

Among the Books.

There are two kinds of libraries—one a storehouse of knowledge, the other a completion of the house, whose value to the house is little more than that of a good sideboard—simply a bit of ornament. If the old adage "Show me your companions and I'll tell you what you are" be true, how much more true is the saying "Show me your library and I'll tell you what your intellectual training is." In this age of the floodtide of books the question is not so much what books we should read as what books we should avoid reading. Books have their relative value of life or death and should be so judged.

I desire to speak now of good books and their value in determining character and life.

"They are," says Bacon, "the true friends that will neither flatter nor dissemble; be you but true to yourself, apply that which they teach unto the party grieved and you shall need no other comfort nor counsel."

Most people read too much, talk too much, think too little and write too little. You find now in many of our universities professors who have ranged through a wilderness of books and yet have little definite to give you. They have retained the drift of the book but have not digested it.

Take for instance the works of the late Brother Azarias. Any Catholic Literary Society might profitably devote a whole winter to a study of them. This is a nervous, restless, anxious age desirous of reaping the harvest of a century from the toil-sown fields of a decade of years. It cannot be done. Patience above all is necessary to assure solid scholarship. Turn a man loose in a good library and let him possess patience, judgment and good taste and I will show you in time a scholar.

The course of American scholarship to-day is its hurry of acquirement. Do you know anything of the patience which characterized the library labor of Brother Azarias? Ask those who knew something of his steady toil and method of labor. D'Arcy McGee was a highly gifted and brilliant man. Do you know how carefully his great speeches were prepared? Run your eye over the subjects that are being discussed in many of the Literary Societies of to-day and you will see evidence of this nervous desire to cover ground. One member will read a paper on Cardinal Newman and forthwith one of the greatest minds of the nineteenth century is exhausted. Another will read an essay of ten pages, perhaps less, on the Spanish Inquisition, and this very vexed and debatable question has received its quietus forever. I am not criticizing the earnestness and sincerity which the zealous members of those Literary Societies and Reading circles bring to their work but the tendency there is nowadays to shallow and useless work.

No person would think of dismissing a great and gifted friend after the companionship of an hour or a day. Why then turn your back upon a great and good book after having enjoyed its companionship perhaps but for a few hours. That most gifted woman of the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, says in "Aurora Leigh":

"We get no good

By being ungenerous to a book. And calculating profits—so much help by so much reading. It is rather when we gloriously forget ourselves and plunge soul-forward, headlong into a book's profound,

Impressed for its beauty, and salt of truth—

"Tis then we get the right from a book."

A chair in our Universities for the purpose of directing the students as to how and what to read would be a commendable innovation in a moderately equipped professoriate and much more sane than many which now have a place in the curricula of students.

THOMAS O'HAGAN.



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