

It is much in favour of reading if it helps in any degree to stop the circulation of such a medium. But it is time to turn to some of the

2. *Positive advantages of reading.*

What is the use of it? Anyone can answer that question. It is the way to knowledge and to power of the best and most righteous kind; it is a means of unceasing refreshment and delight; it is a solace when almost every other pleasure and earthly blessing has departed. How admirably has this been said by one of the greatest contributors to human delight, the author of the "Advancement of Learning" and the "Essays"—the great Lord Bacon:

"Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. . . . Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them. . . . Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man. And, therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit; and if he read little, he had need have much cunning to seem to know that he doth not."^{*}

(1) It may be freely granted that there are men who have acquired great knowledge, especially of the practical kind, and even a large amount of accurate information, without the aid of books. Yes, undoubtedly, the wise man, as Shakespeare reminds us, Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones and good in everything, even as another man, who was not so very wise, tells us—

My only books
Were woman's looks,
And folly all they taught me.

—*Moore.*

* Essay L. "Of Studies."

It may also be granted that many men who have been great readers have not been distinguished for wisdom or for any practical faculty whatever. But what does this prove? Only that some few men have the gift of picking up from the conversation of other men the knowledge which these have acquired mostly from books; whilst many of us are so foolish that we have no power of appropriating or assimilating the wisdom of others however it may be presented to us. And all this is nothing to the purpose.

Books, as a rule, and upon the whole, represent the best and the wisest of men. "A good book," said our great Milton, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to ~~live~~ life beyond life;" and Descartes remarks, "The reading of good books is like a conversation with the best men of past ages, and even like a studied conversation in which they communicate to us only the best of their thoughts. . . . To converse with those of other ages is very much the same thing as to travel. It is well to know something of the manners of different peoples, in order to form a sounder judgment of our own, and to prevent us from imagining that all which is contrary to our own customs is also contrary to reason; as is the way with those who have seen nothing else." *

(2) It is easy to make out exceptions to any principle or any rule; but in these matters we must be guided by the experience of the worthiest who have gone before us; and the testimony of such is unequivocal and unanimous. We might quote the words of men, ancient and modern, telling us of the cultivation of mind, of the discipline of the will, of the joy and communion which they have found in books—in days of health and prosperity, and in hours of sickness and adversity.

* *Discours sur la Méthode.* Part I.