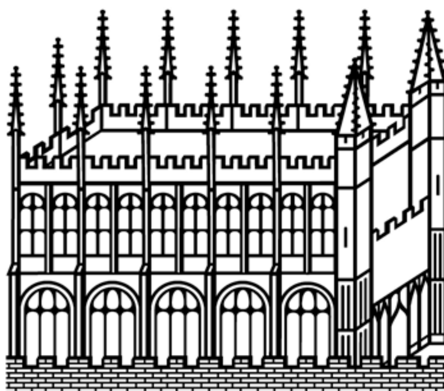

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ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

THE ANNUAL ADDRESS
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE LONDON SOCIETY FOR THE EXTENSION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING, DELIVERED AT THE MANSION HOUSE, FEBRUARY 26, 1887

BY JOHN MORLEY

MY LORD MAYOR, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,

When my friend Mr. Goschen invited me to discharge the duty which has fallen to me this afternoon I confess that I complied with very great misgivings. He desired me to say something, if I could, on the literary side of education. Now, it is almost impossible—and I think those who know most of literature will be readiest to agree with me—to say anything new in recommendation of literature in a scheme of education. But, as taxpayers know, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer levies a contribution, he is not a person to be trifled with. I have felt, moreover, that Mr. Goschen has worked with such extreme zeal and energy for so many years on behalf of this good cause, that anybody whom he considered able to render him any co-operation, owed it to him in its fullest extent. The Lord Mayor has been kind enough to say that I am especially qualified to speak on English literature. I must, however, remind the Lord Mayor that I have strayed from literature into the region of politics; and I am not at all sure that such a journey conduces to the soundness of one's judgment on literary subjects, or adds much to the force of one's arguments on behalf of literary study. Politics are a field where action is one long second-best, and where the choice constantly lies between two blunders. Nothing can be more unlike in aim, in ideals, in method, and in matter, than are literature and politics. I have, however, determined to do the best that I can; and I feel how great an honour it is to be invited to partake in a movement which I do not scruple to call one of the most important of all those now taking place in English society.

What is the object of the movement? What do the promoters aim at? I take it that what they aim at is to bring the very best teaching that the country can afford, through the hands of the most thoroughly competent men, within the reach of every class of the community. Their object is to give to the many that sound, systematic, and methodical knowledge, which has hitherto been the privilege of the few who can afford the time and money to go to Oxford and Cambridge; to diffuse the fertilising waters of intellectual knowledge from their great and copious fountain heads at the Universities by a thousand irrigating channels over the whole length and breadth of our busy, indomitable land. Gentlemen, this is a most important point. Goethe said

that nothing is more frightful than a teacher who only knows what his scholars are intended to know. We may depend upon it that the man who knows his own subject most thoroughly, is most likely to excite interest about it in the minds of other people. We hear, perhaps more often than we like, that we live in a democratic age. It is true enough, and I can conceive nothing more democratic than such a movement as this, nothing which is more calculated to remedy defects that are incident to democracy, more thoroughly calculated to raise democracy to heights which other forms of government and older orderings of society have never yet attained. No movement can be more wisely democratic than one which seeks to give to the northern miner or the London artisan knowledge as good and as accurate, though he may not have so much of it, as if he were a student at Oxford or Cambridge. Something of the same kind may be said of the new frequency with which scholars of great eminence and consummate accomplishments, like Jowett, Lang, Myers, Leaf, and others, bring all their scholarship to bear, in order to provide for those who are not able, or do not care, to read old classics in the originals, brilliant and faithful renderings of them in our own tongue. Nothing but good, I am persuaded, can come of all these attempts to connect learning with the living forces of society, and to make industrial England a sharer in the classic tradition of the lettered world.

I am well aware that there is an apprehension that the present extraordinary zeal for education in all its forms—elementary, secondary, and higher—may bear in its train some evils of its own. It is said that nobody in England is now content to practise a handicraft, and that every one seeks to be at least a clerk. It is said that the moment is even already at hand when a great deal of practical distress does and must result from this tendency. I remember years ago that in the United States I heard something of the same kind. All I can say is, that this tendency, if it exists, is sure to right itself. In no case can the spread of so mischievous a notion as that knowledge and learning ought not to come within reach of handicraftsmen, be attributed to literature. There is a famous passage in which Pericles, the great Athenian, describing the glory of the community of which he was so far-shining a member, says, "We at Athens are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes; we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness." But then remember that after all Athenian society rested on a basis of slavery. Athenian citizens were able to pursue their love of the beautiful, and their simplicity, and to cultivate their minds without loss of manliness, because the drudgery and hard work and rude service of society were performed by those who had no share in all these good things. With us, happily, it is very different. We are all more or less upon a level. Our object is—and it is that which in my opinion raises us infinitely above the Athenian level—to bring the Periclean ideas of beauty and simplicity and cultivation of the mind within the reach of those who do the drudgery and the service and rude work of the world. And it can be done—do not let us be afraid—it can be done without in the least degree impairing the skill of our handicraftsmen or the manliness of our national life. It can be done without blunting or numbing the practical energies of our people.

I know they say that if you meddle with literature you are less qualified to

take your part in practical affairs. You run a risk of being labelled a dreamer and a theorist. But, after all, if we take the very highest form of all practical energy—the governing of the country—all this talk is ludicrously untrue. I venture to say that in the present Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, there are three men at least who are perfectly capable of earning their bread as men of letters. In the late Government, besides the Prime Minister, there were also three men of letters, and I have never heard that those three were greater simpletons than their neighbours. There is a Commission now at work on a very important and abstruse subject. I am told that no one there displays so acute an intelligence of the difficulties that are to be met, and the important arguments that are brought forward, and the practical ends to be achieved, as the chairman of the Commission, who is not what is called a practical man, but a man of study, literature, theoretical speculation, and university training. Oh no, gentlemen, some of the best men of business in the country are men who have had the best collegian's equipment, and are the most accomplished bookmen.

It is true that we cannot bring to London with this movement, the indefinable charm that haunts the gray and venerable quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge. We cannot take you into the stately halls, the silent and venerable libraries, the solemn chapels, the studious old-world gardens. We cannot surround you with all those elevated memorials and sanctifying associations of scholars and poets, of saints and sages, that march in glorious procession through the ages, and make of Oxford and Cambridge a dream of music for the inward ear, and of delight for the contemplative eye. We cannot bring all that to you; but I hope, and I believe, it is the object of those who are more intimately connected with the society than I have been, that every partaker of the benefits of this society will feel himself and herself in living connection with those two famous centres, and feel conscious of the links that bind the modern to the older England. One of the most interesting facts mentioned in your report this year—and I am particularly interested in it for personal reasons—is that last winter four prizes of £10 each were offered in the Northumberland mining district, one each to the male and female student in every term who should take the highest place in the examination, in order to enable them to spend a month in Cambridge in the long vacation for the purpose of carrying on in the laboratories and museums the work in which they had been engaged in the winter at the local centre. That is not a step taken by our society; but Cambridge University has inspired and worked out the scheme, and I am not without hope that from London some of those who attend these classes may be able to go and have a taste of what Oxford and Cambridge are like. I like to think how poor scholars three or four hundred years ago used to flock to Oxford, regardless of cold, privation, and hardship, so that they might satisfy their hunger and thirst for knowledge. I like to think of them in connection with this movement. I like to think of them in connection with students like those miners in Northumberland, whom I know well, and who are mentioned in the report of the Cambridge Extension Society as, after a day's hard work in the pit, walking four or five miles through cold and darkness and rough roads to hear a lecture, and then walking back again the same four or five miles. You

must look for the same enthusiasm, the same hunger and thirst for knowledge, that presided over the foundation of the Universities many centuries ago, to carry on this work, to strengthen and stimulate men's faith in knowledge, their hopes from it, and their zeal for it.

The progress of the Society has been most remarkable. In 1876 there were, I find, five centres and seven courses. This year there are thirty-one centres and sixty courses. But to get a survey of this movement, you must look not only at London, but at the Oxford and Cambridge societies. You find there that Oxford has twenty-two centres and twenty-nine courses, and Cambridge has fifty centres and eighty courses. I say that the thought of all this activity, and all the good of every kind, social, moral, and intellectual, which is being done by means of it, is in the highest degree encouraging, and not only encouraging, but calculated to inspire in every man who has ever felt the love and thirst for knowledge, the deepest interest in the movement and the warmest wishes for its farther success.

Speaking now of the particular kind of knowledge of which I am going to say a few words—how does literature fare in these important operations? Last term out of fifty-seven courses in the Cambridge scheme there were ten on literature; out of thirty-one of our courses, seven were on literature. Well, I am bound to say I think that that position for literature in the scheme is very reasonably satisfactory. I have made some inquiries, since I knew that I was going to speak here, in the great popular centres of industry in the North and in Scotland as to the popularity of literature as a subject of teaching. I find very much what I should have expected. The professors all tell very much the same story. This is, that it is extremely hard to interest any considerable number of people in subjects that seem to have no direct bearing upon the practical work of everyday life. There is a disinclination to study literature for its own sake, or to study anything which does not seem to have a visible and direct influence upon the daily work of life. The nearest approach to a taste for literature is a certain demand for instruction in history with a little flavour of contemporary politics. In short, the demand for instruction in literature is strictly moderate. That is what men of experience tell me, and we have to recognise it. I cannot profess to be very much surprised. Mr. Goschen, when he spoke—I think in Manchester—some years ago, said there were three motives which might induce people to seek the higher education. First, to obtain greater knowledge for bread-winning purposes. From that point of view science would be most likely to feed the classes. Secondly, the improvement of one's knowledge of political economy, and history, and facts bearing upon the actual political work and life of the day. Thirdly,—and I am quite content to take Mr. Goschen's enumeration,—was the desire of knowledge as a luxury to brighten life and kindle thought. I am very much afraid that, in the ordinary temper of our people, and the ordinary mode of looking at life, the last of these motives savours a little of self-indulgence, and sentimentality, and other objectionable qualities. There is a great stir in the region of physical science at this moment, and it is, in my judgment, likely to take a chief and foremost place in the field of intellectual

activity. After the severity with which science was for so many ages treated by literature, I cannot wonder that science now retaliates, now mightily exalts herself, and thrusts literature down into the lower place. I only have to say on the relative claims of science and literature what the great Dr. Arnold said:—"If one might wish for impossibilities, I might then wish that my children might be well versed in physical science, but in due subordination to the fulness and freshness of their knowledge on moral subjects. This, however, I believe cannot be; wherefore, rather than have it the principal thing in my son's mind, I would gladly have him think that the sun went round the earth, and that the stars were so many spangles set in the bright blue firmament" (Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, ii. 31). I am glad to think that one may know something of these matters, and yet not believe that the sun goes round the earth. But of the two, I, for one, am not prepared to accept the rather enormous pretensions that are nowadays sometimes made for physical science as the be-all and end-all of education.

Next to this we know that there is a great stir on behalf of technical and commercial education. The special needs of our time and country compel us to pay a particular attention to this subject. Here knowledge is business, and we shall never hold our industrial pre-eminence, with all that hangs upon that pre-eminence, unless we push on technical and commercial education with all our might. But there is—and now I come nearer my subject—a third kind of knowledge which, too, in its own way is business. There is the cultivation of the sympathies and imagination, the quickening of the moral sensibilities, and the enlargement of the moral vision The great need in modern culture, which is scientific in method, rationalistic in spirit, and utilitarian in purpose, is to find some effective agency for cherishing within us the ideal. That is, I take it, the business and function of literature. Literature alone will not make a good citizen; it will not make a good man. History affords too many proofs that scholarship and learning by no means purge men of acrimony, of vanity, of arrogance, of a murderous tenacity about trifles. Mere scholarship and learning and the knowledge of books do not by any means arrest and dissolve all the travelling acids of the human system. Nor would I pretend for a moment that literature can be any substitute for life and action. Burke said, "What is the education of the generality of the world? Reading a parcel of books? No! Restraint and discipline, examples of virtue and of justice, these are what form the education of the world." That is profoundly true; it is life that is the great educator. But the parcel of books, if they are well chosen, reconcile us to this discipline; they interpret this virtue and justice; they awaken within us the diviner mind, and rouse us to a consciousness of what is best in others and ourselves.

As a matter of rude fact, there is much to make us question whether the spread of literature, as now understood, does awaken the diviner mind. The figures of the books that are taken out from public libraries are not all that we could wish. I am not going to inflict many figures on you, but there is one set of figures that distresses booklovers, I mean the enormous place that fiction occupies in the books taken out. In one great town in the North prose fiction forms 76 per cent of the books taken out. In another great town prose fiction

is 82 per cent; in a third 84 per cent; and in a fourth 67 per cent. I had the curiosity to see what happens in the libraries of the United States; and there —supposing the system of cataloguing and enumeration to be the same—they are a trifle more serious in their taste than we are; where our average is about 70 per cent, at a place like Chicago it is only about 60 per cent. In Scotland, too, it ought to be said that they have what I call a better average in respect to prose fiction. There is a larger demand for books called serious than in England. And I suspect, though I do not know, that one reason why there is in Scotland a greater demand for the more serious classes of literature than fiction, is that in the Scotch Universities there are what we have not in England—well-attended chairs of literature, systematically and methodically studied. Do not let it be supposed that I at all underrate the value of fiction. On the contrary, I think when a man has done a hard day's work, he can do nothing better than fall to and read the novels of Walter Scott or Miss Austen, or some of our living writers. I am rather a voracious reader of fiction myself. I do not, therefore, point to it as a reproach or as a source of discouragement, that fiction takes so large a place in the objects of literary interest. I only insist that it is much too large, and we should be better pleased if it sank to about 40 per cent, and what is classified as general literature rose from 13 to 25 per cent.

There are other complaints of literature as an object of interest in this country. I was reading the other day an essay by the late head of my old college at Oxford—a very learned and remarkable man—Mark Pattison, who was a booklover if ever there was one. Now, he complained that the bookseller's bill in the ordinary English middle class family is shamefully small. He thought it monstrous that a man who is earning £1000 a year should spend less than £1 a week on books — that is to say, less than a shilling in the pound per annum. Well, I know that Chancellors of the Exchequer take from us 8d. or 6d. in the pound, and I am not sure that they always use it as wisely as if they left us to spend it on books. Still, a shilling in the pound to be spent on books by a clerk who earns a couple of hundred pounds a year, or by a workman who earns a quarter of that sum, is rather more, I think, than can be reasonably expected. I do not believe for my part that a man really needs to have a very great many books. Pattison said that nobody who respected himself could have less than 1000 volumes. He pointed out that you can stack 1000 octavo volumes in a bookcase that shall be 13 ft. by 10 ft., and 6 inches deep, and that everybody has that space at disposal. Still the point is not that men should have a great many books, but that they should have the right ones, and that they should use those that they have. We may all agree in lamenting that there are so many houses—even some of considerable social pretension—where you will not find a good atlas, a good dictionary, or a good cyclopædia of reference. What is still more lamentable, in a good many more houses where these books are, they are never referred to or opened. That is a very discreditable fact, because I defy anybody to take up a copy of the *Times* newspaper—and I speak in the presence of gentlemen well up in all that is going on in the world—and not come upon something in it, upon which they would be wise to consult an atlas, dictionary, or cyclopædia of reference.

I do not think for a single moment that everybody is born with the ability for using books, for reading and studying literature. Certainly not everybody is born with the capacity of being a great scholar. All people are no more born great scholars like Gibbon and Bentley, than they are all born great musicians like Handel and Beethoven. What is much worse than that, many are born with the incapacity of reading, just as they are born with the incapacity of distinguishing one tune from another. To them I have nothing to say. Even the morning paper is too much for them. They can only skim the surface even of that. I go farther, and I frankly admit that the habit and power of reading with reflection, comprehension, and memory all alert and awake, does not come at once to the natural man any more than many other sovereign virtues come to that interesting creature. What I do submit to you and press upon you with great earnestness is, that it requires no preterhuman force of will in any young man or woman—unless household circumstances are unusually vexatious and unfavourable—to get at least half an hour out of a solid busy day for good and disinterested reading. Some will say that this is too much to expect, and the first persons to say it, I venture to predict, will be those who waste their time most. At any rate, if I cannot get half an hour, I will be content with a quarter. Now, in half an hour I fancy you can read fifteen or twenty pages of Burke; or you can read one of Wordsworth's masterpieces—say the lines on Tintern; or say, one-third—if a scholar, in the original, and if not, in a translation—of a book of the Iliad or the Æneid. I am not filling the half hour too full. But try for yourselves what you can read in half an hour. Then multiply the half hour by 365, and consider what treasures you might have laid by at the end of the year; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you for a lifetime.

I will not take up your time by explaining the various mechanical contrivances and aids to successful study. They are not to be despised by those who would extract the most from books. Many people think of knowledge as of money. They would like knowledge, but cannot face the perseverance and self-denial that go to the acquisition of it, as they go to the acquisition of money. The wise student will do most of his reading with a pen or a pencil in his hand. He will not shrink from the useful toil of making abstracts and summaries of what he is reading. Sir William Hamilton was a strong advocate for underscoring books of study. "Intelligent underlining," he said, "gave a kind of abstract of an important work, and by the use of different coloured inks to mark a difference of contents, and discriminate the doctrinal from the historical or illustrative elements of an argument or exposition, the abstract became an analysis very serviceable for ready reference" (Veitch's *Life of Hamilton*, 314, 392). This assumes, as Hamilton said, that the book to be operated on is your own, and perhaps is rather too elaborate a counsel of perfection for most of us. Again, some great men—Gibbon was one, and Daniel Webster was another, and the great Lord Strafford was a third—always before reading a book made a short, rough analysis of the questions which they expected to be answered in it, the additions to be made to their knowledge, and whither it would take them. I have sometimes tried that way of steadying and guiding attention; I have never done so without advantage; and I commend it to you. I need not tell

you that you will find that most books worth reading once are worth reading twice, and—what is most important of all—the masterpieces of literature are worth reading a thousand times. It is a great mistake to think that because you have read a masterpiece once or twice, or ten times, therefore you have done with it. Because it is a masterpiece, you ought to live with it, and make it part of your daily life. Another practice which I commend to you is that of keeping a common-place book, and transcribing into it what is striking and interesting and suggestive. And if you keep it wisely, as Locke has taught us, you will put every entry under a head, division, or sub-division.[1] This is an excellent practice for concentrating your thought on the passage and making you alive to its real point and significance.

Various correspondents have asked me to say something about those lists of a hundred books, that have been circulating through this universe within the last few months. I have examined some of these lists with considerable care, and whatever else may be said of them—and I speak of them with great deference and reserve, because men for whom I have a great regard have compiled them—they do not seem to me to be calculated either to create or satisfy a wise taste for literature in any very worthy sense. To fill a man with a hundred parcels of heterogeneous scraps from the *Mahabharata*, and the *Sheking*, down to *Pickwick* and *White's Selborne*, may pass the time, but I don't think it would strengthen or instruct or delight. For instance, it is a mistake to think that every book that has a great name in the history of books or of thought is worth reading. Some of the most famous books are least worth reading. Their fame was due to their doing something that needed in their day to be done. The work done, the virtue of the book expires. Again, I agree with those who say that the steady working down one of these lists would end in the manufacture of that obnoxious product—the prig. A prig has been defined as an animal that is overfed for its size. I think that these bewildering miscellanies would lead to an immense quantity of that kind of overfeeding. The object of reading is not to dip into everything that even wise men have ever written. In the words of one of the most winning writers of English that ever existed—Cardinal Newman—the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address, and expression. These are the objects of that intellectual perfection which a literary education is destined to give. I will not venture on a list of a hundred books, but will recommend you to one book well worthy of your attention. Those who are curious as to what they should read in the region of pure literature, will do well to peruse my friend Mr Frederic Harrison's volume, called *The Choice of Books*. You will find there as much wise thought, eloquently and brilliantly put, as in any volume of its size and on its subject, whether it be in the list of a hundred or not.

[1] "If I would put anything in my Common-place Book, I find out a head to which I may refer it. Each head ought to be some important and essential word to the matter in hand" (Locke's *Works*, iii. 308, ed. 1801). This is for indexing purposes, but it is worth while to go further and make a title for the passage extracted, indicating its pith and purport.

Let me pass to another topic. We are often asked whether it is best to study subjects, or authors, or books. Well, I think that is like most of the stock questions with which the perverse ingenuity of mankind torments itself. There is no universal and exclusive answer. It is idle. It was put to me that I should say something on it. My answer is a very plain one, and it is this. It is sometimes best to study books, sometimes authors, and sometimes subjects; but at all times it is best to study authors, subjects, and books in connection with one another. Whether you make your first approach from interest in an author or in a book, the fruit will be only half gathered if you leave off without new ideas and clearer lights both on the man and the matter. One of the noblest masterpieces in the literature of civil and political wisdom is to be found in Burke's three pieces on the American War—his speech on Taxation in 1774, on Conciliation in 1775, and his letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol in 1777. I can only repeat to you what I have been saying in print and out of it for a good many years, and what I believe more firmly as observation is enlarged by time and occasion, that these three pieces are the most perfect manual in all literature for the study of great affairs, whether for the purpose of knowledge or action. 'They are an example,' as I have said before now, 'an example without fault of all the qualities which the critic, whether a theorist or an actor, of great political situations should strive by night and by day to possess. If their subject were as remote as the quarrel between the Corinthians and Corcyra, or the war between Rome and the Allies, instead of a conflict to which the world owes the opportunity of the most important of political experiments, we should still have everything to learn from the author's treatment; the vigorous grasp of masses of compressed detail, the wide illumination from great principles of human experience, the strong and masculine feeling for the two great political ends of Justice and Freedom, the large and generous interpretation of expediency, the morality, the vision, the noble temper.' No student worthy of the name will lay aside these pieces, so admirable in their literary expression, so important for history, so rich in the lessons of civil wisdom, until he has found out something from other sources as to the circumstances from which such writings arose, and as to the man whose resplendent genius inspired them. There are great personalities like Burke who march through history with voices like a clarion trumpet and something like the glitter of swords in their hands. They are as interesting as their work. Contact with them warms and kindles the mind. You will not be content, after reading one of these pieces, without knowing the character and personality of the man who conceived it, and until you have spent an hour or two —and an hour or two will go a long way with Burke still fresh in your mind— over other compositions in political literature, over Bacon's civil pieces, or Machiavelli's *Prince*, and others in the same order of thought. That is my answer to the question whether you should study books, subjects, or authors. This points to the right answer to another question that is constantly asked. We are constantly asked whether desultory reading is among things lawful and permitted. May we browse at large in a library, as Johnson said, or is it forbidden to open a book without a definite aim and fixed expectations? I am for a compromise. If a man has once got his general point of view, if he has striven

with success to place himself at the centre, what follows is of less consequence. If he has got in his head a good map of the country, he may ramble at large with impunity. If he has once well and truly laid the foundations of a methodical, systematic habit of mind, what he reads will find its way to its proper place. If his intellect is in good order, he will find in every quarter something to assimilate and something that will nourish.

Now I am going to deal with another question, with which perhaps I ought to have started. What is literature? It has often been defined. Emerson says it is a record of the best thoughts. "By literature," says another author, I think Mr. Stopford Brooke, "we mean the written thoughts and feelings of intelligent men and women arranged in a way that shall give pleasure to the reader." A third account is that "the aim of a student of literature is to know the best that has been thought in the world." Definitions always appear to me in these things to be in the nature of vanity. I feel that the attempt to be compact in the definition of literature, ends in something that is rather meagre, partial, starved, and unsatisfactory. I turn to the answer given by a great French writer to a question not quite the same, viz. "What is a classic?" Literature consists of a whole body of classics in the true sense of the word, and a classic, as Saint Beauve defines him, is an "author who has enriched the human mind, who has really added to its treasure, who has got it to take a step farther; who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or penetrated to some eternal passion, in that heart of man where it seemed as though all were known and explored; who has produced his thought, or his observation, or his invention under some form, no matter what, so it be great, large, acute, and reasonable, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, yet a style which finds itself the style of everybody,—in a style that is at once new and antique, and is the contemporary of all the ages." At a single hearing you may not take all that in; but if you should have any opportunity of recurring to it you will find this a satisfactory, full, and instructive account of what is a classic, and will find in it a full and satisfactory account of what those who have thought most on literature hope to get from it, and most would desire to confer upon others by it. Literature consists of all the books—and they are not so many—where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form. My notion of the literary student is one who through books explores the strange voyages of man's moral reason, the impulses of the human heart, the chances and changes that have overtaken human ideals of virtue and happiness, of conduct and manners, and the shifting fortunes of great conceptions of truth and virtue. Poets, dramatists, humorists, satirists, masters of fiction, the great preachers, the character-writers, the maxim-writers, the great political orators—they are all literature in so far as they teach us to know man and to know human nature. This is what makes literature, rightly sifted and selected and rightly studied, not the mere elegant trifling that it is so often and so erroneously supposed to be, but a proper instrument for a systematic training of the imagination and sympathies, and of a genial and varied moral sensibility.

From this point of view let me remind you that books are not the products

of accident and caprice. As Goethe said, if you would understand an author, you must understand his age. The same thing is just as true of a book. If you would comprehend it, you must know the age. There is an order; there are causes and relations. There are relations between great compositions and the societies from which they have emerged. I would put it in this way to you, that just as the naturalist strives to understand and to explain the distribution of plants and animals over the surface of the globe, to connect their presence or their absence with the great geological, climatic, and oceanic changes, so the student of literature, if he be wise, undertakes an ordered and connected survey of ideas, of tastes, of sentiments, of imagination, of humour, of invention, as they affect and as they are affected by the ever changing experiences of human nature, and the manifold variations that time and circumstances are incessantly working in human society.

It is because I am possessed, and desire to see others possessed, by that conception of literary study, that I watch with the greatest sympathy and admiration the efforts of those who are striving so hard, and, I hope, so successfully, to bring the systematic and methodical study of our own literature, in connection with other literatures, among subjects for teaching and examination in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. I regard those efforts with the liveliest interest and sympathy. Everybody agrees that an educated man ought to have a general notion of the course of the great outward events of European history. So, too, an educated man ought have a general notion of the course of all those inward thoughts and moods which find their expression in literature. I think that in cultivating the study of literature, as I have rather laboriously endeavoured to define it, you will be cultivating the most important side of history. Knowledge of it gives stability and substance to character. It gives us a view of the ground we stand on. It gives us a solid backing of precedent and experience. It teaches us where we are. It protects us against imposture and surprise.

Before closing I should like to say one word upon the practice of composition. I have suffered, by the chance of life, very much from the practice of composition. It has been my lot, I suppose, to read more unpublished work than any one else in this room, and, I hope, in this city. There is an idea, and I venture to think, a very mistaken idea, that you cannot have a taste for literature unless you are yourself an author. I make bold entirely to demur to that proposition. It is practically most mischievous, and leads scores and even hundreds of people to waste their time in the most unprofitable manner that the wit of man can devise, on work in which they can no more achieve even the most moderate excellence than they can compose a Ninth Symphony or paint a Transfiguration. It is a terrible error to suppose that because you relish "Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted idyll, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie," therefore you have a call to run off to write bad verse at the Lakes or the Isle of Wight. I beseech you not all to turn to authorship. I will go further. I venture with all respect to those who are teachers of literature, to doubt the excellence and utility of the practice of over-much essay-writing and composition. I have very little faith in rules of style, though I have an unbounded

faith in the virtue of cultivating direct and precise expression. But you must carry on the operation inside the mind, and not merely by practising literary deportment on paper. It is not everybody who can command the mighty rhythm of the greatest masters of human speech. But every one can make reasonably sure that he knows what he means, and whether he has found the right word. These are internal operations, and are not forwarded by writing for writing's sake. I am strong for attention to expression, if that attention be exercised in the right way. It has been said a million times that the foundation of right expression in speech or writing is sincerity. It is as true now as it has ever been. Right expression is a part of character. As somebody has said, by learning to speak with precision, you learn to think with correctness; and firm and vigorous speech lies through the cultivation of high and noble sentiments. I think, as far as my observation has gone, that men will do better for reaching precision by studying carefully and with an open mind and a vigilant eye the great models of writing, than by excessive practice of writing on their own account.

Much might here be said on what is one of the most important of all the sides of literary study. I mean its effect as helping to preserve the dignity and the purity of the English language. That noble instrument has never been exposed to such dangers as those which beset it to-day. Domestic slang, scientific slang, pseudo-æsthetic affectations, hideous importations from American newspapers, all bear down with horrible force upon the glorious fabric which the genius of our race has reared. I will say nothing of my own on this pressing theme, but will read to you a passage of weight and authority from the greatest master of mighty and beautiful speech.

> "Whoever in a state," said Milton, "knows how wisely to form the manners of men and to rule them at home and in war with excellent institutes, him in the first place, above others, I should esteem worthy of all honour. But next to him the man who strives to establish in maxims and rules the method and habit of speaking and writing received from a good age of the nation, and, as it were, to fortify the same round with a kind of wall, the daring to overleap which let a law only short of that of Romulus be used to prevent. . . . The one, as I believe, supplies noble courage and intrepid counsels against an enemy invading the territory. The other takes to himself the task of extirpating and defeating, by means of a learned detective police of ears, and a light band of good authors, that barbarism which makes large inroads upon the minds of men, and is a destructive intestine enemy of genius. Nor is it to be considered of small consequence what language, pure or corrupt, a people has, or what is their customary degree of propriety in speaking it. . . . For, let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly-yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility? On the other hand, we have never heard that any empire, any state, did not at least flourish in a middling degree as long as its own liking and care for its language lasted."[1]

The probabilities are that we are now coming to an epoch, as it seems to me, of a quieter style. There have been—one of them, I am happy to think, still survives—in our generation three great giants of prose writing. There was, first of all, Carlyle, there was Macaulay, and there is Mr. Ruskin. These

[1] Letter to Bonmattei, from Florence, 1638.

are all giants, and they have the rights of giants. But I do not believe that a greater misfortune can befall the students who attend classes here, than that they should strive to write like any one of these three illustrious men. I think it is the worst thing that can happen to them. They can never attain to it. It is not everybody who can bend the bow of Ulysses, and most men only do themselves a mischief by trying to bend it. We are now on our way to a quieter style. I am not sorry for it. Truth is quiet. Milton's phrase ever lingers in our minds as one of imperishable beauty,—where he regrets that he is drawn by I know not what, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies. Moderation and judgment are more than the flash and the glitter even of the greatest genius. I hope that your professors of rhetoric will teach you to cultivate that golden art—the steadfast use of a language in which truth can be told; a speech that is strong by natural force, and not merely effective by declamation; an utterance without trick, without affectation, without mannerisms, and without any of that excessive ambition which overleaps itself as much in prose writing as it does in other things.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I will detain you no longer. I hope that I have made it clear that we conceive the end of education on its literary side to be to make a man and not a cyclopædia, to make a citizen and not a book of elegant extracts. Literature does not end with knowledge of forms, with inventories of books and authors, with finding the key of rhythm, with the varying measure of the stanza, or the changes from the involved and sonorous periods of the 17th century down to the *staccato* of the 19th century, or all the rest of the technicalities of scholarship. Do not think I contemn these. They are all good things to know, but they are not ends in themselves. The intelligent man, says Plato, will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and he will less value the others. Literature is one of the instruments, and one of the most powerful instruments, for forming character, for giving us men and women armed with reason, braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage, and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue of which it has been well said that they are the brightest ornaments of the mind of man. Bacon is right, as he generally is, when he bids us read not to contradict and refute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and to consider. Yes, let us read to weigh and to consider. In the times before us that promise or threaten deep political, economical, and social controversy, what we need to do is to induce our people to weigh and consider. We want them to cultivate energy without impatience, activity without restlessness, inflexibility without ill-humour. I am not going to preach to you any artificial stoicism. I am not going to preach to you any indifference to money, or to the pleasures of social intercourse, or to the esteem and good-will of our neighbours, or to any other of the consolations and the necessities of life. But, after all, the thing that matters most, both for happiness and for duty, is that we should habitually live with wise thoughts and right feelings. Literature helps us more than other studies to this most blessed companionship of wise thoughts and right feelings, and so I have taken this opportunity of earnestly commending it to your interest and care.

APPENDIX

THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION MOVEMENT

In a fourteenth-century College endowment deed at Cambridge, it is recorded how the College was founded out of a desire to see the number of students increased "to the end that knowledge, a pearl of great price, when they have found it and made it their own by instruction and study in the aforesaid University, may not be hidden under a bushel, but be spread abroad beyond the University, and thereby give light to them that walk in the dark byways of ignorance."

This broad and generous declaration breathes the very spirit that should infuse the educational policy of to-day, and linking the present with the past shows that the attempt to give a wider extension to University teaching is in full accord with the best traditions of olden time.

Purpose.—The purpose of the University Extension Scheme (Local Lectures Scheme) is to provide the means of higher education for persons of all classes, and of both sexes engaged in the regular occupations of life. It is in fact an attempt to solve the problem of how much of what the Universities do for their own students can be done for persons unable to go to a University.

The fundamental idea throughout has been education for busy people. The majority of the Courses have been given in the evening.

Origin and Extent.—It originated with the University of Cambridge. Subsequently, three or four years later, the "London Society for the Extension of University Teaching," was formed to carry on the work within the limits of the Metropolis, and a similar scheme was undertaken by Oxford, which, however, was for a time abandoned. Two years ago, however, the Oxford work was revived, and has since been carried on with vigour and success. In addition to this the University of Durham is associated with Cambridge in this work in Northumberland and Durham, while in a tentative and informal way courses of lectures on the University Extension plan have been given during last year in connection with Owens College, Manchester, and the Victoria University. Proposals are now being considered to form an inter-university extension scheme in Scotland in connection with all the Scottish Universities on the same lines as the Cambridge scheme. Finally the movement has even spread into Greater Britain, for the University of Sydney established, three months ago, a similar lecture scheme which gives promise of great success.

Grouping of Centres.—In the appended table statistics are given as to the work. The centres (including large towns, small towns, and even villages like the colliery villages in Northumberland) are associated into groups of three or four, and a lecturer is appointed to each group who lives in the district for the term, and gives a lecture a week at each of the centres under his charge. It is only by such co-operation of centres that sufficient work is secured to provide adequate remuneration for lecturers.

Method of Teaching.—One of the chief characteristics of the system is the method of teaching adopted in connection with it. It has been concisely described as follows by a student who had attended the lectures for several terms: "Any town or village which is prepared to provide an audience, and pay the necessary fees, can secure a course of twelve lectures on any subject taught in the University, by a lecturer who has been educated at the University, and who is specially fitted for lecturing work. A syllabus of the course is printed and put into the hands of students. This syllabus is a great help to persons not accustomed to note-taking. Questions are given on each lecture, and written answers can be sent in by any one, irrespective of age or sex. All the lectures, except the first, are preceded by a class, which lasts about an hour. In this class the students and the lecturer talk over the previous lecture.

The written answers are returned with such corrections as the lecturer deems necessary. At the end of the course an examination is held, and certificates are awarded to the successful candidates. These lectures are called University Extension Lectures."

SUCCESS OF THE WORK AMONG ARTISANS.—There can be no question that a great awakening of the intellectual life of the working classes is taking place, which has been much assisted and fostered in the north of England by the University Extension Scheme. The proofs of this mental awakening are abundant and unmistakable. The Northumberland miners have for several years, under great difficulties, obtained courses of University lectures on Political Economy, History, Mining, Geology, and other subjects. These courses have been given at twelve mining centres. The aggregate attendance in one session was about 1400, which means one in seventeen of the entire population. Many of the students walked miles along bad roads, after dark and in all sorts of weather, in order to attend the lectures, and some of them made pecuniary sacrifices in order to secure these educational advantages.

CHARACTER OF THE AUDIENCES.—Although mention is made here of the artisan class, the majority of the students who have attended the lectures have been busy people of the middle classes, especially tradespeople, clerks, and teachers in schools.

UNIVERSITY RECOGNITION.—The University of Cambridge has now obtained power to affiliate local centres where a course of study approved by the University and extending over three years is adopted. This opens the way for a large consolidation and development of the system. Students passing through the three years' course of study at an affiliated centre, and satisfying the requirements of the University in a preliminary examination, will, in addition to gaining the remission of a year's residence, be excused the Previous or "Little-go" examination, so that on entering the University they may proceed at once to work for their final honours examination, which they will be at liberty to take at the end of two instead of three academical years. They will also be entitled to style themselves "Students affiliated to the University of Cambridge."

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES.—Although the University Extension Scheme has been steadily gaining ground, the financial difficulties which have to be overcome offer serious obstacles to its more rapid advance. Nothing has been brought out more clearly by the experience of the past ten years than the fact that it is not the absence of a demand for, or of interest in, education which prevents a wider extension of the movement, but the difficulty of obtaining funds to meet the expenses.

TABLE

Showing the present position of the University Extension Movement in England, the figures being for one year and taken from the last published Reports.

	Number of Centres.	Number of Courses.	Total Number of Lectures given.	Number of Lecturers employed.	Amount paid to Lecturers in 1885-86.
*Cambridge . . .	47	80	944	19	£2804 4 2
Oxford	22	29	175	13	528 12 6
London Society for the Extension of University Teaching	31	60	696	25	1690 9 5
In informal connection with Owen's College and the Victoria University .	5	6	48	4	150 0 0
	105	175	1863	61	£5173 6 1

* The University of Durham is associated with Cambridge in the work in Northumberland and Durham.

The Cambridge and Oxford figures are for the year ending June 1886, and are considerably larger for the present session, 1886-87.

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