

THE TREAD-WHEEL OF LIFE.

SLOWLY, wearily, Time's great wheel moves round,
 With every now and then a jolt, a jar,
 As some slight pebble, or, at times, a stone
 Of greater size and moment is encountered
 Upon the way, and crushed into the dust
 Relentlessly; a jolt, a jar, perchance
 Scarce to be felt upon the upper rim
 Of the great circle, pausing not at all
 By reason of the shock, but still pressed on,
 Driven by forces long accumulating,
 Not to be lightly stopped; a jar, scarce felt
 By myriad millions more of human pebbles
 Yet clinging, mud-stuck, to the revolving wheel,
 Or climbing and struggling, struggling and climbing up,
 Up, ever up, striving to gain a place
 Upon the top, but only to be dragged
 By the slow revolution of the wheel
 Down, down again, until they too slip off,
 And disappear beneath, and are o'errun.
 So the great wheel rolls round. And we who climb
 Push on, unmindful of the stones that fall
 Incessantly upon our every hand,
 Dreading to look behind. As one who walks
 Alone the grim ink-blackness of the night
 Fears to look back, nor knows the reason why,
 But hurries trembling on, so we climb up,
 Till desperation can no more afford
 Us headway 'gainst the wheel's down-dragging strength.
 Still we toil, breathless—will not yet give up,
 But persevere to make but even way
 Against the wheel, and so to hold our place,
 Though we advance not. But the time is short—
 Until with heartsick for dismay we see
 That now no longer can we e'er prevail,
 Or even hope to hold our own against
 The constant, cruel force which mercilessly
 O'erpowers us, and which, at last, we note
 Is gaining on us; slowly at first, as we
 Renew our efforts to surmount the hill
 And gain the headway lost; slowly at first,
 But ever faster, as our powers weaken;
 Until at length, with limbs and heart toil-weary,
 We cease to struggle, and can only cling
 And watch the nearing brink, which comes so slow
 But sure withal; or smile, perchance, at others
 Scarce yet begun the ascent, whose legs are strong
 And hearts light, and who, bounding nimbly upwards,
 Forgetful are, or ne'er have learned how quickly
 Their joy will turn to grief, and hope to terror.
 Others we see, as we, despondent clinging
 And waiting for the end; some trustful, praying,
 Expecting to attain to bliss hereafter,
 Others, again, full of sighs, groans, and curses,
 With oaths rebellious on their sin-stained lips,
 And fearing to pass o'er th' approaching brink
 To the unknown beyond. Still on we sweep,
 And on, and on, and on—till, at the edge,
 A kind oblivion steals our senses from us.
 So we fall off, and down, and are o'erridden,
 Nor conscious are of death for Life Immortal,
 Where all is smooth, and straight, and none grow weary,
 And Time's great wheel becomes eternal rest.

Dorchester, N.B., Canada. R. W. HANINGTON.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF BOOKS.

THE friendship of books is a friendship within the reach of all. We may not be able to collect rare volumes, or even cover our bookshelves with the great standard writers in the English tongue, not to speak of the higher ranks of scholarship, which are utterly beyond us, yet the average English reader may mark, learn, and inwardly digest the wealth of the ripest thinkers at a cost so trifling that none need be excluded. No doubt we would be delighted to have at command the princely libraries of Prospero, and the immense scholarship of Squire Wendover (poor man!); nevertheless, without such large opportunities and splendid equipment, the intellectual life is not denied any of us, and our influence on others may be both sweet and wholesome, notwithstanding.

We have to regret often, however, that we are a good deal like Old Beattie, of Mickeldales—of all our reading we just retain what hits our fancy, and thereby becomes a part of ourselves. The gigantic memory of Sir Walter Scott or Lord Macaulay strikes us with amazement, making us painfully aware of our own poor resources in this respect. We have some comfort in believing that George Eliot, with all her great ability and unrivalled power in her own field of literature, had always to verify her quotations like an ordinary mortal. So, if we cannot jump over the moon, we may clear a fence or two, if the height be but reasonable.

If we can retain the tone and flavour of our choice authors most of us are satisfied with the result, leaving the polyglot accomplishments of the few uncoveted. Our mental food, however, is a matter of serious consideration. We do not eat every dish that is set before us, be it served ever so daintily. We respect our stomachs (that great seat of the imagination), and have learned to have a wholesome dread of dyspepsia. But there is often a disposition to treat our minds with much less consideration than we do our bodies, intoxicating ourselves, nauseating ourselves, and enervating ourselves with extraordinary complacency, as though we imagined there was laid up somewhere in us an apparatus that would act as a safety

valve, without trouble on our part, and detach at times our moral from our intellectual life. What we read, however little that may be, can never cease to be one main element in the moral atmosphere of our lives. The power of literature, be it ever so poor, or ever so excellent, lies not simply in what it says to us, but in what it makes us say to ourselves. Suggestion is more powerful than statement. The human mind is a mysterious storehouse, laying up good and bad with remarkable indifference, and without conscious effort, and the impression once made may be dormant for years, only to spring to life at the touch of some chance word, or sight, or look, or musical note, which, after the lapse of years, may have power, for good or evil, to fire the whole train of forgotten memories, compelling the burying-places of the mind to give up their dead; and they are indeed fortunate who have

No fears to beat away, no strife to heal,
 The past unsighed for, and the future sure.

Our mental good is of more consequence than we can well estimate, particularly so in youth, for the spring time of life holds within itself the promises of the future.

My inheritance, how wide and fair;
 Time is my fair seed field, of Time I'm heir.

Oliver Wendell Holmes has told us that the training of a child should begin a hundred years before he is born. But it really begins many hundred years before we appear upon the stage of time. We are heirs to all the ages, and whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, in the life and thought of the past belong to us—

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
 Or builds the house, or digs the grave.

Think how much poorer the world would have been without Moses and Isaiah, without Homer and Dante, without Paul and Seneca, without Marcus Aurelius and Caesar, without Epictetus and Plato, without David and Milton, without Bunyan and Shakespeare, not to mention any others of that noble army of seers, apostles, poets, historians, and soldiers, through whose inspired genius the human interests of the past and present are linked together. Whatever the moneyed interests of the world may say to the contrary, thought rules, and when all the bustling and shouting that would stifle it are hushed, and even the great works which it guided the hand of man to do have perished, or remain only in faded splendour to tell of pomp and glory gone forever, it shall remain with us still in the world of wisdom and of beauty, and shall not pass away.

The writer can remember that crisis in his mental life when the beauty and terror and grandeur of the great masters in the English tongue first took possession of his soul. Doubtless others can do the same. It is the hour of the soul's awakening. It may be through a book, a friend, a sermon, a lecture, a great sorrow, or a great joy; but by whatever means it comes to us, it is the beginning of a new life, a veritable new birth—a birth from above. When the first whole and complete Shakespeare came into the writer's hands it was a great occasion, and honour demanded that the bulky volume should be read from the beginning, and the first play was "Macbeth." Retiring early with a solitary candle, which served to make the darkness of a large bedchamber visible, leaving ample room for imagination to call spirits from the vasty deep to people the dark recesses, and peer out between the ample curtains that draped the ancient four-poster of forty years ago—with all these suggestive accompaniments the eager student of twelve years sat down to the perusal of Shakespeare's great tragedy. It was no work of fiction at that moment, but a real and terrible history, painted by a master-hand. The weird sisters were not creatures of the poet's brain, but real and embodied spirits of evil, unearthly, wild, blasted things; creatures accursed, whose very looks were like sword-thrusts, and their tones like a breath from the bottomless abyss. Then that dagger of the mind which lures Macbeth to commit the deed of blood, and the swift vengeance which remorse inflicts upon them both—

Methought, I heard a voice cry, sleep no more!
 Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,
 Sleep that puts up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
 The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
 Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
 Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Sleep has died by violence, the very atmosphere reeks of slaughter, and retribution has already fallen upon the hapless Thane of Glamis, and a worse man might have escaped the terror of his crime, but—

High minds of native pride and force,
 Most deeply feel thy pangs, Remorse!
 Fear for their scourge, mean villains have,
 Thou art the torturer of the brave!

There is nothing here of the lament of another poet when he tells that

Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep,
 He, like the world, his ready visit pays;
 Where fortune smiles; the wretched he forsakes;
 Swift on his downy pinions flies from woe,
 And lights on eyelids, unsullied with a tear.

Nor Shakespeare in another of his plays, when he says:

O sleep, O gentle sleep,
 Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
 That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
 And steep my senses in forgetfulness?

Canst thou, O partial sleep! give thy repose
 To the wet seaboy in an hour so rude,
 And in the calmest and most stillest night,
 With all appliances and means to boot
 Deny it to a King?

But in Macbeth sleep has been killed by crime, and hell has found the criminals in the very hour of their success. They have slipped into a dark river whose current is too strong, and they are being swept on to swift disaster. All the perfume of Arabia cannot sweeten Lady Macbeth's little hand, or undo the terrible past, and Macbeth looks upon the wreck of his own life, and confesses that he has lived long enough, his May of life has fallen into the sere and yellow leaf.

And that which accompany old age,
 As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
 He must not look to have, but in their stead,
 Curses not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
 Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

Having made my first plunge into Shakespeare, and survived it, I settled down to something like a study of his life and writings, but never have I lost the sense of that first night when all alone in the hush of the midnight hour I saw the weird sisters and Banquo's gory locks, and heard Macduff's startled cry—

O horror! horror! horror!
 Tongue, nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee!

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
 The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
 The life of the building.

Many years afterwards I visited the ancient Castle of Glamis, which tradition links with the story of Macbeth, and being somewhat run-down in health and over-fatigued besides with prolonged wanderings among the old armour and records of the castle I was seized with a sudden faintness which made it necessary for me to lie down, and the bed chamber near which I stood at the moment was courteously placed at my disposal. When I recovered I found I was occupying Duncan's Chamber, the chamber tradition links with the murder, and certainly with its imperfect light and sombre furnishings it was better adapted for a veritable chamber of horrors than the sleeping apartment of a King.

Little as we know of Shakespeare's life, we love to weave that little into some picture of the man and his surroundings, if happily we may bring the thousand-souled writer within the scope of our understanding and heart.

We can all imagine him a young man starting for London with little money in his purse, a defective education, if we are to believe that he had "small Latin and less Greek," and weighted by an early and probably unhappy marriage; be this as it may, we find him at about twenty-two in the full stream of London life, living, we may suppose, the unrestrained life of Marlow, Green, and the rest of the "playwrights" of the period. He tries his "prentice hand" on Titus Andronicus, the Comedy of Errors, and the first part of Henry VI. But mere frolics of intellect and action could not long satisfy a mind like Shakespeare's, and with the Midsummer Night's Dream we have the unfolding of the finer qualities of his genius. It is a marvellous blending of classic legend, mediæval fairy land, and the clownish life of the English mechanic of that day, making under the magic touch of the great master a strange and beautiful web of poetic fancy in which threads of silken splendour are run together in its texture with a yarn of hempen homespun. As we study his earlier and later plays we note the change that passes over them. The light and airy fancy we find in his earliest efforts gives place to a tone of sadness and thought. He had prospered and become famous, the Queen patronized him, the people loved him, he had made many and powerful friends, when suddenly all his life was darkened at high noon. His best and dearest friends were ruined. Essex perished on the scaffold; Southampton, to whom he dedicated his sonnets, was sent to the Tower; Pembroke was banished from Court, and he may himself have fallen under suspicion. Under the pressure of public and private ills he turns to the study of the sterner and more tragic aspect of life. The last days of Queen Elizabeth were drawing to a close, and the poet, like his own Hamlet, felt that "the times were out of joint." Measure for Measure, Julius Caesar, Othello, Macbeth, Lear, and some others bear witness to the change that had passed over him. He stands aside from the crash that overwhelmed his friends, gazing sadly on the changing world around him. The darker sins of men, the unpitiful fate which slowly gathers round and falls on men, the avenging wrath of conscience, the cruelty and punishment of weakness, the treachery, lust, jealousy, ingratitude and madness of men, the follies of the great and the fickleness of the mob are all with a thousand varying moods and passions painted and felt as his own.

While friends were falling around him, and hopes fading, he was passing through seas of inward suffering, and his work retains for us the colouring of his mind. Failure seemed everywhere. Hamlet's fine and penetrating intellect is useless for want of the capacity for action. The virtue of Brutus is foiled by its ignorance of mankind, Lear's mighty passion battles hopelessly against the wind and rain of fate. The poison of a villain mars and ruins Othello, a woman's weakness of body and power of conscience dashes the cup from the hand of Lady Macbeth; lust and self-indulgence blast the heroism of Anthony; and pride ruins the nobleness of Coriolanus. The religious questions that agitated thoughtful minds in the days of Queen Elizabeth find no place in the works of Shakespeare, when he touches on questions of religion it is with reverence, but also with impenetrable reserve. "To die is to go we know not whither, we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." Then toward the end of his life the cloud of sadness passes away and his last works are touched by a loving calm, as