

but words? Only by the word can consciousness formulate itself. Sign—note—voice of life and fosterer if not creator of vital intellectuality, literature is the greatest of miracles. What is opening the eyes of the blind compared with the parable of the prodigal? What is Rome? The page of Livy—the song of Virgil. What is the Jewish nation? The Bible. Three score little books, all capable of being put in a nut shell. Open the shell, spread the tiny leaves and behold the march of a marvellous race, a people unique, for hundreds of years; you see them and hear their cry in bondage; their shout of triumph mingled with the sigh of the sea; their meannesses, defeats, victories, naïve idylls, lyric songs; their wisdom and folly. You live in the palaces of their kings; kneel with them in private prayer, join in their antiphonal anthems down the mountain sides; you work in the harvest field; you learn to know these primitive husbandmen; their wives and daughters; a few words and millions are introduced to the gentle Ruth, or to the dark inscrutable Jael; prophets, statesmen, orators, poets, priests, kings, all brought before us by a few bits of writing. Literature can in a true sense say:—“Race—nation—*c'est moi.*”

Alas! for the silent cradle. Literature is the voice of the living and vigorous community; what memory is to the individual—the indispensable condition of conscious relation between past and present—the magic link which makes the generations one; which unifies the Englishman of maxim guns with the Englishman of times when war was innocent of gun powder; the soldiers of Crecy and those of the Soudan and the Dargai ridge. To know a race, we must hear its sighs, its prayers, its curses, its songs, its speeches, its whispers; the hiss of its envies, the velvet voice of its charity and love; nor can it know itself and the present feel one with the past without a generated literature; this absent a people cannot reach its highest, cannot culminate in civilized effort.

We Canadians speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke; we have English literature. But this cannot supply all our needs. We have a national existence of our own. There is a Canada to be expressed; an eminence to be sought which we cannot reach if without that which is to a people what the higher faculties of the mind are to the man. The millionaires should now begin to endow chairs to encourage original literary effort. Prize poems have been laughed at. Yet Tennyson was helped by his. Neither Milman nor Brazenose College, nor Oxford itself, was the worse for the “Belvidere Apollo.” The success of Heber’s “Palestine” encouraged himself, and gave promise of his future eminence. A better method than prize poems can easily be found. The thing to bear in mind is that what we ought to encourage is that form of study which is most likely to be neglected and has least chance of finding stimulus in popular recognition.

More has been said than is quite just of the dignity of literature as