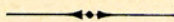


LITERATURE IN ACCOUNT WITH LIFE.



AN ADDRESS

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By the Rev. Dr. S. L. Caldwell,

PRESIDENT OF VASSAR COLLEGE.



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Literature in Account with Life.

REV. DR. S. L. CALDWELL.

President Angell, Ladies and Gentlemen :

The day which calls together the sons of a College to celebrate the privilege of their calling as scholars is bright beyond most other days in the calendar. It is sacred to thought, to reason, to inquiry, to good learning, to liberal culture, to one of the first interests of life. It is the birthday of a new generation of students, who fill the vacancies which the years leave. It calls back the students of other days, many of them perhaps remembering studies which more exacting pursuits long ago brought to an end, but while mourning the disappointment of their young dream, feeling for a day at least that they were once scholars, and have a name and a place in the goodly fellowship. It brings here the guardians, the authorities, the graduates, the students, the friends of this great University, to exchange congratulations, to auspicate the future, to praise the scholar's calling and work.

Eis Athenas was the choral strain of the Thracian maids. Up to Athens we come, to find under these oaks of Michigan a philosophy as genuine and as high as under the olives of the Academy; to drink again the old inspiration; to renew the sweet communion which belongs to every spot where study and learning find a home. And if many come who have served other gods than the classic ones to which they made their young vows; who have found less room than they expected for the liberal culture which was their early aspiration; who to-day confess that they know more of life than of letters, that affairs have displaced studies, that they have denied to scholarship what has been given to more tempting or more urgent pursuits, surely they belong here by birthright as by sympathy, and come up to Athens to pay, at least, the tribute which every good citizen owes to aca-

demie institutions and culture. Life has taken some flavor and charm from early studies, even where it has limited or closed them. Life has been making use of academic training in the midst of demands hostile to its continuance. And every student who has been drawn into the most practical and unclassic pursuits has at least his memory of earlier and dearer things, and in his departure may take shelter, at all events, under the authority of Lord Bacon. "That," he says, "will indeed dignify and exalt knowledge, if contemplation and action may be more nearly and strongly conjoined and united together than they have been,—a conjunction like unto that of the highest planets, Saturn, the planet of rest and contemplation, and Jupiter, the planet of civil liberty and action."

So, at least, life and literature seem to come together here and face each other to-day; and called as I am by the partiality of an old friendship to be the voice of this literary festival, and obliged by an unwritten law of the occasion to speak of some interest of literature, what more natural than to examine the account between the two, and especially to calculate how much after all literature owes to life. The other course appears to be more natural, perhaps suitable. One who has the ear of such an assembly seems to owe it to his calling and the occasion to plead the claim of letters as against all comers. In a University, and on its great holiday, it may seem an offense against the genius of the place and the hour to do anything but declare the glory of letters. In a time and a country where industrial and political interests carry captive even our scholars, with so many to mourn that literature has not had its chance, and that even the Universities are surrendering the humanities to scientific and utilitarian studies, it may seem disloyal to the mistress of our vows not to urge the interests of literature, and establish the great debt which life, which society, which civilization owes to it and whatever promotes it. But whichever side of the shield we face, be it silver or golden, we shall find that it has a reverse, and that the two are really debtors to each other. In fact, it may prove before we may get through that it is for the sake, and in the very interest of literature that life pushes its claim, and comes forward into the midst of this literary festival, and before this learned court to prove it. We may find that the scholar,

the writer, even the poet and the dreamer, is indebted to the very life which in so many high ways is indebted to him.

It has been the fortune of educated men in this country,—perhaps to those who to-day revive recollections of years given wholly to study, it seems rather a misfortune and hardship—to be obliged even on account of their education to mix actively with life, and bear a responsible part in its burdens. They are the ones who have been drafted for the great exigencies of our civilization. They lead a strenuous intellectual life, but it is professional, rather than literary or scholastic. They spend enough mental power to produce a literature, but in works of quite another order. The intellectual energies which have gone into American civilization are neither small nor feeble. They have been mighty and productive. But they have run to something besides literature, whether better or worse. The national mind has not yet reached the late, ripe stage when it blooms most naturally into these finer products. It has been drawn into other fields, with fruit as substantial and necessary, if not as brilliant. It has been compelled to adjourn literature till it could build a better house to live in. Here was a continent to explore and possess. Here were states to be founded. Here was a national order to settle, even to fight for. Here was a bright, free, multiplying people to educate and evangelize. Here were great enterprises in commerce, in industry, in charity. Here were great experiments in education, in government, in religion, in social order, in which literature could have little weight. Thought, knowledge, genius, have been put into works of construction, rather than of culture; into cities, roads, ships, the school, the church, the state. This immense, eager life, hot with irrepressible energies, fighting with the wilderness and pushing it westward, breaking out into sudden cities, into states which are empires almost as soon as they are born, tasked with the necessities of a new order of society, stimulated by the passions of a free democracy, excited by unusual opportunities, running a race with the best things under the sun, charged with destinies as great as any which have ever come out of the world's greatest ages, it has drawn out all our funds for our immediate use, and left little for art and letters. The brain of the nation, which is not dull, has been taxed, perhaps extremely, by all this

great demand. Had the mind of the country been suppressed into the small civic and economic opportunities of some European state, it might have been as fruitful in purely intellectual production. The water which might have supplied a few aspiring and sparkling fountains has been kept on the common level, and carried in more humble and useful courses from house to house. Our experiment would have come to a miserable conclusion long ago if the genius of the country had been busy in literature, breeding scholars instead of men. Literature has been compelled to wait, not by lack of intellectual force, not by defect of inspiration, but by a necessity profound as the providential purpose which is creating a new history on this side of the planet. In an ideal commonwealth, the scholar might have come first. In a small one, with a short course to run, literature might have ripened early. But here by profound laws of sociology this was not possible. By the very laws which made the continent so wide, and the race of people so energetic, and the problems to be solved so complex, and life here so eager, so new, so practical, literary productiveness has been delayed. Either literature or life must give way, and the stronger has taken possession.

And then, moreover, literature has been deferred by our having one already on hand. That immense intellectual property to which we are heirs compensated for all the loss we have suffered by the drafts of practical life. We entered upon our career with a literary estate on the other side of the sea large enough to supply our needs, while engaged in more exigent business. While the active thought of the nation has been depositing itself in inventions, industries, institutions, which carry forward civilization, and give hope to mankind, its intellectual life has been fed from the accumulated supplies of other lands and times, and above all from the stores which English thought has gathered in five centuries as much for the benefit of America as of England. It has been worth a thousand years of history to begin with so much behind us; that we could start with a literature, living and accumulating, which released the genius of this new world for other service. The literature of England is ours by every title, except of being born here. It was the creation of our spiritual ancestry. It comes to us in our language

in which we were born. It is hardly foreign or imported by simply crossing seas. That even gives it the unique flavor which native fruit might lack. And a great inheritance it is. The ages have furnished no better. Into it are expressed the juices of the modern world; the blood of the good races, the though of the most virile and free ones; the softness of the Norman and the mettle of the Saxon; the renascent learning and the reformed faith into which the spirit of classic life and the finest forces of divine religion descended; the love of nature which belongs to the Englishman, with the love of truth which belongs to the loftiest souls. It traverses the whole width of human life, almost of the human mind. Rooted in the real, standing on the solid earth, it touches the ideal and infinite on every side. Mounting into the highest heaven of invention, it is never lost in the clouds. Tender and gracious it is with pathos and an infinite humor; pure and sanative with moral wisdom and spiritual faith; so sincere, so catholic, so vigorous; so opulent in matter, so various in style, so humane in temper. And then it uses, and enriches by using, that language spoken by more tongues than any civilized speech; that language so pliant to all thought; as stiff as steel and as elastic; limber to love; sonorous as a bugle to liberty or to war; now homely and now stately; clear with the lucidity of truth, and yet bright with the beams of poetry; strong enough for any passion, and versatile enough for the lightest trifles or the most solemn discourse. The literature of England, product of so many struggles, of ages so different in their events and their temper, of a national life never monotonous, never stagnant, and even when insular intense and vigorous, let it come alone, it would greatly enrich us. There is very little of it inapt or foreign. Later affluents, from France a century ago, from Germany in the last fifty years, have run into the main stream of American intellect; but it is England which has given us most, and so much as to become a very controlling and vital fact in our history. For it has released the mind of the country for other work. In the midst of this work it has saved us from intellectual decline. In the beginning, when our fathers were cast upon bare nature, in the periods of transition when the backward tendencies which belong to life in a new country in its rude,

exhausting conflicts with the wilderness were strong, and all through the perils of our history, this possession has been a part of our salvation. It has helped arrest tendencies toward barbarism, materialism, coarseness. It has kept open the doors into the ideal world. It has imparted to a new people the virtues and inheritances of age. It has kept us from breaking from that past in which the wealth of nations often lies.

I know another opinion has prevailed. This has been mourned as an enfeebling and servile dependence on another country. It has seemed to forestall original production, and postpone an American literature. But is it not a spurious Americanism which is willing to refuse what is truly ours, and alienate it because it was not born in our woods? Is it an un-American economy to buy in other markets what we cannot produce at home? or to borrow where capital is abundant and interest is low? Should we have gained anything by a protective tariff—not on English books, that is bad enough—but by excluding English literature, in order to have one of our own? That would be the last way to produce one. We need not be so jealous of Englishmen. Shakespeare was of the same race, and the same class in society, which colonized the shores of Massachusetts. Had he been a score of years younger he might have come here himself, leaving a copyright of his plays in England, where for a time they would certainly have been better relished. Milton and Roger Williams learned languages together, and what is better were of the same faith in regard to civil and spiritual liberty; and the poet, like the philosopher Berkeley in the next century, might have sought a home on the shores of the Narragansett. But this would not have made Lycidas or Comus any better poetry, or any more truly ours. There is no Atlantic in that ideal world which the poets make. English letters belong to all English readers, whether by the Thames or the Hudson, whether in the ranches of Colorado or the sheep-walks of Australia, wherever a newer England has transported itself, as well as in the old home of the race. And the debt we owe to England we are fast cancelling, and may one day wipe out. For with all else we have been producing, in due time a literature will come. M. De Tocqueville, one of the most philosophical critics of American life, said fifty years ago, “If

the Americans, retaining the same laws and social condition, had had a different origin, and had been transported into another country, I do not question they would have had a literature. Even as they now are, I am convinced that they will ultimately have one." There has been power enough for it, original, creative, plastic, but it has cast itself into other than literary forms. Secure against intellectual impoverishment, the quick mind of the country has applied itself to that which was nearest, most necessary, and for the time better. It has borrowed poets and made our history a poem. It imported literature, while it was translating the highest political philosophy into a state. It printed its works not in books, but in schools taught at the public expense, in the constitutions of forty republics, in the biography of a nation which in two hundred and fifty years has done the work of ages. Invention has not gone into Iliads or Infernos; it has not done the work of Cervantes or Moliere; but it has saved America from the doom of Spain, and the American Revolution from being an anticipation of the French; it has been finding out, instead of paths in the ideal, the short roads to commodious life, and universal knowledge, and regulated liberty; giving to unborn millions an inheritance such as the country of Dante has waited for a thousand years.

Students, jealous for other interests, may lament with not unnatural regrets, that so much power has not been put to finer uses. It seems as if a nation which grows at the rate of fifty millions in a century, might at least produce some great genius, and a literature as great. But literature at the expense of life; an excellent poet or two, and no Declaration of Independence; great ideas in books, and no idea of justice or liberty wrought into power and a commonwealth; fine arts and a wretched populace; a Vatican with Raphael in one wing, and a Pope in the other; a nation with more mouths than bread, servile and shiftless and decaying, with elegant writers to tell its story and sing its poetry, is not the destiny we started for, or for which our scholars need vent their unavailing sighs. With literature enough, old and new, to satisfy the most eager demand, with as much scholarship as we could make use of, with every faculty of human nature roused, and rushing to fill the unusual oppor-

tunity, with more mind let loose and set to school, than in any nation on earth, with inventive brains multiplying so rapidly, not content to repeat the past, and ready to explore new realms of thought as they find those of life occupied, it is hardly necessary to be mortified yet at the failure of Iliads. The glory of action, the triumphs of liberty, the successes of life, are not the defeat and cessation of letters, but may become their inspiration. Indeed, between life and literature there are secret understandings and communications, there are preparations and nourishments, which will one day appear, and justify the delay. That has been first which comes first, and that will follow which is all the greater when it follows than when it leads. Life, great, original, rich life, will produce literature, because they are at last products of the same power, and because literature is a product and exponent of life itself.

It is a notion rather narrow and pedantic that a book is the only intellectual work ; that literature and art absorb all the genius of the world. There is a great deal of hard study, which is not done in colleges. The cotton gin and the telephone cost study as much as Mill's Logic, or Darwin's Origin of Species. There is a great deal of thought which is not put into libraries. Twenty-five years ago we put ideas into guns, which types were too slow or too feeble to utter. When the great hours of liberty come it is the bayonets which think. Franklin had genius enough for a new system of philosophy, or a new departure in literature, if he had not given it to the independence and constitution of his country. The orations of Henry and Burke are are great and splendid, but so was the sword of Washington. Why should eloquence be greater than generalship ? It was the battle of Gettysburg which made Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg the most eloquent utterance of our time. It was the inspiration of Harvard College, not with her sons dreaming in the still air of delightful studies, but prompt in the sharp sacrifices of war for the country, which made Mr. Lowell in his Commemoration Ode touch the high-water mark in American poetry. Ideas do not express themselves more in the forms of language than in mechanisms, manners, industries, in emigrations, revolutions, institutions, worships. Civilization is greater than literature, for it not only contains and uses it, but it involves

an immense expenditure of the same mental force which creates it. Civilization is the poetry, philosophy, knowledge, invention, thought, the genius and the faith of a people, or an epoch, translated, not into words only, but into all possible forms. Taste, inventiveness, knowledge, ideas, and whatever mental qualities enter into many forms of literature, are also called into action in all civilized and cultivated life. The forces which stir and direct the life of our time will at last lodge themselves in literature, but they have their birth and action outside of it, and will use literature by and by as their expression, as they now use more utilitarian vehicles.

Literature, indeed, may be the best part, and one of the highest forms of civilization. It is one of its creative and conservative forces. Its office is most needful and precious. It fixes the fluid forces of thought, and "preserves as in a phial the purest efficacy and extraction" of the best minds. It is, as Milton has said, "the seasoned life of man." It keeps the continuity of the world's thinking, and stores food for new generations. It is the ministry of great souls to the multitude of men, the motor of thought, the nourishment and the solace of souls who cannot create it for themselves. It is a great social factor, contributing to the progress of the race. To-day is our tribute to it. This University is the acknowledgment of its value. Our civilization would be very coarse, and indeed, very poor without it. And yet the intellectual and spiritual energies which put on the robe of life, and go forth to answer the calls of civilization, are from the same source, and serve a want as true, perhaps for a time as sacred, as learning or poetry. They may even run ahead of literature, and lay a path for it into the ages to come.

But the peculiarity of literature is that it employs language as its single instrument. Into that poetry, philosophy, history, put themselves for preservation and for power. And language is the child of life, as well as of thought, and must be recruited from other than literary sources, or it falls into decay. Writers like Dante, and Chaucer, and Luther, turn their native tongue into literary form and so fix and purify it. Italy, England, Germany, owe their language to their writers. But it was first born of the life of the people before the authors used and finished

it. They found every word almost in common circulation. They took up the dialect of the people as it formed itself in their common ways and doings. It was the use of living words, with the blood still in them, words which came out of the passions the conflicts, the necessities, the uses of every day life, which gave power to their works. Otherwise they would have been remote from men's interests and sympathies, and would have perished early. Ideas, however high or remote, find their clothing in the common market of life, where the people buy and sell. Thought must go the life for its words, its figures, its communications. Literature is indebted to life for the instrument it uses, and by which it is preserved, and every language must have running into it a stream of fresh life from the world, rather than from books, or it becomes sterile. "Literary dialects," says Professor Max Müller, "or what are commonly called classical languages, pay for their temporary greatness by inevitable decay."* To adopt his figure, the literary language freezes, as a river does, smooth, brilliant, stiff, till in warmer weather, new life breaks loose, cracking the crystal surface, and popular language, life a spring flood, revitalizes the old dialect, and gives it freshness and new force. Language becomes reflective, "sick-lid o'er with the pale cast of thought," it becomes artificial and obsolete, when it is withdrawn from the living world and is no more the speech of the people.

We need not think that somehow literature has succeeded in adding something to life which is not already in it, and that it is something other and finer and stronger in making more out of life than it actually contains. Indeed life contains and reveals what does not go into writing, and is itself only a sublimer literature. No history is equal to the facts back of it. The life of persons and of nations is full of unwritten histories and poetries. There is a poetry in life before it is in words, though they be its most cunning and touching revelation. If poetry idealizes life, life realizes poetry. The true may surpass the invented. I am ready to think a drama of Racine hardly equal to the tragic story of Joan of Arc, and that the mimic Shylock or Lear may not surpass the real one. It is indeed the high of-

**Science of Language*. First Series, p. 69.

fice of poetry to extract and condense the finer spirit of beauty in the common and homely world about us,

Clothing the palpable and the familiar
With golden exhalations of the dawn.

But as nature precedes art, as a sunset of Claude or Turner is no finer than every one of us has seen inflaming the west, so genius only discovers with finer insight the beauty and sacredness already in life, and invests it with ideal glory. It may be the ideal which charms us, but the glory and the mystery are there in life, revealed, or unrevealed. This life of man, in a single soul, its appetites, its aspirations, its joys, its glooms, its beliefs, its sins, the stamps of heaven, of hell upon it, the possibilities, the eternities which are in it; the complex, multitudinous life, beating everywhere in co-operative or contending energies, the wild, the beautiful, the useful, royal with a glory from above the stars, tamed to the touch of Christ's Cross, gloomy with wrath or with misery, grand in its efforts and achievements, in the huts of the poor, in the crowd of the streets, flying across seas, bursting into wildernesses, hungry and fierce and sour, how much of it, unspeakably great and touching even in its wretchedness and its ruin,—this marvelous life of man, what study so grand or instructive, what literature contains so much, can equal or express it? Says the historian Menzel, "Literature mirrors life, not only more comprehensively, but more clearly than any other monument, because no other representation furnishes the compass and depth of speech. Yet speech has its limits, and life only has none. The abyss of life no book has yet closed up. It is only single chords that are struck in you when you read a book; the infinite harmony which slumbers in your life, as in the life of all, no book has entirely caught."*

It is life which furnishes staple for literature, as nature does for science. The two may overlap, and pass and repass into each other's realm. For science has undertaken, or theorists in the interest of science have undertaken, to subject not the physical universe only, but the works of human will and genius, and the moral world as well, to its inquiries and its laws. M. Taine attempts in literature and art, and Mr. Buckle

* *History of German Literature*, I, 15.

attempts in history, to carry out a theory which brings nature and the mind, the genius of Chaucer or Rubens, the civilization of Spain or India, into the same realm of law. Comte and Mill see no reason why the spontaneousness of human genius, or passion, or will should be less scientific than the perturbations of Saturn, or the crystallization of a ruby. It is life, the secret and law of it, it is the scientific law of literature, as of all human production, they are after.

And literature too, especially poetry, on its side takes nature, even after science has opened and turned it inside out, and uses it for its own ideal purposes. It adds a precious seeing to the eye, so that nature is transfigured by it. It takes up nature into itself, into human feeling, and unites it to the joys and sorrows and longings of human life. It does not describe nature, nor dissect it, but idealizes it. It colors nature with its own passions, and it is sad or glad according to the poet's moods. So it brings nature and life together, and throws upon the outward world the reflections of the life within. It deals with nature as science cannot, not after the exactness of truth, but after the freedom of impression, giving its own interpretation to it, and using it, as it uses all other things, after a law of its own.

But after all it is life, rather than nature, which furnishes the matter and inspiration for literature. It is not the world man lives in, but himself, and whatever life is in him, which goes into the creations of genius. It takes in the outward world only as it flows through his thought, and is shaped and colored by that. And it is not then out of the impersonal reason, out of depths of abstract truth back of all human and even individual experience; or if from those far recesses, it is truth as it comes into life to be bathed and dressed and used. There is a literature which is entirely bloodless and impersonal and very much of it comes of no life, and reaches none, "Sir," said Hazlitt, "I am a metaphysician, and nothing makes an impression upon me but abstract ideas." There are books like Sidney Smith's satirized friend, whose intellects were improperly exposed. They need to be dressed with some form and power of life before they can come in contact with men, and into the living thought of the world. The book which is

charged with the life of the author, and the life of his time, carries in it the weight and force which make it last. Men's hearts go after that which has heart in it, and the touch of kindred life. An author's genius will take color and turn from his own experience. This gives it individuality. Unless his life is as rich as his genius his work becomes thin and sterile. The great poets have a hardy realism which shows that they were fed on something beside ambrosia. They are as true to life as they are to their genius. Their poetry springs from their age as well as themselves. They are in sympathetic relation with the thoughts and forces and movements of their time, and become its best interpreters. If they go far away, as Milton did in his epic, to find subject and characters and epopee, they bring their creations into the world in which they live, and Adam and Eve, and Raphael and Abdiel talk like English people of the seventeenth century. If Homer ever loses the credit of the Iliad it will be because it seems to be born of many minds of the Homeric age rather than of his own brain, and is too representative to be individual. It is a poet's fancy of Coleridge, as he himself acknowledges, that the blind bard

Beheld the Iliad and the Odysesy
Rise to the swelling of the voiceful sea.

He saw it all in life before the waves on the Chian shore started the inward echoes, and he set to song the great life which had beat like a stormier sea on the coast of the Troad. This is the charm of the classics, which keep their hold, their yet unshaken hold, on the modern world. Says Dr. Temple, lately made Bishop of London, "The classics possess a charm independent of genius. It is not their genius only which makes them attractive, it is the classic life, the life of the people of that day; it is the image there only to be seen of our highest natural powers in their freshest vigor; it is the unattainable grace of the prime of manhood, it is the pervading sense of youthful beauty. Hence, while we have elsewhere great poems and great histories, we never find again that universal radiance of fresh life which makes even the most commonplace relics of classic days models for our highest art." (*Essays and Reviews*, p. 27.) The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer are simply the four-

teenth century of English life put into poetry. The form and pressure, the manners and spirit of the time, even its fugitive aspects are caught and photographed. For this is the office of all literature and its use, that it catches and keeps what otherwise would evaporate and be lost. That literature of power, which De Quincey, (*Essay on Pope*,) so finely discriminates from that of knowledge, is the literature of life, which describes the manners, unfolds the relations, reveals the secrets, comes home to the business and bosoms of men, and sheds light on their true life and destiny. It is the exponent and translator of life, which without it would disappear. And its great writers are those who, if their souls, like Milton's, were "like a star and dwelt apart," were also mixed closest with the deeper life of their time. Rarely, perhaps, never, is individual genius able to escape the influence, to withstand the spirit of its age, that larger genius which embraces and breathes through all its children. The life of an epoch is mightier than any soul in it, and stamps itself into the thought and words of even those who come into it puissant to rule, or dreadful to purify. The verse which seems spontaneous as the blowing of winds, or the growth of clover, takes always some hue and temper, some stamp of conformity or resistance, from the nature and society, the place and the period in which it was born. The poet of the Merrimack and the poets of the Charles have not only enriched American literature, but have illustrated American life. The struggle with slavery beats and shouts in the verse of Whittier, as it did not even in the clash of swords. As Mr. Lowell this summer leaves England, an English writer has said of *The Biglow Papers*, "They give the most perfect literary expression to a great secular movement, and will always remain as the interpretation of it, throwing more light on its causes and characters than the records of historians, or the dissertations of moralists." This great conflict of ideas more and more taking possession of the second generation of American life in the nineteenth century, and precipitated at last in a bloody shower has perhaps not yet produced all its spiritual fruits. The periods of literary fruitfulness do not always synchronise with those of aroused and strenuous action. It would seem as if the era of great and crowded life must necessarily quicken genius, and issue in a

richer harvest. But it may be too tempestuous, and poetry may wait for the calm warmth of the Indian summer to ripen. It may exhaust rather than nourish. Its violent passions may burn rather than warm, and break the crust for the fertile vineyards of the next generation. It may force intellectual action away from poetry. It may spread it over a vast space and great numbers, while if it were compressed into a narrower and more peaceful life it would flower into a richer and rarer literature. It may emancipate political rather than poetic tendencies. It may start inspirations which will pervade the national life, and run into literature at last. But by and by it will show that genius, scholarship, literature cannot escape the forces which belong to a period so eventful as the last fifty years.

The latest and fullest development of literary activity in recent times is in prose fiction. The writing which covers most paper, reaches most eyes, and is devoured with most satisfaction to-day is the novel. For the majority, the philosophers, the historians, the poets, stand aside for the novelist. You may say his touch is superficial, and that people never return to the best novel as they do the great poems and histories. You may say that the truth in it is thin and not deep, that it takes hold of the fancies of readers rather than their convictions, and that out of the crowd of them few novels survive a twelve-month. After all has been said, and after it is said, as it may be, that the novel has not yet attained its ideal function as a teacher of truth, nowhere is life found in such variety, in such extremes of pathos and humor, tragedy and comedy, in such truth to itself. In history, in biography, in philosophy, there may be more fact, and in form at least more reality. But the novel is the book of life, and when it is at its best, of actual life. Life supplies its motive, its story, its persons. Life gives it charm and power. Whatever it may have in it, noble truth, rhetorical beauty, ingenious plot, if it has not actual life, men and women as we know them, the passions, the doings of living men, it fails. If it does not interpret life, and make us know it better, if it does not let us into the secrets of life, not of the day only, but of that life which in its ruling passions is the same all days and everywhere, it has no use, and goes to kindle the fire in the kitchen. It is waste paper, and waste writing, for it does not

speak out of life into life. But in its multitudinous progeny, it is a testimony to the power which in later times life has acquired over literature. It tells how much more men want to know about themselves, that not satisfied with biography and history, the imagination has been set at work so industriously to invent what literature in no other way could supply.

Literature comes out of life. So it returns thither with its gifts, to become the minister as well as the interpreter of life. It is not tributary simply to intellectual culture. It nourishes the mind; but it does no more. It serves the uses of life, its finer and and more spiritual uses. It cannot be weighed in the scales of the market, though literature has its mercantile value. But the five pounds for which *Paradise Lost* was sold was enough for it if had not been above all price. Books are worth not what they sell for, but the contribution they make to the better life of men. Literature has come to this test, as does everything in the world. Genius must obey the same law with much coarser things. It must be of use. It may be spontaneous in its work, as the highest genius always is. It may have no conscious purpose of utility, of anything but to sing its song, and say its say, as the new hay is sweet, or the stream runs at its will. But to this test it must come at last. All literature that lives, and is cherished in human love, has this quality. It is of power to breed better thoughts, to take us out of ourselves a little, a little above ourselves, to help us forget, to help us remember, "to inform man in the best reason of living," to make his life great with thought, with knowledge, with spiritual excellence. Life is better than learning, is the test and the end of it. Life is greater than literature, as all the rivers run into the sea, and it is never full. The ambition to be a learned man, with no reference to use, to life, is no better than the ambition to be a fat man. They are somewhat the same. The book which answers no use of life, of real and good high life, has no use at all. If it neither excites, nor expands, nor chastens, nor nourishes, if it is not constructive as well as instructive, if it does not beget more life, if it does not invigorate the energies of the rational spirit, let it go back to the paper maker. Literature is a servant, and may serve noble or mean interests. It is an instrument, and has its part in the great struggles and

achievements of the age. It gives direction and anchorage to the thoughts of men. It creates influences, a soil, and intellectual climate more potent than any physical circumstance. It may answer base uses and the best. It may be the word of life or death which quickens or petrifies centuries. But its splendor, its virtue, its end is to beget more life and fuller. It is the chariot and not the goal. It is a thing by the way, and at the end is life, true, large, beautiful, eternal.

But literature is liable to perils and mischiefs, from which it is saved by contact with life and the real world. There is a great deal of healthy literature, and a great deal that is morbid and lacks sanity. Its diseases come generally from too much thought and too little life. Its blood is thin and sublimated. It is sick for want of air and exposure. It is too fine-spun and speculative. It wants an infusion of sense and mother-wit. It needs to touch the ground, however far it flies toward the moon. It must go out of doors into the hard and wholesome life of the world. Life is curative and medicinal. It corrects the bad humors, the flighty fancies, the wild excesses, the morbid tendencies of literature. It mixes the practical lessons of experience with ideal truth. I know there is an ideal to which the poet must go for his law, and not to his own times and society. He must descend into his time as a minister of beauty and teacher of truth, who has been in to look at the invisible, and listen to the voice of the Eternal. He is to bring down into life what he does not find in it. He is to adjust his compass and lay his course by celestial observations. Dark will be the day when the poets and thinkers and teachers of the world surrender to the actual, and know no law but experience. Dismal enough is that invasion of realism which in art, in poetry, in fiction, is one of the worst distempers. When the ideal departs, life expires. But they need to keep hold of the solid facts of life, to steady, to correct, to orient themselves by. The aeronaut in the far atmosphere is still held by the law of gravitation, and must depend on that to bring him back from his high visions. The scholar must temper study with some part in affairs. Scholarship needs to be balanced by some knowledge of the world. It becomes very dry and dusty when it retreats into the world of books, and forgets that there is a great world outside of the libraries where

the very life is still going on which it is studying after it has been preserved and embalmed in literature. The new studies are giving Greek a hard fight to hold its place, its traditional and proper place, in the college course. It will not win unless it can show that it belongs to a practical as well as a scholastic education. The Greek literature is such a part of the world's thought and speech as cannot be spared, as would be an irreparable loss to liberal education, to that "complete and generous education," which, as Milton says, "fits a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." It is because there is still life and immortal youth in the languages we call dead, that they are and are to be, the study, not of antiquarians, but of all scholars who hope to take hold of the living world.

And so it is life which is not only curative, but preservative, and really gives literature its immortality. There is some vitality in it by which it survives the doom of decay which falls upon man and his books. Lost literature enough there is, which has gone down into Lethe and devouring time. It perished, not so much for lack of types to preserve it, but because it had no hold on men's love and memory. Long ages before the invention of printing it was said that of the making of books there is no end. But it is not the constant making, but the constant mortality of books, which is most suggestive. They dropped out of the memory because they dropped out of the life of men. They perished because their use was transient, and the life in them was small and brief. They died simply because they had nothing in them to keep them alive, to fasten them to the perpetuated thought and life of mankind. They could not keep with the new thoughts, the new life of the world, and so fell back and were lost. The secret of the longevity of the Hebrew Scriptures, of the best classics, of the literature which every generation reads, is in something more than their style, or even their matter. It is the universal human element in them, which comes home to men everywhere and always. It is life in them, human life, which never wearies, which always delights; it is that touch of nature which makes nations kin, and all the ages one; it is the life of great souls, which have not only been imbued with the *Zeitgeist* of a single age or country, but have drunk into the life

of humanity, and have known how to put that life into words, into the language of their time, by which it has become the language of all time. It is the key which Ben Jonson gave to the immortality of Shakespeare,

And for his poesy, 'tis so rammed with life,
That it shall gather strength with being,
And live hereafter more admired than now.

And when Jesus said, The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life, he explained the immortal freshness and power of the Gospel. It is truth married to life, it is living truth married to living words, it is literature born out of life and into life, which survives every other work of man, and has a vitality which belongs not to forms and letters, but to a spiritual essence.

This is the hour of scholars, when a company of them, in many departments, take the honors of the University, and go their way. They have been students, and please God, let them be students still. They have been trained to scholarship, of one kind and another; let it find its mission. For it remains to you not only to find its increase, but to find its use. Here is life, and you carry into it what it greatly needs. Here is truth, and you have not learned all of it yet. Think not that possibility in either is concluded; that literature has all been written, that life with its great opportunities is exhausted. The last word has not been said, the best deed has not been done. There is yet truth, there is yet life, great, rich, untried. They wait for your coming. Be it yours to use what you have learned, and to turn truth into life. Always may this great University stand, with doors opening both ways, inward toward all truth, known or unknown, outward toward life, and the wants of the world. Always in her training may the reconciliation be made between thought and action, letters and life. She sends forth her children, not as literary dilettanti,

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair;

not to be mere critics while others do the work of the world; not to be theorists only, who tell how it is to be done; but as serious scholars, who learn that they may teach, who study into

the best things, that the best things may be done ; who join good learning and useful living ; who will increase the debt the country owes her scholars, and repay the debt which literature owes to life.

