

which is made valuable by appreciative interest; and those tastes themselves grow with reading. Guided by taste, we keep as part of ourselves what is good in what we read; the bad we must try to avoid, or, not avoiding, forget. It is thus we rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things,—in appreciation and knowledge of books and authors.

And may it not be that the very fact that the vast majority of us are governed, in the choice of books, almost entirely by this uncertain and strictly-individual standard of taste, accounts to a very great extent for the lack of appreciation of the courses of study which have been recommended to us? And it is a standard which is probably, after all, as safe a guide as any other,—assuming, to begin with, a certain development of taste in a right direction. And is it not necessary to make such an assumption, in order to imagine a judicious use of any of the learned lists which have been built up with so much erudition and perseverance? Indeed, this is practically the guide which Shakespeare himself—who must have been a great reader of books—lays down in the sage advice:

“No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.”

And if, on a summer afternoon, one most affects “*Les Miserables*” or “*The Sentimental Journey*,” he is not to be persuaded, by a thousand lists, that he could derive more profit or pleasure from “*The Ramayana*” or “*The Mahabharata*,” even as “*epitomized by Wheeler*.”

Nor are the other applied or suggested tests entirely satisfactory—or even quite intelligible—apart from this universal test, which, reliable or otherwise, we all have in ourselves. It may be interesting to know what books a literary felon has taken to prison with him, or what choice Stanley would make in preparation for a year's burial in Central Africa, or what books Archdeacon Farrar has decided that he would snatch from a fire in which all the books of the world were in a blaze, if he had only time to rescue a dozen of his favourite victims. But there are many of us who, if we were on our way to prison, or to Central Africa, or should find ourselves in the desperate position which the venerable Archdeacon pictures—all of which contingencies let us continue to hope against—would allow no other person to dictate to us in our most careful and loving choice. Those of us who are of a religious tendency would expect to find the Archdeacon prescribing a list by which we might safely be guided; but if we were given the privilege of rescuing a dozen books from eternal destruction, many of us would be likely to kick aside Wordsworth, and the whole of the Lake School together, in a frantic search for “*The Decameron*,” or “*Tom Jones*,” or “*Henry Esmond*,” and would, in all probability, forget Thucydides and Tacitus, if we could catch a glimpse of Horace or Scott, of Cervantes, George Eliot, or Thomas Carlyle.

After all, the differences of opinion, and the difficulties of choice, come back to this fundamental and indisputable fact, that what Dr. O. W. Holmes calls “the saturation point,” is the same in no two minds under the sun. Just as true as it is that no two individuals are exactly alike, so true is it that never will two minds agree, either in their interest in any book, or in the instruction derived from its perusal. The differences may vary in degree. They may not all be so great as that between Coleridge's appreciation of Shakespeare and a child's, or between Stirling's knowledge of the Secret of Hegel and—mine. But there the differences are, and, existing, they must be recognized and taken into account. And so long as they exist—and exist they ever will—no two minds will desire the same food, or, receiving the same food, find in it equal nourishment.

But how variable is each individual taste in itself—changing with circumstances, with seasons, and in its own natural growth by what it feeds on! On a summer holiday, however spent—on the water, in the quiet country, or simply in the “blessed retirement” of a bachelor's den—who would think of taking with him, as a companion in solitude, a volume of the “*Novum Organum*,” or the “*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*,” or “*The Wealth of Nations*?” At such a time, one is inclined to consider, not so much what has been formally recommended to him, as in what he can bury himself, shake hands with the author, and have pleasure in a genuine companionship. For

true readers are an author's intimates, and books have been beautifully spoken of as authors' letters to their unknown friends.

But all this discussion about books and authors may indeed indicate an actual increase of interest in both. If so, what good may not be done! And what genuine pleasure added to the average life! In the love of books, there is that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin; and few writers of books, in any age, have been able to resist the temptation of telling their readers of the books which they themselves have read. Lamb reaches the depth of abstraction in his books when he finds that he is so buried in them that they think for him, and so save him the trouble of thinking for himself.

Leigh Hunt worshipped his books. On a winter evening, sitting in his easy-chair before a brightly-burning grate, his lamp over his left shoulder, and a book in his hand, he would watch the blue smoke curl upwards from his “pipe divine,” and picture to himself a heaven the very conception of which must have been a spur to his religious aspirations. Surely there is something true in the pictures of his reverie. Let us hope so. Would we, too, not like to look forward to a heaven in which the elect would have Shakespeare writing plays and Scott writing novels through all eternity; with Homer, too, and Horace,—if any of the heathen are among the elect,—and Spenser, and Ben Jonson, and Fielding, and Goldsmith, and Burns; with the Garrick Club again re-organized, and Samuel Johnson's sonorous criticisms re-echoing through the lofty club-room; with Dr. Holmes to talk to us at breakfast, and Coleridge and Southey to talk to us at dinner, if only Lamb were in their company again to act as an antidote, and to persuade them not to write, but only talk; with Hume and Gibbon to write histories for us,—it is sad to think that there are some who do not expect to see those worthies there; and with hosts of others who would write books for us, and read them to us,—or who would talk to us as we imagine they must have talked in the flesh, but eternally. And when many, many books had been written, can we not fancy that we see some latter-day essayist,—later by a few millions of years after the end of time and the beginning of eternity,—recommending, in cherubic tones, to listening choirs, a list of the hundred best books? And see the shade of Carlyle fall across the scene, and hear the old voice growling forth such words as these,—if the shade of Teufelsdröckh continues to speak in language similar to that of his former state:—“Fool! fool of fools! Do you wish to be of use to your equals and inferiors, the ignorant, the crowd? Then make a list of books *not* worth reading at all—mind-poisoning, moral-destroying, time-wasting, Devil-inspired trash and filth; you will thus at any rate do no harm, even if you do no good, as you will not, because your list will be so unweildly as to be of no practical value whatever to any person.”

WILLIAM CREEFMAN.

THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

Thou sayest that Faith now dies; that Science, proud
By strong exploit, has proved the right to sway.
Her arms, upheld by Fact and Law, to-day
Leaguer the camp of Faith with clamour loud.
Thou sayest that Faith is dying; that her shroud,
Bleached by Despair's white tears, and one last ray
Of winter's palling sun, awaits—the way
Is strewn with dying leaves that sigh aloud.
Thinkest thou Faith is in extremity?
The flower forever lost its early bloom?
Thou knowest not with how great a constancy
Faith's champion cheers her, and dispels the gloom.
Immortal Love shall banish cecity.
And by his aid Faith conquer even the tomb,

J. O. MILLER.