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Charles Thomas Newton  
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## ESSAYS ON ART AND ARCHÆOLOGY.

### I.

#### ON THE STUDY OF ARCHÆOLOGY.

A DISCOURSE READ AT THE OXFORD MEETING OF THE  
ARCHÆOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, JUNE 18, 1850.\*

THE record of the Human Past is not all contained in printed books. Man's history has been graven on the rock of Egypt, stamped on the brick of Assyria, enshrined in the marble of the Parthenon—it rises before us a majestic Presence in the piled-up arches of the Coliseum—it lurks an unsuspected treasure amid the oblivious dust of archives and monasteries—it is embodied in all the heirlooms of religions, of races, of families; in the relics which affection and gratitude, personal or national, pride of country or pride of lineage, have preserved for us—it lingers like an echo on the lips of the peasantry, surviving in their songs and traditions, renewed in their rude customs with the renewal of Nature's seasons—we trace it in the speech, the manners, the type of living nations, its associations invest them

\* "Archæological Journal," vol. viii. p. 1.

as with a garb—we dig it out from the barrow and the Nekropolis, and out of the fragments thus found reconstruct in museums of antiquities something like an image of the Past—we contemplate this image in fairer proportions, in more exact lineaments, as it has been transmitted by endless reflections in the broken mirror of art.

Again, the vouchers for Printed History, the title-deeds of our great heritage of Printed Literature, are not all preserved in printed texts.

Before there can be Composed History, there must be evidences and documents, Tradition Oral and Tradition Monumental; before the publication of Printed Literature, there must exist the elements and sources from which such publication is made; before the Printer must come the Palæographer; before authoritative edition, scrutiny and authentication. Before we can discern the image of a period, or read the history of a race in Monuments of Art, we must ascertain to what period and to what race these monuments belong; before antiquities become the materials for the history of manners, they must be collected and arranged in museums; in other words, if we would authenticate Printed Literature, if we would verify and amplify Printed History, if we would not ignore all those new elements of thought and memorials of the deeds of men which time is for ever disclosing to us, we must recognise the purpose and function of Archæology; that purpose and function being to collect, to classify, and to interpret all the evidence of man's history not already incorporated in Printed Literature.

This evidence, the subject-matter of Archæology, has

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been handed down to us, partly in spoken language, in manners, and in customs, partly in written documents and manuscript literature, partly in remains of architecture, painting, and sculpture, and of the subordinate decorative and useful arts.

Or, to speak more concisely, the subject-matter of Archæology is threefold—the Oral, the Written, and the Monumental.

Perhaps it would be more exact to say, that there are but two classes of archæological evidences, the Oral and the Monumental, Monuments being either inscribed or Monuments of art and of handicraft.

But I shall venture, on this occasion, to waive strict logical accuracy for the sake of an arrangement which seems more convenient and impressive.

I shall consider each of the three classes of Archæological evidence in succession, taking first, the Oral, under which head I would include not only all that has been handed down to us in Language, but all that can be gathered from the study of Manners and Customs.

That spoken language is Archæological evidence is sufficiently obvious. Everyone is aware that in tracing out the history of any language, we must study not only its written form, but those archaic words, inflections, and idioms, which literature has either rejected or forgotten, which, once general, have become provincial, and are retained only in the mother-tongue of the peasantry.

These obsolete and rare forms of speech are to the philologist what the extinct Faunas and Floras of the primæval world are to the comparative anatomist and

the botanist, and, as Geology collects and prepares for the physiologist these scattered elements of the history of nature, so does Archæology glean these vestiges of language, and construct out of them glossaries of provincial words, that they may form evidence in the great scheme of modern Philology.

As only a certain portion of the spoken language of a race is permanently incorporated in its literature, so its written poetry and history only represent a certain portion of the national tradition. Every peasantry has its songs and mythic legends, its rude oral narrative of real events, blended with its superstitions. Archæology rescues these from oblivion, by making them a part of Printed Literature. It is thus that Walter Scott has collected the minstrelsy of the Scottish border, and Grimm the traditions of Germany.

Such relics are of peculiar interest to the historian of literature, because they contain the germ of Written History and Poetry; before the epic comes the ballad, the first chronicle is the sum of many legends.

But unwritten tradition is not all embodied in language, it has been partly preserved to us in manners and customs. In a rude, unlettered age, indeed at all times when men are too ignorant, hurried, or pre-occupied to be acted upon by language alone, the instinct of those who govern the multitude has suggested other means.

Symbolic acts and gestures, tokens, forms, ceremonies, customs are all either supplementary to or the substitute for articulate speech.

In the processions, military triumphs, coronations, nuptials, and funeral ceremonies of all races we see this

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unwritten, inarticulate, symbolic language in its most fully developed and eloquent form.

Hence it is obviously necessary for the Archæologist to study customs. Addressing the eye by symbols, more generally and readily understood even than words, they may be said to exhibit the utterance of thought in its most primitive and elementary form ; the repetition of such utterance becomes record, which, however rude and precarious, may still rank as a distinct source of historical evidence.

For the observance of such customs as fall under the notice of the Archæologist, it is for the most part necessary that certain acts should be performed, or certain instruments employed, with or without the recital of a set form of words ; the custom may be either commemorative or symbolic without reference to the past ; the event of which it is the memorial may be real or mythical ; the doctrine it typifies and embodies may be religious, political, or legal ; its observance may be occasional, as in the case of a marriage ceremony, or periodical, as in the case of the great festivals with which most nations distinguish the course of the seasons. The Archæologist, of course, directs his attention less to those customs which form a part of the established religion and legal code of a race than to those which, being the result of ideas once generally prevalent, still survive among the peasantry in remote districts, or of which dim traces may be still discerned in the institutions of modern society. It is thus that, in the customs of Calabria, we still trace the relics of the ancient heathen worship, and that the customs of Greece and Asia Minor remain a living commentary on the text of Homer.

The peasant's mind reflects what has been rather than what is. It revolves in the same circle as the more cultivated mind of the nation, but at a much slower rate. On the great dial-plate of time, one is the hour-hand while the other is the minute-hand.

When customs are only partially extant, the Archæologist has not only to record and interpret the usage, but to preserve the instrument with which that usage was associated.

It is thus that the horns which once ratified the tenure of land, the sword or mace, once instruments of investiture and insignia of feudal or official power, vessels once consecrated to the service of religion, are gathered in, one by one, into national museums, the garner and treasuries of Archæology.

A custom may be not merely extinct, but buried. In the tombs of many races, such as the Celtic or Scandinavian, we find nearly all that is known of their sepulchral rites, and thus an examination of the places of sepulture of various countries enables us, with the aid of philology, to trace out many unsuspected national affinities, while at the same time it gives us the means of comparing a number of unwritten creeds. In an uncivilised age men do not define their religious belief in a set form of words, but express it by symbolic rites, by acts rather than by statements.

It is the business of the Archæologist to read these hieroglyphics, not graven on the rock, but handed down in the memory and embodied in the solemn acts of races, to elicit these faint rays of historical evidence, latent in the tomb.

Manners differ from customs, in that they furnish

rather general evidence of a nation's character than special evidence for particular facts; in that they are neither commemorative nor symbolic.

It was the custom of the last century to drink the king's health after dinner; it is part of the general history of English manners to know how our ancestors comported themselves at their meals, and when they first began to use forks.

Traces of ancient manners must be sought, as we seek for customs, in the secluded life of the peasantry, or we must discern them half-obliterated beneath the palimpsest surface of modern society, and this palimpsest must be read by a diligent collation not only with early literature, but with the picture of ancient manners preserved in Monuments of Art.

Such then is a slight outline of the Oral evidence of Archæology. It is inferior in dignity either to Written or to Monumental evidence, because of all the means which man possesses for utterance and record, the oral is the most transient.

We may add that animals are not altogether destitute of oral utterance. Though they do not articulate, they communicate their meaning vocally, and by gesticulation; and some of them can imitate articulate speech, action, and music.

But no animal but man draws or writes, or leaves behind him conscious monumental record.

It is because man can draw, because he possesses the distinctive faculty of imitating forms and expressing thoughts not only by his own gesticulations, but by and through some material external to himself, that he has acquired the inestimable power of writing. This general

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assertion, that all writing has its origin in drawing, is, perhaps, open to discussion ; but those who have most deeply investigated the question have been led to this conclusion, by a comparison of the most primitive systems of writing now extant.

It is stated by these authorities that the elements of all written character are to be found in the Picture, or Direct Representation of some visible object ; that such Pictures were subsequently applied as Phonetic symbols, or symbols of sounds, and as Emblems, or symbols of ideas ; that these three modes of conveying meaning, by Direct Representation, by Phonetic symbols, and by Emblems, existed co-ordinately for a while, and were finally absorbed into, and commuted for the one fixed conventional Alphabetic method.

If we apply this theory to the classification of the systems of writing which remain to us, it will be seen that, though not of course admitting of arrangement in chronological sequence, they exhibit the art in various stages of its development. The Mexican will present to us a system in which the Pictorial is predominant ; the Egyptian hieroglyphics will enable us to trace the gradual extension of the Phonetic and Emblematic, the abbreviation of both forms in the more cursive Hieratic, and the decay of the Pictorial system ; the Chinese, and perhaps the Assyrian Cuneiform, will bring us one step nearer the purely conventional system : and the perfection of the Alphabetic method will be found in the Semitic or Phœnician character, as it has been adapted by the Hellenic race.

I will not attempt here to illustrate more fully, or to justify more in detail, this theory as to the origin of



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writing; nor do I ask you, on the present occasion, to admit more than the general fact, which the most superficial examination of the Egyptian or Mexican hieroglyphics will show, that there have been ages and nations when the Alphabetic system was as yet undeveloped, and the Pictorial was its substitute, and consequently that there was a period when art and writing were not divorced as they are at present, but so blended into one that we can best express the union by such a compound as Picture-writing.

This original connection between two arts which we are accustomed to consider as opposed, obliges us to regard the elements of writing as part of the history of imitative art generally. Thus the inscribed monuments of Egypt are neither art nor literature, but rather the elements out of which both sprang, just as early poetry contains the germ both of history and philosophy.

It is this first stage in the history of writing which peculiarly claims from the Archæologist thought and study. The art of which he has to trace the progress, as it has, perhaps, more contributed to civilisation than any other human invention, so has it only been perfected after many centuries of experiment and fruitless labour. We, to whom the Alphabetic system has been handed down as the bequest of a remote antiquity, find a difficulty in transporting our minds backwards to the period when it was yet unknown; the extreme simplicity of the method makes us accept it as a matter of course, as an instrument which man has always possessed, not as something only wrought out by patient, oft-repeated trials in the course of ages. Till we study the Egyptian hieroglyphics we are not aware how difficult it must

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have been for the more perfect Phonetic system to displace the Pictorial, how long they continued co-ordinate, what perplexity of rules this co-ordination engendered, how obstinately the routine of habit maintained an old method however intricate and inconvenient, against a new principle however simple and broad in its application. The history of writing, in a word, exhibits to us most impressively a type of that great struggle between new inventions and inveterate routine, out of which civilisation has been slowly and painfully evolved.

When we pass from the study of imperfect and transition systems of writing, such as the Mexican, Egyptian, Cuneiform, and Chinese, to the study of perfect alphabets, it is rather the tradition of the art from race to race, than the inventive genius shown in its development, which forms the subject of our inquiries.

The Phœnician alphabet is the primary source of the system of writing we now use. The Greek and Roman alphabets, each adapted from the Phœnician with certain additions and modifications, were gradually diffused by commerce or conquest through the length and breadth of the ancient civilised world. On the decay of the Western empire of the Romans, their alphabet, like their language, law, architecture, and sculpture, became the property of their Teutonic conquerors.

Rude hands now wielded these great instruments of civilisation; strong wills moulded and adapted them to new wants and conditions; and it was thus that the Roman alphabet, transferred from marble to parchment, no longer graven but written, was gradually transformed into that fantastic and complicated character which is popularly called black letter, and in which the original