

The Young Man and His Problem

By JAMES L. GORDON

I purpose in this issue to talk to young men and young people about the value of books in the development of character and the adornment of a home—for one of the finest pieces of furniture in an equipped home is a valuable book.

THE COST OF A BOOK.

Do you know how much it costs to write a book—not to publish it, but to write it? How much of toil and tears, mind and muscle, stress and strain, blood and brain—How much of real heart power and spiritual vitality is wrapped up in a powerful book? George Eliot said concerning the years of hard work expended on her volume entitled "Romola": "I began it a young woman; I finished it an old woman."

THE POWER OF A GOOD BOOK.

Think of the power of a good book. Thomas Hood, the great wit and humorist, in his youthful days was saved from moral shipwreck by the inspiration of good books. He says, "My books kept me from the dog-pit, the saloon, the tavern and the prize-winning ring." Many a man has been saved for manhood and morality by a splendid book.

THE TREASURE VAULTS OF KNOWLEDGE.

Young man, you may not be able to "go to college," but all the college can possibly bring to you is to be found, stored away, within the pages of solid, helpful books. Fifty years ago Thomas Carlyle remarked, "The true university of these days is a collection of good books." It may be difficult to study a great book without a trained teacher, but Abraham Lincoln did this and conquered. The man who can conquer a great book alone, without the help of teacher or professor, will probably be able to solve the practical problems of life. Try it.

GOOD BOOKS VS. GOOD SOCIETY.

That man moves in the very best society who is always, in the hours of his solitude, surrounded by the writings of standard authors. Henry Ward Beecher felt something of the dignity of literature. When walking through one of England's greatest libraries, he said, "Few places affected me more than the libraries, and especially the Bodleian Library, reputed to have half a million printed books and manuscripts. I walked solemnly and reverently among the alcoves and through the halls as if in the pyramid of embalmed souls." This is the library where no candle is ever lighted, so valuable are the books and documents within its walls. Here Beecher found himself in silent association with the good and true of all the ages.

THE BOOK LOVER NEVER LONELY.

The lover of good books is never alone and never lonely. He can always turn to his silent friends on the shelf or in the book case. The man who cannot do this is to be pitied. How restless must be the mortal who finds all his pleasures and resources outside of himself—who possesses no power of self-entertainment. And yet great men sometimes fail at this very point.

CLAY AND WEBSTER.

Listen to the words of Daniel Webster concerning Henry Clay. "Mr. Clay is a great man beyond all question, and a true patriot. He has done much for his country. He ought long ago to have been elected president. I think, however, he was never a man of books, or a hard student. I could never imagine him sitting comfortably in his library and reading quietly out of the great books of the past. He has been too fond of the world to enjoy anything like that. He has been too fond of excitement. He has lived upon it. He has been too fond of company, not enough alone—and he has had few resources within himself." This last sentence reveals the weakness of many an otherwise strong man—"few resources within himself."

READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

Great students have been slow readers. Books which can be read rapidly, are as solid books and slow a rule, not worth reading.

readers are twin brothers. Slow reading is essential to the mastery of great books. Dr. F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, one of the greatest men who ever stood in the pulpit once remarked, "I never knew but one or two fast readers, and readers of many books, whose knowledge was worth anything. I read hard or not at all, never skimming, never turning aside to merely inviting books, and Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Sterne and Jonathan Edwards have passed like the iron atoms of the blood into my mental constitution." Timely words were these and well spoken. Harriet Martineau once said of herself, "I am a slow reader—sometimes a page an hour."

THE POWER OF ONE BOOK!

The power of one book is wonderful! One book has often revolutionized a life and thus changed the current of history. This was true in the careers of St. Augustine, Luther and Wesley. I find these words in a sermon by Dr. De Witt Talmage, "It was a turning point with me when in a book store in Syracuse, New York, one day I picked up a book called 'The Beauties of Ruskin.' It was only a book of extracts, but it was all pure honey, and I was not satisfied until I had purchased all his works, at that time expensive beyond an easy capacity to own them, and with what delight I went through reading his 'Seven Lamps of Architecture' and his 'Stones of Venice.'"

READING WITH A NOTE BOOK.

As a rule, do not read borrowed books. Own the books you read. Underline remarkable sentences and mark favorite passages, and above all else keep a note book by your side. Make a speedy record of thoughts, impressions and inspirations in your note book. I could write a whole volume on "The Place of the Note Book in History."

DARWIN AND HIS NOTE BOOK.

Charles Darwin was one of the young men of history who kept a note book. He was gifted with wonderful eyes and could see. No wandering thought or passing fact was permitted to escape without being duly registered. Every point of value reached the note-book. Into that note-book he poured the results of all his observations. He took up the idea of the transmutation of species and began to inquire into the reason for it. For twenty-one years he gathered material, and when his literary edifice was completed in the year 1859, he published his great book, "The Origin of Species," which has been spoken of as "the most epoch-making book of the nineteenth century." Darwin's great book was the offspring of his note-book. Hundreds of great men have followed the note-book plan. It is the only sure method of mental book-keeping. Keep a note-book!

EMERSON'S THREE RULES.

I presume that every man must have some special rule in the selection of books. Twenty-five thousand books are published annually and there are many million books on the library shelves of the world. We cannot read them all. We cannot, even, read all the books of one class, as for instance, all the books on history or all the books on biography. Here are three rules prescribed by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "First, Never read a book that is not a year old; second, Never read any but famed books; third, Never read anything but what you like." For general reading the last rule is a good one. Read the books which appeal to you. If the writings of Emerson interest you, read everything which Emerson has written. If you find gold in any one given direction, dig out the nuggets until you have exhausted the mine. The author who cannot interest you has nothing for you, whatever he may have for others. Excepting fiction, in literature follow the line of least resistance. Read what you like.

THE BEST BOOK THE CHEAPEST.

We are living in an age when the best books are the cheapest. A Bible may be had for six pence and the writings of Shakespeare for a shilling. This was not always so. In the

tenth century the Countess of Anjou gave two hundred sheep, one load of wheat, one load of rye, and one load of millet for a volume of sermons written by a German monk. In those days only the rich could own or possess books. Today the poor man's books may be great both in quality and quantity. Twenty-five dollars will buy one hundred of the world's best books. The second hand book store is the product of our own age. Two hundred years ago such an institution could scarcely be found. Such a store belonged to the great centre of population and was not to be found elsewhere, but now every city of fifty thousand population has its "second hand" book store, and here are treasures hid away on dusty shelves to be had for the asking. Books in almost every form and shape are cheap. Knowledge is within the reach of all.

A BOOK AS THE SYMBOL OF LIFE.

One great writer speaks of the book as a symbol of life. "Our life is a book. Our years are the chapters. Our months are the paragraphs. Our days are the sentences. Our doubts are the interrogation points. Our imitation of others are the quotation marks. Our attempts at display a dash! Death is the final period. Eternity is the peroration." Life is a book. What depths of meaning in the words, "And the books were opened."

A WORD OF CAUTION.

All books are not alike worthy and should not receive equal attention. Remember the words of Lord Bacon, "Some books are to be read, some to be tasted, some to be swallowed, and some to be chewed and digested."

A CHAIN OF BOOKS.

Here is a true story, very encouraging to all who believe in spreading good books: A Puritan minister named Sibbs wrote a booklet called The Bruised Reed. A copy of this was given by a humble layman to a little boy at whose father's house he had been entertained over night. That boy was Richard Baxter, and the book was the means of his conversion. Baxter wrote his Call to the Unconverted, and among the multitude led to Christ by it was Philip Doddridge. Doddridge wrote The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, and "the time would fail to tell" its blessed influence. By it Wilberforce was converted, and of his life and labors volumes could be written. Wilberforce wrote his Practical View of Christianity, and this led not only Dr. Chalmers into the truth, but Legh Richmond to Christ. Richmond wrote The Dairyman's Daughter, which has been published in a hundred languages, and many million copies have been sold.

VIGILANCE.

One of the great railroad managers said that the remarkable growth of what has become one of the largest and richest corporations was due to the watchful vigilance of the men who controlled it. "You can't keep such men down," he said, in effect. "They have enjoyed no peculiar advantages not open to equally able minds." Whether the latter part of his remark is true is immaterial. It is true that great success comes from eternal vigilance. Able and ambitious men push their business. They are awake most of the twenty-four hours every day in the year and neglect no opportunity to gain an advantage. Vigilance, honesty, perseverance, aggressiveness and progressiveness will win you success. Be vigilant.

ALABASTER BOXES OF HUMAN SYMPATHY.

No not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words, while their ears can hear them; and while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier by them; the kind things you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send to their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them. If your friends have alabaster boxes laid away, full of fragrant perfumes of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over your dead body, it would be better if they would bring them out in your weary and troubled hours and open them, that you may be refreshed and cheered by them while you need them. Better to have a plain coffin without a flower, a funeral without a eulogy, than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Let us learn to anoint our friends beforehand for their burial. Post mortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary way.