

II.—LEARNED LUMBER

"How lovely! To think that there are all those books,—and that one need not read them."

EDWARD CARPENTER

It was Tennyson, I think, who was once moved to the solemn enquiry, "Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail against her beauty?" If by knowledge he meant what the majority of people mean when they use the word, I must confess that I for one have no ardent affection for the lady and have frequently been inclined to rail against her charms. But I daresay—though I am afraid I cannot feel quite sure of it—that Tennyson understood what he was talking about and did not make the common mistake of confusing knowledge with her ugly sister erudition. At any rate, in what I have to say regarding the theory that learning is to be pursued for its own sake, I should like to protest at the outset that I have no desire to cast any unkind reflections on the real fairy princess.

The main difficulty in dealing with the subject is that there is, of course, one sense in which the doctrine I have just quoted is perfectly true, and another in which it is false and mischievous, and it is therefore necessary to distinguish between them. Unquestionably boys and girls should be shown that learning is to be loved and followed after for its own sake, and not for the ulterior ends of material success, yet they must on no account be persuaded that it is incumbent upon them to grasp indiscriminately at all learning, but must be allowed to confine their attention to what they will study with a natural and prompt alacrity. Probably every one has an interest in something or other, if only he were permitted to find it out, instead of being crushed under the steam-roller of information which he doesn't want and which ought, by rights, to be kept out of sight and out of mind as far as may be. The result of cramming pupils with promiscuous masses of information is that they lose the sense of what they really like, and at last either dislike all learning as such, or, worse still, delude