

24.F.23.2

Edgeworth town

Jany. 6th 1838

My dear Sir William Hamilton

I congratulate - not You - upon being chosen President of the Royal Irish Academy, but I congratulate the Irish Academy and Ireland upon you having been so chosen - It is of great advantage to the Science and Literature of Ireland that the President of her Academy should be one known to science and to fame all over Europe, - in his own department of science preeminent - and with a name and character to which all parties do justice because he is of no party - and will not narrow to a sect what is meant for mankind

You do me honor and give me pleasure by writing to me as the daughter of one of the original Members of your Academy, who was truly interested in the establishment of this Institution, contributed all in his power to its progress & ... and was honored by the private and public friendship of its two first Presidents themselves distinguished among Presidents for science and elegant literature

It is highly gratifying to my feelings that you permit me to have both an hereditary and a personal claim to your friendship

But you embarrass me my dear Sir, and make me ashamed of my inability to come up to your too high opinion of me when you condescend to ask my advice as to the best means of promoting the advancement of polite literature in Ireland - You have so many more able counsellors within your circle of literary friends, that I could not with propriety speak, even if I had anything in my own opinion worth saying to you - to You - I would not however excuse my indolence under any affectation of modesty or humility which would not suit my age though it

may my sex - But the plain truth is that I cannot suggest any thing for your purpose beyond what I am sure you are prepared to do

I believe the Irish Academy gives annual prizes for the best essays in Polite literature as well as in Science - I have heard good judges say that the money-prize (£50) I think for the best Essays on each prize subject, is a reward better suited to the temper and the pockets of the times than merely honorary medals

But I should think that a medal accompanying the lucrative prize, would give it an honorary character and raise the reward in the eyes of those who aspire to distinction and tend to inspire in the minds of young aspirants that anti-mercenary spirit which should be honored and which it is easy to excite in this country - where if I may be permitted to say so it seems national and native -

I believe you have monthly meetings - sociable dinners - and evening conversaciones - If these are not expensive, the subscriptions will not prevent any from attending regularly - and it is of importance to keep the subscriptions moderate that they may continue - and be within the power of men of literature who do not always (like Sir W Scott) possess the art of making gold - These meetings elicit bright sparks of intellect - and more - keep up emulation - and more keep literature in fashion - It is the fashion of the age - You see what Babbage does in taking hold of this fashion in London - Dublin society may not afford anything like such ample means - But still you have some to make a good beginning - and we have seen that distinguished foreigners can come to Irish Scientific meetings and we know that they have been delighted with the reception they received - your admitting ladies to your evening parties would be advantageous - I think provided you do commence those parties for the ladies late enough for their fashion and so give your gentlemen time enough to themselves after dinner for conversation & discussions

which might be uninteresting to the fair visitors or in which they might possibly be de trop -
Madame de Trop ...

The main difficulty will be to prevent little jealousies and "bickerings-hot" which "to high words got" break out, not only at vulgar jovial dinners, but among those of polite literature & even among those of the exact sciences - witness the thick pamphlet entitled "Debates & dissensions of the Royal" Society (besides the silver nose, replacing the famous nose bitten off between the celebrated mathematical disputants -

Yours is safe, for nobody can reach it - Envy is always content when nobody can do it -
But as President - to keep to your question to me - I think the greatest possible benefit you can confer upon your Academy, and the most certain mode by which you can promote the progress of polite literature in Ireland is by giving as President the example of polite manners amenity of temper and candor in discussion - By these qualities Lord Charlemont (the first) was distinguished as an excellent President - you who have more scientific weight can keep down little risings effectually if you make this, as I hope you will your first great object - Avoid all competition - Speak less than others - and hold the balance - & you will have no occasion for the rod - Sir Humphrey Davy with all his superior talents had not as far as I have learned the peculiar qualities necessary to a President of a literary & scientific society - Sir Joseph Banks with much inferior talents did much more good in that station was more honored as Prest. of Royl. Soc of England, throughout Europe - and his name lives -

You have every superiority to him except a large fortune - that is I acknowledge a great advantage in our days - but superior in all days is personal merit - and the merits of temper and candor & freedom from party spirit peculiarly requisite in the Prest. of the Irish Academy will I trust distinguish you above your fellows and your fellow Presidents - you see my dear Sir

William that I have written to you as a private friend - private and confidential All if anything
can be so in these publishing days

I pray you so to consider this - and I hope you will believe me to be most sincerely,

Your obliged friend

Maria Edgeworth

I have not time or materials for writing any essay on the progress of literature - Excuse me I have
said now all I can say to you for yourself