CHAPTER III.

GREAT YOUNG MEN.

Boast not the titles of your ancestors
Brave youths ! they're their possessions, none of yours;
When your own virtues equall'd have their names,
'Twill be but fair to lean upon their fames,
For they are strong supporters ; but till then
The greatest are but growing gentlemen.—BEN JONSON.

The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity. . . . The history of heroes is the history of youth.—LORD BEACONSFIELD.

A man that is Young in years, may be Old in hours, if he have lost no time. But that happeneth rarely. Generally, Youth is like the first cogitations, not so wise as the second. For there is a youth in thoughts as well as in ages. And yet the Invention of Young Men is more lively than that of Old. And imaginations stream into their minds better, and, as it were, more divinely.—BACON.

THE world is for the most part young. Children, boys and girls, young men and women, constitute the greater portion of society. Hence the importance we attach to education. Youth is the time of growth and development, of activity and vivacity, of imagination and impulse. The seeds of virtue sown in youth grow into good words and deeds, and eventually ripen into habits. Where the mind and heart have not been duly cultivated in youth, one may look forward to the approach of manhood with dismay, if not despair. Southey says: "Live as long as you may, the first twenty years are the longest half of your life ; they appear so while they are passing ; they seem to have been so when we look back upon them ; and they take up more room in our memory than all the years that succeed them."

Each human being contains the ideal of a perfect man, according to the type in which the Creator has fashioned him ; just as the block of marble contains the image of an Apollo, to be fashioned by the sculptor into a perfect statue. It is the aim of education to develop the germs of man's better nature, as it is the aim of the sculptor to bring forth the statue from the block of marble.

Education begins and ends with life. In this respect it differs from the work of the sculptor. There is no solstice in human development. The body may remain the same in form and features, but the mind is constantly changing. Thoughts, desires, and tastes change by insensible gradations from year to year; and it is, or ought to be, the object of life and education to evolve the best forms of being. We know but little of the circumstances which determine the growth of the intellect, still less of those which influence the heart. Yet the lineaments of character usually display themselves early. An act of will, an expression of taste, even an eager look, will sometimes raise a corner of the veil which conceals the young mind, and furnishes a glimpse of the future man. At the same time knowledge, and the love of knowledge, are not necessarily accompanied by pure taste, good habits, or the social virtues which are essential to the formation of a lofty character.

There is, however, no precise and absolute law in the matter. A well-known bishop has said that "little hearts and large brains are produced by many forms of education." At the same time, the conscientious cultivation of the intellect is a duty which all owe to themselves as well as to society. It is usually by waiting long and working diligently, by patient continuance in well-doing, that we can hope to achieve any permanent advantage. The head ought always to be near the heart to enable the greatest intellectual powers to work with wholesome effect. "Truly,"

says Emerson, "the life of man is the true romance, which, when valiantly conducted, will yield the imagination a higher joy than any fiction."

The difference of age at which men display the ability of thinking, and attain maturity of intellect, and even of imagination, is very remarkable. "There be some," said Bacon, "who have an over-early ripeness in their years, which fadeth betimes;" corresponding with the words of Quintilian: "Inanibus artistis ante messem flavescunt." This is true of precocious children, who are sometimes found marvellous in their knowledge when young and immature, but of whom nothing is heard when they arrive at maturity. Precocity is often but a disease—the excitement of a fine nervous organization, or the over-activity of a delicate brain. The boy Heinecken of Lubeck learned the greater part of the Old and New Testament in his second year; he could speak Latin and French in his third year; he studied religion and the history of the Church in his fourth year; and finally, being excitable and sickly, he fell ill and died in his fifth year. Of this poor child it might be said, in Bacon's words, that "Phaeton's car went but a day."

Parents and teachers sometimes forget that the proper function of a child is *to grow*; that the brain cannot, in early years, be overworked without serious injury to the physical health; that the body—muscles, lungs, and stomach—must first have its soundness established; and that the brain is one of the last organs to come to maturity. Indeed, in early life, digestion is of greater importance than thinking; exercise is necessary for mental culture; and discipline is better than knowledge. Many are the cases of precocious children who bloom only to wither, and run their little course in a few short years. The strain upon their nervous system is more than their physical constitution can bear, and they perish almost as soon as they have begun to live. Boys and girls are at present too much occupied in sitting, learning, studying, and reciting. Their brain is overworked; their body is underworked. Hence headaches, restlessness, irritability, and eventually debility and disease.

Young people are not only deprived of the proper use of their hands and fingers, but of the proper use of their eyes; and the rising generation is growing up useless-handed as well as short-sighted. Education does not mean stuffing a lot of matter into the brain, but educing, or bringing out, the intellect and character. The mind can be best informed by teaching boys and girls how to use their powers; which necessarily includes the exercise of the physical system. If this were more attended to, there would be fewer complaints of the over-pressure of children's brains.

There are, however, some children less fragile—especially boys—who resist the perilous influences of over-excitement, and live to fulfil the promises of their youth. This is especially observed in the case of great musicians. But here there is no over-pressure; for the art comes naturally and causes only pleasant excitement. This was especially the case with the great master, Handel, who composed a set of Sonatas when only ten years old. His father, a doctor, destined for the profession of law, and forbade him to touch a musical instrument. He even avoided sending the boy to a public school, for there he would be taught the gamut. But young Handel's passion for music could not be restrained. He found means to procure a dumb spinet, concealed it in a garret and went to practice upon the mute instrument while the household were asleep. The duke of Saxe-Weissenfels at length became acquainted with the boy's passion, and interceded with his father. It was only then that he was permitted to follow the bent of his genius. In his fourteenth year, Handel played in public; in his sixteenth year, he set the drama of *Almeria* to music; in the

following year he produced *Florinda* and *Nerone.* While at Florence, in his twenty-first year, he composed his first opera, *Rodrigo*; and at London, in his twenty-sixth year, he produced his famous opera of *Rinaldo.* He continued to produce his works— operas and oratorios; and in 1741, when in his fifty-seventh year, he composed his great work, *The Messiah,* in the space of only twenty-three days. In the case of Handel, the precocity of the boy exercised no detrimental influence upon the compositions of the man; for his very greatest works were produced late in life, between his fifty-fourth and sixty-seventh year.

Haydn was almost as precocious a musician as Handel, having composed a mass at thirteen; yet the offsprings of his finest genius were his latest compositions, after he had become a sexagenarian. The *Creation,* probably his greatest work, was composed when he was sixty-five. John Sebastian Bach had almost as many difficulties to encounter as Handel in acquiring a knowledge of music. His elder brother, John Christopher, the organist, was jealous of him, and hid away a volume containing a collection of pieces by the best harpsichord composers. But Sebastian found the book in a cupboard, where it had been locked up; carried it to his room; sat up at night to copy it—without a candle —by the light only of the summer night, and sometimes of the moon. His brother at last discovered the secret work, and cruelly carried away both book and copy. But no difficulties or obstructions could resist the force of the boy's genius. At eighteen we find him court musician at Weimar; and from that time his progress was rapid. He had only one rival as an organ-player, and that was Handel.

But of all the musical prodigies, the greatest was Mozart. He seems to have played apparently by intuition. At four years old he composed tunes before he could write. Two years later he wrote a concerto for the clavier. At twelve

he composed his first opera, *La Finta Semplice.* Even at this early age he could not find his equal on the harpsichord. The professors of Europe stood aghast at a boy who improvised fugues on a given theme, and then took a ride-a-cock-horse round the room on his father's stick. Mozart was a show-boy, and was taken by his father for exhibition in the principal cities of Europe, where he was seen in his little puce-brown coat, velvet hose, buckled shoes, aud long flowing curly hair tied behind. His father made a good deal of money out of the boy's genius. Regardless of his health, which was extremely delicate, he fed him with excitement. Yet the boy was full of uproarious merriment when well. Though he was a master in music, he was a child in everything else. His opera of *Mithridates,* composed at fourteen, was performed twenty times in succession; and, three years later, his *Lucia Silla* had twenty-six successive representations. These were followed by other great works—the *Idomeneo,* written at twenty-five; the *Figaro,* at thirty; the *Don Giovanni,* at thirty-one; the *Clemenza di Tito* and the *Zauberflöte,* at thirty-five; and the *Requiem,* at thirty-six. He wrote the last work on his death-bed. He died in 1792, worn out by hard, or rather by irregular work and excessive excitement. The composer of the *Requiem* left barely enough to bury him.

Beethoven was not so precocious as either Handel or Mozart. His music was, in a measure, thrashed into him by his father, who wished to make him a prodigy. Young Beethoven performed in public, and composed three sonatas when only thirteen; though it was not until after he had reached his twenty-first year that he began to produce the great works on which his fame rests.

Most of the other great German composers gave early signs of their musical genius. Winter played in the King of Bavaria's band at ten years old; he produced his first opera, *Bellerophon,* at twenty-five. Weber, though a scape-

grace of a boy, had a marvellous capacity for music. His first six fugues were published at Salzburg when he was only twelve years old. His first opera, *Das Waldmädchen*, was performed at Vienna, Prague, and St. Petersburg when he was fourteen; and he composed masses, sonatas, violin trios, songs, and other works, until in his thirty-sixth year he produced his opera of *Der Freischütz*, which raised his reputation to the greatest height. Mendelssohn tried to play almost before he had learned to speak. He wrote three quartettes for the piano, violin, and violoncello before he was twelve years old. His first opera, *The Wedding of Comacho*, was produced in his sixteenth year, his sonata in B Flat at eighteen, his *Midsummer Night's Dream* before he was twenty, his Reformation Symphony at twenty-two, and all his other great works by the time that he reached his thirty-eighth year, when he died. Meyerbeer was another musical prodigy. He was an excellent pianist at nine. He began to compose at ten, and at eighteen his first dramatic piece, *Jephtha's Daughter*, was publicly performed at Munich; but it was not until he had reached his thirty-seventh year that he produced his great work, *Robert le Diable*, which secured for him a world-wide reputation.

In Carlyle's *Life of Schiller* we find a curious account of Daniel Schubart, a musician, poet, and preacher. He was "everything by turns, and nothing long." His life was a series of violent fits,—of study, idleness, and debauchery. Yet he was a man of extraordinary powers,—an excellent musician, a great preacher, an able newspaper editor. He was by turns feted, imprisoned, and banished. After flickering through life like an *ignis fatuus*, he died in his fifty-second year, leaving his wife and family destitute. Very different was Franz Schubert, the musical prodigy of Vienna, though his life was no more happy than that of Schubart. While but a child he played the violin, organ,

and pianoforte. At eighteen he composed his popular *Erl King*, scribbling the notes down rapidly after he had read the words twice over. His genius teemed with the loveliest musical fancies, as his published works abundantly prove. He is supposed to have produced upwards of five hundred songs, besides operas, masses, sonatas, symphonies, and quartettes. He died when only thirty-one years old, almost destitute.

The musical composers of Italy have exhibited the same precocious signs of genius. Spontini composed his first opera, *I Puntigli dell Donne*, at seventeen, and its complete success spread his fame over Italy. Cherubini composed a mass and motet at thirteen, which excited a great sensation at Florence, his native city. Paisiello composed a comic interlude at fourteen; and he was employed to compose an opera for the principal theatre of Bologna at twenty-two. Cimarosa, the cobbler's son, wrote *Baroness Stramba*, his first musical work, at nineteen. Paganini played the violin at eight, and composed a sonata at the same age. Rossini's father was a horn-player in the orchestra of a strolling company of players, of which his mother was a second-rate actress and singer. At the age of ten young Rossini played second horn to his father. He afterwards sang in choruses until his voice broke. At eighteen he composed *Cambiale di Matrimonio*, his first opera; and three years later he composed his *Tancredi*, which extended his fame throughout Europe.

The French composers, Boildieu, Gretry, and Halevy, gave indications of musical genius at an early age. Boildieu wrote his first one-act opera at eighteen. Gretry's songs were sung everywhere when he was twenty. At the same age Halevy obtained the first prize for his cantata of *Hermione*. Though the English have not as yet been great in musical composition, Purcell composed some of his best anthems while a boy-chorister at Westminster.

Crotch was a precocity that broke down. Though he played the organ at four years old, there is scarcely a note of his musical compositions that he did not owe to his predecessors or contemporaries. The two Wesleys were precocious. Charles played the harpsichord at three, when his mother used to tie him to the chair lest he should fall off. Balfe composed his *Lover's Mistake* when only nine, and Madame Vestris sang the song with great applause in *Paul Pry*.

It is worthy of remark that there has been no instance of musical precocity, or even of musical genius, amongst girls. There may have been some prodigies, but they have come to nothing. There has been no female Bach, Handel, or Mozart. And yet hundreds of girls are taught music for one boy; nor have they any such obstructions to contend against as boys have occasionally had to encounter. It may also be observed that musical genius seems to be a most consuming one. Though Handel and Rossini lived to be old men, Schubert died at thirty-one. Mozart at thirty-six, Purcell at thirty-seven, Mendelssohn at thirty-eight, and Weber at forty—these great musicians seeming to have been consumed by their own fire. Rossini wrote his *William Tell* at thirty-seven, after which he wrote but little. His *Stabat Mater* was composed at fifty. He was a wise man, for he knew when to leave off.

The lives of painters and sculptors afford many indications of early promise. The greatest instance of all, that of Michael Angelo, showed the tendency of his genius. He was sent into the country when a child, to be nursed by the wife of a stone-mason, which led him to say in after years that he had imbibed a love of the mallet and chisel with his mother's milk. From his earliest years he displayed an intense passion for drawing. As soon as he could use his hands and fingers, he covered the walls of the stone-mason's house with his rough sketches, and when

he returned to Florence he continued his practice on the ground-floor of his father's house. When he went to school he made little progress with his books, but he continued indefatigable in the use of his pencil, spending much of his time in haunting the *ateliers* of the painters. The profession of an artist being then discreditable, his father, who was of an ancient and illustrious family, first employed moral persuasion upon his son Michael, and that failing personal chastisement. He passionately declared that no son of his house should ever be a miserable stone-cutter. But in vain; the boy would be an artist, and nothing else.

The father was at last vanquished, and reluctantly consented to place him as a pupil under Ghirlandaio. That he had by that time made considerable progress in the art is evident by the fact that his master stipulated in the agreement (printed in Vasari's *Lives*) to pay a monthly remuneration to the father for the services of his son. Young Buonarotti's improvement was so rapid that he not only surpassed the other pupils of his master, but also the master himself. But the sight of the statues in the gardens of Lorenzo de Medici so inflamed his mind that, instead of being a painter, he resolved on devoting himself to sculpture. His progress in this branch of art was so great that in his eighteenth year he executed his basso-relievo of "The Battle of the Centaurs"; in his twentieth year his celebrated statue of "The Sleeping Cupid"; and shortly after his gigantic marble statue of "David." Reverting to the art of painting, he produced some of his greatest works in quick succession. Before he reached his twenty-ninth year he had painted his cartoon, illustrative of an incident in the wars of Pisa, when a body of soldiers, surprised while bathing, started up to repulse the enemy. Benvenuto Cellini has said that he never equalled this work in any of his subsequent productions.

Raphael was another wonderfully precocious youth,

though his father, unlike Michael Angelo's, gave every encouragement to the cultivation of his genius. He was already eminent in his art at the age of seventeen. He is said to have been inspired at the sight of the great works of Michael Angelo, which adorned the Sistine Chapel at Rome. With the candor natural to a great mind he thanked God that he had been born in the same age with so great an artist. Raphael painted his "School of Athens" in his twenty-fifth year, and his "Transfiguration" at thirty-seven, when he died. This picture was carried in the funeral procession to his grave in the Pantheon; though left unfinished it is considered to be the finest picture in the world.

Leonardo da Vinci gave early indications of his remarkable genius. He was skilled in arithmetic, music, and drawing. When a pupil under Verrocchio, he painted an angel in a picture by his master on the "Baptism of Christ." It was painted so exquisitely that Verrocchio felt his inferiority to his pupil so much, that from that time forth he gave up painting in despair. When Leonardo reached mature years his genius was regarded as almost universal. He was great as a mathematician, an architect and engineer, a musician, and a painter.

Guercino, when only ten years old, painted a figure of the Virgin on the front of his father's house, which was greatly admired; it exhibited the genius of which he afterwards displayed so many proofs. Tintoretto was so skilful with his pencil and brush that his master Titian, becoming jealous, discharged him from his service. But this rebuff had the effect of giving additional vigor to his energies, and he worked with such rapidity that he used to be called *Il Furioso,* until he came to be recognized as one of the greatest and most prolific painters in Italy.

Canova is said to have given indications of his genius at four years old by modelling a lion out of a roll of butter.

He began to cut statuary from the marble at fourteen, and went on from one triumph to another. Thorwaldsen carved figure-heads for ships when thirteen—working in the shop of his father, who was a wood-carver. At fifteen, he carried off the silver medal of the Academy of Arts of Copenhagen for his bas-relief of "Cupid Reposing"; and at twenty, he gained the gold medal for his drawing of "Heliodorus Driven from the Temple."

Claude Joseph Vernet drew skilfully in his fifth year, and before he had reached his twentieth year his pictures were celebrated. Paul Potter painted his greatest picture —the famous "Bull" at the Hague—when in his twenty-second year, and he dropt his brush before he was twenty-nine. Wilkie could draw before he could read, and he could paint before he could spell correctly. He painted his "Pitlessie Fair," containing about 140 figures, in his nineteenth year. Sir Edwin Landseer painted his "Dogs Fighting" at sixteen; the picture was much admired, and was at once purchased and engraved.

Poets also, like musicians and artists, have in many cases given early indications of their genius—especially poets of a sensitive, fervid, and impassioned character. The great Italian poets—Dante, Tasso, and Alfieri—were especially precocious. Dante showed this when a boy of nine years old by falling passionately in love with Beatrice, a girl of eight; and the passion thus inspired became the pervading principle of his life, and the source of the sublimest conceptions of his muse. Tasso possessed the same delicate, throbbing temperament of genius: he was a poet while but a child. At ten years old, when about to join his father at Rome, he composed a canzone on parting from his mother and sister at Naples. He compared himself to Ascanius escaping from Troy with his father Æneas. At seventeen he composed his *Rinaldo* in twelve cantos, and by his thirty-first year he had completed his great poem of *Jerusalem Delivered,* which he began at twenty-one.

Metastasio, when a boy of ten, improvised in the streets of Rome; and Goldoni, the comic poet, when only eight, made a sketch of his first play. Goldoni was a sad scapegrace. He repeatedly ran away from school and college to follow a company of strolling players. His relations from time to time dragged him away, and induced him to study law, which he afterwards practiced at Pisa with considerable success; but the love of the stage proved too strong for him, and he eventually engaged himself as stage poet, and continued to write comedies for the greater part of his life.

But Alfieri—whom some have called the Italian Byron—was one of the most extraordinary young men of his time. Like many precocious poets he was very delicate during his childhood. He was preternaturally thoughtful and sensitive. When only eight years old, he attempted to poison himself during a fit of melancholy, by eating herbs which he supposed to contain hemlock. But their only effect was to make him sick. He was shut up in his room; after which he was sent in his nightcap to a neighboring church. "Who knows," said he afterwards, "whether I am not indebted to that blessed nightcap for having turned out one of the most truthful of men." The first sight of the ocean, when at Genoa in his sixteenth year, ravished Alfieri with delight. While gazing upon it he became filled with indefinable longings, and first felt that he was a poet. But though rich, he was uneducated, and unable to clothe in words the thoughts which brooded within him. He went back to his books, and next to college; after which he travelled abroad, galloped from town to town, visted London, drowned ennui and melancholy in dissipation, and then, at nineteen, he fell violently in love. Disappointed in not obtaining a return of his affection, he became almost heart-broken, and resolved to die, but his valet saved his life. He recovered, fell in love again, was again disappointed, then took to his room, cut off his hair, and in the solitude to which he condemned himself began to write verses, which eventually became the occupation of his life. His first tragedy, *Cleopatra*, was produced and acted at Turin when he was twenty-six years old, and in the seven following years he composed fourteen of his greatest tragedies.

It was in poetical composition that the genius of Cervantes first displayed itself. Before he had reached his twentieth year he had composed several romances and ballads, besides a pastoral entitled *Felena*. Wieland was one of the most precocious of German poets. He read at three years old; Cornelius Nepos in Latin at seven; and meditated the composition of an epic at thirteen. Like other poets, the fact of his falling in love first stimulated him to verse; for at sixteen he wrote his first didactic poem on "Die Vollkommenste Welt." The genius of Klopstock, too, showed itself equally early. He was at first a rompish boy, then an impetuous student, an enamored youth, and an admired poet. He conceived and partly executed his *Messiah* before he had reached his twentieth year, though the three first cantos were not published until four years later. *The Messiah* excited an extraordinary degree of interest and gave an immense impetus to German literature.

Schiller's mind was passionately drawn to poetry at an early age. The story is told of his having been found one day, during a thunder-storm, perched on the branch of a tree, up which he had climbed, "to see where the lightning had come from, because it was so beautiful." This was very characteristic of the ardent and curious temperament of the boy. Schiller was inspired to poetic composition by reading Klopstock's poem; his mind was turned in the direction of sacred poetry; and by the end of his fourteenth year he had finished an epic poem entitled "Moses." Goethe

was a precocious child, so much so that it is recorded that he could write German, French, Italian, Latin and Greek, before he was eight. At that early age, he had anxious thoughts about religion. He devised a form of worship to the "God of Nature," and even burned sacrifices. Music, drawing, natural science, and the study of languages,—all had their special charms for the wonderful boy. Korner also, the ardent and the brave, met the death which he envied—on the field of battle, for his country's liberties—at the early age of twenty-two. As a boy, he was sickly and delicate; yet he was possessed by the true poetic faculty. At nineteen he published his first book of poems; and he wrote his last piece, *The Song of the Sword,* only two hours before the battle in which he fell. Novalis, also, was another German poet of promise, who achieved all that he accomplished by his twenty-ninth year, when he died.

Many like instances might be cited of early promise as well as performance on the part of French and English poets. Indeed, the poetic genius—depending, as it does, upon peculiar organization and temperament—is that which displays itself the earliest; and if it do not appear before the age of twenty, most probably it will not appear at all. Montaigne has expressed the belief that our souls are adult at that age. "A soul," he says, "that has not by that time given evident earnest of its force and virtue, will never after come to proof. Natural parts and excellences produce that which they have of vigorous and fine within that time or never."* This statement, though perhaps put too strongly, is yet in the main true. The mind and soul give promise of their genuine qualities in youth, and though some plants flower late, the greater number flower in the spring and summer of youth, rather than in the autumn and winter of age.

* Montaigne's *Essays*, book i., chap. lvii.: "Of Age."

Moore, the Irish poet, has observed, that nearly all the first-rate comedies, and many of the first-rate tragedies, have been the productions of young men. Lope de Vega, and Calderon, two of the most prolific of dramatists, began writing very early—the one at twelve, the other at thirteen. The former recited verses of his own composition, which he wrote down and exchanged with his playfellows for prints and toys. At twelve, by his own account, he had not only written short pieces, but composed dramas. His heroic pastoral of *Arcadia* was published at eighteen. He was with the Spanish Armada, in its assault upon England in 1588. He was then in his twenty-sixth year; and in the course of that perilous and fruitless voyage, he wrote several of his poems. But it was after he returned to Spain and entered the priesthood that he composed the hundreds of plays through which his name has become so famous. Calderon also was a most prolific playwriter in his youth, having added some four hundred dramas to the national stock. His first work *Carro del Cielo,* was written at thirteen. He became a priest at fifty, and wrote only sacred pieces after he had entered the Church.

These young Spanish dramatists reached their maturity at an early period. Like girls of the South, who reach their puberty early, ripened by the sun, they accomplished all their great work long before they had reached the middle period of life. In northern climes the mental powers ripen more slowly. Yet Racine wrote his first successful tragedy at twenty-five; and his great work *Phedre,* which he himself thought to be the supreme effort of his dramatic muse, at thirty-eight. Molière's education was of the slenderest description; but he overcame the defects of his early training by diligent application; and in his thirty-first year he brought out his first play, *L'Etourdi.* The whole of his works were produced between then and his fifty-first year, when he died. Voltaire