

autobiography of the writer during the last 20 years of his life. We see him now in one of his many country villas, interesting himself in agriculture, or planting shrubberies, or otherwise improving his estate, and in amusing himself with pictures and statues, just as a country gentleman does to-day. Now we find him at Rome—sick of the strife and ambition of this vain and selfish world—a spectator of the great games which Pompey set on foot at the opening of his theatre, and recording his testimony against the barbarities inflicted by the gladiators upon the elephant—“that noble animal which has something in it which resembles man” (*Epis. ad Familiares*, vii. 1). We also see the literary side of his life portrayed. What a lover of books was he! “I am here,” he writes to Atticus, “feeding on Faustus’ library. You might suppose that it was on the exquisite productions of Puteoli and Lucrinum. There is no want of these; but, to say the truth, in the present state of the republic, I have lost my relish for other enjoyments and pleasures, and find support and refreshment from books alone: and would rather occupy that little seat of yours under the statue of Aristotle [in Atticus’ library], than the curule chair.” (iv. 9, Heberden’s Trans). “Here I am devouring books with a wonderful man (so in truth I esteem him) Dionysius, who sends his compliments to you and all your family. ‘Nothing is more delicious than universal information.’” (*Ep. ad Att.* iv. 2). In another of his letters, he says that when his librarian Tyrannis had arranged his books, it seemed as if his house had got a soul. We find him at one time begging his friend to send him two of his assistant librarians to help Tyrannis to glue the parchments, and to bring with them a thin skin of parchment to make indexes. He tells Atticus on no account to part with his library, as he is putting by his savings to be able to purchase it, as a resource in his old age. Poor Cicero! He never had occasion to invest his savings in the coveted treasure.

His letters are also valuable in opening up

before us the state of society at that time in Rome, and the manners and customs of the people. They do for Roman society what Pepys’ Diary does for the polite society of England during the reign of the Second Charles.

Perhaps the greatest value to us of Cicero’s correspondence is the light it throws upon contemporary history. His letters cover the eventful 20 years from his consulship to his death (B.C. 65-43). It was a time of great men and great deeds, great crimes and great sufferings. That stirring period saw Pompey establish the Roman kingdom on the ruins of the Macedonian; it also saw the murder of Pompey; it saw the rule of the first and second triumvirates; it saw Caesar’s conquests and his assassination; it saw the great battles of Pharsalia and of Munda, Cataline’s Conspiracy, Sallust’s Expulsion, and Cato’s suicide. Cicero’s letters cover this period. In these events he took intense interest. We can thus look behind the scenes upon the actors in those terrible dramas, and see the motives and hopes and fears that swayed them. They show us the despair and suffering which always follow such scenes of carnage and blood, and unholy ambition. “During the three days that I staid at Laodicea, three at Apamea, and three at Synnada, I heard of nothing but the inability of the people to pay the head money imposed upon them; the universal sale of goods; the groans and lamentations of the cities, the fatal traces, not of man, but of some savage beast. In short, I am sick of everything—even of my life.” (*Ep. ad Att.* v. 16). What a terrible picture that! In the picturesque language of his biographer: “We hear [in Cicero’s letters] the groans of the expiring republic, which had been mortally wounded during the long civil wars of Marius and Sylla, and was fast sinking under the flood of social and political corruption which is sure to follow in the train of civil war. At one time we watch with eager impatience the arrival of a courier at Tusculum, with a letter from Atticus, telling his friend the news of the day; and in Cicero’s reply we