

Equally we have to inquire whether the virtue which is the converse of this error may be fostered ; whether and how the study of books may be made to minister to powers of direct observation, instead of being adverse to them, and to assist in the general business of life.

Literary study may conceivably impede our observant faculties, either by suggesting problems that appear to demand pure thinking alone for their solution, or by imbuing the mind with an ambitious tone, in which the ordinary events of everyday experience are looked upon as unworthy of notice. In the latter case it must be acting mischievously ; in the former case it may be mischievous, though it is not always so. If a problem is really of a purely abstract character, it is inevitable that external observation should be lulled during the investigation of it. Newton was in many respects an inobservant, absent-minded man ; but without that inobservance he could not have been the master of abstract thought that he was, or have made the discoveries that have been so powerfully beneficial to the human race. But there are many problems which have an appearance of being abstract, and soluble by pure thought alone, in which this is by no means really the case. Questions of ethics, of political economy, of art, are of this nature ; they have a delusive appearance of abstraction from the actual world in which we live ; and many an inquirer has gone round and round in them in a profitless circle, without being aware that the element needed to render him successful was not brain power at all, but experience of men and things. The danger, however, that the faculties of observation may be blunted by an excess of abstract thought is not very great in the popular education of the present day. But the danger that they may be blunted by mistaken ambition is a real one. The clever and educated poor will at times despise the common incidents of daily life, in comparison with that larger sphere to which books give them an introduction in imagination, though not in reality. Housekeepers find that servants neglect the pots and pans and dishes, cannot find anything when it is wanted, cannot see cobwebs in the corners or dust upon the shelves and tables, while their attention is devoted to the pleasures of literature in some, very often questionable, form. Farmers, we have been told, complain of the degeneracy of ploughboys from the same cause. True, farmers are a complaining race, and their misfortunes of late years