

Smith, the *Danbury News* man with Tom Hood, John Phoenix with Charles Lamb, Lowell with Henry Fielding, the *Burlington Hawkeye* man with Dickens, Bret Harte with Thackeray, and concludes: "There still remains the heroic form of Mark Twain, against whom we do not propose to set up any rival. Mark's way is so peculiarly his own that we cannot find his parallel; but it may be hinted that Jonathan Swift, and Dr. Oliver Goldsmith, and the Rev. Lawrence Sterne were perhaps as funny as any who write in American comic papers."

Let us make up our minds, as far as we know and can find out, to read the very best books we can discover by our own research or by the guidance of others—the very best; and if at first we do not care for the very best, then let us remember that it is one great part of a liberal education, in any proper sense of that word, to learn to know the best and to appreciate it.

Mr. Frederic Harrison has some excellent remarks on this subject: "How," he asks, "shall we choose our books, which are the best, the eternal, the indispensable books? To all to whom reading is something more than a refined idleness these questions recur, bringing with them a sense of bewilderment. To put out of the question that writing which is positively bad, are we not, amidst the multiplicity of books and of writers, in continual danger of being drawn off by what is stimulating rather than solid, by curiosity after something accidentally notorious, by what has no intelligible thing to recommend it, except that it is new? Now, to stuff our minds with what is simply trivial, simply curious, or that, which at best, has but a low nutritive power, that is to close our minds to what is solid and enlarging, and spiritually sustaining."

The same writer remarks with great truth and force that our appreciation of the really great writers will form the best measure of our own mental and literary cultivation. "If," he says, "you find Milton, Dante, Calderon, Goethe, so much 'Hebrew-Greek' to you; if your Homer and Virgil, your Molière and Scott, rest year after year undisturbed on your shelves, beside your school Trigonometry and your old college textbooks; if you have never opened the *Cid*, the *Nibelungen*, *Crusoe*, and *Don Quixote*, since you were a boy, and are wont to leave the Bible and the Imitation for some wet Sunday afternoon, know, friend, that your reading can do you little real good. Your mental digestion is ruined or sadly out of order. No doubt, to thousands of intelligent educated men who call themselves readers, the reading through a Canto of *The Purgatorio*, or a Book of the *Paradise Lost*, is a task as irksome as it would be to decipher an ill-written manuscript in a language that is almost forgotten. But, although we are not to be always reading epics, and are chiefly in the mood for slighter things, to be absolutely unable to read Milton or Dante with enjoyment, is to be in a very bad way." Again, he goes on: "When will men understand that the reading of good books is a faculty to be acquired, not a natural gift, at least not to those who are spoiled by our current education and habits of life? *Ceci tuera cela*, the last great poet might have said of the first circulating library. An insatiable appetite for new novels makes it as hard to read a masterpiece as it seems to a Parisian *boulevardier* to live in a quiet country. Until a man can truly enjoy a draught of clear water bubbling from a mountain side, his taste is in an unwholesome state. And so he who finds the Heliconian spring insipid should look to the state