

it is not everything. We are all wont to display a superabundance of energy when we first put our hands to the plough; but in the burden and heat of the day we are tempted to steal away and seek the grateful coolness of some shady rill or grove. And there is a special reason why a new-born zeal for knowledge should gradually grow cold and at length expire. The study of literature is not all pleasure; like everything that is worth doing it demands a good deal of self-denial and a good deal of perseverance. It is unfortunate that so many have the impression that the great artists in literature, men who have thought deeply on human life, and have toiled hard to make their works give back an untroubled reflection of their best thoughts, are but "the idle singers of an empty day," and that the be-all and end-all of art is to fill up vacant spaces in the lives of frivolous or busy men. That is not the conception of his work which any of our great men of letters has had. Hear what Milton has to say of the function of the poet: "The abilities of the poet," he says, "where-soever they be found, are the inspired gifts of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some — though most abuse — in every nation; and are of power, besides the office of a pulpit, to in-breed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what He suffers to be wrought with high providence in His Church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion

is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thoughts from within; all these things, with a solid and treatable smoothness, to point out and describe."

The man of letters, in Milton's idea of him, must, as you see, be a severe moralist, like Butler, and a preacher of righteousness, like Luther or Savonarola, as well as the inspired singer who lays bare the recesses of the soul, depicts the rise and fall of nations, and bodies forth the glories of the unseen world. Nor did Milton's practice belie his theory; no monk ever disciplined his body more austere than this Puritan poet disciplined his mind by the study of all past literature, sacred and profane. And Milton is not alone in the untiring zeal with which he "builds the lofty rhyme." Dante could speak of his "*Divina Commedia*" as a task which made him lean for many years, and the genial Horace recommends the author to keep his work in his desk for a nine years' revision. Now, if the masterpieces of literature are the product of long and hard effort, is it reasonable to suppose that they will at once yield up their meaning to the first undisciplined mind that skims over their surfaces? Is it not rather self-evident that if we wish to come even within sight of the thought of a great writer, we must do what one of his countrymen felt to be so much of a grievance in the case of the great German philosopher, Hegel; we must "stop — and think — and think — and begin again." The dramas and comedies and sonnets of Shakespeare are perhaps the greatest legacy ever given to the world by any one man. But here, even more than in the case of Milton, it is of prime importance to come to your task of study with a clear consciousness of its magnitude and