The Prison Mirror.

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND."

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RETROSPECTION.

[The following beautiful lines are from the pen of a lady resident of Boston—an intimate friend of the poet Longfellow when he lived. He was very solicitous to have some of her poems published, but she has never done so. Through a fortunate circumstance a copy of "Retrospection" was taken from the original manuscript.—RAMEOUS.]

Our watch is ticking off the seconds which make time;
Our spirit ticking off the heart-throbs which fill time.
The one is heard; the other, audible only within the deep recesses of the soul.
Yet each performs its mission;
Seconds make minutes—minutes hours, and hours elongate into years.
So heart-throbs time our loves.
Each heart beating responsive to another heart
Evokes some ministering spirit to its end.
And straightway moments multiply;
Are bright with some ideal happiness.

'Tis well; but here an old familiar friend taps on our shoulder;
And we can but turn, and give the friendly greeting.
'Tis Retrospection!
Turns she not away but peers into our eyes;
Her look so joyous, neither one gaze is dropped, or hand withdrawn, but an electric thrill.
E'en such as lovers know full well, draws us in closest sympathy.
Our recognition of our pensive visitor, lighting one's eyes with smiles,
Has thrown reflected back, an answering smile,
And as heart answereth unto heart,
Our smile creates the angel,
Where fear would have provoked the fiend.
She bids us go with her: and straight the swift cherub,
Bright winged Thought, tarries not an instant
Till all the years are gathered up, and broken into moments.
Then Retrospection waves her hand, and we're alone again.

Blossoms and sunbeams of experience
Plucked on our journey,
To make the present joyous and the future radiant with hope
Tie our hands; and answering spirits all along the route
Echo the same glad strain;
Tell me not Retrospection is a cruel foe,
Taking advantage in our most defenceless moments;
Only this is she to him who finds
Sin's barbed arrow deeply pierce his heart,
And self-reproached, knows well who placed it there.

E. S. K.

Literary Influence.

That the reading of books is either an incalculable benefit or a positive injury no one will deny. The influence they exert on the human mind is measured and gradual; they direct our thoughts and actions in an imperceptible way, for good or bad, according to the standard of the usual line of literature we pursue.

Man may be turned from his usual paths of life by the emotional appeal of some successful Evangelist or temperance orator, but it does not strengthen the will and develop the intelligence and is less profitable and less likely to succeed as the appeal to the reason through the medium of good books.

The characters one becomes acquainted with during a progressive system of reading so inculcate themselves into his nature that it will take years for him to outgrow. "The soul becomes assimilated to that on which the mind thinks continually" and the minds of men in prison are almost wholly absorbed with what they read, work and other routine occupying very little space in their minds. They live in the spirit of what they read, and no one can rise superior to the spirit of the world in which he lives.

When one thinks of the airy dreams of youth, that are incapable of realization, and then compares the better state preceding manhood, which he soon outgrows, he can easily discern why he has not been more successful and happier in after years. In a majority of cases it will be found that he spent the time preceding manhood in reading trashy and trivial literature. There must be a suitability of mind and purpose between the reader and his book before he can thoroughly imbibe therein. If there is any disparity the reader must lower or raise himself to the level of the book, and it is at this time that we elevate ourselves or sink deeper in our own degradation, and we show by the reading that the book is to our taste and at the same time it portrays the vices or virtues of the author and his reader.

If there is any one work of fiction that would stir me on to hold life as meaning something more than bread, that work is Hugo's "Les Miserables." There is a great deal in common between Jean Valiean and men in prison; his nature is assimilated to our own, we share all his trials and afflictions mentally, and we may finally triumph over our baser selves as he did, in reality. It takes patience, perseverance and inimitable courage, but it can be done. Next in the category of good books to be found in the prison library comes Dr. Johnson's "Rasselas;" it is small in size but it contains more wisdom and a larger amount of moral philosophy than any book three times its size, every chapter brimming full of ethical knowledge. This book is worth the reading at least four times a year.

Of all books I have read within the last ten years, I received the strongest impressions from Dickens' "David Copperfield" and Thackeray's "Henry Esmond;" I can still feel as if I were a participant in the frank, open confidence that existed between David and Agnes, in the former, and I can still hear the passionate appeal of Henry to his foster mother, to forever leave the old world and spend the remaining years of their lives among the beautiful foliage of Virginia. There is in these books the same splendid sweep, and the same mighty movement towards the one grand object—elevating author and reader.

Among the other works which give us a glimpse of life at different decades in the world's history is Scott's "Ivanhoe," Hawthorne's "Mosses from an Old Manse," Cooper's "The Spy," and Irving's "Sketch Book." Any one who knows anything of life knows that what these books have represented is typical and characteristic, and in reality, true.

Nevertheless, I hope I shall not be understood as proposing a course of fiction alone as the best reading for men in prison, such is not my intention. I know that books are most instructive, when the subject is diversified, as, for instance, reading history one week, essays and biography one week, and two weeks, fiction, constituting a monthly course. But above all, readers should avoid all that is exceptional and abnormal whether it is found in religious or vulgar literature; the fact is, the vulgar author likes to boast of the vices the world never knew, and the religious author to boast of the virtue that has never existed, both works producing a false impression; there is nothing to recommend such style of literature except its overwhelming exaggeration and hypocrisy.

There is nothing that will invigorate the good qualities in a man who has obeyed the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart, like the reading and re-reading of a good book; it will stir his ambition and create a desire for a thorough education—and no one can measure the happiness and sensibility of a man who attains it—it is beyond limit.

MARCUS.

The Chautauqua Idea.

Chautauqua is a school for all—a university in which, by joining self-instruction with the schools and platform of Chautauqua, a man or woman of any age may pursue knowledge in almost any field with profit and pleasure. The original impulse to this work was given by providing for the wants of those who had not good advantage in early life; but it has been found in the actual work that an arrangement of subjects and lectures could be made which enables any man to add to his knowledge and quicken his interest in personal study. It has come to pass that Chautauqua's best patrons and friends are those who have graduated in other schools, while its founders continue to increase the usefulness of Chautauqua for those in whose behalf it was founded.

College education, as it has been hitherto carried on, has been largely a forced concern; students have been sent to school, rather than gone on their free and spontaneous will. The pupils of every Chautauqua circle are voluntary agents, and engage in their work with a will. It is the difference between task work and love work. Almost all schools are handicapped by the compulsion necessary to bring their pupils up to the mark. But in a Chautauqua circle all goes like clock work. There is a vim and abandon which argues the best results. Not knowledge, but the love of knowledge, is the best of accomplishments, and that is breathed into the Chautauqua student.

The Chautauqua Idea is not so much to make specialists; as, for example, engineers, editors, ministers, doctors, lawyers, but well-instructed men and women. Human nature is a diamond in the rough, and it is worth polishing and setting for its own sake. God having bequeathed such a magnificent treasure on man, he is guilty who does not put it to its intended purpose, and return it to its author approved and developed to its best extent.

Another fine idea of the Chautauqua University is to educate all at their homes. Massing students together in great institutions is dangerous business. Humanity heats and corrupts when put into crowded institutions, be it in prisons or colleges. Some of the worst disorders perpetrated on society take place in schools and universities where the people are herded together in great numbers with the influences of home and society largely thrown off. This scheme is to carry on the work at the fireside, on the farm, at the shop, at the work bench and within the walls of the prison. Carry education to the people instead of carrying the people to education. And still further it is the idea not to take people from their usual occupations after they are educated, not to take farmers, mechanics, housewives from their present callings and put them in the learned professions, but to leave them still where they are, and start them on a course of mental and moral improvement which they can conduct all their lifetime at their homes, and while still engaged on their several industries. This is a capital merit of the system, and deserves especial commendation.

So planned and engineered, Chautauqua is the university of the common people, of the great middle class that constitute the strength and glory of every country, and especially of ours. Its numbers are prodigious, its extent is world wide. It sets a splendid example for all nations. It strikes the keynote for the education eventually of the whole human race. In our land it is destined to do more for the perpetuation of our free institutions than many another time-honored school or college that limits its benefits to some privileged class, sex, color or section. Chautauqua blows a trumpet to every quarter of the compass, and says to all, "Come ye and buy wine and milk without money and without price."

RAMEOUS.

He Was Looking for a Job.

It was in a little mining town in California where I was working, that a young man came up one morning and put up at the only hotel in the place. He was decently dressed, and seemed to be in easy circumstances. No one at first paid any attention to him as it was not an uncommon thing to see visitors at the mines. But when three or four days had passed without the young fellow moving from the hotel, some of the miners became curious as to what his business might be. He was a very quiet fellow, speaking only when spoken to, and showed no desire to cultivate acquaintances. Some thought one thing about him, and some other things. A few hinted that by the way he was acting, he might be a detective, but the majority could not agree on anything. Finally one of the miners made up his mind that in the evening he would ask the stranger what he wanted around there. So, after supper, he watched his chance and when he got the young fellow alone he walked up to him and said, "Stranger, if it is no 'fense, would you mind telling a feller what your business ar' around hereabouts?" The young fellow, after a moment's hesitation, answered that he was looking for a job in the mines. "Looking for a job in the mines?" roared the old miner. "Well, I'll be dogarned if you don't beat them all. Looking for a job in the mines, and why in h—— did't you say so a week ago?" "Oh, I was a stranger and did not like to," was the only excuse he could give. Well, as soon as the boss knew what he wanted he gave him a job and he went to work next day.

Now, boys, I doubt not but that there are many of us when we get out of here that may feel like that young fellow did. We shall feel that as strangers and ex-convicts, that everyone whom we meet will know our past, and that they are only waiting for an opportunity to show their contempt for us, hence we are loth to ask any one for employment. But, my friends, that will never do. If you want work you must not keep it a secret, for when you go out of here you will be pretty well dressed and will not have the appearance of a working-man, and people will not be apt to ask you if you are hunting for work. The reason why so many of us fail to get employment is that we fail to look in the right way and in the right place. Around the saloon stove is a poor place to find employment other than that of toasting your toes. And now one thing more. We all agree that in every man there is good and evil, or, in other words, two distinct persons—the good and the bad man. Let me ask you, my friends, what are you going to do with this "bad part" of you that has caused your better self so much trouble—are you to take it out with you? If you do, I don't care how good your purpose may be, this old "crooked man" will ever be in your way if you don't cut clear from him. You have often noticed two horses hitched to a load; one is a good willing horse, while the other is a lazy brute that will not help pull the load in the right way, but always holding back and making the other drag him along as well as the load. That is just the way with us, we start out to do right, our better half does its best, but we fail simply because we take the old "crooked man" into business with us instead of cutting him adrift. You can't do it, boys, it has been tried over and over, and I have yet to learn of the man that has made a success of it. Now, when the day comes for you to leave us just say to yourself that you will leave the old "crooked man" behind, as this is the right place for him. Take the lazy plug out of your team and give the other horse a chance. Do like the quaker sailor when his ship was engaged in a sea fight. The enemy sent a boat loaded with men to board him but a shot from one of the guns wrecked the boat; but some of its crew still intent on victory swam to the ship and one of the fellows took hold of a rope that hung over the side and began to draw himself up by it, but the quaker saw him and ran knife in hand and cut the rope, saying, "Friend, thee can have the rope." So cut clear from your evil part and go out of here a free man.

And now let me add that the young man that I have told you of was an ex convict, just out of San Quentin prison. It was discovered after he had been in the mines some time, but no one thought any the worse of him for that. He was a good fellow and all the miners in the camp liked him. When I left the camp he was getting along first rate—he had cut clear from all evil.

DEXTER.

Evil Speaking.

The delusive itch for slander, too common in all ranks of people, whether to gratify a little ungenerous resentment; whether, oftener, out of a principle of leveling from a narrowness and poverty of soul, ever impatient of merit and superiority in others; whether, from a mean ambition, or the insatiate lust of being witty (a talent in which ill-nature and malice are no ingredients); or, lastly, whether from natural cruelty of disposition, abstracted from all views and considerations of self—to which one, or whether to all jointly, we are indebted for this contagious malady, this much is certain: From whatever seeds it springs, the growth and progress of it are as destructive to, as they are unbecoming a civilized people. To pass a hard and ill-natured reflection upon an undersigning action; to invent, or what is equally bad, to propagate a vexatious report, without color and grounds; to plunder an innocent man of his character and good name, a jewel, which perhaps he has starved himself to purchase, and probably would hazard his life to secure; to rob him at the same time of his happiness and peace of mind, perhaps his bread—the bread, maybe, of a virtuous family—and all this, as Solomon says of the madman, who casteth firebrands, arrows and death, and sayeth: "Am I not in sport?"—all this, out of wantonness, and oftener from worse motives, appears such a complication of badness, as requires no words or warmth of fancy to aggravate. Pride, treachery, envy, hypocrisy, malice, cruelty and self-love may be said, in one shape or other, to have occasioned all the frauds and mischiefs that ever happened in the world; but the chances against a coincidence of them all in one person are so many, that one would have supposed the character of a common slanderer as rare a production in nature, as that of a great genius, which seldom happens more than once in an age.—N. Y. Ledger.