: to enter into account and consideration, whether the readings, exercises, and other customs appertaining unto learning, anciently begun and since continued, be well instituted or no; and thereupon to ground an amendment or reformation in that which shall be found inconvenient. For it is one of your Majesty's own most wise and princely maxims, "That in all usages and precedents, the times be considered wherein they first began; which if they were weak or ignorant, it derogateth from the authority of the usage, and leaveth it for suspect." And therefore inasmuch as most of the usages and orders of the universities were derived from more obscure times, it is the more requisite they be re-examined. In this kind I will give an instance or two, for example sake, of things that are the most obvious and familiar. The one is a matter, which though it be ancient and general, yet I hold to be an error; which is, that scholars in universities come too soon and too unripe to logic and rhetoric, arts fitter for graduates than children and novices. For these two, rightly taken, are the gravest of sciences, being the arts of arts; the one for

judgment, the other for ornament. And they be the rules and directions how to set forth and dispose matter: and therefore for minds empty and unfraught with matter, and which have not gathered that which Cicero calleth *sylva* and *supellex*, stuff and variety, to begin with those arts (as if one should learn to weigh, or to measure, or to paint the wind) doth work but this effect, that the wisdom of those arts, which is great and universal, is almost made contemptible, and is degenerate into childish sophistry and ridiculous affectation. And further, the untimely learning of them hath drawn on by consequence the superficial and unprofitable teaching and writing of them, as fitteth indeed to the capacity of children. Another is a lack I find in the exercises used in the universities, which do snake too great a divorce between invention and memory. For their speeches are either premeditate, in *verbis conceptis*, where nothing is left to invention, or merely extemporal, where little is left to memory. Whereas in life and action there is least use of either of these, but rather of intermixtures of premeditation and invention, notes and memory. So as the exercise fitteth not the practice, nor the image the life; and it is ever a true rule in exercises, that they be framed as near as may be to the life of practice; for otherwise they do pervert the motions and faculties of the mind, and not prepare them. The truth whereof is not obscure, when scholars come to the practices of professions, or other actions of civil life; which when they set into, this want is soon found by themselves, and sooner by others. But this part, touching the amendment of the institutions and orders of universities, I will conclude with the clause of Cæsar's letter to Oppius and Balbes, *Hoc quemadmodum fieri possit, nonnulla mihi in mentem veniunt, et multa reperiri possunt: de iis rebus rgo vos ut cogitationem suscipiatis.*

(13) Another defect which I note ascendeth a little higher than the precedent. For as the proficiencie of learning consisteth much in the orders and institutions of universities in the same states and kingdoms, so it would be yet more advanced, if there were more intelligence mutual between the universities of Europe than now there is. We see there be many orders and foundations, which though they be divided under several sovereignties and territories, yet they take themselves to have a kind of contract, fraternity, and correspondence one with the other, insomuch as they have provincials and generals. And surely as nature createth brotherhood in families, and arts mechanical contract brotherhoods in communalities, and the anointment of God superinduceth a brotherhood in kings and bishops, so in like manner there cannot but be a fraternity in learning and illumination, relating to that paternity which is attributed to God, who is called the Father of illuminations or lights.

(14) The last defect which I will note is, that there hath not been, or very rarely been, any public designation of writers or inquirers concerning such parts of knowledge as may appear not to have been already sufficiently laboured or undertaken; unto which point it is an inducement to enter into a view and examination what parts of learning have been prosecuted, and what omitted. For the opinion of plenty is amongst the causes of want, and the great quantity of books maketh a show rather of superfluity than lack; which surcharge nevertheless is not to be remedied by making no more books, but by making more good books, which, as the serpent of Moses, might devour the serpents of the enchanters.

(15) The removing of all the defects formerly enumerate, except the last, and of the active part also of the last (which is the designation of writers), are *opera basilica*; towards which the endeavours of a private man may be but as an image in a crossway, that may point at the way, but cannot go it. But the inducing part of the latter (which is the survey of learning) may be set forward by private travail. Wherefore I will now attempt to make a general and faithful perambulation of learning, with an inquiry what parts thereof lie fresh and waste, and not improved and converted by the industry of man, to the end that such a plot made and recorded to memory may both minister light to any public designation, and, also serve to excite voluntary endeavours. Wherein, nevertheless, my purpose is at

this time to note only omissions and deficiencies, and not to make any redargution of errors or incomplete prosecutions. For it is one thing to set forth what ground lieth unmanured, and another thing to correct ill husbandry in that which is manured.

In the handling and undertaking of which work I am not ignorant what it is that I do now move and attempt, nor insensible of mine own weakness to sustain my purpose. But my hope is, that if my extreme love to learning carry me too far, I may obtain the excuse of affection; for that “It is not granted to man to love and to be wise.” But I know well I can use no other liberty of judgment than I must leave to others; and I for my part shall be indifferently glad either to perform myself, or accept from another, that duty of humanity—*Nam qui erranti comiter monstrat viam, &c.* I do foresee likewise that of those things which I shall enter and register as deficiencies and omissions, many will conceive and censure that some of them are already done and extant; others to be but curiosities, and things of no great use; and others to be of too great difficulty, and almost impossibility to be compassed and effected. But for the two first, I refer myself to the particulars. For the last, touching impossibility, I take it those things are to be held possible which may be done by some person, though not by every one; and which may be done by many, though not by any one; and which may be done in the succession of ages, though not within the hourglass of one man’s life; and which may be done by public designation, though not by private endeavour. But, notwithstanding, if any man will take to himself rather that of Solomon, “*Dicit piger, Leo est in via,*” than that of Virgil, “*Possunt quia posse videntur,*” I shall be content that my labours be esteemed but as the better sort of wishes; for as it asketh some knowledge to demand a question not impertinent, so it requireth some sense to make a wish not absurd.

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