

wing with which we fly to heaven."* Who has not experienced many times in his life, the hindrances of ignorance and the advantages of knowledge? Who has not felt painfully the uncertainty, the feebleness, the helplessness, which resulted from ignorance? And on the other hand, when we know our work and all that is needed for its efficiency, we are like men treading a well-known path in the clear light of day. And besides, almost every one knows that the real value of work depends not merely upon the motive with which it is undertaken—doubtless a very important consideration—but also upon the amount of intelligence with which it is carried out. Even the most laborious and devoted zeal will be no compensation for the want of knowledge. One hour of thoughtful, intelligent labour is often of more real value than the heedless, inconsiderate or ignorant work which is spread over many hours.

Look at the question under the light of practical experience. To whom is it that we have recourse when we need guidance in any of the difficulties of life? To the man who, in our own judgment at least, understands his work; to the man whom we believe to possess a knowledge of the subject on which we require information or assistance. If we have a religious difficulty, we refer it to one who has some knowledge of theology, and whom we believe to have some practical experience of religion; to one who has made the nature of man and the revelation of God the subject of his most earnest and serious study. So with other needs. We will not voluntarily and intentionally put ourselves into the hands of one who knows nothing of the structure and functions of the human body, if we wish to be restored to health; nor will we knowingly put

the settlement of our worldly affairs into the hands of one who has no accurate acquaintance with the laws of the land.

But we may reason as we please on this subject, yet after all no one really believes that knowledge is an evil, and that it is better to be ignorant. The poet * may sing:

A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

But the truth is, and we know it quite well, that all knowledge and any amount of knowledge, provided it be real and true, is a help and a strength to us. We are ashamed of ignorance, sometimes perhaps unduly and foolishly ashamed, and so we strive to hide it, and thereby prevent ourselves from acquiring the knowledge which we need, and which we would gladly have men think that we possess; but even here we are confessing, sometimes in spite of ourselves, that "a wise man is strong, yea a man of knowledge increaseth strength."†

Having now disposed of some of these preliminary questions, we must look a little more closely at the subject, and ask more particularly and minutely *what we mean by knowledge*. And perhaps it will be sufficient if we confine ourselves almost entirely to the practical view. Without in any way disparaging philosophical inquiries into the possibility of knowledge, and the nature of that knowledge which we are capable of acquiring, it is sufficient for our purpose to assume that, for all practical purposes, we certainly have it in our power to gain real knowledge—knowledge so real and certain that we do not scruple to act upon it just as though it represented to us absolute truth. We do not forbid philosophers to theorize; and

* Henry vi., pt. 2.

* Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, ii. 15.

† Eccles. xxiv. 5.