

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:

The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946

H. W. Garrod

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

IN *The Vanity of Human Wishes* Johnson gives a first place to the vanity of scholarship. Before the 'young enthusiast' commits himself to the life of learning, to scholarship as a profession, let him stop and think. Let him 'pause awhile from letters to be wise'—or, at any rate, worldly-wise. Let him mark the ills which assail the scholar's life. Johnson lists the more impressive of them:

Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.

He might, I suppose, have added something about the scholar in the scullery. But he is interested in a more appealing figure, the scholar on the scaffold. Among the obvious prizes of scholarship is church-preferment. Not all scholars are as unlucky as Lydiat—though why Johnson puts Lydiat with the great scholars, I do not know, Lydiat of whom Scaliger¹ said that the world had never

¹ Epistolae 1627, ccxli. Lydiat's *De variis annorum formis* reached Scaliger at the time of the Leiden Fair in 1605. The great attraction of the Fair in that year was a troupe of English comedians; the whole town, including crowds of foreigners, rushed to see them. Scaliger stayed at home, reading Lydiat, whom he found more comic than any comedy (*Prolegomena in Canones*, 1658, ii;v^o). I commend the passage

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
H. W. Garrod
Excerpt
[More information](#)

bred so big a fool. Lydiat had to put up with an Oxfordshire rectory. Yet not even 'the glittering eminence' of a bishopric can be thought exempt from peril. Johnson admonishes his scholar to remember how 'fatal learning' led Laud to the block. Macaulay's comment is unforgettable, and perhaps unforgivable: 'Laud, a poor creature who never did, said, or wrote anything indicating more than the ordinary capacity of an old woman.' But what is the matter, in truth, with Johnson's scholar is that he is insufficiently disinterested. He seeks truth, certainly—he is interested rather specially in religious truth. So far he has (we might know he would have) Johnson's best prayers:

And Virtue guard thee to the Throne of Truth.

But the Throne of Truth is not too sharply distinguished from the episcopal throne. Of learning as an end in itself, of a scholarship which is its own reward, Johnson has nothing to say. The world which he knew was a world where men worked for money, and wrote for money; if they alleged other motives they lied.

The first sketch for his picture of the scholar to the attention of the students of Elizabethan Drama—I do not find it noted in the chapter on 'English Players on the Continent' in Chambers' *Elizabethan Stage*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
H. W. Garrod
Excerpt
[More information](#)

was made in the year in which Bentley died. If not when he made the first sketch, yet certainly when he made the finished picture, Johnson had Bentley in mind. Yet oddly enough, not Bentley the scholar; but a Bentley hard to believe in, Bentley the poet. A one-poem poet, it is true; but the same person as the scholar. There is nobody in the world, says Chesterton somewhere, who has not at some time or other written poetry—unless, he adds weakly, it be Mr Bernard Shaw. Shaw in truth wrote a whole play in blank verse, for a reason which he gives himself—he found it much easier than prose. Bentley wrote one poem, and one only. But it was a good poem, and a fortunate one: it had the happy fortune to be read and admired by Johnson. Without it, we should not have had the lines on the scholar in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Why our Johnsonians have missed Johnson's source, I cannot guess; for the likeness of the two sets of verses is notable. Bentley's verses are not so well known but that I may be forgiven for quoting them entire.

i

*Who strives to mount Parnassus Hill,
And thence Poetick Laurels bring,
Must first acquire due Force and Skill,
Must fly with Swan's, or Eagle's, Wing.*

“ 7 ”

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
 The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
 H. W. Garrod
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

ii

*Who Nature's Treasures would explore,
 Her Mysteries and Arcana know,
 Must high, as lofty Newton, soar,
 Must stoop, as searching Woodward, low.*

iii

*Who studies ancient Laws and Rites,
 Tongues, Arts and Arms, all History,
 Must drudge like Selden, Days and Nights,
 And in the endless Labour dye.*

iv

*Who travels in Religious Jars,
 (Truth mixt with Errors, Shade with Rays,)
 Like Whiston, wanting Pyx and Stars,
 In Ocean wide or sinks, or strays.*

v

*But grant our Heroe's Hopes, long Toil,
 And comprehensive Genius, crown,
 All Sciences, all Arts, his Spoil,
 Yet what Reward, or what Renown?*

vi

*Envy innate in vulgar Souls,
 Envy steps in, and stops his Rise;
 Envy with poison'd Tarnish fouls
 His Lustre, and his Worth decrys.*

« 8 »

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
 The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
 H. W. Garrod
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

*Inglorious, or by Wants intrall'd,
 To Colledge, and old Books, confin'd,
 A Pedant from his Learning call'd,
 Dunces advanc'd, he's left behind;
 Yet left Content, a Genuine Stoick He,
 Great without Patron, rich without South-Sea!*¹

Johnson, we know from Boswell, had Bentley's poem by heart. For Bentley, it was a Horatian exercise; written to admonish a 'youthful enthusiast',² to whom scholarship seemed (what Bentley knew it not to be) roses all the way. Toil, envy, want, the patron, and—if not the jail—the austerities of Trinity College: all these Bentley knew. But he knew also, what Johnson hardly suspects, an ultimate contentment that there is in scholarship. A stoical contentment, admittedly. But in his concluding couplet Bentley does honour, what Johnson omits, the genuineness of the life of scholarship, its greatness not dependent upon patronage, its satisfactions of internal wealth. That scholarship is, like virtue, its own reward, that what the world does for the scholar, does not

¹ *The Grove*, 1721, pp. 247–9. There are slightly different versions in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1740, p. 616, and Dodsley's Collection 1758, vi, 160–1. In v, 1–2 I have adopted Dodsley's punctuation.

² Dodsley gives his name—'Mr Titley'. See Monk's *Life of Bentley*, p. 470.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
H. W. Garrod
Excerpt
[More information](#)

matter, he is too honest to say—too honest, for he has been too often disappointed.

What the world does for the scholar *does* perhaps matter. That it should consign good scholars to the scullery, and bad ones to the deanery, is bad. Yet what the scholar does for the world, what his just place is in the army of human helpers, this too matters, and is not so obvious but that the world may be forgiven if it sometimes makes mistakes. We must allow to the world, in any case, its proper prejudices. Among these may be reckoned a prejudice for the *genialities*. Learning, consummate learning, is a thing a good deal more rare than genius. But in comparison with genius—such is the world, such is life—the odds are always, and everywhere, against it. For one thing, it is a good deal less intelligible than genius. And this, partly, from the very rarity with which its perfections manifest themselves. In a university, if anywhere, one might expect to know it familiarly. I have lived in one for fifty years. I should not be believed anywhere but in Oxford—and perhaps Cambridge—if I said, what is, even so, true, that I have known genius familiarly; talking with it—or at least being talked to by it—endlessly, understanding it easily, sometimes even seeing through it; but consummate learning I have met only very rarely, conversing with it uncomfortably, and often not well knowing what it

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:

The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946

H. W. Garrod

Excerpt

[More information](#)

would be at. Nor is it merely that learning manifests itself less often than genius. It has the further disadvantage that, when it does manifest itself, it can be known only by its like. Mediocrity can appreciate genius. Everywhere its effects are at once apprehended. It is sensibly known in the quickening of the blood, the tension of the nerves, the fine thrill of the whole being. It accomplishes its end in being felt. There is a sense in which genius, mysterious as it is, is the most intelligible of all things. Learning is at once less direct in its aims, and more obscure in its effects. There is nothing in the method of it by which it can capture the heart of the world. Men admire what is great most of all when it seems to be done easily; and the mark of genius is its divine facility. It may endure agonies, but it does not take pains. Learning must both take pains and give them.

The unhappiness of learning Johnson, I must think, exaggerates; Bentley here is better informed. The unhappiness of genius we somehow take for granted. At least I like to think it is never so unhappy as it looks. Yet genius and learning have, I must think, a common trouble; a common trouble arising from a not very obvious community of ideal. The end which genius and learning alike seek and miss, moving by different paths to their common disappointment, may be said, perhaps, in language not too grandiloquent,

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
H. W. Garrod
Excerpt
[More information](#)

to be the restoration of a broken unity of the human spirit. To genius, this broken unity appears mainly as a moral and personal disaster. To learning it presents itself as an intellectual trouble. There are gaps and fissures in the culture of nations; accidents of time, language, place and race hinder sympathy and understanding; after all effort, there remains a pitiful discontinuity in the movement of the human mind. We hear the cry of the past; but we reach out hands in vain to our spiritual kindred. They cannot come to us, nor our weak faculties fly to them. It is because genius and learning conceive thus differently the trouble which affects them, because the one views it as an accident of time, the other as a property of the soul—it is because of this that there commonly appears in either a certain impatience of the method of the other. The two stand contrasted somewhat as the method of storm and the method of siege; and the world sides naturally with the battle of the swift, with the spiritual valour which dashes itself to pieces on the unbreachable walls which fence Truth. The slow and cautious movement of learning has little in it to fascinate eye or heart, and will rarely command from the crowd more than that cool approval which salutes mediocrity. The two activities are conceived as antithetical. We pit Imagination against Knowledge, Letters against Science, the Poet against the

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:
The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946
H. W. Garrod
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Scholar; and in the very act of doing so we are fighting against the cause for which these contrasted causes exist—the unity of the human spirit.

It was not always so, perhaps; at any rate, the antithesis was not always quite so keenly felt. There was a period in the world's history, and a period of some extension, when the repute of learning was hardly inferior to that of genius, a period in which the two activities were not conceived as mutually exclusive. It is easier to say when it ended than when it began. It might plausibly be contended that it began with the beginning of letters. But if anybody prefers to date its beginnings from the rebirth of letters, from the Renaissance, I am not here much concerned. I am more concerned to date the close of it. The close of it is marked, I think, by the early years of the seventeenth century. The last great name in it I take to be that of the younger Scaliger. At his death in 1609 Josephus Justus Scaliger was the greatest scholar in Europe. But he was a good deal more. He was a force in European letters and life. Princes and parliaments paid court to him. The Church feared him. To the learned he was a god—*vir divinus* Casaubon calls him. Young men recorded in their note-books, for the benefit of after ages, his casual utterances. In what concerned literary reputation his every

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-41869-1 - Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value:

The J. H. Gray Lectures for 1946

H. W. Garrod

Excerpt

[More information](#)

word was a fate—*vocem fata sequuntur*. No scholar, as such, will ever hold again a like primacy. The conditions of it have passed beyond hope of recall. Of the manner of their passing I will speak more fully later. I will note here one or two circumstances in connexion with it which are of particular significance.

When Scaliger was born, modern literature was, outside Italy, almost non-existent. When he died, the world was already the richer by nearly all the greatest works of Shakespeare. His fame was contemporary with that of Ronsard and the Pleiad. French verse was just beginning to contend with Latin. Du Bellay had used Latin to achieve a wider hearing. Dorat, the teacher of Ronsard, and himself one of the Pleiad, was a poet—a voluminous one—only in Greek and Latin. A matter of months, again, separates the death of Scaliger from the birth of Milton. Milton's reputation crossed the continent only as that of a Latin pamphleteer. It was a chance that *Paradise Lost* was not written in Latin. *Paradise Lost* was edited later by the scholar who may fairly be regarded as the most considerable that Europe has produced since Scaliger—Bentley. As a boy Bentley might have talked with Milton. What had passed in Europe between Scaliger and Bentley is strangely brought home to us when we find Bentley