

largely; but every great act springs from an ideal, and to understand this we must read his literature, where we find his ideals recorded. When we read a history of the Anglo-Saxons, for instance, we learn that they were sea rovers, pirates, explorers, great eaters and drinkers; and we know something of their hovels and habits, and the lands which they harried and plundered. All that is interesting; but it does not tell us what most we want to know about these old ancestors of ours,—not only what they did, but what they thought and felt; how they looked on life and death; what they loved, what they feared, and what they revered in God and man. Then we turn from history to the literature which they themselves produced, and instantly we become acquainted. These hardy people were not simply fighters and freebooters; they were men like ourselves; their emotions awaken instant response in the souls of their descendants. At the words of their gleemen we thrill again to their wild love of freedom and the open sea; we grow tender at their love of home, and patriotic at their deathless loyalty to their chief, whom they chose for themselves and hoisted on their shields in symbol of his leadership. Once more we grow respectful in the presence of pure womanhood, or melancholy before the sorrows and problems of life, or humbly confident, looking up to the God whom they dared to call the Allfather. All these and many more intensely real emotions pass through our souls as we read the few shining fragments of verses that the jealous ages have left us.

It is so with any age or people. To understand them we must read not simply their history, which records their deeds, but their literature, which records the dreams that made their deeds possible. So Aristotle was profoundly right when he said that "poetry is more serious and philosophical than history"; and Goethe, when he explained literature as "the humanization of the whole world."

Importance of Literature. It is a curious and prevalent opinion that literature, like all art, is a mere play of imagination, pleasing enough, like a new novel, but without any serious or practical importance. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Literature preserves the ideals of a people; and ideals—love, faith, duty, friendship, freedom, reverence—are the part of human life most worthy of preservation. The Greeks were a marvelous people; yet of all their mighty works we cherish only a few ideals,—ideals of beauty in perishable stone, and ideals of truth in imperishable prose and poetry. It was simply the ideals of the Greeks and Hebrews and Romans, preserved in their literature, which made them what they were, and which determined their value to future generations. Our democracy, the boast of all English-speaking nations, is a dream; not the doubtful and sometimes disheartening spectacle presented in our legislative halls, but the lovely and immortal ideal of a free and equal manhood, preserved as a most precious heritage in every great literature from the Greeks to the Anglo-Saxons. All our arts, our sciences, even our inventions are founded squarely upon ideals; for under every