

and reading" must be very modest, and it would be well that the expectations of his hearers should be the same. One can only hope that he may be able to offer some hints which may be helpful to those who are still young and have the greater part of their experience yet to come. So, without further prelude, I will begin by saying some words on

I. The *value* of reading, on the importance of the subject under consideration. Even if I should be unable to say anything new on this subject, I shall at least recall to your minds some words of the great writers of the past which you will be glad to hear once more.

1. And I will begin by pointing to some *negative* advantages in reading.

(1) For one thing, it may help to counteract the somewhat excessive practical tendencies of the age and of the land in which we live. There is no necessity for here insisting upon the necessity of practice, or upon the application of the utilitarian test to the employment of one's time. But mere utilitarianism has a tendency to defeat itself; and no people has ever been great which neglected theoretical, speculative, and ideal considerations. Now, it is difficult to see how these can be kept alive without literature. As a matter of fact they are seldom kept alive otherwise. It needs books, good books, and some variety of books to raise men's thoughts and sentiments above the often weary round of practical life.

(2) Another negative use of books is found in the fact that reading, and especially abundant reading, will help to stop a great deal of useless and superfluous talking. It is a terrible and mysterious subject even to refer to. Think of the amount of talking that goes on in this great city in one hour! Think of the quantity of vapid senseless chatter that pours from human lips, having hardly any rela-

tion, one might fancy, to human brains, from day to day, from week to week. Of course we know it is all wrong and stupid. We do not even need the strong language of Holy Writ to assure us of this: "A man full of words shall not prosper upon the earth;" "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin;" "He that keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul;" "The tongue is a fire;" "The tongue can no man tame." Almost everyone dislikes excessive talking, except perhaps his own. The silent man dislikes it. It bores him, it irritates him. The talkative man dislikes it, it stops his own talking. Everybody almost is of the same mind. There are people whom you are afraid to meet in the street, especially if you are in a hurry. When they get hold of you you are nailed to the spot for an indefinite period, and without a chance of exercising your own gifts. It was an excellent definition which a friend of mine gave of a bore. "A bore," he said, "is a person who insists on talking to you about himself when you want to be talking to him about yourself." But I must not be led on further on this subject. Suffice it to say that, just in proportion as we encourage reading and practise it, we shall help to stay this pestilence of talk in ourselves and others. "I never," says Thomas a Kempis, "return from the ordinary concourse of men, but I feel myself less of a man." It is a strong saying; but it could seldom be said of the perusal of books, unless we have made a very bad choice. Certainly we seldom look back with regret upon hours spent in study or reading. I fear that we very often find general society unprofitable. Mr. Carlyle says that "speech is silvern, but silence is golden." But a great deal of the current coin of conversation is made of a much baser metal than silver.