

BOOKS FOR OUR CHILDREN.

THE war is over, yet our fight is not through; and we always, in this life of ours, and especially in this new country and eventful age, have trouble enough to keep our eyes open when they ought to sleep, and our hands busy when they have earned the right to rest. Several knotty questions already begin to try us sorely, although we are confident that the knots can be untied by skilful fingers without calling upon the sword to cut them. We shall settle the Reconstruction problem, the Negro, the Debt, John Bull, and Louis Napoleon, all in due time, and without war. But there is a question to be settled which comes nearer home to each family, and which distances all others in magnitude and interest:—What shall we do with our children? how train and teach them in body and mind, by schools and books, by play and work, for that marvellous American life that is now opening to us its new and eventful chapter in the history of man? The Slaveholders' Rebellion is put down; but how shall we deal with the never-ceasing revolt of the new generation against the old? and how keep our Young America under the thumb of his father and mother without breaking his spirit or blighting his destiny? Our brave old flag has swept the waters of all Secession craft, and our iron-clad Monitors do not flinch in fear of the model fleets of France and England mustered at Cherbourg. But what standard rules over our children and youth? and what Monitors are keeping watch over our countless schools and playgrounds? Our people have risen to a new and mighty sense of our national life, and the thousands of Americans who are now returning from Europe say that the tide there has wholly turned in our favor, and Americans are too proud to boast of their country, and are quite safe in leaving her to speak for herself. But how are we recruiting the ranks of the nation from the fresh blood

and spirits, the new impulses and passions of childhood? and how does our legion of juvenile infantry compare with the young legions of England, France, Germany, Russia, or Italy? These are grave questions, not to be approached without misgiving, yet not by any means with mistrust, much less with despair. We of course do not propose to try to answer all or any of them now, but must be content with throwing out a few plain thoughts upon the kind of intellectual food we are giving our children, and especially upon the kind of juvenile literature that we ought to encourage.

We do not claim for the American child any exemption from the common lot, nor make him out to be above or below the human nature to which he belongs, in common with the children of the Old World. He is a chip of the old block; and that old block is from the old trunk that has been growing for ages, is a great deal older than the father or mother, as old as mankind; and each new comer into the field bears with him some traces or remains of all the traits and dispositions and liabilities that have appeared in the ancestors and become the heritage of the race. Not only is the American child of the same nature as his European contemporary, but he is born into very much of the same life, the same general circumstances of climate, scenery, morals, and religion, and surely into much of the same nursery talk and juvenile amusement, not excepting books. "Mother Goose" has a nursery catholicity, wherever the English language is spoken, that is denied to any other book; and fruitful as America has been and is in children's books, we have not yet apparently added a single one to the first rank of juvenile classics, and have distanced Æsop, Bunyan, De Foe, Edgeworth, and the old fairy-story-tellers, as little as we have distanced Homer, Dante, Shakspeare, Milton, Words-

worth, and Goethe in the higher imagination.

It may be that the children's books that have been most characteristic of our native authors have been in important respects a mistake, and the "Quarterly Review," not without reason, assailed them some years ago in two articles of considerable sagacity and much patient study. But we have outgrown them now, and see the error that afflicted them. We have ceased to think it the part of wisdom to cross the first instincts of children, and to insist upon making of them little moralists, metaphysicians, and philosophers, when great Nature determines that their first education shall be in the senses and muscles, the affections and fancy, rather than in the critical judgment, logical understanding, or analytic reason. Peter Parley — Heaven rest his soul! — has gone to his repose, and much of his philosophizing and moralizing is buried deeper than his dust; yet Peter himself lives, and will live, in the graphic histories, anecdotes, sketches of life and Nature, and the rich treasures of pictorial illustration, that have blessed the eyes and ears, the hearts and imaginations of our children. He was wisest when he least thought of being wise, and weakest when he tried to be strong. We are not likely to repeat his mistakes, and our best new juvenile literature is too loyal to the old standards and to common-sense to undertake to make a precocious reasoning monster of the dear little child whom God is asking us to help onward in the unfolding of his senses and the observation of the world and its scenes and people.

We must be willing to own that our America is a child of the ages, and to give our children a full share of their birthright as heirs of the juvenile treasures of all nations. Judæa must still give her sacred stories, that charm youth as much, as they edify maturity; Arabia loses nothing of the enchantment of her marvellous tales in the clear light of this nineteenth century, but makes her dreams dearer, as science and business insist that we shall not dream at

all; the old classic times shall still teach us in the fables of Æsop, and the romantic ages shall be with us in the legends of fairies and elves, dwarfs and giants, saints and angels, that are constantly coming up with faces new or old; the Protestant Reformation shall speak to our little folks in the lives of the martyrs and in "Pilgrim's Progress"; the age of modern adventure shall never tire in "Robinson Crusoe"; the new secular era of ethical schooling shall not lose its power so long as Maria Edgeworth finds a printer; nor will the didactic school of writers of juvenile religious books die out so long as Hannah More stands by our Sunday schools and Tract Societies, and keeps their piety and ethics from swamping themselves wholly in dogmatism and dulness.

Yet whilst we are thus to acknowledge and use the old treasures, we are none the less bound to have a juvenile literature of our own; and because we are possessed by the truly catholic spirit that appreciates all good things, we are more likely to have a full and fair growth from the good seed that takes root in our own nurseries. What that new growth shall be we do not presume to predict, for it cannot be fully known until it comes up and speaks for itself; yet it is not presumption to undertake to say what are the essential conditions of its rise and the probable traits of its character. It must grow out of our civilized Christian mind under the peculiar circumstances and dispositions of our children, according to the great laws of God, as they bear upon our sensibilities, tastes, faculties, and associations. It is already showing unmistakable signs of its quality, and none the less so, although we must allow that its best specimens are fugitive stories, stray poems, and magazine pieces, rather than any conspicuous master-works of literature that rival the old standards.

The American child is undoubtedly in some respects peculiar alike in temperament, disposition, and surroundings. He is somewhat delicate and sensitive in organization, and not as

tough and thick-skinned, surely, as his English cousins. He grows up in the midst of excitement, with an average amount of privilege and prosperity unknown heretofore to the mass of children in any community. Our children are generally supplied with pocket-money to an extent unknown in the good old times; and the books that circulate among them at holiday seasons, and are sometimes found in school and Sunday libraries, often have a richness and beauty that were never seen fifty years ago on the parlor tables or shelves of parents. Reading begins very early among us; and the universal hurry of the American mind crowds children forward, and tempts them in pleasure, as in study and work, to rebel at the usual limitations of years, and push infancy prematurely into childhood, childhood into youth, and youth into maturity. The spirit of competition shows its head unseasonably, and there is a precocious fever of ambition among those who are taught almost in the cradle to feel that here the race for the highest prizes is open to all, and the emulation of the school is the forerunner of the rivalry of business, society, and politics. Our heads are apt to be much older than our shoulders, and English critics of our juvenile literature say that much of it seems written for the market and counting-room rather than for the nursery and playground. Yet we are not disposed to quarrel with the American child, or put him down at the feet of the pet children of Europe. He is a precious little creature, with rare susceptibilities and powers, whose very perils indicate high aptitudes, and whose great exposures should move us to temper not a little our pity for his failings with admiration for his excellence. Our boys and girls have done nobly, and the nation which they have now become may well prove its greatness by new wisdom and care for the boys and girls who are yet to grow up men and women and become the nation that is to be.

There are vital questions that meet us at the very outset of the discussion:—What are children? and what is the

difference between them and grown people? and what should be the difference in the reading provided for the two? Some persons seem to think and speak of children as a distinct order of beings, and not as a part of mankind. The simple truth is, that they are men and women in *nature*, but not in *development*. All that is *actual* in the mature mind is *potential* in them, and there is no theory more absurd than that which affirms that the adult powers and dispositions are wholly factitious, and education makes us what we are, instead of simply bringing out what is born in us. The great human mind is in the little child as well as in the gray-headed sage; but it has not come forth into activity and consciousness. The most complete culture, instead of obliterating diversities of natural talent and tendency, does but develop them more effectually; and our great masters and schools are more memorable for the strongly pronounced minds and wills that go forth from them than for any monotony of mediocre scholars or uniformity of paragons of genius. True culture brings out the common human mind in all, and the rare gifts that are in the few, and vindicates the force of Nature by the perfection of its art. Our juvenile literature should proceed upon this idea, and treat its little readers as representatives of the great human mind on its way to its full rights and powers and quite true to its high birthright, as far as it puts forth its prerogative.

What error, then, can be greater than to take it for granted that children have no mind, because they have not had time and means to bring out their whole mind? As far as it goes, is not their mind the great human intelligence? and even in its lisplings and stumblings, does it not give hints and promises of the majestic powers that are on the way to development? Children are, indeed, treated and written about, sometimes, as if they were *little fools*, and any baby-talk or twaddle were good enough for them; but we are inclined to believe that they are in the main *great fools* who make

this mistake, and so sadly libel God's handiwork. In fact, it is probably safe to say, that, so far as their mind works, it works with more intensity and quickness than the adult mind; for they are fresh and unworn, and they put their whole life into the first play of their faculties. They do not know many things, indeed, and require constant instruction; but their *intelligence* is by no means as defective as their *knowledge*, but is as sharp and unwearied as their insatiate appetite for food. Talk nonsense to children, forsooth! Rather talk it to anybody else,—far rather to the pedants and worldlings who have fooled away their common-sense by burying thought under book-dust, or by hiding nature under shams and artifices. Children not only want the true thing said to them, but want to have it said in a true and fitting way; and no language pleases them so much as the pure, simple speech which the good old Bible uses, and which all our great masters of style follow. Any one who has seen the quizzical expression of a score or two of bright little children in listening to some old or young proser, who is undertaking to palm off upon them his platitudes for wisdom and his baby-talk for simplicity, cannot remain long in doubt as to which party leans most towards the fool.

There is, indeed, great difference between the mind of children and of adults, and literature should respect and provide for this difference,—although it is true that the best books please and edify both, and the nursery and parlor can meet in pretty full fellowship over “Æsop's Fables,” “Robinson Crusoe,” and “Pilgrim's Progress,” if not over the “Vicar of Wakefield” and Edgeworth's “Popular Tales.” The great distinction between juvenile and adult literature is a very obvious and natural one. Not to discuss now the absence of business cares and ambition, children, in their normal, healthful state, know nothing of love as a passion, whilst it is the conspicuous feature of adult society, and the motive of all romances for readers of advanced years, and espe-

cially for all who have just passed into the charmed borders of adult life. I do not say, indeed, that children are to know nothing of love, or that it should be shut out of their habitual reading; for love is a part of human life, and is organized into manners and institutions, and sanctioned and exalted by religion. As a fact, and as sustaining great practical relations, love is to be treated freely in juvenile literature, but not as a passion. Every boy and girl who reads the Prayer-Book, and hears every-day talk, and sees what is going on in the world, knows that men and women marry, and young people fall in love and are engaged. This is all well, and children's stories may tell freely whatever illustrates the home usages and social customs of the people; but the more the love senses and passions are left to sleep in their sacred and innocent reserve within their mystic cells, so much the better for the child whilst a child, and so much the better for the youth when no more a child, and Nature betrays her great secret, and the charming hallucinations of romance open their fascinations and call for the sober counsels of wisdom and kindness.

But if love, as a passion, does not belong to our juvenile literature, its place is fully supplied by a power quite as active and marvellous,—the mighty genius of play. Try to read a three-volume novel of love and flirtation to a set of well-trained, healthfully organized children, or try them with a single chapter that describes the raptures or the jealousies, and gives the letters and dialogues, of the enamored couple, who are destined, through much tribulation, to end their griefs at the altar, not of sacrifice, but of union, and you will find your auditors ready to go to sleep or to run away. The girls may, indeed, brighten up, if a famous dress or set of jewels, a great party or grand wedding, is described; and the boys may open their eyes, if the story turns upon a smart horse-race or a plucky fight. Children, in their normal state, do not enter into the romance of the passion, nor should they be trained to it. They may

be bred in all courtesy and refinement without it; and the girls and boys may be true to their sex, and have all the gentle manners that should come from proper companionship. The boys will not want a certain chivalry in the school-room, play-ground, and parlor, and the girls will learn from instinct as well as discipline the delicacy that is their charm and shield. Nothing can be worse than to ply them with love-stories, or throw them into the false society that fosters morbid sentiments and impulses, and gives them the passions without the judgment and control of men and women. Kind Providence, in the gift of play, has mercifully averted this danger, and brought our children into a companionship that needs no precocious passion to give it charm.

How wonderful it is, this instinct for play, and how worthy of our careful and serious study! It is the key to the whole philosophy of juvenile literature: for we take it for granted that books for children belong to the easy play, rather than to the hard work of life; and that they are an utter failure, if they do not win their way by their own charms. Here, in fact, we distinguish between juvenile literature and school-books. School-books are for children, indeed, but not for them alone, but for the teacher also, and they are to be as interesting as possible; yet they are not for play, but for work, and it is best to be quite honest at the outset, and let the little people know that study is work and not play, and that their usual gift-books are not for study mainly, but for entertainment. In this way, study is the more patient and comforting, and reading more free and refreshing. Children make the distinction very shrewdly, and are quite willing to pore carefully over their school-lessons, but are very impatient of lessons that are sugared over with pleasantries, and detect the pedagogue under the mask of the playmate. They are willing to have their pills sugared over, but do not like to have them called sugar-plums.

Playfulness does not require the sacrifice of good sense or sound principle

or serious purpose, but subjects them to certain conditions; and there is no form in which exalted characters or sacred truths are brought home more effectually to the hearts both of young and old than in the stories and dramas that make life speak for itself, and play themselves into the affections and fancy. It does require that the laws of attention and emotion, the unities and the varieties of æsthetic art, shall be observed; and as soon as the book is dull, and offers no sparkling waters nor fair flowers nor tempting fruits to lure the flagging reader over its intervals of dusty road or sandy waste, it is a failure, and not what it pretends to be. With children, play demands more the *varieties* than the *unities* of Art; and their first education deals with those spontaneous sensibilities and impulses that insist upon being played upon freely, with little regard to exact method. Those sports are most pleasing to young children, especially, that touch the greatest number of the keys of sensation and will, and make them answer to the pulse of Nature and companionship. One may learn a deal of philosophy from the most popular nursery rhymes; and Mother Goose, good old soul, who has sung many of those strange old verses to children for a thousand years, if the antiquaries are not mistaken, proves to us that the way to please little ears and eyes is by presenting a variety of images in the easiest succession, without any attempt at intellectual method or logical unity. Her style is that of the kaleidoscope, and she turns words and pictures over as rapidly, and with as little method, as that instrument shows in its handling of colors. As the child's development advances, the varieties need more of the unities, and the favorite sports rise into more method and sequence, nearer the rule of actual life: marbles give way to cricket, and blind-man's buff yields to chess. For a long time, however, anything like severe intellectual unity of plan is irksome, and even the toys that require careful thought and embody extraordinary workmanship are less agreeable than

the rude playthings that can be knocked about at will, and made to take any shape or use that the changing mood or fancy may decree. The rag baby is more popular with the little girl than the mechanical doll; and a tin pot, with a stick to drum upon it, pleases little master more than the elegant music-box. As long as the child's mind is in a chaos of unsorted sensations and impulses, he does not like plays that are so utterly in advance of his position as to present a perfect order that calls up Kosmos within him before its time. There is a good Providence in this necessity, and Nature is servant of God in her attempt to touch and voice the separate keys of the great organ, before she tunes them together to the great harmonies and symphonies that are to be performed. She is busy with each key first by itself; and there is something winning, as well as healthful, in that intensity which attaches to the sensations and impulses of children in this their first education. They are finding themselves and the universe at once; and the marvellous zest with which they see and feel and hear and handle whatever comes within their reach is a kind of rapturous wedding of the senses to the world of Nature and life, and a prelude to that more interior and spiritual union that is to be.

Our best books for children must not forget this great fact, and they must present great variety of impression and images in such sequence and unity as the young reader's mind can easily appreciate and enjoy. The great juvenile classics are rich illustrations of this law, and they have a "variety" as "infinite" as Cleopatra's, whilst they aim at a purpose far more true and persistent than hers, and do not end with a broken life and a serpent's sting. They are invariably *sensuous* in their imagery, but not *sensual*; and the great masters of the nursery well know that the senses are not made to be earth-born drudges of the flesh, but godly ministers of the spirit, and their true office is to open the gates of the whole world of truth and goodness and beauty. All who know

the ways of true children will understand the distinction between *sensual* and *sensuous* impression. Hold up before a true child a ripe, red apple, or a bunch of purple grapes, and how the eye sparkles and the hand reaches forth! But the desire expressed is half aspiration and half appetite, and the dainty rises into ideal beauty under this dear little aspirant's gaze, and is seen in a light quite other than that which falls on a gourmand's table, after he is gorged with viands and wine, and ends his gross banquet with a dessert of fruit which his stupid and uncertain eye can hardly distinguish. The child is *sensuous*, the gourmand is *sensual*. We should give the benefit of this distinction to all of our authors who abound in graphic description and encourage pictorial illustration. The senses should be skillfully appealed to, and the higher spheres of the reason, conscience, and affections may thus be effectually reached. Pictures, whether in words or lines or colors, are symbols; and the child's mind is a rare master of all the true symbolism of Nature and Art. There is no end to the range of susceptibility in children to impressions from this source; and all the chords of feeling and impulse, pathos and humor, seem waiting and eager to be played upon. Instead of needing to be laboriously schooled to pass from one emotion or mental state to another, they go by alternations as easy as the changing feet that pass from a walk to a run and back again, as if change were the necessity of Nature, not the work of the striving will.

Our books for children should study this great law, and be free to go "from grave to gay, from gentle to severe," as is the habit of all high literature. They should not be afraid to let the child have a good hearty laugh before or after telling him that he should study or should pray. It is odd to see the rapid transitions through which very well-behaved children will go in an instant; and I have known a child who has been romping in a complete gale of innocent roguery to burst into tears, if not duly called to the table in time to hear grace

said, and, after clucking with the hens, crying as if heart-broken over a dead bird. I went last spring with a friend to witness a great religious festival at a distinguished ecclesiastical community, — the festival of Corpus Christi, with its gorgeous procession. We were admitted through the private entrance, and saw the altar-boys in the entry waiting in caps and robes to lead off the pageant. They were in high spirits, and pulling and nudging each other like boys of the usual mould. Soon they appeared in church with folded hands, chanting the "Lauda Sion" before the uplifted Host as demurely as if they had walked down from the pictures of seraphs on the walls. "What little hypocrites!" the Philistines at once cry; "what a trick, thus to affect to be pious, after those pranks of mischief!" I say, No such thing; and although not personally given to Corpus-Christi ceremonials as a devotee, I interpret such transitions as I would interpret the conduct of my own children who came from a frolic on the lawn or a game of croquet to a Scripture lesson or the household worship. Let us be true to human nature, and give every genuine faculty and impulse fair play. Our American literature can afford to be more generous to children than it has been, and let them gambol on the play-ground none the less from keeping the library open for grave reading, and the chapel not closed in ghostly gloom.

Our books for children must be truthful as well as interesting; and we are quite strong in the belief that they should be true to all our just American ideas. It cannot be expected, indeed, that our story-tellers, poets, and biographers for the young will desert their pleasant arts, and inflict upon their readers prosy essays upon American law, society, reform, and progress. What we should expect and demand is, that our children should be brought up to regard American principles as matters of course; and their books should take these principles for granted, and illustrate them with all possible interest

and power. They should be trained in the belief that here the opportunities for education, labor, enterprise, freedom, influence, and prosperity are to be thrown open to all; and the highest encouragement should be given to every one to seek the chief good. We are not afraid to say that our children's books should be thoroughly republican, or, in the best sense of the word, democratic, and should aim to give respect to the genuine man more than to his accidents, and to rank character above circumstance. They should rebuke the ready American failings, the haste to be rich, the passion for ostentation, the rage for extravagance, the habit of exaggeration, the impatience under moderate means, the fever for excitement, and the great disposition to subordinate the true quality of life to the quantity of appliances of living. They should especially assail the failings to which our children are tempted, — the morbid excitement, precocious sensibility, and airs and ambition to which they are prone. Some of our best juvenile books, especially some of our best magazine writers, do great service in this way; and it has seemed to us that we may well learn wisdom from the juvenile literature of France in this matter, and translate with profit many of those excellent books for children which do not for a moment countenance the idea that they are to have any hot-bed forcing, or have their senses and fancy turn upon the passions and cares that belong to mature years. Christendom has no cause for gratitude to France for its adult romantic literature; and it is an offence to American as to English homes for its free notions of married life. But the French literature for the young is quite another matter, and may teach purity and wisdom to the parents who allow their sons and daughters to ape the ways and often the follies of men and women, and spoil the flower and fruit of maturity by forcing open the tender bud of childhood and youth.

We may take quite as serious lessons against the wrong of schooling the young in precocious care and calcula-

tion, and setting a bounty upon the too ready covetousness of our people. We spend freely, indeed, as well as accumulate eagerly; but there is a fearful overestimate of wealth amongst us, in the absence of other obvious grounds of distinction; and the evil is nurtured sometimes from childhood. Such books as "The Rich Poor Man and the Poor Rich Man" do vast good; and it is very important that our sons and daughters should have a loving, helpful, cheerful, devout childhood, a true age of gold, to look back upon and ever to remember, without the taint of Mammon-worship that multiplies care, blasts prosperity with inordinate desires, and curses adversity by making it out to be the loss of the supreme good, and little short of hell. It is well to take very high ground with them, and train them to know and enjoy the supreme treasures that are open to them all, to make them observers and lovers of Nature and Art, and to take it for granted that the best gifts of God and humanity are freely offered to every true life. Our magnificent country should be held before them as their rightful heritage, and its flowers, plants, trees, minerals, animals, lakes, rivers, seas, mountains, should be made a part of every child's property. What observers of Nature, in its uses and beauty, bright children are, and how much may be made of their aptness by good books and magazines! I confess, for my own part, that I never saw and enjoyed Nature truly until I learned to see it through a bright child's eyes. Good Providence gave us our little farm and our little May at about the same time; and the child has been the priestess of our domain, and has made spring of our autumn, May of our September. She noticed first only bright colors and moving objects and striking sounds; but with what zest she noticed them, and jogged our dull eyes and ears! Then she observed the finer traits of the place, and learned to call each flower and tree, and even each weed, by name, and to join the birds and chickens in their glee. She gathered bright weeds as freely as garden-

flowers, and, with larger wisdom than she knew, came shouting and laughing with a lapful of treasures, in which the golden-rod or wild aster, the violet or buttercup, the dandelion or honeysuckle, were as much prized as the pink or larkspur, the rose or lily. Darling seer, how much wiser and better might we be, if we had as open eye for loveliness and worth within and without the inclosures of our pride and our pets! I called the first rustic arbor that I built by her name; and May's Bower, on its base of rock, with solid steps cut in the granite by a faithful hand, and with a sight of the distant sea through its clustering vines, is to us a good symbol of childhood, as observer, interpreter, and lover of Nature. When I see in a handsome book or magazine for children any adequate sketch of natural scenes and objects, I am grateful for it as a benefaction to children, and a help to them in their playful yearning to read that elder alphabet of God.

How much power there is in the elements of the beautiful that so abound in the universe, and what capacity in children for enjoying them, especially in our American children, may we not say! The constitution of Americans is in some respects delicate, and shows great susceptibility in early life, and capability of æsthetic culture. Our children are vastly wiser and happier by being taught to distinguish beauty from tinsel pretence, and to see the difference between the fine and superfine. The whole land groans in ignorance of this distinction; and the most extravagant outlay for children and adults is made for dress and furniture, toys and ornaments, that are an abomination to true taste. We may begin the reform at the beginning, and apply the ideas of the truly beautiful in the books and magazines that we put before our children. We can make Preraphaelites of them of the right kind, by training their eye, not to love bald scenes and ghostly figures, but to appreciate natural form, feature, and color, and composition, and so possess their senses and fancy with the materials and im-

pressions of loveliness, that, when the constructive reason or the ideal imagination begins to work, it will work wisely and well, and not only dream fair visions and speak and write fair words, but carve true shapes, and plan noble grounds, and rear goodly edifices for dwelling, or for study, art, humanity, or religion. The child that learns to see the beautiful has the key of a blessed gate to God's great temple, and can find everywhere an entrance to the shrine. What a new and higher Puritanism will come, when we learn to apply pure taste to common affairs, and carry out all the laws of truth and beauty, as the old saints carried out the letter of the Bible! The day is coming, and is partly come. Do not many New-Yorkers look upon the Central Park as being, with its waters and flowers and music for all, as good a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount as any in the Astor Library? and does not solid Boston regard its great organ as a part of that great interpretation of the Divine Mind which Cotton and Winthrop sought only in the sacred book? Give us a thirty years' fair training of our children in schools and reading, galleries and music-halls, gardens and fields, and our America, the youngest among the great nations, will yield to none the palm of strength or of beauty; and as she sits the queen, not the captive, in her noble domain, her children, who have learned grace under her teaching, shall rise up and call her blessed.

In claiming thus for our children's books this embodiment of wholesome truth in beautiful forms, we are not favoring any feeble *dilettanteism*, or sacrificing practical strength to pleasant fancy. Nay, quite the contrary; for it is certain that truth has power, especially with the young, only when it is so embodied as to show itself in the life, and to speak and act for itself. We believe in dynamic reading for children; and we now make a distinct and decided point of this, quite positive, as we are, that books are a curse, if they merely excite the sensibilities and stimulate the nerves and brain, and bring on sedentary

languor, and do not stir the muscles, and quicken the will, and set the hand and foot to work and play under the promptings of a cheerful heart. Undoubtedly many children read too much, and spindle legs and narrow chests and dropsical heads are the sad retribution upon the excess. But the best books are good tonics, and as refreshing and strengthening as the sunshine and the sea-water, the singing-circle, and the play-ground. Let us encourage this tonic quality in our juvenile literature, and favor as much of sound muscular morality and religion as stories of adventure, sketches of sports, hints of exercise and health, with all manner of winning illustrations, can give. It is well that Dio Lewis is now on a mission to our Young Folks, and after exhorting adults, and especially the clergy, to repent of their manifold sins against the body, he is now carrying the gospel of health to children; and I have been quite amused at having him quoted against my own physical transgressions, by his most attentive reader, the youngest member of the family. The cure should not stop there; but the tonic force should knock at every door of the mental and moral faculties, and touch every chord of latent power. A fresh, free, dauntless will should breathe through every page, and be the invigorating air of our juvenile literature, and be as essential to its strength as truth is to its light and beauty to its color.

The great social, civil, and religious forces that move the nation should be brought to bear upon the young, not by learned essays or by ambitious philosophizing, but by living portraiture and taking life-sketches, stirring songs and ballads. A good home story can express as much of the law and economy of the household as a chapter of Paley or Wayland. Our girls and boys will feel the great pulse-beat of patriotism and loyalty more free, by following the brave old flag through perils to final peace, in graphic sketches of our history, from Washington's times to Lincoln's, from the days of Greene and Putnam to those of Sherman and Grant,

than from any learned lectures on the Constitution, or abridgments of Kent and Story. Those more universal and spiritual forces that bind us to our race and to God are surely not to be ignored in books for children, difficult as it is to present them adequately; and the absence of a national church makes religion so various in its ideas and forms as not to offer that ready and common symbolism that makes the cross as expressive as the flag to some nations, and binds the home and country to the altar. But our best writers are finding the way to touch the chords of supreme religion in the young, and the nation is fast developing a faith and worship that meet the wants of youthful feeling and fancy better than catechisms and lectures. Our children have a much more genial church nurture now than their parents had, and the worship in their chapels is sometimes more impressive than that in the churches. I confess to great regret that we, who are now in our prime, had so little joy and action in connection with our early religious impressions, and wish better things for our children, and delight to see the signs of amendment. Our best books are helping it on, and bringing poetry and art, as well as good sense and devout faith, to the rescue of our boys and girls from the prosy pedantry that forgets that the religion of the Bible itself did not begin in the dry letter, but was a rich and various life with Nature and among men, before it was made into a book.

All moving forces, whether domestic, social, civil, or religious, reach children most effectually through personal influence; and not only do they imitate the examples, but they seem to imbibe or breathe in the spirit of their associates and teachers. Hence the importance of having our best people write for children, and give them the precious ministry of all their high qualities of mind and heart. The little readers may not take in the whole of the influence consciously at once, but they are more receptive than they know, and take in the grace of refined manner and pure culture, even as they take diseases, without be-

ing aware of the fact at the time. Is it not well to treat them in their relation to human life as God treats them in their relation to the universe? He puts before them the broad earth and the glorious heavens from the first, and He does not strike off a toy edition of Nature to come down to little eyes and ears. Children look upon the whole universe at once, and their first impressions store up truths that years may interpret, but cannot exhaust. Why not throw open the best minds, and their earth and heaven of earthly sense and starry wisdom, with equal generosity to the young, and put them into communication with the best writers and thinkers of the land? They will not take the whole sense and spirit of the talk or story in at once, but they will have a certain impression or germinal seed of it within; and even before they can interpret or explain what they have learned, they will feel and enjoy and apply most of its meaning and power. Especially do they take in more than they know of the higher manifestations of moral and spiritual life; and a good story of a true soul, or an earnest sermon or devout prayer, goes deeper into their minds and hearts than they can understand, and they may have a great deal of religion before they know a word of theology.

In view of this assimilating force of example and personal character, it is cheering to note the number of our first-class writers who are giving their pens and studies to our children. The authors who figure on the list of contributors to our leading juvenile magazine need not hide their heads before any staff of contributors to any periodical in the country; and they do not seem to lose their wisdom or their wit in getting down from their stately heights to chat and romp with the boys and girls who come thronging to meet them. It is a good sign for our American letters; and I am not ashamed to say, that, after reading some of the numbers of that monthly, and talking over the remainder with a bright child of six, and as bright a girl of eighteen, I felt some-

what envious of the position of those writers, and wondered whether I could write anything that the rising millions of American children would be eager to read. Who might not be envious of the distinction, and which of our poets may not be proud to walk in the steps of Whittier, and sing loving words for the nursery and playground, after ringing the liberty-bell and sounding the bugle-call of liberty through the nation?

We close these cursory thoughts by presenting one idea that seems to us of the highest importance, although it may strike others as far-fetched or fanciful. It refers to the start that our children are to take in life, or, rather, to the ground from which they are to start. Their destiny depends, of course, upon what they make of themselves in their career; but does it not also depend upon their starting-ground, and is there not something dreary in the frequent remark that we can make anything of ourselves, and the implication that we are nothing at all at the outset? The old civilization reversed this; and the great question was not, What shall a man make of himself? but, What is his *status*? and his family or national birthright was more urged than his individual enterprise. Now I am not fighting against our American individualism, or expecting to establish a new national caste; yet may I not hint that it would be well, if our children were brought up in such sense of their native privilege, worth, and respectability as to start upon a solid ground of loyalty and reliance, and to go forth into the world with the feeling, that, whilst they have much to win, they have also much to hold? I would not have them bred in Jewish exclusiveness or pride; yet even that is better than no sense of birthright at all. How striking and suggestive is that trait in the life of one of the most benevolent and liberal-minded of our American Israelites, who, when his leg was broken, and his physician advised amputation, stoutly refused to submit to the knife, and said that he would die first, since he was of

the tribe of Levi, and none of that tribe were allowed to enter the sanctuary with mutilated limbs! A plucky son of Abraham indeed; and his pluck would be worthy of our imitation, if we insisted on such a *status* of manly integrity as to refuse to do any wrong to our manhood, on the ground of its destroying our position and selling our birthright. We do need certainly some deeper sense of our personal and national worth at the outset; and our children should be trained to look upon themselves as heirs of the ages, children of Providence, and bound to keep the priceless trust confided to them. A cheerful home should love them before they can return the love, a great nation guard them before they can keep guard over themselves, and a broad and exalted and genial and helpful church should be mother to them before they know how to interpret her care; and the golden light of the first home should shine upon them as but the faint, earthly gleam of that uncreated light that kindles every rational intelligence, and sends it into the world, as if, "trailing clouds of glory," we came "from God who is our home." We ask our writers for children to throw this cheerful radiance upon the outset of their pilgrimage, and relieve the sore pressure of care, and the anxious burden of never ceasing responsibility, and the force of incessant temptation, by the great and blessed conviction that we start from the supreme good, and, if we go away from it, we not only come short of a precious prize, but we forfeit a sacred birthright. All the ages, nations, leaders, sages, heroes, apostles, have endowed us and our children with a priceless heritage; and we are not to start in life as if we were a set of beggars, aliens, slaves, or heathen. Rome has thought to bless and enrich our America by putting the land under the watch of the immaculate and supernatural Mother. I will not stop now to fight against Rome, but will be content to say that our children have from God a peculiar guardianship from the natural mother who bore them, and from

that natural humanity which is the daughter of God and the recipient of all natural and supernatural graces. Mystical as this thought may seem, when stated in general terms, every genuine American poem and story is full of its meaning; and our best juvenile literature is making it our household faith and love. We shall see good days, when our children start from the true

home feeling, and a sacred memory joins hands with a brave and cheerful hope. Our good old mothers thought so; and our books are good as they repeat their wisdom and renew their love. We might weary our readers, if we tried to say what is in our minds of the American mother in history, and the ideal mother that should charm our books and pictures; but no more now.

DIOS TE DE.*

IN the green and shadowy woodpath,
Where the Fly-bird's † golden hue,
Like a shower of broken fire,
Lights the forests of Peru,
'Mid primeval sward and tree,
Lives the bird, DIOS TE DE.

There the Indian hunter roaming
Softly through the massive shade,
By the Laurel and Cinchona
And the thick-leaved Balsam made,
Halts beneath the canopy
At the sounds, DIOS TE DE.

And the bow unbent reposes,
And the poisoned arrows rest,
And a gush of solemn feeling
Thrills with awe the savage breast,
While the bird unharmed and free
Rocks and sings, DIOS TE DE.

If the name of God thus dropping
From the preacher of the wild,
In the solitude of Nature,
Wraps with awe the forest child, —
What a meaning deep have we
In the bird, DIOS TE DE!

* "May God give thee."

† *Trochilus Chrysurus.*