

KNOWLEDGE OF MEN.

A Chatty Article by Cardinal Gibbons.

THE PREACHER AND HIS PROVINCE

The leading article of the North American Review for May is written by Cardinal Gibbons and is full of bright suggestion and reference. His Eminence is discussing the studies that should be made by men who are to engage in preaching the Gospel:

After the Bible, the study of mankind is the most important and the most instructive pursuit for the ambassador of Christ. The aim of his ministry is to enlighten and convince, to persuade and convert his fellow being, to elevate him to a higher plane of moral rectitude.

The first step toward the accomplishment of this noble aim is to obtain a thorough knowledge of man, his springs of action, his yearnings and desires, his passions and emotions, his vices and temptations, as also the arguments, the motives, and the means best calculated to promote his spiritual progress.

Now, the knowledge of the mysterious kingdom of the heart is more accurately acquired by studying the original than by seeing it described in a book. An artist makes a better portrait from a living subject than from his photograph. We view objects in the abstract in books, but in the concrete in living men.

Books describe human beings as existing in times and countries, or under circumstances different from our own. But in studying the race that surrounds us, we contemplate man just as he is to day.

By a knowledge of his own times and people, the speaker can accommodate his remarks to the special needs of his hearers.

They who have long experience in the ministry, cannot fail to observe the faults into which young clergymen, whose knowledge is chiefly confined to books, and who have had, as yet, little opportunity to commune with their fellow-men, are sometimes liable to fall. They are apt to attach undue weight to matters of minor importance, and to treat lightly subjects of grave moment; they may be strained, fanciful, and unreal, and talk over the heads of the people; or they may denounce in unmeasured, exaggerated terms, a social plague scarcely known by the congregation.

I once listened to a clergyman condemning in vehement language, low-necked dresses where their use was utterly unknown, and where the censure had as little application as it would have had among the inhabitants of the arctic regions. I heard of a young minister of the Gospel who delivered a homily on the ravages of intemperance before an audience composed exclusively of pious, unmarried ladies, who hardly knew the taste of wine.

Some of our separated clerical brethren are not unfrequently betrayed into similar errors by ascribing to their Catholic fellow-citizens religious doctrines and practices which the latter repudiate. A caricature, instead of a true picture, is held up to the public gaze, because the information is drawn from books, hearsay, or tradition, and not from contact with living men.

Another advantage which we derive from a discreet study of men, is the habit of moderation in our judgment of them. We will find that few men are altogether perfect, and few also totally depraved. Blemishes will be discovered in the most exemplary character, and traits of genuine goodness in the most abandoned and perverse. This two-fold experience will

teach us to use sobriety of speech in praising virtuous men and women, including even canonized saints, and to avoid excessive harshness in reproving sinners. For if we paint righteous men without a single fault, we tempt the objects of our eulogy to vanity, and we discourage those that are earnestly aspiring to virtue; but if we paint the vicious as absolutely bad, we drive them to despair.

Modern biographers, while dwelling with pride on the civic and military virtues of Washington, avoid the language of hyperbole in which some of his contemporary eulogists indulged toward the Father of His Country. They seemed to be so dazzled by the lustre of that great luminary before he descended below the horizon, that they could detect no shadow in the object of their adulation.

Webster, too, shortly after his death, was lauded with extravagant encomiums as a man above reproach. The dispassionate testimony of Mr. Bryce, who says that his splendid intellect was mated to a character open to censure, will be acquiesced in by the judgment of impartial readers. Yet, the American people admire and cherish, none the less, these two illustrious personages, notwithstanding the more discriminating verdict and less fulsome praise of modern critics. The spots discovered in these effulgent suns, serve only to disclose in bolder light the splendor of their achievements. "Paint me as I am, warts and all," said Cromwell to Cooper, the artist.

The first living book that a student should read is his own heart, which is a little world in itself, a miniature of the great heart of humanity. "Know thyself," is a primary maxim of Christian, as well as of pagan, philosophy. Massillon was once asked how he could delineate so faithfully the emotions and rebellions of the human heart, and especially the intrigues, the ambitions and jealousies of the Court, which he so rarely frequented. He replied that he drew his knowledge from the study of his own heart.

He will also find an open and instructive book full of object lessons in the mass of human beings that he may encounter in the daily walks of life. He can pick up useful bits of information from his companions during his college course, and afterward from the persons he may meet on the street, on the farm, in the workshop, in the counting-room, in the social circle, on the steamboat and on the railway.

Sir Walter Scott says that a man of active mind cannot talk to the boy who holds his horse without obtaining some new thought.

Intercourse with living men not only enlightens the mind, but it also quickens the sympathies, and fires the heart of the speaker in the pulpit far more powerfully than abstract learning; for what is seen affects us more sensibly than what is read, and the earnestness of our words is proportioned to the strength of our impressions.

The more the man of God studies the inner life of the people, their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, the more persuasive and moving will be his exhortations. He will come down to the level of his flock, he will be in touch with them, and they will recognize that his heart is in his work. He will retain his hold on the masses without neglecting the classes.

These remarks apply to statesmen and lawyers, as well as to ministers of the Gospel. O'Connell's influence over the people of Ireland was such as no other man in his generation ever exerted on any nation. He could sway the multitude, move them to tears or laughter, playing on every chord of their heart. The secret of his empire over his countrymen was that he had sprung from the peasantry, and had lived among them. He knew their grievances and aspirations, and sympathized with them in their wrongs and sufferings.

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Napoleon, though a poor shot, was the greatest general of his age. He said with truth of himself: "I know man." He owed his success to his insight into human character, which enabled him to make a judicious selection of his military officers and state officials.

The learned men of ancient Greece and Rome did not consider their education complete till they had travelled abroad, and acquainted themselves with the habits and manners of other people and climes.

Herodotus, the Father of History, derived most of the information embodied in his work from travel and converse with men.

Plato, after being eight years a disciple of Socrates, spent twelve years in the pursuit of knowledge in foreign parts before he returned to his native Athens.

Edmund Burke says of Homer and Shakespeare: "Their practical superiority over all other men, arose from their practical knowledge of other men"—a knowledge which Homer acquired by frequent journeys abroad; and Shakespeare, by studying mankind at home.

St. Jerome, the most eminent Hebrew scholar of his age, visited various cities of Gaul and Greece, Antioch and other places in Asia-Minor, Palestine, Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria and other centres of learning in Egypt, where he consulted the men most conspicuous in those times for erudition and piety. When his own fame for learning was spread abroad, scholars from all parts of the civilized world flocked to him as to an oracle.

Sir Walter Scott's charming novels are remarkable for their accuracy in the portraiture of Scotch character, and the scenes he describes. He obtained his information by traversing Scotland, living and conversing with the people, treasuring up their bits of local traditions, and afterward interweaving them with his historic romances. "I have read books enough," he says, "and conversed with splendidly educated men in my time; but, I assure you, I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor, uneducated men and women, than I have ever met with out of the pages of the Bible."

It is well known that, while Milton is read by the few, Dickens is read by the million. He made personal visits to the prisons, insane asylums, reformatories, and boarding schools of England. He frequented the haunts of poverty, suffering, and wretchedness in London. His sense of indignation is aroused against official insolence, cruelty, and injustice; and his warmest sympathy is quickened in behalf of the victims of legalized oppression and tyranny. He draws his scenes from actual life; he deals with the men and women of his own time, and he gains the popular heart.

I was never more impressed with the impulse given to knowledge by contact with learned men, than during the Vatican Council, when Prelates of world-wide experience and close observation were assembled in Rome. Each bishop brought with him an in-

timato acquaintance with the history of his country, and with the religious, social, and political condition of the people among whom he lived. One could learn more from a few hours' interview with those living encyclopedias than from a week's study of books. An earnest conversation with those keen-sighted churchmen on the social and moral progress of their respective countries, yielded as much more instruction and delight, as compared with a printed account, as a personal inspection of an international exposition would, in comparison with a description of it in the pages of an illustrated periodical. The living words left an indelible impress on the heart and memory.

As the minister of Christ is pre-eminently the friend and father of the people, he cannot be indifferent to any of the social, political and economic questions affecting the interests and happiness of the nation. The relations of Church and State, the duties and prerogatives of the citizen, the evils of political corruption and usurpation, the purification of the ballot-box, the relative privileges and obligations of labor and capital, the ethics of trade and commerce, the public desecration of the Lord's day, popular amusements, temperance, the problem of the colored and Indian races, female suffrage, divorce, socialism, and anarchy—such are vital, and often burning, questions, on which hinge the peace and security of the Commonwealth.

Politics has a moral as well as a civil aspect. The clergyman is a social as well as a religious reformer, a patriot as well as a preacher, and he knows that the permanence of our civic institutions rests on the intelligence and the virtue of the people. He has at heart the temporal as well as the spiritual prosperity of those committed to his care. They naturally look up to him as to guide and teacher. His education, experience, and sacred character give weight to his words and example.

There is scarcely a social or economic movement of reform on foot, no matter how extravagant or Utopian, that has not some element of justice to recommend it to popular favor. If the scheme is abandoned to the control of fanatics, demagogues, or extremists, it will deceive the masses and involve them in greater misery. Such living topics need discriminating judges to separate the wheat from the chaff.

And who is more fitted to handle these questions than God's ambassador, whose conservative spirit frowns upon all intemperate innovations, and whose Christian sympathies prompt him to advocate for his suffering brethren every just measure for the redress of grievances and the mitigation of need less misery?

The timely interposition of the minister of peace might have helped to check many a disastrous popular inundation by watching its course, and diverting it into a safe channel before it overspread the country.

It is the mind that makes the body rich.
Every man's life is a fairy tale written by God's fingers.