

Let us consider how great a commodity of doctrine exists in books, how sweetly, how safely they expose the nakedness of human ignorance without putting it to shame. These are the masters that instruct without rods of ferules, without hard words and anger, without clothes or money. If you approach them, they are not asleep; if investigating you interrogate them, they conceal nothing; if you mistake them, they never grumble; if you are ignorant, they cannot laugh at you.

RICHARD DE BARRY,
Bishop of Durham; "Philobiblon," 1344.

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose they are. Nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

JOHN MILTON, "Areopagitica."

If I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness through life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man, unless, indeed, you put into his hand a most perverse selection of books. You place him in contact with the best society in every period of history—with the wisest, the wittiest—with the tenderest, the bravest and the purest characters that have adorned humanity. You make him a denizen of all nations—a contemporary of all ages. The world has been created for him. There is a gentle, but perfectly irresistible coercion in a habit of reading well directed, over the whole tenor of a man's character and conduct, which is not the less effectual because it works insensible, and because it is really the last thing he dreams of. It cannot, in short, be better summed up than in the words of the Latin poet—"Emallit mores, nec sinit esse feros," "it civilizes the conduct of men, and suffers them not to remain barbarous."

SIR J. HERSCHELL.

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And when I think of the delight given by every true book to generations after generations, moulding souls and humanizing savage impetuosities, exalting hopes and prompting noblest deeds, I vary the poets phrase and exclaim—"An honest book's the noblest work of man."

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