

however, we may have many wants, and yet, if they are only reasonable, we may gratify them all.

Nature indeed provides without stint the main requisites of human happiness. "To watch the corn grow, or the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to pray,"—these, says Ruskin, "are the things that make men happy."

"I have fallen into the hands of thieves," says Jeremy Taylor; "what then? They have left me the sun and moon, fire and water, a loving wife and many friends to pity me, and some to relieve me, and I can still discourse; and, unless I list, they have not taken away my merry countenance and my cheerful spirit and a good conscience. . . . And he that hath so many causes of joy, and so great, is very much in love with sorrow and peevishness who loses all these pleasures and chooses to sit down on his little handful of thorns."

"When a man has such things to think on, and sees the sun, the moon, and stars, and enjoys earth and sea, he is not solitary or even helpless."¹

"Paradise indeed might," as Luther said, "apply to the whole world." What more is there we could ask for ourselves? "Every sort of beauty," says Mr. Greg,² "has been lavished on our allotted home; beauties to enrapture every sense, beauties to satisfy every taste; forms the noblest and the loveliest, colors the most gorgeous and the most delicate, odors the sweetest and subtlest, harmonies the most soothing and the most stirring: the sunny glories of the day; the pale Elysian grace of moonlight; the lake, the mountain, the primeval forest, and the boundless ocean; 'silent pinnacles of aged snow' in one hemisphere, the marvels of tropical luxuriance in another; the serenity of sunsets; the sublimity of

¹ Epictetus.

The Enigmas of Life."

storms; everything is bestowed in boundless profusion on the scene of our existence; we can conceive or desire nothing more exquisite or perfect than what is round us every hour; and our perceptions are so framed as to be consciously alive to all. The provision made for our sensuous enjoyment is in overflowing abundance; so is that for the other elements of our complex nature. Who that has revelled in the opening ecstasies of a young imagination, or the rich marvels of the world of thought, does not confess that the intelligence has been dowered at least with as profuse a beneficence as the senses? Who that has truly tasted and fathomed human love in its dawning and crowning joys has not thanked God for a felicity which indeed 'passeth understanding?' If we had set our fancy to picture a Creator occupied solely in devising delight for children whom he loved, we could not conceive one single element of bliss which is not here."

THE CHOICE OF BOOKS

LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE LONDON WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE IN 1887

"All round the room my silent servants wait—
My friends in every season, bright and dim,
Angels and Seraphim
Come down and murmur to me, sweet and low,
And spirits of the skies all come and go
Early and late." —Proctor.

AND yet too often they wait in vain. One reason for this is, I think, that people are overwhelmed by the crowd of books offered to them.

In old days books were rare and dear. Now, on the contrary, it may be said with greater truth than ever that—

"Words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think."¹

¹Byron.

Our ancestors had a difficulty in procuring them. Our difficulty now is what to select. We must be careful what we read, and not, like the sailors of Ulysses, take bags of wind for sacks of treasure,—not only lest we should even now fall into the error of the Greeks, and suppose that language and definitions can be instruments of investigation as well as of thought, but lest, as too often happens, we should waste time over trash. There are many books to which one may apply, in the sarcastic sense, the ambiguous remark which Lord Beaconsfield made to an unfortunate author, "I will lose no time in reading your book."

There are, indeed, books and books; and there are books which, as Lamb said, are not books at all. It is wonderful how much innocent happiness we thoughtlessly throw away. An Eastern proverb says that calamities sent by heaven may be avoided, but from those we bring on ourselves there is no escape.

Many, I believe, are deterred from attempting what are called stiff books for fear they should not understand them; but there are few who need complain of the narrowness of their minds if only they would do their best with them.

In reading, however, it is most important to select subjects in which one is interested. I remember, years ago, consulting Mr. Darwin as to the selection of a course of study. He asked me what interested me most, and advised me to choose that subject. This, indeed, applies to the work of life generally.

I am sometimes disposed to think that the great readers of the next generation will be, not our lawyers and doctors, shopkeepers and manufacturers, but the laborers and mechanics. Does not this seem natural? The former work mainly with their head; when their daily duties are over the brain

is often exhausted, and of their leisure time much must be devoted to air and exercise. The laborer and mechanic, on the contrary, besides working often for much shorter hours, have in their work-time taken sufficient bodily exercise and could therefore give any leisure they might have to reading and study. They have not done so as yet, it is true; but this has been for obvious reasons. Now, however, in the first place, they receive an excellent education in elementary schools, and in the second have more easy access to the best books.

Ruskin has observed that he does not wonder at what men suffer, but he often wonders at what they lose. We suffer much, no doubt, from the faults of others, but we lose much more by our own ignorance.

"If," says Sir John Herschel, "I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. I speak of it of course only as a worldly advantage, and not in the slightest degree as superseding or derogating from the higher office and surer and stronger panoply of religious principles—but as a taste, an instrument, and a mode of pleasurable gratification. Give a man this taste and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man, unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books."

It is one thing to own a library; it is quite another to use it wisely. I have often been astonished how little care people devote to the selection of what they read. Books, we know, are almost innumerable; our hours for reading are, alas! very few.

And yet many people read almost by hazard. They will take any book they chance to find in a room at a friend's house; they will buy a novel at a railway stall if it has an attractive title; indeed, I believe in some cases even the binding affects their choice. The selection is, no doubt, far from easy. I have often wished some one would recommend a list of a hundred good books. If we had such lists drawn up by a few good guides they would be most useful. I have indeed sometimes heard it said that in reading every one must choose for himself, but this reminds me of the recommendation not to go into the water till you can swim.

In the absence of such lists I have picked out the books most frequently mentioned with approval by those who have referred directly or indirectly to the pleasure of reading, and have ventured to include some which, though less frequently mentioned, are especial favorites of my own. Every one who looks at the list will wish to suggest other books, as indeed I should myself, but in that case the number would soon run up.¹

I have abstained, for obvious reasons, from mentioning works by living authors, though from many of them—Tennyson, Ruskin, and others—I have myself derived the keenest enjoyment; and I have omitted works on science, with one or two exceptions, because the subject is so progressive.

I feel that the attempt is over-bold, and I must beg for indulgence, while hoping for criticism; indeed one object which I have had in view is to stimulate others more competent far than I am to give us the advantage of their opinions.

¹ Several longer lists have been given; for instance, by Comte, "Catechism of Positive Philosophy;" Pycroft, "Course of English Reading;" Baldwin, "The Book Lover;" Perkins, "The Best Reading;" and by Mr. Ireland, "Books for General Readers."

Moreover, I must repeat that I suggest these works rather as those which, as far as I have seen, have been most frequently recommended, than as suggestions of my own, though I have slipped in a few of my own special favorites.

In any such selection much weight should, I think, be attached to the general verdict of mankind. There is a "struggle for existence" and a "survival of the fittest" among books, as well as among animals and plants. As Alonzo of Aragon said, "Age is a recommendation in four things—old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, and old books to read."

Still, this cannot be accepted without important qualifications. The most recent books of history and science contain, or ought to contain, the most accurate information and the most trustworthy conclusions. Moreover, while the books of other races and times have an interest from their very distance, it must be admitted that many will still more enjoy, and feel more at home with, those of our own century and people.

Yet the oldest books of the world are remarkable and interesting on account of their very age; and the works which have influenced the opinions or charmed the leisure hours of millions of men in distant times and far-away regions are well worth reading on that very account, even if to us they seem scarcely to deserve their reputation. It is true that, to many, such works are accessible only in translations; but translations, though they can never perhaps do justice to the original, may yet be admirable in themselves. The Bible itself, which must stand first in the list, is a conclusive case.

At the head of all non-Christian moralists, I must place the "Enchiridion" of Epictetus and the "Meditations" of
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Marcus Aurelius, certainly two of the noblest books in the whole of literature; and which, moreover, have both been admirably translated. The "Analects" of Confucius will, I believe, prove disappointing to most English readers, but the effect it has produced on the most numerous race of men constitutes in itself a peculiar interest. The "Ethics" of Aristotle, perhaps, appear to some disadvantage from the very fact that they have so profoundly influenced our views of morality. The "Koran," like the "Analects" of Confucius, will to most of us derive its principal interest from the effect it has exercised, and still exercises, on so many millions of our fellow men. I doubt whether in any other respect it will seem to repay perusal, and to most persons probably certain extracts, not too numerous, would appear sufficient.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers have been collected in one volume by Wake. It is but a small one, and though I must humbly confess that I was disappointed they are perhaps all the more curious from the contrast they afford to those of the Apostles themselves. Of the later Fathers I have included only the "Confessions" of St. Augustine, which Dr. Pusey selected for the commencement of the "Library of the Fathers," and which, as he observes, has "been translated again and again into almost every European language, and in all loved;" though Luther was of opinion that St. Augustine "wrote nothing to the purpose concerning faith." But then Luther was no great admirer of the Fathers. St. Jerome, he says, "writes, alas! very coldly;" Chrysostom "digresses from the chief points;" St. Jerome is "very poor;" and in fact, he says, "the more I read the books of the Fathers the more I find myself offended;" while Renan, in his interesting autobiography,

compared theology to a Gothic cathedral, "Elle a la grandeur, les vides immenses, et le peu de solidité."¹

Among other devotional works most frequently recommended are Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ," Pascal's "Pensées," Spinoza's "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," Butler's "Analogy of Religion," Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and last, not least, Keble's beautiful "Christian Year."

Aristotle and Plato stand at the head of another class. The "Politics" of Aristotle, and Plato's "Dialogues," if not the whole, at any rate the "Phædo," the "Apology," and the "Republic," will be of course read by all who wish to know anything of the history of human thought, though I am heretical enough to doubt whether the latter repays the minute and laborious study often devoted to it.

Aristotle being the father if not the creator of the modern scientific method, it has followed naturally—indeed, almost inevitably—that his principles have become part of our very intellectual being, so that they seem now almost self-evident, while his actual observations, though very remarkable—as, for instance, when he observes that bees on one journey confine themselves to one kind of flower—still have been in many cases superseded by others carried on under more favorable conditions. We must not be ungrateful to the great master, because his own lessons have taught us how to advance.

Plato, on the other hand,—I say so with all respect,—seems to me in some cases to play on words: his arguments are very able, very philosophical, often very noble, but not always conclusive; in a language differently constructed they

¹ "It has the same grandeur, the same vast spaces, and the same lack of solidity."

might sometimes tell in exactly the opposite sense. If this method has proved less fruitful, if in metaphysics we have made but little advance, that very fact in one point of view leaves the "Dialogues" of Socrates as instructive now as ever they were; while the problems with which they deal will always rouse our interest, as the calm and lofty spirit which inspires them must command our admiration. Of the "Apology" and the "Phædo" especially it would be impossible to speak too gratefully.

I would also mention Demosthenes's "De Corona," which Lord Brougham pronounced the greatest oration of the greatest of orators; Lucretius, Plutarch's Lives, Horace, and at least the "De Officiis," "De Amicitia," and "De Senectute" of Cicero.

The great epics of the world have always constituted one of the most popular branches of literature. Yet how few, comparatively, ever read Homer or Virgil after leaving school.

The "Nibelungenlied," our great Anglo-Saxon epic, is perhaps too much neglected, no doubt on account of its painful character. Brunhild and Kriemhild, indeed, are far from perfect, but we meet with few such "live" women in Greek or Roman literature. Nor must I omit to mention Sir T. Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," though I confess I do so mainly in deference to the judgment of others.

Among the Greek tragedians I include Æschylus, if not all his works, at any rate "Prometheus," perhaps the sublimest poem in Greek literature, and the "Trilogy" (Mr. Symonds, in his "Greek Poets," speaks of the "unrivalled majesty" of the "Agamemnon," and Mark Pattison considered it "the grandest work of creative genius in the whole range of literature"), or, as Sir M. E. Grant

Duff recommends, the "Persæ;" Sophocles ("Œdipus Tyrannus"), Euripides ("Medea"), and Aristophanes ("The Knights" and "Clouds"); unfortunately, as Schlegel says, probably even the greatest scholar does not understand half his jokes; and I think most modern readers will prefer our modern poets.

I should like, moreover, to say a word for Eastern poetry, such as portions of the "Maha Bharata" and "Ramayana" (too long probably to be read through, but of which Talboys Wheeler has given a most interesting epitome in the first two volumes of his "History of India"); the "Shahnameh," the work of the great Persian poet Firdusi; Kalidasa's "Sakuntala," and the "Sheking," the classical collection of ancient Chinese odes. Many, I know, will think I ought to have included Omar Khayyam.

In history we are beginning to feel that the vices and vicissitudes of kings and queens, the dates of battles and wars, are far less important than the development of human thought, the progress of art, of science, and of law; and the subject is on that very account even more interesting than ever. I will, however, only mention, and that rather from a literary than a historical point of view, Herodotus, Xenophon (the "Anabasis"), Thucydides, and Tacitus ("Germania"); and of modern historians, Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" ("the splendid bridge from the Old World to the New"), Hume's "History of England," Carlyle's "French Revolution," Grote's "History of Greece," and Green's "Short History of the English People."

Science is so rapidly progressive that, though to many minds it is the most fruitful and interesting subject of all, I cannot here rest on that agreement which, rather than my own opinion, I take as the basis of my list. I will there-