

I shall go on to say a few words about great separate regions of literature, such as History, Poetry, and Biography; but here I will conclude by urging you, dear reader, to enter on this paradisiacal domain which lies ever open before your feet — these gardens rich with “the summer opulence of heaven.” You may breathe this pure and exhilarating spiritual atmosphere as you sit with those high souls whom God has illuminated with the flame of genius. Glorious leaders are waiting to welcome you, and gentle saints to sit as brethren by your side. Why need any man feel “cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d” in pettiness when at the lifting of a latch he may enter into “unimaginable realms of faerie”? Why need we be overworried by the fussy and the foolish, the base and the contemptible, when in books, without travelling as far as Endor, we may summon to our bidding the mightiest spirits of the dead? Why need we be drowned in disappoint-

ment and listlessness, as with that tide on the coast of Lincolnshire, “always shallow, yet always just deep enough to drown,” when, at the price of a few pence, we may, as it were, hear Heaven’s Seraphim choiring round the sapphire throne? Can we not escape in a moment from those whom the poet calls

“Men-slugs and human serpentry;”

and can we not be relieved from life’s worst enemies — vexatious, fretful, and lawless passions, “spirits of wasted energy and wandering desire, of unappeased famine and unsatisfied hope” — by communion with these kingly and radiant souls? A man who lives in this high society will walk through the world with the open eyes of wonder and the receptive mind of intelligence. He will believe in God; he will believe in Man; he will believe in Conscience; he will believe in Duty; and while he believes in these no darkness without

can ever wholly quench that light within, which is a reflection of the light of God Himself in the human soul. The best books of man will throw more and more widely open before him the Books of God, which are best interpreted by that chosen literature of the Chosen People, which more than all the other literature of the world is able to make us wise unto salvation.

Although great books should occupy the main attention of every student, yet I would by no means exclude the reading of other books which may be useful and even necessary, though we may be unable to call them "great." Many a book which is not great may still tend to diminish human sorrow and enhance human blessedness. It may only be "a book of the hour," and yet may help us towards the understanding of the books which are "for all time." It may live, even though it dies, for it may have tended "to add sun-

light to daylight by making the happy happier." It may have passed into the thoughts of many men, and so may survive in the best of all ways, by adding its infinitesimal quota to the nobler life of the world. Books doomed to swift oblivion have, of course, been multiplied to an amazing extent since the discovery of printing, but they must not be regarded as one of the unfortunate results of that discovery. The evil of the over-multiplication of books is more than counterbalanced by the blessing conferred by the dissemination of pure thought and wholesome knowledge. Only the fewest books—a mere infinitesimal proportion of the numbers which daily appear—survive even for a year; but the world is enriched forever by—

" Books written when the soul is at springtide,
When it is laden like a groaning sky
Before a thunderstorm. They are power, and
gladness,

And majesty, and beauty. They seize the reader
 As tempests seize a ship, and bear him on
 With a wild joy. Some books are drenched sands
 On which a great soul's wealth lies all in heaps
 Like a wrecked argosy's. What power in books!
 They mingle gloom and splendour as I've oft
 In thunderous sunsets seen the thunder-piles
 Seamed with dull fire, and fiercest glory-rents.
 They awe me to my knees as if I stood
 In presence of a king. They give me tears."

Even when we recall the thirty thousand novels which have been written in the last eighty years, many of them — perhaps the majority — though doomed to oblivion from their birth, have at least afforded some passing and harmless amusement to a few. It is said that now novels are being published at the rate of five a day! In that fact young readers should see the need for careful discrimination. Why read an utterly poor and meaningless book when a lifetime is far too short to read even those which are really good? I would say the same of "religious" books. There

are many which are full of high and pure thought. Why, then, waste time over those which are empty of all good; over books of the feeblest commonplace, or shoals of manuals of sickly, exotic, and namby-pamby devotions? Hood was right when he said, —

"A man may cry 'Church, church,' at every word,
 With no more piety than other people;
 A daw's not counted a religious bird
 Because it keeps caw-cawing from the steeple."

We can go to sleep without aid from the narcotic of ecclesiastical nullities; and even if we had nothing but the Bible in our hands, we could well do without the books of hypocrites, Priests and Pharisees, when they teach for doctrine the commandments of men.

1. Great books are the outcome of every age in which men have risen above the life of the savage. Even faithful students must be conscious, with deep sadness, of

the time they have wasted on what was worthless and tenth-rate, when they might have been holding intercourse with the immortals. It would be impossible for me in this brief paper even to touch on the whole splendid world of Pagan literature; and yet how much does it enshrine of priceless worth! "God," as St. Peter so emphatically taught us, in language which was an echo of the teaching of the Saviour of mankind, "is no respecter of persons, but *in every nation* he that feareth Him, and doeth righteousness, is accepted of Him."

This was why St. Paul does not shrink from quoting Menander to the Corinthians; and a hexameter line of Epimenides to Titus; and a poem of his fellow-countryman Aratus to the Athenians, when he was trying to impress upon them the truth that "God hath made of one every nation of men . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one

of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." Even those who do not know Greek might with advantage read Homer in the translations of Chapman, Pope, or Cowper. Keats was no scholar, yet after reading Chapman's Homer he wrote the famous sonnet—

"Much have I travell'd in the lands of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I as some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent upon a peak in Darien."

Again, Emerson has taught us all he learnt from an English translation of Plato; and without knowing Greek we might learn much from Plumptre's Sopho-

cles; and versions of the holy thoughts of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, those "bright consummate flowers" of heathen morality: — and with no knowledge of Latin a youth may yet gain delight from Dryden's or Sotheby's Virgil, or Murphy's Tacitus.

2. But I must pass on to the great realms of Christian literature.

By Christian literature we mean that vast, and indeed immeasurable, multitude of books which owes its direct origin and inspiration to the advent of Christ. They belong to many different ages and many varying epochs of human thought; but to come under the head of distinctively Christian literature they must have emanated from those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who own allegiance to "Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end."

1. The first great epoch of Christian literature for six centuries is that of "The

Fathers." Now, I do not, of course, recommend the study of the Fathers, as a whole, to ordinary readers; yet almost any one might procure translations of a few writings which would throw light on a most memorable epoch, and not be without their influence on daily life. Even the earliest and least gifted of them teach us the memorable lesson of the supremacy of godliness. So far as genius and learning are concerned, there is no comparison between such humble and ungifted men as the earliest Christian Fathers — such men, for instance, as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, or Polycarp — and the great classic writers of Greece and Rome.

The early Christians could boast of no historian who distantly approached the genius of Tacitus; of no philosophers so eloquent as Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius; of no satirists like Juvenal and Persius; of no men of letters like the elder or younger Pliny; of no poet who could for

a moment be compared even with Martial, or Statius, or Claudian. Yet the miracle of the Christian victory was won when Christianity was simplest, was weakest, was most despised; when Christians were hunted into the darkness of the catacombs, and were mangled by wild beasts in the Colosseum; and when, nevertheless, "by the irresistible might of weakness they shook the world." From Christ alone came the new mysterious force which gave to Christian literature, even in its crude and poverty-stricken infancy, its rapturous confidence "that, at last, the routine of vice had met its match," and that the attainment of the loftiest ideal of manhood was open even to the humblest slave.

The secrets of the glorious history of Christianity lay in the fact that the life "in Christ"—to quote the special motto of St. Paul—was a life of innocence and of hope. Amid a paganism desecrated by putrid stains, the proudest heathen might

well quail before the simple challenge of Tertullian, "*Nos soli innocentes sumus.*" And the hope of Christians, as it was a result of innocence, was also concomitant with peace and joy. There is one book which every one might read with interest and advantage. It is the "Shepherd of Hermas"—the "Pilgrim's Progress" of the second century. It was a book so beloved in early days that it was even read in churches as though it were a book of Holy Scripture. Intellectually it reaches no high level; but where in all the rich, but too often unhallowed, works of Pagans would you find such a sentence as this?

"The Angel of Repentance is delicate, and modest, and meek, and quiet. Take from thyself grief, for it is the smoke of doubt and of ill-temper. *Put on gladness, which hath always favor before God. For every one that is glad doeth the things that are good, and thinketh good thoughts, despising grief.*" This ebullient gladness, this

joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of much tribulation, this mixture of ἀγαλλίασις and ἀφελότης as St. Luke calls them, of "buoyant exultation" and "single-hearted simplicity," were the essential characteristics — alas! in these days the too much darkened characteristics — of early Christian life. In those old primitive Fathers we might rediscover this unique and original birthright of Christianity, this secret which of all others should be most jealously guarded by the torchbearers of Christian literature; and therewith we might recognize the truth that—

"We may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life *whose fountains are within.*"

We are told of the old Egyptian king Ozymandias, a thousand years before Christ, that he called his library "the treasure-house of the remedies of the soul." No better description could be given of holy and noble books. They wield "the

expulsive power of pure affections." In sadness they may make us less sad, in solitude less lonely, in bereavement less utterly bereaved.

II. What is called "Patristic Literature" continues for about five centuries. If any of my readers desire to form even a slight acquaintance with its manifold wealth, I would recommend them to read some of the works of Gregory of Nazianzus and of St. Chrysostom among the Greek Fathers; of Tertullian, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine among the Latin Fathers. St. Augustine especially was a man of genius, sensibility, and eloquence; and there are two of his works which may be said to belong to general literature, and have a never-dying interest. One is the famous "Confessions," the other the epoch-making "City of God." The first—a book of a class which has been exceedingly rare—is from first to last a commentary on Augustine's own memorable words, "Thou,

O God, has made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The other is the first attempt to write a philosophy of history. It suggested to the Spanish writer Orosius the groundwork of his celebrated "Epitome;" and its meaning is summed up in the sentence with which Orosius begins his work, "*Divina providentia agitur mundus et homo.*" It is God who sways all the destinies of the universe and of human life.

III. The "Patristic" epoch was succeeded by the "Scholastic." The long period of the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages produced, of course, its historians, — such as our own Gildas and Bede, — and a few other general writers; but the *main* literature — and even that is comparatively scanty — consists of the theological works of the "Schoolmen," as they are called, both theologians and mystics. These rest, for the most part untouched by any but a few scholars, upon very dusty

shelves. But the *Summa Theologiæ* by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor; and the Life of Christ by St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor; and the impassioned sermons of St. Bernard, the Mellifluous Doctor, — will always find eager readers. The most universally popular book of the Middle Ages is "The Imitation of Christ," usually attributed to St. Thomas à Kempis, but in which Jean Gerson, "the most Christian Doctor," probably had a share. With all its defects — mediæval and monastic as it is, expressive mainly of a cloistral Christianity, and in some directions glaringly inadequate — it has yet, as a whole, most powerfully and beneficently swayed the religious imagination of many generations of men, and its "brief, quivering sentences" will find a place in every earnest heart.

IV. The thirteenth century witnessed the dawn of vernacular religious poetry in "The Song of the Creatures," by sweet

St. Francis of Assisi; but about the year 1300 Dante began to write his "Divine Comedy," which has been called "the voice of ten silent centuries." Of that immortal poem — one of the deepest utterances which ever came from the human heart — I will not speak now, because in future papers I hope to win many of my readers to its earnest study.

v. The fifteenth century witnessed events of overwhelming significance, both for Christian literature and for the general progress of mankind. Such events were the discovery of America in 1492; the invention of printing in 1449; and that awakening of the human mind known as "The Renaissance," which received a powerful impulse from the flight of Greeks into Italy, who brought with them a revived knowledge of Greek literature, after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.

In my former church of St. Margaret's, Westminster, is a stained glass window,

presented to me by the printers of London in memory of William Caxton, the first English printer, who was one of the auditors of that church. On one side of the window you see the founder of English literature, the old monk of Jarrow, the venerable Bede, dictating to his boy scribe, just before his death, the last verse of his translation of St. John. On the other side stands Erasmus, the morning-star of the Reformation, whose troubled life was the outcome of the eager age when "Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand." Between the two stands William Caxton beside his simple printing-press. Caxton's motto was "*Fiat Lux* — Let there be light;" and underneath the window are the four lines written at my request by the late Lord Tennyson: —

"His cry was 'Light, more light, while time shall last;'
He saw the glories growing on the night,
But not the shadows which that light should cast,
Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light."

Who shall attempt to estimate the immeasurable results of the Art of Printing? It has shaken the thrones of tyranny, and quenched the bale-fires of the Inquisition. By disseminating the thoughts of those in whose souls God has illuminated the light of genius, it may enable the humblest among us to

“Unfold

The wings within him wrapped and proudly rise,
Redeemed from earth, a creature of the skies.”

And — because the cause of truth, with such a power as that of the Printing-Press to help it, is irresistible — the Renaissance was followed by “the bright and blissful Reformation,” which, as Milton said, “struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and Anti-Christian tyranny,” and in which “the sweet odor of the returning Gospel embathed men’s souls in the fragrancy of heaven.”

VI. After the invention of printing, the range of literature widened, and from a

narrow river it became a boundless sea. Think of all the wealth of the Elizabethan age, when a galaxy of glorious men gathered round the throne of the maiden queen, and when England could boast of such writers as Sydney, Raleigh, Hooker, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, and above all, of the poet who, of all men who ever lived, was endowed with the most oceanic and myriad-minded genius, William Shakespeare. Think of the period of the Commonwealth, with such sons as John Milton and John Bunyan and John Dryden. Think of the age of Queen Anne, with such writers as Pope and Addison. And has any century in England been more prolific of splendid names than our own? We have had such poets as Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Browning, and many more of brilliant fame; such novelists as Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; such histo-

rians as Macaulay, Freeman, Froude; such men of science as Wheatstone, Faraday, Darwin, Tyndall, and Huxley; such men of letters as Carlyle and Ruskin; such theologians and religious teachers as Newman, Stanley, F. W. Robertson, and Lightfoot (to mention the dead only), and multitudes of other writers of eminence whose names alone would fill the page.

So vast is the realm open to every young reader even in Christian and English literature. If he choose Poetry as his field, two at the least of the supreme poets of the world, Shakespeare and Milton, were Englishmen. And what reading would be more likely to purify and enoble than that of the poets who teach us, most sweetly, and with clearest insight, "the great in conduct, and the pure in thought"? Do not those rare souls "enrich the blood of the world," and present us with the very bloom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thought,

human passion? Wordsworth accepted it as his mission "to open the eyes and widen the thoughts of his countrymen, and teach them to discern in the humblest and most unsuspected forms the presence of what was kindred to all that they had long recognized as the highest and greatest." We gratefully echo the prayer, —

"Blessings be with them, and eternal praise,
Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares;
The Poets who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!"

Or if a youth choose History as his field, is not history "the crystallized experience of humanity," — "a civil theology of the divine providence"? Is it not as Bolingbroke said, "Philosophy teaching by examples"? Surely History is as Carlyle called it, "a divine book of Revelation, of which the inspired texts are great men;" and as Fichte said, "a constant inflowing of God into human affairs."

Is it a small thing to have presented to us as in a splendid drama the reasons why Empires rise and fall;

“The solid rules of civil government—
What makes a nation happy; keeps it so;
What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat”?

Or if a student choose Biography for his favorite branch of study, Biography will show him every type of man, the innocent and the guilty, the strenuous and the idle, the happy and the wretched; as well as (for his warning) the multitude who are neither one thing nor the other, the half-and-half souls, the neutral Laodiceans. Thus we may make the dead live again, to show us how to guide our own lives by avoiding their errors, and imitating their good examples. Who shall say how much we may thus gain?

What inexhaustible treasures are here! Yet if the youth would really enjoy them, “he must not only listen, but *read*; he

must not only read, but *think*. Knowledge without common sense is folly; without method it is waste; without wisdom it is fanaticism; without religion it is death.” The reading of all other books will fail in its best object if it does not enable him to read and understand the Book of books, of which it has been truly said that “its light is like the body of heaven in its clearness; its vastness like the bosom of the sea; its variety like scenes of nature.”