

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSBIOGRAPHY AS A SOURCE OF
INSPIRATION.

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Wherein lies the captivating power of the Novel? Is it not in the interest it awakens in the life and fortune of some one? Is it not in our becoming desirous to see how it will turn out with the hero or the heroine? Its peculiar charm, therefore, is purely biographical. And this is because of the movement and the unfolding of the life of the individual in the complex experiences of his existence.

As we like to see the plants grow, and the buds unfold, and the blossoms set in fruit, and the fruit come to perfection, so we are drawn to the study of the evolution of our human life with an unflagging interest. And everything that gives us this, be it memoir, or biography, or chronicle, or letters, attract our attention with an almost irresistible force. Anything that has life in it as a record claims our regard, and in its measure acts as an inspiration. Life is always magnetic; it attracts, and thrills and lifts us upward, and to come into contact with it is to become its recipient.

And so there is a nameless charm in biography, however imperfectly the character is delineated, so long as it carries in it the element of truth. When any man has done something that is for the benefit of his fellows, either in making moral conquests easier, or in rendering the life of the Spirit more free and its activities more enjoyable, or in showing the way to the mastery of the physical, we instinctively want to know somewhat of the individual himself. We are anxious to learn the steps and stages by which he accomplished the feat of his life, the motives that prompted him, the means he employed, and the magical results that followed. Everything touching him becomes of interest to us because of what he has done. He who has done something good, as soon as it becomes known, claims the homage of his fellows, and they at once assume the attitude of devout admirers and of joyful disciples. The hero worship of man's nature spontaneously asserts itself. We reverence the man who has done something good. And this deep and devout regard we pay to him opens our hearts to the incoming of his life so that we are inspired by him to enter upon a line of correspondent action.

How many singers has Homer made! How many thinkers, both keen and clear and cogent, has Socrates brought to the birth? How many missionaries has Moffat caused to go into the lonely and dark places of the earth? How many men have been made inventors by Watt's meditations on the burling kettle lid and the force of the puffing steam? How many have gone forth to seek new worlds since Columbus sailed, in the grip of a mighty faith, across the sea? How many whose in-born poetic vein lacked the facility of verse, till touched by the potent fire of Robert Burns, which set them free to sing out the fulness of their hearts in strains of touching sentiment and measures of sweetest melody? How many human beings have been uplifted and purified and blest by thinking out what lies in the briefest of all biographies that ever have been written: "And Enoch lived sixty and five years and begat Methuselah; and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years and begat sons and daughters; and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years; and Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

How true is it that no man liveth to himself. Widening circles all around him receive the vital force that, like the burning sun, he throws out into the void. None of it is lost. The divine economy conserves all force, and by constant transmutations uses it up to the last atom.

How often is one asked, What books should I read? Alas! not so often as one would like. This is not pre-eminently a book-reading age. Books are too plentiful and too cheap to be highly appreciated. And newspapers are so multitudinous that they forestall all other reading. They capture, if not the most of the time, at least the best of the time. That is when the mind is alert and curious to know, and determined to learn. When it seeks something.

But this kind of reading, while it gives a general information and an outlook upon the world to-day which all ought to have, yet more is needed. That makes us acquainted with men and things in a superficial way—it introduces us, but does not provide for a thorough fellowship and a deep knowledge such as we all love. Now books of the best kind offer this to us. And in that wide and rich realm, which has grown so wondrously since the invention of the printing press, we are likely to be lost unless we make a selection. Everything cannot be read.

Here I put a plea for biography, which thrills with interest, because it not only gives us information, but it gives us fellowship and through that touches us at every point, and calls us to imitate, if not to emulate, our hero.

Let me indicate a few books of this class every young man should read—read carefully, constantly, conscientiously, till he grows warm to them and they become his personal friends. There is "Plutarch's Lives"—a perfect treasure-house of the best biography, rich in stories, and inlaid with principles of wisdom. Carlyle's lectures on "Heroes and Hero Worship," and a twin volume, Emerson's "Representative Men." These are most valuable and highly educative. Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson" is one of the very best biographies. It portrays a character strong in thought, wide in knowledge, brusque in statement, somewhat narrow in sympathy—he is an insular Englishman, but a prodigy of his kind in his time. To read his life as written by Boswell is to get far more than Dr. Johnson, it is to get the world in which he lived and moved as well, and also to gather the efflorescence of his ripe wisdom. This is a book which being carefully read leaves a residuum of matter for thought that imparts to the man much that is valuable in life.

How many biographies of missionaries might be mentioned? Moffat, Livingston, Paton, MacKay, Geddie, Harrington, and others—all vital forces. How many inventors like George Stevenson, James Watt, and others? How many discoverers like Sir J. Y. Simpson, Harvey, Galileo, and others? In all the various departments of human life there are the stories of self-sacrificing devotion and noble achievement for the benefit of men that are glorious, and with which we cannot become acquainted without a fellow-feeling being awakened in us, and a strong desire taking hold of us to reach a like distinction. It will be with us as it was with Themistocles, of whom Plutarch tells us, that he was so carried away with the love of glory, so immoderately desirous of distinguishing himself by some great action, that, though he was very young when the Battle of Marathon was fought, and when the generalship of Miltiades

was everywhere extolled, yet even then he was observed to keep much alone, to be very pensive, to watch whole nights, and not to attend the usual entertainments. When he was asked the reason of it by his friends, who wondered at the change, he said—"The trophies of Miltiades would not suffer me to sleep." While others imagined the defeat of the Persians at Marathon had put an end to the war he considered it as the beginning of greater conflicts, and for the benefit of Greece he was always preparing himself and the Athenians against these conflicts, because he foresaw them at a distance.

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UNDERPAID CLERGYMEN.

—In an editorial on this subject the New York Times says: "Preaching is a small part of a clergyman's toil, and we doubt if it is the most important, unless the preacher is a man of original thought and commanding eloquence." The Times then proceeds thus:

The services of a clergyman, however, are in eager demand for christenings, marriage ceremonies, the comfort of the sick, and the burial of the dead, and the amount of labor of that sort, combined with the routine of parish visiting and the details of charitable work, keeps him stirring and alert early and late. Well-established clergymen with rich congregations receive handsome fees for christenings, marriages, and burials, but the poorly placed ones, whose salaries are barely sufficient to comfortably support their usually large families, are never sure of fees, and rarely get big ones.

Apart from his spiritual uplift and his intellectual capacity, a clergyman must be an active, sympathetic, and well-poised man to hold the least lucrative post. He must always be amiable, and it is unwise for him publicly to avow cares of his own. There is no question that the labor of these men is poorly paid in comparison with most other labor.

On this timely subject the New York Christian Advocate, the able organ of the Episcopal Methodist Church in the United States, offers the following observations:—

No minister not "of original thought or commanding eloquence" can afford to neglect the things the Times enumerates. Many men "of original thought and commanding eloquence" have been most painstaking in the other departments of ministerial activity; and these attain the highest success. But woe to the church that has, as a pastor, a person of ordinary ability, who, thinking himself "of original thought and commanding eloquence," neglects the pastorate. It was the saying of John Lord, the historical lecturer, an eccentric personage but a reader of character and a penetrator of situations, that a man of deep pathos though limited intellectuality might succeed, and also a man of very great intellectual abilities without much pathos, but a man with only a moderate intellectual outfit and little or no pathos must make a dreary minister and a weary congregation.

While almost all commodities are increasing in cost, and wages and salaries are increasing in almost every line of trade or traffic, the stipend of ministers, except in a few cases, remains the same or is decreased. And the plea of The Times for underpaid clergymen has a real basis and should be gratefully recognized by those concerned.