

poetry, carried here and there by the precarious fancy of the writer. Again his ideas need to be held in check, to be directed in a certain channel lest his very ability for writing be led to a pernicious use. Left alone, without any guidance, he would naturally be inclined towards the promulgation of false doctrines. By study one learns not only the general features of life, but especially those little peculiarities which determine a man's nature, and in which we find all our greatest poets were well versed. When Lord Tennyson first began to write poetry his works were not very well received, and many severe criticisms were passed on his initial attempts. Silent for ten years, he read, studied the old *mediaeval romances*, and obtained the knowledge possible. On his return he at once soared to the highest point in public esteem. "He is decidedly the first of our living poets," said Wordsworth, a commendation which he certainly merited.

It is possible even with a little talent to build up a complete system for oneself. The correct mode must be first acquired, then by slow, steady perseverance, ever correcting, ever improving, a talent for poetry may be cultivated to such a degree that after a time it comes spontaneously. We have an example of this in the person of Virgil, the greatest epic writer of his time. As a man he was gentle and amiable, but bashful and awkward in appearance. He was not original in ideas at first, nor impelled by genius in any way to write poetry. He worked slowly, carefully and laboriously with a definite object in view, patiently and incessantly polishing, and so became the model of the time for correctness and elegance of style.

It is even true that men have begun to write poetry and continued to do so with great success, without having the least inclination towards such, and even utterly devoid of genius. For an example we may take Plautus, one of Rome's most noted playwrights. He was of very humble birth, and earned a scanty living by working in mills or holding some menial position of a similar kind. To gain a better support he turned to writing, and especially towards the production of comedies, of which he made a great success. Thus a man of ordinary talent, of little or no education, by sheer mental exertion, became one of the founders of early Roman literature. Another example of this may be found in the early colonial era of the United States, where such men as George Sandys turned their hand to poetry absolutely "*invita minerva*," and produced works which according to many authorities are among the most poetical of the English language.