

of the contents of these works. To what class of literature do they belong?

"Write a life, with dates, of Sir John Suckling. What do you mean by the 'metaphysical' poets? Discuss the appropriateness of that term."

Now I am not citing this style of question to condemn or ridicule it. No knowledge can be entirely useless, and there is no saying when and where it may not be useful to an upper middle-class English man or woman to know the authors of the aforesaid works. But this at least is certain, that a student might obtain full marks in such a paper without its proving that he or she was any the better, wiser, or happier for any of the literature of which it treats. To begin with, there may be ample time in one school or college session to get up all the information requisite to answer such a paper, when there would not be time enough for the profitable study of any one of the writers named, if read for the sake of his works and not for the sake of being examined about him. And it is obvious that if literature is pursued in this kind of way, there is hardly any limit to the extent of ground that the student may be asked to traverse in a single year. I have myself been more than once invited to set the examination papers in this subject in an institution that I will not name. The syllabus of the lectures given during one session has been laid before me, to assist me in framing my questions, and I could only gather from this that in the course of a single year the whole range of English literature from "Piers Plowman" to "Waverley" had been dealt with by the lecturer, and therefore after a fashion supposed to be profitable to the learners. Imagine five centuries of our noble classics in verse and prose—the greater and the minor prophets of our literature—so much as touched upon to any purpose in

such a space! No doubt the area covered looked well in the prospectus of the lectures. It displayed the comprehensive character of the instruction given, and by consequence the complete knowledge of English authors carried away by a daughter after only a year's work—"and still the wonder grew, how one small head could carry all she knew." Yes! the old, old fallacy! The area nominally cultivated—*this* the wonder and the attraction. No thought of the depth to which the plough has gone, or whether any really valuable seed had been sown at all! No thought of whether any genuine pleasure had been acquired through experience of any one of these English writers! Yet only through some pleasure given, I venture to assert, is any profit afforded by the study of an English writer.

May I tell two anecdotes, for which I can vouch, illustrating the opinion I am upholding, drawn not from the class-rooms of our own rank, but from the "simple annals of the poor?" You know that of late years, in our national schools under government inspection, the higher standards are allowed to learn and study some passage of defined length from an English poet—a scene from Shakespeare, a poem of Cowper, a canto of Walter Scott. Well, I once knew of a village schoolmaster who actually chose Milton's "Lycidas" for the purpose, and, stranger still, the inspector did not put his foot down upon the absurdity. It is quite easy to divine why the schoolmaster, who had perhaps studied the poem in his own training college days, chose that poem. "Lycidas" has always been one of the happiest of hunting-grounds for the examiner. It is full from end to end of names, phrases, allusions in mythology, geography, scripture-history, on which questions can be framed. Just recall a few—"the Sisters of the sacred well," "the Fauns and Satyrs," "the