

The Young Man and His Problem

DOING OUR BEST. We are bound always to take the best plan; the best plan of life, on the whole, as far as it may lie within our own choice; the best course through each separate scene; the best way of doing each several duty. We have no right to act in an aimless and indolent manner, and then expect all our negligences and slips to be made up and corrected by an over-ruling providence. There is an over-ruling providence, but there is also a teaching wisdom of God, and if we wish to be fully under the protection of the one, we must open all our faculties to receive the instructions of the other.

ENTERING ON LIFE. Morning opens with painted clouds, and so does life. Many colored dreams of the future sail, slow moving, along the blue—romantic enough as a contrast to the reality when it comes. The far-off hills of our happy valley lie in the rosy light, hiding the roughness one day to be climbed, and sowing the earth with orient pearls. Change the figure; call life a voyage: it comes to the same. We sail out of the quiet harbor of early years, streamers flying, yards dressed—"Hope in the prow, and Pleasure at the helm"; but before we gain quiet waters again, what chances, changes, dangers, failures, anxieties, fears! Some, too light, turn over and sink with the first wind; some, wrong in the compass, or driven by a gale, drift on ruin, and perish; some go down battling bravely in the wild sea; some come back again, grey and weather-stained, but sails spread proudly, the light of home on all faces, deep laden with the wealth for which they have ventured so much and so far.

But success is rightly to be expected, and waits our winning in far more cases than it is realised. The vessel and the seamanship is as often at fault as the weather, or the bad markets. There are, of course, crowds of rivals, but there always have been so, and some prize, at least, is open to most who deserve it. Even young Hope sometimes half-fears as it looks the world in the face—and wonders how it is to push its way through the crowd. But, sursum corda, lift up your hearts, there's room for every brave and wise worker in the constant shiftings, openings, and changes of life. Like a flock of birds on a bough, it may take time for all to get into their places, but it comes in the end.

READING WITH A PURPOSE. In a recent book Sir Arthur Helps says: "What avails it to have perused the lives of the learned, and the witty, and the valiant, and the wise, if, without having gained one single rule of action, we merely remember that in all ages the generality of mankind have contrived to make themselves miserable by their own follies and their own vices; and that, when there would have been a happy one, he was persecuted? What avails it to have read so many polemical discussions, if we merely remember the intemperate zeal and the learned bitterness which gave equal animation to each contending party? Surely it would be better to remember Coleridge's 'Ode to Dejection,' Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality from the Recollections of Early Childhood,' Shelley's 'Invocation to Night,' Southey's beautiful description of

"How happily the years
Of Thalaba went by,"
and the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' than to have read all the poets from Chaucer downwards, and possess a dim shadowy notion rather of their merits than of them—enough, forsooth, to talk critically.

We want the brilliant ideas of the poet, and the majestic thoughts of the philosopher, as companions for our weary hours, to charm away the solemn dulness of every-day life, to wander with us over the hills, in solitude to form the link between us and our fellow-creatures, in the society of those we love, to be a test of their perfect sympathy; and, therefore, we must not spare the labor of imprinting them on the tablets of memory for ever."

RICHES. The sanity of a man is mainly tested among his neighbors and kindred by the amount of consideration which he has consistently given to cash. If money has been the chief object of his life, and he, for its sake, has spared nobody, no sooner is he known to be successful, than admiration overpowers all the ill-will he has caused. He is shrewd, sagacious, long-headed and great; he has earned his success, and few even grudge, while many seek to get a slice of it; but, he, as a general rule, declines any premature distribution, and for this custody of his wealth he is admired all the more by those who have no hope of sharing it.

SELF-CONTROL. Herbert Spencer has said: "In the supremacy of self-control consists one of the perfections of the ideal man. Not to be impulsive, not to be spurred hither and thither by each desire that in turn comes uppermost, but to be self-restrained, self-balanced, governed by the joint decision of the feelings in council assembled, before whom every action shall have been fully debated and calmly determined—that it is which education, moral education, at least strives to produce."

THE YOUNG MAN AND THE BIG CITY.

Most men, especially most young men, in towns and small cities long to go to the large city. When his New York, or Chicago, or St. Louis friends, with their stylish, well fitting clothes and superior air—all city people put on an air of superiority over town and country people, no matter what their relative social, material, and cultural positions may be—come down into the country on business or a vacation the village man is apt to regard them enviously as having achieved a higher and happier success than he has and to regret that he hasn't had the opportunity or enterprise to go to some great centre of population. If the discontented town or small city dweller knew how many people there are who wish they never had gone to big cities and would welcome a chance to escape them, he probably would be less discontented with his lot. Life in the big city undeniably has many advantages. It is the centre of intellectual and social activity, of business, and of industry, as well as of population. There the great prizes of most kinds are to be won. Experience shows that if a man wants to rise in America as a statesman he would better stay in the country. But eminent success in the law, in art, in medicine, in journalism, and literature, in money-making, in fact, in almost every great field of human endeavor—usually must be achieved in the city. It is the place for the man who is confident he has strength enough to meet all comers, who has resolution to work incessantly, and who is so constituted that he never will be satisfied with any station below the topmost. Most people have not these qualities. Those who lack them would better stay in the country. They will prosper more there and be happier. And happiness is the chief end of life. It is what we all aim at.

"MADE, NOT BORN."

Less and less emphasis is being placed on "born" ability. More and more men are coming to realize that a man's birth has less to do with his life than what he does after birth, and that what he does after birth depends not so much upon what he started with as upon what he wills to do. More than half a century ago Elihu Burritt, famous as the "learned blacksmith," who studied as he worked at the forge, carried a Greek grammar in his hat, and read Virgil and Cicero in the evenings, and finally was sought as a lecturer, adopted the motto "fit, non nascitur"—"made, not born"—as an improvement over the then current and wrongly placed emphasis on ability which was supposed to be born, not made. There is no question that God gives ability to some which He does not give to others; but it is equally beyond question that "only Omnipotence can stand in the way of a determined man."

WORDS. Medals of the mind, we may call words. And as the medals of creation from the geologic would reveal the working of creative energy, and the successive developments of the Divine idea, so words present a humanitarian geology where histories, philosophies, and ethics lie embodied and embalmed. But this is a spiritual geology, its strata built up of the rich deposits of mind. With passionate fervour man pours himself on Nature. An irrepressible longing to express a secret sense of his unity with Nature possesses him, and from the consciousness, all plastic and aglow, rush words, infinitely free, rich and varied, laden with pathos and power, with passion, poetry, humor, thought.

INFLUENCE. Every life is a profession of faith, and exercises an inevitable and silent propaganda. As far as lies in its power it tends to transform the universe and humanity into its own image. Every man is a centre of perpetual radiation, like a luminous body; he is, as it were, a beacon which entices a ship upon the rocks if it does not guide it into port. Every man is a priest, even involuntarily; his conduct is an unspoken sermon, which is for ever preaching to others; but there are priests of Baal, of Moloch, and of all the false gods. Such is the high force of example.

THE PENALTY OF MISTAKES. Nature pays no attention to motives. Her penalties for our mistakes are just as severe as her penalties for our sins. The pistol that we "didn't know was loaded," does just as deadly work as the pistol that is used in murder. The wreck or fire caused by carelessness is just as destructive as the wreck or fire caused by deliberate intent. And there is little doubt that the actual number of disasters and accidents and sorrows in the world due to mistakes is greater than the number of those that are the result of what we call deliberate sin. Thoughtlessness is sin. Let us think of this the next time we are tempted to excuse ourselves to ourselves on the ground that we "didn't mean to."

CONVERSATION OF MEN OF GENIUS.

In view of the fact that the art of conversation is a difficult one, it is of interest to know something about men of genius in the matter. Tasso's conversation was neither gay nor brilliant. Dante was either taciturn or satirical. Butler was either sullen or biting. Gray seldom talked or smiled. Hogarth and Swift were very absent-minded in company. Milton was very unsocial, and even irritable, when pressed into conversation. Virgil was heavy in conversation. La Fontaine appeared heavy, coarse, and stupid—he could not speak and describe what he had just seen; but then, he was the model of poetry. Chaucer's silence was more agreeable than his conversation. Dryden's conversation was slow and dull; his humor saturnine and reserved. Corneille, in conversation, was so insipid that he never failed in wearying; he did not even speak correctly that language of which he was such a master. Ben Jonson used to sit silent in company, and suck his wine and their humors. Southey was stiff, sedate, and wrapped up in asceticism. Addison was good company with his intimate friends, but in mixed company he preserved his dignity by a stiff and reserved silence. Fox, in conversation, never flagged; his animation and variety were inexhaustible. Dr. Bentley was loquacious, as was also Grotius. Goldsmith "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll." Burke was entertaining, enthusiastic, and interesting in conversation. Curran was a convivial deity. Leigh Hunt was "like a pleasant stream" in conversation. Carlyle doubts, objects, and constantly demurs. Emerson has the charm of a good listener, and is quite as willing to be talked to as to talk. And, we may add, in conclusion, great talkers are very seldom good conversationalists.

CIVILISATION. Civilisation is nothing more than a complicated outcome of a war waged with Nature by man in Society to prevent her from putting into execution in his case her law of Natural Selection. Civilisations are lost as well as gained. All existing savages possibly are, and some of them certainly are, in a state of civilisation below that which their ancestors occupied, and there is no intrinsic tendency in human societies separately, to pass ever on and ever up to something better and higher and nobler. A state of high civilisation is difficult to keep as well as difficult to gain. . . . Is it not possible that there may never have existed a time in the history of mankind as a whole when there were not among those composing it persons potentially as good—persons exhibiting as high a capacity—as any among those who now go to make up mankind?