

## LITERATURE AS A CAREER.

IN the remarks which follow, it must be understood that I speak of things as they obtain in my country. And perhaps a few words of explanation may be accepted as regards the comparison which I have to make between literature as a profession and the other recognized professions. The distinguishing points about the recognized professions—including the church, the law, medicine, the services, education, and certain branches of science—are these: 1. The pay is regulated. In the services, in education, and in science it is by way of salary, and that not high; in law and medicine, by way of fixed fee and regulated scale of charges—those not high. So that though there are very great prizes in these professions, they are few in number. Those who enter the professions do so, for the most part, with a full knowledge that they are not to become rich. 2. The regulation of the pay means that there is no fighting for money, no ignoble cutting down and underselling. This is an enormous advantage. The professions are independent. 3. All professions are fenced about with a high wall. No one can enter without passing a severe series of examinations, the preparation for which costs a large sum of money and keeps the candidate at study till the age of twenty-one or twenty-two. 4. The prizes of professions—the honors—those of bishop, judge, solicitor-general, lord chancellor, general, the order of the Bath, a peerage—fall as a rule to the best men. 5. All the professions have their central body, which protects the interests of the craft, admits candidates on examination, excludes unworthy members and prohibits them from practising.

Now, with these facts before us for comparison, let us take the profession of letters: In the first place, any one who chooses may enter this profession. It is impossible to keep any one out. If the strictest examinations were devised in order to hedge it round, some young fellow in some country paper would write in disregard of them and would take the world by storm. It is anybody's profession—no college, institute, or academy can close its doors—all the world can come in. Again, in any other profession there is a common standard of good

work. In literature there is a kind—without doubt the highest kind—which pleases the refinement of five hundred or five thousand who possess the highest culture possible. That is a very rare kind. There are not a dozen living writers of our language who quite satisfy the standard of this small class. But there are lower standards—those which appeal to the better class, the class whose literary taste is not so keen, so subtle, as that of the first class, yet is sound and wholesome. And there are lower standards and lower still, till we reach the depths of the penny novelette, the journal which is a scrap-book, the halfpenny sheet of ballads. Yet it is all literature, the literature of the nation, the literature of the people, from highest to lowest. At no point on this ladder of printed sheets can one stop and say, “Here literature ends.”

The ever-open door of literature is sometimes considered an encouragement. In a sense it is. No one can be kept out. That seems a great thing. Every man who thinks he has a voice and a thing to say may say it if he pleases. Many think so daily and essay to speak, yet never get a hearing. In another sense it is a discouragement, because this very freedom makes it so much more difficult to consider literature as a profession. Formerly there was a school of prophets; the greatest attention was paid at that school to style, to the right balance of the verses, and to the rules of composition. Yet there was no safety for the school; every now and then a man came out of Gilead clothed in a sheepskin, and, without any attention at all to style and rules, led all the people after him. And so it has been ever since. Yet one would not break up that school. It did good work. Such a school might still do good work. The most important function of the French Academy has not been to make its dictionary, but to maintain literature on the same level as other liberal professions; to rank its followers with those who follow scholarship; to make its leaders *officially* the equals of judges, barristers, physicians. When we succeed in getting such an institution in Great Britain, we shall take the first step toward securing for literature a general recognition of its position as a profession. Other advantages may perhaps follow; this seems to me the first and the most important.

Meantime, anybody who can may enter the profession. Its followers are scattered units; there is no cohesion, no combination among them for their material interests; every man manages his own affairs for himself as best he can. That is to say, he cannot manage them at all, because the elements, the principles of his business have been

carefully concealed from him. He is helpless. Even in the rare cases of assured success he is absolutely helpless. The literary papers encourage this helplessness; they enlarge upon the generosity of publishers, ignoring the fact that this so-called "generosity" reduces the poet to the condition of a mendicant dependent on the doles of his master! A London publisher died the other day, and the papers have since been full of his "generosity" and his "liberality." Is it not wonderful that in a community of business men this sort of talk should still be continued? In what other line of intellectual work would a man submit without indignation to be considered a workman without rights, a mendicant, a helpless dependent, the mere recipient of bounty and charity? Can one figure the physician standing hat in hand before his patient—"Oh, sir, this is too much! You are indeed generous! Heaven itself will bless— Another shilling? The starting tear betrays the grateful heart." Or a barrister? Or a solicitor? Or a clergyman? It is ridiculous. Yet this is supposed to be the attitude of the man of letters, and any attempt on his part to get his affairs put upon a proper business basis is resented by the agent as if it were the greatest insult possible and as if the property belonged to him—indeed, he generally makes it his own—instead of to its creator.

All the other professions have their central college or their institute, which is maintained and endowed for the sole purpose of maintaining the interests of its own profession. What has the calling of letters? The "Royal Society of Literature" is a small decaying association which meets occasionally for the reading of papers. I suppose its own members would not claim for it that it does anything or tries to do anything at all for literature. The "Royal Literary Fund" relieves writers who are in difficulties; it is indeed doing invaluable work, but only in this direction. There is the "Society of Authors": until the last year or two it was a very small society, though with ambitious aims; it is now growing powerful and its aims are grown more ambitious. There are even hopes that this society will ultimately do for literature what the Inns of Court do for law and the College of Physicians does for the medical profession; that is to say, that it will be powerful enough to regulate by fixed principles the management of literary property; that it will be disgraceful for a man of letters not to be a member of the society; that by its influence literature in every branch will take its place as a recognized and honorable profession.

The greatest discouragement to literature at the present moment—

the cardinal discouragement—is the want of fixed principles as regards the management. This it is which makes every man who writes a book dread above all things making his own business arrangements. He does not know what the agreement should be; he hates to seem exorbitant and grasping; his very soul loathes the attitude of a mendicant. The other man, thoroughly experienced in these emotions, watches him, waits for his chance, speaks smooth things, hopes success, hints at great risks and dangers, suggests his own magnanimity in undertaking these risks, and at the right moment, the critical moment, proposes an arrangement by which he will get nine-tenths of the proceeds. The author signs, half-ashamed of himself, half-conscious of trickery, but above all things anxious to have his book published. When the accounts come in he is mad, but then it is too late. This little comedy is enacted with nearly every book that is published. The publisher considers nothing but the getting of the property into his own hands, on his own terms; the author, helpless and ignorant, yet suspicious and resentful, yields up his property as meekly as a cow yields up her milk. No worker in the world, not even the needlewoman, is more helpless, more ignorant, more cruelly sweated than the author. Therefore in a country, like Great Britain, of trade and business, that is, of enterprise, struggle, and battle; in a country, like ours, where honor of all kinds is rightly bestowed upon the victorious, contempt is the lot of the author. Contempt must indeed be the lot of those who are never victorious, whose spoils are always taken from them, who cannot combine, cannot fight, cannot defend their own property.

So far, it must be owned, we have not discovered many encouragements to the literary life. Let us continue to dwell a little longer upon the discouragements. This contempt of letters is often vehemently denied. Yet, in Great Britain, it exists deep down in the national heart—not contempt for the work, understand; if that were so, then, indeed, of all mankind we should be the most miserable. The contempt is for the men who produce that work. Consider, there grows up gradually, in the course of generations, for every profession, a spectre, a phantom, an image, with outlines more or less dim, yet in its general details plain to see and to understand. To the judge, the barrister, the solicitor, the physician, the general practitioner, to every kind of trade, belongs its own phantom. The newer lines of work—those of journalist, engineer, electrician, physicist—have not yet developed their spectres: they will gradually arise and take shape. What

is the spectre of the literary man? It is that of a creature wholly incapable of conducting business of any kind; one whose opinion on any subject is not worth anything; that of one not practical; who cannot be trusted; who is a fool as to his own affairs; who allows himself to be plundered and robbed, a creature in every relation of life foolish and contemptible, who yet produces things which the world loves to receive and to read. This man—which the world does not consider—this man so unpractical and so foolish, actually guides, leads, teaches, inspires, delights, admonishes the world; this man, whose opinion cannot be trusted, teaches the world what opinions it should hold. Yet it is all true: he is contemptible because he cannot manage his own affairs, and he cannot do this because that management has been carefully concealed from him hitherto by his own agent.

This contempt, I repeat, is denied as often as it is asserted. That is because the contempt for the workman is one thing and admiration for his work is another. Yet if any doubt the contempt, let them consider the language and ideas of leading articles on the subject; I say leading articles, because there is nothing that more vividly and more truly expresses the opinion of the day. They do not, it is true, call the writing tribe contemptible in so many words, but they do always speak of them as naturally dependent, not on their work, but on their publishers. For instance, there are few men in England of broader mind than the editor of the "Spectator." Yet even he, in a note written a few weeks ago, spoke of the publisher as formerly the patron of literature—which he never has been—and of that "old position" as "fine and gracious." That is to say, it is fine and gracious for the author to be a dependent and a mendicant! Now, this has always been, outside the literary life, the prevailing estimate.

Again, there happened five years ago a thing which Americans will hardly believe—I have mentioned it already, but I repeat it because it ought not to be forgotten: At the greatest national function which has ever been celebrated in England, when we rejoiced solemnly and thanked God for a reign of fifty years of unexampled progress—at this function, to which were invited representatives of every profession and almost every calling, *there was not invited one single man or woman of letters, as such.* Why? Because the official mind in every country, which always represents, measures, and illustrates the Philistinism of a country, has not yet risen to the consideration of literature as a profession, or of historians, essayists, poets, novelists, as persons worth regarding. To red tape and Bumble they

do not exist. In America such an omission would be impossible. Why, if it was made, the whole of the States, from Massachusetts to the newest Territory, would raise one consenting voice of reprobation; in France it would be impossible; in Germany, the mere possibility of such an insult to letters could not be so much as suggested. In no country could it be done except in Great Britain. And here it was done. And here no one perceived the omission. Here, so far as I know, not a single paper took up the thing. The contempt for letters could not be more signally shown, more clearly proved.

Well—but here is another and a more recent case. The other day a bust of Richard Jefferies, the latest of that little company of whom Gilbert White and Thoreau are leaders, was unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral, the mother church of his diocese. A little ecclesiastic ceremony was arranged; prayers were read; an address was delivered by the bishop and another by the dean. Now, this monument was given to the cathedral by a small number of Jefferies' admirers; there was a London committee to get together the money required. The committee and the greater number of the subscribers were literary men, some of them men of great eminence. It will hardly be believed that not a single man of letters was present on the occasion. Even the committee were not invited; *not a single man of letters was invited*. Yet the bishop and the dean are scholars and gentlemen. Why did they not invite the living *confrères* of Jefferies to assist in rendering this honor to their dead friend? Because these *confrères* were literary men. Because it never occurred to the functionaries of the cathedral that there was such a thing as a calling of literature. "O land of Philistia!" cries the American reader. Truly. Yet to change the name of Britannia to that of Philistia will not by itself mend matters.

Here, again, is another proof of official and national contempt for letters and calling. Let us once more remember that we must not confuse this contempt with contempt for the work produced, which does not exist, even in Great Britain. Rightly or wrongly, wisely or foolishly, we have in this country the institution of rank. There is hereditary rank from duke to baronet; there are also various orders of knighthood—the Garter, the Bath, the Thistle, St. Michael and St. George, the Star of India, the Knight Bachelor. These distinctions are supposed to be awarded for services to the state. They are, as a matter of fact, awarded in the most capricious and happy-go-lucky way possible. One man of science—only one—gets made a peer;

another, equally great, is offered the lowest order of knighthood, which he contemptuously refuses. A man makes vast sums in a brewery and is made a peer; another, equally rich, becomes a baronet. The mayor of a country town, the clerk of a city company, the greatest traveller of modern days, the greatest physician in the country, the greatest musician—are all alike rewarded by being made knight bachelors. The others—the superior orders—are reserved for the services, and especially for the army.

Now, I am not prepared, in an American magazine, to defend the institution of rank. But we must take things as they are. In every country where it exists, that is, in all European countries, those callings which are *outside* the pale of distinctions are regarded with a certain contempt. Thus while a man who has a big brewery may obtain a peerage, a man with a big draper's shop cannot hope even for a knighthood save in connection with civic honors. Literature, like retail trade, cobbling, and chimney-sweeping, is excluded rigorously from distinction. What is the nation, then, to think of literature as a calling? It is—it must be—as one worthy of no honor. Wealth may be regarded; lawyers, physicians, surgeons, architects, sculptors, painters, engineers, may all look for rank and distinction—but not literature. Tennyson, it is true, is a peer; but he is the lonely single example, he is the exception. Browning was never offered anything. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Swinburne—what has been offered to these great writers? Perhaps they would take nothing. That is quite another thing. The fact remains that the official mind has not conceived it possible that literature should be deemed worthy of such honors as the nation has to bestow. One of two things seems to follow: either the production of noble literature is not a service to the nation or the national honors are of no value.

A nation which professes to confer distinction upon its leading men, and refuses distinction to any one branch of service does its very best to bring contempt upon that branch. Who, for instance, would go into the Royal Engineers if that corps were excluded from the military orders, the rank, the titles, the honors that are freely bestowed upon the cavalry and the line? Would not this branch of the service fall into contempt? Yet that is exactly what is done to the literary branch of the service. Perhaps it would be best to abolish all rank. I only maintain that while rank is continued, to exclude any liberal profession is to insult and to degrade that profession in the eyes of the nation.

I have already elsewhere pointed out this absurdity; it has been received in a way which illustrates—one could not wish for a better illustration—the very things I maintain. The “Spectator,” for instance, in a long article assumed that I wanted all writers of distinction to be knighted. Observe that the mind of the writer of that article—in a paper recognized for its breadth and good sense—could not possibly rise above the lowest and least form of distinction. The writer could not conceive it possible that a man of letters should dare, should presume to hope, for more than an honor which would put him on the same level as a city sheriff. Of course, what I claimed was that literature, like law and the services, should be open to everything, even to the highest rank of the peerage. It is idle to talk about Englishmen not desiring rank; they do desire it. Many solid things go with rank; a newly-made baronet, for instance, is received everywhere with a certain consideration, and social consideration is a very real thing. Few Englishmen ever refuse rank except certain statesmen, in their own interests—Gladstone could not, every one feels, accept a peerage—but these cases are very, very few. There are certain old families which are proud of having refused titles for many hundreds of years, but these also are very few. Certain great scientific men have refused rank because the humble knighthood generally offered them is too ludicrous, and they do not desire hereditary rank, to which it is felt money should be attached. And most men of letters would certainly refuse the proffer of the lowest distinction. Yet it would be good for the nation that even by such an offer their services to the country should be recognized. Meantime the most remarkable point in the Victorian age will probably be the fact that the men who made the greatest glory of the age—the men of science and of literature—received no honor, no recognition, no encouragement, from the advisers of the Victorian court. They have been absolutely neglected.

Then again, to go back to the question of dollars. In other professions there are many great and solid prizes. A very successful lawyer may make ten thousand pounds a year; many lawyers make five or six thousand pounds a year. A very successful physician may make fifteen thousand pounds a year; many physicians make five or six thousand pounds a year. Of engineers it is notorious that many have made colossal fortunes; of architects, solicitors, accountants, actuaries, the same may be said. Even in the Church there are bishoprics, deaneries, canonries, and benefices which in comparison with the majority may be reckoned fat. There are thousands in every



profession to whom these prizes are absolutely unattainable: the rank and file remain without promotion because they lack the ability to rise. Professional success means ability of a special and unusual kind. But these prizes glorify the profession—even the profession of the Church—and they give it dignity in the eyes of the world, to whom a poorly remunerated calling is always more or less contemptible.

Now turn to the literary profession. It is, to begin with, in the popular estimation, regarded as a poor and beggarly trade. People cannot be persuaded that there is any income to be got out of it. They think of Johnson sending his publisher that famous note, "*Impransus*"; yet Johnson was actually poor for only a very brief space, only while his wife was in the country and he was in town. They remember Goldsmith's distresses, yet forget that Goldsmith was a spend-thrift and that he made while at his best over two thousand pounds a year. They think of Chatterton starving—but they forget that he was only a boy, ignorant of the town and its resources. They think of the "Royal Literary Fund," with its annual dinner and its annual appeal for the poor author. They think of Savage, Otway, and the whole tribe of starveling poets; but they forget the sufficiency, if not the affluence, that awaited Southey and Leigh Hunt and many others. They read how publishers have "generously" given this and that sum; the tale is taken up by the papers and is made the subject of leading articles. So that this literary calling, though the work produced may be almost divine, though it provide thought, teaching, leading, amusement, for the whole world, appears in the light of a company of hungry poets, all with their hats off before the man who has got the bag, imploring and beseeching and begging for "generosity."

Things are not quite so bad. Yet when, not long ago, a statement was made in the "Author" that there were fifty men and women in Great Britain and the States who were making a thousand pounds a year and upward by writing novels, the statement was received with derisive laughter. Fifty novelists making a thousand a year? Impossible! Preposterous! The statement, however, was made by one who knew what he was saying. It is a true statement; it represents the real prizes of the profession. There are in London alone, it is said, fifteen thousand people who in some branch or other exercise the literary profession. Fifty of them by writing novels make over a thousand pounds a year. What do the rest make? This brings us to the consideration of the modern literary life—what it is.

First of all, those who frankly live by writing have of late years received an immense enlargement of independence by the development of journalism. It is not too much to say that forty years ago almost the only papers for which scholars wrote were the "Times" and the newly founded "Saturday Review." We all remember the journalism depicted by Thackeray—Captain Shaldon in the debtor's prison: the critic who seizes the books and cuts up the author in a tavern. All that is changed. The editorials of the great journals in London and in the country are written by scholars and gentlemen; journalists of the better kind have their clubs and their suburban houses. It is reckoned a fortunate thing, as well as a most honorable thing, to occupy a position as leader-writer on a great daily. Then, again, there is another departure of quite recent date. The new fashion of journalism depends less upon its staff of regular leader-writers, with whom there is the danger that they may not keep abreast of the day, than upon the special papers invited by the editor, contributed and signed by men who happen to be authorities upon the subject. This opens up a great field. And the number of papers is simply enormous; there seems no end to them. Every trade, every profession, has its organ. The circulation of the weekly penny papers may be reckoned at many millions; all these papers vie with each other in getting the best fiction, the most striking articles possible; they offer a means of subsistence—not a mere pittance, but a handsome income—to hundreds of writers. Out of one office alone there is poured every week a mass of fiction representing as much bulk as an ordinary three-volume novel. The daily papers with their leading articles; the high-class weeklies, such as the "Saturday Review," the "Spectator," the "Athenæum," the "Guardian," the "Speaker," and a few others, with their leaders political and social and their reviews, give occupation to a large number of the best literary men and women; and the popular weeklies employ a much larger number of the rank and file.

As for the monthly magazines, they form also an additional staff, not a crutch, for the writer. In a little analysis undertaken a short time ago, I discovered that taking the seven leading magazines for the last three years, out of eight hundred articles, on all the topics which have occupied our thoughts during that time, three hundred and twenty, or two-fifths, were written on some point connected with the literary craft by writers who were also scholars. Further, that the number of these writers was about seventy, which represents an average of four

and a half papers by each writer during the three years. One cannot, therefore, live by writing for the monthlies. There are now, however, so many of these that if a man has anything to say he can reckon on finding some place where he will be allowed to speak.

All these papers, all these weekly journals, all these monthly magazines require editors. Scores of editors are wanted; most of them are not expected to give their whole time to their official posts. Thus many editors are men of letters engaged for part of the day in their own work. For instance, Thackeray edited the "Cornhill"; Mr. Leslie Stephen and Mr. James Payn have been his successors—both busy men of letters. Mr. Hepworth Dixon was for fifteen years editor of the "Athenæum"; Mr. Mowbray Morris edits "Macmillan"; Mr. Alfred Austin edits the "National"; Mr. Walter Pollock edits the "Saturday Review"; Mr. Hutton edits the "Spectator"; with many other instances. A literary man of the present day, therefore, may carry on all his literary work—all that he can do—for as many hours of the day as is good for him, together with as much journalistic work as will suffice to render him independent of his publisher. This is an enormous gain. Perhaps it has its dangers: the papers become exacting; they may grow too attractive; they may absorb a man so that he will produce little beyond his work for the Ephemerides. Here, again, the philosopher may remark that those men are few indeed whose original work may be considered so precious that the loss of it cannot be supplied.

The number of men who actually live by the production of original work, apart from journalism in any of its branches, is comparatively small. There are half a dozen dramatists; about a hundred novelists; a few successful writers of educational books, which are indeed a mine of wealth if one can succeed; and a few publishers' hacks. The greatest prizes are those of the dramatists. But the stage is a fortress very hard to take: many there are who sit down before it and presently retire vanquished. They console themselves, for the most part, with the reflection that their plays are too good for the theatre-goer. One would not disturb them in the belief. At the same time we may whisper that a good play—one which strikes the imagination, holds the audience, fills the house with tears and laughter, a strong play, a bold play, a skilful play—is never too good for any audience, not even the much-abused audience of a London playhouse.

There are over fifty novelists, as has been already stated, in

America and Great Britain whose income from the literary calling amounts to more than a thousand pounds a year. The most common method of procedure here is to sell the serial right first and to make a new arrangement for the volume form. Of course the new copyright act will make a great difference with novelists who are so happy as to have a following on both sides of the Atlantic. There is a broad step between these novelists and those whose hold of the public is less secure. There is a broader step still between the second rank of popularity and the third and those below it. The three-volume system has produced one very remarkable result: it allows the existence of some fifty writers whose novels nobody wants. These novels, quite harmless, very dull, only read by girls in dull and monotonous houses, come out in three volumes. The publishers pay the writers from fifty to a hundred pounds for each novel; they know exactly how many copies will be taken by the circulating libraries, and they do not print one copy more. Their own profit is about double the amount given to the author. If there were no circulating libraries, with their subscribers crying "Give! give!" these novels would not appear. We need not pretend to any virtuous indignation at these productions, because they die as soon as they have answered their little purpose of filling the book-box, and because their authors have neither the courage nor the originality to write anything that would do harm to anybody.

Far below this level is a depth—dark, black, terrible—into which sink those hapless wretches who have attempted to live by writing fiction without the natural aptitude and the necessary equipment of learning, experience, and observation. One of these has written for me a brief account of his present condition. He is, I believe, a man of forty, or perhaps less. He began life with a fine enthusiasm and soaring ambitions. He would be a great writer. Well, he had, I believe, a certain thin vein which if cultivated carefully might have led to something. But he was ignorant. He belonged to the ranks of clerks. He was educated in a school where the sons of clerks prepare for the life of clerks. They do not teach much in these schools—arithmetic, bookkeeping, a good hand, care in spelling, the proper manner of commencing and ending and addressing a letter, perhaps shorthand, a pretence at French, perhaps a nibbling at Latin, a little geography, less history—this was all that the boy learned. Then he became a clerk, and presently tried to become a novelist. Understand that he knew nothing—nothing at all—of the constitution, laws, order, pro-

fessions, society, manners and customs, universities, army, navy—in short, he knew nothing at all about his own country. But he began to write stories, all, really and truly, out of his own head. Presently, to his great unhappiness—which he did not at first suspect—his fervent prayers were answered to his own undoing, a way which the gods sometimes have. He sent a story to a certain editor, who accepted it and gave him a little advice about the *technique* of story-telling—of a kind. He had more stories accepted—and still more. Then he thought himself justified in giving up his clerkship and devoting his whole time to this weaving of conventional and unreal fiction for obscure magazines. In this occupation he has since continued. Indeed, he can do nothing else. It is an occupation in which there is cut-throat competition. He is married; he has children. He writes all day long and every day; he produces story after story; he is paid £2.10 for a story of twenty thousand words; he writes the penny “novelettes” that are sold by the ten thousand and bought by factory girls and servant girls. When things are desperate, he sends begging letters to men whose names he knows.

There would seem nothing lower or more miserable than the lot of those who try to earn a livelihood by the production of bad fiction. But there is a small—now rapidly decreasing—class more miserable still. It is the class which lives by manufacturing books not wanted. The maker of books—the man who first brought the name of author into contempt—is still with us, but he is rare. Heaven knows what first induced that man to make a book. He has no charm of style; he has neither fancy nor imagination nor wit nor humor; he cannot call up tears or laughter; he cannot arrest the attention; he never writes books that any human being cares to read; he spoils every subject which he touches; he bungles, blunders, and plunders. No one knows how or why he ever gets a commission to make any one of his books, but he does: he gets paid for every book—fifty pounds, seventy-five pounds, a hundred pounds. He is always impecunious; he lives from hand to mouth; the “Royal Literary Fund” regards him as a pensioner, so regular are his applications. When things are very hard, he, too, sends round the begging letter. Wretched, miserable, servile trade! You may see the few who remain in it at the British Museum reading-room. With the spread of education their occupation will vanish. The time has come when all the world can write at least as well as these poor denizens of Grub Street. The time has come when only those who have a thing to say will secure a hearing. \*

Once more—what are the encouragements to the literary life? You have seen there are apparently none. The first, the essential encouragement to any profession, that it should be independent of the employer—as the physician, the barrister, the solicitor, the architect, the beneficed clergyman, is independent—is wanting in the literary life. I believe we shall succeed in conferring this independence upon writers, in which case we shall render to literature a service greater than has ever yet been dreamed of or attempted, a service which shall at once lift the author to the same level as the lawyer or the physician. There are no great prizes or emoluments. That is true, but the prizes are substantial. A man who does good work will then be assured of the prizes that belong to him. There are but few who can afford to live by writing novels, plays, poems, essays, or the like. Most true: and whatever happens, the number must always remain comparatively few. But the literary life can be carried on with many other things—in the civil service, for instance—with any pursuit which does not demand all the thoughts during all the day. One of our living poets is a solicitor; two others are in the civil service; one of our living novelists is a grower of fruit for the London markets; another was for twenty years the secretary of a society. Of other successful writers the larger number are journalists. So let them continue. Far better, though it limit the production, than to join the crowd of those who have to besiege publishers' doors and to beg humbly for better terms.

No encouragements to the literary life? Of outside encouragement, none, none, none. Why, then, this rush, this competition, this ardent yearning, which draw thousands to try their fortune, year after year, with poem, novel, or with play? Hundreds, thousands of MSS. are on their travels at this moment from publisher to publisher. One recognizes them by the marks on the outside page. This number shows the hand of the house; this mark reveals the fact that another house has refused it, and so on. Why is it, if there are no encouragements? There are two reasons. The first, the simplest, the reason which accounts for ninety-nine out of every hundred, is that it seems, of all ways of making money, the easiest. Girls especially are gifted with the facile pen. They all want money; they want to be independent; they envy the girl who makes her own income and lives as she pleases. To write a novel seems the easiest way. They do write that novel; they glow with anticipation of success; then comes the time of bitterness and of disappointment. Needless to say, they

find that the way to fame and fortune is not so easy as it seems. The belief that money is easily made by literature—that is the chief reason why these thousands of pens in these islands are rushing, flying, driving across the everlasting plains—the endless prairie—of paper.

But it is not the only reason. There remains the man or woman born for the work. His gift may be small, his vein slender. But he is a man of letters from his youth upward. The encouragement to him is that writing is the breath of his life; he must say what is in him; he has a message of some kind; he has a power of some kind; if he cannot preach he can paint; language to him is a force, an instrument, a vehicle, unknown to the vulgar; words and phrases are living things; a happy turn rejoices him; an unexpected phrase fills him with joy. He knows the meaning of style and form—happy if he is not carried by love of style so far as to forget that style is nothing if there is nothing behind it—as fine clothes are nothing without a living body beneath them. To him writing is a continual joy when, which is not always, he can command his thoughts and force them under the yoke of language. This exercise of force makes writing a struggle as well as a joy; there is battle in it; there is defeat; there is victory in it.

The first and greatest encouragement of the literary life at the present moment is the joy of it. The next encouragement is the honor of success. We have dwelt so much upon the contempt of literature that this may seem a contradiction. It is not, however, any contradiction. Side by side with the general contempt for the literary class there exists a profound admiration—nay, a love—for the man who has succeeded. Not because he has succeeded, but because, in order to succeed as a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, even an essayist, one must touch the hearts of people. We love—we cannot choose but love—the man or the woman who can touch our hearts. Go to the church, listen to the scholarship, the sound doctrine, the logic, of the learned divine in the pulpit. You listen and you go away; you have learned something, perhaps, but you feel no gratitude to the teacher. In another pulpit hard by there stands a man who speaks from his heart. The eyes of the people are riveted upon him; they are motionless; he has carried them out of themselves: when they go home their hearts glow within them, their cheeks burn. Which of the two preachers does the world love? It is so with actors, with orators, with all who teach or preach or play or amuse. The world loves the successful man because he commands their love. He touches

their hearts. Therefore, while they despise the helpless dependent, the uncertain, unpractical trade of letters, they love the man of letters who can move them. Perhaps the two encouragements are powerful enough to counterbalance all the discouragements.

To conclude, the discouragements are all of such a nature that they may be remedied. It is quite possible to place the man of letters on the same footing of independence as is now occupied by the barrister and the physician. It is quite possible to create such a body, not a servile copy of the French Academy, as shall exercise a restraining influence upon extravagance and a certain guiding influence in taste. This done, recognition by the state will naturally follow. One does not crave for the ordinary titles and distinctions. Science is ennobled by "Fellowship of the Royal Society." Literature might perhaps be most fitly ennobled in the same way. The defence and protection of authors by some central body must also be provided—this has already been attempted, with a fair measure of success. All these things are possible and practicable. All, we hope, will be undertaken; all, we hope, will be carried through by men and women of letters acting together as a company, a guild, a profession, an association.

WALTER BESANT.



## AN AMERICAN VIEW OF THE IRISH QUESTION.

THE very closeness of our relations with England has been a cause of friction between us, our very similarities have produced jealousies; but notwithstanding these jealousies and this friction, I do not believe the mass of Americans desire to have the British Empire broken up and her influence in Europe lessened. We like to criticise her, we like to ridicule those who indiscriminately imitate everything that is English; but after all there are certain fundamental qualities and instincts of the race common to us both on which we pride ourselves, on which we build our hope of national continuance, and which we wish to see extended in the world. There is a certain sense of justice and fair play, a love of individual freedom exceeding the love of present ease and comfort, and a detestation of unfairness, from which have sprung the specific institutions of the *habeas-corpus* acts, public trial by jury and other rights of the accused, the freedom of the press and public debate, the right of petition and the consent of the governed which Americans took with them when they came to this land and have cherished ever since as their fondest possessions.

We are cousins by blood. The population of the United States has a much larger percentage of Englishmen and descendants of Englishmen than of any other race. At the adoption of our Constitution the inhabitants were almost wholly of English and Scotch descent. The few Irish were not Catholic Celts, but Scoto-Irish Presbyterians from Ulster. From 1787 to 1847 there was very little immigration into the United States, not exceeding a million in all, and of that England furnished a good portion. Out of a total white population of 43,400,000 in 1880, undoubtedly 32,600,000, or about 75 per cent, were natives, born of native parents or those born of British and British-American parents. The Irish immigrants and children of Irish make up but a trifle over ten per cent of the white population. The good feeling *au fond*, the cousinly sentiments, are, it seems to me, mutual. During our Civil War we had, it is true, to bear many galling things from part of the English press and from persons high in political and social life, even now hard to overlook; but, on the other hand, we do not forget that the large majority of the English people favored the