

rivalry—a heroic purpose, ourselves to fill a niche in the pantheon of history? Was it not thus, that the youthful Themistocles exclaimed that “the trophies of Miltiades would not suffer him to sleep?” That Alexander prized above all the literature of his age, *Iliad* of Homer; and that in our day Napoleon daily perused some portion of Plutarch’s lives! I say it without fear of successful contradiction, that example is the most edifying counsel, the most attractive influence, often the most lucid instruction, ever addressed to the youthful mind. If so, a library enriched with the lives of those who have made themselves a blessing to mankind, by the light of their intelligence and virtue, will instil love of truth and goodness with silent but irresistible energy.

In the next place, every well assorted library is a benevolent guide along the pathway of knowledge. True it is, that to pupils at school such guidance is far less necessary, than for those who are deprived of systematic culture; who are compelled to grope their way as best they may, through surrounding darkness, and to whom any casual aid furnished by the example of others, shines on them like a light from heaven. Who has not read, with delight mingled with sorrow, of a Scotch shepherd boy, that demonstrated, unaided, the propositions of the first three books of Euclid; or of Pascal, when his father had interdicted the study of mathematics to his son, accomplishing the same remarkable feat? Were these youths wisely engaged in thus poring over the simplest truths, which, had they known it, were at their finger’s ends? Undoubtedly, the dictate of wisdom is, to him who in a brief life would survey the utmost bounds of knowledge, to use all the foreign aid which he can summon to his assistance. The instructions of the school room, which present this truth in a simple summary, and systematic form, are one of these aids; and in addition thereto, every one who is anxious to view truth under special and different aspects, must approach it as it is exhibited in the volumes of those master minds who have penetrated farthest into the arcana of nature. The manner of studying, is a point not to be overlooked in connection with this topic, and the difficulties which meet the student in the outset or in the progress of his career. The history of

other minds, however illustrious they were, shed an instructive light on our pathway. We are pursuing the same career; each of us may say—“sequor, etsi non passibus æquis”—the history of their difficulties and the manner in which they overcame them, alleviates our burdens; we are borne as on angels’ wings, over the ground on which, but for such aid and sympathy, we should have crawled as worms. If we for a moment contemplate that immense sea of literature which is the record of the teeming fancies, the tender sensibilities, the taste, the imagination of our own and all by-gone ages, we shall conclude at once, that no instructions of the school room, no well thumbed text books of scraps or extracts, no rules or formulas of criticism, can ever replace that knowledge which is to be gathered from an actual perusal of the classical literature of our mother tongue. Let us recollect, too, with honest pride, that in several departments, this literature is of transcendent excellence. There may be a few Greek compositions rivalling anything we have produced. The *Iliad* of Homer, is undoubtedly the first epic in the world, and has the *Œdipus* of Sophocles, its peer anywhere? But as a whole, the English poetry is the richest gift ever bestowed by the genius of any people, upon the human family.

The school library, is the depository of this literature, and by the study of it chiefly, must the taste of our people be refined and the current of their thoughts be ennobled. In Italy, pictures and statues, architecture and music, have performed this task: in England landscape gardening has infused universally a tinge of poetic sentiment. Here these agencies do not exist; but it is the privilege of all to see suspended in writing, the imperial creations of the poet and the philosopher, and to gaze on them till their own souls thrill with transport, and vibrate in unison with these generous sentiments. It may be urged that periodical literature may replace that of the library, and that the village newspaper and the monthly magazine, are a fitting substitute for bound volumes.—But this supposition is too weak to admit of refutation. An argument which fills a volume requires a volume;—the conclusion reached at the close, is arrived at as the result of a series of consecutive arguments which require such a