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**Title:** "Deficiency of Literature," by Wilson L. Spottswood

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very well spoken.

Deficiency of Literature.

By

Wilson Lee Spottswood.

Carlisle.

## Deficiency of Literature.

We are ever inclined to be restless. Hence with truth has it been remarked that "the world is like a number of persons in a fever". Man is never satisfied with his present attainments in wealth; though his possessions may be as extensive as some vast empire, whose hills are covered with living herds, and whose valleys are overspread with bleating flocks, which the shepherd cannot number.

Power cannot satisfy the mind. The soul of the monarch is ever restless - ever anxious to extend farther and farther the limits of his empire, until he has subdued some disaffected province, or brought under his government some wealthy island - until his banner has waved in triumph over the battlements of some populous city, or some distant haughty king has felt the force of his arms. Should he even extend his conquests over the world, compelling nation after nation to own him conqueror, and princes and potentates to do him reverence; yet like Alexander the Great he would weep for other worlds to conquer.

Glory is alike unsatisfying. The experience of ages - the history of the world ought to convince us that the most extensive reputation cannot satisfy the mind. The warrior after all his valiant deeds - his battles fought, and victories won, goes down to the grave convinced of the fact

that he might have done something for his reputation  
which he has not achieved. The literary man, often char-  
med by the light, which streams from the temple of fame  
(as the wearied traveller by the side of light on the imp-  
ending cloud) nerves his mind with more than its acc-  
ustomed vigour - calls into lively exercise all its powers.  
But he finds, on gaining the summit for which he so ard-  
ently longed, that he is disappointed in his expectations.  
He does not experience that contentment of mind for which  
he looked. He is still desirous to arise higher - that he  
may gain new laurels. And even at the hour of death,  
perhaps, he thinks of some latent discovery - some una-  
ttempted theme. We must not be understood utterly to  
condemn the love of literary fame. There is something  
aspiring in the soul of man, which cannot brook the  
idea of forgetfulness, but which excites in him an ardent  
desire to live in the praise of his fellow men, and when dead  
to be embalmed in their memory. When the love of fame  
is guided by the influence of truth, and restrained <sup>to the limits</sup> within  
, which God and reason design that it should act, it can-  
not be condemned. But this we assert that pleasure  
and satisfaction, founded on literary fame, as a basis,  
are as perishable as the tints which appear on the wing of  
an insect. There are always circumstances which render  
this strictly true. The aspirant for fame may be striped  
of his honours by a more successful rival. His thoughts

and sentiments may not be congenial with those of his fellow-men, and may not produce the impression, which ~~was~~ he designed they should. His merits may be misjudged, either from the influence of prejudice, or the spirit of the age. Death may rob him of his laurels. Men may talk as they please, yet it is a fact that thoughts of death will intrude - that feelings will seize the scholar's mind, similar to those, which crossed the breast of the mighty Terres, as he sat on an eminence and surveyed the thousands, that passed before him in gaudy array.

Literature is not proof against the disappointments of life. Sind other cases so in this the efforts of the literary man are often followed by disappointment. Take the case of Milton. With a genius extraordinary, with powers capable of "displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful", he chose a theme upon which his imagination cultivated and refined might have unlimited scope, and his great inventive powers an opportunity to act freely. Late and early he wandered around the confines of Eden - he explored its inmost recesses - he examined all its beauties. In difficulties and blindness he laboured - and in the fullness of time he produced "Paradise Lost", "which is not the greatest of heroic poems only because it is not the first." What was the result of his labour? He was disappointed! - His merits were neglected - his fame long obscured, and his poem late received.

Literature is often, to some extent, a source of pleasure and satisfaction. The winding up of the characters and scenes of a novel is often attended with pleasant emotions. There is a pleasure in the conception of some great truth, some original thought, some noble image. When old age has settled on the head - when the feelings, the joys and gay dreams of youth have fled forever, and life is but a wintry waste, where not a flower blooms; when the outward senses become dull and languid, and refuse to perform their ordinary offices; when the mind has nothing before it, on which to engage its attention, it must as a consequence turn inward upon itself. Under such circumstances the imagination of that individual, whose mind has been ~~stored~~ cultivated and stored with knowledge, can transport him to other scenes and other days - his memory can draw from his well-filled mental storehouse themes on which to muse. He can revel in the fields of thought - he can experience satisfaction. But there is a time when literature cannot produce this result - the hour of Death!

In another point of view do we observe the deficiency of literature. It is insufficient to form a suitable character for man. We may argue the truth of this from the fact that many - very many of those, who have deeply drunk at the well of science, have exhibited in their lives, conversation, and writing the most depraved characters. How numerous is that class of literary men, who from the pride of self-understanding, have refused to bend their lofty

minds to the comprehension of Christianity, but who have shown themselves utterly innocent of any knowledge of its plain and simple truths. There are others, who, though comprehending its truths, have assailed them in all the walks of life - who have disseminated far and wide their pernicious principles: so that King on his throne, and the peasant in his cottage have fearfully drank of their poisonous drafts. Men of letters have entered the garden of Eden, already a wreck, and plucked with a stealthy hand the last-lingering flower that bloomed on the cheerless waste. They have siled the tomb of the only ray of light, that could penetrate its dark recesses. They have written on the green grave that death is an eternal sleep. Their only desire seems to have been to cultivate the intellect, regard less of the moral principles and affections <sup>of the soul</sup>. So that while their minds have been like fruitful fields, their hearts have been like barren wastes. They have passed through life applauded for their talents, but cursed for their crimes. They have sunk into the grave - and the monument, which their talents and learning have reared, alone perpetuates their memory. But recollection thus suggested is not so desirable as that which Virtue produces - it is not so lasting. When the storms of life shall have swept from its base the monument of the one - the other shall stand firm and unshaken. Yes, when the name of a Byron shall be forgotten, or only remembered in connection with his crimes - the name of a Howard - of a Colburn - shall be recollected with pleasing emotions.

Commencement Oration of Wilson Lee Spottswood, Class of 1841  
Transcribed by Tristan Deveney, May 2008  
Edited by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, June 2008

### Deficiency of Literature

We are ever inclined to be restless. Hence with truth has it been remarked that “the world is like a number of [one word illegible] in a fever.” Man is never satisfied with his present attainments in wealth; though his possessions may be as extensive as some vast empire. Where hills are covering with lowing herds, and whose valleys are overspread with bleating flocks, which the shepard cannot number.

Power cannot satisfy the mind. The soul of the monarch is ever restless ever anxious to extend farther and farther the limit of his empire until he has subdued some disaffected province, or brought under his government some wealthy inland – until his banner has waved in triumph over the battlements of some populous city, or some distant haughty king has felt the force of his arms. Should he even extend his conquests over the world, compelling nation after nation to own him conqueror, and prince and potentates to do him reverence; yet like Alexander the Great he would weep for other worlds to conquer.

Fame is alike unsatisfying. The experience of ages – the history of the world ought to convince as that the most extensive reputation cannot satisfy the mind. The warrior after all his valiant deeds – his battles fought, and victories won, goes down to the grave convinced of the fact

that he might have done something for his reputation which he has not achieved. The literary man, often [one word illegible – charred?] by the light, which streams from the temple of Fame as the wearied traveller by the sake of light on the impending land, moves his mind with more than its accustomed rigour – calls into lively exercise all its powers. But he finds on gaining the summit for which he so ardently longed, that he is disappointed in his expectations. He does not experience that contentment of mind for which he looked. He is still desirous to arise higher – that he may gain new laurels. And even at the hour of death, perhaps, he thinks of some latent discovery – some unattempted theme. He must not be understood utterly to condemn the love of literary fame. There is something aspiring in the soul of man, which cannot brook the idea of forgetfulness but which excites in him an ardent desire to live in the praise of his fellow men, and when dead to be embalmed in their memory. When the love of Fame is guided by the influence of truth, and restrain within the limits which god and reason design that it should act, it cannot be condemned. But this we assert that pleasure and satisfaction, founded on literary fame, as a basis, are as perishable as the tints which appear on the wing of an insect. There are always circumstances which render this strictly true. The aspirant for fame maybe striped of his honours by a more successful rival. His thoughts

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minds to the comprehension of Christianity, but who have shown themselves utterly innocent of any knowledge of its plain and simple truths. There are others, who, though comprehending its truths, have assailed them in all the walks of life – who have disseminated far and wide their pernicious principles: so that King on his throne, and the peasant in his cottage have fearfully drank of their poisonous drafts. Men of letters have entered the garden of Eden, already a wreck, and plucked with a stealthy hand the last-lingering flower that bloomed on the cheerless waste. They have robbed the tomb of the

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