

pitied Ichabod while I laughed at him ; thought the old Dutch feast a most admirable thing, and long before I was through, all regret ceased that my last Christmas had gone down the wind, and I had found that there were books and books. That vast hunger to read never left me. If there was no candle, I poked my head down to the fire ; read while I was eating, blowing the bellows, or walking from one place to another. I could read and walk four miles an hour. The world centred in books."

Books are the friends of the friendless, and a library is the home of the homeless. A taste for reading will always carry you into the best society, and enable you to converse with men who will interest you by their wisdom, and charm you by their wit : who will soothe you when fretted, and refresh you when weary ; counsel you when perplexed, and sympathize with you at all times.

They are the windows through which the soul looks out. A home without books is like a room without windows. No man has a right to bring up his children without surrounding them with books, if he has the means to buy them. Children learn to read by being in the presence of books. The love of knowledge comes with the reading and grows upon it. And the love of knowledge in a young mind is almost a warrant against the inferior excitement of passions and vices. Charles Lamb said : "I own that I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form for saying grace setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or for a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts ?—A grace before Milton, a grace before Shakespeare, a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the 'Faire Queen.'"

And Elizabeth Barrett Browning has said in these servid lines : "Mark, there ! We get no good by being ungenerous even to a book, and calculating profits—so much help by so much reading. It is when we

gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge soul forward, headlong, into a book's profound, impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth. This is when we get the right good from a book."

I have said that in the power of reading we have admission to society of all kinds. But it is not quite true to say that admission to that society of the noble is open to all. There is need of effort of patience, of discipline, to approach great minds in literature. Anyone can read "King Solomon's Mines," but not everyone can read Milton. Beyond all question, it takes time and energy and active thought. These monarchs of literature are only at home with those who can don their own regal dress.

There are some minds, which, for lack of use and training, feel more at home gossiping with the servants than sharing the hospitality of the master's table. And here comes in the responsibility of reading. It is our duty to nerve ourselves to encounters with the great. We are to put on the livery of the master minds. But it may be asked, Who are the master minds ? By what mark are we to distinguish them ? How are we to discharge our responsibilities in the absence of those regal insignae with which alone we are familiar. Here is an acknowledged difficulty, and in it may be rooted a plea for reading more of those writers whose place in literature is fixed, and less of those current writers who have not yet passed the stern examination of time or received the stamp of that final criticism which is not local nor of the age, but universal and eternal. For Anglo-Saxons, at any rate, there is little excuse if they go wrong.

There have risen in our literary heavens so many Constant Stars that by their steady and glowing light more mutable objects may be fixed. Let a man, while he is young and unformed, and the uncertainty of conflicting authorities leaves him in some doubt to whom he should attach his reverence and affection, take up Milton's poems, first the shorter poems, and after the longer. Let him commune