

The Young Man and His Problem

By JAMES L. GORDON

STANDING ALONE.

When Lord Roberts was about to leave the city of London to superintend the war in South Africa, a great reception was tendered to him at the railroad station. The Prince of Wales was there. There were also representatives of the aristocracy—lords, dukes, earls and nobles. Statesmen were not wanting and ministers of the state were in evidence. And so the train moved out of the station and the form of Lord Roberts finally disappeared from view. How they cheered the departing general. "God bless you, Bobbs!" cried the Prince of Wales. Cheer followed cheer—but as the train turned the curve, Lord Roberts found himself alone—alone with the responsibility of the war upon his shoulders. In a few hours London and England were behind him and he found himself alone with the problem of war and the struggle for empire. Cheers are good, but can you stand in the hour of loneliness?

POOR PENMANSHIP.

I suppose you think that it makes little or no difference what the style of your penmanship may be. Horace Greeley wrote such a poor hand that a week after he had written an article he was not sure of its authorship. Great men have been poor artists in handling the pen, and therefore you conclude that penmanship is not a vital matter in the achievement of success. Let me tell you, however, that nothing in life is insignificant or of small importance. A student at Rugby once said to his instructor, "Many men of genius have written worse scrawls than I do; it is not worth while to worry about so trivial a fault." Ten years later this lad was an officer in the English army, doing service in the Crimean war. An order he copied for transmission was so illegible that it was given incorrectly to the troops and cost many brave fellows their lives.

ROOSEVELT NOT AN ACCIDENT.

On the morning after the last presidential election in the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, taking his seat at the breakfast table in the White House looked into the face of his wife and said, "My dear, I am happy to state that your husband is no longer an accident." That must have been a moment of real genuine satisfaction to the president. To realize that you are in the right place. To realize that Providence, the people and your own conscience are agreed as to your "call" and appointment is indeed a triumph worth battling for. This sense of satisfaction comes to one with first great success or achievement of life. To have reached the first mountain top. To have proved yourself indispensable for any special work or position in life—this is worth ten years of toil and effort.

LIGHT A MATCH.

Light a match and fling it upon the barren rock and it will burn itself to a cinder and then flicker out. Light a match and fling it upon the bosom of the sea and it will shed a faint gleam just for a moment and surrender to the first baptism of spray. Light a match and fling it into a tank of oil, and you must needs call out the entire fire department in order to protect the city. The burning match and the rich petroleum have an affinity one for the other. So truth dies out upon the old unmoved conscience of one man, but sets on fire the soul of the man who is responsive to the truth. One man goes to sleep under the sermon while another individual is lifted into the third heaven of rapture and contemplation. One man finds mental food in the writings of Emerson while another finds companionship in a third rate novel. A man's choice of friends, books, and amusements is his own judgment on his own character.

ARISTOCRACY OF CHARACTER.

Character is the diamond which scratches every other stone. In the throne room of Napoleon, in the palace of Fontainebleau, every piece of furniture bears the initial letter "N"—So does a man stamp himself upon every deed and action of his life. Nebuchadnezzar caused the letter "N" to be inscribed on every brick placed in the great wall which surrounded the mighty city of Babylon. So are our very thoughts, words and actions inwrought into the very fibre and texture of our being. Josiah Wedgwood, though risen from a workman, was

never satisfied until he had done his best. He would not permit or tolerate inferior work of any sort in his establishment. If a vase did not come up to his idea, he would smash it in pieces. Flinging the rejected article aside he would say, "That won't do for Josiah Wedgwood." The most brilliant reputation is a poor thing unless it rests upon the foundation of character.

When Coleridge met Southey in Edinburgh in 1803, he remarked to his friend, "What a wonderful city Edinburgh is—wonderful in height and wonderful in depths." In this respect the queen city of Scotland stands as an illustration of life. Life has tremendous possibilities in two directions—upward and downward. Moody could not read at eighteen, at thirty-seven he was preaching to audiences of twenty thousand. Jonathan Edwards was in some respects the greatest preacher New England ever produced. His grandson, Aaron Burr, turned traitor and because of his immoral practices became a social outcast. Harry Thaw, born in a Pittsburg palace, stands before a New York jury charged with the sacrifice of a life, without even a good reputation or a clean record to sustain him, while Gypsy Smith, born in a gypsy's tent, without the advantages of culture or education, holds thousands spellbound by his eloquence and can command an audience of 5,000 at any time of the day or night.

THE BUSINESS VALUE OF POLITENESS.

"It's his way of doing it" has often been remarked concerning a certain individual, who seems to enjoy an enviable success in any enterprise to which he may apply his hand. He "captures" the audience during the first five minutes of his speech. It is his way. He makes a sale where another clerk would only have made "an impression." It is his way. He avoids a difficulty where another would have had things hopelessly entangled. It is his way. He is a miracle worker at the point where man touches man. He knows the science of getting along with people. During a sudden outbreak among the students of Harvard College, at Cambridge, the final appeal was made to Henry W. Longfellow: "We will listen to Mr. Longfellow," said the students, "he is the only one that treats us as if we were gentlemen."

THE INSPIRATION OF A DIFFICULTY.

Luxury is not a hero producer. To be favored with many advantages has often turned out a disadvantage. The youth born in the valley very often climbs to the apex of the mountain, but the young man born amid the sunny peaks of comfort does not always remain there. Byron was born a cripple and gave himself to poetry. Sir Walter Scott lost the use of one of his feet through the carelessness of a nurse and found himself shut in to literature. Beecher struggled with some defect in his vocal apparatus which caused him to stutter and stammer and in conquering the difficulty became the greatest pulpit orator of his day. The Scotch Covenanter preached his best sermon when the danger of an attack was greatest. The strongest men are always inspired by a difficulty. They seem noblest when leading a forlorn hope.

HAVE A CONVICTION!

A conviction is a ripe mental conclusion with reference to a vital subject. A man's convictions always touch the fundamentals. It is the decision of a man's soul concerning that which has touched the very core of his being. We have "notions" concerning things which are trifles, and "opinions" concerning things which are of minor importance, but we have "convictions" touching only those things which we regard as of vital importance. Lincoln said concerning the question of slavery, "If slavery is not wrong, then nothing is wrong." It's a great conviction nobly expressed which sets the world on fire. Every vital problem is worthy of a conviction. Think your way through. Make up your mind in one direction and then speak out!

ONE DAY AT A TIME.

One day of twenty-four hours seems to be a divine allotment of time. Nature has marked this period of exact measurement in a most emphatic manner. Its dawning

is announced by the quiet glories of the day-break and the completion signaled by the golden splendors of sunset. It is nature's first suggestion of an exact measurement of a period or duration. Emerson's suggestion, "Live one day at a time," is a wise one and worthy to be regarded as a maxim. Another philosopher has said "Live each day as though it were the whole of life," which is the same thought expressed in another way. Regard each morning as a fresh beginning and each evening as a vital conclusion. Crowd into each day all that belongs to it. Let your motto be—"One day at a time."

A HINT FOR SOCIETY PEOPLE.

Society is the realm of social contact, where man touches man and woman meets woman—this is the social realm. The social realm has as distinct an existence as the commercial or religious. When society leaders are pure and noble their influence is felt down to the lowest strata; when they are immoral and ignoble, the entire community is tainted and poisoned. Society and its claims, as a rule, are safe when regarded as a recreation. When, however, society becomes the main business of life and the mainspring of all our thoughts and actions, it is apt to be dangerous to our moral well being. Tolstoi says, in his confessions, that for ten years he went from banquet to banquet, drinking rich wines and feasting and flattering, sleeping during the day and dancing during the night. "No galley slave in the days of ancient Rome ever worked so hard for so little satisfaction."

"I AM MASTER OF MY FATE."

Every man is the architect of his own fate. Self-made or self-ruined, every man writes his own life or signs his own death warrant. Robert Burns at one time in his career enjoyed a reception at the hands of the aristocracy of Edinburgh. They paid him every possible attention and rejoiced in his genius. Such favoring approval might have lasted for years, but wrecklessness, dissipation and low companionship robbed him of the society of the cultured people of Scotland. Passing through Dumfries one evening, a friend noticed that Burns was permitted to pass through a group of the best people unrecognized, and speaking to the poet about the matter, Robert Burns remarked, "That's all over now!" He had sinned away his day of social grace. The aristocracy refused to do business with him. There are certain opportunities which come to a man only once in a life time and when gone—are gone forever.

BE SURE OF YOURSELF.

A man may have a proper conception of himself without being conceited. To be proud of that which is worthy of pride is not unchristian. To develop certain God-like characteristics and then to be humbly conscious of the attainment is not an unpardonable sin. There is a certain dignity of soul which a man may possess even though he be a grave-digger or a hod-carrier. Sheridan, the English statesman, had splendid gifts but lacked dignity of soul. He dazzled and amused but lacked weight and influence. Had he possessed principle he might have ruled the world. As it was, his own servants did not respect him. When Delpini one day made a just request, Sheridan said to him, "You have forgotten your station, sir!" Delpini replied, "I have not forgotten my station, sir—I know the difference between you and me. In birth and parentage and education, you are my superior, but in life and character and behavior, I am your superior." Noble answer. Here was a man who was sure of himself.

HYPOCRISY IN MODERN LIFE.

The modern hypocrite is not always to be found within church circles. We have always been of the opinion that for every hypocrite inside of the church you might possibly find four or five outside the sanctuary. We have just come across the following pointed paragraph in a sermon by Dr. T. DeWit Talmage:

Nothing but sheer falsehood can represent as perfection boots that rip, silks that speedily lose their luster, calicoes that immediately wash out, stoves that crack under the first hot fire, books insecurely bound, carpets that unravel, old furniture rejuvenated with putty and glue, and sold as having been recently manufactured, gold watches made out of brass, barrels of fruit, the biggest apples on the top, wine adulterated with strychnine, hosiery poorly woven, cloths of domestic manufacture shining with foreign labels, imported goods represented as rare and hard to get because foreign exchange is so high, rolled out on the counter with matchless display—imported indeed! but from the factory in the next street.