

he furnishes us with enablements for conversing rationally, and for wrestling effectively, with the problems of living, operative truth; that he ministers guidance and support for thinking nobly and working bravely in the services, through the perils, under the difficulties and adversities of our state, — this is the test and measure of his worth; this is the sole basis of his claim to rank as a classic. This, to be sure, is not always done directly, neither ought it to be; for the helps that touch our uses more or less indirectly often serve us best, because they call for and naturally prompt our own mental and moral co-operation in turning them to practical account.

It is such literature that the poet has in view when he tells us,—

books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good;  
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastime and our happiness will grow.

And books are yours,  
Within whose silent chambers treasure lies  
Preserved from age to age: more precious far  
Than that accumulated store of gold  
And orient gems which, for a day of need,  
The Sultan hides deep in ancestral tombs:  
These hoards you can unlock at will

Nor is it the least benefit of such authors that they reconcile and combine utility with pleasure, making each ministrative to the other; so that the grace of pleasant thoughts becomes the sweeter for their usefulness, and the virtue of working thoughts the more telling for their pleasantness; the two thus pulling and rejoicing together. For so the right order of mental action is where delight pays tribute to use, and use to delight; and there is no worse corruption of literature in the long run than where these are divorced, and made to pull in different lines. Such pleasure is itself uplifting, because it goes hand in hand with duty. And as life, with its inevitable wants and cares and toils, is apt to be hard enough at the best with most of us, there is need of all the assuagements and alleviations that can come from this harmonizing process. Pressed as we are with heavy laws, happy indeed is he

Who from the well-spring of his own clear breast,  
Can draw, and sing his griefs to rest.

Next to a good conscience and the aids of Christian faith, there is no stronger support under the burdens of our lot than the companionship of such refreshing and soul-lifting thoughts as spring up by the wayside of duty, from our being at home with the approved interpreters of Nature and truth. This is indeed to carry with us in our working hours a power

That beautifies the fairest shore,  
And mitigates the harshest clime.

Now I do not like to hear it said that our school-education can do nothing towards this result. I believe, nay, I am sure, it can do much; though I have to admit that it has done and is doing far less than it might. I fear it may even be said that our course is rather operating as a hindrance than as a help in this respect. What sort of reading are our schools planting an appetite for? Are they really doing anything to instruct and form the mental taste, so that the pupils on leaving them may be safely left to choose their reading for themselves? It is clear in evidence that they are far from educating the young to take pleasure in what is intellectually noble and sweet. The statistics of our public libraries show that some cause is working mightily to prepare them only for delight in

what is both morally and intellectually mean and foul. It would not indeed be fair to charge our public schools with positively giving this preparaticn; but it is their business to forestall and prevent such a result. If, along with the faculty of reading, they cannot also impart some safe-guards of taste and habit against such a result, will the system prove a success?

As things now go, English literature is postponed to almost everything else in our public schools; much as ever it can gain admission at all; and the most that can be got for it is merely such fag-ends of time as may possibly be spared from other studies. We think it a fine thing to have our children studying Demosthenes and Cicero; but do not mind having them left almost totally ignorant of Burke and Webster. Yet in the matter of practical learning, aye, and of liberal learning too, deep and comprehensive eloquence, for instruction in statesmanship and in the principle of civil order and social well-being, Burke alone is worth more than all the oratory of Greece and Rome put together, albeit I am far from meaning to disrepute the latter. And a few of Webster's speeches, besides their treasure of noble English,—“a manly style fitted to manly ears,”—have in them more that would come home to the business and bosoms of our best American intelligence, more that is suited to the ends of a well-instructed patriotism, than all that we have inherited from the lips of ancient orators.

So, again, we spare no cost to have our children delving in the suburbs and outskirts of Homer and Virgil, for not one in fifty of them ever gets beyond these; yet we take no pains to have them living in the heart of Shakespeare and Wordsworth; while there is in Shakespeare a richer fund of “sweetness and light,” more and better food for the intellectual soul, a larger provision of such thoughts as should dwell together with the spirit of a man and be twisted about his heart for ever, than in the collective poetry of the whole ancient heathen world.

It may indeed be said that these treasures are in a language already known, and so are accessible to people without any special preparation; and that the school is meant to furnish the keys to such wealth as would else be locked up from them. But our public schools leave the pupils without any taste for those native treasures, or any aptitude to enjoy them; the course there pursued does almost nothing to fit and dispose the pupils for communing with the wisdom and beauty enshrined in our mother-tongue; while hardly any so master the Greek and Latin as to hold communion with the intellectual virtue which they enshrine. Few, very few, after all, can be trained to love Homer; while there are, I must think, comparatively few who cannot be trained to love Shakespeare; and the main thing is to plant that love. The point, then, is just here: Our schools are neither giving the pupils the key to the wisdom of Homer, nor disposing them to use the key to the wisdom of Shakespeare. And so the result is that, instead of bathing in the deep, clear streams of thought, ancient or modern, they have no taste but for waddling or wallowing in the shallow, turbid puddles of the time:—

Best pleased with what is aptliest framed  
To enervate and defile.

It is a notorious fact that among our highly-educated people, the graduates of our colleges, really good English scholars are extremely rare. I suspect it is not too much to say that among our instructors there are at least twenty competent to teach English literature. Very few indeed of them are really at home in the great masters of our native tongue, so as to make them matter of fruitful exercise in the class-room. They know not how to come at them; or to shape their course in teaching them. Their minds are so engrossed with the verbal part of learning, that, unless they have a