

expenditure of time produce more valuable results than some of the studies in which long hours are weekly spent.

Since familiarity with the best English poetry is so desirable, I have come to the conclusion that I can at least do no harm by publishing the following selections. This volume is not meant to come into competition with any existing manuals. I have collected from our best poets in each main epoch of English poetry such complete poems, or brief passages from longer works, as seemed most likely to be of use in forming the taste of young readers. No one could read or learn by the passages here collected without being morally and mentally the richer and better for it. "The noble mansion," says Walter Savage Landor, "is most distinguished by the beautiful images it retains of beings passed away; and so is the noble mind." The picture gallery of a pure imagination cannot be stored with loftier or lovelier images than those which it may derive from the writings of the true singers who are here represented. The poets, better than any other moral teachers, lead us to "the great in conduct, and the pure in thought." No one has better described their highest function than the poet who so nobly fulfilled it—William Wordsworth. "I doubt not," he wrote to a friend, "that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings, and among them these little poems, will co-operate with the benign tendencies of human nature and society, wherever found; and that they will in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser and better. . . . To console the afflicted; to add sunlight to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, to feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous,—this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform, long after we, that is, all that is mortal of us, are mouldered in our graves." Surely this is a lofty description of the aim of poetry; yet, lofty as it is, our truest poets have set before themselves no lower standard.

The first few passages are taken from Chaucer. The paucity of them must not be taken, any more than in the case of other