

## World-Wide Young Methodism

## XI.—The Young Methodist and His Books

REV. ERNEST F. H. CAPEY.

"Life is a leaf of paper white,  
Whereon each one of us may write.  
His word or two and then comes night."  
"Lo, time and space enough," we cry,  
"To write an epic!"

IT is ever thus. The temptation constantly recurs: time enough, space enough. In truth there is shortage of both. He who would write an epic must not only "greatly begin," he must early begin. "No one can give more than he has received. So life's first task is to gather, to learn to pile high, with eager hand, the treasure within. Youth is storing time. "Lege, lege," was the late Dean Farrar's insistent cry to his Marlborough boys—"read, read." This process of storing can hardly begin too soon. Macaulay was a great reader from the age of three. Mrs. Browning, when eight years old, was as familiar with Homer in the original as she was happy with her doll. The young Methodist who loves books is in proud and honored company. In the ranks of the great we are to be found nearly all the great names of the world. Petrarch died with his head resting upon a book for pillow. Charles Lamb once actually kissed an old folio, Chapman's "Homer," in a transport of delight. To Southey, the biographer of John Wesley, books were "all but everything." Dr. Johnson—to use, as Miss Stephen's impolite word—"forged books." "Sir," said he to Boswell, "in my early years I read very hard. It is a sad reflection, but a true one, that I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now."

Among the great men of action, we recall Frederick's love of letters, and Abraham Lincoln's passion for, and Napoleon's travelling library. Among politicians we think of Pitt's sofa with its sheaf of thumbed classics, and of Fox, exchanging with tears, his books and his garden for the House of Commons with its strife of tongues. We well also upon the names of Walpole, Canning, Sir Robert Peel, Disraeli, Gladstone, leaving out of view eminent statesmen with us today.

To your books, young Methodists! If, like Edward FitzGerald, you can retire these dull November evenings

"Into an old room  
Beside a bright fire,"

and there sit

"Reading old things  
Of knights and ladies,  
While the wind sings,  
Oh! dearly sings!"

your joy no man can take from you. The roof-tree of your father's house may be low, the walls narrow, and bare, and near, but yours is the life limitless in spite of all. Do not ask me to say what books you should read. Trust your own instincts. "That which is natural for us, that which nourishes us, gives us appetite," says Drummond, "is that which is right for us." Do not be distressed if, for a season, you turn against classical works or recommended books. We all have original tastes, and are at different stages of growth. The important thing is that the edge upon your appetite should be kept keen. To be genuinely interested in one book means awakening and growing interest in many books. Mr. W. T. Stead has told us what wonder and joy came into his life when, at the age of fifteen, the first penny weekly number of Dick's "Shakespeare" fell into his hands. Shakespeare became to him the key to all literature. Gillilan's

"Gallery of Literary Portraits" contained a lecture on Shakespeare. For the sake of that lecturer he secured the book. Gillilan discloses the fact that most of the great essayists had written a criticism of Shakespeare, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Schlegel, Goethe, young Stead was soon reading them all. In less than a year from the investment of a penny in the purchase of "Hamlet," and "Othello," he was studying Locke, and had begun "to take a keen interest in politics and history."

Perhaps you will begin with Shakespeare. It would be a seemly thing for a young Methodist to do. John Wesley left behind him an annotated Shakespeare, the precious sheets of which an editor is said to have thrown to the flames! He expressly named Shakespeare as one of the works to be studied in the fourth year's course at Kingswood School. Do you know Shakespeare's boys? Brutus's page-boy, for example? Ho! Lucius!

Brutus. Look, Lucius, here's the book  
I sought for so;

I put it in this pocket of my gown.

Lucius. I was sure your lordship did  
not give it me.

Brutus. Bear with me, good boy, I am  
much forgetful.

Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes  
awhile,

And touch thy instrument a strain or  
two?

Lucius. Ay, my lord, an it pleases ye.

Brutus. It does my boy;  
I trouble thee too much, but thou art well  
fitted to sing.

Lucius. It is my duty, sir.

Brutus. I should not urge thy duty  
past thy might,

I know young bloods look for a time of  
rest.

Lucius. I have slept, my lord, already.

They say that courtesy is a lost art; that twentieth-century young people have no manners. I repel this dictum as a slander upon your fair name. At the same time is there not something to be learned by going to school to Shakespeare's boys?

But perhaps other poets, not Shakespeare, throw their spell upon you. Wise teachers may have told you stories like "Una and the Lion," or "Braggadocio and the Snowy Maid," or "Pastorella the Shepherdess," or "The Quest of the Blatant Beast," thus opening your eyes to the "white witchery" of Spenser's "Faerie Queene." If so, the countenance of Wesley is lifted upon you. Advising his preachers in their studies he urged them to write not only with the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament but with the literary masterpieces also, and in this connection he signalled out, as worthy of special study, Spenser's "Faerie Queene." The boy Keats raved through the romance of the poem "like a young horse turned into a meadow." You may do the same, especially if you take care that the allegory does not bite you. It is possible, of course, that "our sage and serious poet" may act upon you as he did upon Walter Savage Landor—like a sleeping draught, sending you to bed.

The heart of loyalty is in you, I know, and "Wesley" and "Methodism" are in your ears as magic words. The young Methodist who despises his Church, or his fathers, is surely ignorant of the story of the Evangelical years. In your case ignorance is, or soon will be, dis-

pelled. You cannot be content not to know. No one expects you to begin with Wesley's "Sermons," "Journals," or with Southey's "Life of Wesley," or with one of the Histories of Methodism, full of romance and colour as these works certainly are; but no man versed in the tricks of reading doubts, for one moment, that such books must arrest you before long. Even if you read, somewhat, "Dear-dayler," or "Robinson Crusoe," or "Uncle Tom's Cabin," or "Tom Brown's School-days," or "Pickwick," or "Monte Christo," or "Treasure Island," or "The Jumping Frog," you will wake up some day soon in the company of the brothers Wesley, John and Charles, and the Moravians, and the Mystics, and the Missionaries, and the great and good of all ages and lands.

And because you are Methodists you will read with method, outlining your own scheme. If you train yourself in the habit of making extracts from every wordy book you read, some valuable material will be gathered for your blessing in the days that lie before. Index cards have revolutionized modern business methods; why should they not do us service in the world of books? I would start every young reader with a box of subject index cards. Dr. Marcus Dods speaks gratefully of the friend who counselled him, in boyhood, to read each week one chapter of Foster's "Essays," and the following week to write what his memory retained. If Goethe had known such a friend he might have been saved the confession, that after fifty years of fruitless endeavor he was still trying to learn how to read.

"Rejoice . . . in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee." The lines are fallen to you in pleasant places.

"Do you stoop, you pluck a posy;  
Do you stand and stare? all's blue."

Are you fully appreciative of your privileges? In these days of cheap classical reprints no one need fail to build a library of his own. This library, in its beginnings, may be small, but the young Methodist whose wisdom remains in him, counts a few books, chosen because beloved, mastered because worthy, more precious than thousands of volumes accumulated for fashion's sake or in pride.

My space is filled, and I wanted to speak of the Book of books, and of Palgrave's incomparable "Golden Treasury," and of Dante, and Butler, and Ruskin, and Tennyson, and . . . but, enough! the love of reading is in you; also, I trust, the fear of God and the grace, the charm of the Lord Jesus Christ, so you will not miss your way.

## DISTRICT SECRETARIES!

PLEASE NOTE!

You are earnestly requested by the General Secretary to send at the earliest possible date a full list of your newly-elected District Epworth League officers. Without their names and addresses the records in the Central office must necessarily be unreliable and incomplete. KINDLY OBLIGE!