

56. To Arthur Hugh Clough

Fox How. September 6th. [1853]

My dear Clough ...

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I do not believe that the Reformation caused the Elizabethan literature - but that both sprang out of the active animated condition of the human spirit in Europe at that time. After the fall of the Roman Empire the barbarians powerfully turned up the soil of Europe - and after a little time when the violent ploughing was over and things had settled a little, a vigorous crop of new ideas was the result. Italy bore the first crop - but the soil having been before much exhausted soon left bearing. The virgin soils of Germany and England went on longer - but they too are I think beginning to fail. I think there never yet has been a perfect literature or a perfect art because the energetic nations spoil them by their illusions and their want of taste - and the nations who lose their illusions lose also their energy and creative power. Certainly Goethe had all the *negative* recommendations for a perfect artist but he wanted the positive - Shakespeare had the positive and wanted the negative. The Iliad and what I know of Raphael's works seem to me to be in a juster measure and a happier vein than anything else.

...

ever yours

M. A....