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ART. I. — *An Oration delivered before the Literary Societies of Dartmouth College, July 24, 1838.* By RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown. 1838. 8vo. pp. 30.

MR. EMERSON in this oration professes to discuss the subject of Literary Ethics. He speaks of the Resources, the Subject, and the Discipline of the Scholar.

The resources of the scholar are proportioned to his confidence in the intellect. They are coextensive with nature and truth. Yet can they never be his, unless claimed with an equal greatness of mind. He must behold with awe the infinitude and impersonality of the intellectual power; learn that it is not his, that it is not any man's; but the soul which made the world; that it is all accessible to him, and he, as its minister, may rightfully hold all things subordinate and answerable to it. He must feel that he stands in the world as its native king; that he may inhale the year as a vapor; and give a new order and scale to the grand events of history. He is the world; and the epochs and heroes of chronology are pictorial images in which his thoughts are told. So must the scholar feel. All things are his, and he is equal to all things,

nature and its laws, life and its deeds, the world and its events.

And not only must the scholar feel his right, but he must claim and exercise it. He must assert and maintain his spiritual independence; feel that he is a new man, and that the world into which he comes is not foreclosed; is not mortgaged to the opinions and usages of Europe, Asia, or Egypt. Every man, as to his spiritual independence, comes into a new world, and may roam as freely over it, as if he were the first born of time. Every man is an Adam in the Garden, and may summon all creatures before him, distribute them into their classes, and give them their names. No one is bound to follow the classifications, or to adopt the names given by his predecessors. Creation is born anew with every new-born soul; and each new-born soul may hear the sons of the morning singing with joy over a new created world. In plain terms, the whole field of thought and action are open to the scholar, and he must, to avail himself of his resources, feel that he comes into the world as free as the first born man; that he is bound by none of the opinions, or usages of those who have preceded him; that he has the right to read all nature with his own eyes; and is in duty bound to form his own creed, his own life-plan, his own system of the Universe.

The subject offered to the scholar is as broad as his resources. His subject to-day is the same that it was yesterday. Nothing has been exhausted; science is yet in its cradle; literature is to be written; and poetry has scarcely chanted its first song. The perpetual admonition of nature to us is, "The world is new, untried. Do not believe the past. I give you the Universe a virgin to-day."

Latin and English poetry sing us ever the praises of nature, and yet poetry has hitherto conversed with only the surface of things. Its chants reveal to us nothing of the handsome things of nature. The poet has not seen and felt for himself. All is yet undescribed, almost unattempted. The man who stands on

the sea-shore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange. Nature still awaits her poet, and listens to catch the strains of the voice that shall sing her praises worthily.

Civil history is yet open to the labors of the scholar. The past shall wear a new aspect as each new man of genius looks upon it. Since Niebuhr and Wolf, Roman and Greek history have been written anew. May not a new Niebuhr and Wolf be needed to re-write them? Is the story told, and its lesson fixed forever? Let a man of genius pronounce the name of the Pelasgi, of Athens, of the Etrurian, of the Roman people, and under what new aspect do we instantly behold them. Are there not still new aspects under which they may be seen? Who can say what shall be the new aspect under which the next man of genius shall reveal them? As in poetry and history, so in all other departments. There are few masters or none. Religion is yet to be settled on its fast foundations in the breast of man; and politics, and philosophy, and letters, and art. As yet, we have nothing but tendency and indication.

Such are the resources and the subject of the scholar. The world is his; but he must possess it, by putting himself into harmony with the constitution of things. He must be a solitary, laborious, modest, charitable soul. He must embrace solitude as a bride. He must have his glees and his glooms alone. His own estimate must be measure enough; his own praise reward enough for him. We live in the sun and on the surface of things, — a thin, plausible, superficial existence, and talk of muse and prophet, of art and creation. But out of our shallow and frivolous way of life how can greatness ever grow? We must go and be dumb; sit with our hands on our mouths a long Pythagorean lustrum; live in corners, and do chares, and suffer, and weep, and drudge, with eyes and hearts that love the Lord; by silence, seclusion,

austerity, pierce deep into the grandeur and secret of our being; and so diving, bring up out of secular darkness the sublimities of the moral constitution. How mean to go blazing, a gaudy butterfly, in fashionable or political saloons, the fool of society, the fool of notoriety, a topic for newspapers, a piece of the street, and forfeiting the real prerogative of the russet coat, the privacy, and the true and warm heart of the citizen?

But we give it up. We cannot analyze one of Mr. Emerson's discourses. He hardly ever has a leading thought, to which all the parts of his discourse are subordinate, which is clearly stated, systemetically drawn out, and logically enforced. He is a poet rather than a philosopher, — and not always true even to the laws of poetry. He must be read not for a work of art, which shall be perfect as a whole, but for the exquisite beauty of its details; not for any new or striking philosophical views, but for incidental remarks, frequent aphorisms, valuable hints, rich and original imagery and illustration. In all his productions, the decorations strike us more than the temple itself, and the shrine evidently surpasses the god. Nevertheless, he always selects an important topic for his discourses, and furnishes us subjects which well deserve our consideration. This is something.

In reading Mr. Emerson's various productions, and in listening to his lectures, we obtain the impression that he thinks very meanly of the past achievements of the human mind. No poet according to him has ever yet seen the sea-shore, or entered a grove; and nobody but himself has ever heard the "wild geese scream." As it regards American scholars, they have done nothing to redeem the pledges we made the world, when we adopted free institutions. American Literature can scarcely be said to have a being. Not that we want men who write very clever books, and make commendable verses which fill up the corner of a newspaper with much respectability, and look very decent in a scap-book, or lady's album; but

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of the higher literature, which addresses itself to the higher faculties of the soul, and is the out-speaking and the embodiment of the national life, we have produced nothing worth naming. And worse than all this, we seem to have no adequate conception of what American literature should be, and what it is capable of becoming. Why is this, and what is the remedy?

This is the question which is laboring in his mind, and which he appears to be striving to answer. One of the chief causes, he thinks, is our want of faith in the intellect. Wanting faith in the intellect, we attempt no great intellectual effort, and therefore produce nothing intellectually great. We have no faith that great things may be done, and therefore do not attempt to do great things. The remedy here is to increase and confirm our faith in the intellect, to learn that the intellectual power, which develops itself within us, is the power that made the world, and therefore infinite and inexhaustible.

Another cause is our want of confidence in ourselves. We regard ourselves as born in the dotage of the world, and out of work, except to treasure up in our memories, and mimic as we may in our lives, the sayings and doings of the giants, who lived long ago, when the world was in its prime. Genius has no vocation; poesy has sung her swan-song, philosophy is finished; the sciences are completed; creeds are all determined; opinions made up; miracles ended, and the book of prophecy is closed. Sad creatures are we! — born long ages too late, after all the work cut out by the Almighty for thought, fancy, imagination, genius, is completed! We are doomed to idleness, and by idleness to imbecility. The spiritual nature is useless, and must be discharged. We sink our humanity, and become mere prudent, calculating animals; content to labor for a little worldly wealth, to fill the belly or clothe the back; to flutter in a saloon, or to catch a breath of empty applause from brainless fellow mortals; to be complaisant and decorous; to provide for a commendable funeral, a showy coffin, and a respectable tombstone.

To remedy this evil, we must cease to look back to learn what has been, around to learn what is, and must look into ourselves to learn what we are, and what we can do. Man is man to-day as much as he was six thousand years ago; and every man is born with all that constitutes a man, with as rich endowments, and as creative a genius, in this age or country as in any other. Men in the past were great, were heroes. Be it so. Men in the present are also men, and may be great, may be heroes, if they will but act out the divinity that is slumbering in them. Our senses are as acute, our minds as penetrating, our bodies as finely moulded and as firmly knit, our limbs as active and as vigorous, and our souls as capable of swelling with noble thoughts, with rich affections, and of burning with as pure, as free, and intense a love for the true, the beautiful, and the good, as theirs who lived in the past, and before whose shadows we prostrate ourselves with such servile devotion. Nature is ever renewed, and is as fresh now, as when beheld by the divine bards of old; and is as open and as beautiful to us, as it was to them. We stand as near to God as did the prophets, who had "open vision" and conversed with him face to face; and we may be inspired, illuminated by his spirit, as well as they were. The whole spiritual world is ours. Truth, beauty, goodness, are not monopolized, foreclosed. God has not disinherited us, nor left us no employment. Every man has an indefeasible right to the Universe, and may labor in what part of it he pleases; in work which commends itself to his taste and genius; and be his own producer; and in his own way too. He need labor where others have labored, and be their imitators, not unless it be his choice. He may whistle his own tune, and sing his own song. Nobody has the right to insist on his obligation to imitate the tone or gestures of others. He may pitch his voice to his own key, and modulate it to his own ear. Plato, Bacon, Cousin, have philosophized; let who will philosophize also, and be a Plato, a Bacon, a Cousin, not by imitating them, but by

claiming and maintaining that right to philosophize for oneself, which they claimed. We must assert our spiritual independency, or never shall our minds act freely, and show forth the divine stuff they are made of. And without free, strong, and varied action, no living literature; no original creations; no works of art, worthy of the age, of the country, of man.

This may be true, if understood in strict reference to literature, and what are usually considered the higher walks of art and science; but we are not disposed to regard the American mind as strikingly deficient in originality and independence. We doubt if there ever was a country in which the people had more faith in the intellect, or less of servility to the mind of other ages or other countries. We may not be ready at once to adopt every new notion or new doctrine, which may be set forth in metaphysics, theology, morals, æsthetics; but we are by no means backward in considering and adopting everything, which promises to be an improvement in agriculture, manufactures, the mechanic arts, commerce, and navigation. In these matters we are not wanting in faith in intellect, nor are we slaves to routine, to established usage, to fixed opinions, to the teachings of other ages, other countries, other men. We create for ourselves, and our creations are by no means despicable. The American ship is not a servile copy of a foreign model. The Yankee exercises his own original genius in its construction; and he mans and works it in his own way. The Patent Office may bear witness that we are cunning to seek out many inventions. Our political institutions can hardly be termed a copy, a tradition, a reminiscence. They are original. In whatever direction the American mind is turned, it is self-confiding, original, creative. Hitherto it has been turned almost exclusively in a material direction; to the realization of progress in our external condition; not to the realization of progress in the moral and intellectual sciences. With us, genius has come forth into practical life; instead of the marble statue, it gives us the ship;

for a picture, it gives us a mule or jenny; for systems of metaphysics and ethics, it gives us railroads, canals, and steamboats; for the novel or the poem, it furnishes us with an improved system of legislation, ministries to the poor, and universal education; and for an elevated and living literature, it creates an elevated and living people. Genius has come out of the cloister and the university, and creates in the ship-yard and the smithy, reasons on 'change, and sings in the music of the axe, the hammer, and the loom, giving dignity to labor and the empire of the world to the laborer.

Shall we complain of this? Is this all low utilitarianism? Why is it that our minds have been carried away in an outward direction? In this world there is a reason, and usually a pretty good reason, for whatever is. Nothing is arbitrary, or the production of blind chance. It is not by accident that a people at a given epoch is wholly intent on improving its outward condition, all engrossed in useful labors; and at another epoch, equally intent on spiritual progress, and engrossed with the embellishments of life. It is true that we have not, as it concerns high literary matters, that full faith in intellect which may be desirable; and it is true, that in such matters, we depend too much on the taste, criticism, and opinions of others. But what then? Our first and most urgent work in this country was not the creation of an original literature. Give the whole American people that peculiar self-trust and faith in intellect, called for in the oration before us, and every man, woman, and child would be soaring into the regions of ideas, or seeking in vain a pathway through the wilds of imagination; the useful arts would be neglected; the fields would lie fallow; commerce would languish; manufactures would fail; silence would reign in the workshops; and nakedness and starvation cover the land. Nature ordains that we provide for the body, before we provide for the soul; that we obtain those things without which life is not possible, before we attempt life's embellishments.

We have a few misgivings about the propriety of this declamation, in which some of our scholars are beginning to indulge, against the utilitarian pursuits of our age and country. We are not quite sure but we ought to be very thankful for these pursuits. Perhaps this business world on which the scholar looks down, is fulfilling a higher mission than it or the scholar dreams of. We can hardly persuade ourselves, that the young man, who has no means of living but by his daily labor, can be applauded for neglecting all useful labor and devoting his whole time to playing the flute or the fiddle. Why not? Music is one of the fine arts, and to play the flute or the fiddle well is an elegant accomplishment; and why not then applaud the young man who devotes himself to it at the expense of his worldly fortunes? What is true of individuals, is true of nations. Let a nation provide for its physical well-being, let it provide for the easy subsistence of all its citizens, before it takes itself to fiddling or flute-playing.

We commenced in this country poor; we had little beside our hands, our wits, and our self-confidence. We had a savage world to subdue, and by our labors a wilderness to convert into a fruitful field. We had this to do also for the *whole* people. In the old world the mass of the people are drudges, and we know not but always must be drudges. There a favored few may study life's embellishments, because the drudges are at hand to furnish them with subsistence. But here, all must be drudges or none; so long as drudgery is necessary, all must drudge; and when a part enter into the paths of elegant literature, the mass must enter. If at any previous epoch in our history, a number of our people sufficiently large to secure success had engaged solely in literary pursuits, and labored exclusively for progress in the spiritual order, they must have imposed an extra amount of drudgery on the rest; for scholars, all spiritual as they would have us believe them, have bodies and stomachs, and require food and raiment, as well as the drudges them-

selves, and in general of a somewhat superior sort too; they would have established a literary caste, which, when it is a caste, is no better than a sacerdotal caste, or a military caste; divided the community by a broad and distinct line into two classes, of which one would have been regarded as altogether superior to the other. The scholars would have constituted a nobility; they would have glorified themselves,—boasted the dignity of their pursuits; and, speaking to the mind and passions of the people, they would have had all things pretty much in their own way. The drudges, marking the leisure and apparent ease of the scholars, their freedom from many of the cares, vexations, and hardships of ordinary life, would have regarded them as a privileged class, a superior order of beings;—and in return, they would have looked upon themselves as a doomed race, lying under the curse of God, bound to the dust they cultivated, and fated to live and die mere beasts of burden. Now this would have been at war with the mission of this country. A literary class, as such, we cannot tolerate. They who call for a literary class, and labor diligently to create one, were they not impotent, should be regarded as our worst enemies. Here, no man can safely be exempted from the ordinary duties of practical life. The scholar must be a man of business, and do his own share of the drudgery.

We confess, therefore, that we are beginning, of late, to look favorably on the business habits of our countrymen, and to declaim less and less against their money-getting propensities. It is, in fact, a real cause for gratitude to God, that our whole population has been carried away in a material direction, engaged in the accumulation of material wealth. Not that literature is unimportant, not that progress in the spiritual order is not in the last degree desirable and imperative; but because it is as desirable and as imperative in the case of all men, as in the case of a few; and because it can be possible in the case of all men, only on the condition that all men be placed in

such circumstances, as to their physical wants, that with moderate labor they can obtain a respectable subsistence. It was necessary then in the first instance, to cut down and clear away the eternal forest, to break the stubborn glebe, and convert the barren field into a garden, to build up our manufactures, to extend and perfect our commerce, and so to augment and distribute the wealth of the country, that all our citizens should have the requisite independence and leisure for the cultivation of their minds. And this could not have been done, had not our whole people been carried away in a material direction.

It is said, that the whole nation has been absorbed in the pursuit of wealth. We admit it, and rejoice that it has been so. It is a proof of the unity of our national life; that we all move together, feel the pulsations of one heart, and engage as one man in whatever is the work for the moment. It is also a proof that we are an earnest race, and that what we attempt, we attempt with our whole heart; that we throw our whole being into our work, and live and move but in it and for it. This is a noble trait of character. It is full of promise. It assures us that whatever the nation undertakes, it shall accomplish; that when it has provided for the most pressing wants of the body, and turned its attention to the creation of a literature, it shall bend its whole soul to it, and create a literature which shall deserve and receive the world's admiration. The very intensity with which we pursue wealth is full of hope. It proves that the pursuit of wealth can be only a temporary pursuit, that we must soon satisfy our material wants, and be ready to engage with similar intenseness in providing for the wants of the soul.

The pursuit of wealth, we are told again, is a low, degrading pursuit, proceeding from a mean and sordid ambition. It can in no sense compare with the elegant and ennobling pursuit of letters. The business man, counting dollars and cents, and balancing his losses and gains, is a low and servile being compared with

the scholar, whose soul is unbound, whose thoughts are free to roam over the universe, to commune with all nature, and to rise to close intimacy with the "first Good and first Fair." "The scholar is the favorite of Heaven and Earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men. His duties lead him directly into the holy ground, where other men's aspirations only point. His successes are occasions of the purest joy to all men. Eyes is he to the blind; feet is he to the lame." Is there no "optical illusion" in all this? Is there not here, in this estimate of the comparative dignity of literature and business, no want of independence? Is there no slavishness to what we have been taught, — to the mind of the past? What occasion is there for the men of letters to scorn the men of business? Is this business world as contemptible as the literary world would fain make us believe? Genius has not hesitated to weave a garland of fadeless flowers around the brows of ancient heroism, and later chivalry, and why should it hesitate to do the same for modern business, since there is many a merchant moved by as heroic and chivalric aspirations, as ever moved an ancient hero or a modern knight? We often suppose that the merchant is moved by mere love of gain, that his ruling motive is avarice; but we are greatly mistaken. The merchant fits out his ships with as lofty feelings, as those with which an ancient monarch led forth his armed followers to make conquests. He loves excitement; he has a taste for the adventurous; and he longs to act a conspicuous part in great events. The great and active man is in him; the soul of the chivalric knight is in him; and it is only in immense business calculations and business enterprises, that the spirit of the age allows him to act out what is in him. It is not the littleness, but the greatness, of his soul, that leads him to cover the ocean with his rich "argosies," and to lay every clime under contribution. Now we ask, wherein is this merchant-prince less honorable, less glorious, than the warrior-prince, around whom men of letters love to cluster, and whom

they conspire to deify? His enterprises are infinitely more serviceable to Humanity.

In all ages of the world, business pursuits have been regarded as ignoble. Kings and military chieftains, tyrants and "man-killers," royal and noble hunters, have passed for the representatives of God on earth; while the honest laborer has been accounted low and vulgar, a menial, a slave. Is not this contempt, which men of letters cast on the men of business, a tradition of the old contempt with which they looked upon all useful labor? Is it not a reminiscence of the times when all useful labor was performed by slaves, or by the ignorant and vulgar; and when the "better sort" lived in idleness and luxury, or engaged only in war or "manly sports?" If so, the business world has not yet succeeded in rendering labor perfectly honorable. The patent of its nobility bears a too recent date; the scholar remembers the time when it was plebeian and accounted vile. But does the scholar well to remember this? Has he a right to look down on the man of business? and is he aiding the cause of Humanity by sowing dissensions between those who labor to accumulate wealth for the body, and those who are seeking to create wealth for the soul? The scholar, in fact, ought to be chary of producing a disgust, a loathing for the practical duties of life, or of undervaluing those pursuits without which society and life must fail, or worse than fail. Instead of regarding the material improvements of society, efforts to perfect political institutions, and to increase the physical comforts of the people, as low, sordid, mercenary, he should elevate them to the rank of liberal pursuits. His mission is to ennoble business, and to make drudgery the path to honor, as it is to independence. He may, and he should, point out the abuses into which the business world falls, — the errors it commits, — the low standard of morals it adopts; but he should also seek to combine business with literature, — as we would practice with theory, — and make it felt to be not beneath the dig-

nity of the most learned man, the most accomplished scholar, to enter the arena of politics, to cultivate a farm, to manage a shop, to engage in manufactures, or commerce. The business world doubtless has its errors; its morality is of too low an order; its aims are not high enough; many of its practices are injurious to society; many of its members are purely selfish, and fall far below the standard of even its own morality; its politics are short-sighted and selfish, deficient in enlarged views and true policy; but nevertheless the more closely we examine it, the more we see it in all its bearings, the more shall we find in it to approve, and the better satisfied shall we be with the mission it is fulfilling.

Moreover, we believe the charge brought against the American people, of being exclusively devoted to money-getting, of being great lovers of money, is altogether too sweeping. The American people are far, very far, from being supreme lovers of money. They have no disposition to hoard: Not a native born miser can be met with in our whole country. We pursue wealth indeed to a great extent, but not as an end. We pursue it not for its own sake, but as a means; because we crave independence and would possess what wealth alone can purchase. The majority start in life poor, obliged to depend on their own exertions for the means of living. They are obliged, for a time at least, to struggle hard; they are made to feel the evils, the slights, the inconveniencies of poverty; the consideration, influence, ease, and pleasures of which it deprives them; and they seek with great earnestness, by all the means in their power, to escape it; to cease to be mere drudges, living and toiling but for the human animal; to gain independence, and a position by which they can take rank as men amongst men, and act a useful and respectable part in the affairs of society. What is there in this to blame? The end is surely honorable and elevated; and the most we can say is, that the means adopted are not the most appropriate, or that some few forget the end in the means. No doubt many

among us continue the pursuit of gain, long after the original reasons which induced them to adopt that pursuit have ceased to exist; but they do it not from the mere love of money, but from the force of habit; from the pleasure they find in doing to-day what they did yesterday; from the excitement, the employment afforded by their business exercises; and because they must, in order to enjoy themselves, do something, and there is nothing else they are fitted to do. Those among us who are most absorbed in money-getting, and who acquire wealth fastest, often spend it faster than they acquire it, proving thus that they value something else more than they do money. There is nothing miserly, sordid, mercenary in the American disposition. We are fond of show and consideration, anxious to be thought well of both at home and abroad, of holding a respectable social rank, and of gathering around us the comforts and elegances of civilized life; and so far as wealth can contribute to this end, we love and seek it; but no farther. The man who seems wholly absorbed in counting dollars and cents, and balancing his losses and gains, may on close inspection be found to be moved by an honorable ambition, and to be contributing not a little to the means of moral and intellectual progress.

This general and absorbing pursuit of wealth, which seems so low and mean to the man of letters, is, moreover, essential to the existence and success of the scholar. A poor people, a people sunk in the depths of poverty, all of whose thoughts and exertions are needed to gain a mere subsistence for the human animal, can never be expected to contribute anything to the cause of letters. Men must be taught to read, and have leisure to read and reflect, before they can either become scholars or the audience of scholars. This instruction and this leisure can be obtained only on the condition that there be a certain independence as to the means of living. The scholar cannot be far in advance of his countrymen, at least not far in advance of the class to which he ad-

dresses himself. He never appears alone. He may surpass his brethren; but there will be always many near him, who reach the goal almost as soon as he. He must have competitors. He must have an audience, a public. This is always an indispensable condition of his existence. Give the audience, and the speaker will present himself; the public, and the philosopher will bring forth his theories, the scholar unfold his treasures.

Now in this country the whole people must constitute the audience, the public. The scholar here must speak not to a clique, a coterie, but to the entire nation. The first thing to be done, then, is to make the whole nation a "fit audience." To talk of a "fit audience though few," betrays an entire ignorance of the age and the country. This is neither the age nor the country for scholars to consult only the tastes of scholars, and to address themselves only to a literary nobility. He who would be an American scholar must address himself to the whole American people; and his own attainments cannot far outrun the capacity of the masses to comprehend and relish his speech. It follows from this, that the first requisite to the scholar's success, in this country, is to make the whole nation a nation of readers, and to secure to the great mass of the people the leisure necessary to attend to the subjects on which the scholar discourses. The mere ability to read, however, is not enough. He who has worked all day with his hands, and sits down at night fatigued with the day's labor, and harassed in mind about the employment of the morrow, can hardly be expected to read and relish the profound and finished compositions of the true scholar. Now this very business world, against which we war, is the most active in teaching all to read, in providing the means of universal education. And how, without this general and absorbing devotion to money-getting, is the general wealth of the country to be sufficiently augmented to allow the leisure we have determined to be necessary?

We go still further; we say that the general attention to business in this country is itself favorable to the growth of mind, to moral, spiritual progress. We could verify this assertion by history, were we so disposed. But we ask, what can more tax the mind and call forth its powers than the pursuits of commerce? Can the merchant make his calculations, extend his business to all parts of the world, without mental exertion? All industrial employments require more or less of skill and science. The desire to become rich, and quickly rich, stimulates improvements, seeks out inventions, makes perpetual demands on science to abridge the process. Many an ordinary mechanic in our city makes use of a science that a Newton might have been proud to own, and employs a mental power equal to that which discovered the law of gravitation, and determined the laws of the Universe. The more intense the desire to accumulate wealth, the more use will be made of science; consequently the more employment will be given to mind, to intellect. The business world is in no sense inferior in active intellect to the world of letters; all the difference is in the application.

Nor is American literature, as it is, to be condemned outright. True, not much is to be said of our regular built books; but we have newspapers. Our newspapers are conducted for the great mass of the people, by men who come out immediately from the bosom of the people, and they of necessity express the sentiments of the people. They constitute, therefore, in the strictest sense of the word, a popular literature. And scattered through our newspapers and popular journals, may be found more fine writing, more true poetry, genuine eloquence, vigorous thought, original and comprehensive views, than can be found in the classics of either France or England. All the elements of the soul by turns are appealed to, and in turn find their expression; all subjects are discussed, and on all sides too; and often with a clearness and depth which leave little to be desired. Your most ordinary

newspaper not unfrequently throws you off an essay, that it would be impossible to match in the writings of Addison, Steele, or Johnson.

The great merit and wide circulation of our newspapers and periodicals, are doubtless the cause of the meagreness of our "book" literature. They are a ready channel through which he who thinks can communicate his thoughts to the public; and they therefore supersede the necessity, in some measure, of writing books. They answer the most urgent wants of the people, talk to the people on the topics on which they are thinking, discuss the subjects in which they feel an immediate interest; and therefore lessen the demand for more elaborate productions. At least this is their effect for the moment. But in the end they will increase the demand for more elaborate productions, by calling forth the ability and giving the preliminary information necessary for understanding and relishing them. The newspaper gives us a general view of all matters, and therefore prepares us for a special view of any particular matter. Not to insist then on the newspaper as affording in fact a definitive literature, we cannot fail to perceive that it must end in creating a taste for literature; in preparing a literature; in leading directly to its creation; and that so long as we sustain it, we can by no means be said to be doing nothing for literature.

It may be alleged that our newspaper literature, whatever its excellence, is so scattered, so mixed up with what is impure and noxious, and withal presented in so frail and perishing a form, that it can neither be made available nor preserved. But it is preserved; perhaps not on the shelves of the student's library, but in the hearts and intellects of the people; in the actions it prompts, and in the public measures, the adoption of which it secures. And this is enough. A literature is of no great value any farther than it becomes absorbed into the popular mind, and constitutes an integral part of the life of the people; and a literature which becomes so absorbed, can hardly be said to be unavailable.

But passing over all we have thus far said, admitting all that may be urged against the business pursuits of our countrymen, and the meagreness of American literature; we must still call in question the soundness of the doctrine set forth in Mr. Emerson's oration. This oration teaches us, if we understand it, that the creation of a literature is a thing entirely dependent on the individual will; that a man has nothing to do but to rise up and say, Be there produced a literature that shall command the world's homage, and forthwith it shall be. Now in point of fact, few things are less dependent on mere will or arbitrariness than literature. It is the expression and embodiment of the national life. Its character is not determined by this man or that, but by the national spirit. The time and manner of its creation are determined by as necessary and invariable laws, as the motions of the sun, the revolutions of the earth, the growth of a tree, or the blowing of a flower. It is not by accident that this man sings and that one philosophizes; that this song is sung, and this system of philosophy is brought out now and in this country; and that another song is sung and another system of philosophy is broached, at another time and in another country. The thing is predetermined by the spirit of the age and nation. It depended not on Homer alone to sing. He sung because his song was in him and would be uttered. The God moved, and he must needs give forth his oracle. The choice of his subject, and the manner of treating it, depended not alone on his individual will. It was given him by the belief in which he had been brought up, the education which he had received, the spirit, habits, beliefs, prejudices, tastes, cravings of the age and country in which he lived, or for which he sung. Had he been born at the Court of Augustus, or of Louis XIV., he had not sung the wrath of Achilles and prowess of Hector; or if he had, it would have been to listless ears. His song would have taken no hold on the affections, and would have died without an echo. He might even not have been a poet at all.

This notion, which some entertain, that a national literature is the creation of a few great men, is altogether fallacious. Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Milton, Spenser, Pope, and Johnson are not the creators of English literature; but they are themselves the creatures of the spirit of the English nation, and of their times. Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke are not the authors of English philosophy, they are but its interpreters. Great men do not make their age; they are its effect. They doubtless react on their age, and modify its character; but they owe their greatness not to their individuality, but to their harmony with their age, and to their power of embodying the spirit, the reigning views of their age and country. Know the great men of a country, and you know the country; not because the great men make it, but because they embody and interpret it. A great man is merely the glass which concentrates the rays of greatness scattered through the minds and hearts of the people; not the central sun from which they radiate. To obtain an elevated national literature, it is not necessary then to look to great men, or to call for distinguished scholars; but to appeal to the mass, wake up just sentiments, quicken elevated thoughts in them, and direct their attention to great and noble deeds; the literature will follow as a necessary consequence. When a national literature has been quickened in the national mind and heart, the great man is sure to appear as its organ, to give it utterance, form, embodiment. Before then his appearance is impossible.

We find also some difficulty in admitting the notion that the scholar must be a solitary soul, living apart and in himself alone; that he must shun the multitude and mingle never in the crowd, or if he mingle, never as one of the crowd; that to him the thronged mart and the peopled city must be a solitude; that he must commune only with his own thoughts, and study only the mysteries of his own being. We have no faith in this ascetic discipline. Its tendency is to concentrate the scholar entirely within himself, to make him a mere

individual, without connexions or sympathies with his race; and to make him utter his own individual life, not the life of the nation, much less the universal life of Humanity. He who retires into the solitude of his own being, in order to learn to speak, shall never find a companion to whom he can say, "How charming is this solitude!" He who disdains the people shall find the people scorning to be his audience. He who will not sympathize with the people in their sentiments and passions, their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their truths and prejudices, their good and bad, their weal and woe, shall gain no power over the mind or heart of his nation. He may prophesy, but it shall be in an unknown tongue; he may sing, but he shall catch no echo to his song; he may reason, but he shall find his arguments producing no conviction. This is the inflexible decree of God. We can make the people listen to us only so far as we are one of them. When God sent us a Redeemer, he did not make him of the seed of angels, but of the seed of Abraham. He gave him a human nature, made him a partaker of flesh and blood, in like manner as those he was to redeem were partakers of flesh and blood, so that he might be touched with a sense of human infirmities, sympathize with our weakness, and through sympathy redeem us. So he who would move the people, influence them for good or for evil, must have like passions with them; feel as they feel; crave what they crave; and resolve what they resolve. He must be their representative, their impersonation.

He who has no sympathies with the people, and who finds himself without popular influence, may console himself, doubtless, with the reflection that he is wiser than the people; that he is above and in advance of his age; that a few choice minds understand and appreciate him; and that a succeeding generation shall disentomb him, — posterity do him justice and dedicate a temple to his memory. Far be it from us to deprive any man of such consolation as this; but for ourselves, if we cannot succeed in commanding to

some extent the attention of our own age, we have no hope of succeeding better with a future and more advanced age. He who is neglected by his own age, is more likely to be below his age than above it. We recollect not an instance on record of remarkable posthumous literary fame, in opposition to the decision of the people during the man's life time. Posterity often reverses the judgments our own age renders in our favor; rarely, if ever, the judgments rendered against us. We speak not here of the judgments rendered by professional judges, but by the real, living, beating heart of the people. We therefore, notwithstanding we have experienced our full share of neglect, derive very little consolation from the hope that a coming age will do us better justice. Alas, it is that "better justice," we most dread. If we have failed to interest our own age, how can we hope to interest the age to come? Is it not as likely to be our fault as that of the age, that we do not reach its heart? We always distrust the extraordinary merits of those, who attribute their failures not to their defects, but to their excellences, to the fact that they are above the vulgar herd, and too profound to be comprehended, till the age has advanced and called into exercise greater and more varied intellectual powers. We are disposed to believe that of our scholars the greater part may attribute their failures to the fact, that they have drawn their inspirations from books, from the past, from a clique or coterie, and not from the present, not from the really living, moving, toiling and sweating, joying and sorrowing people around them. Did they disdain the people less, did they enter more into the feelings of the people, and regard themselves strictly as of the people, and as setting up for no superiority over them, they would find their success altogether more commensurate with their desires, their productions altogether more creditable to themselves, and deserving of immortality.

Moreover, we doubt whether we show our wisdom in making direct and conscious efforts to create an

American literature. Literature cannot come before its time. We cannot obtain the oracle before the Pythoness feels the God. Men must see and feel the truth before they can utter it. There must be a necessity upon them, before they will speak or write, at least before they will speak or write anything worth remembering. Literature is never to be sought as an end. We cannot conceive anything more ridiculous than for the leading minds of a nation to set out consciously, gravely, deliberately, to produce a national literature. A real national literature is always the spontaneous expression of the national life. As is the nation so will be its literature. Men, indeed, create it; not as an end, but as a means. It is never the direct object of their exertions, but a mere incident. Before they create it, they must feel a craving to do something to the accomplishment of which speaking and writing, poetry and eloquence, logic and philosophy are necessary as means. Their souls must be swelling with great thoughts — struggling for utterance; haunted by visions of beauty they are burning to realize; their hearts must be wedded to a great and noble cause they are ambitious to make prevail, a far-reaching truth they would set forth, a new moral, religious, or social principle they would bring out and make the basis of actual life, and to the success of which speech, the essay, the treatise, the song are indispensably necessary, before they can create a national literature.

We feel a deep and absorbing interest in this matter of American literature; we would see American scholars in the highest and best sense of the term; and we shall see them, for it is in the destiny of this country to produce them; but they will come not because we seek them, and they will be produced not in consequence of any specific discipline we may prescribe. They will come when there is a work for them to do, and in consequence of the fact that the people are every where struggling to perform that work. How eloquently that man speaks! His words are fitly

chosen; his periods are well balanced; his metaphors are appropriate and striking; his tones are sweet and kindling; for he is speaking on a subject in which his soul is absorbed; he has a cause he pleads, an idea he would communicate, a truth he would make men feel, an end he would carry. He is speaking out for truth, for justice, for liberty, for country, for God, for eternity; and Humanity opens wide her ears, and her mighty heart listens. So must it be with all men who aspire to contribute to a national literature.

The scholar must have an end to which his scholarship serves as a means. Mr. Emerson and his friends seem to us to forget this. Forgetfulness of this is the reigning vice of Goethe and Carlyle. They bid the scholar make all things subsidiary to himself. He must be an artist, his sole end is to produce a work of art. He must scorn to create for a purpose, to compel his genius to serve, to work for an end beyond the work itself. All this which is designed to dignify art is false, and tends to render art impossible. Did Phidias create but for the purpose of creating a statue? Was he not haunted by a vision of beauty which his soul burned to realize? Had the old Italian masters no end apart from and above that of making pictures? Did Homer sing merely that he might hear the sound of his own voice? Did Herodotus and Thucydides write but for the sake of writing, and Demosthenes and Cicero speak but for the purpose of producing inimitable specimens of art? Never yet has there appeared a noble work of art which came not from the artist's attempt to gain an end separate from that of producing a work of art. Always does the artist seek to affect the minds or the hearts of his like, to move, persuade, convince, please, instruct, or ennoble. To this end he chants a poem, composes a melody, laughs in a comedy, weeps in a tragedy, gives us an oration, a treatise, a picture, a statue, a temple. In all the masterpieces of ancient and modern literature, we see the artist has been in earnest, a real man, filled with an idea, wedded to some great cause, ambitious to gain

some end. Always has he found his inspiration in his cause, and his success may always be measured by the magnitude of that cause, and the ardor of his attachment to it.

American scholars we shall have; but only in proportion as the scholar weds himself to American principles, and becomes the interpreter of American life. A national literature, we have said, is the expression of the national life. It is the attempt to embody the great idea, or ideas, on which the nation is founded; and it proceeds from the vigorous and continued efforts of scholars to realize that idea, or those ideas, in practical life. The idea of this nation is that of democratic freedom, the equal rights of all men. No man, however learned he may be, however great in all the senses of greatness, viewed simply as an individual, who does not entertain this great idea, who does not love it, and struggle to realize it in all our social institutions, in our whole practical life, can be a contributor to American literature. We care not how much he may write; how rapid and extensive a sale his works may find; how beautifully in point of style they may be written; how much they may be praised in reviews, or admired in saloons; they shall not live and be placed among the national classics. They have no vitality for the nation, for they meet no great national want, satisfy no national craving.

In order to rear up American scholars, and produce a truly American literature, we would not do as the author of the oration before us, declaim against American literature as it is, against the servility, and want of originality and independence of the American mind; nor would we impose a specific discipline on the aspirants to scholarship. We would talk little about the want of freedom; we would not trouble ourselves at all about literature, as such. We would engage heart and soul in the great American work. We would make all the young men around us see and feel that there is here a great work, a glorious work, to be done. We would show them a work *they* can

do, and fire them with the zeal and energy to do it. We would present them a great and kindling cause to espouse; wake up in them a love for their like, make them see a divine worth in every brother man, long to raise up every man to the true position of a man, to secure the complete triumph of the democracy, and to enable every man to comprehend and respect himself, and be a man. If we can succeed in doing this, we can make them true scholars, and scholars who shall do honor to their country, and add glory to Humanity. When our educated men acquire faith in democratic institutions, and a love for the Christian doctrine of the brotherhood of the human race, we shall have scholars enough, and a literature which will disclose to the whole world the superiority of freedom over slavery.

Let Mr. Emerson, let all who have the honor of their country or of their race at heart, turn their whole attention to the work of convincing the educated and the fashionable, that democracy is worthy of their sincerest homage, and of making them feel the longing to labor in its ennobling cause; and then he and they may cease to be anxious as to the literary results. It will be because a man has felt with the American people, espoused their cause, bound himself to it for life or for death, time or eternity, that he becomes able to adorn American literature; not because he has lived apart, refused "to serve society," held lone reveries, and looked on sunsets, and sunrise. If he speak a word, "posterity shall not willingly let die," it will not be because he has prepared himself to speak, by a scholastic asceticism, but by loving his countrymen and sympathizing with them.