

forms, the silent ordinances of God's great law—the unspoken voice of Him in whom we live, move and have our being,—the human mind attains its rarest, ripest skill, the human faculties quicken and develop into their most vigorous, most abounding life.

This may be all very well, I fancy I hear some one saying, for those that like it, but the knowledge we want is a knowledge of life; the knowledge that is most useful—most indispensable—is knowledge of men. I admit this. "The proper study of mankind is man," I admit this. The thoughts, the passions, the characters, the actions of our fellow-men are influences very near to us. They touch us all round. We are immersed in them. It concerns us to comprehend them. We shall miss our mark if we miscalculate them. If we would study men, if we would be good judges of human nature we must—to use the quaint language of Bacon—we must lay aside the *idols of the den*—must come out of the cavern of our individual peculiarities, with its dim distorting lights, and observe mankind under the broad, clear light common to all. And this we shall only do by the aid of history. It is by observing man as he has lived under varied conditions, by tracing the connexion of events, by weighing, testing, estimating the relative strength of the many conflicting, modifying causes and influences by which events have been produced, that we shall so train and restrain, so file and finish what natural gifts we may have or attain to that swiftness of insight, and ripeness of judgement, which we all flatter ourselves that we possess. If we would be good judges of human nature—if we would understand the present, or forecast the future, we must first of all have practised ourselves to reconstruct the past. History then and science entering thus of necessity into all mental cultivation we have in our Literary and Historical society the aids and incitements by which such cultivation is induced, and advanced. We have in our library a large collection of books, and we have in our stated meetings that intellectual co-operation which can make those dry bones live. The organization of the society which promotes the literary habit and invites to original research cannot well be set at a value that is too high for it. It is by trying to do a thing that we learn to know it. I remember to have heard, about the time of the revolution of 1848, how that Mr. Louis Blanc then chiefly known as the great socialist authority on the organization of labor, who, you recollect, was one of the provisional government in Paris, found his office invaded one morning by an excited throng of his disciples, demanding the instant realization of his theories. "What did they want?" "The organization of labor." It was in vain that the philosophical minister assured them that the thing could not be done in a moment. These tumultuous deputations do not wait upon ministers, I believe, in order to listen to reason. They were getting furious; when a great thought came into the statesman's mind. Singling out the most unreasonable of his admirers, he said, "The thing shall be done, and at your dictation. What shall I write?" and taking a pen and a sheet of foolscap, he waited for the word. The man whom he addressed stepped confidently forward. He rejoiced. The hour of the unappreciated was come! "What shall I write?" "The organization of labor." He wrote it. "What next?" "The organization of labor." He wrote it again; and again looked up expectant. The organizer began to get flurried. He took a turn across the room, came back, and, placing his hand to his head, repeated, for the third time, "The organization of labor—is—is a more difficult matter than I thought it was." There it is: the bending of the mind to original effort, whether it be for the production of a state paper, the composition of a treatise, or the investigation of a phenomenon, cannot fail to teach a man something about his subject and something about himself. The criticism of his friends will probably teach him something more, always supposing that the society to whose criticism his lucubrations are submitted do not descend, as such societies have a tendency to descend, into a mutual admiration society. I may assume, I think, that there is no fear of that with us; but that we shall reap the full benefit of such co-operation, not the least of which arises out of the free discussion and conversation which follow the reading of our papers. These are the very things to keep a man within those bounds of strict and sober statement which in the gush of composition the unaccustomed pen is apt to overleap. The correction of error, however, and the enforcement of accuracy, invaluable as these are, are not the only good purposes which a competent fact to face criticism subserves. In the prompt dealing with novel views, and the prompt handling of new facts necessitated by the exigencies of oral debate, a man acquires, if ever he can acquire, swiftness and precision of mental movement. And he acquires more than that. He acquires mental fecundity. The mind is fertilized by the heat evolved in the play and collision of thought and bears more abundant crops—crops that spring up not from those ideas only which have been implanted from without, but from unsuspected seeds of thought warmed into life within. After all, however, it will be to no pur-

pose that we sharpen our wits if they have nothing to work upon. But this something to work upon is the very thing which our own institution supplies. We have in our library the treasures of theory and fact, the records of observations and reasonings which constitute the knowledge and the wisdom of the past. And in the same library, by the continued accession of new works representatives of modern thought and modern research we enter into intellectual possession of the present. And this is what we are bound to do. It may be all very well to talk, as some people will talk, about the superiority of mother wit over book-learning. But nowhere can a man keep himself abreast of the intelligence of his age without book learning—least of all can we venture to make the experiment here,—we who inhabit a city which with all the beauty of its environments, and all the venerableness—as things go in these parts—all the venerableness of its associations is not, it must at length be conceded, I suppose, quite the centre and source of civilization. Upon libraries then and books, if we would not fall behind in the race, upon libraries and books we must rely as our main means of intellectual culture. Something we have in this way. More we need. And I trust that our funds will so increase that the best thought and freshest knowledge of the day will always be accessible to us and familiar amongst us. And here perhaps I might leave the matter; but in truth I am loath to leave it here. The literary character stands first in the description of our Society. And though the office, I have been assigning to books and libraries is an important and an honorable office, yet it is but a subsidiary and a secondary one. Now I am certainly led by natural disposition—I think I am called by the occasion to take, before I bring these observations to a close, at least one brief glance at the humanizing influence of literature valued and followed for its own sake. And since I have trespassed already too long upon your attention, I shall confine myself in what I say about this influence to this one single consideration,—that the love of literature takes us into good company. Books that live, preserve and perpetuate for our society and conversation the selectest minds of all the ages. No magician's fabled wand was ever mightier to conjure up the dead than is the spell that every student of literature holds in his hand. The world's master-spirits wait upon his will. Addison will come at his call to charm a vacant hour with the exquisite ease, the genial archness of his talk, and the delicate grace of his wit. Bacon, laying aside the cares and the snares of state, will unfold, of a winter's evening, his grand conceptions for the creation of science, or pour into listening ears, with many a quaint proverb and many a sparkling phrase, those wise counsels for the conduct of life which, as he himself says, come home to men's business and bosoms. Or, if his mind be in more imaginative mood—if he be disposed to

"Feed on thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers,"—

an old man rises to his side—aged before his time—the lines of whose noble countenance betoken one that has been used

"To scorn delights, and live laborious days;"—

A blind old man, to whom it has been given to

"See and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight;

And, lo! under Milton's guidance he is present in the conclave of the rebellious angels, where,

"High upon a throne of royal state, which far
"Outshone the wealth of Ormus or of Ind,
"Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
"Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
"Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
"To that bad eminence."

He hears that high debate, and as he gazes on the grand forms of the fallen angels—

"Majestic though in ruin,"—

He thrills under the weird power of that infernal eloquence, or—still by the spell of this "old man eloquent,"—other sights and other sounds prevail; and he hears

"The merry bells ring round,
"And the jocund rebecc sound
"To many a youth and many a maid
"Dancing in the chequered shade
"And young and old come forth to play
"On a sunshine holiday."

Or if his fancy take a different sweep, stepping back some three