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ARTICLE VIII.

RECOLLECTIONS OF NOAH PORTER.

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THE most marked trait of Noah Porter was unconsciousness of self when dealing with persons, and perfect self-consciousness in his treatment of a subject. His freedom from selfishness enabled him to give himself wholly to the interests of those who sought his presence; while by voluntary concentration of thought on whatever was in hand he could wield all his intellectual force for its elucidation. The one characteristic gave him control over men by his sympathy with their interests; the other, over a subject by his grasp of its fundamental principles.

"The Perfect Christian Gentleman" is the *sobriquet* which unconsciously arises at the mention of his name. The well-rounded life consists in positive work for good, and negative energy toward evil. To mingle extensively with the world and yet give no offence in anything, requires a more happy union of qualities than that force of character which pursues unrelentingly a noble idea, but with an impetuosity which rudely thrusts aside all who stand in the way. Luther fells by a blow the enemy who opposes: Melanchthon raises the fallen, and through kindness reclaims from error and makes him his friend forever. If the Roman Emperor, when dying, considered the fact that he had never caused a tear greater ground of rejoicing than all his splendid achievements in arms or statesmanship, how happy must the spirit of Noah Porter be if conscious of the memories he has left with all who ever felt his winsome presence!

It would be a great mistake to conclude that his character was not strong or positive because he gave no offence. There are two sorts of forces which rule the world. As attraction and repulsion act on matter, even so moral influences sway character. The one unites; the other disintegrates. Harsh measures and fierce spirits may sometimes be necessary in dealing with evil, but blessed is he who is possessed of such a temper that he can do his Master's work, and make even bad men feel happy while their mistakes are corrected. For most men neutralize much of their good work by a severity which cares little for the method pursued, or the pain given to others, provided their own purpose be effected. But it was the special excellence of President Porter, that his goodness equalled his wisdom, and that his kindness of heart led him to feel that a great part of any desirable result consists in the happiness of the actors while engaged in achieving it. He illustrated this pre-eminently in his own conduct. If he was not always sunny in temper, he was a first-rate actor. When vexations came upon him, he was strong enough to bear them without the help or knowledge of others. The writer has never seen him morose, nor known any one that ever saw him manifest any anger. Yet this was not for lack of vigor, spirit, or deep sense of indignation for wrong. It requires indeed less force of character to get angry and make a fool of one's self than to do almost anything else. Ebullitions of temper are the heat lightning which in summer flashes from a cloud, but brings no rain.

He was many sided; worked in many fields, and in the full light of publicity. There was no reason to conceal his motives; and so he was a living epistle, known and read of all men. In brief outline we may note his chief phases of activity:—

1. He was an Instructor of Youth and a Preacher of the Gospel;

2. Professor and President of a University;

3. The Author of a Philosophical System;
4. An Essayist and Litterateur.

1. The idea, conspicuous through all the ages of the Christian church, that the teacher of knowledge should be a preacher of righteousness, was strongly exemplified in his career. It is to be hoped that this union, held with so much tenacity by the New England churches while they were laying the foundations for a splendid national character, will never be annulled by the tendency to division of labor which of late has become so marked. The divorce between the callings of Preacher and Teacher can help neither, and indicates supposed incompatibility. Noah Porter illustrated the idea of combination most happily, like so many of our greatest educators. After a novitiate as Tutor, during which time he studied theology, he entered the Pastorate; which he cannot be said to have ever given up. For, during all subsequent life, he preached constantly; and everywhere to audiences sympathetic with his earnest but calm presentation of the truth. He preached what he himself experienced, and gained admission to the heart and conscience by presenting the gospel as something adapted to mould the whole man anew. The truths of external nature, the laws of the mind, and the sensibilities of the soul, were shown to be parts of a scheme in which the Divine by condescension enters the sphere of human consciousness. God comes down to us, that we may be raised through right thinking and right living to unite with him; and thus heaven and earth be brought together as component parts of one life eternal. This life was so completely felt and thought by the preacher, that he spoke of its doctrines as realities with which he was familiar, as truths which must find access to all receptive hearts. He believed these so implicitly that he expected them to be appropriated by all fair-minded hearers. "He believed, and therefore he spoke." The sanctity and candor of the preacher were a voucher for the reali-

ties of his message; while the sweetness of his temper showed the effect of their transforming power.

2. It is difficult, even in thought, to separate the preacher from the teacher, because they both have identically the same purpose, that is, to make men capable of doing more good work through the increase of knowledge. These offices were so blended in our instructor that he seemed like a radiating body, giving out both light and life. But if we analyze his work according to the ordinary conceptions, it will be proper also to say that Noah Porter was a Professor of Philosophy; and that he spent his life in teaching young men to think correctly, that they might act rightly. While he is still the preacher, yet in the class-room his attitude must be different from that required by the pulpit. It is there to convince men of the truth, and thereby make them better, but exclusively through the reason. The affections are indeed warmed by the truth as a resultant, but the direct incidence of the light is to awaken intellectual energy. He taught *ex cathedra*, as all successful instructors do, by his presence, the sympathy of his look, the tone of his voice, as well as by the meaning of the words he uttered. The whole man was at work on us, and the force of his character, moral and intellectual, was the hiding of his power. His pupils at the time might not be startled at the novelty of his ideas, or the elegance of his diction. Most likely they were not thinking about him or his manner at all. He certainly never appeared to think of himself. The message he had to deliver absorbed his thoughts. There was energy exerted by him on his pupils, just as attraction by the sun upon the earth. The flower opens its petals to the rays. The youthful nature expanded under the master's touch, which, though powerful, was so gentle that it was discovered only by the effect it silently wrought. Like the dew and rain which fall everywhere to refresh all things alike, but glide off from natures with no capacity for their appropriation; so his teaching fell upon his hearers and tested their

capacity for growth. As far as intention could make it, his instruction was impersonal. The truth spoke for itself, and was sufficient of itself. With some instructors there is always such a consciousness of self apparent, that the man himself is exhibited, not the subject. But he was an apostle with a message, and this so completely filled his soul that there was no thought for anything but its deliverance. He desired the welfare of his pupils to such degree, and was so fully assured that his message would effect this result, that he seemed never to waste a thought as to whether he was popular or not. To have courted popularity was impossible for such a nature as his; yet he received, without asking, what the self-seeking can never secure. Doubtless he desired to be loved, since such a great nature as his must receive as well as give forth much of that feeling which expresses the essential attribute of God. But this came to him by the equalization of forces. His pupils were so happy in his presence, so carried away by the truths he gave them to digest, that they were conscious neither of him as the instructor, nor of themselves as learners. But when time for reflection intervened, they realized that a prophet had been among them.

There was no occasion for him to reprove in the class-room. The instructor was so artless, so confiding, so full of sweetness and light, that no student, however boyish and surcharged with mischief, could think of giving any annoyance. For all instinctively felt that he lived for their welfare; that no thought of himself was entertained; and, therefore, no roguish freak could be looked upon as a personal indignity. There was no constraint between teacher and pupil. The professional chair was not held as a vantage-ground, save to do good to the learner. Hence there was the most perfect freedom in the class-room, in the home of the teacher, which was open as the day to all who wished to enter, and in all public intercourse. He was the minister for the service of every one: both friend and instructor so blended that the two relations could not be

distinguished. It was the writer's privilege to sit with him, listening to lectures on logic and philosophy, at Berlin in 1853–54. He mingled among the brilliant throng of professors and students, adapting himself alike to every age and stage of culture. He was both admired and loved in that assemblage, which composed the most intellectual as well as elegant coterie of literati at that time in the world. His kindness to young men in the University, and their fondness for him, was as marked as when he lectured to his own students at Yale; while his fame as a thinker insured for him the most deferential treatment from those professors at Berlin whom he honored by sitting at their feet as a learner. It is hard to say, in referring to him as a professor, which feeling predominated—whether love for the friend, respect for the noble simplicity of his character, or admiration for his ability and culture; for these were united in such a happy combination, that his pupils must ever feel a new inspiration for all that is true and good when they think of him as their teacher.

His government of young men, whether as professor in his own lecture-room or president of the whole university, was by the law of kindness. His nature was wholly averse to harsh methods, and he employed no punishment as discipline while professor. His manner was so genial, his desire for the well-being of his pupils so hearty, his mastery of the subjects taught so thorough, that there really was no call for animadversion, save in rare instances. Even in these cases he thought it better not to notice offences than to interrupt the progress of his work with those who wished to learn; for the turmoil occasioned in the current of university life is poorly compensated by the punishment of an offender. The great body of students desire to do their duty; they know the authors of all mischief done, and if they cannot correct the evils by the *esprit de corps* of a healthy college sentiment, the infliction of punishment will surely not be successful.

It is true, that among a large body of strong characters

such as college students are, and at a period when their passions are hot and the sense of mischief at its highest, offences must come, and therefore the power of an instructor must be felt occasionally, to be duly respected by the unruly. While president, Mr. Porter did not shrink from the infliction of punishment when his colleagues deemed it necessary. There will always be some professor in any faculty who is not able to stand alone, and for the protection of such the students must be taught that there is reserve power somewhere which can be applied. For his own protection, President Porter had never found it necessary to punish. In fact his aims and methods rendered punitive discipline well-nigh useless. This temper he always retained, and though for the sake of others he did not refuse to punish, yet the discipline of the whole university was strongly marked by his well-known inclination. The prosperity of Yale under his kindly *régime* is well known. In pecuniary growth, increase in the number of faculty and students, the erection of elegant buildings,—in a word, in the wide expansion of every material as well as intellectual resource,—his administration was worthy to come between the magnificent presidency of Woolsey, and the university era so happily ushered in by him whom we all delight to honor.

3. To be the founder of a school or system of philosophy is the privilege of but few in the history of the world; but to do this signifies rather the enunciation of something startling than the exposition of the accredited and consequently normal facts in the phenomena of mind. It is hard to be original in the discovery of principles since Plato showed what is in the intellectual man. It is like winnowing chaff to be a critic of what other men have thought since Aristotle tried the chief thinkers of Greece in his merciless alembic; for he possessed a knowledge which was encyclopædic, and an insight which could discern the truth and eliminate the error through all the mazes of sophistry. If one subtract from

even such writers as Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, the thoughts which can be found in Plato, the residuum of their systems, if not a *caput mortuum*, still would not have enough of life left to stand alone. Nor is this strange. For the phenomena of mind as they have been observed by introspection are as accessible in the clear sky of the Academy as in the mists of Holland and Prussia. The mind in dealing with itself has both the material on which to act, and the most perfect instrument for observation, always at hand. So, in philosophy proper, new schools are, in accuracy of speech, only modifications of ideas well known to the Greek sages; and most commonly a one-sided view of mental phenomena, which claims originality by giving undue prominence to a part of man's spiritual nature. In the sciences of material nature, or kinetic energy, the case is entirely different. Here experiment constantly opens new fields, since nature may be both cajoled and tortured into revealing her secrets; and each new discovery opens fresh lines of investigation. With the phenomena of mind it is not so. Here:

> "Sunt certi denique fines
> Quos ultra nequit pergere homo."

Corroborating testimony to prove this statement may be found in the history of Formal Logic and Pure Geometry. While their applications may be unlimited, the fundamental principles will remain, if we are to judge the future by the past, very much as Aristotle and Euclid formulated them.

Though he wrote a treatise on Metaphysics the most comprehensive and accurate that has been produced in this century, and for purposes of general study the most satisfactory that has ever been written, it would not be just to call President Porter the founder of a school of philosophy. He did not claim originality for his leading principles. He did not attempt to startle the world by paradox. He cast no discredit on his predecessors. He made himself thoroughly master of everything of value in the speculations of the leading

thinkers from Socrates to Schelling. Their doctrines he did not merely take and rearrange in an arbitrary scheme; but he made them his own by assimilation. And from this storehouse of materials he elaborated a System of Philosophy which was as truly original as any one can be that, while holding to independent investigation as its *raison d'être*, must be critical, else fail in its leading purpose as a guide to the study of philosophy. But he did not borrow from others, and then by clothing their thoughts in a new dress challenge them for his own discoveries. His object was to enumerate and describe the facts of mental consciousness so comprehensively and fairly that no tract belonging to his proper sphere might be neglected. And here, just as in his oral instruction, there is not the least trace of egotism. He is as impersonal in his treatment of his subject as if he thought all men could, like himself, forget the interpreter in giving heed to the oracle. His object was to state in the simplest and clearest language the universal principles of philosophy,—principles which must be known, in order to answer the riddle which the sphinx propounds as she stands confronting each thinker who will know his destiny. The subject was clear to his own mind by long and patient elaboration. He had proved that he knew it by the test which Aristotle[1] gives of knowledge, "the ability to communicate it through teaching." Gifted with rare clearness of diction, he aimed to write a book that could be understood. The reproach to metaphysics is that it is a subject which none understand, and which grows darker by illustration. Doubtless this reproach is often deserved from the manner in which the subject is handled. Some deceive themselves in thinking they know what they do not. Others, perhaps, do know, but have no faculty of enunciation. Still others, unconscious, we may charitably hope, of their poverty of knowledge, desire to be esteemed wise, and therefore proceed on the theory: *Omne ignotum pro mirifico est;* and so, like

[1] Metaph. i. 1, § 9. *δλως τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ εἰδότος τὸ δύνασθαι διδάσκειν ἐστί.*

the cuttlefish, leave behind them only troubled waters—of thought. But if philosophy is a science at all, it can be known. And if it can be comprehended, it can be taught. So, also, if this is not the case, this fact can be known. President Porter, like Plato, Descartes, Pascal, Bishop, Butler, and Kant, can always be understood. One who really knows himself and his subject can make others of fair intelligence see what he does. In this indispensable requisite to philosophy, the treatise on the Human Mind by President Porter is an epoch-making book. It is more complete in its scope, more clear in its enunciation, more fair in its critical estimate of what others have done, than any other system ever published. Many thinkers have been more thorough in their treatment of special topics in philosophy, and laid juster claims, perhaps, to originality. But no one else has at the same time surveyed the whole ground so carefully, and given such a complete *coup d'œil* of the plotting. His clew to the labyrinth, if firmly grasped, can be relied on to lead to the light of truth. No book can be found more unpretentious, and at the same time more suggestive on the philosophy of the human mind. It is doubtless the author's most enduring monument, save the influence which he exerted by personal intercourse. This, though unseen, has been felt; and will be perpetuated through all time by receptive souls who will continue to work in the same paths that the master led them.

4. Any notice of Noah Porter would be incomplete which did not include his work as a Litterateur and Essayist. The amount and versatility of his literary activity, exclusive of the books he wrote, was prodigious. He was constantly engaged, during his whole mature life, either as a preacher or teacher, and much of the time both, and for fifteen years as an executive in the harassing demands of a large university; still he somehow found time to write for the press continually. The number of articles in the daily papers, in the monthlies and quarterlies, in separate pamphlets, was marvellous. He wrote

with great ease and rapidity. The style of his pen was always like that of his speech, simple and clear; and the first draught required little revision. Its pervading tone sparkling, crisp, and permeated with the genial good nature of the man. The power to discern the salient points of a subject, to seize that which is fleeting and fix it for observation before it disappears and is lost, to hit the point at which the public thought on any subject is aiming, is the province of the essayist. In this faculty of mind, President Porter showed consummate ability. There was a combination of earnestness with humor which enabled him to treat the driest and most hackneyed subject with such a degree of freshness as to compel attention. His humor was of that easy sort which came from its source without noise, and touched the reader before he suspected what was coming. It was like that of Addison, when he described his vision of society ladies rendering their account to Rhadamanthus; or Irving, comparing the pestilent shrew when in her company manners, to the brook which had left its brawling in the rocky ravine, and become demure and placid in the level meadow. We wonder, as we shake with convulsive laughter, how the writer could look so serious, so dignified, while his pen was tracing the pungent sallies. His marked aversion was pretentious knowledge; the being wise above that which is written in religion; covert infidelity masquerading under the guise of free inquiry; the doctrinaires in education, whose claim to be heard rests on the assumption that, as their theories seem to work beautifully before they are tried, they must prove faultless in application. Men who hold that all systems under which the world has worked and prospered hitherto, must be rejected because they were not free from all defects, received no quarter from his caustic ridicule. In holding up such sciolists to merited derision, he was in his proper element. For we owe a large debt to the carefully elaborated systems of education, which have shown their adaptation to the wants of humanity by enabling the

world to reach its present stage of culture so that it is fitted for farther progress. His abounding good nature, his love for the truth, his hatred of shams, his ill-concealed contempt for the confidence of ignorance, as he holds up his victims for our mirth, reminds one of the caricature which represented Mr. Lincoln, having his face all beaming with the most benevolent smiles, holding up a diminutive general transfixed by a table fork, to give piquancy to "the little story" intended for our delectation. The victims of President Porter's satire must have felt themselves happy in giving occasion for so delicious basting, much in the same way that the eels are said to have felt pleasure because they were skinned by good Izaak Walton.

There should be a collection made, from all President Porter's writings, of extracts, longer or shorter, which form unities fulfilling the conception of essays, such as those of Montaigne and the *Spectator*. This would add to the delight and instruction of the world, as well as to the assured fame of the author.

We cannot think of Noah Porter as dead, or his activities impaired by his removal from us. He is still, as heretofore, engaged about his Father's business; with an ever-increasing capacity for service, and a boundless field for its exercise. We love him more than language can express; with an affection which can be adequately shown only by imitating, as we have strength and opportunity, the marked features of his beautiful life.