

fine art. Ruffles are all very well, but it is folly to cultivate them to the neglect of the shirt.

While, therefore, grace of manner, politeness of behavior, elegance of demeanor, and all the arts that contribute to make life pleasant and beautiful, are worthy of cultivation, it must not be at the expense of the more solid and enduring qualities of honesty, sincerity, and truthfulness. The fountain of beauty must be in the heart more than in the eye, and if it do not tend to produce beautiful life and noble practice, it will prove of comparatively little avail. Politeness of manner is not worth much unless it is accompanied by polite actions. Grace may be but skin-deep—very pleasant and attractive, and yet very heartless. Art may be a source of innocent enjoyment, and an important aid to higher culture; but unless it leads to higher culture, it may be merely sensuous. And when art is merely sensuous, it is enfeebling and demoralizing rather than strengthening or elevating. Honest courage is of greater worth than any amount of grace; purity is better than elegance; and cleanliness of body, mind, and heart, than any amount of fine art.

While the cultivation of the graces is not to be neglected, it should never be forgotten that there is something far higher and nobler to be aimed at—greater than pleasure, greater than art, greater than wealth, greater than power, greater than intellect, greater than genius; and that is purity and excellence of character. Without a solid, sterling basis of individual goodness, all the grace, elegance, and art in the world would fail to save or to elevate a people.

CHAPTER X.

COMPANIONSHIP OF BOOKS.

“Books, we know,
Are a substantial world, both pure and good,
Round which, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness can grow.”—WORDSWORTH.

“Not only in the common speech of men, but in all art too—which is or should be the concentrated and conserved essence of what men can speak and show—Biography is almost the one thing needful.”—CARLYLE.

“I read all biographies with intense interest. Even a man without a heart, like Cavendish, I think about, and read about, and dream about, and picture to myself in all possible ways, till he grows into a living being beside me, and I put my feet into his shoes, and become for the time Cavendish, and think as he thought, and do as he did.”—GEORGE WILSON.

“My thoughts are with the dead; with them
I live in long-past years;
Their virtues love, their faults condemn;
Partake their hopes and fears;
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with a humble mind.”—SOUTHEY.

A MAN may usually be known by the books he reads, as well as by the company he keeps; for there is a companionship of books as well as of men; and one should always live in the best company, whether it be of books or of men.

A good book may be among the best of friends. It is the same to-day that it always was, and it will never change. It is the most patient and cheerful of companions. It does not turn its back upon us in times of adversity or distress. It always receives us with the same kindness; amusing and instructing us in youth, and comforting and consoling us in age.

Men often discover their affinity to each other by the mutual love they have for a book—just as two persons sometimes discover a friend by the admiration which both entertain for a third. There is an old proverb, "Love me, love my dog." But there is more wisdom in this, "Love me, love my book." The book is a truer and higher bond of union. Men can think, feel, and sympathize with each other through their favorite author. They live in him together, and he in them.

"Books," said Hazlitt, "wind into the heart; the poet's verse slides into the current of our blood. We read them when young, we remember them when old. We read there of what has happened to others; we feel that it has happened to ourselves. They are to be had everywhere cheap and good. We breathe but the air of books. We owe everything to their authors, on this side barbarism."

A good book is often the best urn of a life, enshrining the best thoughts of which that life was capable; for the world of a man's life is, for the most part, but the world of his thoughts. Thus the best books are treasuries of good words and golden thoughts, which, remembered and cherished, become our abiding companions and comforters. "They are never alone," said Sir Philip Sidney, "that are accompanied by noble thoughts." The good and true thought may in time of temptation be as an angel of mercy purifying and

guarding the soul. It also enshrines the germs of action, for good words almost invariably inspire to good works.

Thus Sir Henry Lawrence prized above all other compositions Wordsworth's "Character of the Happy Warrior," which he endeavored to embody in his own life. It was ever before him as an exemplar. He thought of it continually, and often quoted it to others. His biographer says, "He tried to conform his own life and to assimilate his own character to it; and he succeeded, as all men succeed who are truly in earnest."*

Books possess an essence of immortality. They are by far the most lasting products of human effort. Temples crumble into ruin; pictures and statues decay; but books survive. Time is of no account with great thoughts, which are as fresh to-day as when they first passed through their author's minds, ages ago. What was then said and thought still speaks to us as vividly as ever from the printed page. The only effect of time has been to sift and winnow out the bad products; for nothing in literature can long survive but what is really good.†

Books introduce us into the best society; they bring us into the presence of the greatest minds that have ever lived. We hear what they said and did; we see them as if they

* Kaye's "Lives of Indian Officers."

† Emerson, in his "Society and Solitude," says, "In contemporaries, it is not so easy to distinguish between notoriety and fame. Be sure, then, to read no mean books. Shun the spawn of the press or the gossip of the hour. . . . The three practical rules I have to offer are these: 1. Never read a book that is not a year old; 2. Never read any but famed books; 3. Never read any but what you like." Lord Lytton's maxim is: "In science, read by preference the newest books; in literature, the oldest."

were really alive; we are participators in their thoughts; we sympathize with them, enjoy with them, grieve with them; their experience becomes ours, and we feel as if we were in a measure actors with them in the scenes which they describe.

The great and good do not die, even in this world. Embalmed in books, their spirits walk abroad. The book is a living voice. It is an intellect to which one still listens. Hence we ever remain under the influence of the great men of old:

“The dead but sceptred sovrans, who still rule
Our spirits from their urns.”

The imperial intellects of the world are as much alive now as they were ages ago. Homer still lives; and though his personal history is hidden in the mists of antiquity, his poems are as fresh to-day as if they had been newly written. Plato still teaches his transcendent philosophy; Horace, Virgil, and Dante still sing as when they lived; Shakespeare is not dead: his body was buried in 1616, but his mind is as much alive in England now, and his thoughts as far-reaching, as in the time of the Tudors.

The humblest and poorest may enter the society of these great spirits without being thought intrusive. All who can read have got the *entree*. Would you laugh? Cervantes or Rabelais will laugh with you. Do you grieve? there is Thomas a Kempis or Jeremy Taylor to grieve with and console you. Always it is to books, and the spirits of great men embalmed in them, that we turn for entertainment, for instruction, and solace—in joy and in sorrow, as in prosperity and in adversity.

Man himself is, of all things in the world, the most interesting to man. Whatever relates to human life—its experi-

ences, its joys, its sufferings, and its achievements—has usually attractions for him beyond all else. Each man is more or less interested in all other men as his fellow-creatures—as members of the great family of humankind; and the larger a man's culture, the wider is the range of his sympathies in all that affects the welfare of his race.

Men's interest in each other as individuals manifests itself in a thousand ways—in the portraits which they paint, in the busts which they carve, in the narratives which they relate to each other. “Man,” says Emerson, “can paint, or make, or think, nothing but Man.” Most of all is this interest shown in the fascination which personal history possesses for him. “Man's sociality of nature,” says Carlyle, “evinces itself, in spite of all that can be said, with abundance of evidence, by this one fact, were there no other—the unspeakable delight he takes in Biography.”

Great, indeed is the human interest felt in biography! What are all the novels that find such multitudes of readers, but so many fictitious biographies? What are the dramas that people crowd to see, but so much acted biography? Strange that the highest genius should be employed on the fictitious biography, and so much commonplace ability on the real!

Yet the authentic picture of any human being's life and experience ought to possess an interest greatly beyond that which is fictitious, inasmuch as it has the charm of reality. Every person may learn something from the recorded life of another; and even comparatively trivial deeds and sayings may be invested with interest, as being the outcome of the lives of such beings as we ourselves are.

The records of the lives of good men are especially useful. They influence our hearts, inspire us with hope, and

set before us great examples. And when men have done their duty through life in a great spirit, their influence will never wholly pass away. "The good life," says George Herbert, "is never out of season."

Goethe has said that there is no man so commonplace that a wise man may not learn something from him. Sir Walter Scott could not travel in a coach without gleaning some information or discovering some new trait of character in his companions.* Dr. Johnson once observed that there was not a person in the streets but he should like to know his biography—his experiences of life, his trials, his difficulties, his successes, and his failures. How much more truly might this be said of the men who have made their mark in the world's history, and have created for us that great inheritance of civilization of which we are the possessors! Whatever relates to such men—to their habits, their manners, their modes of living, their personal history, their conversation, their maxims, their virtues, or their greatness—is always full of interest, of instruction of encouragement, and of example.

The great lesson of Biography is to show what man can be and do at his best. A noble life put fairly on record acts

* A friend of Sir Walter Scott, who had the same habit, and prided himself on his powers of conversation, one day tried to "draw out a fellow-passenger who sat beside him on the outside of a coach, but with indifferent success. At length the conversationalist descended to expostulation. "I have talked to you, my friend," said he, "on all the ordinary subjects—literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse-races, suits at law, politics, and swindling, and blasphemy, and philosophy: is there any one subject that you will favor me by opening upon?" The wright writhed his countenance into a grin: "Sir," said he, "can you say any thing clever about *bend leather?*" As might be expected, the conversationalist was completely nonplused.

like an inspiration to others. It exhibits what life is capable of being made. It refreshes our spirit, encourages our hopes, gives us new strength and courage and faith—faith in others as well as in ourselves. It stimulates our aspirations, rouses us to action, and incites us to become co-partners with them in their work. To live with such men in their biographies, and to be inspired by their example, is to live with the best of men and to mix in the best of company.

At the head of all biographies stands the Great Biography—the Book of Books. And what is the Bible, the most sacred and impressive of all books—the educator of youth, the guide of manhood, and the consoler of age—but a series of biographies of great heroes and patriarchs, prophets, kings, and judges, culminating in the greatest biography of all—the Life embodied in the New Testament? How much have the great examples there set forth done for mankind! How many have drawn from them their best strength, their highest wisdom, their best nurture and admonition! Truly does a great Roman Catholic writer describe the Bible as a book whose words "live in the ear like a music that can never be forgotten—like the sound of church-bells which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities often seem to be almost things rather than mere words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of national seriousness. The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of man is hidden beneath its words. It is the representative of his best moments; and all that has been about him of soft, and gentle, and pure, and penitent, and good, speaks to him forever out of his English Bible. It is

his sacred thing, which doubt has never dimmed and controversy never soiled. In the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible.*

It would, indeed, be difficult to overestimate the influence which the lives of the great and good have exercised upon the elevation of human character. "The best biography," says Isaac Disraeli, "is a reunion with human existence in its most excellent state." Indeed, it is impossible for one to read the lives of good men, much less inspired men, without being unconsciously lighted and lifted up in them, and growing insensibly nearer to what they thought and did. And even the lives of humbler persons, of men of faithful and honest spirit, who have done their duty in life well, are not without an elevating influence upon the character of those who come after them.

* Coleridge, in his "Lay Sermon," points out, as a fact of history, how large a part of our present knowledge and civilization is owing, directly or indirectly, to the Bible; that the Bible has been the main lever by which the moral and intellectual character of Europe has been raised to its present comparative height; and he specifies the marked and prominent difference of this book from the works which it is the fashion to quote as guides and authorities in morals, politics, and history. "In the Bible," he says, "every agent appears and acts as a self-substituting individual; each has a life of its own, and yet all are in life. The elements of necessity and free-will are reconciled in the higher power of an omnipresent Providence, that predestinates the whole in the moral freedom of the integral parts. Of this the Bible never suffers us to lose sight. The root is never detached from the ground. It is God everywhere; and all creatures conform to His decrees—the righteous by performance of the law, the disobedient by the sufferance of the penalty."

History itself is best studied in biography. Indeed, history *is* biography—collective humanity as influenced and governed by individual men. "What is all history," says Emerson, "but the work of ideas, a record of the incomparable energy which his infinite aspirations infuse into man?" In its pages it is always persons we see more than principles. Historical events are interesting to us mainly in connection with the feelings, the sufferings, and interests of those by whom they are accomplished. In history we are surrounded by men long dead, but whose speech and whose deeds survive. We almost catch the sound of their voices; and what they did constitutes the interest of history. We never feel personally interested in masses of men; but we feel and sympathize with the individual actors, whose biographies afford the finest and most real touches in all great historical dramas.

Among the great writers of the past, probably the two that have been most influential in forming the characters of great men of action and great men of thought have been Plutarch and Montaigne—the one by presenting heroic models for imitation, the other by probing questions of constant recurrence in which the human mind in all ages has taken the deepest interest. And the works of both are, for the most part, cast in a biographic form, their most striking illustrations consisting in the exhibitions of character and experience which they contain.

Plutarch's "Lives," though written nearly eighteen hundred years ago, like Homer, still holds its ground as the greatest work of its kind. It was the favorite book of Montaigne; and to Englishmen it possesses the special interest of having been Shakspeare's principal authority in his great classical dramas. Montaigne pronounced Plutarch to

be "the greatest master in that kind of writing"—the biographic; and he declared that he "could no sooner cast an eye upon him but he purloined either a leg or a wing."

Alfieri was first drawn with passion to literature by reading Plutarch. "I read," said he, "the lives of Timoleon, Cæsar, Brutus, Pelopidas, more than six times, with cries, with tears, and with such transports that I was almost furious. . . . Every time that I met with one of the grand traits of these great men I was seized with such vehement agitation as to be unable to sit still." Plutarch was also a favorite with persons of such various minds as Schiller and Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon and Madame Roland. The latter was so fascinated by the book that she carried it to church with her in the guise of a missal, and read it surreptitiously during the service.

It has also been the nurture of heroic souls such as Henry IV. of France, Turenne, and the Napiers. It was one of Sir William Napier's favorite books when a boy. His mind was early imbued by it with a passionate admiration for the great heroes of antiquity; and its influence had, doubtless, much to do with the formation of his character, as well as the direction of his career in life. It is related of him, that in his last illness, when feeble and exhausted, his mind wandered back to Plutarch's heroes; and he descanted for hours to his son-in-law on the mighty deeds of Alexander, Hannibal, and Cæsar. Indeed, if it were possible to poll the great body of readers in all ages whose minds have been influenced and directed by books, it is probable—that excepting always the Bible—the immense majority of votes would be cast in favor of Plutarch.

And how is it that Plutarch has succeeded in exciting an interest which continues to attract and rivet the attention of

readers of all ages and classes to this day? In the first place, because the subject of his work is great men, who occupied a prominent place in the world's history, and because he had an eye to see and a pen to describe the more prominent events and circumstances in their lives. And not only so, but he possessed the power of portraying the individual character of his heroes; for it is the principle of individuality which gives the charm and interest to all biography. The most engaging side of great men is not so much what they do as what they are, and does not depend upon their power of intellect but on their personal attractiveness. Thus there are men whose lives are far more eloquent than their speeches, and whose personal character is far greater than their deeds.

It is also to be observed that, while the best and most carefully-drawn of Plutarch's portraits are of life-size, many of them are little more than busts. They are well-proportioned but compact, and within such reasonable compass that the best of them—such as the lives of Cæsar and Alexander—may be read in half an hour. Reduced to this measure, they are, however, greatly more imposing than a lifeless Colossus or an exaggerated giant. They are not overlaid by disquisition and description, but the characters naturally unfold themselves. Montaigne, indeed, complained of Plutarch's brevity. "No doubt," he added, "but his reputation is the better for it, though in the mean time we are the worse. Plutarch would rather we should applaud his judgment than commend his knowledge, and had rather leave us with an appetite to read more than glutted with what we have already read. He knew very well that a man may say too much even on the best subjects. . . . Such as have lean and spare bodies stuff themselves out