

The last prolific cause of mental waste, which I shall mention, is indolence and irresolution. Among the vast numbers of men capable of rising to eminence in art, science, or literature, and of making a deep impression on the world, how few confer any lasting benefit upon their generation, by their works, inventions, or discoveries! And it seems to me that the want of perseverance—in other words, indolence and irresolution—is the principal cause of their failure. Go to the primary school, and, among a hundred boys you will usually find fifty exhibiting nearly equal natural abilities, and making equal progress in learning. In the academy and the college you will find as large a proportion, between whose talents and scholarship you will see scarcely any difference. Year after year, they will move forward shoulder to shoulder, and come to the end of their literary course so nearly abreast, that it requires a nice application of the merit gauge to give them a difference of rank on the scale of honorary appointments; and the most sagacious application of the doctrine of probabilities will not enable any one to predict with confidence which of them will be distinguished above his fellows in future life. But let the history of those boys and young men, whether from the primary school, the academy, or the college, be consulted at the end of their lives, and you will scarcely find a dozen, out of a hundred, who have risen to high distinction in their business or profession, or made valuable discoveries, or left a deep impression upon the world. The others may have done much good; but why have they not done as much as their dozen comrades, who, during the years of their elementary education, were not able to outstrip them? We must allow something for feeble health, and other unforeseen difficulties, hedging up the path of a few. But in respect to the great body of these men, difference in