

that it is the most inspiring and marvellous of spiritual forces. As the chord in one instrument responds to the vibrations of its fellow in another, so the emotions of the human soul vibrate under the influence of a great and ardent character. But in the limitations of time and space and circumstance by which our lives are bound, such encounters must needs be rare; and fortunate it is that through literature we are able to feel the kindling spiritual presence of the mighty dead. It is true that but few can thus transmit themselves through the ages; but these few are among the greatest spirits of our age. The power of style in the highest degree is the prerogative of genius alone. When style, in that highest degree, is present, we are not merely told how the writer felt, but his feelings are communicated to us; not how he saw, but we are enabled to see as he did; not what manner of man he was, but we are introduced into his very presence. In the sphere of studies, I know nothing comparable to this. History and biography tell us about men; we see them imaged in a more or less imperfect medium; but here we feel the thrill of their emotions, the power of their presence. So that, not only does literature bring us into contact with ideas, the higher literature brings us into contact with men, the choice and master spirits of all ages. Here is a society, ever open to us, the best and most desirable we can conceive—the truest aristocracy of the human race in their happiest moods, with their wisest and deepest thoughts on their lips.

It is in no figurative sense, but in sober truth, that I call this "society." From what has been said of style, it is manifest that the influence of a great work on a competent literary capacity does not differ in kind from the influence of personal contact. If somewhat is

lost in vividness, many of the limitations of personal converse are absent. But if in the best literature we find, in no merely hyperbolic sense, "society," it is, like all good society, difficult of access. Not much of worth in this world but is the prize of merit, of toil, of patience. The gardens of the Hesperides stood ever open, but to fetch the golden apples was the labour of a Hercules. The books are waiting on the shelves, but he is far astray, indeed, who thinks to win the secret of Goethe, of Shakespeare, of him

Who saw life steadily and saw it whole,
The mellow glory of the Attic stage.

in the same easy fashion in which he skins through the last popular novel, or an ephemeral essay of the periodical press. To experience the power of literature, to appreciate style in its fulness, to feel, not merely the main emotion, but the whole complex of emotions with which the writer regards his subject, is the outcome only of constant and careful study, combined with a large innate susceptibility to literary art. Though the capacity for the highest literary appreciation is not common, in most men a measure of innate capability is dormant. To rouse this dormant capability, to guide it aright when roused, to teach the proper spirit in which to approach the masterpieces of literature, and to keep the mind in contact with them; this should form a main part of every course of literature. And I claim that, excluding the other benefits of college work, it would be no inadequate return, should the student gain this alone, the appreciation of what is noblest and best in books, and a love for that august company of whom we have spoken.

Style is the most pervading manifestation of form. We find it present when the literary structure is not otherwise elaborated. Thucydides' History, for example, has the simple mould of a chronicle of events nar-