

time enough on the acquisition of the spoken idiom. It is often supposed that to be able to speak a language is a desirable enough accomplishment, but something not at all necessary to the full and complete understanding of the written forms. But to be able to speak a language is a proof of the completest facility in composition, and ability to compose is the proof

of ability to understand what others have composed. He who learns to express all his own thoughts in any language has the best possible preparation for the comprehension of the thoughts of others expressed in that language, and has laid the only foundation for successfully prosecuting the study of its literature and philology.

## THE EVOLUTION OF HISTORY THROUGH LITERATURE.

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MAN, the aggregate, is essentially the same as man, the individual. So far as rational and unprejudiced investigation informs us, the civilized aggregate, whenever and wherever found, develops from a state of infancy, progresses through successive phases of being, and at length reaches a stage which may, without any impropriety, be termed adult; then it decays, sometimes by slow degrees, sometimes by quicker processes, till at length it dies, worn out by natural causes, by accidents inseparable from the state terrestrial, or self-immolated to the Moloch of a corrupt and debasing habit of life. One boundary seems to encircle the nation as the individual, that periphery of oblivion from which both alike spring, that limit which seems in very deed to have no parts and no magnitude, which encloses within its meagre circumference all we seem able to realize of cognition and sensation, and excludes everything we do not realize; an immensity of possibility so vast, that finite reason is almost dethroned in its contemplation. Such, at least, seems to have been the history of man, aggregate, in the past. If the presumable law is to be broken in the future, the future alone can record the

fact, the *Ædipus* of posterity can alone read the riddle of the Sphinx.

Man evolves. The helpless infant becomes the strengthening child; the progressive student, the perfected and cultured adult, perfected with limitations. The nation evolves. The helpless, because savage tribe, becomes the strengthening clan; the developing commonwealth, the civilized and consolidated dominion, civilized, with limitations. The life of the one is the reflex of the life of the other. The recorded life of the one we call biography; the recorded life of the other we term history. Yet both are in a sense history; the one individual, the other national; and this history, whether individual or national, has evolved. Of necessity it must be so, as history is the outcome of man and the nation, not the nation and man of history. And both biography and history owe their evolution to the literary instinct in man, the natural desire to transmit to posterity a connected relation of the virtues and failings, real or imaginary, of those individuals, who, by ability or good fortune, have made their mark on the epoch.

Now this very fact of evolution prepares the way for a startling thought