

# What Can Literature Do For Me?

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"Why, about this matter of avoiding all appearances of evil. I suppose we'd all of us like to go only where it is desirable, if we could. Now, here am I, tempted through and through, but I can't say that I won't go into Chapin's. If he wants his walls fixed, and has a mind to pay enough for his hangings, my men and I must go and hang them for him; that's all there is to that. You may keep clear, but we can't."

John's face flushed and his lips went quickly together. But they didn't stay together; it wasn't a way they had when John was touched upon a sore place, and John was sore yet as concerned the occurrence of the day previous; so before he hardly knew what he was going to do he was hammering away again.

"I'd see if I couldn't keep clear of it," he said, his eyes flashing fire. "If I was a big man like you with plenty of money to do with, too! Yes, sir, ee, I'd see whether I'd be nosed around by a man like Chapin, and tell him, jest for a little money, how to fix the gold and red and deep blue on the walls so as to make an old den like his shine out tempting like. No, sir! he might die for it before I'd help him."

And having had his say, John turned, and was conscious that his heart had gone to pounding again, and the strength of his knees deserted him. Oh, dear! why did he care before he was out of the world! He might have known that he wasn't through with it yet! And leaning behind the awning, he let the tears roll down over his face undetected.

Mr. Sullivan did not remove his hat this time. It was a soft felt one, and he crowded it down over his forehead in a way that was very different from the one of the morning previous. Really things are getting personal. If the boy keeps on, there'd be no getting on with him—that was sure. And looking around and seeing the store was clear of him, he felt relieved, and still more relieved when his foreman, stepping forward, urged him into a vortex of troublesome business.

That night Mr. Sullivan found rest as hard to gain as he had the night before, but John slept well, and even as Mr. Sullivan tossed and tossed away visions were hovering near the plainly dressed couch of the errand boy.

It was three days before Mr. Sullivan could lay the matter off from him and call it settled, and during the time he led John a life of fractious demands that would have been hard to bear had John borne it alone. But one evening, standing in the door, just as the hurrying six o'clock throng was sweeping by, John felt a hand laid upon him, and looking up, found his employer beside him. The old smile was back again; he was himself, and seeing it, John drew a long breath and could hardly restrain himself from making some demonstration of pleasure at the sight.

"Well, John, you gave me a knotty old problem with that last, but I rather guess it's a good deal as you say. There's no use in having independence unless you can be independent. I've written Chapin that he may look elsewhere for his work to be done. I rather think the city'll support us without his help. At any rate, as you say, it isn't just pleasant to think we help make such places attractive." And with a hearty grasp of the hand, the gentleman stepped into the carriage and was borne away.

Was John sorry that he had stood firm? Did his heart trouble him by great turbulent bounds? His heart did indeed beat within him stormily, but it was from over-abundance of joy, not grief; and John slept that night as he had never slept before. And Mr. Sullivan—well, he was younger by a half dozen years, when the day again broke over him.

A RECENT writer endeavors to answer through a little book in a very interesting way the above question. Too often books are made merely instruments of entertainment or for acquiring knowledge, without any broad or serious outlook or enquiry into their possibilities for us. What can I get out of them? is the usual question, but this writer asks, What can they get out of me?

Literature, he claims, can give one an outlet. "It is your own personality you are trying to unlock. Literature, then, is within you. The masters only bring it out." Many of the world's greatest books are composed of ideas which have floated haphazardly through the minds of many men, but to which they have never been able to give adequate expression. The book crystallizes into forms of beauty their vague and incoherent thoughts. The great book or poem is not something high above or far away from men, but something which actually links itself to their minds, and leads them out into new provinces of thought and beauty, yet provinces which lie within themselves. The novel is interesting because it links itself with our own feelings and experiences. Longfellow's "Psalm of Life" tell upon its own age we are told with great delight and found in it a mighty inspiration. While its ideas are more commonplace now, where is the true young man who does not discover in it the beautiful expression of his own inmost thought?

Books keep before us great ideals. They help us to look up and out from and beyond ourselves. The greatest books furnish a mighty appeal to the imagination; and however far the imagination may lead us, we feel that no thing, no place, is alien to us or impossible for us. We may reach it or the race of man in some way at some time may accomplish it. The doctrine of evolution, as outlined by Darwin's "Origin of Species," was anticipated by the poets Tennyson and Browning. "Lord Kelvin's genius was the genius of vision," he imagined things first, then executed them. America has produced some of the noblest poems of idealism; perhaps the greatest short poem of this class is Longfellow's "Excelsior," but surely Holmes' "Chambered Nautilus" is a worthy second? Our young people should find much in the literature of the ages to inspire them and the great possibilities and tasks of Canadian Nationhood. Nature and personality are the great themes of literature, and in both we discover great ideals beckoning us afar.

From literature we get a better knowledge of human nature. There is nothing more wonderful about books than their characters, creations. Great types of character abound, which not only portray living men and women, but interpret to us human hearts and lives as no mere observation of living men and women can do. Omitting minor ones, Shakespeare gives two hundred and forty-six, George Eliot one hundred and seven, Dickens one hundred and two, and Thackeray forty, well-defined and widely-known characters. The author noted above gives us a list of fifteen outstanding characters in literature. Homer's Ulysses, Tennyson's King Arthur, Dante's Beatrice, Cervantes' Don Quixote, Shakespeare's Falstaff and Hamlet, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Goethe's Faust, Cooper's Leatherstocking, Browning's Pippa, Thackeray's Becky Sharp, Dickens' David Copperfield, Eliot's Silas Marner, Hugo's Jean Valjean, and Harris' Uncle Remus.

Literature restores the past to us. Not

only in the historical records of the past, but more especially in the characters and characteristics of the men and the conditions of the bygone times as depicted by the poet and novelist. What vivid pictures of historical personages and places we get from the pages of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott. Arthur Henry Hallam would have been forgotten now, but he lives forever in Tennyson's "In Memoriam." The Battle of the Baltic was a great fight, but we remember it largely as described in Campbell's ringing poem.

Another great gift of literature is the unwilling to us of the glory of the commonplace. Some simple thing which men see, but which hardly claims their attention; some incident in our own lives or in those of others, soon forgotten; some situation rousing only passing curiosity, is seized by the poet or romancer, and is transformed into a thing of literary beauty or power which influences men forever. It may be only a flower in a wall, a mouse in a field, a man with a hoe, but round these ordinary things is woven a glory which binds them to the highest things in earth and heaven.

Then literature gives us mastery in our own language. Words are properly used, ideas are fitly expressed by the great masters. It has often been said that the reading and studying of the English Bible is one of the best ways to acquire a mastery of the English language. This is true, not merely because it is a book containing great and noble ideas clothed in fitting words, but because it is a collection of books embodying literature in almost every possible form. Poetry has been divided into four great classes—the epic, the lyric, the drama, the ballad, and prose into seven—history, orations, biography, letters, the essay, the novel and the short story. In form or essence we find every one of these in the Bible. It is one book, but it gives us the key to all books. It is an introduction to the masters of all time. If we would know our own language we must know the Bible and the great books written in that language.

What can literature do for me? More, probably than most of us have thought. Carlyle says, "The true university of these days is a collection of books."

## Scientific Management

A prosperous looking drummer entered the office of a merchant to whom he sold his new filing system a short time before.

"Good morning, Mr. Hobbs," said he, in his genial way. "And how is the filing system working?"

"Great!" said the merchant.

"Good!" said the agent, rubbing his hands. "And how is business?"

"Business!" echoed the merchant. "Oh, we have stopped business to attend to the filing system."—*Harper's Monthly.*

## Sizing Up Louis

There recently came to a fashionable shoe-shop in Chicago a daughter of a man whose wealth has been acquired within very recent years. The young woman was disposed to patronize the clerk, and rejected a number of "classy" slippers he produced for her approval. Finally she said:

"I think, perhaps, I shall take these two pairs. But Louis XV. heels are too high for me. Give me a size lower—or, stay—perhaps Louis XIII. will be high enough."—*Harper's.*