

of "The Imitation of Christ"—a book that has had an immense circulation, and exercised a vast religious influence in all Christian countries. It is usually attributed to Thomas a Kempis; but there is reason to believe that he was merely its translator, and the book that is really known to be his* is in all respects so inferior that it is difficult to believe that "The Imitation" proceeded from the same pen. It is considered more probable that the real author was John Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, a most learned and devout man, who died in 1429.

Some of the greatest men of genius have had the shortest biographies. Of Plato, one of the great fathers of moral philosophy, we have no personal account. If he had wife and children, we hear nothing of them. About the life of Aristotle there is the greatest diversity of opinion. One says he was a Jew; another, that he only got his information from a Jew: one says he kept an apothecary's shop; another, that he was only the son of a physician: one alleges that he was an atheist; another, that he was a Trinitarian—and so forth. But we know almost as little with respect to many men of comparatively modern times. Thus, how little do we know of the lives of Spenser, author of "The Faerie Queen," and of Butler, the author of "Hudibras," beyond the fact that they lived in comparative obscurity, and died in extreme poverty! How little, comparatively, do we know of the life of Jeremy Taylor, the golden preacher, of whom we should like to have known so much!

The author of "Philip Van Artevelde" has said that "the world knows nothing of its greatest men." And doubtless oblivion has enwrapt in its folds many great men,

*The "Dialogus Novitiorum de Contemptu Mundi."

who have done great deeds and been forgotten. Augustine speaks of Romanianus as the greatest genius that ever lived, and yet we know nothing of him but his name; he is as much forgotten as the builders of the Pyramids. Gordiani's epitaph was written in five languages, yet it sufficed not to rescue him from oblivion.

Many, indeed, are the lives worthy of record that have remained unwritten. Men who have written books have been the most fortunate in this respect, because they possess an attraction for literary men which those whose lives have been embodied in deeds do not possess. Thus there have been lives written of poets laureate who were mere men of their time, and of their time only. Dr. Johnson includes some of them in his "Lives of the Poets," such as Edmund Smith and others, whose poems are now no longer known. The lives of some men of letters—such as Goldsmith, Swift, Sterne, and Steele—have been written again and again, while great men of action, men of science, and men of industry, are left without a record.*

We have said that a man may be known by the company he keeps in his books. Let us mention a few of the favorites of the best-known men. Plutarch's admirers have already been referred to. Montaigne also has been the companion of most meditative men. Although Shakspeare must have studied Plutarch carefully, inasmuch as he copied from him freely, even to his very words, it is remarkable

*The Life of Sir Charles Bell, one of our greatest physiologists, was left to be written by Amédée Pichot, a Frenchman; and though Sir Charles Bell's letters to his brother have since been published, his Life still remains to be written. It may also be added that the best Life of Goethe has been written by an Englishman, and the best Life of Frederick the Great by a Scotchman.

that Montaigne is the only book which we certainly know to have been in the poet's library; one of Shakspeare's existing autographs having been found in a copy of Florio's translation of "The Essays," which also contains, on the fly-leaf, the autograph of Ben Jonson.

Milton's favorite books were Homer, Ovid, and Euripides. The latter book was also the favorite of Charles James Fox, who regarded the study of it as especially useful to a public speaker. On the other hand, Pitt took especial delight in Milton—whom Fox did not appreciate—taking pleasure in reciting, from "Paradise Lost," the grand speech of Belial before the assembled powers of Pandemonium. Another favorite book of Pitt's was Newton's "Principia." Again, the Earl of Chatham's favorite book was "Barrow's Sermons," which he read so often as to be able to repeat them from memory; while Burke's companions were Demosthenes, Milton, Bolingbroke, and Young's "Night Thoughts."

Curran's favorite was Homer, which he read through once a year. Virgil was another of his favorites—his biographer, Phillips, saying that he once saw him reading the "Æneid" in the cabin of a Holyhead packet while every one about him was prostrate by sea-sickness.

Of the poets, Dante's favorite was Virgil; Corneille's was Lucan; Schiller's was Shakspeare; Gray's was Spenser; while Coleridge admired Collins and Bowles. Dante himself was a favorite with most great poets, from Chaucer to Byron and Tennyson. Lord Brougham, Macaulay, and Carlyle have alike admired and eulogized the Great Italian. The former advised the students at Glasgow that, next to Demosthenes, the study of Dante was the best preparative for the eloquence of the pulpit or the bar. Robert Hall

sought relief in Dante from the racking pains of spinal disease; and Sydney Smith took to the same poet for comfort and solace in his old age. It was characteristic of Goethe that his favorite book should have been Spinoza's "Ethics," in which he said he had found a peace and consolation such as he had been able to find in no other work.*

Barrow's favorite was St. Chrysostom; Bossuet's was Homer. Bunyan's was the old legend of Sir Bevis of Southampton, which in all probability gave him the first idea of his "Pilgrim's Progress." One of the best prelates that ever sat on the English bench, Dr. John Sharp, said, "Shakspeare and the Bible have made me Archbishop of York." The two books which most impressed John Wesley when a young man, were "The Imitation of Christ" and Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying." Yet Wesley was accustomed to caution his young friends against overmuch reading. "Beware you be not swallowed up in books," he would say to them; "an ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."

* It is not a little remarkable that the pious Schleiermacher should have concurred in opinion with Goethe as to the merits of Spinoza, though he was a man excommunicated by the Jews, to whom he belonged, and denounced by the Christians as a man little better than an atheist. "The Great Spirit of the world," says Schleiermacher, in his *Rede über die Religion*, "penetrated the holy but repudiated Spinoza; the Infinite was his beginning and his end; the universe his only and eternal love. He was filled with religion and religious feeling; and therefore is it that he stands alone, unapproachable, the master in his art, but elevated above the profane world, without adherents, and without even citizenship."

Cousin also says of Spinoza: "The author whom this pretended atheist most resembles is the unknown author of 'The Imitation of Jesus Christ.'"

Wesley's own Life has been a great favorite with many thoughtful readers. Coleridge says, in his preface to Southey's "Life of Wesley," that it was more often in his hands than any other in his ragged book-regiment. "To this work, and to the Life of Richard Baxter," he says, "I was used to resort whenever sickness and languor made me feel the want of an old friend of whose company I could never be tired. How many and many an hour of self-oblivion do I owe to this Life of Wesley: and how often have I argued with it, questioned, remonstrated, been peevish, and asked pardon; then again listened, and cried, 'Right! Excellent!' and in yet heavier hours entreated it, as it were, to continue talking to me; for that I heard and listened, and was soothed, though I could make no reply!"*

Soumet had only a very few books in his library, but they were of the best—Homer, Virgil, Dante, Camoens, Tasso, and Milton. De Quincey's favorite few were Donne, Chillingworth, Jeremy Taylor, Milton, South, Barrow, and Sir Thomas Browne. He described these writers as "a pleiad or constellation of seven golden stars, such as, in their class, no literature can match," and from whose works he would undertake "to build up an entire body of philosophy."

Frederick the Great, of Prussia, manifested his strong French leanings in his choice of books, his principal favorites being Bayle, Rousseau, Voltaire, Rollin, Fleury, Malebranche, and one English author—Locke. His especial favorite was Bayle's Dictionary, which was the first book that laid hold of his mind; and he thought so highly of it that he himself made an abridgment and translation of it into German, which was published. It was a saying of Frederick's

*Preface to the new edition of Southey's "Life of Wesley" (1864).

that "books make up no small part of true happiness." In his old age he said, "My latest passion will be for literature."

It seems odd that Marshal Blucher's favorite book should have been Klopstock's "Messiah," and Napoleon Bonaparte's favorites Ossian's "Poems" and the "Sorrows of Werther." But Napoleon's range of reading was very extensive. It included Homer, Virgil, Tasso; novels of all countries; histories of all times; mathematics, legislation and theology. He detested what he called "the bombast and tinsel" of Voltaire. The praises of Homer and Ossian he was never wearied of sounding. "Read again," he said to an officer on board the *Bellerophon*—"read again the poet of Achilles; devour Ossian. Those are the poets who lift up the soul, and give to man a colossal greatness."*

*Napoleon also read Milton carefully, and it has been related of him by Sir Colin Campbell, who resided with Napoleon at Elba, that, when speaking of the battle of Austerlitz, he said that a particular disposition of his artillery, which, in its results, had a decisive effect in winning the battle, was suggested to his mind by the recollection of four lines in Milton. The lines occur in the sixth book, and are descriptive of Satan's artifice during the war with Heaven:

"In hollow cube
Training his devilish engin'ry, impal'd
On every side with shadowing squadrons deep
To hide the fraud."

"The indubitable fact," says Mr. Edwards, in his book "On Libraries," "that these lines have a certain appositeness to an important manœuvre at Austerlitz, gives an independent interest to the story; but it is highly imaginative to ascribe the victory to that manœuvre. And for the other preliminaries of the tale, it is unfortunate that Napoleon had learned a good deal about war long before he had learned anything about Milton."

The Duke of Wellington was an extensive reader; his principal favorites were Clarendon, Bishop Butler, Smith's "Wealth of Nations," Hume, the Archduke Charles, Leslie, and the Bible. He was also particularly interested by French and English memoirs—more especially the French *Mémoires pour servir* of all kinds. When at Walmer, Mr. Gleig says the Bible, the Prayer-book, Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," and Cæsar's "Commentaries," lay within his reach; and, judging by the marks of use on them, they must have been much read and often consulted.

While books are among the best companions of old age, they are often the best inspirers of youth. The first book that makes a deep impression on a young man's mind often constitutes an epoch in his life. It may fire the heart, stimulate the enthusiasm, and, by directing his efforts into unexpected channels, permanently influence his character. The new book, in which we form an intimacy with a new friend, whose mind is riper and wiser than our own, may thus form an important starting-point in the history of a life. It may sometimes almost be regarded in the light of a new birth.

From the day when James Edward Smith was presented with his first botanical lesson-book, and Sir Joseph Banks fell in with Gerard's "Herbal"—from the time when Alfieri first read Plutarch, and Schiller made his first acquaintance with Shakspeare, and Gibbon devoured the first volume of "The Universal History"—each dated an inspiration so exalted that they felt as if their real lives had only then began.

In the earlier part of his youth, La Fontaine was distinguished for his idleness, but hearing an ode by Malherbe read, he is said to have exclaimed, "I too am a poet," and his genius was awakened. Charles Bossuet's mind was first

fired to study by reading, at an early age, Fontenelle's "Eloges" of men of science. Another work of Fontenelle's—"On the Plurality of Worlds"—influenced the mind of Lalande in making a choice of a profession. "It is with pleasure," says Lalande himself, in a preface to the book, which he afterwards edited, "that I acknowledge my obligation to it for that devouring activity which its perusal first excited in me at the age of sixteen, and which I have since retained."

In like manner, Lacepede was directed to the study of natural history by the perusal of Buffon's "Histoire Naturelle," which he found in his father's library, and read over and over again, until he almost knew it by heart. Goethe was greatly influenced by the reading of Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield," just at the critical moment of his mental development; and he attributed to it much of his best education. The reading of a prose "Life of Gotz von Berlichingen" afterwards stimulated him to delineate his character in a poetic form. "The figure of a rude, well-meaning self-helper," he said, "in a wild, anarchic time, excited my deepest sympathy."

Keats was an insatiable reader when a boy; but it was the perusal of the "Faerie Queen," at the age of seventeen, that first lit the fire of his genius. The same poem is also said to have been the inspirer of Cowley, who found a copy of it accidentally lying on the window of his mother's apartment; and reading and admiring it, he became, as he relates, irrecoverably a poet.

Coleridge speaks of the great influence which the poems of Bowles had in forming his own mind. The works of a past age, says he, seem to a young man to be things of another race; but the writings of a contemporary "possess

a reality for him, and inspire an actual friendship as of a man for a man. His very admiration is the wind which fans and feeds his hope. The poems themselves assume the properties of flesh and blood."*

But men have not merely been stimulated to undertake special literary pursuits by the perusal of particular books; they have been also stimulated by them to enter upon particular lines of action in the serious business of life. Thus, Henry Martyn was powerfully influenced to enter upon his heroic career as a missionary by perusing the Lives of Henry Brainerd and Dr. Carey, who had opened up the furrows in which he went forth to sow the seed.

Bentham has described the extraordinary influence which the perusal of "Telemachus" exercised upon his mind in boyhood. "Another book," said he, "and of far higher character (than a collection of Fairy Tales, to which he refers), was placed in my hands. It was 'Telemachus.' In my own imagination, and at the age of six or seven, I identified my own personality with that of the hero, who seemed to me a model of perfect virtue; and in my walk of life, whatever it may come to be, why (said I to myself, every now and then)—why should not I be a Telemachus? . . . That romance may be regarded as *the foundation-stone of my whole character*—the starting-point from whence my career of life commenced. The first dawning in my mind of the 'Principles of Utility' may, I think, be traced to it."†

Cobbett's first favorite, because his only book, which he bought for threepence, was Swift's "Tale of a Tub," the repeated perusal of which had, doubtless, much to do with

* "Biographia Literaria," chap. i.

† Sir John Bowring's "Memoirs of Bentham," p. 10.

the formation of his pithy, straightforward, and hard-hitting style of writing. The delight with which Pope, when a school-boy, read Ogilvy's "Homer" was, most probably, the origin of the English "Iliad;" as the "Percy Reliques" fired the juvenile mind of Scott, and stimulated him to enter upon the collection and composition of his "Border Ballads." Keightley's first reading of "Paradise Lost," when a boy, led to his afterwards undertaking his Life of the poet. "The reading," he says, "of 'Paradise Lost' for the first time forms, or should form, an era in the life of every one possessed of taste and poetic feeling. To my mind, that time is ever present. . . . Ever since, the poetry of Milton has formed my constant study—a source of delight in prosperity, of strength and consolation in adversity."

Good books are thus among the best of companions; and, by elevating the thoughts and aspirations, they act as preservatives against low associations. "A natural turn for reading and intellectual pursuits," says Thomas Hood, "probably preserved me from the moral shipwreck so apt to befall those who are deprived in early life of their parental pilotage. My books kept me from the ring, the dog-pit, the tavern, the saloon. The closet associate of Pope and Addison, the mind accustomed to the noble though silent discourse of Shakspeare and Milton, will hardly seek or put up with low company and slaves."

It has been truly said that the best books are those which most resemble good actions. They are purifying, elevating, and sustaining; they enlarge and liberalize the mind; they preserve it against vulgar woldliness; they tend to produce high-minded cheerfulness and equanimity of character; they fashion, and shape, and humanize the mind. In the North-

ern universities, the schools in which the ancient classics are studied are appropriately styled "The Humanity Classes."*

Erasmus, the great scholar, was even of opinion that books were the necessities of life, and clothes the luxuries; and he frequently postponed buying the latter until he had supplied himself with the former. His greatest favorites were the writings of Cicero, which he says he always felt himself the better for reading. "I can never," he says, "read the works of Cicero on 'Old Age,' or 'Friendship,' or his 'Tusculan Disputations,' without fervently pressing them to my lips, without being penetrated with veneration for a mind little short of inspired by God himself." It was the accidental perusal of Cicero's "Hortensius" which first detached St. Augustine—until then a profligate and abandoned sensualist—from his immoral life, and started him upon the course of inquiry and study which led to his becoming the greatest among the Fathers of the Early Church. Sir William Jones made it a practice to read through, once a year, the writings of Cicero, "whose life,

* Notwithstanding recent censures of classical studies as a useless waste of time, there can be no doubt that they give the highest finish to intellectual culture. The ancient classics contain the most consummate models of literary art; and the greatest writers have been their most diligent students. Classical culture was the instrument with which Erasmus and the Reformers purified Europe. It distinguished the great patriots of the seventeenth century; and it has ever since characterized our greatest statesmen. "I know not how it is," says an English writer, "but their commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who constantly practice it, a steady and composing effect upon their judgment, not of literary works only, but of men and events in general. They are like persons who have had a weighty and impressive experience; they are more truly than others under the empire of facts, and more independent of the language current among those with whom they live."

indeed," says his biographer, "was the great exemplar of his own."

When the good old Puritan Baxter came to enumerate the valuable and delightful things of which death would deprive him, his mind reverted to the pleasures he had derived from books and study. "When I die," he said, "I must depart, not only from sensual delights, but from the more manly pleasures of my studies, knowledge, and converse with many wise and godly men, and from all my pleasure in reading, hearing, public and private exercises of religion, and such like. I must leave my library, and turn over those pleasant books no more. I must no more come among the living, nor see the faces of my faithful friends, nor be seen of man; houses, and cities, and fields, and countries, gardens, and walks, will be as nothing to me. I shall no more hear of the affairs of the world, of man, or wars, or other news; nor see what becomes of that beloved interest of wisdom, piety, and peace, which I desire may prosper."

It is unnecessary to speak of the enormous moral influence which books have exercised upon the general civilization of mankind, from the Bible downward. They contain the treasured knowledge of the human race. They are the record of all labors, achievements, speculations, successes, and failures, in science, philosophy, religion, and morals. They have been the greatest motive-powers in all times. "From the Gospel to the Contrat Social," says De Bonald, "it is books that have made revolutions." Indeed, a great book is often a greater thing than a great battle. Even works of fiction have occasionally exercised immense power on society. Thus Rabelais in France, and Cervantes in Spain, overturned at the same time the dominion of monkery

and chivalry, employing no other weapons but ridicule, the natural contrast of human terror. The people laughed, and felt reassured. So "Telemachus" appeared, and recalled men back to the harmonies of nature.

"Poets," says Hazlitt, "are a longer-lived race than heroes: they breathe more of the air of immortality. They survive more entire in their thoughts and acts. We have all that Virgil or Homer did, as much as if we had lived at the same time with them. We can hold their works in our hands, or lay them on our pillows, or put them to our lips. Scarcely a trace of what the others did is left upon the earth, so as to be visible to common eyes. The one, the dead authors, are living men, still breathing and moving in their writings; the others, the conquerors of the world, are but the ashes in an urn. The sympathy (so to speak) between thought and thought is more intimate and vital than that between thought and action. Thought is linked to thought as flame kindles into flame; the tribute of admiration to the *manes* of departed heroism is like burning incense in a marble monument. Words, ideas, feelings, with the progress of time harden into substances: things, bodies, actions, moulder away, or melt into a sound—into thin air. . . . Not only a man's actions are effaced and vanish with him; his virtues and generous qualities die with him also. His intellect only is immortal, and bequeathed unimpaired to posterity. Words are the only things that last forever."*

* Hazlitt's *Table Talk*: "On Thought and Action."

CHAPTER XI.

COMPANIONSHIP IN MARRIAGE.

"Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks,
Shall win my love."—SHAKESPEARE.

"In the husband Wisdom, in the wife Gentleness."

GEORGE HERBERT.

"If God had designed woman as man's master, He would have taken her from his head; if as his slave, He would have taken her from his feet; but as He designed her for his companion and equal, He took her from his side."—ST. AUGUSTINE—"De Civitate Dei."

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. . . . Her husband is known in the gates, and he sitteth among the elders of the land. . . . Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her husband, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."—*Proverbs of Solomon*.

THE character of men, as of women, is powerfully influenced by their companionship in all the stages of life. We have already spoken of the influence of the mother in forming the character of her children. She makes the moral atmosphere in which they live, and by which their minds and souls are nourished, as their bodies are by the physical atmosphere they breathe. And while woman is the natural cherisher of infancy and the instructor of child-