

For companionship
with his fellow-men.
shelley, in



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For the other side of Aristotle's remarks we find clearer support in historical instances. Many of the most noble characters known in the history of human thought took delight in solitude. It was in the wilderness, rather than among the haunts of men, that the greatest religious teachers thought out their solutions of the great mystery of life. Many great poets took delight in solitude and derived their highest thoughts from lonely communing with nature.

Milton knew well that "solitude sometimes is the best society," and composed his great epic when the loss of his eyesight shut him out, to a large extent, from close companionship with his fellow-men. Shelley, in one of his letters to his wife, wrote: "My greatest delight would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea; would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world." Similar sentiments are expressed by Virgil, Wordsworth, Cowper, and still more frequently by Byron. The explanation of their love for loneliness is that in solitude they were far away from all the petty meannesses of humanity and everything else that could distract them from their high thinking. Nothing is more conducive to deep and noble thought than to be alone, surrounded by the beauties of forest mountain, valley, lake and river. Yet even the most elevated minds would surely tire of continual solitude unrelieved by any human presence.

We see that Shelley, in his vision of a solitary island, had enough of ordinary human nature to find a place on it for his wife and child. Absolute solitude is the greatest punishment that can be inflicted upon vulgar criminals, and it would probably be even more painful for minds of high culture. A Byson, a

Wordsworth, or a Cowper, if condemned for years to solitude existence on a desert island, would have the feelings of disgust expressed by the last-mentioned poet through the mouth of Alexander Selkirk. In perfect solitude men are deprived of much that makes life worth living, and are in danger of becoming entirely centered in self by their removal from the sight of the joys and sufferings of humanity. They lose the consolations of friendship and love, and have little opportunity of training themselves in moral virtue in their retreat, where there are few temptations and no opportunities of directly increasing human happiness or relieving human misery.

Even from an intellectual point of view they are sure to suffer from the want of stimulating conversation with other minds equal or superior to their own. On these grounds, although it is a good thing for reflective persons occasionally to retire for short periods from human society, perpetual solitude would promote neither their happiness, nor their virtue, nor their intellectual well being.