

THE
Debt of Civilization
TO LITERATURE.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE
ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT
OF THE
University of Michigan,

THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 1883.

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ANN ARBOR:
PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF REGENTS.
1883.

COURIER BOOK AND JOB PRINTING HOUSE.

THE DEBT

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CIVILIZATION TO OUR LITERATURE.

The honor you have done me in giving this opportunity to address you imposes, I am well aware, some serious responsibility in the choice of a theme. And if I come before you with no discussion of what are called "the burning questions of the day," it is partly because I distrust my own ability to handle them; still more, because I have noticed that our men of affairs are often glad to forget such questions in these hours consecrated to academic memories; and most of all, because of the conviction, that such occasions demand, with rare exceptions, discussion of topics that lie more closely within the range of scholastic themes and pursuits. I venture the more confidently upon my chosen line of thought, because of the assurance that any word worthily spoken on topics relating to the interests of general culture will be sure of a patient and kindly hearing in this centre of thorough academic training. My subject then, let me say without further introduction, is *literature considered as a social force*, the part which literature has played in our modern social progress.

Things have indeed mightily changed both in the literary and the social sphere, since Sir Philip Sidney thought it needful—as indeed it was—to write his eloquent "Defense of Poesie." That was probably in 1581. A quarter

of a century later, Shakespeare, "the mystery and the glory of our literature," had written his Hamlet, and since then poetry has needed no defense. The divine Plato, with all the glorious creations of Grecian poetry about him, had excluded poets from the Republic he dreamed of so magnificently. I think, however, in spite of all prohibition, the poets would have claimed the right of citizenship in any Republic a Plato might find, by the right of eminent domain; and at the very worst, the mistake of the great philosopher must now be condoned, because he had never read Shakespeare. Literature is certainly no longer on the defensive. The age of the patron is past. The time has fully come to take far higher and more positive ground, and to show how widely and how deeply modern civilization is indebted to letters.

Evidently civilization antedates literature, in a sense creates it. In certain forms of barbaric life, you may find rudimental poetry or history in the song of the bard or gleeman. German civilization was far from being fully developed when the Niebelungen was written. But the full blown development of letters comes only, when under the influence of benign laws and institutions created by civilization, civilization being both a cause and effect, the large scope and the vital need of a true literature are recognized. Thus you have the Constitutions of Clarendon and Magna Charta before you have the Vision of Piers Ploughman and the Canterbury Tales of Chaucer. So also it is evident, that the decay of a great civilization involves a swift and sure decay of literature. Dry-rot appears in the poetry or the philosophy of an age as soon as it appears in those institutions under which all the arts flourish. And so we find in Cruttwell's recent history of Roman Literature, no more striking and no sadder page than that in which he depicts the "spectacle of literature in the days of Tiberius, prostrate and dumb, threatened by the hideous form of tyranny now no longer in disguise, offering it with irony the choice between submission, hyp-

ocrisy and death." We need not, perhaps, weep too bitter tears over the decadence of Spanish chivalry. But we can never cease to deplore the sudden collapse which struck Spanish Literature after its brief but brilliant career.

We may go farther and even concede that a civilization is possible without a literature of commanding breadth and power. At all events, the Chinese civilization has been an accomplished fact for many a century. We give all honor to Confucius, and are willing to believe all that may be justly claimed for him. Still he is not a literature. No one mind could ever evolve this. Nor are we under necessity of appealing to China in support of our position. We may suppose a civilization wrought out on a basis of materialism with enough of education in it to keep society from a dry-rot of ignorance; with a religion of social science in which all the "modern conveniences" are brought to perfection; when every man should have a vine or a fig-tree to sit under, as well as none to molest him or make him afraid; when every house should have a telephone and every corporation—a soul; when sanitary reform should have become so thorough that all diseases were reduced to the minimum, and the occupation of the late lamented Mrs. Lydia E. Pinkham, whose face looks benignly upon us from so many of her advertisements in the religious newspapers, as well as that of all her compeers, forever gone—the livers of the patients having survived the pills; when, if the song of the reaper had gone silent along with that of the milk-maid looking pensively on as she saw her favorites milked by machinery, we should have the music of mowing machines to fall back on, we might have all this, and, I suppose, it might be called a civilization. At least it would be fairly up to that congressman's idea of civilized life, who flung his wanton insult at our men of letters in foreign diplomacies. It would have what the Englishmen call "solid comfort," and would be what the Americans

call "practical" civilization. To a large and growing class, it would be as barren of all the best life as Sahara is of rich herbage, and emigration might set in for some Juan Fernandez, where, with scarcely more modern conveniences than Robinson Crusoe had, but with the dear old books round us in which the best life of the past is garnered up, we could solace ourselves with the immortal truth, that "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." Not even the failure of the Brook Farm experiment would deter us from the attempt. We need, however, fear no such fate. History has made it plain that no high civilization has been wrought out without a literature. It may come in later stages of the civilization, as German literature in its great body and highest form, is of comparatively modern origin. It comes at last, the "bright consummate flower." Yet it is not reasoning in a circle to speak of a debt which civilization owes its literature. Effects in time become causes. The parent often more indebted to the child than the child to the parent. Like the mother, whose daughter becomes a queen, society gains from letters—the queen of all arts—larger conditions of life and nobler estate. The world of scholars to-day is mourning over the untimely death of that historical scholar whose "Short History of the English People" achieved so sudden and so wide a popularity. Whatever may be the defects which a severe criticism may find in his work as a historian, it has one striking feature, which is also an illustrious merit. Far more than many so-called histories of literature, it does—and for the first time it does—an ample justice to literature as a benignant and powerful agent in our English civilization. The glowing words in his preface are no empty boast. "I have restored to their place among the achievements of Englishmen, the Faerie Queen and the Novum Organon. I have set Shakespeare among the heroes of the Elizabethan age and placed the scientific inquiries of the Royal Society side by side with the vic-

ories of the New Model. If some of the conventional figures of military and political history occupy in my pages less than the space usually given them, it is because I had to find a place for figures little heeded in common history, the figures of the missionary, the poet, the painter, the merchant or the philosopher." And it may be said as to any full and satisfactory history of the American People, that it, too, must be written on similar principles, and the historian must not have failed to acquaint himself thoroughly with that history of American writers, which we shall owe to one, who once in this institution filled its chair of literature.

Advancing now to more direct discussion of the subject, consider the inner significance, the true scope, the vast results of that movement known to history as the Italian Renaissance. If we accept what the latest historian of the great movement submits as its true analysis, we shall see at a glance how deeply rooted the whole development was in the literary spirit. According to Mr. Symonds, there are three distinct stages in its progress: *First, the age of passionate desire*, when Italy was aflame with enthusiasm for antique culture; an enthusiasm which finds no adequate historic parallel, but that earlier religious enthusiasm which hurled its successive crusades upon the east for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. *Secondly, the age of acquisition*, of which this historian says, "all subsequent achievements in the field of scholarship sink into insignificance beside the labors of such men" as Aldus Minutius, Henricus Stephanus, and Johannes Froben, when "with their scores of assistants they raised from the dead, classical learning." "What vigils," he eloquently says, "what anxious expenditure of thought, what agonies of doubt and expectation were endured by those heroes of humanizing scholarship, whom we are apt to think of merely as pedants!" *Thirdly, the age of scholarship*, the ripe fruit of which in great Erasmus, was the true spirit of criticism, that spirit of "testing and

sifting" which differencing modern from ancient scholarship, has wrought for modern civilization so prolific results in philosophy, in science, in politics and religion. "Virgil was printed in 1470, Homer in 1488, Aristotle in 1498, Plato in 1512." How little these names and dates read like a record of revolution! But events so diverse in nature as the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492, and the nailing of his ninety-five theses to the church-door of Wittenberg by Luther in 1517, almost synchronize with these dates, and illustrate the celebrated formula of Michelet, that the great achievements of the Renaissance were the "discovery of the world and the discovery of man." "By the discovery of the world is meant," says Mr. Symonds, "on the one hand the appropriation by civilized humanity of all corners of the habitable world, and on the other the conquest by Science of all that we now know about the nature of the Universe." The contents of the Renaissance as a discovery of man are explained by the same historian to be, that "new birth to liberty—the spirit of mankind recovering consciousness and the power of self determination, recognizing the beauty of the outer world and of the body through art; liberating the reason in science and the conscience in religion, restoring culture to the intelligence and establishing the principle of political freedom." There may be room for question as to whether the whole subsequent advance, including that of the nineteenth as well as that of the sixteenth century, is due to this revival of classical learning. Other and subsidiary agencies have come in. But there can be no room for doubt that all this modern progress drew its originating force, its guiding principles, its undying power from the Italian Renaissance, from the Revival of Learning, in which the study of classical literature has done its most and best for mankind. And nothing can be finer, as nothing can be truer, than the insight of the leaders in this Renaissance, which gave to their noble pursuits the name, "Literae Humaniores." Yes,

the literature that humanizes, it was then, it ever has been, it ever will be. The literature that humanizes, an intellectual force that despotism could never subdue nor subsidize, and that superstition could not endure; that humanizes by revealing man to himself in his best selfhood, in his true relation to the world he inhabits and to the society of which he is a part; a literature that humanizes can be nothing other or less than this. The *humanities* we call them sometimes, as if we were simply using a quaint old academic title. But we should never forget that those who gave this title gave it in recognition of the underlying fact, that there is in literature an immense and benignant social force. Of this truth the Renaissance in Italy, indeed the whole movement we name the Revival of Letters, is the amplest and most brilliant illustration.

Of literature as a mere *ornament* of social progress, I do not propose to speak. That ornament subserves high ends in life, there need be no question. Civilization demands amenities of life as truly as it demands modern conveniences. There is certainly no virtue in boorishness, for boorishness' sake. If there is no morality *per se* in good taste, there is certainly none in bad. Yet so much stress has been laid on literature as an ornamentation of life, as to have obscured its higher meaning and nobler functions. It is time to discard that old and misleading phrase, "polite letters," and the more modern one which terms such studies "ornamental branches" in education. They degrade the man of letters to a place beside the dancing-master. There is a choice in the Muses. We cannot regard with equal affection and homage all the Sacred Nine. Doubtless Terpsichore has her claims, as she will always have her devotees. But let us give our most devoted service and most chivalrous affection to Clio and Melpomene and Calliope. Whatever fault the scholar may have to find with Mr. Ruskin for his criticisms, however much we may protest against mere dogmatism in art as well as in religion, let us not be unmindful that he has

rendered the noblest service to art in all her forms by his eloquent portrayal of her higher ministries. The light from his "Seven Lamps" streams out far and wide over the whole field of æsthetic pursuits, and in that light we see the glorious possibilities in art as an educator of what is best in our intellectual and social nature.

There is a service which literature renders, and which greatly enriches human life, of which not enough has been made, because it has been too superficially considered. Here and there indeed, attention has been called to it by gifted men. Who can forget that noble closing passage in Macaulay's essay on Mitford's History of Greece, in which the music of his rhetoric voices a great truth, as an old Gregorian chant voices the praise of God. "Wherever literature consoles sorrow or assuages pain, wherever it brings gladness to the eyes which fail with wakefulness and tears, and ache for the dark house and the long sleep, there is exhibited, in its noblest form, the immortal influence of letters." When Rufus Choate gave the address at the dedication of the Institute which George Peabody founded in his native town, the orator insisted, with his unrivalled eloquence, that good books were among life's choicest blessings as ministers to the higher and purer delights of life; and illustrated his point by passages in his own experience. Inspection of any annual report of such a library as the Boston Public Library will show how wide is the field which such a ministry may cover, the range extending far beyond what are called the educated classes. Keats in his delightful sonnet "on first looking into Chapman's Homer," has uttered what many a heart has felt, as literature opened some hidden mental enjoyment to his possession.

" Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken ;
 Or like stout Cortez when, with eagle eyes,
 He stared at the Pacific ; and all his men
 Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
 Silent upon a peak in Darien."

Doubtless the *highest ministry* here belongs to religion. Christian Faith is the great Consoler. Christian Hope is the great Inspirer and Uplifter. Christian Charity is the great Pacifier in this "little life, rounded with a sleep," yet in which the wear and tear of struggle, the soreness of disappointment, the pang of sorrow plays so large a part. But still literature has its ministry of joy, which gladdens, invigorates and rests the soul in this life of care and struggle and sorrow, environing us all. Yes, literature has its ministry of intellectual delight, when books become sympathetic companions and helpers; a ministry which the consolations of religion do not supersede and cannot replace. There are those, some of our finer spirits too, who find in books what they cannot find in churches. Especially in an age of unsettled opinion, the very sadness which comes from loss of faith demands something to temper it and keep the soul from a sour pessimism. Intellectual joy cannot give the soul the "peace which passeth understanding." But, on this side the consolations of religion, where can be found a ministry to delight, at once more accessible and more ennobling? Of this ministry, it is not too much to say, in the lines of Chaucer,

"Through me men go into the blissful place
Of the heart's heal, and deadly woundes cure;
Through me men go into the well of grace,
Where green and lusty May doth ever endure;
This is the way to all good aventure;
Be glad, thou reader, and thy sorrow offcast,
All open am I, pass in, and speed thee fast."

That I am not inventing any chimeras or dealing in rhapsodies will soon appear if the range of such joys be considered. "Lord Coke," Emerson tells us in his essay on Culture, "valued Chaucer highly because the Canon Yeoman's Tale illustrates the statute *Hen. V. Chap. 4* against Alchemy." But the true value of Chaucer is the pure delight in his poetry which fifteen generations of English speaking people have felt and which countless thousands

more will feel. What census could be made of the enjoyments which great Shakespeare has conferred on our race! What bureau of statistics could possibly compute and enroll all the elevating pleasures which the great world of poetry has showered upon its readers! The fascinating histories, from the early chronicles, like those of Froissart, down to the latest one from our brilliant school of modern historians, like Freeman or our own Prescott and Motley, how many of our choicest spirits have steeped themselves in the purest intellectual joy, as they have had the veil lifted from the past by the power of historic insight and historic imagination, and have gazed on its heroic deeds or mighty issues! And then the novelist like Scott and Dickens and Thackeray and our own Hawthorne, like Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, who is there that is not ready with a full heart to say, "these gifted souls have brought us, at a thousand turns in life, rest when we were tired and happiness in dull or sated moments; and have lifted us, for the time, above the cares which fret us and sometimes even the anguish which corrodes our hearts!" When things have gone badly with the lawyer in the court room, as judge and jury both went against him, the one with his charge and the other with his verdict; when the patient has insisted upon dying, contrary to all the rules of the profession; when the sermon has failed to convince anybody but the preacher; when the professor, looking over his examination papers, has, together with some of his pupils come to grief, he, because his favorite points in his best lectures were so decidedly missed, and they because missing them entailed serious consequences, when, to speak seriously, life has suddenly made a great demand for some helpful relaxation, some resource to chase away the frightful ennui or to lubricate the creaking friction—then is the hour in which a genuine intellectual delight plays a noble part. The times seem out of joint. The world is rushing to destruction. But after an hour spent with some grand old "prophet of the

soul," poet, philosopher, dramatist, novelist, man of science, essayist, historian, traveller, there comes a new Renaissance. The world grows brighter. The weeping has become the laughing philosopher, and life is every way the gainer.

For we may set it down as an axiom in all true social science, that the world needs enjoyment. One way to make men better is by making them happier. Walter Besant's novel, "All Sorts and Conditions of Men," has taught a great lesson, if only we have eyes to see it. A Palace of Delight reared in Stepney is but a romancer's dream, you say. But like the dream of the great allegorist, it contains truth for us to ponder deeply in our Pilgrim's Progress through all sloughs of Despond, from every City of Destruction towards the New Jerusalem of modern progress. We may in one aspect measure the completeness of a civilization by the kinds of enjoyment it has opened to man. If it leaves him to find his satisfaction in witnessing a gladiator's show, a bull-fight or a ballet, we may charge it with essential lowness. If it bring to him sources of delight, such as Richard Wagner gave to Germany last summer at Bayreuth, or such as our English Literature opens to its myriads of readers, then it is so far forth among the highest. For I must insist on the view that ministry to the higher joys of life, especially to its intellectual joys, is a noble and needed ministry. Any social science, which should, while discussing prison discipline and sanitary reforms, omit its consideration and not discuss what the town or village library can do to make life brighter, and so, purer, would certainly need reconstruction. "To think," said Thomas Carlyle, "that every town in Scotland has its king's gallows, and no town in Scotland its king's library?"

Surely our American life needs just this ministry. Our foreign critics all remind us that we are frightfully careworn, that the American physiognomy has too many dark lines under the eyes, too much corrugation of the brow, too much look of haggard toil. It may be so. Let

us look full in the face the possible danger of turning our fresh young American life into a terrible mill for grinding out what we call success. At the same time let us remind ourselves, and our foreign critics as well, that the remedy is at hand. Let us be thankful that the American nation has entered upon its second century of existence as a confessed nation of readers. Let us remember that our Colleges and High Schools and Common Schools are multiplying rapidly the number of those who delight in books. To-day let us not forget that the State of Michigan, in its generous equipment of this University, has not been unmindful of responsibility to her sons, and that in this ministry to intellectual happiness the youngest of the nations—a nation confessedly of readers—is securing the best possible results; and that a nation of readers can never be a nation whose delights shall centre and end in a bull fight or a beer-garden.

We may see still more clearly how our literature has been a benignant social force, as we consider how it has always been a storehouse of helps and impulses to nobler ideals of life. Whatever else in our civilization has forgotten the divine teaching, that "the life is more than meat and the body than raiment," our literature has not forgotten it. Henry Morley, in his first sketch of that literature, has pointedly and truthfully said, that its prolonged note as well as its supreme note, is emphasis on high ideals of duty. Yet how many so-called practical men, often educated men, better men by far than Dickens has made of his *Dombey*s and *Gradgrinds*, think of literature as eventuating in a mild æsthetic craze. I am afraid some of them lay the new animal which is said to infest Rotton Row and Fifth Avenue—the Dude—to the charge of poetry. But it is not the sunflower which Chaucer, and all the poets after him, have worshipped; it is the daisy. The æstheticism of Oscar Wilde is something which William Shakespeare would have used in constructing another *Malvolio*. English literature is no patron of effeminacy.

It has no more pleasure in Mrs. Ponsonby de Tompkins than it has in Sir Gorgias Midas. There never was a shallower; there could not be a falser, notion than that the voice of English Literature, in its poetry, or in its prose, has been other than a manly voice calling all who have heard it to strenuous and earnest devotion unto high and good ends. When Edmund Spenser, in his letter to the "right noble and valorous" Sir Walter Raleigh, defined the aim of his "Faërie Queen" in these words, "the general end therefore of all this book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," and put in the very forefront of his immortal allegory the conflict of the Red Cross Knight with Error, he gave utterance to the deep intent of all literature before and in his day. Since then, and never more significantly than in our own time and in our own land, literature has sought to develop the strong, the brave, and the true in manhood and womanhood. It is time justice were done the literary class and they were exempted from the false suspicion or unjust charge of ministering to an effeminate life. The best, the noblest answer to this charge is James Russell Lowell's Commemorative Ode over the young heroic Harvard scholars, who fell during our late civil war.

Yet there are those, among the professed friends of literature, who discard the notion that art has or can have any higher aim than itself. *L'art pour l'art*—art for art's sake—has been a literary shibboleth in France for the last thirty years or more. "*Tendenz-poesie*" our Teutonic brethren—some of them at least—would remand to Sunday Schools and Tract Societies. It is vehemently affirmed by one class of critics that the sphere of the moral and the sphere of art are not concentric, but lie apart. The highest art can be reached without any recognition of the moral. To the question, "should art or poetry have a purpose?" it is replied: "a moral purpose makes a sermon out of a song. An association of the two is not necessary but accidental." I am concerned in this discussion with

any such theory only as it applies to literature. This theory is responsible for much of the misconception to which allusion has already been made. Can we not bring it to some actual test? What then are the facts? On the one hand we have a nature in which the admiration of moral and spiritual beauty is as instinctive and pure and powerful as love for the natural beauty that glistens in dew drops on morning roses or flashes from the silent, solemn stars of God. It is not at all a question as to the origin of sentiment. Account for it as you may, on Christian grounds or those of a Positive philosophy, there it is, impelling the human soul to this recognition of divine beauty in the pure and the holy, and sometimes more than of beauty—sublimity in the strenuous demands of righteousness. It is difficult to decide sometimes which is the more overmastering emotion of the soul, as the character of Jesus Christ rises “like another morn risen on mid-noon” before that soul’s rapt contemplation, that of the serene, spotless, awful beauty in His life, or that of the Divine love itself, toiling and suffering there.

And, as if answering to this law of our souls—this make of our being, “deep calling unto deep,” we have the fact that literature in its highest and best forms, especially English Literature, always embodies a high and pure moral element. Both “sweetness and light” are here blended. The moral purpose may be more or less unconscious. It often is distinctly avowed. Is it there by accident? Is it only happy coincidence that I may find this, whenever I open the books of our great authors, living or dead? Is there no connection between this constitution of the human soul and this noble fact of our literary history? Take for example the poetry of Shelley. Many there be who would laugh to scorn the idea that his poetry was in any sense the bright minister to any moral ends. For this very reason I select him. There is now no question to be raised as to the essentially poetic nature of that misguided spirit. If ever there was a human soul in which

the ethereal poetic imagination colored and controlled the whole being, it was that of this gifted poet. When and where does that poetic essence burn with clearest light and intensest flame? Not in odes so exquisite as that to the Skylark or the West Wind; not in strains so musical as his lines on the Cloud, or the Sensitive Plant, or the Eugeanean Hills. Rather in that superb lyrical drama, the Prometheus Unbound, where the poet's soul most deeply stirred by his dream of man triumphant over all ills after his ages of suffering, pours itself out in passionate bursts of melody, in strains which throb with a deep undertone of moral aim and aspiration. Yet at this point I shall be met by the objection that so much of our literature needs expurgation, that so much of it is morally diseased as to cripple it effectually as an agent for conducting men to higher levels of life. That some of our literature is morally diseased is freely admitted. What is claimed is that moral health, vigorous, blooming health, is the rule; disease, the exception, proving the rule. The comic drama of the Restoration is all that Jeremy Collier ever painted it for foulness, and Colley Cibber's "Apology for his Life" has, like most apologies, only ended in making a bad matter worse. Say the worst that can be said of some fiction; hold up Mrs. Aphra Behn's novels, and, if you please, Fielding and Smollet to reprobation; let Byron and Shelley, Swinburne and Walt Whitman be dealt with as men deserve, who trifle with the sacred interests of moral purity. But when all is said that can be said, and every line pointed out which has the slightest moral taint upon it, the fact remains which no well-read man can dispute, that the great body of our literature is sound, pure, and wholesome,—the greatest authors conspicuously so. Even in regard to what the sternest, most scrupulous critics have to say of Shakespeare and the Drama, of Fielding and the Novel, of Byron and Poetry, it is beyond all question that the pure outweighs the impure by an amount so great as to leave our Literature a sun, with spots on its surface

perhaps, but still flooding its readers with beneficent moral heat and light, which beget true life among men. Literature in the form of Fiction is to-day read as it never was read before. There is a library in nearly every American home in which both young and old find frequent refuge. It goes by different names, sometimes "Seaside," sometimes "Franklin Square." The novel has become a teacher and the friends of sound moral training do well to ask what is taught. And after a somewhat extended examination of this new teacher, I shall venture to affirm that it may be said with truth and justice and thankfulness, that the modern English novel is not the evil so many dread and condemn, that its voice is in favor of purity, that it frowns on deceit and sycophancy, that it fosters generosity and honesty, that it has caught from the great masters of modern English Fiction, Dickens and Thackeray, the note of fidelity to moral ideals. What Mr. Emerson has said in his Essay on Beauty, that "all high beauty has a moral element in it," is true of the great art of the novelist. It is conspicuous in our later English novels and their high beauty as works of art is such because of the moral element that is in them. Now, while I cannot share in Mr. Mahaffy's views as to the decaying power of the pulpit, and while I hold that the real elements of power in the pulpit were never more there than they are to-day, it is undoubtedly true that over many minds and hearts the pulpit may have lost its power, or rather, let me say, it is in suspense. The reaction will come and they will again turn eagerly to teachers who have the living word for them. But meantime, as I have endeavored to point out, there is in our literature a great storehouse of help and impulse to other ideals of life. When Emerson speaks of "books which take rank in our life with parents and lovers and passionate experiences, so medicinal, so stringent, so revolutionary, so authoritative; of books which impart sympathetic activity to the moral power"—he is talking no transcendental philosophy, above all comprehension.

Who cannot, each for himself, name such—some poem, novel, drama, essay, history? And, if this be so, who can gainsay, nay, rather, who can fully estimate the reach and range of the statement that as furnishing these high ideals of life our literature is a vast and growing social force.

Turning now to still broader fields of influence, the services of literature to the cause of popular liberty come into commanding view. *Political idealism* is a factor in modern progress, which no student of either history or literature can afford to neglect. It is very easy to sneer at the *doctrinaire* in politics. There is no cheaper thing in the market than the ability to draw out the shouts of the people by eulogies on practical politics, and by travesties of theoretical politics. The trick is transparent beyond most devices of political charlatans. But there are some things it would be well for gentlemen who have no faith in anything but practical politics, to remember. The first is this: every advance in a political liberty which the world has known, emerged first on the horizon of political idealism. It came to its birth in the brain of a thinking man; not in a caucus; not in a general election. The second thing is this: Political idealism is a very safe thing to make merry over, to sneer at, to hustle out of the way—up to a given point. There comes a time when a great orator with convictions takes it up; when a popular poet sings it; and the people catch the tune; when a novelist robes it in fiction, and men, women and children read it. What a transformation ensues! The idealism has become realism of the most actual sort. It is a live question and its life seems to be everywhere. Sneers now are dangerous. It is time to clear the deck for action. It is not very long since Civil Service Reform was political idealism of the most ideal sort. But it certainly has passed the point where it is safe to sneer. It is wiser politically to trim. It is wisest to get on its side as quickly as may be, with decent regard to a too sudden change of front. The story of one such reform is the story of all since Magna Charta. Now

the point to be made is that literature, English literature especially, furnishes a long and brilliant series of illustrations showing how it has helped the ideal into the actual—the idea of enlarged popular liberty into the fact. Symonds, in his history of the Italian Renaissance, has said that in Dante's treatise, *De Monarchia*, we possess "the first attempt at political speculation, the first essay in constitutional philosophy, to which the literature of Europe gave birth; while his letters, addressed to the princes of Italy, the Cardinals, the Emperor, and the republic of Florence, are in like manner the first instances of political pamphlets setting forth a rationalized and consistent system of the rights and duties of nations." If these services of literature to the cause of popular liberty began with Dante, (and such a scholar as Frederick Ozanam claims Dante as the prophet of democracy and of the revolution of modern society), they quickly transferred their seat of operation to England and thence after centuries to America, and thence back again to France and Germany and Italy and Russia. For Russia has her Turgenieff and Italy has her Mazzini, as France had her Encyclopedists and England her John Milton.

As one studies this subject in the light of historical instances, this undying hatred of oppressors in all their forms, this vindication of popular rights, becomes a subject of contemplation. Far away in the early dawning of a literature the rough ballads of the people embodied the great element of modern progress. "Rough as they are, they express clearly enough the mingled passions which met in the Revolt of the Peasants, their longing for a right rule, for plain and simple justice, their scorn for the immorality of the nobles and the infamy of the court, their resentment at the perversion of the law to the cause of oppression." What, according to the historians, the ballad literature embodied, that, in later times, is found in the bewitching music of the Faerie Queen. Spenser covered it with the veil of allegory all curiously embroid-

ered with flowers, and many have contented themselves simply with admiring the embroidery and have not sought to see what depths of meaning the veil covered. Great Shakespeare came, and some have been found to charge him with indifference to popular rights, because he in his *Julius Cæsar* lashes so pitilessly the fickle mob. But it is forgotten that, though he had "small Latin and less Greek," he had read Plutarch enough to know that a Roman Proletariat was a thing to be feared like a Parisian Commune or Russian Nihilism or Dublin Assassins. And in such a judgment on Shakespeare, it is strangely forgotten also that in him first is found the full-throated cry of the great English Nationality; that he gave in his adhesion to no hide-bound doctrine of divine right; that he has held up to reprobation all Machiavellian prelacy from Pandulph to Cranmer. A political idealist like Harrington, of whose *Oceana* even David Hume said, that "it was the only valuable model of a commonwealth yet offered to the public," has not the literary power to make his idealism felt. But when we come to such a man as John Milton, we come to the point where literature comes into the arena as a political force of the first rank. Think of his laying aside his singing-ropes for twenty-one years, that he might promote liberty—civil, domestic, religious. Read his *Areopagitica*, and as your soul swells with the imperial grandeur of its diction and the stirring dash of its logical movement, you will be prepared to estimate what literature may do to promote a true freedom. It has taken at least two centuries to estimate Milton. I think it may fairly be said that his whole measure could not be taken till Republican principles had been wrought out in actual history. He was the defeated champion of a lost but noble cause. The wail of his own Samson is his outcry of a wounded spirit. Time and successful revolutions—the growth of popular liberty and free government—have interpreted Milton, and we can read not only the recognition of Milton's genius, but the still broader and

grander lesson of the service literature can render the cause of popular liberty.

And, coming to later times, let us not, in our eager and indignant protests against the base and immoral elements of Byron's poetry, be unmindful of his services to the cause of popular liberty. Byron dead at Missolonghi is Byron more than half redeemed. "The day will come," said Mazzini, that noblest of modern revolutionists, "when Democracy will remember all it owes to Byron. * * * * From him dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for this land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented among the oppressed." In our own revolutionary history we find striking confirmation of the principle that literature has always been the advocate of popular liberties. A revolution, indeed, needs three sorts of men as leaders—the great orators, the great fighters, and the stirring poets. Few have known how much this land owes to one such poet. I refer to Philip Freneau, popularly known as the poet of the revolution, and whom I am glad to name as a graduate of Princeton College. He sang in fiery strains of indignant satire the injustice of Great Britain toward her colonies. He sang in elegy so tender, so elevated, so true, the virtues of fallen patriots, that Walter Scott gave the elegy on the heroes of Eutaw Springs his heartiest praise, and borrowed from it a line for his own Marmion. So much and so well did this poet of our Revolution write, that his name will live forever among those patriots of whose fame the American people grow more jealous with each new era of our progress. I have thus touched here and there on illustrations of the principles enunciated. One fact is indisputable. Despotism may find here and there its logicians to defend it. But despotism can find no poet to chant its praises. From first to last, and with increase of power from age to age, the voice of literature in all its forms has been the voice of popular liberty. Coleridge in his noble Ode to

France in the throes of her great revolution, has given fit utterance to that clear, undying devotion to the holy cause.

“ Ye clouds! that far above me float and pause,
 Whose pathless march no mortal may control!
 Ye Ocean Waves! that wheresoe'er ye roll,
 Yield homage only to eternal laws!
 Ye Woods! that listen to the night-bird's singing,
 Midway the smooth and perilous slope reclined,
 Save when your own imperious branches swinging,
 Have made a solemn music of the wind!
 Where, like a man beloved of God,
 Through glooms which never woodmen trod,
 How oft pursuing fancies holy,
 My moonlight way o'er flowering weeds I wound,
 Inspired beyond the guess of folly,
 By each rude shape and wild unconquerable sound!
 O ye loud Waves! and O ye Forests high!
 And O ye Clouds that far above me soared!
 Thou rising Sun! thou blue rejoicing Sky!
 Yea, every thing that is and will be free!
 Bear witness for me, wheresoe'er ye be,
 With what deep worship I have still adored
 The spirit of divinest liberty!”

The last service of literature to modern progress to be considered on the present occasion, is its service rendered to the great philanthropic movements of the age. If it is the latest, it is in some respects the noblest and the greatest. It has more of moral grandeur in it. Matthew Arnold has somewhat sharply said of the Revisers of the New Testament, that they proceeded on the assumption that the aorist was not made for man, but man for the aorist. Men of letters have never written as if man was made for literature and not literature for man. In the advocacy of the humane reforms which have agitated the continent of Europe, the realm of Great Britain, and the United States, our men of letters have laid their gifts on the altar of humanity, in the high consciousness that their greatest office was to disenthral and bless men. It is here indeed that the proud title of *humanism* is most signally vindicated. That is *humanism*, surely, in its highest and purest form, which addresses itself not merely to the in-

tellect but to the heart of humanity, which concerns itself, not merely with the adornments and delights of modern society, but with its wants and woes.

As a social force working to this noble end, the mission of literature is of comparatively recent origin. There is a period, a long period too, in the history of English men of letters, when they wrought under the system of patronage, and were dependent for their daily bread on the favors of nobility. From Chaucer to Dr. Johnson the hateful bondage of dependence lasted. It was only the few, who by the gifts of fortune were "safe from the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass's hoof." But the day of servile dependence on patronage of nobles ended forever, when Dr. Johnson defined to Lord Chesterfield a patron as "one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help." Since that day literature has stood on its own feet, and has created its own public, to which it looks alone for support and encouragement. It is but justice, however, to our men of letters to say that the wretched system of patronage never enslaved these souls. It is indeed a pitiable sight to behold Edmund Spenser suing long and anxiously at the court of Elizabeth, dancing attendance on Lord Burleigh for some crumbs that might fall from the royal table. It is still more painful to read "glorious John Dryden's" fulsome adulations of his patrons. But the poets were not tonguetied. Spenser never put himself under bonds to keep the peace, when a word was to be said or sung for the lowly and the wretched. The chivalry which is so idealized in his great poem, is a chivalry of service to the unfortunate and the distressed. Even John Dryden flung in the face of an English nobility a noble defiance, when he satirized so mercilessly the Shaftesburys and Buckinghams of his day. But the debt of our civilization to literature for its espousal and advocacy of modern philanthropy really begins with William Cowper. It was a note, if not wholly

new to English poetry, yet not before sung so as to penetrate the "business and bosoms" of men. Great as Shakespeare is, it is not in him. You search the splendors of Milton's prose and verse in vain for those homely, potent lines which melt men into silent thoughtfulness and tears, as our hearts are made to throb with human sympathy for the human race. William Cowper lifted his voice in the Task for the slave, the down-trodden and the wretched. Burns prolonged the note which Cowper had struck as he sung—

" For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that ;
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be, for a' that."

Wordsworth caught from Burns the sacred impulse. The world of the lowly and the poor was at once lighted up with the tenderest and truest of poetic illumination. The critics have made themselves merry over Susan Lee and Alice Fell. They have had their laugh. But if it was nothing else, it was verse recognizing the common humanity around us ; and being this, it was on a high and holy mission. And then came Ebenezer Elliott with his Corn Law rhymes, claiming to be the "Poet of the Poor," and doing by his song what Cobden was doing with his oratory, and of whom even Carlyle has said, "the work of this corn law rhymer we might liken rather to some little fraction of a rainbow ; hues of harmony and joy painted out of troublous tears." Mrs. Browning lifted up in the streets of England the "Cry of the Children." Ah me ! what a world of pathos and pleading is in the lines. And Hood took all England over his "Bridge of Sighs," and bade us listen to the "Song of the Shirt." And all this had access to the hearts and homes of English people. John Bull is not commonly supposed to be much moved by pathos. But I suspect he was found sometimes furtively wiping his eyes behind the door, as he read the poetry of the gifted and saintly Mrs. Browning, or gentle, witty, sad, dear, delightful Tom Hood.

And then in that different field, the field of fiction, came those giants, twin brothers in the rank of letters—Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. In method as diverse as methods can be—the one with his bright, breezy humor, the other with his sharp, trenchant satire; both with truest sympathy for men and the loftiest scorn for whatsoever is sordid and oppressive in men or institutions, attacking boldly and attacking successfully—who can fail to see how magnificently they press the novel into service for the exaltation of humanity over false nobility, or hateful institutions, or the oppressions of wealth, or the neglect by society of those for whom it is formed to care. It was no trodden path. They blazed the road over which many have since walked. Gradgrinds and Dombey's, and, sad to say, Mr. Carlyle, called it sentimental. Yes, it was sentimental. But so are the best things this earth knows, sentimental. The love of the mother that bore us, the love for our country which is our home, and the royal law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” is sentiment, if you will have it so. But what were human life without such sentiment! The noblest elements in all progress spring from it.

There is nothing in the history of literatures more striking than the moulding influence exerted on each other. This wave of philanthropic emotion, which swept over English literature, rolled on across the Atlantic. The influence of Cowper and Burns, Dickens and Thackeray, Ebenezer Elliott and Mrs. Browning, was felt here, and there went forth an answering chord in the hearts of our poets and essayists and writers of fiction. When the history of that movement, which culminated in the emancipation of our slaves, comes to be finally written, the agency of literature cannot be forgotten. There was the silvery note of Longfellow, heard early in the great struggle, in his poems on slavery. There was the calm philosophy of Emerson, so unflinching, yet ever so incisive in its word for the reformer and his reforms. There was the fiction of

Mrs. Stowe—that “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which, with its sequel, went into almost every northern home, and became a power which was mightier than the tongues of orators; which was beyond question a large and irrepresible factor in the great movement, whose ground-swell was just then beginning to be felt. The poetry of James Russell Lowell, from his Biglow Papers to his Commemoration Ode, is suffused with the spirit of a broad and generous humanity. Now it flashes with indignant fire, and then it melts into pathos, most genuine and most deep. Here and there his charming wit vies with the music of his verse. But all is sacred and lofty with a true humanism. And for how many honored years has that pure-souled, large-hearted poet, Whittier, shrinking from public glare in the simplicity of his New England home and his Quaker training—for how many honored years has his muse been ready to celebrate any event, to commemorate any hero, to sound a call for any self-sacrifice, to bury any unholy enmity, to stand by any popular movement, to consecrate any cause of justice or truth or right, to bring to the consummation of all wise and good reform all that his muse could bring in verse, limpid, sweet, and ever radiant with love to God and love to man. The note has been struck in our own literature, and so well struck, that for years to come its echo will surely be heard. Concerning the future of that literature, speculation is somewhat rife. What it shall be as to form, what new elements it shall contribute to the literature of the future—on questions like these it may be quite useless to speculate. But that our men of letters will be found in days to come, as in days past, doing their highest and holiest for the great cause of man, there can be no reason to doubt. For literature may well recognize as its purest and best mission, not simply ministration to high intellectual joys, not only the furnishing of high ideals of manhood and womanhood, not yet even the promotion of popular liberty, but the espousal of every good cause in philanthropy, the helping

on the grand consummation, when every wrong shall have been redressed and every human woe removed or lightened.

It was the winter of 1863. The Civil War had dragged its slow and horrible length through all preceding campaigns. Oppressed with doubts and fears, stung by the dreadful suspense, the country waited to hear from Washington the Proclamation of Emancipation. At last it came. Who, that took any part in the scenes of that stern and solemn period of our history, but can recall with what a strange beating of the heart the newspaper was opened which contained the immortal document of President Lincoln. It was felt by the city of Boston that such an event should be commemorated. I well remember that winter afternoon when the gathering crowds wended their way to Music Hall, filled with a majestic audience. The *Te Deum* pealed forth from organ and orchestra. The Reformation Symphony of Mendelssohn, in which Luther's great hymn "Ein feste Burg" is inwrought, was performed. Dryden's noble Ode to St. Cecilia, in great Handel's music, was sung. And then there came upon that platform a well known face and form. I see him now. His face serene with philosophic calm, his eye lighted with strange fire, his tall and slender form moving gently forward in the quiet, self-poised manner of old—and Ralph Waldo Emerson began the recitation of his celebrated Boston Hymn. His utterance was solemn and slow, but resonant and musical. It was then the voice of the prophet no longer crying in the wilderness, but rather chanting in the temple the psalm of progress. I can hear him now, as over that hushed and breathless throng came the measured cadences of the lyric to freedom :

The word of the Lord by night
 To the watching pilgrims came,
 As they sat by the sea-side,
 And filled their hearts with flame.

God said : I am tired of kings,
 I suffer them no more ;

Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor.

I can recall the thrill which shot through the vast audience as the poet said :

Pay ransom to the owner,
And fill the bag to the brim ;
Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
And ever was. *Pay him.*

I seem still to hear the words float solemnly over the listening, sympathizing crowds, as, recognizing the Divine control in all human destinies, the hymn ended with the words—

My will fulfilled shall be ;
For, in daylight or in dark,
My thunderbolt has eyes to see
His way home to the mark.

And as I sat and listened, I thought within myself, here is literature fulfilling its last and best office, and the memorable scene of Emerson, reading his Boston Hymn, is a type of what the literature of the future is to do and to be.