

The Young Man and His Problem

By JAMES L. GORDON

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

The sum total of a man's knowledge is expressed in one word—Conscience. What a man knows, or what a man thinks he knows, is congested in that pregnant word. A knowledge of the world is important. A knowledge of God is indispensable. But self-knowledge is the one thing which is fundamental, for upon it the superstructure of character is built. A recent writer had this thought in mind when he penned the following lines:

"I like the piety of those artists who wrought well the hidden parts because 'the gods see everywhere;' but I like still better the religion of the faithful Welsh stonemason I know up in Wisconsin, who, when urged to toss off a piece of work roughly because the building would hide it and no one would know how it looked, replied: 'Ah, but I would know it!' and so finished the inside pillar with the deliberation and nicety of the loving craftsman."

BOYS, DON'T SMOKE.

Smoking is a luxury intended for mature years and old age. It calls for an expenditure of energy stored away by nature for an emergency. It is a luxury which most young men under thirty years of age ought to forego. The physical and mental pleasure of smoking comes from a more rapid action of the heart and an increased force in the current of blood as it flows through the body and toward the brain. Such pleasure means an expenditure of your reserve force. We copy the following from the New York Observer:

"I am not much of a mathematician," said the cigarette, "but I can add to a youth's nervous troubles, I can subtract from his physical energy, I can multiply his aches and pains, I can divide his mental powers, I can take interest from his work, and discount his chances for success."

STEADY NERVES.

The temperance wave which has been sweeping over the United States is not a wave of religious reformation, but a revival of good common sense—or what the old-fashioned citizen would call, "good horse sense." The truth is that our complex and advancing civilization calls for the man of clear brain and steady nerve. Robert E. Speer, says, in a book just published:

"At one of the annual dinners of the Periodical Publishers' Association I sat next to the proprietor of one of our best known magazines. On the other side of him sat a justice of the United States Supreme Court, and beyond him other men of like prominence and influence with these two. During the dinner I noticed that only one man in the row on our side of the table was drinking. I called the magazine publisher's attention to the fact and asked him if he did not think it unusual. 'No,' he said, 'I do not think it is. Our life is at too high a tension now. When everything may hang upon a sudden decision at an unexpected moment, a man can't afford to take any chances.'"

YOUR COMPETITOR.

Speak well of your neighbor. It will help you in the neighborhood. Be fair. Be kind. Be generous. You can afford to commend the good points in the character of your competitor. It will strengthen you with your customer. You can never run yourself up by running another down. The world admires fair play and just treatment. You will never lose a dollar by paying a timely compliment to your neighbor's enterprise or by defending his character when it is unjustly attacked.

One important phase of the character of Turner, the artist, is revealed by his attitude toward his fellow-artists. "I knew him (Turner) for ten years," said John Ruskin, "and during that time had much familiar discourse with him. I never once heard him say an unkind thing of a brother artist, and I never once heard him find a fault with another man's work. I could say this of no other artist whom I have ever known." The fine spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson comes out in one of his letters: "I was delighted to hear the good news about —. Bravo, he goes uphill fast. Let him beware of vanity, and he will go higher; let him be still discontented, and let him (if it might be) see the merits and not the faults of his rivals, and he may swarm at last to the top-gallant. There is no other way."

INGERSOLL AND WHISKEY.

Col. Clark E. Carr has written an exceedingly interesting book entitled "My Day and Generation." In one of the chapters he gives an account of how Mrs. Ingersoll cured the great orator of his weakness for strong drink. It is one of the best incidents set forth in recent biography:

In those earlier days Robt. G. Ingersoll was given to drink and afterward to infidelity, and both had a bad effect on public sentiment, for Illinois does not like men who drink or men who scoff. From the one Ingersoll was rescued, but not from the other. It was his wife who broke up the drink habit. I heard the story while in Peoria a year or so ago. My informant said that when the colonel came home one night he found his wife and child in the parlor, dressed as if to go out. He looked surprised, but she looked stern.

"Mr. Ingersoll," she said, "you are either going to stop drinking or I'm going away with the children. We can't stay here with a whiskey-drinking husband and father. Take your choice, and take it now."

The colonel pleaded for delay, but the tall, handsome wife was determined.

"Decide right now," she commanded. "Whiskey or wife and children? Which is it?"

The colonel pulled himself up and with the resolute look of a martyr replied, "The whiskey will go and the wife and children will stay."

That was the last of the whiskey business.

SELF-FAITH IS SAVING FAITH.

Self-faith is saving faith considered from the standpoint of a man's individuality. Even a college course is a poor thing if it robs a man of a legitimate confidence in himself. You must believe in yourself if you ever expect anybody else to believe in you. These are sad words quoted by an American writer from the life of an over cautious youth:

"I confess that I came out of college with my initiative atrophied. I was afraid to do anything. I was afraid I would make a mistake if I did anything; afraid I was not well enough equipped to do the things that suggested themselves; afraid that if I did try to do anything everybody would criticize what I did; afraid that my old college mates would laugh at me."

"And I confess in humility that I myself acquired the habit of intellectual suspicion toward everybody who does try to do any real thing. I find myself unconsciously sneering at young men who are accomplishing things. Yes, and that is not the worst of it; I find myself sneering at myself." That is pathos—a soul doubting, denying itself. Pathos! yes, it is tragedy!

THE HARD GRIND.

The hard grind makes a smooth surface. Rule and regulation lay the foundation for force and character. An easy time in youth, as a rule, means a hard time in old age. Be hard on yourself in the beginning and nature will be gracious to you in the end. Hard lessons, well learned, mean certain results and gratifying rewards. Sir Algernon West said, in speaking of Eton, "I look back to dear old Eton and think of the life there, the absolute order, the regular hours, the six-o'clock breakfast, the bare floor, the many restrictions, the few rewards. And I go back there now and see the luxury—the upholstery, the cushioned benches, the easy life—and wonder whether it is all improvement. The old way was hard, but it made men hardy; it brought out the thews and sinews of our manhood."

THE SCIENCE OF LAUGHTER.

When you are discouraged—laugh. When you are disappointed—laugh. When you meet with a loss—laugh. When your best friend fails you—laugh. When the unexpected happens—laugh. When you are misunderstood—laugh. Speaking of the perpetual smile which rests on the animated face of Theodore Roosevelt, a student of the American president says:

"If there is jocularity, there is plenty of seriousness too. It would be killing business without the relief of fun. The President has grown in suavity of manner, and his good humor has deepened. He is by nature severe—he is severe with himself—and he is masterful; but he has learned to find recreation in the indulgence of a

sense of the ridiculous, and he has grown kinder. His talent for order surprised me. He never looks at the clock, but he seems to have a subconscious sense of the passing of the minutes. He takes up a new man with a new interest like a machine grabbing a new piece of metal to shape it to the requirement in precisely so many seconds. He works off a crowd as if by the stop-watch. Not a second is lost. He sees with eyes fitted by nature with a wide-angle lens, commanding the whole room at once, but intent on the eye of the man to whom he is talking."

HOW TO READ.

F. W. Robertson, the great English preacher, was a famous reader. He compelled universal literature to yield its gems and jewels that his public discourses might thereby be enriched and beautified. But he was a slow reader. He mastered what he read. With him the pages turned slowly. Each page was well scanned, well studied and well marked. He never skipped a paragraph and seldom missed an idea. Listen! "I read hard, or not at all—never skimming—never turning aside to merely inviting books; and Plato, Aristotle, Butler, Thucydides, Sterne, Jonathan Edwards, have passed like the iron atoms of the blood into my mental constitution." He adds: "I never knew but one or two fast readers and readers of many books, whose knowledge was worth anything. Miss Martineau says of herself that she is the slowest of readers, sometimes a page in an hour; but then what she reads she makes her own."

HOLD YOUR TONGUE.

It takes time to talk and time is money. You must have something to talk about and fuel for your tongue may involve the reputation of your neighbor and the secrets of your profession. How people trust the quiet man. He says little to his neighbor so his neighbor reveals much to him. Learn to hold your tongue and it may assist you to get other "holdings" which will prove of value to you. The biographer of Thomas A. Edison says: "A quality which Edison admires most in a workman is his ability to keep silence. Any employee who talks outside about things which he has no right to mention he has no use for. On one or two occasions a workman—smart and ambitious, perhaps—has obtained a position in the Edison laboratory, and soon after been 'fired' through his insatiable fondness for gossip. When given a fortnight's money and shown the door he has felt aggrieved, not realizing that he possesses every sense but common sense, and has yet to learn the value of silence. There are in the Edison laboratory, more perhaps than in any other, secrets which have to be guarded, and did his workmen talk the results of Edison's investigations would, of course, become known long before he desired to take the public into his confidence. Hence the value the inventor places on a man's ability to 'hold his tongue.'"

EARLY DEFEATS.

Men are prone to talk about their victories. They hide their defeats. or, what is even better, forget them. And yet there is nothing in the history of the world's great men more inspiring than the record of their early failures, mistakes, defeats and disappointments. It is encouraging to me, as a preacher, to know that even Savonarola preached to a congregation of twenty-five in the city of Florence. From a bright little magazine called "The Bible Today," I cull the following concerning Abraham Lincoln:

"Lincoln, too, has a high place among the men who would not be put down by adversity and defeat. He won his way upward and achieved in the face of startling defeats. His vicissitudes are vividly set forth by Mr. Nicolay in the last chapter of his unequalled 'Life of Lincoln.' He says that almost all of Lincoln's successes were balanced—sometimes overbalanced by a seeming failure. Reversing the usual promotion, he went into the Black Hawk War a captain, and, through no fault of his own, came out a private. He rode to the hostile frontier on horseback, and trudged home on foot. His store 'winked out.' His surveyor's compass and chain, with which he was earning a scanty living, were sold for debt. He was defeated for his first campaign for the legislature; defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for congress; defeated in his application to be appointed commissioner of the General Land Office; defeated for the Senate in the Illinois legislature of 1854. These rebuffs were followed by others no less exasperating."

"But these defeats, as Mr. Nicolay points out, were not failures, but in reality a slow success. Every scaffolding of temporary elevation he pulled down, every ladder of transient expectation which broke under his feet accumulated his strength, and piled up a solid mound which raised him to wider usefulness and clearer vision. The buffets that he met were a part of the discipline that fitted him for his masterful career."