

other life-afflicted sufferers. That will adequately account for the existence of social clubs and sewing societies. The real reason for this hatred of solitude is fear—fear for oneself, fear of those obstinate questionings that will rot down. We abhor the advice of David to “commune with your own heart on your bed and be still.” If we can’t sleep as soon as we go to bed, we always have an opiate ready. Truly those things which compel solitude—illness, imprisonment, exile, loss of friends—are “celestial benedictions,” as history fully proves.

We have so dinned into our ears a most pernicious saying—pernicious, like most maxims, both in pedagogy and in other places, when not interpreted properly—“There is so much to do and so little time to do it in,” that we seem to find in it a sort of justification for cutting short our hours of idle solitude. But all depends on one word: what is the *much*?

“Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way;
But to act that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.”

Find us *farther*? But in what direction? There it is again; we can’t escape it; we have to settle *what* we have to do, *where* we are to go. On these points the wisest answer to both that wisdom and philosophy can give us is self-realization, the realizing of the best there is in us. To attempt to do this we must necessarily get acquainted with ourselves, with what there is in us; we cannot do it, in the deepest sense, in the hurly-burly of active life; we must tear down every barrier that we have hitherto raised, and in solitude, not idle but full of purpose, seek to fathom the heights and depths of the noblest subject of study that God has given man—our own human and divine nature.

When we look round and mark the stress and strain of modern life, the high-pressure condition of mod-

ern civilization, well may we be tempted to wonder if we are really better off than our forefathers of three and four centuries ago; well may we sympathize with the prayer of Whittier:

“Forgive our feverish ways
* * * * *
Breathe through the pulses of desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm.”

The blind pursuit of such utter trivialities as make up the greatest part of our lives is deadly to the production of greatness in ourselves and of great men in the world. When we get sick to death of the littleness of things in and round us, our first cry is for some great man, some prophet, to lead us out of the wilderness of our wanderings into some promised land. Such a cry is idle and vain. In no nation and in no age where there is an absence of the elements of greatness in the people can there possibly arise a great man. A Homer, a Shakespeare a Newton, a Faraday can not be looked for from Patagonia or the Islands of the Pacific.

“All thoughts that mould the age begin
Deep down within the primitive soul,
And from the many slowly upward win
To one who grasps the whole.
In his wide brain the feeling deep
That struggled on the many’s tongue
Swells to a tide of thought, whose surges
leap
O’er the weak thrones of wrong.”

We must therefore put ourselves right first, must “work out our own salvation.” And will meditation in solitude accomplish this? In one place Lowell says that

“Action is the birth of thought;”

in another that

“All thought begins in feeling.”

He is right in both cases, as the context will show. Some difficulties will find their solution only in active effort; for the solution of others, and these the most difficult because they are antecedent to any effort, the in-