

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE V.

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AS AN
INSTRUMENT OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE.

BY HENRY M. WHITNEY.

FEW now doubt that one of the most important things in their lives is their choice of their reading. Not more directly or more powerfully is the body affected by its food than is the mind by the thought that it receives: thought is the very food of the mind, as thought and impulse are the very life of the soul. Hence the admonition of the Apostle: Whatsoever things are pure, lovely, honorable, of good report, *think* on these things. Hence, also, the reading of the best books has been the central cause by which many an unschooled and self-depreciating man of business, perhaps a clerk on a salary, has been better taught and more symmetrically rounded in his culture and in his manhood than many a graduate of schools. All observant and all reflecting men are agreed that reading is an extremely important means of culture.

But study is reading in the comparative or the superlative degree. In the essay "Of Studies," reading and study evidently seem to Bacon to be synonymous terms, or study is only a more intense form of reading: "*Studies*," he says, "serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. . . . *Read* not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to *weigh* and *consider*. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be *chewed* and *digested*." If a man attempts to feed upon this last and most excellent kind of books, he had better be thorough, and get the

good of them by the chewing and digesting of study. To attempt to chew and digest a book that is fit only to be tasted is folly, if not sin; to taste a book that is fit to be chewed and digested may lead one to try to get and assimilate more of such nourishing and invigorating food.

In these days, when the proportion of the most cursory reading is so great in comparison with real study; when the newspaper has taken the place of the book and is even read largely by captions; when the manager of the newspaper often finds it not worth while to get the editorial writing done by men of any intellectual power; when fiction has nearly crowded out history and biography and poetry, and still more nearly the essay, and still more nearly the books that are yet more abstract,—it is well to emphasize the fact that, as a general thing, whatever is worth reading is worth reading well, worth reading twice, worth reading intently; and that means good hard study.

Take, for instance, Mrs. Humphry Ward's four stories that have been most discussed ("Robert Elsmere," "David Grieve," "Marcella," and "Helbeck of Bannisdale"): to read any one of these superficially is almost a blasphemy against him who has endowed man with a feeling heart and a reasoning mind; it certainly is a trifling with an opportunity for growth. They were wrung from the heart of a woman of very high ability and very great earnestness,—a woman whose difficulty in religious belief is so full of longing to know the truth that it is worth more to the world than any amount of flippant or unthinking or essentially agnostic assent. To read any one of these books is to address oneself to some great problem of personal conviction or of social conduct or of spiritual attitude. And, again, to acquiesce in some of Mrs. Ward's assumptions, as he does who only reads, is to suffer grave spiritual peril and perhaps to make shipwreck of faith: it is a perilous thing to let any one, unchallenged, take for

granted, while he is sitting for us in the instructor's chair, that Christianity and science, faith and reason, cannot live together; or, again, that the searching criticism of the nineteenth century left of the historic Christ little more than a legend. If we are to read such books as Mrs. Ward's, we must read, as Bacon would say, "not to believe and take for granted," but to "weigh and consider."

We may take this matter back to an author who, by the suffrage of the centuries, has been put permanently upon even the shortest lists of the authors whose works it is both enjoyable and profitable either to study or to read. Many a man can say that, as with advancing years he began to get a little discernment, he was early and impressively struck with a sense of the quality of man made by the mere reading and re-reading of Shakespeare. Answer as we may the hard problems as to the personality of Shakespeare, his real convictions about truth and duty, his power of conforming his life to such standards of honor and virtue and piety as he himself confessed and preached,—answer as we may the questions suggested by his consenting sometimes to cater to the popular taste for the gross,—the fact remains that his works are a treasure-house of intellectual, moral, and spiritual suggestion; that they have a depth of penetration into the very heart of man, a breadth and a range of vision, an eloquence, a beauty, such as can be found nowhere else outside of the Bible. Indeed, his works are so saturated with the language, the spirit, the very atmosphere, of the Scripture, that they have even been called the lay Bible; and they go far to prove the justice of this title, not only by their inner character, but by the way in which they have proved themselves strong meat, alike for intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Granted that, the better one knows Shakespeare, the more assured he is that the man himself is a sphinx; it still is true that in his dramas there is not so much a sphinx-like

riddling as a masterful teaching of the secret of a thinking that is high, a regard that is large, a feeling that is noble, and a living that is wise and kind and true.

To return to the proposition with which we entered upon these facts as to Shakespeare, it follows from what we have said that, if Shakespeare is worth reading, he is worth reading well. His works are well worth tasting, if one can do no more. It is hard to imagine a man as having the most superficial acquaintance with "Macbeth," for instance, without catching something of awe before the moral nature of man,—and that is Christian culture; or the most casual acquaintance with Antonio and Portia without an uplift in his conceptions of faithful friendship or a deeper reverence for that mercy which "droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven," which "blesseth him that gives and him that takes," which "becomes the thronèd monarch better than his crown," and "is an attribute to God himself,"—and this is culture, Christian culture.

Yet, again, why "taste" merely, if one can "chew and digest"? Why read "for delight" when one can read "for ability" as well? Why read to "take for granted," when one can "weigh and consider"? It is preëminently a part of Shakespeare's greatness that he can bear being weighed and considered.

Doubtless he had not the elaborateness of meaning attributed to him by certain commentators, nor especially the philosophical reasons, for every turn in plot or phrase, discovered for him by some microscopic self-projecting students of his works. If ever a man wrote with only his own generation in mind, it was he; yet this does not break the fact that his works can be studiously gone over year after year with ever more richly rewarding results. To read them cursorily is worth something; to read them with all possible effort at penetration and possession is worth a thousandfold more.

All great literatures are akin in this. We smile at the way in which the Rabbins pored over the Hebrew Scriptures till every letter in every patriarch's name was made to speak a fact connected with his life. They argued, for instance, that the world should last six thousand years because *aleph*, their symbol for one thousand, occurs six times in the first verse of the Bible. This, we know, so far as it was not mere mnemonics, was childish, but it was an accident connected with the great fact that they did more than merely to read the Scriptures: they "gave attendance on reading," as Paul urged Timothy to do; and so, like Timothy and Apollos, those who could be more than pedants and literalists became mighty in the Scripture, and such high and beautiful characters as Simeon and Elizabeth and Anna and Joseph and Mary were furnished for the first welcome to the gospel, and a Paul was equipped for the struggle with Jewish and heathen unbelief. It took more than zeal, it took a deep spiritual culture, to enable the church to rise from the disheartenment that followed the crucifixion of its Founder and to carry the gospel within seventy years to the utmost limits of the world then known; and that culture was got primarily by a reverent study of the elder revelation.

It was so with the Greeks. Homer was their bible; before they had a text of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, they listened to the recitation of the stories with rapt attention, and it entered into their blood like fire. Young Alexander had the volume under his pillow when he slept; he made Achilles his waking and his sleeping ideal. Then came other forms of literature, culminating in tragedy, and each in its turn took with them the same exalted place. They studied especially their tragedy; they studied it with all their hearts, and it became with them in its turn a great formative force. To him that had was given: if one had a soul for what Æschylus and Sophocles and

Euripides could teach him, he was molded within by those teachers till he lived after them his mental and his spiritual life.

We are dealing at this time with English literature: first, because that literature is the richest in the world, and, second, because it is our own. To most of us no other is really open, but any language that carries a valuable literature is worth breaking into if one has time. Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, French, Spanish, Italian, and now we may add Norwegian, Russian, and many more, will always be studied that men may get at certain books. But Anglo-Saxon, for instance, will be little studied because its literature is relatively of little worth. While any language and literature is studied, it will be the English, and it is our good fortune that to it we were born.

Perhaps one may seem to be glorifying truisms when he emphasizes these two facts: that study of English literature is more than reading; and that enduement with spiritual power,—which is Christian culture,—comes, not from mere contact with great authors, but from the studious and strenuous endeavor to get into their very minds and hearts. But error in this connection is more common than we tend to think. The Bible we expect to have to study, if we are to possess its hidden and most satisfying wealth; but as to other books we may not have that mind. The pressure of the twentieth century is upon us; the pace of everything else is quickened; let us whirl through our books; or, rather, let us have the book for appearance's sake, while we skim the magazine on Sunday, or on the weekday substitute for family-worship a glance at the newspaper and then hasten to our work. Here is a good time to remind ourselves that in all ages the people of intellectual and spiritual power have been made by deep and serious thought first of all; and then by laborious and continued study; and, through both, by the active use, rather

than the passive, the receptive, attitude of the mind. For reading may be little more than passive, a mere skimming of the most external, superficial, conceptions; but intent study calls for the most active use of every appropriating and assimilating power.

Yet we have not given the whole or the worst of the current tendency to an easy-going reception of thought. There has been a subtler agency at work, and one more fundamentally a source of harm, because seated, we may even say enthroned, at a chief center of influence: for half a century this evil has worked in our schools. The old theory was that the pupil studied and was tested; then came the theory that the teacher taught. The new theory was most delightful to human laziness on one side and to human pride on the other: there is a most delicate and yet satisfying ministrations to the idol of conceit, when a hundred heads are bowed over paper and a hundred stylographic pens are racing after the lecturer's all-wise, all-important, and all-sufficient words. But are the notes thus taken used? It may be, especially now that we are beginning to realize the mischief of leaving the pupil inert. But many a man has to confess with bitterness that he wrote the notebook full, and yet not only was so busy with the penmanship that he got little or nothing of the thought, but was not even called upon to look back and see what he had written, and in fact never afterward knew. He did no studying, and so he got very slight results.

That this evil is wide-spread may be proved by evidence from near and from far. Ruskin, refusing to give a course of popular lectures in Glasgow, wrote, "I find the desire of audiences to be *audiences only* becoming an entirely pestilent character of the age. Everybody wants to hear, nobody to read, nobody to think; to be excited for an hour—and, if possible, amused; to get knowledge it has cost a man half his life to gather, first sweetened up to make it

palatable, and then kneaded into the smallest possible pills—and to swallow it homeopathically and be wise—this is the passionate desire and hope of the multitude of the day. It is not to be done. A living comment quietly given to a class on a book they are earnestly reading—this kind of lecture is eternally necessary and wholesome; your modern . . . lecture is an entirely pestilent and abominable vanity.”

One has only to look into the methods and the actual practice of “University Extension” to see that its work is largely that of telling things to passive listeners, although its usefulness depends preëminently upon its power to get those listeners to study and think and know. One of the most popular lecturers in this field has been accustomed to say to his “classes”: “The questions on this lecture are in the syllabus, but if you cannot answer them, I will answer them for you.” To the stricture that such “University Extension” is turned from profitable work to unseasonable play, the only answer is that, in the haste and superficiality of modern life, those who do not get this will get nothing; while also there is a chance that some will be quickened to begin to do really serious work. If Ruskin had taken his sarcasms to Glasgow, he might have done some good.

Not long ago, on one of the most influential platforms of England, one of the wisest and most influential of Englishmen told his hearers that the teachers of Great Britain “were bringing up a generation in the supposition that all the child had to do was to sit still like a pitcher under a pump.” But, he said, “the only education that anybody really obtains is that which he gives himself.” The idea prevailing at the beginning of the century was that men should read a good book, master its contents, and pursue for themselves the lines of thought it suggested, making its ideas the subject of discussion with discerning friends. So,

says a shrewd observer, "the social conditions of a college make it easy for a number of young minds, set alight by the perusal of some great book, to pass on the divine fire."

That we may not seem to do injustice, we would record here our belief that, in America at least, the situation is on the mend. We are beginning to know how to combine teaching by the teacher and studying by the student. Our teachers see now that the lecture-system has been greatly overdone; most of them are trying to make sure that their pupils study and think. Although the other method got well rooted in the traditions of the schools, as it is well rooted also in the infirmities of human nature, it is now steadily giving way: he who teaches must seek, first of all, to evoke an active soul in those who are given him in charge.¹ To this end he must teach with his soul. Thus teaching, he is quadrupled in his power to quicken the soul of his pupil if he deals with a soulful subject and is equipped with a soulful book. Such teaching and such study must be the best way of attaining what Matthew Arnold called the main aim of culture: "to know the best that has been thought and said in the world."

We have, perhaps, reached a livelier sense, a deeper conviction, that a real study of the best books is an exceedingly valuable thing,—that, indeed, it is one of the chief means to culture. We take, then, another step, and that the chief of all: we would speak of such study as the means to a culture that is distinctively Christian. And here let us be understood as holding that this is not a narrowing but an elevation of our theme. It is a good thing for a man to be able to give good reasons for his creed, and

¹In a certain college-catalogue it is said that the professor of English literature expounds to his classes a certain great literary masterpiece "line by line"; it is to be hoped that he also tries to learn from them what that masterpiece has led them to think and especially how it has led them to feel and to aspire.

some creed, however general, he certainly should have; but that is accidental here. The deeper thing is Christian character, Christian manhood, womanhood; or, put in a form to which all will consent, a character, a culture, that have most of the spirit of Christ. For to this all reasoning men will consent. It is only the bigot in unbelief who will object to our wishing and endeavoring that he may, in life and in character, have more of the spirit of Christ. One might object to being drawn to this or that dogma or church, to this or that type of piety or of religious practice, but we all know that, the faster and the more completely the world gets toward the realization of that conception of Christ which is common to all the churches and that can be drawn from the Scripture and from the lives of those who seem most Christlike, the better, unspeakably the better, will it be for the world. In the largest sense of Christian culture, in the glory and beauty and sweetness and beneficence of the true Christlikeness, we want a Christian culture, we want it in its fullness, and we want it soon.

And so we reach the chief question of our discussion: What is the value of the study of our best books to the attainment of this ideal?

We have already said much that helps us to answer the question: it is the value of an immediate and powerful cause.

It would indeed be almost a begging of the question, it would certainly be an arguing in a circle, if we were to define "best books" as those that immediately or chiefly preach Christ as an atoning Saviour for men. Of course such books, just so far as they seemed to have a sweet or a mastering reasonableness in that which they taught, would affect the man with the evangelical type of culture. But let us dare to take a bolder view, excluding only those books that are not best in any sense. The better the book,

we say, the better the result; and, the poorer the book, the poorer the result. Yet we have such confidence in the victory of truth in its battle with falsehood and error that we are willing to trust a man to read and even study any book that has great excellence of any substantial kind, feeling sure that he will be able somehow to appropriate more good than he will experience harm.

Thus it used to be deemed the dictate of proper parental oversight to hide away the works of Byron, lest the children, not knowing the difference between good and evil, should suffer moral and spiritual damage. He, however, who has not only read but studied Milton's doctrine of this matter in his "Areopagitica" will take the risk of children's being more injured by the reading of Byron than by the consequences of their knowing that the attempt had been made to put Byron out of their reach. The mockery of "Don Juan" is repulsive to a fresh young soul, and those who would read "Don Juan" are sure to get hold of it or of something like it; so that, as the "Areopagitica" says, the effort to keep such books out of children's hands is too much like the nobleman's effort to keep the crows out of his park by shutting the gates. Byron's attitudinizing affectation of pessimism and cynicism and misanthropy, his labored scoffing at a religion that he did not understand, the eating out of his moral purpose by egotism and self-will and voluptuousness, now simply make our young people feel that Byron threw away the opportunities of influence that were opened to him by his rank and by his extraordinary gifts; so the evil of the man serves for warning, while the better self of Byron, that better self which breaks out here and there in his poetry and which, too late for a fuller redemption, enabled him to close his life in an heroic endeavor for struggling Greece,—this better self will have at least some distinctive value in the making of a broad, many-sided Christlike man. And, as

for those that are bent upon evil, they will find their evil somewhere; and, wherever they find it, they will make it the savor of death unto death.

The question is too large for present discussion,—just what we shall do about keeping bad books from the young. It is certain, on the one hand, that Milton's arguments for courage are exceedingly hard to answer, and that the practice of the great libraries is increasingly on that side; while, on the other hand, as Milton reminds us, the best books contain much that is not wholesome but that cannot be separated from the good; and, again, that nothing undermines the influence of the teacher with the young like the discovery that the teacher is trying to keep the pupil from knowing what any one has thought or said. Milton reminds us that the Bible itself has been put, by one great branch of the church, "into the first rank of prohibited books." Shakespeare says courageously: "Read what you most affect"; and that certainly is what, for better or worse, the mass of men do. It is enough for our present purpose to say that, in the largest sense of Christian culture, men will in the long run choose for reading and study those books which by the very charm of their character give that culture; and that we, in the effort to have the right influence and to do the most good, must keep on holding up the highest standard of reading, urging men to read according to quality, choosing the best, the best for the mind, the best for the heart, and hence the best for the life and the character,—and then urging them to magnify study above cursory reading, giving great zeal to the mastery, the absorption, of the noblest books.

And now as to the way in which such study produces its effect. Obviously its first effect is to broaden the thought. It may be remembered that, in the epilogue to "Romola," the children of Tito are taught by Romola that, to keep out of their father's sin and resulting ruin, they must learn

to have thoughts that are large. This seems at first a counsel pitiably short of perfection; but perhaps, after all, as George Eliot meant it, it is not so bad. Large thoughts are worth a great deal if they wake us up to the existence of a great world outside our own narrow confines. To be kind and just and Christlike¹ toward that larger world, it is necessary, first, that we be fully aware that it exists. Then, if our books are "the best," and if they are studied with an appropriating heart, they will not leave our new and wider knowledge cold, but will warm it into a living interest in the masses and the individuals that make up that wider world. It was the counsel of the Apostle, "Add to your virtue knowledge." The pyramid of Christian character may have delicacy, grace, but it cannot have height or massiveness, unless it stands four-square upon a foundation, broad and wide, of acquaintance with the interests of that whole world for which by the gospel we are bidden to care.

Such, for instance, is singularly the influence of reading the stories of Sir Walter Scott. Scott had a good deal of impatience with evangelical Christianity as he misunderstood it, but we risk the harm of that when we urge the young to read his books, for the sake of the masculine, manly character that they infallibly produce. There is hardly a page in the Waverley novels but contains some blunder in English; yet we risk the chance that our young people will copy the error. There is a plenty of historical inaccuracy; yet we risk the chance that our young people will thereby be misinformed; indeed, we delight, rather, in that Scotchman who said that Scott was "a verra thru historian," because "he made a man love his fellow-men." Christian culture finds rich nourishment in Scott by the breadth of interest awakened, by the way in which Scott,

¹ Mic. vi. 8: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

though an aristocrat to the bone, yet made even the peasant seem noble by manly virtues, and visited ruin upon even a Leicester or a Mary who would not live by the law of love. This is the kind of book that we crave.

Thus we are led to the deeper reason why the study of our literature ministers to Christian culture: it is the reason that makes us give to literature the name literature at all. It is that literature is to man the interpretation of life. Prominent men have said that "literature is life": of course they mean the picturing, the interpreting, the idealizing, of life: do not those three offices cover the ground? However sorely any one of us may be tempted to do wrong by this or that special access of evil to his heart, we want our books to help us to live rightly. We want ideals; we want examples, real or imagined, to warn or encourage; we want motives; we want the reason why; we want great thoughts; we want the interpretation of our own hearts to ourselves; we want faith to believe in our fellow-man, in ourselves, in our God. If a book does not do this sort of work, it is not literature; it is only something printed. We can get such help from the voice of a friend; we can get it from the lecture or the sermon; we can get it from the school; we can get it even from some humble clipping from an obscure country-newspaper; we get it from the Bible; we get it, without the charm of the voice, but with convenience and permanence and the possibility of review, in a book. It gets home to the heart, it begins to work out into the life, and we straightway begin to be a different kind of men.

For instance, how mighty a tonic there is for self-respecting character in the poems of Burns. There is a certain section of these poems that is exceedingly bad, but few people know it and still fewer care. We need not care. We hunt up the poems that have in them the tonic that will make us robuster men; the best of them we read over

and over; we sing them into our hearts; the whole Scottish people has been transformed by Scott and Burns.

To us there was something altogether pathetic in the way in which plain people who had caught the secret of this power of literature used to grope about in the works of Browning for aid. They had heard that he was a great interpreter of nature and man and God, as great as Shakespeare, perhaps even greater in his vision of spiritual truth,—and indeed these things are largely true; and now they wanted his help. They had heard that he was obscure: so they accumulated commentaries, and they gathered in clubs, and they sent far for a guide. They read patiently, again and again, long poems that even with many commentaries they could only faintly if at all understand. They found many poems that, according to their previous studies, did not belong within the province of poetry at all. They found that Browning was so afraid of saying anything beautifully that, perhaps just after clothing some high thought in diction of transcendent beauty, he turned away to practice the tricks of the contortionist in words. They had all too abundant evidence that he had a morbid impulse to dwell upon dreadful and utterly unbeautiful stories of crime and lust. They knew that he had extraordinary gifts and that especially his help was needed now to enable them to live for the things of the spirit; so they struggled with all these mistakes of Browning's, that have robbed the world of a very large part of what he might have done for Christian culture, hoping somehow to get the good of that which he was able to do. And doubtless, though often they had faith in certain poems where there was no room for sight, and though they said over jargon because others had said that it contained wonderful sense, yet they did get much help, for it is peculiarly in this province of the study of literature for the materials of culture that he that seeks shall find, that he that hungers and thirsts shall be filled.

Turning from authors teaching to lessons taught, we find that a great book does its work by holding up noble ideals. As an example of this let us take what such ideals have done for the position of woman. The most influential thing in the world is, we suppose, what men see in other people's lives; and, if we cannot see, we can know by conversation and reading, and, if we cannot have real lives to study, we can have lives plausibly imagined. Hence Aspasia and Semiramis, Cleopatra, and Catharine of Russia, real women, but the more mischievous because fascinating, and, again, suggesting badness in their sex by the badness of their lives, have brought womanhood into disrepute and have been a means of degradation to woman wherever their stories have gone. On the other hand, the stories of the real Virgin Mary and the real Joan of Arc and the real Florence Nightingale have just as steadily lifted up their sex. It has been the same in fiction: Homer sang of Penelope; Solomon in his "proverbs" drew a type of efficient womanhood that could hardly be improved; Chaucer gave us the loyal and devout Custance, ennobling every one who reads the tale; and Shakespeare set Portia upon a pedestal where all the world could see her, and through the sight of her the world has been less slow to realize how womanly and how lovely can be the union in woman of the highest powers of the mind and the heart. Our present point is that the story of any noble woman, in life or in realistic fiction, becomes a permanent force for the uplifting of the race, while the unworthy woman, in life or in story, is sooner or later made out in her true character and influence and is excluded by public consent from the attention of the world. As a hideous or a carnal statue is left unlooked-at but a Venus of Melos is a constant power to make beautiful the human form and face, as every fine picture hung upon our walls becomes a molding force in the home, so it is an added force for Christian

culture to draw any noble character and to set it off with such graces of composition that even the most careless reader must heed.

For often the thing that decides whether a poem or a piece of prose is literature is the excellence of its form. Indeed, if the form is not excellent, the best thoughts fail to lift the work to the plane of literature, while often a slight or a simple thought is clothed in a form so beautiful that it is literature by that very fact. Such is Tennyson's "Crossing the bar." Then how it clings to the memory! How it works in the heart! An eminent Catholic writer once accounted for the power of the English Bible and the impossibility of displacing it from the affections of men by saying that it had a consummate literary form, so that its accents lingered upon the memory like the far-off cadence of the old church-bells at home. Here and there an author may wed beautiful, entrancing form to ignoble or corrupting thought, but it is contrary to nature. As an old poet said that music and verse were sister and brother, so we may say that noble thought and noble form must needs be "married in immortal verse" or prose. So the euphony or the aptness of well-chosen words, the solemn throb of the rhythm, the long-drawn roll of the cadence, all give to great prose or great poetry an unspeakable, an immeasurable, power.

For example, Bunyan, the self-taught tinker, performed the astonishing feat of giving to monosyllables a sweet, a noble, rhythm; hence, while all the imitations of the "Pilgrim's Progress" have passed into oblivion, the original Pilgrim still trudges on, an unceasing joy to the great English-speaking race.

So sang Keats of his debt to a friend for introducing him to the great poetry of our mother-tongue:—

" You first taught me all the sweets of song:
The grand, the sweet, the terse, the free, the fine;

What swell'd with pathos, and what right divine;
 Spenserian vowels that elope with ease,
 And float along like birds o'er summer seas;
 Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness;
 Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness.
 Who read for me the sonnet swelling loudly
 Up to its climax and then dying proudly?
 Who found for me the grandeur of the ode,
 Growing, like Atlas, stronger from its load?
 Who let me taste that more than cordial dram,
 The sharp, the rapier-pointed epigram?
 Show'd me that epic was of all the king,
 Round, vast, and spanning all, like Saturn's ring?
 You too upheld the veil from Clio's beauty,
 And pointed out the patriot's stern duty;
 The might of Alfred, and the shaft of Tell;
 The hand of Brutus, that so grandly fell
 Upon a tyrant's head. Ah! had I never seen,
 Or known your kindness, what might I have been?
 What my enjoyments in my youthful years,
 Bereft of all that now my life endears?
 And can I e'er these benefits forget?
 And can I e'er repay the friendly debt?
 No, doubly no."

We have been speaking of the study of literature: that study is carried on more and more in the schools. What should the schools do in that field? Should they not begin the hearing of true literature with the first appearance of the child within the kindergarten-door? For what makes a piece of writing literature? It may be partly that the thing is supremely worth saying well, but it certainly is that the thing has been supremely well said. The thought does not have to be difficult; it may be simple: Whittier gathered many poems of this sort into the volume called "Child-Life"; for a child to hear them is to begin, in an infantile but a real way, to think and to feel and to aspire toward all truth and beauty and goodness. This is Christian culture in its tender beginnings, just as truly as the tiny sprout breaking out of an acorn has in it the promise and the potency of the oak. We may well be

doubtful about some of the kindergarten-methods, but we may be perfectly sure of the value of reading to the little ones the sweetest music of our English poetry and prose. And they have to get but little older before they are ready for Longfellow's and Whittier's melodious stories, and, later, for the sturdy march of the lines of Scott; boys of eight have been delighted with the lays of Macaulay; much of Tennyson has been highly relished before that age: to say that the young should be fed upon such things is to say that they should be fed upon the best. The beauty of form simply helps the thought to cling to the memory, to root itself in the emotions, and thus to be clasped very close to the heart. The course of reading prescribed by the association of colleges as part of the preparation for college is little enough to have been covered by one's Freshman year: he has been famished indeed who has not had vastly more. But with the college-course, in Latin, in Greek, in French, in German, as well as in English, the student should be fed upon the richest thought in its most finished forms. If there is any one foolish enough to prefer to have none of it, he is the one who needs it most. And through all this period the activity of study should be taking the place of a passive receiving; and the study should grow deeper and more serious every day: for is not the man dealing with the world's most precious thought in its most perfect form? Through all this preparatory and college work the methods should be not primarily those of scholarship but those of assimilation, and the choice of the things to be studied should be decided by the question of their power for making character, developing a culture that is both fine and strong.

With graduate-work may come such philological matters as the study of Old French, Old High German, Anglo-Saxon, Sanskrit, but through the college-course they can wait; they do not carry a content of thought and impulse

and uplifting sufficient to entitle them to a hearing in the most formative period of life; let them come as the finishing touches of scholarship that are put upon the candidate for the professorial chair.

Professor Jowett once said that "mere intellect, however keen, is barren, apart from the full and just development of feeling, imagination, and, above all, volition." We plead here for the study that will be the best corrective or preventive of this evil, of mere intellectuality, that the powerfully intellectual Jowett so keenly felt. It has been wisely said that "what this age preëminently needs is not so much light upon the intellect as dew upon the heart": the light and the heat smite steadily but vainly on Arabian sands: they stretch away all the more certainly a monotonous waste of death; but even the gentle dew would make them show some tender greenness, suggesting the glory and the blessedness of life. God grant us, then, this dew, —nay, the full rain,—of spiritual outpouring upon an education that may otherwise be only a brilliantly barren intellectual waste. Give us the highest, the purest, the most far-reaching, the most glorious, thoughts of the elect ones of the earth; bring them in their most perfect expression, that thus they may linger in the memory after almost every other human voice is hushed; bring them as the quickening of our childhood, the strength of our maturity, the consolation of our age¹; teach us to dwell upon them as the voice of God to his children; and in the lives of those who thus receive them they will show what they can do to make men fit to live among their fellows in this world or to sit with the blessed beyond.

¹ *Hæc studia adolescentiam acunt, senectulem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis per fugium ac solatium præbent; delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.*

Cicero, pro Archia, xvi.