

LIFE'S TRUEST FRIEND

"There is one great society alone on Earth
The noble Living and the Noble Dead.
Thine be such converse, strong and sanative
A ladder for thy spirit to re-ascend
To health and joy and pure contentedness."

Whatever be the circumstances or environment that awaits students beyond the college portals, we know that if we have but the will, we can always hold converse with the one great society on Earth, "The noble living and the noble Dead."

The humblest of us has at his command, the privilege of associating with the world's greatest aristocracy—that of mind and heart and soul. "The best thing," says Bishop Spalding, "that youth carries from school is not knowledge, but the ardent desire to learn. Genuine books inspire courage, confer hope, beguile time, teach wisdom, fill the memory with beautiful and noble thoughts, thrill the heart with noble aspirations, sow the mind with seeds of truth, bring the distant and the past with all their glories, victories, failures and defeats to the minds of even the poor and heavy-laden to enrich, to soothe, to enlighten their weary and lonely lives."

Another great educator said, "After the grace of God flowing to us through the channels of prayer and the sacraments, I know of no greater solace to the soul than the soothing words of a good book."

One who has paid the slightest attention to his sleeping and waking dreams, need not be very old to realize that nothing touches the soul but leaves its impress. Little by little we are fashioned into the image of all we have seen, known or loved. All the greater need we have to harken to the counsels of him "who uttered nothing base."

"Thine be such converse strong and sanative,
A ladder for thy spirit to re-ascend
To health and joy and pure contentedness."

But unfortunately it is with books as it is with men—it is easiest to acquaint oneself with those that are least worth knowing; and this in a double sense or rather from

a subjective as well as an objective view point. Cheap books are not exacting friends and their name is legion. There are, no doubt, minds of a certain cast, that love to cope with difficulties, and prize only what is obtained at the cost of trouble, but the greatest number prefer to loiter on the broad and easy way. A great wrong it is to hail each new production with joy, before examining the book's claim to a place in literature. Let us put down as mediocrity, never as genius, the abilities of the filthy writers who struggle among us for fame. Let us consign them to their rightful place in the offal-market, and, perhaps when they are forced to partake of the husks of swine, with which they fain would fill the reading public, the spirit of the Prodigal may lead them back to their father's house of truth and morality. And, until they are willing to return, no Christian man or woman should be seen raking over the ash-heaps or feasting on their garbage.

Happily, however, although the ability to enjoy good books is not always a natural gift, it is one that can be acquired. We may begin with something light, but must keep on elevating our tastes and capabilities until we are at home with the most serious and solid.

It is Ruskin who has classified books under two headings: books of the hour and books for all time. The books of the hour—whether bright accounts of travel or good humored and witty discussions; lively or pathetic storytelling in the form of novel—all these he describes as merely letters or newspapers in good print. The books for all time are written by men who have glimpsed and expressed something of universal appeal as no one else has done.

Now as heirs of the ancient Catholic culture let us see what books for all time we may claim as our heritage. First of all there is the Bible. What prose can equal the parables of our Lord? What sweeter music has the world heard than the Magnificat? The Benedictus? The Nunc Dimmitis? In the Old Testament the book of Job is recognized as the greatest epic ever written—the book of Ruth as the finest pastoral—and Isaias is lyric poetry of the highest order. To this ancient treasury of the church, new gems have been added through the ages. With these the missal makes us familiar. We may mention the "Dies Irae", the "Veni Sancte Spiritus"—the hymns of Thomas

Aquinas all of which are recognized as masterpieces. After the Bible and the Liturgy comes that "low, sweet voice of humanity"—The Imitation of Christ—Even infidels recognize this book as a classic. Do we know and love it as we ought?

The care with which the church has preserved and fostered even the pagan classics is proof that where literature is truly great it is always formative of what is true and wholesome and good. The author of "My Unknown Chum" tells a charming incident of his travels in the North of France. He met there in the city of Douai a Benedictine Monk—a man sprung from an ancient English house, and endowed with more than ordinary gifts of intellect, and the charms of a rare sanctity. On visiting him in his cell, the then Protestant author was charmed to find as the only companion to the Monk's books of devotion a well worn copy of Shakespeare

No one has been harmed by reading the classics—No one can acquire a solid education without them. They paint human life as it is with its evil as well as its good, but the writers are always on the side of virtue. While the modern writer of low order labors to persuade his readers that vice is not vice, the great dramatists and novelists like Shakespeare, Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, compel evil to unmask itself, to disclose its name, and to meet its penalty. Therefore, let us cultivate a taste for good literature, live with the best authors, until they have trained us in that discipline of taste which tolerates no deception. Then by comparison with the works that have stood the test of generations, let us estimate those who today claim our homage. Let us be honest, let us be just, not ready to condemn unheard, nor yet to vaunt undeservedly. What of the authors contemporaneous of our own times? Where could we find a more delightful companion than, Belloc, Dawson, Chesterton, Hopkins, Francis Thompson, Dudley or Edwards?

Again, good books are instruments of intellectual culture—books and hard work. Now culture implies refinement, but refinement does not mean softness. It is that beautiful union which we so admire in a true scholar and gentleman, union of great learning and clear thinking, with grace, common sense and practical religion. Let books then, and the best books be our ideals. Let us observe men. That will keep us human. But let us read books,

study books, own books. That will help us to become divine. "If we leave school without a taste for good books," writes the Catholic critic, Maurice Francis Egan, "our education has partly failed." "We in this world," he continues, "are like the violins in a great orchestra, if we do not keep in tune, we lose in finess of quality, and when the great Leader of this wonderful earthly orchestra waves His baton, we are found wanting; we make discord." To be at our best always, we must keep ourselves in tune with the best of the instruments near us. And the best of these instruments are **good books**.

—R. S. '54.

WINTER

When winter's icy blasts across the land do blow,
Blanketing the frozen waste with swirling snow,
Nature's art fashions a thousand myriad forms,
Of twinkling crystals and frosted outstretched arms.

Inside, nestled so comfortably beside the open hearth,
I listen to the crackling log fire, darting in gay mirth,
While deep in my easy chair reclined,
Mystic, enchanting dreams enshroud my mind.

And as the drifting clouds disperse, the glowing moon
now shines,
Casting her fleeting shadows among the sullen pines,
Meanwhile the logs in the fireplace lazily burn low,
And into my mind drifts the reality of winter's show.

—J. R. D. '53.

Never hold anyone by the button or by the hand in
order to be heard out; for if people are unwilling to hear
you, you had better hold your tongue than them

—Chesterfield.